

**Representations of Gender and Sexuality in the Key Characters of Lauren Beukes's Interstitial  
Fiction**

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## Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters, in the Graduate Programme in English Studies, Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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## **Abstract**

In the past seven years South African author Lauren Beukes has published four highly successful novels: *Moxyland* (2008), *Zoo City* (2010), *The Shining Girls* (2013), and *Broken Monsters* (2014). Beukes's novels have garnered much attention both locally and overseas, with critics frequently praising the social awareness of her writing and noting her unique use of genre. Beukes employs a number of techniques to render the settings of her novels realistic and recognisable to a contemporary reader; however, disrupting the familiarity of the world in each case is an unexpected speculative twist. The supernatural elements of the texts become vehicles for the exploration of a number of topical social issues, offering fresh perspectives on these issues, and encouraging reader engagement with them. This dissertation focuses specifically on the presentation of contemporary gender issues in the novels, using textual analysis in order to consider how Beukes's manipulation of genre tropes affects a reading of gender and sexuality in the key characters of her texts, and relating this to various contemporary gender theories. What emerges is a thorough demonstration of the socially constructed and multifaceted nature of gender and sexuality, together with insightful commentary on the complexities of enacting masculinities and femininities in a modern world influenced by rapid technological advancement and associated social developments. Through her narratives Beukes challenges the patriarchal ideologies which remain a significant feature of both South African and American social landscapes, advocating in their place a postfeminist egalitarianism.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

In the past seven years South African author Lauren Beukes has published four highly successful novels that have garnered much attention both locally and overseas, and have been accorded a number of literary awards. Her debut novel, *Moxyland*, was published in 2008, followed by *Zoo City* in 2010, which won the highly prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2011. Beukes's third novel, *The Shining Girls*, was published in 2013 and was awarded the August Derleth prize for Best Horror, the Strand Critics Choice Award for Best Mystery and the esteemed University of Johannesburg Prize. Her latest novel, *Broken Monsters*, was released in 2014, and was shortlisted for the 2015 University of Johannesburg Prize. Although the novels are not connected narratively, and operate as individual stories rather than as a series, a much-noted common feature of these works is Beukes's unique writing style and use of genre. Beukes blends together a number of speculative elements with other genre tropes, as well as imbuing her writing with pop culture references and a creative use of language to create hybrid texts that are appealing and accessible to a younger, technology-savvy contemporary readership. Beukes's writing is also striking in its social awareness, and she provides a point of entry for her readers to engage with this aspect of her novels through her use of speculative fiction and magical realism, integrating magical elements seamlessly into otherwise realistic settings in order to address relevant social issues in an engaging and exciting way. Some of these issues are context-specific, but many are applicable to both her South African and American settings.

This dissertation focuses specifically on the novels' portrayal of gender and sexuality in contemporary society, and the way in which the texts articulate some of the issues surrounding these themes at present. Using textual analysis, this dissertation aims to use a genre theory framework to support a classification of Beukes's texts as "interstitial fiction" (Moulthrop 1999) or "span fiction" (Brigg 2000), in order to explore the effects of her eclectic manipulation and amalgamation of genre in the novels. A consideration of the genre categories that she draws on, including speculative fiction and its subgenres of science fiction and fantasy, as well as crime fiction and *noir*, will be undertaken in order to investigate how gender and sexuality are conventionally represented in these genres, and how Beukes's characters are positioned in relation to these conventions. Given the present and future settings of the novels, together with the wide range of characters that Beukes presents in her texts in terms of gender, age, race, class and sexual orientation, contemporary gender theories will also be used in order to analyse the representations of gender and sexuality offered in the key characters of the novels. This will predominantly involve references to the theories and arguments that have arisen

out of third wave feminism and its emphasis on social constructionism, and its associated valorisation of difference, hybridity and multiplicity.

This chapter will provide an outline of relevant scholarly work that has been undertaken with regard to Beukes's novels, with a particular focus on work that has considered her writing style, her use of genre and the way in which gender and sexuality have been represented in her novels. The topic of this dissertation will then be positioned in light of this previous work, emphasising how it aims to further the research that has already been undertaken in this area. A discussion of the theoretical framework that will be used in the analyses of the novels that will follow in the next four chapters will then be undertaken. This will involve a consideration of genre theory in relation to the concepts of interstitial fiction, span fiction and speculative fiction, as well as some of the key arguments of relevant contemporary gender theories that will be used to complement an exploration of the representations of gender and sexuality in Beukes's novels.

Although both *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* have garnered much academic attention, relatively little scholarly work has been published on *The Shining Girls* or *Broken Monsters* to date. Previous analyses of Beukes's work discuss the difficulty of classifying her novels in terms of genre, her merging of the fantastic and realist modes, the notable incorporation of popular culture into her writing style, and the contemporary, urban settings of her narratives. A few of these articles also consider some of the key characters of the novels with reference to the representations of gender and sexuality that they offer.

Phoenix Alexander (2015) considers Beukes's writing style across all four of her novels, claiming: "Beukes' aesthetic delights in the hectic interplay of fads diligently hyperlinked, sources proliferating and spinning out, multiplying in virtual space, online, stream-able. Hers is an eclectic, chaotic style" (p. 156). He discusses the proliferation of references to modern Western cultural trends that are apparent in her writing, noting that these are necessarily dominated by technological advancements and digital media. He argues that Beukes writes for a contemporary audience, for whom her work is rendered appealing through "the deliberately scattershot techno-cultural references that saturate her narratives" (p. 158). Although he notes that this technique is one of the hallmarks of cyberpunk fiction, he claims that "the cyberpunk taxonomic category cannot, in fact, contain her generically rambunctious texts" (p. 158), pointing to the difficulty of classifying her works in terms of genre. With regard to *Moxyland* specifically, Eric Smith (2012) similarly argues that while in many ways the text is a stereotypically cyberpunk novel there is a self-consciousness about the way it uses the genre. Like

Alexander, Smith notes the excessiveness of Beukes's cultural references, arguing that the novel offers a critique of the technological advancements typically depicted in cyberpunk "not through simple or spectacular opposition to the cyberpunk aesthetic but through the acceleration of the form to its terminal velocity, through appropriating its penchant for cynicism, stereotype, and kinesis and carrying these to their perdurable limits" (p. 160). He argues that *Moxyland* can be read as an example of a text which critically considers the effects of "the global saturation of capital and the techno-cultural formations" (pp. 159-60) that have resulted from globalisation, in a South African context.

Alexander extends this idea to all of Beukes's novels, arguing that the most prominent connecting element in the four novels is the use of digital formats. Through these, he contends,

She explores the dissemination of spectacular icons and digital pop-objects around and within global bodies: networked, linked electronically and sometimes physically in what [. . .] comes to form the illusion of a digital, dystopian everywhere, relentlessly performing transcendence of locality. (pp. 157-8)

He considers Beukes's excessive style in relation to postcolonial theory, claiming that while the latter has insisted on counter-histories characterised by a breakdown into multiplicity, subjectivity and locality, Beukes's style provides a sense of "dystopian counter-locality" (p. 162) which writes "disorienting resonances between continents and cultures, generating *new* connections in digital space as opposed to staging a breakdown" (emphasis in original, p. 162-163). Alexander suggests that the digital third space that Beukes creates in her writing thus seems to suggest a global, common version of modern society; however, the excessiveness of her writing, her cynical tone, and the development of the narratives provide a critical framing of the loss of locality.

Cheryl Stobie (2012) focuses on the social commentary offered by *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* in a South African context specifically. She argues that both of these novels present critical dystopias which critique present social issues, while allowing for a degree of hope for the future. She argues that the texts display connections to feminist, postmodernist and postcolonial writing through their use of literary techniques such as a resistance to easy closure in their endings, the mix and manipulation of genre, and the use of a multiplicity of voices in their narration. Stobie argues that Beukes's use of genre together with her fantastical imaginings encourage re-engagement with many of the socio-political issues that have characterised South Africa's past, and continue to affect its present. She stresses that the openness of the novels' endings allow for some "social dreaming" (p. 368) and the hope for a potentially more just and progressive society in the future. Stobie further notes that the energy and "punk" resistance to mainstream norms offered by the use of cyberpunk conventions in

*Moxyland* are enhanced by the use of slipstream writing, “a surreal and dislocating postmodernist style of writing which blurs the boundary between speculative and literary fiction” and which “transcends the framework of realism in order to highlight and sardonically attack ethically indefensible issues naturalised in everyday life” (p. 373). With regard to *Zoo City*, Stobie notes that the novel has been classified as a “*muti noir*” (p. 374), and argues that by merging these two modes Beukes

is amplifying the possibilities of *noir* beyond its original manifestation as a Western and androcentric (if not implicitly misogynistic) form, and she is investigating the possibilities of traditional African belief systems, explored from a sympathetic perspective, within the framework of *noir*. She thus brings *noir* into dialogue with postcolonialism and feminism. (p. 376)

Stobie thus reflects on Beukes’s resistance to Western hegemony through both form – in her use of polyvocality, magical realism and genre mixing – and content, through her valorisation of alternate world views and belief systems as expressed through Zinzi’s narrative.

Konstantin Sofianos (2013) discusses the merging of fantastic and realistic elements in *Zoo City*, claiming that

Beukes’s recourse to the fantasy genre represents an ambitious and exciting attempt to fling open the post-apartheid imagination, and to seek aesthetic means through which to figure the daily bizarreness of life in its cities. One of the lessons the text offers is that a minimal cognitive estrangement may currently be the prerequisite for accessing the pent-up narrativity of the post-apartheid state. (pp. 119-20)

He notes that the novel makes a point of showcasing international pop culture which, he argues, reflects a commodity aesthetic that has become a prominent feature in many post-apartheid cities. He further notes the harshness of the city portrayed in the novel, arguing that only someone as formidably endowed as Zinzi – “a street-hardened ex-convict, a formerly well-connected hipster, and the university-educated daughter of academic parents” (p. 115) – is equipped to traverse the socially stratified landscape of Johannesburg.

The proliferation of digital references and excerpts in Beukes’s writing style that have been noted by some of these scholars is further complemented by work by Louise Bethlehem (2014) and Adalet Snyman (2010), who have focused on the portrayal of the influence of technology on society in *Moxyland*’s narrative. They focus specifically on the novel’s depiction of the influence of an urban setting, complete with advanced technology and corporate exploitation and control, on the society that dwells there. Bethlehem studies the novel in terms of the notion of “citiness” which considers

“how cities produce the modernity of the subjects who inhabit them” (p. 1). She argues that the city setting of Cape Town and its social geography mould the narrative and result in a triangulation of sovereignty, spatiality and technology, in which technology is treated as an important mechanism for regulating the inclusion and exclusion of people from social life. Adalet Snyman (2010) similarly discusses the ever-increasing role of technology in our social lives and considers how this is portrayed in the novel, pointing to the loss and subversion of human sensibilities, virtues and rights in favour of mechanical and capitalist advancement. She notes that many of the futuristic technological elements in the novel are not actually as fantastical as they may initially seem considering developments that are taking place at present, and thus argues that the speculations made in *Moxyland* with regard to the development and control of society are worryingly realistic. She considers the effect of these developments on our social lives, as portrayed by the protagonists in the novel, describing Toby and Lerato as hard individuals who cultivate artificial relationships, in contrast with Tendeka and Kendra who are more emotional, and constantly searching for human connection. That the latter two characters both die by the end of the novel, while the former two survive, suggests that the society depicted in *Moxyland* is one which “cannot accommodate true human emotions and connectedness anymore” (p. 119). Given that the society depicted in the novel is one which imaginatively extrapolates to an extreme present conditions in Western society, she claims that this may suggest a critical framing of the way in which technology is influencing how people interact and connect with one another at present.

Work that has considered some of the key characters of the novels has been limited to those in *Moxyland* and *Zoo City*. While *Moxyland* is not explicitly preoccupied with issues of gender and sexuality Stobie argues that these themes, as well as a number of other human rights issues, “are embedded in the novel, without any attempt at preaching, but in such a way as to elicit an intellectual and emotional response from the reader” (pp. 372-3). She claims that through the characterisation of the four protagonists in the novel, “Beukes represents gender from the perspective of contemporary sophisticated urbanites who have moved beyond simple representations of victims and perpetrators” (p. 372). Through Kendra, she argues, Beukes offers a portrayal of a young vulnerable woman who becomes an easy target for a corporation that uses her to test its nanotechnology; through Tendeka she notes Beukes provides an implicit criticism of homophobia in non-western cultures; in Toby she claims Beukes represents a selfish and sexist version of masculinity, and in Lerato she gives voice to an ambitious, but callous and disconnected, version of femininity. Noting the novel’s use of cyberpunk elements, Stobie argues that it offers “the possibility of concerted, creative responses to technology and its effects on human bodies, both male and female” (p. 373).

Jennifer M. Schmidt (2014) argues that through Kendra's narrative *Moxyland* problematises the historical positioning of white women's bodies as the normative definition of beauty, and considers its strategic continuation in post-apartheid South Africa when the hegemony of whiteness is under threat. She argues that the novel exposes "how the hegemonic power of whiteness maintains itself through rigorous self-normalised practices and gendered commodification" (p. 109), in this case specifically through the "right look" and "star power" of a "cool, effortlessly casual" (p. 110) white femininity which Kendra negotiates in her role as a "Ghost girl". She claims that Kendra occupies a bifurcated position as both a representative of this idealised and eroticised femininity in her role as a "Sponsorbabe" for "Ghost", and a photographer who is obsessed with the beauty and resonance of imperfect photographs and who attempts to "manage her objectification and reverse the flow of power relations of the gaze by taking pictures with her camera" (p. 111). This counter-hegemonic gesture, together with her astute awareness of how her body has been commodified by her agreement to be injected with the nanotech, briefly disrupts absolutist notions of femininity. However, her failure to conform ultimately results in her death – "a warning that the hegemonic power of whiteness, while vulnerable, is far from fading" (p. 115). Schmidt further notes that in the novel cyberspace, entered into by the characters through various online games, presents "the illusion of being freed from bodily determination" (p. 111). This is, nevertheless, revealed to be *only* an illusion, for even in virtual reality people fashion themselves according to normative standards of attractiveness.

Deirdre Byrne and David Levey (2015) consider the novel's presentation of identity, and argue that it presents post-transitional South African identities as being "fractured, riven and characterized by sharp edges", with "edges" referring to the "boundaries of personal, corporeal, national and corporate identity" (p. 71). They claim that all the main characters in *Moxyland* are liminal in terms of their identities' "partaking in multiple forms of subjectivity at the same time" (p. 71), and describe their identities as being "excessive" in that they cannot be defined in fixed terms. They are, however, unable to seamlessly amalgamate identity categories and inhabit the space between them, and instead display identities that are fractured and replete with edges, and it is these edges between categories that they inhabit. The authors argue that the characters depict contemporary South African identities as being robbed of agency as a result of the "individual and social demands placed on subjectivities in a post-transitional society" (p. 85).

Sandra J. Lindow (2014) conducts an analysis of contemporary texts with female protagonists who follow the “hero journey” or quest narrative reserved for male protagonists in traditional folklore and fairy-tales. She notes that historically the role of women in these texts was generally reserved for that of princesses who required saving, or if the heroine did have some agency at best the goal of her journey was “a made-over, upwardly mobile, better-dressed self finding a new home [. . .], more love and acceptance, and, for a while at least, a happily ever after” (p. 3). She explains that the hero journey is a developmental process that involves both the transformation of the self and problematic aspects of society. She briefly discusses Zinzi in *Zoo City* among her examples of heroines who embark on such a journey of transformation, outlining her trajectory from her position at the beginning of the novel as a con-woman with a dark past to her position at the end of the novel as a character who has metaphorically slain her dragons in dealing with her past, solving the mystery of the murders, and embarking on an altruistic trip to find Benoît’s family. Female heroines like Zinzi, she argues, not only undergo personal transformation in their narrative but also promote societal transformation by challenging conservative gender stereotypes and unrealistic feminine ideals.

Elzette Steenkamp (2015) discusses the human-animal relationships in *Zoo City*, arguing that the novel challenges an absolutist divide between the human self and animal other by situating “zoos” in an interstitial position between being human and non-human through their relationships to their animal others. She connects the blurring of this boundary to a challenge of other self/other dichotomies, such as race or gender binaries, as well as the stigmatisation of foreign and HIV-positive “others” in South Africa. She argues that it is Zinzi’s symbiotic relationship with her animal familiar that catalyses her compassion towards her human “others”, thereby challenging hierarchical social binaries and promoting acceptance and compassion for all. Phoenix Alexander (2015) similarly argues that the idea of hybridity is brought to the fore in *Zoo City*, where the animalled characters “challenge what it means to be a social, and indeed human, subject” (p. 166). He notes that hybrid bodies are a recurring trope in Beukes’s writing, occurring again in *Moxyland* through Kendra’s character and through the *Woof and Tweet* artwork that Tendeka destroys, and in *Broken Monsters* through the artwork of Clayton Broom.

Although no other scholarly articles could be located on *The Shining Girls* and *Broken Monsters*, a sampling of online reviews on both novels reveal a number of relevant themes. Reviewers of *The Shining Girls* repeatedly highlight the novel’s feminist exploration of violence against women (Kelly 2014; Martin 2014; Frisby 2013; Dowling 2013; Newitz 2013; Bullington 2013; Hartland 2013), and the characterisation of the novel’s serial killer which goes against the dominant trend in crime fiction to

portray the killer as an intelligent, debonair predator (Keller 2013; Jakola 2013; Gilfillan 2013). In addition, these reviews note the use of genre in the novel, highlighting elements of historical fiction, crime thriller fiction, and science fiction. With regard to *Broken Monsters*, reviewers consistently emphasise the novel's commentary on the role of technology in society, focussing specifically on its influence on social relations (De Vos 2014; Newitz 2014). Reviewers also discuss the use of supernatural elements in an otherwise realistic world (Corman 2014; Waclawiak 2014; Nance 2014; Kelly 2014), and the characterisation of Detective Gabi Versado as a feminisation of the traditionally male character portrayed in *noir* and crime fiction (Hinis 2014; Roper 2014).

Previous work on Beukes's novels has thus repeatedly focussed on her complex use of genre as well as her unique writing style, which employs an eclectic amalgamation of different writing forms and a plethora of pop culture references. It has also noted her emphasis on the role of technology in contemporary society. Although some of this work has considered these features of her novels in relation to the representations of gender and sexuality that are offered in her main characters, this work has been limited. No previous work has thus undertaken an extensive analysis of the representations of gender and sexuality offered in the main characters across all four of the novels, with specific reference to the effect that Beukes's use of genre has on a reading of these elements. This dissertation thus aims to further the body of work on Beukes's fiction by arguing that her novels can be considered as examples of interstitial or span fiction, and considering how this classification and use of genre contributes to an analysis of gender and sexuality in the key characters of the novels. This analysis will further be considered in light of a number of contemporary gender theories in order to discuss the commentary that Beukes offers on these themes in her fiction.

Writing in 1999, Stuart Moulthrop discusses the emergence "of a fictive sensibility more finely attuned to gaps, inconsistencies, tensions, and fissures than to unbroken traditional lines" that he claims is becoming increasingly more evident "in imaginative cybertexts and unconventional novels and films" (p. 199). He proposes the term "interstitial fiction" to refer to this fictive sensibility, describing it as "an extension of storytelling into and across various gaps and fault lines" (p. 200) that is evident in texts that employ elements from various different genres, fiction forms, and media without fully belonging to one dominant category. He argues that the uncertainty inherent in terms of trying to classify these texts means that:

We must try to understand these odd cultural objects according to their departures from established forms, the mediations and affordances they offer that might be understood as novel, if not new. In taking up these features we come to a second and perhaps more important reading of the interstitial: a commitment to the project of mapping across networks, riding the trams and subways of our strangely prosperous zone if not to “freedom” then to some engagement with sign systems and their contingencies. (p. 200)

Moulthrop thus frames interstitial fiction as a potentially transgressive writing practice that can challenge restrictive writing conventions, thereby opening up new spaces for the articulation of various themes and the interpretation of texts, as well as promoting a shift away from hierarchies in terms of fictional forms in favour of what he calls “networks” of interlinked systems. He argues that interstitial fiction “operates as much along the extensible fabric of interface as in the stable circuit of signified and signifier” (p. 200), and thereby describes it as existing in a new, third space in which it at once relies on references to traditional forms while it undermines them by showing some departure from their conventions in order to create something new. It is this meeting point of various writing forms, genres and media that Moulthrop suggests as the area of interest and critical engagement in interstitial texts.

Henry Jenkins (2013) further discusses this “fictive sensibility” Moulthrop identifies as he considers the changes that are taking place at large in contemporary writing with regard to the role of genre. He considers how genre is working “in an era when so many of us are mixing and matching our preferences and defying established categories”, arguing that “the work of genre is changing as we speak – in some ways becoming more constraining, in others more liberating”, and he urges genre theorists to rethink old assumptions “to reflect the flux in the way culture operates” (p. viii). Jenkins describes how any creative expression (including fiction writing) involves a tenuous balance between invention and convention, for it must reference things that are familiar to its readers or viewers in order to make sense and to meet their expectations to a certain degree, while simultaneously engaging and exciting them with something new and unexpected. All artists fall naturally on a continuum between convention and invention, he explains, “in some ways following the dictates of their genres, in other ways breaking with them. And most readers pick up a new book or video expecting to be surprised (by invention) *and* gratified (by convention)” (emphasis in original, p. ix). Genre conventions are thus both constraining and enabling mechanisms, Jenkins contends, “as they foreclose certain creative possibilities” while also allowing their authors “to focus the reader’s attention on novel elements” (p. ix).

Jenkins explains that most current academic thinking dismisses the idea that genre categories are stable or essential, or that by determining what genre a piece of work belongs to we can instantly know everything there is to know about that piece of work. Instead, he explains that recent scholarship “talks about what genres *do* rather than what they genres *are* and describes the processes by which works get classified and reclassified over time” (emphasis in original, pp. x-xi). He praises the emergence of interstitial fiction, arguing that its desire to resist categorisation and move fluidly along the continuum between convention and invention challenges efforts to define art that “deform the imagination, not simply of authors, but also of their readers” (p. vi). He argues that in challenging easy categorisations interstitial fiction opens up spaces for renewing debates and discussions about the topics it addresses, that it widens people’s interests by introducing them to various art forms they may previously have overlooked, and that it challenges their preconceived notions of the world by encouraging them to see things in a new light.

Heinz Insu Fenkl (2007) additionally differentiates interstitiality from liminality, claiming that while liminality is implicitly transitory in its ultimate progression to reintegration, “an interstitial work does not require reintegration – it already has its own being in a willfully transgressive or non-categorical way” (p. 3). He further elaborates on Moulthrop’s contention that interstitial fiction operates equally “along the extensible fabric of interface as in the stable circuit of signified and signifier”, explaining that while interstitial texts exist in this new, third space that they create in their resistance to established categories they do so while simultaneously “maintain[ing] a consciousness of the boundaries they have crossed or disengaged with; they present a clear awareness of the kinds of subtexts which might be their closest classifiable counterparts” (p. 4). These authors thus repeatedly stress that the third space that is interstitial fiction is a category in and of itself, but one that simultaneously relies on references to other categories in order to exist.

One of the most striking elements of Beukes’s writing is the way in which she integrates a number of different genres and writing forms in her novels, a fact that has clearly been noted by several of the scholars and reviewers cited in the literature review. Given this, it is argued that all four of her novels can clearly be classified as examples of interstitial fiction. Of particular interest to this dissertation is her use of genre in the novels, placed as they are variously at the intersections of the subgenres of speculative fiction and crime fiction. These genres will be discussed in more detail as relevant to each novel in the chapters that follow. Through Beukes’s unique amalgamation of genre tropes and her clever manipulation of genre conventions she thus enthusiastically demonstrates the creation of a third space in terms of genre; however, she does this while simultaneously relying on the conventions

of the established genres she references in order for her readers to grasp the impact of the departures that she orchestrates. Her texts thus operate, as Moulthrop argues interstitial works should, “as much along the extensible fabric of interface as in the stable circuit of signified and signifier” (1999, p. 200), by creating their own hybrid genre category while maintaining a consciousness of the established genre boundaries they have crossed in order to do so.

Beukes’s use of speculative elements across all four novels complicates the issue of naming this kind of writing, as the existence of a new hybrid genre category has been a subject of some debate with regard to science fiction literature in particular. Writing in 1989, Bruce Sterling describes the emergence of a style of writing which blends science fiction with other genres that he called “slipstream”. He argues that slipstream texts portray fictional worlds which, notably, are not entirely futuristic or “beyond the fields we know” in order to “sarcastically tear at the structure of everyday life”. Analysing Sterling’s article, Doug Davis (2012) describes slipstream as the merging of postmodernism and science fiction, and argues that it is simply “the literature of our contemporary ‘structure of feeling’” (p. 5). He argues this on two levels, noting firstly that while the mixing of genres and forms in art and fiction was *avant-garde* a few decades ago, it is now a common feature in creative works. Secondly, he notes that scientific and technological advancement have become such an ingrained part of everyday life in the twenty-first century that it is unsurprising that elements of science fiction can be seen infiltrating a wide range of popular fiction. He claims that slipstream fiction thus simply “hijacks science fiction’s speculative ethos to become a kind of fiction that fits our stage of postindustrial digital-media capitalism just right, a stage of capitalism that is about making money off of hybrid forms and multiple and virtual identities” (p. 6). Like Jenkins, he thus argues that the current instability of genre categories is a product of our social historical present, and that it mimics the flux that is evident in contemporary Western culture at present with regard to categorisation on multiple levels.

Peter Brigg (2000) similarly argues that the science and technology typically portrayed in science fiction is becoming a normal part of everyday life in the modern world, and that it is thus unsurprising that the divide between science fiction and other genres, what he collectively calls “mainstream fiction”, is being eroded. He also notes the emergence of a hybrid third space between genres, and suggests the term “span fiction” to refer to the space between science fiction and other genres in particular. Like Jenkins, he broadly discusses the role of genre theory, arguing that interpreting a text is a combination of looking for “ideal signs” of a genre in order to place a text within a genre, and then considering the departures it shows from these. He outlines how these ideal signs are constantly

evolving as each new text created in a genre “changes forever the overall pattern of signs that delineates the genre” (p. 8) by transgressing some of the demands of that genre. He echoes Moulthrop’s understanding of the interstitial in claiming that these transgressions “make the zone where a great deal of meaning of literary texts is generated”; however, they “can be recognised only because the reader brings to the text an existing extra-text vision of the genre to be transgressed” (p. 8). Readers must thus place a text within a genre, based on “the sum of their reading in the genre and their cultural moment’s understanding of it” (p. 8), in order to begin to interpret it and then consider the way it departs from this genre, and how it modifies it. Genres, however complex or difficult to define they may have been made by postmodern writing and interpretation, are thus necessary in order to understand a text, he contends.

Texts that exist between genres therefore become difficult to define, Briggs argues, “as a definition needs to claim and define that central space and contend at its edges for the texts which sit on the cusps of genres and whose bifurcated nature produces rich transgressions of textual variety” (p. 11). Although Brigg acknowledges Sterling’s attempt to name this space through his description of slipstream he dismisses the term, criticising Sterling’s inability to identify a coherent list of examples of slipstream fiction. He instead proposes the term “span fiction”, and draws on Darko Suvin’s notion of the *novum* in order to provide a defining characteristic of this new hybrid genre. He contends that cognitive estrangement, “a deliberate distancing from reality which, in turn, by perspective gained makes reality clearer”, and the *novum*, “the novelty or innovation that dominates the narrative” (p. 19), are widely considered to be the most important features of speculative fiction as a genre. In order to be classified as science fiction, the *novum* “must be validated by cognitive logic” (p. 19) in the text, where it must be supported by a seemingly scientific explanation. This explanation will of course be a fabricated one, he explains, but it must appear to arise out of science and be logically complete insofar as it is needed to support the narrative. If a *novum* exists but is not supported by a scientific explanation then it belongs to the realm of fantasy.

Brigg argues that span fiction uses the *novum* in quite a different way, and that this, above all else, forms its defining characteristic as a genre. Due to its engagement with both science fiction and non-science fiction texts, Brigg describes span fiction as an intersection of science fiction and humanism in emphasising the merging of the *novum* (typical of science fiction) with the subjectivity of the characters in the text (typical of mainstream fiction). What becomes most notable in span fiction texts, then, is the degree to which the *novum* becomes “a real factor in the human condition, affecting characters’ feelings and behaviours in the subtle and complex ways that are associated with the

sensibility of the humanist: concerns with identity, soul, morality, and social reality” (p. 20). Span fiction may also not adhere as strictly as ‘pure’ science fiction to the maintenance of the *novum*’s cognitive logic, with its writers preferring instead to challenge and undermine their own *nova*. “This playing with doubt, the creation of a deliberate tension within the work as opposed to the traditional tension involved in making a future or distorted present wholly believable, will be frequently a clearest distinguishing mark of span fiction” (p. 21), Brigg contends. Span fiction writers are thus willing to depart from science fiction’s strict demand for cognitive logic, and “to leave their worlds up in the air, not providing every detail or dovetailing every aspect of their *novum*” (p. 21). With science and technology becoming necessary themes in mainstream fiction in order to express a sense of our modern world, Brigg argues that the integration of science fiction and mainstream fiction in span fiction provides a space for writers to articulate the complexity of the historical present. He contends that their freer use of the *novum* can be read as a challenge to scientific discourses and an unwillingness to yield

to the sort of single and simple vision of things that a rigidly extrapolated *novum* would demand. Such writers may have been unwilling to take up with science until science in turn was willing to accept the essential position that there are no single and simple answers to the complexity of man [*sic*] living in a complex world. The developments through which contemporary science has begun to accept multiplicity and limitations on its competence may make the employment of an open-ended and flexible scientific view a far more comfortable option for writers whose world view is unwilling to submit to the iron grip of an absolute, logical, and rigidly reasoned universe. (p. 22)

Again, the transgressive potential of this hybrid style of writing is thus highlighted, with particular emphasis on its ability to challenge dominant discourses, hierarchical world-views, and problematic categorisations.

All four of Beukes’s novels employ elements of speculative fiction, making use of cognitive estrangement and *nova* in order to create worlds that are, if not strictly futuristic, at least distanced from reality in some way but not, in Sterling’s words, “beyond the fields we know”. Imbuing her texts with well-known landmarks, real suburb and street names, and recognisable characters, Beukes works deftly to make the settings of her novels chillingly familiar to her readers and to weave her *nova* seamlessly into otherwise very realistic worlds. In addition, she engages in interesting play with her *nova*, making her texts prime examples of Brigg’s span fiction. In *Moxyland*, the fictional technological elements of the narrative require only a small cognitive leap for the average contemporary reader to understand these elements as the products of near-future scientific development; however, their existence is never explicitly explained. In *Zoo City* the phenomenon of being “animalled” and the presence of the Undertow are given several explanations that draw variously on scientific discourses,

religious discourses, mythical discourses and public opinion to explain the *novum* in the novel. *The Shining Girls* tends more towards fantasy, with no science-based explanation provided for how the magical house is able to travel through time. Beukes's readers are asked instead to simply suspend their disbelief, and accept this element of the text, while in *Broken Monsters* the explanation of the *novum*, where dream-like images are brought to life, is given both a fantastical and a scientific explanation in the closing chapters of the text. In each novel Beukes thus plays with the *novum* in various ways, either refusing to explicitly explain it or offering multiple, often conflicting explanations for it. In all cases she displays a refusal to adhere strictly to any internal cognitive logic, to over-explain, or to force her readers to understand the unusual elements of her narratives in any singular way. In doing so, she actively creates a space for a multiplicity of interpretations, catering to multiple world-views with equal sensitivity. The resistance her novels show to categorisations or hierarchies in terms of form is thus further bolstered by a challenge to singular worldviews, or dominant discourses in the structure of her narratives.

Beukes's commitment to privileging multiple world-views is moreover conveyed through her use of polyvocality in each of the novels, through which she allows her readers to enter the stories at different times through the consciousness of different focalisers. We are never limited to just one view of events, and are constantly asked to question notions of absolute truth, to live with ambiguity, and to be open to alternate worldviews when reading her novels. In doing this she constantly refuses a singular, dominant, or 'correct' view of the worlds she creates, and leaves ample space for the reader to draw his/her own conclusions about what happens there. The characters that Beukes writes are additionally from a wide range of different genders, sexual orientations, races, and classes, thereby offering readers a varied selection of viewpoints that are shaped by various social influences. Across all four novels her focus is thus clearly placed on her characters and the way in which her *nova* affect their experiences of the worlds they live in and influence their sense of identity, morality and social reality. Her novels are thus not primarily about magical animals or time travel – these elements are rather the vehicles through which she is able to articulate nuanced analyses of the changes occurring with regard to individuals, societies, and cultures in a modern, globalised, technology-driven world.

This use of the speculative mode to articulate observations and concerns about contemporary society is increasingly gaining momentum and respect in scholarly circles. Speculative fiction is a hybrid genre itself, as it is an umbrella term that in its most basic sense refers to works of fiction that draw on the genre conventions of science fiction, fantasy and horror (Shimkus 2012). Although it is a vast and ill-defined category according to R.B. Gill (2013), he describes speculative fiction as those works "which

conjecture about matters that in the normal course of things could not be. More specifically, their emphasis is not so much on possible though fictional matters as on the events that are impossible under the physical laws and constraints of our ordinary world” (p. 72), or works “presenting modes of being that contrast with their audience’s understanding of ordinary reality” (p. 73). Speculative fiction has, however, for a long time been dismissed as a low-brow, ‘guilty pleasure’ unworthy of serious scholarly attention. Tim Jones (2009) describes how in the 1990s a hierarchy developed between speculative fiction and literary fiction, with the latter being more highly respected, that resulted in profound difficulties for authors classified as speculative fiction writers to cross over into the domain of literary fiction and gain significant recognition for their work. He explicitly links the evolution of speculative fiction into a more well-respected genre to the emergence of interstitial fiction, in outlining how the interstitial movement gained momentum when

A group of young American authors of speculative fiction, the majority of them women, whose work was not easy to categorise into science fiction, fantasy or horror, [became] frustrated that, despite their stories sharing common territory with what was known on the literary side of the fence as fabulation, metafiction or magical realism, they found it hard to reach a sympathetic audience. (p. 9)

Jones argues that interstitial fiction has done significant bridging work in both directions between speculative fiction and literary fiction, as it “is providing a pathway into literary fiction for genre authors, and into the less ‘techy’ end of speculative fiction for literary fiction readers” (p. 10). It has made significant steps in breaking down the idea among literary authors and readers that speculative fiction is an inferior fictional form, while simultaneously challenging speculative authors and readers who argue that literary fiction is “too snobbish, too obscure, too slow-moving and lacking in the virtues of narrative” (p. 12). In terms of narrative, Jones argues that interstitial fiction can thus “offer the best of both worlds: story, but also style; characters, but also concepts” (p. 12).

The emergence of interstitial fiction, slipstream fiction and span fiction has thus been complemented by a growing recognition in academic circles of the value of speculative fiction as a mode for the consideration of social issues. James H. Shimkus (2012) challenges the hierarchical divide between speculative fiction and literary fiction by advocating that pleasure, appeal and entertainment value should be included as important criteria for determining the merit and usefulness of texts in academic settings. He argues that people read because “they want to understand the world around them and their place in it” (p. 33), and it is thus important to consider why they are drawn to genre fiction for this purpose. He argues against critics who dismiss speculative fiction as a form of escapism, quoting Lev Grossman (2012), who claims:

When you read genre fiction, you leave behind the problems of reality but only to re-encounter those problems in transfigured form, in an unfamiliar guise – one that helps you understand them more completely and feel them more deeply. Genre fiction isn't generic pap. You don't read it to escape your problems, you read it to find a new way to come to terms with them. (p. 32)

Gill similarly notes that works of speculative fiction present alternate realities in order to “comment on this world – negatively to satirise its shortcomings, or positively to provide a model for emulation” (p. 75). These texts rely on their readers’ recognition of the social realism portrayed in their fantastical narratives in order to communicate the caution they offer, which leads Shimkus to argue that the value of speculative fiction lies in its ability to engage people’s intellect in some way, to make its readers problem-solvers rather than complacent, passive spectators. He argues that emerging work in genre theory “is far less interested in the question of what makes particular works good or bad, but on what such works can show us about the societies in which they are created and consumed” (p. 34). The rise in popularity of speculative fiction and the merging of science fiction with mainstream fiction is of particular importance in this regard at present, he argues, “because its central concern is our relationship to technology, which is becoming an almost invisible but crucial facet of human existence in the twenty-first century” (p. 39). Marie Jakober (2008) further argues that by inventing alternative worlds speculative fiction forces us to consider the societies we live in and “makes us think, makes us question, makes us wonder what is, and what is not, changeable” (p. 30) about them. She claims that these texts force us to examine and re-imagine things that we may have taken for granted or thought were fixed, and contends that it encourages us to develop new ideas, to “engage reality with our minds open” and to “become more comfortable with the idea that little, if anything, is written in stone” (pp. 30-1).

Elzette Steenkamp (2011) considers speculative fiction specifically within a South African context, claiming that while speculative fiction is gaining respect internationally it remains a very rarely used mode in South African fiction, and suggests that this is largely connected to the fact that much attention in this literature is still being directed towards the representation of human conflict in the post-apartheid era. She argues that with its emphasis on science and technology, science fiction has been largely disregarded in South African literature, as “the region’s legacy demands that the stories told in a post-apartheid South Africa should be those of *real* people” (emphasis in original, p. 13). She cites the success of Neill Blomkamp’s 2009 film *District 9* and Beukes’s *Zoo City* as being integral in opening up a space for speculative fiction in a South African context. It is perhaps Beukes’s use of span fiction, combining science fiction with a humanist approach, which has made her successful as a science fiction writer in South Africa, where Steenkamp suggests that it seems to be almost a

requirement that literature focus on the lives and experiences of people. The need for this to include some reference to apartheid may, however, account for why Beukes chose to set her last two novels in an American context instead of a South African one.

Steenkamp notes that while speculative fiction is growing in South Africa following these successes,

very little has been done in the way of scholarly articles examining the role of science fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction in South African literature. The field of South African speculative fiction presents a rich, uncultivated area of study which allows for the exploration of a range of themes relevant to the South African condition, including (but by no means limited to) the issues of gendered and racialised inequality. (p. 16)

Steenkamp argues that speculative fiction is an especially useful mode for considering the construction of identity and the relationship between self and other, which are themes that are particularly resonant in a South Africa context. She claims: “The element of play which characterises the speculative mode enables its authors to re-think, expand and contest entrenched categories and restrictions, and particularly those which govern the relationships between self, other, and environment” (p. 187).

Although Beukes’s novels abound in exciting fantastical imaginings and fast-paced plots, what is perhaps most striking about her writing is the social awareness with which she shapes her narratives. Beukes uses what she calls “the distorting mirror” (in Hatfull, 2015) of speculative fiction to address a myriad of social concerns across her four novels in an engaging way. The use of the speculative mode works to re-ignite readers’ interests in issues that have perhaps been over-debated in both the popular media and the academy, but which nonetheless remain highly relevant. Given the settings and themes of the narratives, what emerges overall with regard to themes of gender and sexuality in the novels is thus a particular emphasis on the way in which they are enacted in a modern world, influenced as they are by both material developments, such as technological advancements, and social developments, such as changes in gender relations as a result of earlier feminist movements. A number of contemporary gender theories will thus be considered in relation to the discussion of gender and sexuality in Beukes’s novels.

Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan (2004) note that since the development of gender studies as a specialised area of academic study many shifts have taken place in the field, forcing us to think of gender “as a complex, multi-faceted topic” but one within which, they contend, “feminist perspectives remain central” (p. xiii). Carisa R. Showden (2009) notes that much contestation has arisen in

contemporary gender studies over the relevancy of feminist arguments at present, resulting in two related but distinct movements that are both referred to as postfeminism. Showden notes that both movements express dissatisfaction with some of the tenets of second wave feminism; however, “they express these dissatisfactions for somewhat different reasons and in somewhat different ways” (166). She argues that neither movement can be understood simply as a backlash against the second wave, and instead asserts that they are both part of an ongoing contestation over the meaning of feminism.

The term “postfeminism” was popularised in the 1980s in the media with the “post” signalling “after” in order to refer to the idea that the time of feminism had come and gone (Showden 2009). The movement was characterised by a feeling of “joyous liberation from the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement” (Gamble 2006, p. 36), in which anti-feminist advocates argued that the fight for gender equality had been won, and thus deemed the critiques and goals of feminism to be too extremist and inflexible, and no longer relevant (Showden 2009; Gamble 2006; Gillis and Munford 2004). This movement led to the development of Girlie feminism, which is a branch of postfeminism that aims to decry a view of women as victims through the reclamation of traditional femininity and heterosexuality as positive and empowering (Showden 2009). Rather than pushing against stereotypical versions of femininity, these Girlie feminists thus see femininity as being “at the very centre of an ideology of agency, confidence and resistance” (Gillis and Munford 2004, p. 171). Linked to this is an emphasis on female sexuality, and the idea that traditional models of heterosexual power relations can be appropriated “as pleasurable rather than demeaning” through the embracing of standard tropes of feminine sexuality and a celebration of “images and self-presentations of female sexiness that are often unreconstructed and uninterrogated” (Showden 2009, p. 176).

Girlie feminism is characterised by an emphasis on personal choice, seemingly advocating the idea that a woman is liberated “to do or wear whatever she wants, so long as it’s done with an appropriately fierce, optimistic attitude” (Showden 2009, p. 172). Showden highlights the appeal of this movement to young women, describing it as a “celebratory movement” in which it appears that “nearly all of women’s choices are affirmed, making it positive and supporting for the individual woman, and nonthreatening to anything or anyone else” (p. 172). However, she is critical of its rhetoric of choice, claiming that it is applicable to only a privileged minority and that it fails to consider the constrained realities of women in different cultures, and racial, sexual or class positions. She contends that the Girlie movement’s attitude towards female sexuality is problematic in a world where “women’s sexuality is still objectified, rather than being subject-centred” (p. 176). She

questions the political and social costs of the Girlie movement, arguing that it advocates a child-like femininity that privileges fun over all else. She claims:

“Girlie” denotes an unthreatening, submissive, easy-to-control femaleness – as opposed to a fully formed adult subjectivity and political prowess – combined with an emphasis on “sexy dressing” and “ironic” participation in women’s sexual objectification. This Girlie chauvinism narrows rather than expands models of women’s adult subjectivity and sexuality. What remains is a hypersexualised collusion with the gender status quo. (p. 177)

She argues that the key shortcoming of Girlie feminism is its failure to acknowledge that while women can indeed choose how they dress and act, they have no control over how they are socially read. She contends that to assume that a reclamation of traditional femininity equates to a feminist statement on women’s agency is to ignore “the still-existing political inequalities of women” (p. 177).

The recognition that gender inequalities still exist and that we are not, in fact, in a world that is beyond feminism continues to be a subject of much discussion in academic circles, where the term “postfeminism” has been used in a very different way. In this case, the “post” signals a body of feminist work which aligns itself with the theories of postmodernism, post-structuralism and postcolonialism as “a pluralistic epistemology dedicated to disrupting universalising patterns of thought” (Gamble 2006, p. 41). In this sense, the term becomes aligned with a definition of “third wave feminism”, as a body of theories that continue the legacy of the second wave, predominantly through critiques of essentialism (Showden 2009). Rather than rejecting or actively pushing against the arguments of the second wave like Girlie feminism, the third wave articulates a connection to older feminisms, embracing its critiques while emphasising ways that these may be evolved in the present context and used to revive activist work (Showden 2009). Gamble argues that the third wave attempts to adapt some of the key arguments of the second wave to an ever-changing world, and to address a generation of younger, contemporary women in particular. Showden notes that rather than being beyond feminism, we are thus instead in a process of creating a new gender regime in which many of the core issues of the second wave remain relevant, but are being addressed in different ways.

Third wave feminism is then the next evolutionary step in feminism, and while it is characterised by a postmodern amalgamation of various contemporary social theories (Conrad 2001), a common thread linking these theories is postmodernist and post-structuralist focus on difference, deconstruction and decentring (Mann and Huffman, 2005). Showden argues that across the different approaches that make up the third wave is a shared commitment to building coalitions among diverse groups of people; to prioritise and expand identity category play and to challenge the use of gender as an

organising principle for distributing political and social power; and an increased complexity of understanding of the intersection of gender, race, class and sexuality. It is characterised by a “reliance on fluid boundaries, fear of restrictive labels, and determination to question modern conceptions of gender” (Conrad 2001, p. 196), and a valorisation of multiculturalism and alternative sexualities. The third wave places emphasis on embodied politics, focusing on “personal and often physical, bodily action that aims to provoke change by exercising and resisting power in everyday life” (Fixmer and Wood 2005, p. 237).

Shelley Budgeon (2011) describes third wave feminism as having developed in an attempt “to respond to a wide range of economic, political and cultural features of contemporary Western society which have affected the ways in which gendered subjectivities are articulated and enacted” (p. 279). She lists “the rise of global capitalism, the expansion of information technologies, crises of environmental degradation, multiple modes of sexuality, changing demographics, and declining economic vitality” (p. 280) as some of the key influences in this regard. Budgeon connects the third wave’s conceptualisation of gender identity as being fluid and unstable to the view that “late modern lifestyles are characterized by increased levels of insecurity and that this state of uncertainty prevents individuals from investing their identities in any one specific site” (p. 280). Budgeon also claims that the third wave attempts to respond to a shift that has taken place in the structuring of contemporary power relations, where the “enemy” of patriarchy is being increasingly decentralised. As such, the third wave does not limit itself to gender and sexual difference as the key sites of struggle, but embraces a wide range of identity politics. Budgeon notes that particular attention is paid to “those sites in which lived contradictions associated with new femininities reveal the instability of gender categories and create the possibility for reclaiming femininity through the appropriation and resignification of dominant codings of femininity” (p. 283). She argues that the practices which create a third space beyond binary identity categories are both subversive, as “by deploying disruptive discursive strategies third wave subjects create self-representations which evade the effects of phallogocentric representational practices”, and generative “because they allow for the production of new subjectivities and the legitimization of new forms of knowing” (p. 283). She argues that the aim of the third wave is not to make representational claims on behalf of women, but to encourage women to define themselves and their relationships to feminism in ways that make sense to them. This, however, is far from a straightforward issue, Budgeon contends, as beneath an often celebratory discourse of female success is a “deep sense of unease and ambivalence regarding the role that gender now plays within a transforming social order characterised by rapid change and uncertainty” (p. 284). Within a complex, fluid environment new femininities thus “provide far from straightforward subject positions as they

produce both possibilities and troubles for young women attempting to manage the difficulties of enacting ideals associated with both traditional femininity and masculinity” (p. 285). This tension, she argues, “places demands on young women which are difficult to resolve within current social arrangements” (p. 285).

These scholars thus point to the continued existence of gender inequality in Western contemporary society, although they describe it as having evolved into a far more subtle force which nonetheless exerts significant influence in shaping social structures and behaviours. Given the contemporary settings and themes of Beukes’s novels, the theories and arguments that have emerged in the third wave will provide key references for an analysis of gender and sexuality in the texts. Intersectionality theory and various postmodern and post-structuralist approaches will be considered, as well as outlining how masculinities research is positioned within the third wave.

Much of third wave feminism has been born out of a dissatisfaction with the second wave’s conceptualisation of women as a homogenous group with shared experiences (Mann and Huffman 2005). Women of colour in particular have been at the forefront of a critique of the second wave’s tendency to downplay differences between women, and its lack of acknowledgement of the influence of other identity categories such as race, age, class or sexual orientation on gendered subjectivity (Mann and Huffman 2005). These scholars have criticised the second wave’s approach to dealing with multiple oppressions, claiming that it tended to treat multiple oppressions as separate, distinct, and hierarchised rather than conceptualising them “simultaneous, inseparable, interlocking” (Mann and Huffman 2005, p. 59). These critiques led to the conceptualisation of intersectionality theory, which is concerned with acknowledging the differences between women, and the way in which various identity categories, such as gender, race, class and sexual orientation, intersect and influence the experiences of an individual (Mann and Huffman 2005; Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011). Intersectionality theory argues that these various identity categories cannot be separated but are experienced simultaneously, and thus does not seek to privilege one axis of identity over another but considers how various identity categories “*intersect* (rather than work additively and as discrete categories) to produce both identities and political needs” (emphasis in original, Showden 2009, p. 182). This theory thus places “the site of power at the junction where the axes overlap and intertwine”, and its emphasis on multiple axes of difference aims to reflect “the complexity and transient nature of identity and of experience” (Frost and Elichoff 2013, p. 57).

Intersectionality theory's critique of a conceptualisation of women as a homogenous group is echoed in other postmodern and post-structuralist feminist approaches which are concerned with deconstructing gender categories and challenging the essentialist notions which underpin them. An essentialist understanding of gender sees masculinity and femininity as being biologically determined and men and women thus as being inherently and unalterably different (Phoca 2006). It also thus sees gender in strictly binary terms. Theories which seek to deconstruct an essentialist understanding of gender work to expose the socially constructed nature of these two categories, and in so doing to destabilise a binary model of masculinity and femininity so that neither term may be privileged over the other, as well as opening up a space for the consideration of a vast array of different masculinities and femininities (Phoca 2006).

Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) describe postmodernism as primarily being a theory of society, culture and history, and post-structuralism as primarily being a theory of knowledge and language. Postmodernism turns away from a modernist valorisation of scientific thinking, and proposes 'that instead of the existence of one essential truth, there are multiple subjective, relative truths of personal construction. These realities are shaped not just by subjective experience, but also "by what is available from society, culture, the spoken and written word" (Frost and Elichaooff 2013, p. 46). Postmodernism sees knowledge as being socially constructed and therefore culturally specific, and is thus critical of theories that claim absolute truth or universal applicability. It has been connected to "a loss of faith in the powers of science and other universalist metanarratives (or large-scale theories) as the route to improve the human condition", and an increased emphasis on "cultural representations and knowledge forms, with greater recognition of the local and the specific and of minority social groupings, differences and diversity" (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, p. 110). It challenges the idea that any knowledge is fixed, advocating instead for fluid understandings of the world (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004).

Postmodern feminism thus seeks to consider women's experiences and behaviour "in relation to the context in which they are taking place rather than within a framework of assumed hegemonic norms that sees women as members of a group that is deviant from the norm" (Frost and Elichaooff 2013, 46). Paralleling much of the work of intersectionality theory, postmodern approaches reject the notion of gender categories as homogenous groups, instead placing value on individual realities and the diversity of women's experiences (Gray and Boddy 2010). A postmodernist approach aims to deconstruct socially constructed categories to explore individual variations within those groupings, and in so doing to question the existence of such groupings themselves (Gray and Boddy 2010). It

questions Western universalism and embraces multiculturalism and plurality through an emphasis on difference, diversity and deconstruction.

Post-structuralism similarly rejects the notion of the subject as a fixed entity with any inherent essence, and places its emphasis on the importance of language as a means of structuring our experiences of the world (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). It sees meanings as being created “through words and their relationships to other words” and thus argues that meaning is being “endlessly remade through the process of reading or speaking and changes in social life” (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, p. 113). The key principle of a post-structuralist approach, then, is the principle that “language produces social reality, which varies across cultures and time” (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, p. 113). Post-structuralism regards language as being constitutive of experience rather than just representative of it, and thus emphasises the idea that knowledge is socially produced, unstable and contextualised (Frost and Elichaoff, 2013). In this understanding, “language is not separate from experience because the way it is understood and expressed is reliant upon it” (Frost and Elichaoff 2013, p. 47).

Post-structuralist feminists thus seek to expose the ways in which language creates and reinforces essentialist views of women as different from men, and considers how power relations are constructed and maintained through these essentialist and binarist discourses in which the dominant half of the binary (man) is granted the status of “normality, rationality and naturalness”, while in contrast the subordinate term (woman) is marked “as other, as lacking, as not rational” (Davies and Gannon 2005, p. 318). It furthermore shows how the social world not only shapes us into particular ways of being, but also exposes how those ways of being are made desirable, “such that we actively take them up as our own” (Davies and Gannon 2005, p. 318). The subject is thus inscribed “not just from outside of herself, but through actively taking up the values, norms and desires that make her into a recognisable, legitimate member of her social group” (Davies and Gannon 2005, p. 318).

Post-structuralist feminism is interested in the kind of gendered subjectivities that are available to individuals within a popular discourse and the way in which individuals actively take up the gendered conditions of their contexts, defending them, desiring them and understanding themselves in terms of them (Davies and Gannon 2005). It aims to deconstruct language in order to examine how realities are constructed and the limits thereof, and thereby undermines the claims of dominant discourses to superiority, exposing them as merely options among a multitude of knowledge systems (Davies and Gannon 2005). This body of work argues:

Gendered subjects exist at the points of intersection of multiple discursive practices, those points being conceptualised as subject positions. The individual is not fixed at any one of these points or locations. Not only does the individual shift locations or positions, but what each location or position might mean shifts over space and time and context. This understanding is central to the fluidity and multiplicity of subjectivities that is central to feminist post-structuralist thinking about change and agency. (p. 320)

Post-structuralist feminism accepts and embraces ambivalence and contradiction in its understandings of gendered experience, and understands power not as a fixed entity belonging to one gender, but as a system of strategies, manoeuvres, tactics and techniques that are always contingent and unstable, and therefore potentially changeable (Davies and Gannon 2005).

Because of its emphasis on language, post-structuralism has been widely employed in studies of literary texts (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). Post-structuralist feminism seeks to identify ways in which the subject may actively and reflexively engage in the signifying process through which she is constituted in order to disrupt it, by resisting, subverting and decomposing the discourses themselves through which she is constituted (Davies and Gannon 2005). It thus concerns itself with accounts of gender that “*reveal the ways in which sense is being made of gender, or, the way gender is being performed* in that particular text, rather than an underlying essential truth about sex or gender” (emphasis in original, Davies and Gannon 2005, p. 319) in order to disrupt that which is taken as stable or unchangeable.

Together postmodern and post-structuralist feminist theorists thus argue that fixed categories imply a degree of homogeneity of experience among their members that does not exist (Mann and Huffman 2005). They advocate a conceptualisation of identity that does away with fixed categories and universal understandings of human behaviour, valorising difference and individual experience instead (Mann and Huffman 2005). This deconstruction of group categories has become the basis for “a full-scale critique of binary or dualistic thinking” through the key assertion that “identity is simply a construct of language, discourse, and cultural practices” (Mann and Huffman 2005, p. 63), rather than the product of biology. The goal of postmodern and post-structuralist approaches is to dismantle these categories, and in so doing reveal their constructed nature and thereby “to undermine hegemonic regimes of discourse” (Mann and Huffman 2005, p. 63). These approaches have led to a conceptualisation of identity as “multiple, fluid and unstable” (Mann and Huffman 2005, p. 63), allowing for freedom from categorisation, and for the accommodation of ambiguity, contradiction and multiplicity (Fixmer and Wood 2005). This work aims to decentre dominant discourses and do away

with hierarchical world-views by embracing the view that all knowledge is socially constructed and socially situated (Mann and Huffman, 2005). In place of views which attempt to claim superiority, postmodern and post-structuralist theorists “call for polyvocality and more localised mini-narratives to give voice to the multiple realities that arise from diverse social locations” (Mann and Huffman, 2005, p. 65). In so doing, these approaches help to give voice to those that have previously been marginalised by dominant groups.

One of the most influential theorists in this endeavour has been Judith Butler, who conceptualises gender as discursive, relational and performative. In her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler argues that both sex and gender are socially constructed. She eschews the notion that there are any essential dimensions to gender, or that masculinity or femininity are the cultural articulation or performance of the biological sex of a pre-existing subject. Instead, Butler develops the notion of performativity in which she argues that sex and gender are constituted through discourse, which inform a pattern of corporeal acts. She considers specifically how sex and gender are constructed within a heterosexual framework so that they appear to be natural or inevitable, arguing that they in fact create the very elements that they claim to merely be representing.

Sophia Phoca (2006) argues that in this way,

Gender is not represented as “real”, but as a boundary which is politically regulated. Sex is seen as an obligatory injunction for the body to become a cultural sign, and it has to repeatedly define itself as such. Therefore, Butler argues that sex becomes a “corporeal project”, a sustained performative act. The notion of an “authentic” essential masculinity or femininity is replaced by the notion that all gender/sexual configurations are performed, constructed by a recycling of gender signs or sexuality and desire. (p. 50)

If gender has no connection to any pre-existing quality in the subject, masculinity and femininity are then understood as discursive constructions of what men and women should be in any particular cultural or historical context, that inform a set of “bodily and relational performances that, theoretically, can be embodied by (are available to) anyone and will be contextually variant” (Schippers and Sapp 2005, pp. 29-30). There is thus no necessary relationship between one’s biological body and one’s gender, and the possibility exists that a subject with a designated “female body” may exhibit traits that are traditionally thought of as masculine, or vice versa (Salih, 2002). Through this conceptualisation of gender Butler destabilises that which appears to be “natural”, exposing gender as a social construction, and opens up a space for challenging stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity and the power structures which rely on them, as, “if the subject is not just ‘there’ from the

beginning [. . .] but *instituted* in specific context and at specific times [. . .] then the subject may be instituted differently in ways that do not simply reinforce existing power structures” (emphasis in original, Salih 2002, p. 10). The transformative power of Butler’s revelation is, however, limited by the fact that gender enactment occurs within a highly rigid regulatory frame that limits the choice of gender styles that the subject might choose (Salih, 2002). Gender is then “a corporeal performance of a discursively produced and contested set of criteria” for being a woman or a man, which occurs “*within the structural conditions of gender inequality*” (emphasis in original, Schippers and Sapp 2005, p. 30). Nevertheless, this understanding of femininity and masculinity as discursive processes rather than social locations opens up space to challenge hegemonic ideas of femininity and masculinity and rework them in potentially subversive ways.

Laura Hebert (2007) and Nancy Down (2010) argue that it is imperative that third wave feminism’s critique of essentialism and emphasis on heterogeneity in gender categories is extended to studies of masculinity in order to better understand contemporary gender relations. The understanding of masculinity as a social construction rather than a biological given opens up space for the conception of multiple masculinities, and the intersection of masculinity with race, class, and sexual orientation that form critical areas for understanding the interplay of privilege and disadvantage among men, and hierarchies among men (Down 2010). Ultimately, such analysis leads to the powerful realisation that a patriarchal gender structure does not confer privilege on all men, but can in fact be harmful to men, either through “the ‘price’ of privilege” or as a result of “men subordinating men as a way of performing masculinities” (Down 2010, p. 418).

The acknowledgement of multiple, hierarchical masculinities is crucial to an understanding of gender relations as being not the rule of all men over all women, but the fluid interaction of multi-layered hierarchies of identities including gender, race, sexuality, class and so on (Hebert 2007). This conceptualisation of gender relations is integral to the achievement of the ultimate goal of generating broad-based resistance to gender hierarchies, and of reimagining masculinity in more positive, egalitarian ways (Down 2010). Hebert argues that a more inclusive feminist approach that recognises and prioritises multiple masculinities in its work alongside femininities will be a powerful means of forming alliances that transcend gender, and encourage male allies of feminism to take a visible stand against gender inequality in their everyday lives and relationships.

Drawing on this notion of multiple, hierarchical masculinities, Raewyn Connell (2005) describes four patterns of masculinity that are apparent in contemporary Western society: hegemony,

subordination, complicity, and marginalisation. Connell argues that at any given time, in any given society, there is one form of masculinity that is culturally exalted above all others, and she refers to this as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is then an idealistic or aspirational version of masculinity, or as Connell and James Messerschmidt describe it, the embodiment of “the currently most honoured way of being a man” (p. 832). While hegemonic masculinity is not normal in a statistical sense, as only a very select minority of men can actually enact such an idealised version of masculinity, it is certainly normative and forms the standard against which all men in a particular society are measured and in relation to which all other patterns of masculinity are described (Connell 2005). Although hegemonic masculinity may not correspond closely to the actual lives of most men, it thus does “express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires” and “provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 837).

Connell stresses that hegemonic masculinity is historically and culturally defined and therefore not a fixed or stable construct, but one that constantly changes. Connell and Messerschmidt note that this stems from an understanding of gender as being not “a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals”, but rather “configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (p. 836). Hegemonic masculinity is thus culturally and historically positioned and subject to change according to context. In theory, Connell and Messerschmidt argue that this is a point of optimism, as it is thus possible for a more egalitarian means of being a man to become hegemonic. The possibilities of this are, however, “constrained massively by embodiment, by institutional histories, by economic forces, and by personal and family relationships” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 842-3).

Connell and Messerschmidt stress that the concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities, through a complex interplay of “cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalisation, and the marginalisation or delegitimation of alternatives” (p. 847). Connell identifies three such patterns of alternatives. The first of these is subordination, and in contemporary Western society she argues that this most often manifests in the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men. Connell argues that “this is much more than a cultural stigmatisation of homosexuality or gay identity. Gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices” (p. 78). She lists political and cultural exclusion, cultural abuse, legal violence, street violence, economic discrimination and personal boycotts as various means by which homosexual men are subordinated to heterosexual men, and argues that homosexual men are positioned at the very bottom of the hierarchy among men. “Gayness, in patriarchal ideology,

is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” she contends, and “hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (p. 78). This, she argues, is most clearly signalled by name-calling which displays an obvious symbolic blurring with femininity.

The second alternative to hegemonic masculinity that Connell identifies is complicit masculinity. She argues that while it is only a minority of men who are “rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety”, the majority of men will benefit from this hegemony as “they all benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (p. 79). Most men thus have some connection to, and receive some benefit from, hegemonic masculinity although they do not embody it. Complicit masculinity then refers to “masculinities constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the front-line troops of patriarchy” (Connell 2005, p. 79). She identifies a number of areas of social life, such as marriage, fatherhood, and community life, in which male complicity with patriarchal hegemonic masculinity is evident although not explicit. She claims: “A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists” (pp. 79-80), thereby suggesting that complicity may simply be an altered and more nuanced dimension of male domination.

The third alternative pattern of masculinity that Connell identifies is marginalisation, which refers to the relations between the other three patterns of masculinity in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups. In this pattern of masculinity, other social structures such as race and class thus become significant, although marginalisation will always be “relative to the *authorisation* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group” (emphasis in original, pp. 80-1). Hegemonic and marginalised masculinities are, however, always subject to change according to particular situations and changing structures of relationships.

Connell also considers the role of violence in the maintenance of a patriarchal gender structure, arguing that it is often employed by men in order to defend the authority and material benefits that they receive by virtue of the patriarchal dividend. Connell argues:

Violence is part of a system of domination, but it is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate. The scale of contemporary violence points to crisis tendencies in the modern gender order. (p. 84)

Connell sees these crisis tendencies as stemming predominantly from the collapse of the legitimacy of patriarchy and the global surge of the women's movement; a change in the distribution of work and wealth between genders; and the legitimation of alternate sexualities and women's sexuality. She argues that these changes in gender relations force both men and women to engage with the construction of contemporary gender relations, and highlights that "men no more than women are chained to the gender patterns they have inherited. Men too can make political choices for a new world of gender relations" (p. 86). However, she acknowledges that "those choices are always made in concrete social circumstances, which limit what can be attempted; and the outcomes are not always easily controlled" (p. 86).

Like Hebert and Down, Connell and Messerschmidt also stress the need to study masculinities in relation to changes in femininities, arguing that gender is *always* relational. They claim: "Gender hierarchies are also affected by new configurations of women's identity and practice, especially among younger women – which are increasingly acknowledged by younger men" (p. 848). As a result of this, they contend that research on hegemonic masculinity needs to pay close attention to the practice of women and the interplay of masculinities and femininities in society.

These theories and arguments will be used to inform an analysis of the representations of gender and sexuality that are offered in the key characters of Beukes's four novels. Given the third wave's conceptualisation of gender as a social construction, this will particularly involve a consideration of how the fictional – though not unrecognisable or wholly unrealistic – alternate societies that Beukes portrays in her texts exert an influence on the gendered subjectivity of her characters. The obvious connections between these created worlds and realistic contemporary society will form the basis for a consideration of what Beukes is suggesting with regard to gender and sexuality in our historical present.

This study will make use of textual analysis as a method for exploring the representations of gender and sexuality in the key characters of Beukes's four novels. Catherine Belsey (2005) discusses the value of textual analysis as a methodology for research in cultural criticism. She argues: "Textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help" (p. 160). She highlights that research as a distinct form of study "is expected to make a contribution to knowledge; it uncovers something new" (p. 163), and this is made possible by analysing a text closely "in the light of something

I bring to it from elsewhere” (p. 163). Belsey argues that the process of interpreting a text is a dialogue between the text and the reader. The text, she explains, poses limits on meaning-making by inviting the reader to see things in a certain way. It is not “an empty space, a vacancy into which we pour whatever we like” (p. 168), but rather an active participant in the process of signification, and always intertextual. The possible meanings of a text therefore exist in the relation between the text and the reader who is its destination, and each party contributes to the process of meaning-making. The reader is not entirely controlled by the text but has a certain degree of independence to change the position from which he/she views the text. She contends: “Every time [a text] appears in a new location, the signifier relates differently to its prior appearances, as well as its new surroundings [. . .] Every time it is recognised, it is capable of being seen in a new light, related to different knowledges” (p. 169).

Belsey highlights the fact that any given text can be read in several different ways, and that meaning is always plural – in other words, that there is no singular “correct” reading of a text. She argues that textual analysis poses the questions which research seeks to answer in its acknowledgement that the text itself constitutes the inscription of culture. Her contention, then, is that textual analysis should be used as a methodology in research that allows the text to open up avenues of meaning. Appropriating the text “to illustrate a prior thesis seems to miss the point”, she argues: “my idea is that the text has priority; ideally, the text sets the agenda” (p. 171). She explains that there is no prior, fixed meaning to a text that must be discovered, “instead, there are only multiple possibilities, intended or unintended, to be followed up and assessed in the light of what we can learn from the text itself in its relation of difference to the sources it cites” (p. 196).

In this dissertation genre theory and third wave feminist theories will be brought into dialogue with the primary texts under consideration, in order in to examine the texts as they unfold in light of these themes and arguments. Rather than attempting to impose a rigid predetermined argument on the texts and searching for those elements of the texts that would support that argument, this dissertation instead notes that Beukes’s four novels present a mix of generic components and gendered characters and seeks to explore these areas of the texts by relating them to the genre and gender theories that have been discussed. In order to do this the dissertation will be divided into four main chapters, as well as a concluding chapter. Each chapter will focus on one of Beukes’s novels, and the chapters have been ordered according to publication of the novels from earliest to latest date (the order will thus be as follows: *Moxyland*, *Zoo City*, *The Shining Girls*, *Broken Monsters*). As the novels do not operate as a series, but are distinct in their narratives, this order is merely an arbitrary means of organisation. In

each chapter, a consideration of the novel's use of genre will be undertaken, relating this to the dominant genre categories that are evident in the text as well as to the concepts of interstitial fiction and span fiction. Of particular interest will be a consideration of how gender and sexuality have typically been represented in these genres, and how Beukes's manipulation and amalgamation of genre tropes thus affects a straightforward reading of the key characters' genders and sexualities. An analysis of the key characters in each novel will then be undertaken in order to explore how these characters are positioned in relation to stereotypical versions of masculinity and femininity, and to discuss the ways in which they conform to, deviate from or subvert these constructions in light of the arguments of third wave feminism. The study will be drawn together in the concluding chapter with a comparative discussion of the novels and a consideration of the social commentary that they collectively offer to the perceptive reader.

## Chapter Two

### **“Computer cowboys” and “ass-kicking techno-babes”: challenging cyberpunk’s conventional representations of gender and sexuality in the futuristic digital world of *Moxyland***

Beukes’s first novel, *Moxyland*, was published in 2008 and is set in a near-future version of Cape Town which features a number of advanced fictional technological innovations. The society depicted in the novel is a clearly bifurcated one, exaggerating present socio-economic conditions in South Africa through its depiction of the divide between the wealthy, but corrupt, “Corporates” and the impoverished “Rurals” over whom the Corporates exert rigid social control through the use of advanced technology. The novel is focalised in alternating chapters by four young characters named Toby, Tendeka, Lerato and Kendra as they attempt to rebel against the governance of the Corporates in varying ways. Although their narratives intersect at various points of the novel, the characters are each granted their own sub-plot in the novel as they attempt to assert their agency in this oppressive society. As noted in the literature review, *Moxyland* has been categorised by many scholars as a typically cyberpunk novel, and through this genre Beukes explores a number of social issues that are relevant to South Africa at present, focussing particularly on the influences of capitalism and globalisation on the country. Through the characterisation of her four protagonists Beukes considers the influence of technology on the physical and social lives of individuals, and challenges problematic conventions with regard to the cyberpunk genre’s established representations of masculinity and femininity.

Cyberpunk is a sub-genre of science fiction that typically depicts a technologically-enhanced urban society set in a near future. This future is conventionally dystopian, playing out to extremes a reality in which “globalisation and capitalism have led to the rule of multinational conglomerates, while marginalised individuals live in a post-industrial setting defined by cold metal technology, virtual reality and crime” (Lavigne 2013, p. 11). Cyberpunk considers how digital and cybernetic innovations have altered the human condition, addressing this theme together with “the anti-establishment attitude of punk” (Harrison 2012, p. 210). The world of cyberpunk is a dark one, and frequently features themes such as murder, drug use, prostitution, and war alongside its central preoccupation with technology (Heineman 2012), exploring these issues within a setting of urban decay (Cavallaro 2000).

Cyberpunk has gained recognition as a socially significant literary genre because of the marked connection it draws between the historical present in which it is written and the fictional future it imagines. Although the technological features it depicts are usually not (yet) realistic elements of our

world, the society that cyberpunk portrays is one “we can easily imagine our own one becoming, located somewhere between a simple fiction and the ‘facts’ of the present day” (Harrison 2012, p. 212). Cyberpunk narratives thus typically base their fictional elements on technological and societal features of the present, extrapolating them to extreme, but not entirely impossible, future imaginings. The tenable link that cyberpunk draws between the present and the future lends the genre credence as social and cultural theory as its narratives are positioned as potentially insightful commentary on our present, given their ability to dramatise recognisable versions of the modern predicament and gesture towards the potential implications of contemporary social changes (Balsamo 1996).

Stylistically, cyberpunk narratives are fast-paced and typically postmodern in their deliberate blurring of the lines between reality and fiction, their fragmented presentation, their numerous references to popular culture and their excessive use of technical jargon (Heineman 2012). Jenny Wolmark (2013) draws attention to cyberpunk’s status as a hybrid genre, claiming that it displays a “self-conscious crossing of generic boundaries, both within popular culture and across the binary division between high and popular culture” (p. 119). Cyberpunk is influenced by a myriad of genres, including science fiction, hardboiled detective fiction, dystopian narratives, postmodernist fiction, and the Gothic (Cavallaro 2000). Its preoccupation with the “revolutionary redefinition of the relationship between humans and machines brought about by the science of cybernetics” (Cavallaro 2000, p. 12) is furthermore connected to an attitude of punk resistance to mainstream culture, effectively linking ideas of science, logic and control, with those of rebellion, anarchy and chaos in order to “represent a paradoxical culture riven by conflict and contradiction” (Cavallaro 2000, p. 19). This punk attitude is clearly identifiable in cyberpunk’s commitment to showing “how and why dominant ideologies marginalise dispossessed strata of the population”, which is often achieved by imitating the punk movement’s desire to cultivate and magnify “anything that mainstream culture would deem least savoury” and to deliberately exaggerate “the features that would make it the object of revulsion and aversion and intensify the establishment’s desire to outlaw it” (Cavallaro 2000, p. 20). Cyberpunk also draws on punk’s tendency to employ “highly idiomatic language, a willingness to use obscenity, sensory overload, and an emphasis on paranoia and sexual and psychic violation” (Cavallaro 2000, p. 21). Elements of ‘cyber’ and ‘punk’ thus constantly interact in cyberpunk narratives “to produce varying constellations of the relationship between the glossy world of high technology and the murky world of addiction and crime” (Cavallaro 2000, p. 24).

Much of the fictional world that is portrayed in *Moxyland* appears just as it does in the real world at present, and passing mention to some of Cape Town’s most famous sites together with the presence

of issues such as poverty, Aids, and xenophobia enhance the familiarity of the setting, and position it as distinctly South African. The comfort afforded the reader by this realism in the novel is, however, quickly interrupted by its commingling with elements that remove this world from our present reality. The role of technology is heightened in *Moxyland's* Cape Town, with familiar objects being used in new ways as well as new technologies being employed in the everyday reality of the novel. Cell-phones, for example, have become the means by which all monetary transactions take place, and they have also become the means by which the Corporates maintain social control, with police given the power to administer shocks to offenders through their cell-phones. The harshest punishment that can be dealt by law enforcers is that of disconnecting offenders entirely – “we’re talking relegated to homeless, out of society, cut from the commerce loop, no phone” (p. 85), Toby says – and the Rurals thus live in constant fear of stepping a toe out of line lest they receive this sentence. “You can’t play nice by society’s rules? Then you don’t get to play at all,” Toby muses, highlighting the rigidity with which this society is governed: “No phone. No service. No life” (p. 21). Other fantastical technological elements are slipped into the narrative as normal, everyday features of this world, such as bio-sig pens which draw DNA out of the fingers of those who use them to sign documents, disinfectant swabs with germ-eating bacteria, vitamin-enriched cigarettes that are personalised for the smoker’s nutritional requirements, and VIMbots which take care of domestic chores. Advanced virtual reality games also feature prominently in the text.

*Moxyland* is thus typically cyberpunk in its straddling of the line between reality and fantasy, and in the centrality of technology in the narrative. It is also clearly a dystopian text that extrapolates social issues of the present to problematic imagined extremes. In typical cyberpunk fashion, all signs of a democratically-elected government seem to have dissolved, with only the capitalist-driven corporations remaining as the enforcers of law in this society. The wealthy and powerful Corporates inhabit an entirely different part of the city from the Rurals, who are restricted to the impoverished, disease-ridden slums. The divide in this society is fiercely guarded by over-zealous police with technologically enhanced dogs called Aitos, who stand on high-alert for any individuals who may attempt to challenge this hierarchy. The punk element of the text is introduced through the attempts of the protagonists to do exactly this.

Carlen Lavigne (2013) argues that one of the key preoccupations of cyberpunk is speculation about the perceived changes in human nature and identity that are taking place through the blending of technology and corporeality. A central theme in terms of the genre’s consideration of embodiment is the enhancement of the human body through technological means, which produces a

human/machine hybrid called a cyborg. The mixing of the biological and the technological in these narratives has been hailed as a potentially significant transgressive act, producing characters whose identities are fluid and permeable, whose boundaries are unstable, and who are “always on the verge of becoming something else” (Cavallero 2000, p. xiv). Although the fusion of the technological and the biological could be seen to herald the disappearance of the body, Danni Cavallero (2000) notes that it also opens up opportunities “for experiment, recombination and play” (p. xv). The potential for the hybridity of the cyborg to allow for experimentation, recombination and play is perhaps most famously articulated by Donna Haraway (1991), who uses the figure of the cyborg as a metaphor for advocating the breaching of the boundaries that delineate various identity categories. She argues that the crossing of the boundary between humans and machines calls into question what it means to be human, and in so doing casts doubt on the dualistic categories that we have traditionally used to define ourselves – including that of gender. Haraway argues that the figure of the cyborg allows for the possibility of envisioning a world that is beyond gender categories.

With its challenge to conventional ideas of embodiment and identity formation, together with its stylistic impulse to cross borders and mix modes, as well as its countercultural punk ethos, cyberpunk would seem like a genre that is ripe for the depiction of transgressive versions of gender and sexuality. However, several critics have argued that cyberpunk has failed to fully explore this potential, and that it instead continues to privilege heterosexual masculinity in its narratives while repressing or marginalising the feminine and non-heterosexual relations (Ertung 2001). David Heineman (2012) argues that gender in cyberpunk should be read as fluid and ambiguous because so many of its characters change their identities through technological means, although this fluidity appears to be only an illusion, as “it is common for characters to use technology to attain hypermasculine or hyperfeminine ideals of physical appearance or emotional character” (p. 56). Katherine Harrison (2012) similarly notes that despite the disruptive potential that the genre gleans from its connection to punk, it is distinctly limited in terms of gender through its stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity. The punk element of cyberpunk “thus functions as a glossy surface which obscures the ongoing reproductions of oppositions and hierarchies” (p. 221). Anne Balsamo similarly notes: “The widespread technological refashioning of the ‘natural’ human body suggests that gender, too, would be ripe for reconstruction”; however, “as is often the case when seemingly stable boundaries are displaced by technological innovation (human/artificial, nature/culture), other boundaries are more vigilantly guarded” (pp. 216-7). These boundaries are guarded through the genre’s conventions with regard to the centrality of the male hero in the narrative, and the highly sexualised representations of the secondary female characters who feature in his story.

In *Moxyland* the presence of four protagonists, varied in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race and class, works against the cyberpunk convention of focussing its narratives on a single, male protagonist, and thereby decentres the dominance of this masculinity that so many critics have identified as the problematic core of the cyberpunk genre. The traits associated with the archetypal cyberpunk protagonist and his female cyborg sidekick are shared among Toby, Tendeka, Kendra and Lerato, combining with their embodiment of gender and sexuality to interesting effect. It is in engaging in play with the conventions traditionally employed by the genre in terms of the characterisation of its key male and female characters that Beukes challenges the gendered power structures that underlie them.

The prototypical heroes of cyberpunk narratives are “marginalised male loners who live on the fringes of society trying to manipulate the system’s technological tools for their own profit” (Ertung 2011, p. 80). It is typically this alienated hacker protagonist who undertakes the key “hero quest” of the narrative, which involves using his computer skills to challenge and undermine the corrupt multinationals who govern his world. So central is this male protagonist to the cyberpunk narrative that Wolmark argues that the genre can be defined not just by its contemporaneity but also by its masculinity. She describes the main characters of cyberpunk as being:

hackers and street-wise rock’n’roll heroes who wear mirrorshades and do ‘biz’ in the urban sprawl, dealing in designer drugs, information technology and stolen data. The cyberpunk hacker is a ‘computer cowboy’ who jacks into the matrix of cyberspace by means of implanted cranial sockets. He is the modern equivalent of the *flâneur* described by Baudelaire, strolling anonymously and heroically through the chaotic streets of the modern city. (p. 111)

Although not a conventionally powerful member of society, the cyberpunk hero, according to Wolmark, does represent a kind of contemporarily idealised masculinity which is characterised by an arrogant but suave disregard for authority, and a high degree of skill to manipulate the technology which dominates his world. It is the supremacy of this masculinity that Wolmark sees as being central to cyberpunk’s inability to reach its full potential as a transgressive genre in terms of its representations of gender and sexuality. She argues that the potential that cyberspace offers for facilitating new ways of conceptualising identity and desire is always contained because this space is dominated by the masculine in cyberpunk texts. As such, it becomes a place in which the loss of traditional identity categories becomes something to fear, rather than celebrate.

The threat to the gender status quo that is suggested by the interface of humans and machines in the figure of the cyborg is thus most often contained by the cyberpunk narrative through the re-assertion of gender and sexual norms. Despite the genre's eagerness to cross borders in terms of genre and writing style, Wolmark argues that cyberpunk narratives persistently retreat from the potential implications of the crossing of gender boundaries. Ceylan Ertung (2011) similarly argues that while cyberspace offers the hope of a world beyond conventional notions of embodiment and beyond gender, wherein sexual identity can be altered and rendered multiple and fluid by novel technologies, "in most cyberpunk fiction the roles assigned to men and women remain conventionally hierarchical and bifurcated" (p. 82). He claims that the cyberpunk genre is "the [product] of a mind-set that is thoroughly and insidiously entrenched in the masculine, reiterating (or resuscitating) the sexist attitudes of early science fiction – and patriarchy in general (p. 81). While the genre offers the revolutionary promise of cyberspace as a gender-free space, it instead repeatedly duplicates gendered power dynamics that perpetuate inequality.

Beukes challenges the dominance of this problematic version of masculinity in *Moxyland* by dividing the key characteristics of the prototypical cyberpunk protagonist between two markedly different characters. Toby embodies nearly all of the cyberpunk hero's key qualities in an excessive form, exaggerating his selfishness and his sexist attitude toward women in doing so. Toby is largely negatively positioned, and for most of the novel we are encouraged to be highly critical of the version of masculinity that he embodies. The most positive element of the cyberpunk protagonist, his commitment to engaging in acts of rebellion against the corrupt multinationals who govern his world, is transposed onto the character of Tendeka, who is far more positively portrayed in his embodiment of a principled and compassionate masculinity. Tendeka is also homosexual, which works to undermine the genre's typical glorification of heterosexual masculinity.

Toby comes from a wealthy family, but finds himself traversing the dingier streets of the city after having been cut off from his parents who refuse to financially support him and his drug addiction. Toby was once an ambitious man who was pursuing a Master's degree in literature, but his addiction to a wide-range of narcotics has left him apathetic and desperate just to make enough money to get his next fix. In order to do so he undertakes a number of part-time jobs that are often of an illicit nature. Toby is a selfish and isolated character who does not cultivate meaningful relationships with anyone, and this translates into his romantic dealings with women with whom he pursues a number of casual affairs. Alienated, misogynistic, cynical, steeped in technology, and thriving in a dark world, Toby seems to almost excessively embody the prototypical cyberpunk "street-wise rock'n'roll hero"

(Wolmark 2013, p. 111). Toby's chapters are written as though he is directly addressing an audience as he records various aspects of life on his BabyStrange (a coat with cameras sewn into it) and publicises them on his streamcast entitled, in crude punk fashion, "Diary of Cunt" (p. 17). In his opening chapter he describes this streamcast as: "Your weekly round-up of Toby's astounding life: good drugs, good music, sexploits with exceptionally beautiful girls, regular skirmishes with the motherbitch, and, most recently, some para-criminal counter-culture activities" (p. 17), and in so doing sums up a striking example of the archetypal cyberpunk protagonist.

Despite his flippancy Toby often acts as a kind of informal anthropologist who keenly observes his world and provides some wry but accurate insights into the way in which his society operates. Upon walking through the market, for example, which is bustling with vendors selling cheap versions of techy gadgets made in Asia, Toby notes that much of the merchandise is being sold illegally, "but then notions of illegal don't extend to the developing" (p. 10), he says. Wolmark suggests that Toby can be read as a *flâneur* for the modern, digital age; a figure which Petra Désirée Nolan (2004) describes as a modern male "urban wanderer and observer" (p. 63). The *flâneur*, who emerged in literature of the nineteenth century, typically traverses an urban terrain, always looking attentively at his surroundings, for his "hermeneutic endeavour is to 'read' the urban wilderness and its crowd" (Nolan 2004, p. 63). Above all else, Nolan argues, the *flâneur* is an observer and a recorder, and in undertaking this endeavour he hopes to gain some understanding of the bewildering modern world he finds himself in. The *flâneur* is quite at home among the crowds of the city; however, he remains a detached and alienated character, although he is always on the lookout for a desirable woman as he wanders the streets of the city. Toby takes the roaming and observing nature of the *flâneur* into a digital realm through the use of his BabyStrange, which he often switches on to record mode while navigating the streets of Cape Town, claiming: "You'd be amazed at what compelling viewing even the most arb of daily interactions can make" (p. 9). Despite his coarse sense of humour and lack of compassion, Toby's desire to observe and record the world around him, and to share his images and thoughts on his streamcast, represents an attempt to understand and engage with his world on some level.

Toby is selfish and highly unsympathetic towards other people, and an air of detachment and cruelty characterises all of his interpersonal relationships. While Toby seems to know a lot of people, he does not have any meaningful friendships or romantic relationships, choosing instead to charm his way into forming superficial connections that are useful to him in some way. This is demonstrated when he goes to meet Tendeka, who is orchestrating various acts of rebellion against the Corporates. While Tendeka treats Toby as a friend, greeting him with a hug when Toby arrives at the bar, Toby's

commentary in the chapter makes it clear that he is only helping Tendeka because of the benefit he can gain from doing so: “I score quality vid that’ll push up my streamcast’s rankings, and he gets his exploits recorded for posterity” (p. 14), he says. While Tendeka believes passionately in the fight he is undertaking for the betterment of society, Toby is only involved in the rebellion in so far as it is advantageous to him personally. He does not appear to harbour any deep ideological concerns about the society he lives in, and cruelly dismisses Tendeka as a “Mr Steve Biko-wannabe” (p. 17). This is something that we come to criticise Toby for in later chapters focalised by Tendeka, whose political ideals and desire to try and bring about practical, positive changes in his society warrant respect.

Toby’s lack of connection with other people extends into his romantic life, as is evidenced by his penchant for casual sex. Toby is a highly sexist character who approaches his trysts with women with a high degree of arrogance and callousness, and passages that reflect his inner thoughts often reveal a leering attitude to the women who fall for his charms. Toby provides us with a clear idea of his attitude towards women and relationships while musing about how much he likes Kendra after meeting her at the pool bar. He says:

The last person I was this interested in was Tamarin, and she was psycho deluxe, especially when she bust me and Nokulelo together. But what was she expecting when I was still with Jenna when we hooked up? Forget the rational, they always think they can change you. Rearrange the furniture. What is with that? (p. 68)

In this statement Toby displays a casual attitude towards sex, relationships and cheating, and moreover positions himself as the innocent party, framing the women he has disappointed as being irrational and unreasonable for expecting commitment or sincerity from him. He furthermore suggests that this is a common attitude, that in general women are unreasonable for expecting these things from men, by the rhetorical question he poses at the end of the quotation which aims to imply that it is a universal perplexity. Toby’s lack of meaningful relationships does not seem to worry him, and the arrogance with which he pursues these casual affairs, together with the delight he seems to take in disappointing women who expect more than a one-night stand, suggest a problematic version of masculinity. Toby is unwilling to connect with women emotionally and instead reduces them to sexual objects, and in so doing he maintains control in the casual relationships he pursues. Toby’s need for control with regard to women is further communicated when he and Kendra have sex and Toby, put off by her boldness at initiating it, comments: “it’s a little annoying, kids, cos where’s the fun in that?” (p.225). That Kendra attempts to take the lead in intimate moments vexes Toby as he feels as if this is the domain in which he can exert a masculine dominance, that is perhaps less potent in other spheres of his life.

Toby's tendency to objectify women also connects to the masculine gaze of the *flâneur*, and his search for desirable women in the streets of the city. Drawing on the work of Lacan, Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough (2006) argue that there are two modes of the male gaze: one which is scopophilic, which preserves patriarchal power by positioning women as "the objects of an erotic and covetous look" (p. 10), and one which is narcissistic, which suggests that "if the look is a way of taking the other as an object, it is actually in an effort to repair a fundamentally lacking self" (p. 10). D'Souza and McDonough argue that the gaze of the ever-watchful *flâneur* can thus, on the one hand, be read "as an assertion of male authority over women on the city streets by recasting them as erotic objects" (p. 10), but on the other, it may be indicative of an unstable masculinity. Aligning themselves with the latter reading, the authors suggest that the *flâneur* could then be understood as "an ideological construction or representation that had as its purpose the making invisible of the instability at the heart of masculinity" (p. 10). Toby's condescending, and at times vindictive, attitude towards women could thus be interpreted as an act of over-compensation, in a bid to assert an allegiance to a patriarchal ideal which he falls short of in other areas of his life, such as in his lack of career success and financial security.

Toby's use of language is also typically cyberpunk, with a flurry of brand names, technical jargon, made-up slang and expletives imbuing his speech. For example, he describes things as being "not exactly halaal" (p. 18) if there is something wrong, or alternatively as being "sony" (p. 23) if everything is fine. He is also typically punk in his fondness for crude expressions, and idioms of his own invention are scattered throughout his text, such as when he claims that "security on the adboards is tighter than a nun's twat" (p. 15). His use of language works to further emphasise the alignment of his character with the conventions of the cyberpunk genre. While the version of masculinity that is promoted by these texts may not seem to be ideal by present cultural standards, the traditional hierarchical positioning of masculinity and femininity that scholars have argued exists in cyberpunk texts does suggest a complicity with patriarchal ideals. While Toby may not embody all the qualities associated with patriarchal hegemonic masculinity, he does assert an allegiance to it through his treatment of women, which could potentially be read as over-compensation for the ways in which he falls short of it. Beukes constantly encourages readers to be critical of Toby, especially in his treatment of women, and seems to suggest that both this version of masculinity, and a world which idealises it, are problematic. In so doing she mounts an implicit critique of the cyberpunk genre's conventional treatment of gender, as well as the patriarchal power relations it promotes.

She further highlights this point by almost over-emphasising Toby's alignment with cyberpunk conventions, critiquing the version of masculinity associated with the genre by casting the key qualities of the character in a negative light by making them excessive. This is driven home by her displacement of the one characteristic of the cyberpunk protagonist that is perhaps his most redeeming quality – his commitment to engaging in acts of rebellion against the oppressive Corporates who govern his world – onto another character. In *Moxyland* Toby is merely a sidekick to the “hero quest” undertaken by Tendeka, onto whose character Beukes transfers the ideals of the cyberpunk protagonist who attempts to fight against the evil powers in his world.

Tendeka is Toby's antithesis in his characterisation as a highly principled and compassionate individual, whose life revolves around helping other people and fighting to improve the state of society at large. Tendeka is actually from a middle-class family but, refusing to accept any benefits from the corporate-led social structure he so vehemently opposes, he has chosen to fully immerse himself in the life of the Rurals. As he travels home to the outskirts of the city we begin to see why he is so uncompromising in his bid to defend the rights of these people. Tendeka describes the bustling taxis where people are forced to “[shove] in among 24 people packed into a space officially licensed for 16” and to deal “with the strikes or the gun fights when the taxi wars get too heated” (pp. 33-4). He also notes the poor living conditions that the Rurals are condemned to, describing “the tin shacks and the old miners' hostels and the converted containers” that serve as dwellings, and points to the spread of disease, claiming angrily that “people are just as economically fucked as they were before, only now they're sick as well” (p. 36). Through his descriptions Tendeka highlights the lack of development that has occurred in the townships of the city, and the continued poverty, and all its associated social ills, that the Rurals are forced to live with due to a lack of intervention from the Corporates. The picture Tendeka paints is a recognisable version of the present reality in South Africa, and readers are urged to see that these problems will only persist and intensify in the future so long as those at the top of the social power structure refuse to do anything to help those at the bottom. Through this we are strongly encouraged to support Tendeka's worldviews and to allow for some understanding of the lengths he is willing to go to in order to enforce them.

Tendeka's commitment to helping others is evident on multiple levels, stretching from his personal life, to his community, to society at large. Although the incident report which introduces Tendeka states that he is married, we soon learn that he is actually homosexual, and that he is in a committed relationship with a man named Ashraf. The marriage that is mentioned is merely a cover in order to help a refugee named Emmie gain permanent residence in the country. Not only has he helped her in

this way, but he and Ashraf also pay the rental fee that enables her to run a stall at the Green Point Market, and plan to adopt the baby she is expecting. Although less radical than Tendeka, Ashraf is also an extremely compassionate man who is committed to doing whatever he can to help those in his community. Together Tendeka and Ashraf run a number of social outreach programmes, including a soccer club in the township where they live, which seems to double as a safe haven for children in the area who need it. The couple take on parental roles to the children, cleaning up after them, helping them with their homework, and trying to keep them out of illegal activities by engaging them in the soccer team.

Tendeka's dedication to his ideals, coupled with his zeal for fighting for tangible change in society, make him an exemplary leader for a revolution, but as the novel progresses these qualities are also what make him fanatical in his beliefs and endow him with a quick temper and a willingness to sacrifice all for the greater good. This reaches its peak after he meets someone in a virtual reality programme known only by his on-screen moniker "skyward\*", who recruits Tendeka to run a number of protest operations in the city, sending him the 'intel' and resources that are necessary to execute them. Although Tendeka's reasons for wanting to oppose the corporates are legitimate, his commitment to doing so reaches radical heights when he recruits a number of street children to take part in one of the protest missions he organises. He reasons that these children are perfect for such a mission because they are already disconnected, and therefore have nothing to lose in engaging in illegal acts of resistance against the Corporates. "They're disenfranchised. Society dropouts, the lost generation. We're giving them a purpose" (p. 171), Tendeka tries to explain to Ashraf; however, at this point readers are encouraged to side with Ashraf who is furious that Tendeka is willing to risk the lives of children.

Ashraf's worst fears are realised when the police release the M7N1 Marburg virus at the protest, and everybody present becomes infected. The virus induces extreme flu-like symptoms, and is fatal to those who do not check into a vaccine centre within a few hours, where they will surely face arrest (or worse) because of their implication in the riot. As Tendeka lies dying in an alleyway we realise that he is unwittingly to blame for sending a vast number of people to their deaths. It furthermore transpires that skyward\* was never an activist, but put into place by the Corporates to deliberately incite a rebellion from the Rurals that would, in turn, give the police reason to increase their measures of defence against them. Tendeka's desperation to bring about change makes him an easy target for manipulation, and he unintentionally becomes instrumental in the decimation of the very people he is trying to save. While we are urged to be critical of Tendeka to a certain extent, we are also

continually reminded that his faults stem from a desperate desire to change a very problematic society for the better. While both Toby and Tendeka identify problems in their society, Toby never shows any inclination to try and help anyone but himself, and we are therefore encouraged to view Tendeka's passion favourably in contrast with Toby's apathy. Tendeka and Ashraf's relationship is also portrayed as a very loving and respectful one, and this stands in stark contrast to most of the heterosexual relationships in the novel, which are generally characterised by an emphasis on casual sex. While Tendeka is a flawed character, we are encouraged to sympathise far more with the version of masculinity that he represents than that which is portrayed by Toby. The end of the novel, which sees Tendeka dying a gruesome death while Toby survives, thus urges us to critically consider the influence that the society portrayed in the novel has on these representations.

As Tendeka's body begins to rapidly deteriorate he convinces Toby to record his final moments so that proof of what the Corporates have done to people can be published online as his last act of protest. Toby has unknowingly been passed a form of nanotechnology from Kendra through their sexual encounter, which is working to eliminate the virus from his body. As he starts to feel better, he becomes convinced that the virus is not real and treats the whole situation as a joke. It is only when Tendeka dies a truly gruesome death that epitomises cyberpunk's preoccupation with the grotesque, that we get our first and only glimpse of Toby's humanity. Toby is completely distraught and for the first time we see him registering real emotion, and conveying some degree of compassion for another human, as he breaks down in sobs. When he checks his BabyStrange and finds that Tendeka's death has been recorded, as per his final request, Toby is relieved and claims that he will honour Tendeka's wish to ensure that the world sees how he died as a result of the corruption of the Corporates. For a moment, the reader is invited to believe that Toby has undergone a positive personality change, and that perhaps he will continue Tendeka's fight for a better world.

This moment is, however, short-lived. Once back in his apartment, Toby realises that he will not die in the same way Tendeka has because he has been passed the nano, and he quickly regains his nonchalant attitude. He turns on the TV to find that Tendeka is being hunted down by the police, framed as a terrorist, and as he considers the footage of Tendeka's death he claims: "I have the total sony exclusive on the untimely death of a terrorist. Or a martyr. Depends who's paying" (p. 289). Toby's brief moment of compassion for Tendeka, and the cause he was fighting for, is thus quickly erased by an overriding desire for personal advancement, and the end of the novel is left ambiguous, with no certainty provided for the reader as to what he will actually do with the footage. Cheryl Stobie (2012) argues that Toby's brief but intense reaction to Tendeka's death should not be discounted, and

suggests that the novel's open-endedness activates "a heartfelt desire for Toby's better instincts to prevail, even while experiencing a profound scepticism" (p. 374). For those in whom this scepticism prevails, Beukes suggests an alternative reading which is still saved from being entirely pessimistic. In an interview with Shaun Green (2014), the author herself suggests that the unlikelihood of Toby undergoing a positive personality change at the close of the novel can, paradoxically, be read as a point of optimism. Given his promiscuous lifestyle, Beukes argues that it is possible that he will continue to pursue casual sexual relationships with women in the future, and therefore pass on the nanotech to them, just as Kendra passed it to him. Unintentionally, then, he may gift the disenfranchised with the technology that was manufactured for the Corporates, and the physical benefits that go with it. This is beyond the scope of the actual novel, however, and thus remains but one speculation among many potential readings of the ending, which Beukes allows for by leaving her ending open and ambiguous.

Although we are repeatedly encouraged to be critical of Toby it is thus, ironically, with him that hope in the novel is placed. Beukes's decision to do this, rather than placing hope on the more likeable character of Tendeka, may seem to be counterintuitive; however, it invites the reader to be critical of the society in which these events have played out. As many scholars in the literature review have noted, that Tendeka and Kendra (the two most positively portrayed characters in the novel) die at the end of *Moxyland* while Toby and Lerato (the two most negatively portrayed characters), thrive, highlights the injustice of the society in which their narratives are set. Through the descriptions of the setting of *Moxyland*, which constantly highlight the social and economic problems at the bottom of the social structure, Beukes encourages the reader to see the world represented in the novel in a severely negative way. This criticism is further heightened by the connections she draws between the issues that are prevalent in our historical present and those she presents in the imagined future. That hope in the novel hinges on Toby's most negative qualities – his desire for meaningless sexual encounters and his misogynistic treatment of women – furthermore urges us to question the gender dynamics that are played out in this world. It is Toby's complicity with patriarchal ideals that allows him to survive in this world, and on which hope in the novel depends. Far from suggesting that these should thus be praised, Beukes's repeated negative positioning of Toby's character suggests that a world in which this is made possible is deeply flawed. This is reinforced by the largely positive presentation of Tendeka, especially with regard to his relationship with Ashraf. That Tendeka dies such a gruesome death is highly unsatisfactory, and the reader is urged to be critical of a world that has allowed this. With regard to gender and sexuality, a nuanced reading may thus suggest that Beukes criticises contemporary society's elevation of detached, casual, hyper-sexualised relationships over

committed and loving ones, implying that they work to re-establish a patriarchal status quo despite the feminine agency and non-conformist attitude that they seem to espouse. In addition, she positions this alongside a positive representation of homosexuality, in which she highlights a propensity for meaningful, loving connections that goes against discourses that position it as depraved or grotesque. That she displaces the most heroic elements of the cyberpunk protagonist onto a homosexual man also undermines the hegemony of heterosexual patriarchal masculinity that is traditionally portrayed in the character.

Her challenge to the version of masculinity conventionally celebrated in cyberpunk narratives is further complemented by the way in which she manipulates the characteristics of the archetypal female cyberpunk character. Dani Cavallaro (2000) and Stacy Gillis (2007) argue that the policing of gender norms in cyberpunk is most evidently played out in the highly sexualised portrayal of its female characters. Both writers note that the female characters typically found in the genre are tough, independent women who are in control of their environments, and who have often undergone extreme physical enhancement to their bodies. These characters thus appear to challenge traditional ideals of submissive femininity; however, the authors argue that this challenge is ultimately undermined by the highly sexualised terms in which they are couched. Gillis describes the female characters of cyberpunk as “ass-kicking techno-babes” (p. 7), and brings cyberpunk, *noir*, and postfeminism into dialogue with one another to argue:

The ass-kicking techno-babes of cyberpunk film and fiction should be read as examples of the (post) feminist [*sic*] subject. These women are positioned as very much at home in the traditionally masculine domains of both technology and physicality, remarkably so given the gender arrangements involved in *noir* and gothic fictions. Yet this articulation of female agency is mediated by the ways in which the bodies of these cyborgic women are reduced to either a sexualised or monstrous femininity. (pp. 10-1)

Gillis claims that the female cyborg presents a potentially powerful figure in its merging of femininity, with its connotations of irrationality, nature and emotion, with technology, and its connotations of rationality, science and intelligence. However, she argues that the potential of this figure is never really realised, “as the femaleness of these cyborgs is contained by a *hyper*-feminised *hyper*-sexuality which draws upon the long history of representing women through sexuality” (emphasis in original, p. 11). Gillis connects the illusory power of the ass-kicking techno-babe to the figure of the postfeminist Girlie, claiming that just as the seemingly powerful Girlie’s appropriation of traditional femininity is always contained within patriarchal discourse, so the power of the cyberpunk woman is always underscored by a long history of representing women as sexualised and as sites of activity. While the

women of cyberpunk may appear to challenge the tropes of traditional, subordinated femininity, they are thus always contained by their participation “in a fetishistic rendering of femininity and femaleness” (p. 12).

Gillis also argues that while in cyberpunk both male and female bodies have been cyborgised, the male body is traditionally positioned as the active key interface with technology while the female body is passively acted upon in being made cyborgic. She argues that the handling of gender in cyberpunk can be seen as being heavily influenced by the detective narratives of *noir*, with the male hacker of cyberpunk descending from the detective figure who prizes rationality and reason over all else, and who exerts authority over the bodies of the female characters in the narrative. The women of cyberpunk are similarly closely aligned with the *femmes fatales* of *noir* in their portrayal of “non-reproductive femininity whose expression of sexuality is perceived as fatally dangerous to men and the heterosexual family structure” (p. 14). Gillis notes that while these cyberpunk women often appear to have exerted a large degree of agency in choosing to alter their bodies into cyborg form, “they often do so for a male gaze and/or for male consumption. Indeed, in some cybertexts, it is sexual pleasure which is paramount in these body alterations” (p. 15). Despite the promise of escaping the traditional confines of embodiment offered in cyberpunk, the cyborgic female body thus remains one “which is predicated and controlled in ways which are deeply embedded within Western epistemologies and ontologies” (p. 15). While the cyborgic female body promises much in its transgressive potential, “its promises are always contained by the models of femininity validated by patriarchal discourse” (p. 16).

As with the male cyberpunk protagonist, Beukes plays with cyberpunk’s conventional representation of women by dividing the key characteristics of “the ass-kicking techno-babe” between two very different characters. Kendra fulfils the role of the cyborgic female in the novel, volunteering as a test subject for a form of nanotechnology that the Corporates are developing, and her body thus becomes the site of the intermingling of biology and technology which calls into question the essentialism of each of these categories, and casts doubt on the legitimacy of others. Kendra, however, is no “ass-kicking” character in her portrayal of submissive and passive femininity. The toughness of this figure is instead transposed onto the character of Lerato, who embodies a number of traditionally masculine qualities. Significantly, through both of these characters Beukes challenges cyberpunk’s tendency to reinforce a traditional gender hierarchy, using the genre’s conventions with regard to the representation of its female characters in unexpected ways. Lerato, although highly empowered and highly sexual, is never presented in sexualised terms, and Kendra’s decision to volunteer for the nano

based on its health, rather than solely for its cosmetic benefits, emboldens her to gradually begin to take control of her life, rather than enhancing her sexual objectification.

Like the typical female cyberpunk characters that Gillis and Cavallero identify, Lerato is a tough, independent woman who is “very much at home in the traditionally masculine domains of both technology and physicality” (Gillis 2007, p.10). Unlike the other three characters, Lerato is not subject to the difficulties of life in the Rurals’ sections of the city, but instead lives in the wealthy corporate section with all the material benefits this affords her. She has not always lived a privileged life, having been orphaned after her parents died of Aids and placed in a trade school where she was trained as a computer programmer with thousands of other children. In order to better her circumstances, Lerato has had to become tough and fiercely competitive, and this makes her a very ruthless character. Lerato embodies many traditionally masculine qualities in her lack of emotional attachment to people, her ambition in terms of her work, and her skills with computer systems. She is moreover alienated, extremely cynical, and becomes embroiled in illegal hacker activity in the course of the novel, which aligns her character with some of the key characteristics of the typically male cyberpunk protagonist. Her role as a hacker, significantly, places her at the active key interface with technology – a position usually reserved for the male protagonist – pushing against the convention in which the female body is merely passively acted upon by technology in being made cyborgic. By combining her female body with a number of traditionally masculine traits, Beukes effectively challenges an essentialist conceptualisation of gender.

Lerato’s character is distanced from stereotypical conceptions of femininity that are associated with being nurturing and emotional, and placing emphasis on forming bonds with others, as is evidenced through her disinterest in maintaining relationships with her sisters, her casual attitude towards men, and her lack of desire to start a family of her own. Lerato’s lack of emotional attachment and capacity for cruelty are reinforced through various comments in the novel, but are perhaps most clearly shown in her treatment of a co-worker named Mpho, with whom she has a short affair while on a business trip. Like Toby, Lerato has a distinctly casual attitude towards sex and relationships, and she becomes frustrated when Mpho continues to pursue her after they have returned home. “He hasn’t caught on [. . .] that our little sexual sojourn was a one-time limited offer, valid for this particular business trip only,” she says, “and only then because there’s fuck-all else to do in Gaborone except fuck” (p. 45). Lerato’s irritation with him quickly transforms into callousness, and she views Mpho’s attempts to try and woo her with a great deal of contempt. When he brings her coffee she “deliberately [lets] the coffee slip through [her] fingers so it drops into the bin, spilling its contents en route” (p. 96), and

when he asks if she got the flowers her sent her she sarcastically responds: “They’re stunning. Amazing. How did you ever think of such a meaningful and original gesture?” (p. 98). Her cruel treatment of Mpho makes it clear that forming meaningful relationships with other people is not high on her list of priorities, and that she has little regard for other people’s feelings. Being successful at her work, and achieving the prestige and financial benefits of doing so, are far more important to her. These qualities work to distance her character from a stereotypical version of femininity, and instead to align her with a number of key masculine traits.

Lerato is depicted as a highly sexual character, much akin to the *femme fatale* in her portrayal of a “non-reproductive femininity” (Gillis 2007, p. 14), but is never positioned in sexualised terms, and this works to push against the tendency to undermine the transgressive potential of cyberpunk female characters that Gillis identifies. Lerato is never sexually objectified, but is rather the one who maintains control and power in all of her romantic connections, in much the same way that Toby does. This works to further align her with traits that are traditionally masculine, playing out Butler’s contention that gender is a set of bodily and relational performances that are theoretically available to anyone, rather than essentially linked to one’s biological sex.

At the end of the novel Lerato finds herself in trouble, when her illegal activity is detected by her employers. While she is being interrogated an elaborate conspiracy is unveiled, in which it transpires that the company created the skyward\* persona from whom Tendeka has been taking orders, in a bid to incite a rebellion that would give the Corporates reason to increase the levels of control in the city. It emerges that they have used Lerato as a central player in ensuring that this happens, and that they have been aware of her illegal activity but have let her get away with it as it helped their cause. The company threatens to kill Lerato unless she agrees to continue to help them in this way, by becoming a conscious participant in the creation of terrorists that will justify heightened levels of societal control. Although obviously forced under duress to take the position they offer her, her closing lines suggest that this is more than just an involuntary decision. “It makes perfect sense” Lerato says; “The process has to be managed. Fear has to be managed. Fear has to be controlled. Like people” (p. 282).

Although the female agency that Lerato portrays is not contained in the narrative through death or marriage, as the *femme fatale* traditionally is, or through her sexual objectification, as the female cyberpunk cyborg traditionally is, it is positioned as problematic in its complicity with an unjust, oppressive regime. Although Lerato represents a highly empowered version of femininity, her extreme embodiment of the traits of ambition, confidence and self-sufficiency make her a cruel character

whom we are encouraged to view critically. The potentially transgressive power of the version of femininity that she represents is not undermined through her sexualisation, but instead through her complicity with a social structure that is determined to hierarchise human life and attempt to control those in subordinate positions. Beukes refuses to replicate a problematic gender dynamic which is oppressive to women, and challenges essentialist notions of gender by creating a female character who embodies a number of masculine characteristics. She also challenges discourses that frame technology as a masculine domain, by having Lerato take on the role of the traditionally male hacker in her cyberpunk novel. However, she is critical of a version of femininity that seeks to oppress others in a bid to get ahead, and one which knowingly colludes with an unjust power structure.

Beukes instead advocates a version of femininity that is compassionate and empathetic through Kendra's narrative in the novel. Kendra is a young former art student who dropped out of university after her father died of cancer. Her forte is photography, and she carries around with her an old analogue camera that requires film – an anomaly in a world that is so technologically advanced. At the start of the novel Kendra is recruited by a corporation to test a new form of nanotechnology, which is injected into the volunteers' bodies and offers them immunity to all injuries and diseases, as well as enhancing their physical appearances. In volunteering to be injected with the nano Kendra comes to represent the cyberpunk cyborgic body which blends together the natural, biological body with scientific, technological elements. Kendra claims of the nano:

The cosmetic effects are the most obvious, but it's the stuff you can't see that counts; the nano attacking toxins, sopping up free radicals, releasing anti-oxidants by the bucket-load. It's a marathon detox and a fine-tune all in one. And the nano's programmed to search and destroy any abnormal developments, so I'll never have to go through what dad did, the cancer chewing its way through his stomach, consuming him from the inside out. (p. 60)

Although Kendra is profoundly aware of her appearance, and makes mention of the cosmetic benefits of the nano, in this passage she highlights how much she values its ability to keep her healthy, and to protect her from the disease which killed her father. Unlike most cyberpunk cyborgic enhancements, the cosmetic benefit of the nano is thus presented as a secondary effect, both in terms of what it does (making her skin look luminescent) and Kendra's emphasis on its importance. Kendra decides to get the nano without discussing it with her manager and lover, Jonathan, and she decides to keep it a secret from him long after she receives it. The agency she displays in choosing to alter her body in this way, as well as the fact that it is not done "for a male gaze and/or for male consumption" (Gillis 2007, p. 15) or for sexual pleasure, positions Kendra's cyborgic transformation as a potentially empowering act.

The doctor explains that the nano will produce flu-like symptoms initially, but these will soon wear off. “Just my immune system kicking into overdrive to war with the nanotech invasion. But it’s only temporary. People adapt. Evolve”, Kendra says (p. 7). Kendra interestingly uses the notions of adaptation and evolution – inherently natural progressions – to describe how her body will respond to the injection of the synthetic scientific enhancement of the nano, and her description implies a seamless blending of the biological and the technological, thereby crossing the boundary between the two and challenging them as distinct categories. Later when Toby notices the logo of a soft drink which has been branded on to her wrist (a side-effect of the nano) he claims that it is different from a tattoo because “this isn’t sub-dermal. This *is* her skin” (emphasis in original, p. 19), and thus similarly highlights the complete merging of biology and technology that she represents as a cyborg.

Kendra’s embodiment of the merging of technology and biology provides the key transgressive theme that is traditionally found in cyberpunk texts. Unlike the prototypical cyborgic female character, however, Kendra is neither tough nor independent, but instead portrays a version of femininity that is self-deprecating and passive in her interactions with men, especially in her ‘relationship’ with Jonathan. Jonathan is very similar to Toby in his approach to women, and treats Kendra with a lack of consideration and an extremely casual attitude. Although Kendra is not blind to this, her sensitivity and desire for meaningful human connection makes her desperately want to believe that on some level he does love her, and she is unable to summon up the confidence to stand up to him or to leave him. Kendra’s lack of self-confidence has made her heavily dependent on Jonathan, or so her psychologist suggests, and this dependence has rendered Kendra “afraid to make [her] own decisions, so [she] defer[s] to Jonathan because it’s easy” (p. 62-3). Jonathan repeatedly reminds Kendra that their relationship is just casual and she knows that he is seeing other women besides her. She claims that she is “cast in the role of Poor Thing. The doomed unrequited who can’t quite let go” (p. 64), which only serves to further deepen her lack of self-confidence. “I am afraid,” Kendra says, “that he’s right. That without him, I am a nonentity” (p. 186). She tries to comfort herself by claiming that this is a mutually beneficial relationship, as she gets a loft apartment and a career guidance in exchange for sex with Jonathan. However, her feelings of hurt and anger make it clear that she does not really see things this way, but pines for a more emotional connection with him. Jonathan’s refusal to grant her that means that he maintains control in the relationship.

Kendra is portrayed as a likeable character through the empathy and compassion she displays for others, but her embodiment of a stereotypically passive and subordinated version of femininity

becomes a source of frustration in the novel for the reader, who is urged to be critical of her inability to remove herself from such a cruel man and unfulfilling relationship. Kendra is, however, not without some agency, and she uses her photography, in particular, as a means to exert a measure of control over her life. When she meets one of the other women whom Jonathan is seeing, for example, she asks to take the woman's picture as a means of "reducing her to planes of colour, the hard sculptured bones offsetting the flicker of pity in her eyes" (p. 64). Like Toby, Kendra also shares a preoccupation with documenting the world around her, although, while Toby relies on an extremely advanced piece of technology to do so, Kendra prefers to use a Nikon analogue camera. Kendra's love of using film stems from a fascination with the flaws that it produces in the photographs, as well as the mystery involved in not knowing how the pictures are going to turn out. She tells Toby: "Film is more interesting than digital. There's the possibility of flaw inherent in the material [. . .] Some of it has rotted or it's been exposed even before I load it in the camera, but I don't know that until I develop it" (p. 161). Kendra's photography is an area of her life in which she feels empowered, and this is made clear when she explains that using an old camera means working without automatic functions, so the role of the operator becomes more influential. At one point she catches Toby unawares and takes a photo of him, and he comments, "She's completely composed now, as if the camera rather than the nanotech inside that smooths out her edges" (p. 27). The control that Kendra is able to exert on the world through her photography thus becomes a means of managing the lack of control she feels in her relationship with Jonathan.

Kendra's decision to be injected with nano also becomes a source of empowerment to her. When she goes to meet Jonathan a few days after she has received the nano, she says: "My secret makes me feel smug and secure, counterbalancing the elation, like a fish jumping in my chest, that I can't keep down at seeing him" (p. 61). She goes on to describe not telling him about the nano as her "amulet of protection" (p. 65), a counter to all the times he has treated her cruelly. Her new-found confidence is dented, however, when she finds out that Jonathan was the one who recommended her for the nano, and that the mutation she has undergone is not a secret but ultimately of Jonathan's doing. Her disappointment at finding out that it was not, after all, only her decision ignites an anger in her that finally gives her the courage to leave Jonathan. She decides to get her own apartment and make her own friends in a bid to distance herself from him, and for the first time she shows some agency, in deciding to go and meet Toby at the club where he works as a disc jockey. She claims: "That e-vite suddenly feels like a passport to somewhere other than here. And maybe tomorrow, everything will be different" (p. 186). This decision to take some control of her life filters through into her relationship with Toby, in whom she quickly recognises "just another Jonathan" (p. 252). Kendra reacts to Toby

with far more confidence and assertiveness than we have seen her do up until this point, challenging him on things she disagrees with and initiating sex with him. When he is unforgivably hurtful to her she furthermore leaves him without second-guessing herself.

Kendra's growing display of confidence and independence is, however, thwarted just as it begins to flourish. Worried about how the nano may interact with the virus, Kendra goes to the medical centre for a check-up and while there, expresses a desire to have the nano removed. In doing so, Kendra is no longer promoting the interests of the company, and is portraying the wrong image for their marketing campaign through her association with the protesters in the subway. As a result, Kendra is effectively 'put down' in the same way that the Aitos are when they are no longer considered useful. In a prior conversation Kendra asks the doctor if the Aitos cannot be used as guide dogs, or adopted, but the doctor replies that it is impossible as "it's our intellectual property. It's very closely guarded" (p. 285). This description firmly frames the technologically enhanced dogs as 'property' or objects, rather than animals, and given the way in which Kendra is killed she too is framed as property, rather than human, thereby denying her the basic rights and ethical treatment she should be entitled to as a human.

The empowerment that Kendra felt as a result of her injection of the nano thus proves to have only been illusory: as soon as she starts to gain agency and make decisions for herself she is considered to no longer be a useful piece of 'property' to the corporation, who cannot easily control her anymore and use her body as a site for projecting a version of femininity that is beneficial to their interests. Although Kendra attempts to assert herself, as many contemporary women do in various ways in the real world, Beukes reminds us that these attempts are always played out within a larger, unjust power structure which curtails the impact of individual choice and agency. Her refusal to couch Kendra's cyborgic transformation in sexualised terms, however, shows a significant departure from cyberpunk norms and positions the intermingling of biology and technology in the female body as a potentially empowering act, rather than reducing it to a means of merely appeasing a masculine gaze.

Although not strictly interstitial fiction in its classification as a cyberpunk novel, *Moxyland* nonetheless displays many of the transgressive tendencies of this style of writing. As a hybrid genre amalgamating elements of science fiction, *noir*, and the gothic, cyberpunk already extends storytelling "into and across various gaps and fault lines" (Moulthrop 1999, p. 200), and Beukes further pushes her novel into the realm of the interstitial by engaging in play with the genre's conventions, especially with regard to its representations of masculinity and femininity. In doing so, she enters the third space of

the interstitial in which her readers are invited to recognise the ways in which her text conforms to the cyberpunk genre's conventions in order to grasp the ways in which she departs from them. In identifying several elements of *Moxyland* as being distinctly cyberpunk, it is possible to read the characterisation of her four protagonists in relation to the genre's conventions and so explore the ways in which she manipulates these conventions in order to challenge cyberpunk's tendency to reiterate "the sexist attitudes of early science fiction – and patriarchy in general" (Ertung 2011, p. 81). She does this by challenging the centrality of the male cyberpunk protagonist which is typically evident in these texts, decentring his dominance in *Moxyland* by dispersing the narrative between four focalisers who embody the character's key traits in combination with a variety of genders, sexual orientations, races, and classes. In Toby, she highlights the cyberpunk protagonist's most negative qualities, urging us to be critical of the detachment and selfishness he embodies. She also frames the sexist attitude inherent in the character as deeply problematic, and suggests that this could be read as a bid to over-compensate for a masculinity which is flawed and falling short of a patriarchal ideal. In Tendeka, she furthermore challenges this ideal by coupling the most heroic quality of the cyberpunk protagonist, his attempt to fight against the Corporates, with a sympathetic portrayal of homosexuality.

As well as manipulating genre tropes with regard to the characterisation of the male protagonist, Beukes also rebels against cyberpunk's tendency to restrict the transgressive potential of its empowered female characters by framing them in terms of a highly sexualised femininity. Lerato challenges essentialist notions of gender in her portrayal of a number of stereotypically masculine traits, and challenges discourses that see femininity and technology as being at odds with each other through her positioning as the hacker character who is able to skilfully manipulate the technology in her world. Through Kendra's decision to become a cyborg Beukes additionally allows the potentially transgressive blending of technology and biology, and specifically technology and femininity, to be played out without limiting it by making her transformation a spectacle for a masculine gaze. Throughout the novel, however, Beukes is ever mindful of the fact that challenges such as these take place within an unequal power structure, and are thus limited as long as those who relish having power over others, and who try to maintain it through unjust and violent means, remain dominant in society.

## Chapter Three

### Representations of gender and sexuality at the intersection of Western and African cultures in *Zoo City*

Beukes's second novel, *Zoo City*, was published in 2010 and follows criminal-turned-*noir* detective Zinzi December as she embarks on an investigative quest in a magical alternate imagining of contemporary Johannesburg. In the world of *Zoo City*, people who commit a crime become magically bonded to an animal, which acts as a kind of shield between the person and the Undertow – a mysterious dark force which annihilates the animalled person upon his/her animal's death. Those who are animalled also receive a magical power, referred to as a *shavi*. As a result of a mysterious dark past, Zinzi carries around a sloth on her back and is bequeathed a *shavi* that allows her to locate lost items. During the course of the novel she is hired by enigmatic music producer Odi Huron to find a teenaged singer named Songweza, who is believed to have run away from home. During the course of her investigation Zinzi uncovers a series of *muti* murders, and the two cases become intertwined as she attempts to track down the perpetrators of both crimes. *Zoo City* disrupts categories, challenges hierarchies and promotes plurality on multiple levels, drawing on the tenets of postmodernism, postcolonialism and postfeminism (or third wave feminism) in doing so. By engaging in play with the *novum* of the novel and employing the mode of magical realism Beukes undermines the superiority of Western worldviews, elevates the legitimacy of alternate worldviews, and advocates an amalgamation of the two. She furthers this impulse through her handling of *noir* genre tropes in the text, challenging the Western and patriarchal paradigms traditionally affirmed by the genre through the characterisation of Zinzi and her lover, Benoît.

The broad category of speculative fiction is particularly relevant with regard to this novel, which offers both scientific and non-scientific explanations for its *novum*, thereby making it difficult to classify as either science fiction or fantasy. Although the text is predominantly focalised by Zinzi, several chapters are constructed to look as though they are excerpts taken from various sources, such as newspaper articles reporting on crimes involving zoos, a film review about a documentary on a famous animalled Afghan warlord, interviews with prison inmates regarding the care of their animals while incarcerated, and extracts from a psychology journal and an encyclopaedia providing explanations on the Undertow and *mashavi* respectively. These excerpts fulfil many important functions: they provide plurality in the text by disrupting Zinzi's first-person narration and give voice to alternate viewpoints in the narrative, and also work to normalise the magic in the novel by framing it as something that is discussed, analysed and reported on in public media, thus positing its existence as a taken-for-granted part of everyday life in this world. These passages also provide a number of different explanations for the

non-realistic elements of the novel, drawing on a range of scientific, religious, and mystical discourses to do so. One passage, for example, refers to “Hell’s undertow” (p. 65) as a form of metaphysical punishment for crimes committed on earth. In contrast to this explanation another passage, which is presented as a paper published in a psychology journal, draws on scientific discourse to describe the psychological phenomenon of “shadow-self absorption” that occurs in “aposymbiot individuals”(p. 157) when referring to the decimation of zoos by the Undertow. This article explicitly positions itself against religious discourses which see death by the Undertow as divine punishment, and instead aligns itself with scientific understandings which frame it as “a quantum manifestation of non-existence, a psychic equivalent of dark matter that indeed serves as a counterpoint to, and bedrock for, the principle of existence” (p. 158). At another point in the novel an array of alternate explanations are given for the Undertow:

The Japanese believe it’s hungry ghosts. The scientologists claim it’s the physical manifestation of suppressive engrams. Some eyewitness reports describe teeth grinding and ripping in the shadows. Video recordings have shown only impenetrable darkness. (p. 209)

Another passage, which is made to look as if it is taken from encyclopedia, draws on elements of established African belief systems in claiming that *mashavi* is derived from the Shona word *mashave* (p. 177). It explains that *mashave* refers to the restless spirits of those who have passed on in bad circumstances who look to inhabit a human host, and bestow the host some kind of special skill if they are accepted. In the novel Beukes never favours any one of these explanations for her supernatural elements or attempts to influence the reader to accept one as more accurate than another. It thus becomes impossible to classify the text as either science fiction or fantasy based on its internal logic, as it has both scientific and non-scientific explanations for its *novum*. It is therefore simultaneously both and neither science fiction and fantasy. This difficulty in terms of classification and the amalgamation of different writing styles makes the text distinctly interstitial, and Beukes’s willingness to “leave [her] world up in the air, not providing every detail or dovetailing every aspect of [her] *novum*” (Brigg 2000, p. 21) furthermore places it in alignment with the most distinguishing characteristic of span fiction. Rather than imposing a single, totalising or superior truth on her readers, Beukes offers multiple, sometimes conflicting explanations for the unusual elements of her narrative, and encourages her readers to be open to ambiguity and contradiction in her refusal to prize one worldview over another.

This openness to multiple worldviews is reiterated in the use of magical realism in the novel, where the magical elements of the text are immersed in an otherwise realistic setting and accepted as a

normal part of that setting's reality. Maggie Ann Bowers (2004) contends that the juxtaposition of the seemingly contradictory terms of "magic" and "realism" brings into question the sanctity of the categories they name, and erodes the distinction between the two by presenting the magical as part of ordinary reality. The term is thus inherently transgressive as it constructs a liminal space between the purely magical and the purely real which "encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures" (p. 64). In addition, because the reader becomes aware that reality is not definite, questions of truth of also brought to the fore. As magical realism allows for the possibility of multiple truths to exist simultaneously, it has been widely used in postcolonial and non-Western contemporary fiction to challenge dominant Western notions of scientifically and logically determined absolute truth. Bowers claims that magical realism has become a popular mode for the discussion of alternative approaches to reality, truth and history to those of authoritative Western assumptions, and that it is often used in postcolonial and feminist writing to express "a non-dominant or non-Western perspective [. . .] in opposition to dominant cultural discourse" (p. 9). Brenda Cooper (1998) notes that magical realism is particularly useful mode for articulating the complex hybrid realities of postcolonial societies, where "old and new, modern and ancient, scientific and magical views of the world coexist" (p. 31). In *Zoo City*, Beukes describes just such a society, and uses magical realism to great effect to challenge Western notions of absolute truth, to transgress the boundaries between Western and African worldviews, and to promote an in-between space in which an amalgamation of the two is possible. Through the use of magical realism Beukes appeals to the reader to suspend judgement, cynicism, and notions of absolute truth and to be more open to assimilating apparently dissonant worldviews.

Beukes appeals to her readers to be open to alternate realities by situating the supernatural elements of the narrative in a very recognisable version of Johannesburg at present. *Zoo City* is described as an area in Johannesburg that is full of run-down buildings, with poor service-delivery, inefficient police, "hurtling taxis" (p. 7), refugees, junkies, prostitutes and street-vendors selling "skyfs" and other goods out of "amaShangaan" (p. 7), the red and blue checked bags that Zinzi quips appear to be handed out with refugee status in South Africa: "Here's your temporary ID, here's your asylum papers, and here, don't forget your complimentary crappy woven plastic suitcase" (p. 7), she sardonically says. All of these elements make it an exceptionally realistic portrayal of a South African Hillbrow-like suburb. The realism of the setting is further enhanced through references to well-known real-world landmarks, such as Sun City (p. 49); Johannesburg suburbs, such as Midrand (p. 85); roads, such as Empire Road (p. 11); shops, such as CNA (p. 115); and restaurants, such as Kauai (p. 111). These elements work to render the world of the novel realistic and recognisable despite its magical nuances, thereby eroding

the distinction between reality and fantasy and challenging the superiority of the former over the latter. In terms of form, there is thus a repeated movement away from totalising discourses and instead an impulse towards multiplicity in *Zoo City*. In various ways Beukes opens up spaces between established categories and challenges the dominance of any one view or understanding over another, urging her readers to be open to worldviews that differ from their own and leading them to see that any sense of 'truth' that they hold is but one of many possible versions. The text is thus distinctly postmodern, postcolonial and postfeminist in its bid to disrupt Western metanarratives or "universalising patterns of thought" (Gamble 2006, p. 41), and instead to champion the value of alternate worldviews, such as those espoused in traditional African belief systems. It further refuses to prize scientific-based 'truths' over those derived by alternate means, and suggests that local, traditional beliefs still have value as meaning-making systems in the modern world.

One such metanarrative that the novel seeks to challenge is the legitimacy of Western hegemonic masculinity, which it addresses through the characterisation of both Zinzi and Benoît. Cheryl Stobie (2012) claims that in terms of genre the novel has been categorised as a *muti noir*, bringing traditional African beliefs into dialogue with a genre that is distinctly Western in terms of its historical grounding. *Film noir* refers to a series of films centring on themes of law and criminality that were popular during the 1940s and 1950s, that were derived from the hardboiled detective fiction that was popular in America in the years preceding it. These films typically projected a world-view that was doomed and hopeless, and explored the darker side of human nature, frequently featuring themes and visual sequences that had previously been considered "too racy, depraved or downbeat" (Luhr 2012, p. 8) to be screened, and challenging cinema censorship codes of the time with "heightened levels of immorality and brutality" (Luhr 2012, p. 8). Critics of *film noir* frequently foreground four main characteristics of the category: the centrality of crime in the narrative, an urban setting, a flawed male protagonist, and the sense of unease on the part of the viewer due to the moral ambiguity of the film (Orr 1997; Luhr 2012; Ilie-Prica 2014).

The *noir* narrative is conventionally dominated by a white, heterosexual male protagonist, who is positioned as either a detective figure who seeks to uncover a criminal conspiracy or, conversely, an individual who is lured into committing a crime (Nolan 2004; Krutnik 1991). The stereotypical *noir* protagonist is alienated, cynical, and of questionable morality, and thus represents a transgressive version of masculinity that challenges patriarchal ideals (Krutnik 1991). Frank Krutnik (1991) observes that the transgressive potential of this figure is, however, traditionally contained by the *noir* narrative, which sees the protagonist either killed in punishment for his transgressions or integrated into

patriarchal society. Krutnik argues that the detective quest undertaken by the protagonist is thus inextricably bound to his quest for identity as a male subject, and the path by which he comes to define himself in relation to “the legally defined framework of law and to the law of patriarchy which specifies the culturally acceptable positions (and the delimitation of) masculine identity and desire” (p. 86). The protagonist either comes to accept his position under the authority of patriarchy, and willingly embodies the ideals of patriarchal masculinity, or he is punished for refusing to do so. Despite the reassertion of patriarchal ideals traditionally seen at the close of *noir* narratives, Krutnik argues that the genre thus reveals that there exist multiple, alternate versions of male desire and identity and it presents these through the characterisation of its anti-heroes, “together with a manifestly more sceptical framing of the network of male cultural authority” (p. 88). He claims that these films reveal the instability of the phallic regime which must constantly protect itself against various forms of “deviance and disruption” (p. 85), which would undermine its illegitimate claim to power.

Women in *film noir* generally take on secondary roles, and inhabit one of two extreme positions as either the alluring and cunning *femme fatale* or the rigidly pure and loyal ‘good girl’ character (Nolan 2004). The *femme fatale* is traditionally characterised by her use of seduction to get what she wants from men, and is positioned by traditional *films noir* as a dangerous, or ‘evil’ version of femininity that lures the male protagonist into a world of criminality and to his ultimate downfall (Farrimond 2011). Like the male protagonist the *femme fatale* is conventionally either killed as punishment for her transgressions, or reformed through marriage to the protagonist. The *noir* hero’s marriage to either the good girl or the appropriately reformed *femme fatale* works to cement his allegiance to a patriarchal regime by affirming his heterosexuality and ensuring the containment of women who challenge the status quo (Krutnik 1991).

*Zoo City* is at its core a story about a criminal who takes on the role of an informal detective in a bid to unwind a dark and convoluted web of crimes that are committed in the seedy underbelly of the metropolis that is Johannesburg, making it distinctly *noir* in both its themes and setting. Beukes, however, extends the transgressive capacity of the genre with regard to its representation of gender into new territory by making Zinzi, an African woman, the protagonist of her narrative. In doing so, she challenges the dominance of Western world views and the centrality of masculinity in the genre by having the cynical, wise-cracking, ‘tough guy’ traits of the stereotypical male detective embodied by a female character, whose cultural identity is influenced by both Western and African cultural paradigms. Through Beukes’s characterisation of Zinzi she simultaneously challenges the rigidly bifurcated casting of women in *noir* narratives as ‘good girls’ or ‘evil temptresses’, and instead offers

readers a version of contemporary femininity that is complex, existing at the intersection of multiple identity categories. Significantly, Beukes also refuses to curb the transgressive potential of her protagonist's transgressive representation of gender at the novel's close by punishing her through death or ensuring that her character development sees her conforming to a more submissive version of femininity. This challenge to traditional notions of gender is further complemented by a critical portrayal of the male characters in the novel who embody a conventionally patriarchal version of masculinity, and the valorisation of the more egalitarian version of masculinity portrayed by Benoît.

Zinzi is a young woman who had a privileged upbringing and in her "Former Life" (p. 2), as she refers to the time before she was animalled, was a successful lifestyle journalist who enjoyed a glitzy lifestyle. However, the drug addiction that came along with such a lifestyle inadvertently led to the death of her brother, and she is now a lowly "disgraced zoo girl" (p. 85) who is alienated from her family, ostracised from mainstream society and reduced to living in Zoo City. Because of her zoo status Zinzi struggles to find work, and only barely manages to make ends meet financially by using her *shavi* to find lost objects for people. Like the prototypical *noir* detective Zinzi is thus alienated, and lives on the margins of society. She also has a very dry and dark sense of humour, and displays the iconic world-weariness that characterises the *noir* protagonist in her prevailing attitude of cynicism. While traversing the busy roads of the city, for example, she claims that "traffic in Joburg is like the democratic process. Every time you think it's going to get moving and take you somewhere, you hit another jam" (p. 84), and on another occasion she notices an excessive number of cars parked outside the local newspaper's offices early in the morning and wryly comments that she imagines "you have to get up pretty early in the morning to invent the news" (p. 7). On another occasion Zinzi thinks back on her incarceration at a prison called "Sun City", claiming that unfortunately "there [weren't] any water slides or showgirls" at this particular place which is "an oversight of the prison system," she reckons; "Reform might be more effective if they taught you useful life-skills – like the high kick and the titty jiggle" (p. 50). These witty comments add an element of humour to a novel that deals with a number of very serious issues, preventing it from becoming excessively morose, and encourage a fondness in the reader for her character.

Zinzi furthermore exudes confidence and toughness in all of her dealings with people, demonstrating the hard-boiled nature typical of the *noir* protagonist. When she is interrogated by the police in connection with the first murder that occurs in the novel, for example, Zinzi remains completely calm and unruffled by the inspector who tries to unnerve her. "She's forgetting I've done jail-time," Zinzi haughtily says, as she stares down the inspector who is attempting to pressure her into saying

something by maintaining a prolonged silence. At another point of the novel during the course of her investigation she is chased through the storm water drains below Johannesburg by a group of aggressive street children who threaten to stab her with a rusty screw-driver and cut Sloth up to be sold for *muti* parts. Zinzi manages to escape, but returns the next day to the parking lot where the chase began to retrieve her car, claiming: "I should have left the car there, but I'm stubborn like that. Also: not about to be overly intimidated by a cluster of junkie tunnel rats" (p. 211). When Zinzi is first approached by Odi Huron's sinister henchmen about accepting the job to find the missing pop singer, after fielding some of Zinzi's sassy retorts one of them says to her: "You're such a tough guy. I love it" (emphasis in original, p. 66-7). Zinzi is not easily daunted and indeed seems to relish the idea of proving that she is a 'tough guy', further blurring the line between conventional notions of masculinity and femininity and further aligning her with the character of the *noir* detective.

Zinzi's continued dabbling in the world of crime through her involvement in 419 email scams also make her a character of dubious morality, and we are urged to be critical of her at times despite the fact that her first person narration encourages us to sympathise with her for the majority of the novel. In order to pay off a large drug debt from her "Former Life" to a violent syndicate, Zinzi writes emails in which she pretends to be various desperate characters, seeking money in order to save them from their horrific circumstances. Zinzi uses these tragic stories to prey on sympathetic people, scamming them out of large amounts of money when they respond, eager to help. Although Zinzi is aware that what she is doing is wrong, she claims that it is the only way she is able to pay off her drug debts to an aggressive group of people who threaten to kill Benoît if she does not co-operate. That she takes advantage of scenarios that are terrible realities in some parts of the world in order to scam innocent people out of their money becomes even more contemptable because of the disparaging attitude she shows towards the people who fall for these scams, whom she calls "*moegoes*" (p. 31). Zinzi's blasé attitude to these people is made particularly callous in a scene where she and Vuyo, her contact with the syndicate, meet an American couple at the Rand Club whom they are about to cheat out of a large sum of money. The depravity of what Vuyo and Zinzi are doing is emphasised when it turns out that the couple are not exceptionally wealthy but have used their entire pension to pay Vuyo. They are also earnest in their concern for the character Zinzi plays, and desperate to try and save her from the horror of her fictional circumstances. Zinzi's response to this is highly ambivalent, as can be seen when she claims:

The whole thing is grotesque. Yet some perverse part of me is getting off on it. The same way I ticked off points on a scoreboard when my parents actually believed the bullshit I spun them about

my car breaking down, about needing help paying the fees for a master's degree in Journalism that I never even registered for. (p. 37)

This response positions Zinzi as a morally ambiguous character who is constantly negotiating the line between right and wrong, and in doing so reveals how complicated moral judgements can be. Despite her moral shortcomings, it is consistently with Zinzi that readers are encouraged to identify and sympathise, and any rigid notions about morality that they may have thus also become disrupted. The alignment of the reader's sympathies with a character who is morally ambiguous is a common technique found in *film noir*, and it has the disconcerting effect of moving the reader/viewer away from a position of relative moral security, and towards an uncomfortable feeling of "sympathy for the devil" (Luhr 2012, p.3). This loss of moral bearings results in the creation of tension, anxiety and insecurity in readers or audiences as they are moved into a space in which issues of right and wrong are rendered complex, subjective and difficult to define or judge (Ilie-Prica 2014). Zinzi is not entirely without a conscience, and later in the novel when she receives a response from an overly-zealous French journalist who wants to help a fictionalised refugee named Eloria she decides to delete the mail without telling Vuyo. This proves to be one of many steps that Zinzi takes in order to attempt to redeem herself as the novel progresses, and readers are encouraged to champion her internal development and invest in her as a complex character who is humanly flawed but in whom we come to hope good will ultimately prevail.

Beukes thus successfully challenges the centrality of masculinity in *noir* texts by transposing all the key characteristics of the *noir* protagonist onto Zinzi. Beukes engages in further play with the genre's conventions by refusing to present her key female character in terms of a simplistic binary as either a 'good girl' or an 'evil woman', but instead demonstrates the multifaceted nature of modern identities through her presentation of Zinzi's character as being complex, and influenced by multiple intersecting identity categories. In terms of gender identity, Zinzi displays a complex combination of both stereotypically feminine and masculine traits, and she often seems to struggle to reconcile the two, dramatising Shelly Budgeon's (2011) contention that contemporary femininities "provide far from straightforward subject positions as they produce both possibilities and troubles for young women attempting to manage the difficulties of enacting ideals associated with both traditional femininity and masculinity" (p. 285). This tension, she argues, "places demands on young women which are difficult to resolve within current social arrangements" (p. 285). The struggle of trying to do this can most clearly be seen in Zinzi's use of cynicism and sarcasm, which seem to function as protective mechanisms by which she is able to reduce the severity of the world she inhabits, as well as a means by which she can hold people at bay and avoid forming deep or meaningful connections with others.

That she feels the need to protect herself in this way hints at the possibility that beneath her tough 'masculine' exterior she is far more vulnerable than she appears, and her attempt to hide this is perhaps an attempt to distance herself from stereotypical notions of femininity as weak or emotional.

This conflict is most obviously played out in her relationship with Benoît. Zinzi's attitude to their relationship is a complex one as she attempts to treat him with the same sassiness and toughness that she approaches everything in life. At one point, for example, when Zinzi holds the door of her flat open for Benoît's mongoose to run out to the litter tray, Benoît tells her that she should just put a cat-flap in the door. "Why?" Zinzi says, "You moving in?". Benoît responds by asking if that is an invitation, but Zinzi replies, "Don't get comfortable is all I'm saying" (p. 3). As he leaves he asks if he will see her later and she indifferently replies "maybe" (p. 4), but a smile betrays her true feelings. As he moves to kiss her Sloth swats him away and he comments: "I don't know who is worse [. . .] you, or that monkey" (p. 4), and Zinzi responds that it is definitely she who is. It is subtly made clear, however, that this attitude is merely an attempt to hide her true feelings, a bid to pretend that she cares less than she actually does. Zinzi tries to display the same stereotypically masculine nonchalance to sex and relationships as Toby and Lerato do in *Moxyland*, but instead cannot help feeling a stereotypically feminine desire for love and connection with Benoît. Benoît often calls her *cherie na ngayi*, meaning "my love", and Zinzi comments that she is glad he only ever refers to her in this way in Lingala as it "makes it easier to disregard" (p. 3). Zinzi thus shows hints that she is scared of getting too emotionally attached to Benoît, and her air of indifference towards him works as a shield to distance herself from the feelings she truly has for him. That she does in fact harbour deep feelings for him is made clear when Benoît receives word that his family, who were left behind in the Democratic Republic of Congo when he was forced to flee the rebels and seek refuge in South Africa, are alive, and makes plans to leave for Kinshasa. Zinzi describes her feelings at the news as a "heart attack in the guts. A wrenching squeeze and twist" (p. 48), but when Benoît tells her about it she replies: "That's great, Benoît, You must be –", but here she pauses. "There are a lot of words I could fill here. None of them quite match the cocktail of emotion burning a hole on my stomach right now: a mix of Stroh rum and sulphuric acid" (p. 48), she says. Zinzi's intense emotional response shows that her tough banter is merely a cover for how she really feels, and how vulnerable Benoît's leaving makes her feel.

As Benoît prepares to leave, Zinzi attempts to keep up the façade of not caring when she tells him:

I won't even remember you, I'll be so busy shagging other guys. I'll be like Benoît *who?* [. . .] I won't miss you. I never loved you. I never even liked you. And you smell funny. And your feet, your

calloused nasty-ass feet? They're disgusting. I'll be glad to have them gone from my bed. (Emphasis in original, p. 204)

All toughness has left her at this moment, however, and as she moves to lean on Benoît it is clear that she does not mean a word she says. "You smell funny too," (p. 204) Benoît simply responds and kisses her, emphasising the love that characterises their relationship. Although Zinzi tries to distance herself from traditional notions of femininity, she is made vulnerable in her relationship with Benoît and displays an emotional dependency on him. That she tries so vehemently to hide this demonstrates the struggle she undergoes in trying to reconcile the stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine traits of her identity.

Zinzi's representation of gender is further influenced by the conflict she experiences in trying to amalgamate two seemingly contradictory categories in terms of her cultural identity. In their analysis of the representation of identity in *Moxyland*, Deirdre Byrne and David Levey (2015) argue that this complex interplay of identity categories is not unusual for contemporary identities, which are often "excessive" in that they cannot be defined in terms of fixed categories. The authors additionally argue that in a post-transitional South African context, rather than portraying a seamless integration of various identity planes, these subjectivities are often "fractured, riven and characterized by sharp edges" (p. 71), with "edges" referring to the boundaries between identity categories that the individual struggles to cross. They further argue that these edges "may be considered symptomatic of the individual and social demands placed on subjectivities in a post-transitional society that serve to rob these subjectivities of agency" (p. 85). One of the places that this is most obvious is *Zoo City* is in Zinzi's struggle to reconcile Western worldviews with traditional African belief systems, making her identity distinctly edged. Beukes, however, engages in play with the implicit dominance of Western worldviews in *noir* by making traditional African beliefs a key feature of the narrative, and depicting Zinzi's positive character development as being facilitated in large part through her eventual amalgamation of her Western valorisation of reason, with an openness to elements of African mysticism. In doing so, Zinzi is able to breach the edges of her identity, and maintain agency at the close of the novel.

Although a black African woman, Zinzi is highly Westernised, and her scepticism towards traditional African beliefs is introduced when she claims:

There are plenty of [. . .] *nyangas* and *sangomas* and faith healers with varying degrees of skill or talent, broadcasting their services on posters stuck up on telephone poles and walls [in *Zoo City*]. Some of them are charlatans and shysters, advertising cures for anything from money woes to

love-sickness and Aids with *muti* made from crushed lizard balls and aspirin. Guess which ingredient does all the hard work? (p. 116)

Through Zinzi, much of a contemporary reader's scepticism is voiced, and there is an awareness that certain individuals will always try to exploit other people's beliefs. Beukes does not suggest that all practices claiming to be based on traditional methods should be blindly accepted as legitimate treatments, but she does seem to advocate that an openness towards alternative understandings of the world should be fostered. Zinzi's relationship to traditional African beliefs is shown to be a complex and highly edged one, in part as a result of her upbringing with a highly academic father and a more traditional mother. Upon remembering her father's reaction to some of her mother's more traditional beliefs, which he dismissed as "superstitious rubbish" (p. 164) and accused of being "what's holding the continent back" (p. 164), Zinzi criticises him, saying, "He was always too narrow about his definitions of what modern Africa meant" (p. 164). Beukes thus seems to encourage a certain degree of wariness when it comes to practitioners of traditional healing who make outrageous claims, but she is also critical of those who dismiss traditional understandings and methods outright as backward, or not having any relevance in a modern world. Despite Zinzi's cynicism, her mother's traditional beliefs seem to have made some impression on her, and as a last resort in trying to find Songweza she goes to a *sangoma* for help.

Through the encounter between Zinzi and the *sangoma* Beukes demonstrates how traditional beliefs are able to remain relevant in a modern world through their ability to be adaptable. This is most clearly illustrated in the character of the *sangoma*, a man named Baba Dumisani, who is shown right from the outset to be a truly modern adaption of a traditional healer. He dresses in a white vest and red apron with a leopard skin tied over it, and Zinzi immediately notices that "there's a D&G logo on his vest, so subtle as to be the real *makhoya*" (p. 167). She goes on to explain that cheap imitations of designer clothes "tend to shout their fake logos as loud as they can" (p. 167), and scathingly comments: "So much for the simple life of serving the spirits of the ancestors" (p. 167). When Zinzi enters the treatment room the *sangoma* waves a brand new iPhone at her and tells her that the ancestors have already told him about her. Zinzi cynically comments, "I didn't know the ancestors were SMSing now" (p. 167), and he explains that it is presently common practice for the spirits to communicate through cell-phone calls. He claims that the spirits in fact find that conveying their wishes is made far easier thanks to technology, and explains that "they still like rivers and oceans most of all, but data is like water – the spirits can move through it. That's why you get a prickly feeling around cell-phone towers" (p. 167). Once again Zinzi is quick to show her distrust in the *sangoma*, muttering disparagingly, "And here I thought it was the radiation" (p. 167). When Zinzi enters the

treatment room she greets the ancestors according to the custom, but she claims to do it only out of “some residual deference” (p. 167) to her mother and not because of anything she feels herself, and all through her consultation with the traditional healer she is quick to offer humorous, though highly derisive comments on his methods. When the *sangoma* explains about the ancestors speaking to him through his cell-phone, she claims that despite knowing that she is being disrespectful she cannot help facetiously asking, “So is there a spirit-world MTN? What are the tariffs like? I bet you get a lot of please call me’s” (p. 167). The *sangoma* chastises her saying, “*Hayibo, sisi*. So cynical and you with a *shavi*. What would you mother say?” (p. 167). Although Zinzi dismisses the *sangoma*’s omniscience with regard to her mother as a lucky guess, she flinches at his comment, indicating her reluctant acknowledgement of his supernatural abilities.

Zinzi’s attitude toward the *sangoma* and traditional beliefs at large is shown to be a conflicted one: the educated and Westernised part of her, prizing rationality, wants to dismiss and discredit him and his methods, but perhaps because of her mother’s conditioning or perhaps because she has first-hand experience with the presence of magic in her world, she is unable to do so. Beukes, however, shows through the *sangoma* that it need not be a mutually exclusive decision, and that both worldviews can be held simultaneously. The *sangoma*, it is revealed, was in fact the epitome of a modernised African in his former life where he worked as a very successful actuary, with an “Audi S4. Four-bedroom house in Morningside [. . .] All the gadgets. Three different ladies [. . .] Two children by different mothers. Private schools. Apartments. Cars” (p. 169). In making him an actuary-turned-*sangoma* Beukes forcefully brings ideas of Western science, with its valorisation of facts and reason, into contact with a traditional African belief system and its connotations of tradition, mysticism and faith. Although Baba Dumisani has clearly not left all of the luxuries of his past behind him, he has chosen to abandon that life for the life of a *sangoma*, and is thus able to integrate two different worldviews. This is no doubt facilitated in large part by the modernisation of traditional beliefs, which are reworked so as to remain relevant in a contemporary, globalised setting.

The *sangoma* conducts a reading for Zinzi, by giving her a handful of objects and telling her to throw them down on the floor. The objects which he gives to her form one of the most evocative images of the modernisation of traditional healing in the novel: “cowrie shells and stones, a chipped nautilus fossil, dominoes (one broken), a twist of white beads around a piece of wood, a bullet, an MTN pay-as-you-go sim card [. . .] and a tiny plastic figurine of an ugly purple monster with a shock of matted hair that might once have come in a Happy Meal” (p. 168). The sim card and the figurine are perhaps the most striking objects as symbols of modern technology and Western consumerism respectively,

and speak of the influence of Westernisation and modernisation in Africa at present. While it is clear that Zinzi is trying to resist the influence of her traditional African beliefs, Baba Dumisani explains that when he resisted the call to become a *sangoma* in the beginning he got very sick, but was instantly cured when he “stopped fighting it” (p. 169). To ‘stop fighting it’ and to be more open to the commingling of Western philosophies and alternative world views seems to be one of the primary messages of Beukes’s novel. Zinzi begins to ‘stop fighting it’, apologising to the *sangoma*, saying: “I’m sorry *baba*, I meant no disrespect to you or the *amadlozi*” (p. 170). Although she remains argumentative and resistant to the *sangoma* to a certain degree, as the novel progresses she is shown to gradually be more open to giving his methods a try.

Significantly, it is only when she decides to drink the *sangoma*’s *muti* that Zinzi has visions that enable her to pinpoint Odi as the culprit behind the *muti* murders she has been investigating, and alert her to the fact that Songweza and her twin brother, S’busiso, are in danger of becoming his next victims. While Krutnik argues that the *noir* quest is traditionally inextricably bound up to the *noir* hero’s quest for identity as a male subject, in the case of *Zoo City* it appears that Zinzi’s investigative quest is inextricably bound to her quest for identity as a female subject in a postfeminist era. Through her openness to alternative worldviews, and her decision to embrace ambiguity and contradiction, Zinzi is able to do away with the edges that previously dominated her identity, and to merge together her Western worldviews and African beliefs in a more seamless manner. This is portrayed as an unquestioningly positive development in Zinzi’s character as it enables her to solve the case, and also facilitates a positive personality change in which she starts to become more sensitive to the needs of others. This is most clearly seen when she selflessly sets out for Odi’s mansion in a bid to try and save the twins, calling on Benoît for help, and again at the end of the novel when she decides to embark on a journey to try and find Benoît’s family for him, as he lies injured in hospital as a result of their attempt to rescue Song and S’bu. Although Zinzi retains her assertiveness and toughness, her actions show an increased level of compassion for others and a willingness to acknowledge a degree of dependence on Benoît, which are no longer positioned as weaknesses in her character but strengths which additionally demonstrate a more successful integration of the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ aspects of her identity. Zinzi’s ability to amalgamate the extremes of her identity mean that she is not robbed of agency, but is a character who is able to make difficult decisions and act on them at the close of her narrative. Although a ‘dangerous woman’ in her refusal to conform to traditional ideals of femininity, Zinzi is neither punished through death nor is she reintegrated into traditional patriarchal society by taking up a more submissive role. Instead, she remains an empowered woman who sets out on yet another quest of sorts, and we are encouraged to see this in an extremely positive light

based on the selflessness of what she is doing. Ironically, this entails finding Benoît's wife and reuniting the couple, an act which further complicates traditional notions of marriage which are conventionally drawn on to assert the *noir* protagonist's allegiance to a patriarchal system. "It's going to be awkward. It's going to be the best thing I've done with my miserable life" (p. 309), she says, and at this point we are encouraged to suspend our earlier criticism of her and to fully sympathise with her character.

The criticism of the patriarchal ideals usually affirmed by the *noir* narrative that Beukes offers through Zinzi's characterisation is further complemented by a sympathetic portrayal of the version of masculinity embodied by Benoît, which stands in stark contrast to that portrayed by the other male characters in the novel. Benoît is a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and through him Beukes offers commentary on some of the atrocities that are taking place in Africa, and the impossible situations that refugees find themselves in after fleeing their homes and attempting to seek safety in South Africa. That he has led a difficult life is suggested on the very first page of the novel, when Zinzi introduces him by his "calloused feet" which stick out from the duvet "like knots of driftwood", and claims: "Feet like that, they tell a story. They say he walked all the way from Kinshasa with his Mongoose strapped to his chest" (p. 1). The full tragic story of Benoît's past only surfaces later in the novel: as a teenager he was kidnapped by the "*Armée de résistance du Seigneur*. Lord's Resistance Army" (p. 228), who attacked the church where he and some other children had sought safety. "They broke the windows. Used their rifle-butts to smash in the heads of the little ones too small to walk," he describes, and "in the forest, they did things to drive us mad. *Muti*. Drugs. Rape. Killing games" (p. 228). Benoît painfully recounts how he was forced to shoot his friend in order to save himself, and sadly claims: "*Nzambe azan a zamba te*. God is not in the forest. Maybe He is too busy looking after sports teams or worrying about teenagers having sex before marriage. I think they take up a lot of his time" (p. 228). Having escaped the trauma of his childhood, Benoît tells Zinzi how he was able to start his life again, by getting married and having three children. One day as he and his family were on the way to his wife's father's funeral they were attacked: "We knew it was dangerous, but it was her father. We should have left the kids behind. The FDLR [*Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda*] attacked us. I fought back. Killed two of them. That's why they burned me" (p. 229), Benoît explains. Benoît's family ran into a nearby forest during the attack, but Benoît could not be certain whether they escaped or were caught. Zinzi describes how

He'd sent messages to his extended family, friends, aid organisations, refugee camps, scoured the community websites, the cryptic refugee Facebook groups that use nicknames and birth orders and job descriptions as clues – never any photographs of faces – to help families find each other without cueing in their persecutors. No dice. His wife and his three little children had vanished. Presumed dead. Lost forever. (p. 56)

Through him Beukes offers a glimpse into the horrors that people in Africa are facing on a daily basis, and the lack of help that is provided to them by other countries. Having survived the attack and journeyed to South Africa Benoît is still faced with difficulties in terms of finding work and accommodation, being doubly marginalised as both a zoo and a refugee, and Beukes seems to urge us to be critical of the added hardship that refugees face in South Africa and the distinct lack of financial, material and social assistance that is offered to them in this country.

Through Benoît, however, she also shows that violence and hate need not become a vicious circle that people get caught up in, but that the potential exists to step out of this cycle by refusing to perpetuate the injustices that one has been subjected to. Although Benoît has had an extremely violent upbringing his character is not marked by bitterness and aggression, and he instead displays fairness, compassion, and gentleness in all of his dealings with people. Beukes thus demonstrates that while one's social context exerts a degree of influence over one's attitudes and behaviours, there still remains an element of personal choice in one's decision to perpetuate problematic attitudes and practices. Zinzi describes how she and Benoît met for the first time shortly after Zinzi was released from prison and moved into the building where they both now live. On her first day in the building Zinzi found herself in an elevator full of men, and she noticed that unlike most zoos,

The men in the lift didn't carry their animals like burdens, certainly not the giant in front with the burn scars creeping down his neck underneath his t-shirt, and a Mongoose slung across his chest in a customised baby sling. They carried them the way other men carry weapons. (p. 52)

In this scene Benoît is described in terms which seem to align him with a stereotypical version of masculinity that is aggressive, tough and intimidating. However, as the story progresses he is presented as a highly principled man, who displays an honest and honourable attitude in his dealings with people, and a great degree of tenderness and patience in his relationship with Zinzi. Benoît is very loving towards Zinzi, and is the only person she appears to have in her life who will support and help her. Things between the couple go sour when Benoît finds out about the email scams that Zinzi has been involved in. Zinzi tries to defend herself, telling him, "I just write the formats, Benoît. You think this is easy for me? Living on money scrounged from finding a lost set of keys here, a passport there? I have debts to pay" (p. 227). Benoît angrily responds "We all have debts to pay!" (p. 227), and asks Zinzi if she has thought about what circumstances the people she is taking money from are in. "I didn't know you were this selfish", he says, and Zinzi, now in full defence, responds: "I'm an addict! It comes with the fucking territory. I'm sorry I'm not as perfect as your fucking wife. And I hope for your

sake she's as fucking perfect as you remember" (p. 227). Zinzi's response is aggressive and extreme, and seems to belie her own guilty conscience. For Benoît, who has experienced first-hand the types of atrocities that Zinzi makes up in her emails, this is a dire offence, and Zinzi's refusal to admit that what she has been doing is wrong sees them part ways. Zinzi's separation from Benoît affects her badly, and the novel opens in the second part with Zinzi hungover and in bed with an anonymous boy, "or at least I think it's a boy" (p. 233), she flippantly says. Flashbacks from the night before reveal that Zinzi went to a club to get drugs, and ended up getting high in the car of the dealer who is now in her bed. Zinzi tries to get the man to leave, and considers "going to the pharmacy for the morning-after pill. Maybe a shot of anti-retrovirals" (p. 235). That Zinzi has hit rock bottom is further emphasised by the fact that Sloth refuses to interact with her: "he refuses to move from his perch in the cupboard and when I try to pull him out, he hits out at me, scratching my cheek" (p. 235), she says. This image is juxtaposed harshly with the safe and loving relationship she shared with Benoît, further highlighting the positive influence he has been in her life.

Benoît's character furthermore stands in stark contrast to many of the other male characters in the novel, such as his friend D'Nice; Vuyo; Zinzi's ex-boyfriend and ex-colleague, Gio; and Odi Huron, all of whom are characterised by violence and selfishness. These characters use other people, exploiting them and threatening them in order to get what they want, and this stands in harsh contrast to Benoît's fairness, honesty and compassion. All of these characters are also noticeably threatened by the empowered version of femininity that Zinzi represents, with Vuyo and Odi both repeatedly rebuking her for her sharp tongue, Gio consistently couching her in highly sexualised terms, and D'Nice looking for any excuse to tarnish her character. Through Beukes's sympathetic portrayal of Benoît's character, and the marked way in which it diverges from the versions of masculinity embodied by the other male characters, she challenges the cultural idealisation of masculinity that is based on the aggressive maintenance of authority over others. She additionally acknowledges that masculinity is a multifaceted concept, influenced by the interaction of gender identity with other identity planes, such as class and race, and encourages the reconceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity in a more positive, egalitarian way to that promoted by patriarchy. Through Benoît's struggles in the novel Beukes also provides a critical framing of the way in which nonhegemonic masculinities are subordinated to hegemonic masculinity through a complex interplay of "cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalisation, and the marginalisation or delegitimation of alternatives" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 847). In *Zoo City* Benoît is subordinated in terms of social power to the other male characters, and marginalised because of his status as a zoo and a refugee, or *makwerekwere* (meaning "foreigner"), as he is disparagingly referred to by several of the characters in the novel. His

marginalisation is not achieved simply through stigmatisation, but translates into material practices, such as the way in which he struggles to find work and accommodation. Benoît, however, refuses to wear his marginalised status as a badge of shame but is instead portrayed as an individual who is secure in who he is, which is displayed most clearly in the scene where Zinzi meets him in the elevator. His refusal to be shamed, together with the positive light in which he is portrayed, provide a clear valorisation of an alternate version of masculinity to that championed by patriarchy, and an emphasis on a more egalitarian approach to human relations of all kinds in the place of perpetuating patterns of dominance and subordination.

Although Benoît and Zinzi have not reconciled since their fight, he accompanies her without hesitation when she asks him for help in order to try and save Song and her brother. During the climactic scenes of the novel Benoît is seriously injured by Odi's animal, a giant albino crocodile, and the end of the novel is fairly bleak as Zinzi embarks on her quest to try and locate his family while he lies unconscious in hospital, with readers left uncertain of his fate. Although Odi is killed during the attempted rescue, his henchmen escape with no indication that they will face any consequences for their involvement in the murders, and Benoît's injuries prove to be in vain as the twins are both killed. As in *Moxyland*, Beukes thus once again urges us to question a world in which such an ending is possible, where the innocent are unable to survive but the violent, selfish and corrupt thrive.

Readers are, however, left with a small glint of optimism through Zinzi's selfless decision to try and locate Benoît's family for him, despite the fact that it may mean she loses the man she loves. Stobie argues that Zinzi's "attention to her finer instincts, despite her attachment to Benoît, leaves the reader feeling hopeful that on occasion virtue can be its own reward, and that it can resonate into the lives of others across national divides" (2012, p. 378). Molly Brown (2014) similarly argues that Zinzi's final act "foregrounds the traditional values of *ubuntu*, the belief that societies and individuals are defined by and made to endure by their respect for others" (p. 38). She claims that *Zoo City* is a unique example of South African dystopian texts, in that it acknowledges "its central character's complicity in and shared responsibility for the dystopian environment in which she finds herself" (p. 37), which enables her to reject a 'masculine' paradigm in which tactics of resistance simply mirror those of oppression, and instead favour "what might be seen as traditionally feminine values involving nurturing and renunciation" (p. 38). In doing so, Zinzi unwittingly follows the pattern of choices modelled by Benoît in the novel, in his willingness to acknowledge the terrible things he has done in the past, his refusal to perpetuate the violence and injustice he was subjected to, and his example of selflessness, compassion and equality in his interactions with others. Zinzi's final actions thus demonstrates the

possibility for such a mind-set to take hold and spread among people, confirming both Stobie's and Brown's reading that the novel allows us to glimpse, and hope for, transforming future possibilities that spread beyond just a personal level, to society at large.

That readers are ultimately urged to be sympathetic of Zinzi furthermore encourages an openness to all the contradiction and ambiguity that is evident in her character. Once Zinzi 'stops fighting' the contradictions that erupt as a result of the commingling of her African and Western beliefs, she is able to move forward positively in the narrative, and her openness to ambiguity and fluidity in terms of her worldviews ultimately helps her to understand herself and her world more clearly, and fosters a positive personality development in which she starts to become sensitive to the needs of others. The positive portrayal of this openness to a postmodern amalgamation of worldviews is furthermore supported in the form of the novel, through the effective use of genre hybridity, magical realism and polyvocality, which advocate multiple, fluid understandings of the world, and which carve out a space for the voices of those who have been previously marginalised and disregarded by totalising discourses.

Through Zinzi Beukes provides a transgressive indigenisation and feminisation of the *noir* detective, challenging both the dominance of a Western worldview and of patriarchal masculinity that is traditionally found in *noir* texts. In refusing to fashion her ending in such a way as to affirm the legitimacy of patriarchal masculinity and its ability to protect itself against various forms of "deviance and disruption" (Krutnik 1991, p. 85), she moreover demonstrates that there are multiple other ways of being than those championed by patriarchal discourses. Through her characterisation of Zinzi she also challenges *noir's* simplistic casting of women in the binary categories of 'good femininity' or 'evil femininity', and instead portrays a version of femininity that is complex and exists at the intersection of multiple identity categories. Through this manipulation of the genre's tropes, Beukes displays an exemplary use of interstitial writing practices to challenge preconceived notions about the world, and to encourage reader engagement with the theme of gender as she addresses it in her fiction.

By depicting Zinzi as embodying *both* masculine and feminine traits, Beukes destabilises essential notions of gender that see gender traits as being biologically determined rather than socially constructed. She furthermore refutes the notion of gender categories as homogenous groups, by considering the roles of race, culture and class in Zinzi's embodiment and expression of gender. Rather than affirming the 'naturalness' of constructed categories, Beukes takes a distinctly postmodern and post-structuralist approach in her bid to portray Zinzi's identity as ultimately being "multiple, fluid and

unstable” (Mann and Huffman 2005, p. 63), and in so doing allows for the accommodation of ambiguity, contradiction and multiplicity in her identity. Zinzi’s struggle to manage the contradictions that erupt because of the difficulties she faces in her embodiment of traits associated with both traditional masculinity and femininity demonstrates Budgeon’s contention that the contemporary fluidity of gender identity often “places demands on young women which are difficult to resolve within current social arrangements” (2011, p. 285). Beukes’s refusal to privilege a version of patriarchal hegemonic masculinity is also evident through her portrayal of Benoît, and the equality that is evident in his and Zinzi’s relationship. The other male characters in the novel are depicted in an extremely negative light, and we are encouraged to be highly critical of a version of masculinity that is characterised by selfishness, driven by a need for power and authority, quick to violence, and so easily threatened by a woman like Zinzi. Through the characterisation of both Zinzi and Benoît, together with the valorisation of alternate worldviews that is so evident in both the form and content of the text, Beukes challenges the dominance of any person over another because of arbitrary social constructions such as gender or race, and advocates intersecting systems of knowledge in the place of hierarchies.

## Chapter Four

### Sexualised serial murder and the persistence of patriarchy in *The Shining Girls*

Beukes's third novel, *The Shining Girls*, was published in 2013, and sees a move away from the South African settings of her first two novels to the United States of America. Set in Chicago, the novel tells the story of a man named Harper Curtis who happens upon a magical House in the year 1931 that allows him to travel through time. In the House he also finds the names of women etched on the wall, and led by the magic of the House he tracks down these women – the “shining girls” of the novel's title – and brutally murders each of them in their time periods. He also takes an object from each of the women, and replaces it with an object from one of the others, creating an elaborate puzzle of murders that stretches across seven decades and makes them nearly impossible to connect or solve. However, one of his victims, a young woman named Kirby Mazrachi, survives his attack in 1989 and dedicates her life to catching him and bringing his violent vendetta against women to an end. Intermingled with the fantasy of the narrative and the grip of Kirby's investigation is a homage of sorts to the women who have challenged the gender norms of their times and brought about a change in gender relations in Western society in the twentieth century, and a strong critique of the violence and injustice that they have been subjected to by those who oppose their bid to challenge an oppressive patriarchal system. Refusing to let her crime novel be defined only by the thrill of the chase between her male serial killer and the detective character, Beukes refocuses her narrative on the victims of the novel, granting each woman a name and a back-story. Through these sub-narratives Beukes creatively incites the reader's sympathies for characters who are shown to be strong, feisty women who are pushing against the structures of gender oppression that prevail in each of their time periods in ordinary, everyday ways. In doing so Beukes refuses to let her shining girls become “pretty corpses” (Beukes 2013b) who feature in the narrative merely as puzzles for the detective to solve, but urges readers to see them as well-rounded characters with unique personalities. Complementing this is a forceful critique of the man who takes pleasure in ending their lives and their fights prematurely and violently, and a consideration of the theme of sexualised serial murder, which is a phenomenon that Jane Caputi (1987) considers to be a contemporary form of “functional phallic terrorism” (p. 2) and indicative of power dynamics at a societal level rather than just the result of individual psychopathology.

*The Shining Girls* is interstitial in its amalgamation of genre tropes from speculative fiction and crime fiction, and fits the criteria for span fiction in Beukes's refusal to offer an explanation, either scientific or non-scientific, for the *novum* in the novel. The House's ability to enable Harper to travel through time and the way in which it leads him to each of his victims are not presented, as the advanced

technology of *Moxyland* or the supernatural elements of *Zoo City* are, as being normal or taken for granted features of the world depicted in the novel. The unrealistic elements in *The Shining Girls* are instead posited as being an anomaly, and Beukes does not normalise them by offering an explanation for how they work. Beukes instead leaves her narrative “up in the air” (Brigg 2000, p. 21), and requires her readers to suspend their disbelief and accept the fantastical fulcrum of her novel. The narrative is, however, not entirely without internal logic, and the willingness of the reader to be open to the magical elements of the novel is perhaps aided by the precision with which the time-travelling conceit is handled, such that no murder is left unconnected and no object taken from or left on the victims is left unaccounted for. Each part of the narrative is carefully connected to the larger story so that Beukes’s time-travel operates in a systematic pattern that never leaves any loose threads unexplained or brushed over.

Intermingled with the speculative elements of the novel is a crime fiction narrative, which draws particularly on the sub-genres of hard-boiled detective fiction and crime thriller fiction. John Scaggs (2005) outlines how the hard-boiled mode of detective fiction emerged in crime narratives produced predominantly in America between World War I and World War II, and saw a shift in the characterisation of the detective hero from the upper-middle class, respectable detective figure that had been popularised up until this point, to private eye investigators who were characterised by social marginality, violence, a degree of anti-intellectualism, and “fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language of the streets” (p. 56). The private eye is often depicted as single-handedly fighting against the rampant corruption of his society, “the figure of the tough loner on a crusade against social corruption” (p. 64), and is thus often unable to solve the crime, bring criminals to justice, and restore social order by the close of his narrative.

As in *Zoo City*, Beukes plays with the centrality of masculinity in the hard-boiled mode by making Kirby her alienated, tough, wise-cracking private eye figure. The feminisation of the hard-boiled detective is not an entirely novel idea, with both Scaggs and Adrienne Gavin (2010) listing examples of hard-boiled texts that featured female detectives. However, they argue that these texts typically simply transposed all of the qualities of the prototypical male hard-boiled detective onto a woman, to little effect. Gavin argues that twenty-first century crime fiction has seen the emergence of what she calls “humanistic crime fiction” which “places the detective’s psychology and human and social issues at its core” (p. 267). She argues that one of the most dominant features of this fiction is a focus on violence against women, which is often addressed alongside the use of a female detective who has herself been attacked or had a loved one that has been the victim of violence. She claims that in these narratives

women are “captured, raped, murdered, butchered and in the hands of forensic detectives dissected into evidence” (p. 269), and because of the detective’s own experiences the crime becomes “not simply a professional interest, but a devastatingly personal experience” (p. 269). Gavin argues: “In emphasising violence against women, feminist detective fiction makes a gendered protest. It also implies a gendered question: if even the detective figure is violated and attacked, is justice possible?” (p. 269). Gavin outlines how many critics of the genre have argued that the gruesome and detailed portrayal of attacks on women becomes a means by which violence against women is implicitly condoned by the way in which it is sensationalised and capitalised upon by authors. Others, however, argue that feminist writers “are simply telling it like it is, and in doing so are asserting, if not control over violence, then power to express it in their own terms” (p. 269).

Beukes clearly positions her novel in amongst this work, making Kirby both victim and detective and constantly highlighting the obsessiveness with which she approaches the case because of its personal nature. Violence against women becomes the central theme of the novel through Harper’s multiple femicides, and the question of whether justice is indeed possible for the victims of such violence is explored through Kirby’s quest. In her review of the book, Jane Rosenthal (2013) argues that *The Shining Girls* “is full of violence and gratuitous cruelty described in such detail as to be quite obscene, repeatedly inflicting on the reader a sort of secondary violence by re-enacting these horrific crimes” (n.p.), and she suggests that Beukes seems to “revel in the gore” (n.p.) of her depiction of violence against women, rather than using it as a platform for the critique thereof. However, I argue that although the depiction of the women’s murders is at times graphic, Beukes does not appear to advocate the sensationalism of violence against women, but instead uses these scenes to ignite reader indignation at the subject matter. This is achieved primarily by allotting each of the women whom Harper kills a chapter in the novel, the majority of which is dedicated to portraying her thoughts, her feelings, her hopes, and her fears, so that by the time her murder is depicted inevitably in the last lines of her chapter, Beukes has instilled in her readers a connection to the woman whose life is being so unjustly taken away. In doing so, Beukes forces her readers to identify and sympathise with the character who is being killed, and to be enraged at her death rather than finding any perverse excitement or entertainment in it. This feeling is further enhanced through her negative judgement of the vile man who kills them. A close analysis of each of the murder scenes also reveals that in most cases the brutality of the woman’s death is not described explicitly, but is instead implied through an evocative detail of the scene. Where more intricate detail is provided, most notably in the scene depicting Kirby’s attack, I furthermore argue that this is in service of eliciting an emotional response from the reader. The attacks are also described from the victims’ points of view rather than from

Harper's, so that readers are encouraged to empathise with the women's fear and anger rather than being made complicit in the crime by identifying with Harper's excitement. Rosenthal sees the novel as being wholly pessimistic on the subject of female advancement, claiming that "by the end it is just depressing, with not much post-reading residue" (n.p.), and claims that "the social comment in *The Shining Girls* is weak, counterproductive and diffused in the thriller context. We are left with gratuitous violence, sex and death" (n.p.). However, I argue that while the overall tone of the novel is a bleak one that forms a strong criticism of the violence and injustice women have been subjected to in the past century, this is deployed alongside a subtle, but unmistakable, celebration of female agency and a strong sense of continued defiance.

Readers of *The Shining Girls* are not restricted to narration from only the victims' points of view but are provided with chapters that are focalised by the killer as well, lending the novel elements of a crime thriller. Scaggs describes the crime thriller sub-genre as deviating from early detective fiction and hard-boiled fiction through its primary focus on the crime and the criminal who commits it rather than on the detective and the investigation. As well as this, Scaggs argues that crime thrillers are character-driven rather than plot-driven, focussing on the motivations of the characters for committing the crimes; that there is often no detective or if there is he/she plays a secondary role in the narrative; that the setting of the narrative is often "inextricably bound up with the nature of the crime itself" (p. 108); and that there is often a radical social perspective in the text which provides a critique of some aspect of society. Scaggs notes that the first of these is particularly notable, as a focus on why the crime is committed shifts the narrative away from a "whodunit" to a "whydunit", and this question is traditionally explored by having the story focalised by the criminal him/herself, in order to provide the reader entry into the internal world of the character. This is undoubtedly a key element of Beukes's novel, in which readers are introduced to the killer at the start of the narrative, and the focus is thus shifted from finding out who the culprit is to finding out why he commits these murders. Interestingly, although readers enter large parts of the novel through Harper's point of view, rather than working to engender sympathy in his character these chapters work to further encourage readers to view him critically because of the depth of his depravity and the lack of remorse he displays for what he does. Scaggs further argues that crime thrillers have a tendency to focus on the horror and revulsion of the crimes that are committed in their narratives, and this tendency can clearly be seen in *The Shining Girls* in the chapters focalised by Harper which explore his capability for violence and his problematic sexuality, and are clearly meant to invoke a sense of shock and revulsion in readers for his character.

Through its time-travelling conceit, *The Shining Girls* also displays elements of historical crime fiction, which Scaggs describes as a branch of crime thriller fiction “that is set entirely in some particular historical period, but which was not written during that period” or, alternatively, “crime fiction [that] has a contemporary detective investigating an incident in the more or less remote, rather than very recent, past” (p. 125). Beukes employs an amalgamation of these two streams of historical crime fiction, setting the entire narrative in time periods before the novel was written, as well as having Kirby investigate a number of murders that occurred in both the distant and recent past as she attempts to unravel the complex web of crime that Harper weaves. Scaggs argues that the simultaneous awareness of past and present afforded in historical crime fiction “seems to offer a means of gaining a new perspective on the present through the lens of the past” (p. 134), and Beukes uses this feature to urge her readers to contemplate gender relations in Western society at present, and to consider simultaneously how much and how little has changed in this sphere in the past century.

Harper’s *modus operandi* is to innocuously approach each of his victims years before he kills them and warn them that he will see them again some time in the future. The novel opens in 1974 in a chapter focalised by Harper, as he approaches a six-year-old Kirby while she plays in the garden of her home. Kirby is presented as the picture of innocence: a young freckled girl with wild hair who sits cross-legged on the ground with an “an assortment of random junk splayed around her” (p. 7) from which she invents a game. Harper asks her if she is having a tea party, but the harmlessness of his enquiry is immediately tainted with a sinister air as he surveys the items Kirby plays with, noting “that the rock holding [a bicycle wheel] up is the perfect fit for his fist. Or how easily one of those needle spokes would slide right through the girl’s eye like Jell-O” (p. 8). He notices that Kirby has caught a bee underneath an upturned teacup, and the violence of his thoughts is made even more disturbing as he excitedly grabs at a plastic toy pony in the pocket of his pants, the buzzing coming from underneath the cup “a vibration he can feel all the way down his vertebrae, tugging at his groin” (p. 8). Although he continues to charm Kirby, taking an interest in the ‘circus’ she has built out of random objects and teasing her, his encounter with her continues to be tinged with malice as he takes the bee out from underneath the cup and proceeds to pull its wings off. That Kirby and Harper will come to be in opposition to one another is subtly introduced as Kirby reacts in horror to what Harper has done, and frantically smacks him and tells him to go away. All of Harper’s previous charm disappears in an instant, as his temper rises and he grabs her hands and tells her to “cut it the fuck out, little lady” (p. 10). Harper gives Kirby the plastic pony and tells her to keep it safe for him until he sees her again. “Look out for me, okay, sweetheart? I’ll come back for you” (p. 11), he tells her, and this ominous

promise creates a typically *noir* atmosphere of anxiety, threat and hopelessness, together with a sense of inevitability at the events which will unfold as the novel progresses. Right from the outset we *know* that the protagonist of the novel is doomed to undergo a violent and traumatising experience, and we are immediately introduced to the man who will perpetrate it. The emphasis is thus immediately placed on the characters rather than the plot, and we are invited to start questioning why Harper is on this mission to rid the world of shining girls like Kirby.

Harper is initially introduced with a sinister coupling of charm and malice in his encounter with Kirby, but his next chapter opens in 1931 with him being chased by a group of men after he has killed someone during a game of cards, ironically initially positioning him as the hunted rather than the hunter. Unable to see clearly in the dark, Harper falls into a pit and injures his leg, earning himself the permanent limp he will be identified by for the rest of the novel. The other men soon find him, and as they stand threateningly over him with pipes and hammers the leader of the group tells Harper: “You can’t come here and just do you what you want [. . .] You have to respect your neighbour and your neighbour must respect you” (p. 14). Harper is thus introduced as being low down in the masculine hierarchy described by Connell and Messerschmidt, an outcast who does not obey the laws laid down by the hegemonic men in this society, and his subordination to the other men is indicated by his physical position in the pit below them, and the fact that he is subject to punishment at their hands for not following their rules. While the men are distracted by a police raid in the area Harper manages to escape by pulling himself out of the pit in a passage that depicts him as being extremely strong and resilient to pain. The theme of the intermingling of sex and violence is immediately introduced as he examines the scrapes on his chest caused by the exposed nails lining the pit, and he notes that “the gouges make it look like an enthusiastic whore has laid her mark in him” (p 16). Harper’s escape from the pit is described as “a kind of rebirth” (p. 16), positioning him at the beginning of an Oedipal journey of sorts which will see him seek to assert an allegiance to a patriarchal regime in the most violent way. Although at this point Harper is couched in hyper-masculine terms with regard to his physicality, the injury that he sustains to his leg during this ‘rebirth’ becomes a permanent weakness that forces him to rely on a crutch for the rest of the novel. This physical impairment distances him from a patriarchal ideal of masculinity, and acts as constant reminder that the version of masculinity he represents is flawed. It is the constant over-compensation for this and other shortcomings that makes him quick-tempered and desperate to place himself in a position of power over others. Significantly it is at this point, when he is ripe for proving himself against a patriarchal ideal, that Harper is magically led to the House which enables him to travel through time and directs him to the shining girls.

Harper's penchant for violence is shown to extend far back into his childhood when he recalls how as a young boy he was once caught by his older brother, Everett, while torturing a chick by cutting off its legs with a shard of broken mirror. Everett reprimanded Harper, and readers are shown that even as a child, Harper was positioned in an inferior position to other male figures and rebuked for his failure to play by society's rules. Later, Harper and Everett were driving into town to fetch feed when they got a flat tyre. Harper remained in the car while Everett tended to the tyre; however, the truck began to roll and, in retaliation for his earlier rebuke, Harper chose to ignore his brother's yells for him to pull up the handbrake and stop the truck from running him over. Instead, Harper sat passively in the car as it rolled over Everett, breaking his pelvis. The incident displays the beginnings of Harper's cruelty and violence, as well as a complete lack of basic empathy as he neither hurries to see what has happened to his brother nor to go and fetch help. It also hints at his need for control over others, and his desire to demonstrate to other male figures that he is unwilling to be subordinated to them.

This personal motive is further explored through the zeal with which Harper takes on the task of murdering the women in the novel, and the disturbing sexual excitement he gleans from doing so. That Harper falls short of a patriarchal ideal of virile patriarchal masculinity is suggested when readers are told that with regard to women, "he has always taken whatever he could get, whenever he could get it, paying for it most of the time" (p. 54). The murders become a source of sexual excitement for Harper, and he is frequently described as being aroused while planning the attacks or recalling the details of the murder he has just committed. At one point, he revisits the scene of one of the murders the day after it occurred, and

He's thrilled to see that they have not been able to get all the blood out of the glassy tiles [. . .] It makes him achingly hard and he grips himself through his pants, stifling a little moan of pleasure. He leans against the wall, pulling his coat around him to obscure the unmistakable jerky movements of his hand, remembering what she was wearing, how red her lipstick was. Brighter than blood. (p. 162)

After this, he makes it a habit to revisit the scenes of the murders years after he commits them, "to jerk off over the place a girl died" (p. 164). Killing these women gives Harper a strong sense of power over them, and this power makes him feel sexually aroused and potently masculine, which further heightens the misogyny of his actions. The necrophiliac aspect of Harper's actions further suggest the urge to assert his dominance over women, with Jonathan Rosman and Phillip Resnick (1989) famously concluding that the primary motivation for necrophilia is the possession of an unresisting and unrejecting partner.

Harper's motivation for the murders, however, becomes complicated by his affiliation to the magic House. Throughout the novel the House is spelled with a capital letter, as if it is itself a character, and there are numerous suggestions that the House has a degree of agency as well as an ability to exert control over Harper. On entering the House Harper claims that rather than feeling empty or abandoned, it feels as though "there is someone here with him" (p. 31), and the House is furthermore personified when it is described as being "full of expectation" (p. 31) upon Harper's arrival. A strange voice in his head tells Harper that the previous owner of the House "never belonged here" (p. 32), but Harper instantly, mysteriously, knows that he does. He knows somehow that "the House has been waiting for him. It called him here for a purpose" (p. 32), and this description positions Harper and the House as being connected in some inexplicable way. It is through the House that Harper is able to travel through time, but rather than simply being an object that enables his movements in the novel, it is also portrayed as being able to influence Harper. It seems to be the House that orchestrates the murders in a sense by leading Harper to the women who must be killed, the names of whom Harper finds etched on the wall of a room in the House in his own hand-writing. As he reads the names inside his head he once again hears the strange voice saying: "Kill her. Stop her" (p. 34), and this 'her' seems to be a universal one, a dark and desperate cry from the House to Harper to help it stop these women who shine bright with potential. Although Harper revels in the murders as he commits them, gleaning a sick pleasure from ending these women's lives, he is also often described as being compelled by the House to carry them out, and claims that he does it because "it seems he must" (p. 34). Harper and the House become so intertwined that "he can't always tell if his thoughts are his own or if the House is deciding for him" (p. 73). Harper's motives are thus ambiguous, in part driven by his own bid to assert a powerful version of masculinity in compensation for his shortcomings, but also in part driven by a larger, more mysterious force. Together Harper and the House embark on an aggressive rampage to thwart a number of attempts made by women to challenge a patriarchal system through the twentieth century.

The women the House and Harper target are those who 'shine': independent, strong young women who are each fighting against various forms of oppression levelled at them as women in everyday ways in their times. The House does not target just any woman, it specifically "wants *potential* – to claim the fire in their eyes and snuff it out" (emphasis in original, p. 55). The main motivation for the murders is thus to get rid of those women who pose a threat to the gender status quo, suggesting a collective motive which enables a reading of Harper's mission as an extreme instance of patriarchal masculinity defending itself against those who would challenge its claims to authority in society. Jane Caputi (1987) argues that the sexualised serial murder of women by men in contemporary Western

culture is always driven by a larger social motive, claiming that “these are crimes of sexual/political – essentially *patriarchal* – domination” (emphasis in original, p. 2). Caputi argues that like rape, sexualised serial murder

is not some explicable explosion/epidemic of an extrinsic evil or the domain only of the mysterious psychopath. On the contrary, such murder is an eminently logical step in the procession of patriarchal roles, values, needs, and rule of force. It enacts a primary principle of male supremacy. (p. 3)

She claims that it can be seen as a modern expression of “gynocide”, a term which Andrea Dworkin (1982) defines as “the systematic crippling, raping, and/or killing of women by men [. . .] the relentless violence perpetrated by the gender class men on the gender class women” (p.16 , in Caputi 1987, p. 3). Caputi sees sexualised serial murder as the modern equivalent of the anti-witch crazes of the middle-ages, with the origins of its contemporary manifestation in the murders committed by the infamous Jack the Ripper in the Whitechapel district of London in the late 1800s. Jack the Ripper is famous for never having being caught, despite committing multiple murders of women and writing directly to the police to brag about his crimes. Caputi outlines how the mystery surrounding the murders led to excessive media involvement in the cases, which saw the killer turned into a legend of sorts: “a stylish and likeable rogue” and “an endless source of intrigue, a criminal who, in his twisted way, was a genius, rather than the repulsive and lethal misogynist his actions reveal him to be” (p. 21). Caputi describes how the infamy of Jack the Ripper created a stereotype of the serial killer as being an intelligent, suave predator in both popular media and fiction. This is a trend that Beukes seems to actively challenge through her portrayal of Harper as she repeatedly encourages her readers to recoil in horror at his vile thoughts and actions, and emphasises his cruelty and his lack of remorse. Julia Keller (2013) similarly argues that Beukes avoids the pitfall that so many crime thriller writers fall into of making their killers too appealing in a sense. Instead, Keller claims that “Beukes is true to the basic nature of a career criminal, a nature that is greedy and seedy and opportunistic. Not scintillatingly brilliant and alluringly damaged”, and in doing so she gives a time-worn genre new life, while simultaneously “infusing it with a bleak reality”. Caputi argues that the sense of power over women that is afforded to the male sexualised serial killer through his ability to decide who lives and who dies works to fuse notions of manhood and godhood. Harper’s killings thus become a means by which he is able to achieve the authority of patriarchal masculinity which has previously been denied to him, asserting his allegiance to a patriarchal regime in an extreme and excessive way.

Harper is thus positioned as a distinctly unlikable character, and we are repeatedly encouraged to view his thoughts and actions with extreme criticism. This is further enhanced through Beukes’s

portrayal of his female victims, with whom we are strongly urged to identify and sympathise. Through Harper's victims Beukes provides a glimpse of the evolving role of women in Western society, by positioning each of them within larger cultural movements that have been instrumental in pushing against conservative stereotypes of femininity and against the patriarchal regime which constructs those stereotypes and attempts to limit and control women through them. More than this, Beukes writes against the tendency of both crime fiction and real-world media to focus on the (male) serial killer and the (traditionally male) detective in murder cases, at the expense of the victims. Caputi writes that typically the victims of these killers,

The uncounted women who have been terrorized, mutilated, and murdered are rendered profoundly nameless. Most are soon forgotten, catalogued as only just another photograph in the standard picturing of the victims, just another notch in the belt of the master killer. These women, particularly those who are non-white, poor, elderly, prostitutes, or streetwomen – are noted only as brief news items against the daily parade of 'important' worldly events. Still others are never even named, left only as unidentified bodies in morgues across the country. (p. 202)

Beukes actively writes against this trend, insisting that each of Harper's victims is named and portrayed as a memorable character. Many of them are the types of marginalised women Caputi mentions – a stripper, non-white women, a transgender woman, and a lesbian, for example – and each character is carefully moulded and sympathetically treated in the novel. Beukes makes a point of not letting the victims be reduced to a constellation of corpses that the detective figure must connect and solve, but makes sure that each is presented as a well-rounded character and that her life, rather than her death, is what remains with the reader after finishing her chapter.

Harper's first victim is Jeanette Klara in 1931, a burlesque dancer better known as "the Glow Girl" (p. 62) because she paints her body in radium paint for her performances. Harper's motive for this murder stems from the sexual boldness of Jeanette's performances, and his need to punish her for her refusal to embody a submissive and conservative version of femininity. That he sees her as embodying an evil or dangerous version of femininity is communicated by the way in which he interprets each part of her performance in a distinctly sinister manner. While everyone else in the audience is completely entranced by her as she dances and removes her first layer of clothes in order to reveal a shimmering butterfly costume beneath, "like a butterfly shrugging out of the folds of a black cocoon", Harper claims that the movement reminds him "more of a snake wriggling out of its skin" (p. 65), and that the images of butterflies which are projected all around her make him think of "plague and infestation" (p. 66). The performance is designed to be beautiful, exciting and entertaining, but Harper repeatedly interprets what he sees in negative terms. As he watches her he is described as "finger[ing] the folding

knife in his pocket” (p. 66) in much the same way as Harry Powell does in Charles Laughton’s 1955 film *The Night of the Hunter* as he watches a woman stripping on stage. Like Harper, Harry Powell murders a number of women in the film, and the obsessive flicking of his knife during the woman’s erotic performance has been interpreted as representing masculine anxiety at the threat posed by such a confident and sexually-liberated woman (Ewer 2005, p. 40). Harper attacks Jeanette in an alleyway after the show, and her murder is not described in gruesome detail, but rather draws its horror from the comment that “it was no great thing to break her. And if she screamed [. . .] no one came running to see” (p. 67). Afterwards Harper bends down to wipe his knife on her coat and his hands are described as “shaking with excitement” (p. 67), alluding to the thrill and lack of remorse that his first murder produces.

The second shining girl is Zora Ellis Jordan, who works as a welder on a ship in 1943, representing the women who stepped in to perform what had been traditionally masculine trades up until World War II. At twenty-eight Zora is the mother of four, and is left alone to raise her children after her beloved husband is killed in the war. Desperate for money, Zora becomes a welder because although she had received a condolence letter from the government praising her husband for his doing his duty during the war, the letter “hadn’t specified how she was supposed to feed and clothe and school Harry’s children all on her own” (p. 87). Through her character, Beukes gives voice to a whole generation of women whose roles in society underwent a dramatic change during the war in order to both keep the country’s workforce alive and support and raise families on their own. Zora faces additional difficulty as a black woman in America at a time when “Jim Crow [was] still alive and well” (p.86) in the area where she lives. That these jobs are ill-equipped for female employees is shown in the fact that Zora wears a pair of men’s work boots that she must stuff with newspaper because they are far too large, “after seeing a woman in loafers get the bones of her foot crushed by a falling crate” (p. 89). As well as this, Zora must undertake an hour’s journey home to see her children at the end of a long shift as “there is no official housing for coloured, let alone coloured families” (p. 87) near the shipyard. Her strength and the agility with which she steps out of the domestic sphere and takes on masculine traits in both the work sphere and in family life make her a threat to essentialist ideas regarding gender and to patriarchal discourses that position women as being less capable than and dependent on men.

Harper sees that such a threat is annihilated when he attacks Zora as she is walking home in the early hours of the morning after her shift to get her children ready for school. Her attack is described in more detail than Jeanette’s, although this appears to be done in service of showing the courageous way in which she fights back against Harper, rather than sensationalising her murder. As Harper

approaches her she fearlessly says to him: “I suggest you limp away and leave me the hell alone. Because I *will* drop you” (emphasis in original, p. 90), and when Harper stabs her with his knife she yells “No! [. . .] furious with him and her body for betraying her” (p. 91). As she falls she grabs him, and punches him in the face hard enough to break his jaw. Other than Kirby, Zora is the only woman who is described as doing some damage to Harper, and this further highlights her toughness and defiance. Once again, however, the true horror of her death is depicted not in the physical act itself which is not described in detail, but in her panicked cries to be spared for the sake of her children. It is only as she worries that her eldest is not yet grown enough to raise the younger three that Zora is described as being afraid for the first time during this horrible ordeal, and her selflessness and strength engender a deep sense of sympathy for her character in the reader.

Harper’s next victim is an architect in 1954 named Willie Rose. Beukes’s depiction of women entering a previously male-dominated workforce in Zora’s narrative is continued in Willie’s, through her portrayal of the challenges Willie faces as an unwelcome female employee in a predominantly male firm. As well as being a working woman at a time when women were being pushed back into the domestic sphere after the end of World War II, Willie is a lesbian, positioning her as the antithesis of the domesticated, submissive, conservative and implicitly heterosexual 1950s housewife that was valorised at the time. Willie repeatedly refers to the paranoid *Zeitgeist* of her era, claiming: “Fear festers in the imagination [. . .] Nightmares breed. Allies become enemies. Subversives are everywhere. Paranoia justifies any persecution, and privacy is a luxury when the Reds have the bomb” (p. 109). Such is the level of political paranoia that Willie claims to have heard stories about people whose careers have been ruined “for not taking the oath of loyalty to the United States of America and all it stands for” (p. 109). Willie claims that she is not radical in her political beliefs, “but she’s artistic. And these days that’s bad enough. Because artists socialise with all kinds of people. Like blacks and left-wing radicals and people with opinions” (p. 110), she cynically thinks. Despite this, she is nervous of her ‘artistic’ tendencies and homosexuality becoming public knowledge in such a cultural climate, because “to most people, it’s all equivalent anyway. Pinkos. Subversives. Homos” (p. 110), and she thus has to hide these aspects of her identity, and lives in fear of the consequences of speaking her mind.

Willie alludes to the fact that she had to fight to be admitted to university, and to be employed in her current position, and so claims that she has come to terms with the fact that some of her ambitions will never be realised. She recalls, for example, how one of her colleagues told her that “the only reason they hired a woman architect was so that she could answer the phones” (p. 110). Although

Willie projects a confident persona, she lives in constant fear of the men she works with who look for any excuse to pass uncomfortable comments and offer her lower-grade projects. After refusing the sexual advances of one of them at an office party she moreover feels the need to tailor her movements around the office so as not to run into him alone, and her anxiety further highlights the fact that despite her education, ambition and independence, in this work environment she is constantly pushed into a position of powerless femininity by the men who are threatened by her. As Willie sits alone in the office late one evening, finishing her work, Harper – perhaps the man who is most threatened by her – arrives and kills her. As with Jeanette no details of Willie’s murder are described, and instead readers are left with only the chilling image of Harper advancing towards her, “grimacing around the wires in his mouth” (p. 116) which hold his jaw together after his encounter with Zora, and a feeling of dread knowing what will inevitably happen next.

In 1972, Harper’s victim is a woman named Margot who works for a secret abortion clinic called Jane at a time when abortion was still illegal in parts of America. Margot’s chapter begins as she is helping a young girl named Jemmie home after an abortion, at great risk to herself late at night in a bad neighbourhood, but, she thinks, “there’s no way she’s going to let Jemmie go home alone in her condition. They try to make it easy on the women. But it still hurts and it’s still scary and it’s still illegal” (p. 198). The care and sympathy with which Jane helps women is contrasted starkly with respectable doctors who demand an exorbitant price “to have someone pick you up on the street corner and blindfold you so you can’t identify them, and scrape your womb out and dump you back after it’s done without so much as a how-do-you-do-ma’am-have-a-nice-day” (p. 198). Margot describes the kinds of women who seek their help: there is “the forty-eight-year-old housewife worn down by seven kids who just can’t go through it again”, “the farm manager whose twenty-two-week old baby is so deformed the doctor says he (or she) won’t live more than an hour after birth, but insists she carry it to term”, and “the fourteen-year-old from the West Side who rocks up with a jar full of pennies because that’s all she has and begs you not to tell her ma” (p. 200), for example. By considering the individual circumstances that each woman is in, Margot provides a sympathetic view on the subject of abortion and urges readers to consider some of the different reasons a woman might seek such a procedure, rather than assuming each case is the same.

That abortion is not an easy or flippant decision for most women is suggested by the role that Margot fulfils at Jane. Margot does not perform the actual medical procedure itself, but works specifically to provide emotional support to the women who are going through it. She highlights the fact that the work is not easy, and that while performing abortions and providing support to vulnerable women

Jane must also constantly fight off the mafia, who are trying to get involved in order to make money, avoid suspicion from the police, and deal with disgruntled and sometimes violent partners. Those who work for Jane must also deal with the trauma of what they are doing, and Margot hints at how difficult this is when she bitterly comments: “Wrap up your first fetus in an old T-shirt for a burial shroud and toss it in a dumpster three miles from the Place and see how you like it. No one said it would be pretty, yanking despair out of a woman” (p. 201).

Through Margot’s descriptions Beukes engenders sympathy for both the women who seek abortions in desperate circumstances, and the women who perform them with such care and understanding, despite coming under attack by those who oppose it. She repeatedly highlights that those who oppose it are those who do not have to deal with bearing and raising a child in terrible circumstances – the police, the husbands, and other family members. When Harper approaches Margot and Jemmie as they struggle home, Margot’s protective nature is once again foregrounded as she tells Jemmie to hurry away, and even as Harper stabs her, her attention is focussed on checking that Jemmie has got to safety. Margot’s murder is described as being slow and drawn out, and that she suffers so much after having devoted her life to lightening the load of suffering experienced by others is tragic. The chapter, however, ends hopefully with reference to the famous Roe vs. Wade trial in which the United States Supreme Court legalised abortion in 1973. Readers are thus given their first hint of optimism that despite Harper’s rampage, he will never be able to truly stop the collective ‘shining girls’ of history.

In 1993 Harper has two victims, a drug addict named Catherine Galloway-Peck and a social worker named Jin-Sook Au. Catherine is an artist, whom Harper approached as a child and identified as one of his shining girls, but whose potential has been dimmed by her drug addiction. Although Harper visits each of his victims some years before he returns to kill them, Catherine is the only one to immediately recognise him, and it is suggested that it is the anticipation and fear of him coming back to kill her that has impeded her from ever reaching her true potential. Harper decides that he need not kill her, because, he tells her, “You don’t shine anymore” (p. 223), indicating that she is no longer a threat to a patriarchal system. Catherine, however, asks him to do it anyway, and he agrees, although he gleans no satisfaction or thrill from this kill. Catherine’s murder is not described in any detail, and the only image the reader is left with at the end of the chapter is that of “blood spattered on the canvas” (p. 224). Through her narrative Beukes provide a short and subtle, but powerful, critique of a society in which a person’s – and specifically a woman’s – potential can be dampened by the threats she must constantly face, for no other reason than because she is a ‘shining girl’, and is thus a hazard to those

who try to protect their unjust claim to power. The next chapter is a newspaper article reporting on the murder of Jin-Sook, who is described by a co-worker as being “a bright young woman whose passion and insight made a real impact” (p. 225) in her endeavour to help people in dire circumstances. A woman from the community where she helped explains how Jin-Sook always brought the children little presents, “books and such even though they asked for sweets. Inspirational things [. . .] Martin Luther King’s biography or Aretha Franklin CDs. Strong black role models the kids could look up to” (p. 225). Jin-Sook is thus portrayed as a progressive, forward-thinking woman who had devoted her life to helping people to achieve better lives and to follow role-models who question social injustices. With her capacity to question her world, to attempt to bring about change and to encourage others to do the same, it is little wonder that Harper must do away with such a threat to the patriarchy he represents.

Harper’s penultimate victim in terms of the narrative is a transgender woman named Alice, although in terms of date chronology her death occurs between Zora’s and Willie’s in 1951. Alice works as a dancer in a show with a number of other women, who base each of their acts around various ‘attractive’ feminine stereotypes. Her transgenderism is not immediately foregrounded when her character is introduced, and she instead appears to fit in naturally with the other women as they prepare for the show. Through this Beukes encourages her readers to see Alice as she sees herself, rather than how society would see her, and this engenders reader sympathy in her character. The show appears to be orchestrated around a theme of sexual teasing, but nothing too explicit as Alice notes: “There is a new prudishness in the air lately and Joey [the show’s manager] has cunningly adapted the act to suit” (p. 172). Joey reminds the performers that “this show is a wholesome family affair” and warns the crowd: “This is no cooch show!” (p. 173). The entire show is predicated on setting up a binary opposition between innocent, virtuous, conservative women and ambitious, sexually-dangerous women who lead ‘guileless’ men astray. One performer, for example, plays a nymphomaniac, and is introduced to the crowd by Joey as a woman “plagued by unnatural, uncontrollable desires [. . .] wholly at the mercy of her depraved fantasies” (p. 175). Another performer, who emerges wearing red lipstick, a pencil skirt and her hair tied up in a bun, is described as “The strumpet! The hussy. The harlot. The wicked temptress! The ambitious young office girl with her eye on the boss. Intent on coming between husband and wife” (p. 175). The women in the show are highly sexualised, but their sexuality is repeatedly positioned as something unnatural and shameful, or as evil and disruptive to ‘decent’ society. Joey sells the show as a warning “about the dangers of decadence and desire and how easily the fairer sex may be led astray. Or do the leading”, and tells the crowd: “Come see for yourselves just how far and how *easily* a good woman may fall” (emphasis in

original, p. 175), lobbing “prostitutes and drug addicts”, “women victim to their own quivering desires”, and “insatiable black widows” (p. 175) all into this category of ‘fallen women’. That Joey’s sales pitch sends the crowd into an excited frenzy speaks to the judgemental attitudes which prevailed at the time. That these draw specifically on female sexuality highlights the threat that growing female agency posed to the gender status quo of the time, and the eagerness with which female sexual independence, in particular, was being demonised highlights the maintenance of patriarchal structures through intimate, bodily practices.

Alice’s transgenderism is subtly introduced through comments that one of the other performers keeps passing, intimating that Alice is not a ‘real’ woman. Alice is confronted by Joey, who orders her to take off her clothes so that he can see for himself if the other woman’s accusations are true. This is a frightening and humiliating experience for Alice, who trembles as she reveals her body and thinks:

She has fought against this her whole life. Against Lucas Ziegenfeus who lives inside her. Or she lives inside him, resenting his physical body, the despicable hateful thing dangling between her legs that she straps down but doesn’t have the courage to cut off. (p. 178)

Joey dismisses her, telling her that she should go and join a speciality show in one of the bigger cities, or a carnival as a bearded lady, but Alice is quick to tell him, “I’m not a freak” (p. 178). “You are in this world, princess” (p. 178), he retaliates, and tells her that he can’t run the risk of letting her keep working for him in case someone finds out. “It’s a family show” (p. 179), he says again by way of explanation, positioning her transgenderism as something deeply shameful and deviant. Alice constantly compares herself unfavourably with other women, and so when Harper first approaches her in 1940 after her confrontation with Joey she is deeply flattered by his interest in her. Alice is introduced early on as someone who yearns for love and acceptance as she stands watching a young couple at the fair, and thinks as they kiss that “it’s so lovely, [she] could just die” (p. 171). Harper comforts her, and she is quick to interpret his interest as attraction, claiming that “she’s never felt like she so utterly belonged somewhere before” (p. 179). Harper leaves her, but when he reappears in her life eleven years later she is giddy with excitement: “It is the moment she has been waiting for her whole life” (p. 238). Her romanticism of the situation is influenced by her desperation for love, and cruelly, Harper plays along with her need for acceptance as a ‘real’ woman, complimenting her, taking her to a hotel, dancing with her and presenting her with a gift of jewellery. His actions are a cold-hearted game intended to lull Alice into a false sense of security and happiness, which is broken when he chases her through the hotel and onto the roof. Harper advances towards Alice with his knife out, telling her to come to him, and cruelly telling her: “I love you” (p. 242). Alice, however, reverses the

control of power in the situation by jumping off the roof. Although she dies, it is through her own doing rather than through Harper's, and in a paradoxical way, her death thus forms a moment in which she is able to take control of her life and refuse to be victimised by him. Harper is furious that his plans are thwarted, and Alice's death thus stands as a small triumph in the novel, and another instance of feminine agency that remains beyond Harper's control.

Harper's last victim is Mysha Pathan, a biologist in 1993. By his last murder, Harper has become discouraged by his mission and the fact that it does not seem to have an end-point. Harper is described as being "efficient" (p. 257) during her murder, which he carries out in her laboratory; however, in order to make up "for the lack of joy this brings him" (p. 257) he cuts out all of her internal organs and arranges them around her, stuffing the cavities of her body with leaves. His actions add a new level of horror to the murder, but the fact that he is driven to try and *make* the murder exciting signals a dramatic shift in his attitude and a sense of the futility of what he is doing. Gone is the excitement Harper used to feel at killing his victims, and he treats this killing as though it were a mundane, but necessary, task that he must undertake. Harper becomes frustrated because his quest is never completed: time keeps presenting the world with new shining girls who continue the fights of their predecessors. Despite the dark tone of the novel, this stands as a great point of optimism, and Beukes seems to suggest that no matter how hard representatives of patriarchy may try to keep women down, they will never truly prevail as there will always be a supply of strong individuals who will fight against this oppression.

This idea is further represented through Kirby's surviving of Harper's attack, and her decision to devote her life to finding him. Harper attacks Kirby in 1989 while she is walking her dog on the beach, and unlike the other murders, Kirby's attack is described in explicit and harrowing detail. Perhaps more noteworthy than the violence of Harper's attack, however, is Kirby's response to it: Kirby remains defiant throughout and fights Harper every chance she gets. She is described as feeling angry at herself for crying out as he stabs her, and, ludicrously, tries to justify her involuntary reaction by claiming that "her body is a separate animal to her mind, which is a shameful, bargaining thing, willing to do anything to make it stop. Anything to live" (p. 133). After fighting off an attack from Kirby's dog, Harper leaves, assured that Kirby will soon bleed out; however, when she hears her dog grunt, indicating that he is still alive, her defiant instincts kick in and "she starts getting seriously pissed off. *Fuck him*" (p. 134), she thinks. Fuelled by her indignation at what he has done Kirby manages to get up and carries her dog until they find help. Her experience, and what she can physically feel are described in detail,

in what can only be a bid to make readers aware of the horror of what she has endured, and the subsequent zeal with which she seeks justice.

Despite the severity of her injuries, Kirby miraculously survives Harper's attack, although her life is turned upside down by it. She stops her studies and moves around the country for a while, never quite feeling as if she fits in anywhere: "too dark and fucked up for San Diego and not fucked up enough, or in the wrong ways, for LA" (p. 43), she says. Eventually she ends up back in Chicago, although she loses touch with all her friends because nobody knows what to say to her. Alienated and traumatised by her ordeal, Kirby becomes obsessed with solving her case, and gets an internship at the *Chicago Sun-Times* working under Dan Velasquez, a sports reporter who used to cover homicides, and who covered her attack. At the newspaper, Kirby is able to start researching female murder cases involving stabbing that have been reported on in the past, and she is slowly able to start connecting Harper's victims. Kirby is thus positioned as an amateur private eye figure rather than a formal detective aligned with the police force, and her alienation and sarcasm further associate her with the hard-boiled mode of detective fiction, although the personal nature of the case and the feminist slant of the murders also draw on elements of humanistic crime fiction.

Dan is depicted as principled character, whose determination to uncover the truth and expose corruption in the past have made him and his ex-wife the targets of death threats. Dejected at the lack of justice in his society, he stopped reporting on homicides and became a sports reporter. When Kirby meets him he is discouraged and cynical, but still empathetic enough to agree to help her. Kirby, who claims that she prefers to be alone because she does not "play well with others" (p. 77), quickly becomes comfortable around Dan, put at ease by the straightforward nature and lack of awkwardness with which he is able to discuss her case and murder at large, and his natural inclination to treat her as he would any other person rather than as a victim. Used to seeing and hearing the terrible details of attacks in the past, Dan is able to broach the topic of Kirby's attack as he would any other topic, and although at first "it rocks him. How easily they're able to talk about this, make stupid jokes" (p. 78), he soon realises that this air of normalcy is something Kirby craves in a world where everyone treats her like a "trainwreck celebrity without the limo rides or free designer clothes" (p. 106). Like Zinzi, Kirby has a cynical wit that she uses as a protective mechanism to keep people at arm's length and to project a confident persona that cloaks the vulnerability she actually feels. She also uses humour to help her project an air of not caring, which makes her seem like a tough character rather than a deeply traumatised individual. As Benoît does with Zinzi, Dan is able to connect with Kirby on a deeper level, and becomes the source of support that she needs as her investigation progresses.

As Kirby closes in on Harper, by chance he learns that she is still alive. Before he can find her, however, Kirby manages to locate the House, and together she and Dan go to confront him. In the climactic scene of the novel Kirby shoots Harper, and his final chapter describes his death, with the narration continuing on even after he has physically died. He describes himself as being outside of his body as it dies, “looking down on everything, as if wedged high against the ceiling” (p. 294). This strange, extra-bodily narration continues as

He stretches out, reaching for anything. And finds the House. Floorboards instead of bones. Walls instead of flesh. He can pull it back. Start again. Undo this. The heat of the flames and the choking smoke and the howling fury. It's not so much a possession as an infection. The House was always his. Always him. (p. 295)

Harper cannot separate his sense of self from that of the House throughout the novel, and ultimately they are depicted as being one and the same thing. This provides a complex suggestion about accountability for the murders, as Harper is held responsible and punished for his crimes, but there is also a sense that he has been acting as part of a bigger entity. The image of the House suggests, as Caputi does, the need to consider the role of the environment in influencing the behaviour of individuals, and it is possible to see the House as standing for a metaphor for the cultural framework of patriarchy – something bigger than any individual, but which works through the actions of individuals, and relies on them in order to survive in society. Stuart Kelly (2014) claims that the novel is at its core about “how misogyny adapts to and exploits every freedom that feminism achieves”, and that the image of Harper bleeding into the house as he dies becomes a powerful means of conveying the idea that “hatred of women is the architecture, the framework, the structure” of the horror in Beukes’s narrative. In an interview with Dan after Kirby’s attack, Rachel tells him: “Society is a poisonous hamster wheel” (p. 76), and it is ultimately this that Beukes seems to draw our attention to. She repeatedly asks her readers to question what kind of a world favours a man like Harper and aids him in a terrible quest, what kind of a world has allowed atrocities to be committed against women for decades, and how this still remains a relevant topic at the present time.

That Caputi sees sexualised serial murder as a distinctly modern phenomenon suggests that that it has arisen in relation to the increasing threat posed to the patriarchal system it defends by people, like the shining girls, who are challenging it. Raewyn Connell argues that violence is integral in the maintenance of a patriarchal gender structure, employed by men in order to defend the authority and material benefits they receive by virtue of the patriarchal dividend. However, she argues that the prevalence of this type of violence in a society is also indicative of a social system in crisis, for “a

thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate” (p. 84). That violence against women remains a prevalent feature of contemporary society points to a gender order in crisis, with patriarchy looking to extreme means for defending its unjust claim to power. Harper’s actions in the novel can thus be seen as playing a small part in a larger picture, and motivated, at least in part, by the power of the social structure in which he exists. His personal motivations – his desire for power over others and the unconscious need he seems to have to prove his manliness in compensation for his flaws – are influenced by the society in which he lives, which favours a patriarchal hegemonic version of masculinity in which men are physically strong, intellectually elite, and authoritative. That he falls short of this ideal creates a drive in Harper to prove his masculinity by gaining power over the women who threaten the legitimacy of this ideal, and in doing so he becomes an “exemplar of phallic manliness; [. . .] everything that patriarchal culture, at root, says a man to be” (Caputi 1987, p. 201), and fixes women in the position of victim. As has been argued, this clouds the issue of accountability for the murders in the novel, as Harper’s motives for the murders are inextricably influenced by larger societal power structures, which Harper unquestioningly supports and perpetuates. Dan Hartland (2013) suggests that the influence of the House in the novel is over-emphasised, and argues that it seems as though it is the House and not Harper who is responsible for them. However, Connell reminds us that “men no more than women are chained to the gender patterns they have inherited. Men too can make political choices for a new world of gender relations” (p. 86), a point which may be used to argue Harper’s accountability for the murders through his willingness to actively play his part in maintaining a problematic gender status quo. Through Beukes’s refusal to portray Harper in the mould of a legendary ‘Jack the Ripper’ killer and instead her repeated drive to encourage readers to despise him, together with her insistent alignment of the readers with the women in the novel, Beukes urges us to be critical of those who have chosen not to “make political choices for a new world of gender relations” but instead have chosen to replicate and defend the problematic ones of the past. Whether or not justice is possible for women in such a world is a question the author does not clearly answer, for although Kirby is able to kill Harper and find personal justice, she leaves the House with Dan and re-enters a society in which only the two of them know what has happened, and no larger-scale change is enacted as a result of Harper’s death. The novel ends with the only chapter focalised by Bartek, the previous owner of the House, depicting his finding the key to the House in 1929, two years before Harper will find it and kill him in the passage of the House. That the novel ends at the point where the narrative starts urges us to never forget the past but to keep returning to it and learning from it. The narratives of the women also collectively provide a picture of hope despite their grim ends, and celebrate the positive steps that have been taken in Western society in the fight for

female agency and equality; these narratives suggest that there will always be a supply of shining girls who will continue this fight through the ages.

## Chapter Five

### **Hybrid bodies and porous borders: the multifaceted nature of contemporary gender and sexuality in *Broken Monsters***

Beukes's fourth novel, *Broken Monsters*, was published in 2014 and is set in present-day Detroit. The novel opens at the scene of a gruesome murder, where a young boy's body has been cut in half, and his torso attached to the hindquarters of a deer. As in *The Shining Girls*, we are introduced to the perpetrator of the crime early on in the novel, a man named Clayton Broom, who has been possessed by a mysterious dark force referred to only as "the dream". Reality and fantasy intermingle in the narrative, as the dream drives Clayton to bring its nightmare-like visions to life through a series of unusual and grisly murders. Clayton's strange supernatural narrative is juxtaposed with the realism of a police procedural, which is articulated through chapters focalised by the detective investigating his case, Gabi Versado. As in *Zoo City* and *The Shining Girls*, Beukes feminises the investigator of her crime novel, and through Gabi's narrative she explores the difficulties a woman faces in finding her niche and defending her authority within the patriarchal framework of the police force, as well as the challenge of trying to balance her career with motherhood. The influence of technology on society is a key theme running through the novel, and chapters focalised by Gabi's teenage daughter, Layla, explore the effects of the internet and social media on the socialisation of young people, and specifically, young women, in contemporary times. Through her narrative Beukes provides a critical consideration of the premature loss of childhood innocence that is occurring in Western society as a result of the highly public and highly sexualised nature of the internet. Interwoven with the main thread of the novel are sub-plots that are introduced through chapters focalised by an aging journalist named Jonno, who follows the murders in a desperate attempt to find the story that will reignite his career while trying to navigate a relationship with a much younger woman; and a benevolent homeless man named TK, who becomes involved in the investigation after one of his friends falls victim to the dream. Through Clayton, Jonno and TK, Beukes explores three radically different versions of modern masculinity, all of which have failed in some way to meet hegemonic norms and thrive in this society, and considers the different ways in which they respond to this.

Like *The Shining Girls*, *Broken Monsters* brings the genres of speculative fiction and crime fiction into dialogue with one another, forcing logic, reason, and rationality to co-exist with mysticism and ambiguity within its pages. Gabi's alignment with the official police force, and the detail and realism with which the case is depicted lend the novel elements of a police procedural, which John Scaggs (2005) describes as "a type of fiction in which the actual methods and procedures of police work are central" (p. 91), and a sub-genre of crime fiction in which realism is paramount as the foundation for

the investigative process, themes, characters, action and setting. Crime is depicted as “an everyday occurrence arising from the tensions of modern life” (p. 97) and typically solved using ‘normal’, realistic police methods, and the genre shows a departure from hard-boiled fiction in its depiction of collective and co-operative policing. “The transition from hard-boiled fiction to police procedural is, therefore, a transition from the *private* eye, in the sense of personal, small-scale, and often self-serving investigation, to the *public* eye, in the sense of civic, large-scale policing that serves society as a whole” (emphasis in original, p. 89), he claims. Scaggs argues that while the lone detective usually depicted in hard-boiled fiction “characteristically interrogates the social order, he or she can barely make a dent in its structures” (p. 97), but that the collective and state-sanctioned nature of the police work carried out in the procedural has the capacity to influence it in more noticeable ways.

Scaggs notes that there is a tendency in the police procedural to reduce notions of right and wrong to rigidly defined categories. As a result of this, there is a noticeable inclination in the genre to couch criminality in terms of “a pure and inexplicable monstrosity” (p. 99), which Scaggs argues serves to “isolate such criminal and murderous instincts from all social, political, or economic causes, exonerating the social order of all responsibility regarding its ‘deviant’ citizens” (p. 99), as well as positioning the criminal as wholly ‘other’ and inhuman. He claims: “The device of reducing the killer to something purely evil or animalistic restores an ideal status quo, and is a corresponding validation of the social order that is specifically not responsible for social aberration” (p. 100). He argues that recent procedurals have begun to interrogate and challenge dominant ideologies through their depictions of the relationship between the dominant social order and the individual detective “as part of a team that is a microcosm of that social order” (p. 100). This has specifically led to the interrogation of the position of women and racial minorities within the predominantly white, male, heterosexual sphere of the police force. Scaggs argues, however, that most feminist appropriations of the procedural tend to simply portray their heroines as having to become ‘one of the guys’ in order to succeed in the predominantly male world of law enforcement rather than exploring the gender issues “associated with placing women within the hierarchical and traditionally masculine world of the police” (p. 102).

Laura Miller (2014) sees *Broken Monsters* as being at the forefront of a relatively new trend of crime fiction written by female authors, who share a “focus on the penumbra of crime, a truer portrait of the halo of human damage surrounding violence and death” (n.p.). She argues that these writers bend the conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction by employing

a dash – or more than a dash – of fabulism, or lingering over characters who used to serve as the mere furniture of the old-style hard-boiled fiction. They may dare not to offer a solution to every mystery or to have their sleuths arrive at those solutions by nonrational means. Their prose ranges from the matter-of-fact to the intoxicating, and the battlefields they depict are not the sleazy nightclubs, back alleys, diners and shabby offices of the archetypal P.I. novel, but a far more intimate and treacherous terrain: family, marriage, friendship. (n.p.)

Miller highlights the humanistic and social elements of this kind of crime fiction, arguing that it “mines the distorted relationships that produce and follow crime for [its] material” (n.p.). This brand of female-written crime fiction focuses on the social elements that produce crime, as well as considering the effects that crime has on the lives and relationships of those immediately affected by crime, and by society at large. What is repeatedly stressed, Miller claims, is the importance of connection: *Broken Monsters* “does not have a hero, let alone a lone brooding one [. . .] The corrective to wickedness in [the novel] is not a bruised melancholy individualism, but connection, loyalty, [and] trust” (n.p.).

Beukes provides readers with a diverse range of characters in *Broken Monsters*, who vary in terms of age, race, class and gender, thereby offering glimpses of the ways in which various identity categories intersect to influence how identity is constructed and understood. In terms of femininity in the novel, Beukes presents readers with four main female characters: Gabi, her teenage daughter Layla, Layla’s best friend, Cas, and Jonno’s girlfriend, Jen Q. All four of these women push against traditional ideas of femininity in different ways, and through their narratives Beukes provides an eclectic group of examples of the kinds of challenges women face in contemporary Western society. These challenges, significantly, are often linked to the female characters’ sexualities, and what repeatedly emerges is a tension between their desire to claim and take ownership of their sexualities, and the way in which sex is repeatedly used to undermine them.

*Broken Monsters* opens with Detective Gabi Versado standing over the boy-deer hybrid body of Clayton Broom’s first murder victim, and her tough, hard-boiled attitude is immediately introduced as she surveys the body and claims: “Dead is dead. It’s only the hows and whys that vary” (p. 9). Crime is clearly a dominant feature in Detroit, “The. Most. Violent. City. In. America. *Duh-duh-duh*” (p. 9), Gabi sardonically says, thinking of the dramatic horror-movie chords her teenage daughter would probably use to punctuate the words, and we are encouraged to immediately see the murder as part of a large-scale societal breakdown rather than an isolated act of violence. It is special, however, in its depth of depravity, which is illustrated as Gabi jadedly lists the different ways in which murders are usually committed and admits that this one is completely unique. Gabi’s position as a detective on the police force as opposed to a lone private investigator or amateur sleuth is foregrounded as people from

various crime-related departments gather to hear her initial report on the case. As she looks around the room and describes some of her colleagues a stereotypically masculine presence is introduced as she notes the “bull-neck” of one of the men, and the “brutish” (p. 64) haircut of another. As the men joke among themselves it becomes clear that this is a structure in which a tough, strong, commanding version of masculinity is idealised, and initiation into the brotherhood of the police force is shown to be difficult for anyone who does not fit this ideal. The newest young officer on the force, Marcus Jones, for example, quickly earns the nickname ‘Sparkles’ after Gabi gives him some sparkly, cherry-flavoured lip-gloss to rub under his nose while they are at the crime scene in order to help him deal with the smell of the body. Although Marcus instantly proves himself to be an asset on the police force by calling in the murder on his cell-phone instead of on the police radio in order to avoid the press finding out about it, by the time he returns to the precinct “there’s already a picture on the noticeboard, his personnel photo badly photoshopped onto Tinkerbell’s body, surrounded by fairy dust” (p. 64). Women are shown to have been the target of similar mocking when Gabi recalls the time when all the female officers’ bra sizes were leaked around the precinct when they were measured for bulletproof vests, leading her to dress in loose sweatshirts in an attempt to hide her body and her femininity.

Gabi is an authoritative character who is not easily intimidated by anyone, and who retains a degree of calm and control in any situation she finds herself in, both professionally and in her personal life. As a detective she is fairly high up in the chain of command on the police force, and she embodies many of the characteristics revered by her male colleagues, such as confidence, assertiveness, toughness, and a strong reliance on logic and rationality. Despite embodying many of the ‘masculine’ qualities of an ideal detective, Gabi is still viewed differently because she is a woman, and often reduced to her physicality by her colleagues. This is communicated most clearly when she and one of her colleagues, Luke Stricker, go to interview a Russian mobster, and Luke accuses her of flirting with him, telling her: “This is why female cops get a bad reputation” (p. 137), and implying that she has used her femininity and her sexuality as a means to get what she needs professionally. Gabi counters that she was not flirting, and that Luke could have had exactly the same conversation with the mobster and not have had it construed in a sexual sense, but Luke simply replies that “he wasn’t looking at *my* tits” (emphasis in original, p. 137). Luke suggests that even when Gabi is not trying to emphasise the fact that she is a woman, she is nonetheless treated differently because she is. He additionally tells her that among the police Gabi is known as a “threefer” because she is Latina, a woman, and pretty, which means she gets preferential treatment, “so the department can look more progressive” (p. 137). His comment suggests that Gabi has not earned her success and authority on the force through merit, and that he makes such a comment indicates the threat such a strong and capable woman poses on

the police force, and the danger her embodiment of many traditionally masculine traits poses to the essentialist notions about gender that underpin white masculinity's claim to authority in this sphere, and in society at large. He moreover implies that the only reason Gabi has been put in charge of such a big case is because it is receiving so much media coverage, and it is thus a good opportunity for the police department to showcase that they support the hiring of women and racial minorities, at least at an official level. That she may be being used for political reasons angers Gabi, who thinks: "screw them all for putting her in this position when she's just here to do her job" (p. 153). Luke's comment additionally suggests that the police force holds up the appearance of being progressive and supportive of empowered women at an official or theoretical level, but continues to assert conservative, patriarchal ideals in subtle, but practical ways. If, as Scaggs suggests, the police force can be seen as a microcosm for social relations at large, this suggests that while society appears to support gender equality, women are still constantly undermined and subordinated in subtle ways during the practicalities of day to day life. Gabi's experiences on the police force thus demonstrate Shelly Budgeon's (2011) observation that beneath the celebratory discourse of female success that is prevalent at present, is a "deep sense of unease and ambivalence regarding the role that gender now plays within a transforming social order characterised by rapid change and uncertainty" (p. 284).

Gabi's femininity is foregrounded once again when Marcus stays the night at her house in order to watch over Layla later in the novel, and the next day Gabi's partner, Bob Boyd, teases him by asking if he slept with Gabi. The whole conversation is framed as friendly male banter, in which the subject of conversation is Gabi's physical appearance and sexual attractiveness. Although she distances herself from traditional notions of femininity in terms of her appearance and attitude, and although she has proven her position on the force through dedication, hard work, and a sound work ethic, Gabi's position as a woman is repeatedly foregrounded by the men she works with, and allusions to her are often couched in sexual terms in a bid to undermine her authority and reduce her to her physical body.

Gabi's bid to portray an empowered version of femininity is further undermined by individuals who intimate that she cannot be both a good detective and a good mother, and through her narrative Beukes demonstrates the pressure that modern women face in trying to juggle both a career and motherhood. Although not a typically maternal or domesticated woman, Gabi is a loving mother who has raised her daughter to be an independent, principled, assertive and opinionated individual. While there is clearly love between them, Gabi and Layla's relationship is a complex one, tempered with a tension and antagonism that are perhaps not unusual between mothers and teenage daughters. Gabi's work often takes her away from home at unusual hours and for long periods of time, and Layla

is often left to look after herself. Layla is often left alone at moments when she craves parental support and advice; however, she struggles to articulate this need to her mother and instead often lashes out at her with sarcastic comments. This bitterness towards Gabi is nonetheless tempered with deep-seated respect for her, and as Layla finds herself getting into trouble despite desperately wanting to confide in Gabi she resists doing so, knowing that her mother would be disappointed in her. Layla finds even less support from her father, who appears to have traded in his old family for a new one. Although he and Layla appear to have had a good relationship in the past, he makes it clear on multiple occasions that he does not really have time to raise both her and her two younger step-siblings.

The loneliness Layla experiences at home extends to her social life at school, where Layla initially feels like an outsider until she is befriended by Cas, an exceptionally confident girl whom Layla describes as being “so out of her league” (p. 28). While Layla often feels awkward because of her unique, mixed-race appearance, Cas is the epitome of conventional feminine beauty, with Layla describing her as being “super-hot, even though she never wears make-up, with her fine sandy-brown hair, big grey-blue eyes and freckles, and breasts that make boys do double-takes” (p. 28). Combined with this exterior, Cas has a tough attitude and never seems to rely on anyone else for approval or validation, and Layla sees her as portraying an ideal of contemporary femininity when she claims: “Life lesson: looks plus don’t-give-a-fuck confidence mean you can have anything you want – any guy, any friends” (p. 28).

At the age of fifteen, Layla and Cas are in a liminal position between childhood and adulthood, and through their narratives Beukes offers readers an account of the difficulty of navigating this passage in a digital era, pointing specifically to the influence of the highly sexualised nature of the internet on this coming-of-age. Cas in particular often passes crude and highly sexual remarks that seem inappropriate for someone of her age; however, it becomes clear that explicit language and images have become a normal part of their everyday lives. Often left to their own devices at Layla’s house, Layla and Cas spend a lot of time on the internet and the pair take it upon themselves to teach various sexual predators a lesson. An early chapter in the novel sees the two girls searching through live camera feeds until they find a man “lying in bed with his shirt off. His face is open. Naked” (p. 86). Layla confidently claims that they have prepared themselves for this sight by watching porn, and comments nonchalantly that she “has seen a lot of penises” (p. 86). Cas expertly plays the role of an alluring young woman, passing explicit sexual comments in order to get the man’s attention, but she suddenly changes the nature of the interaction and launches in to a tirade of insults designed to humiliate him. Although at no point is the reader invited to feel sympathetic towards the man as he is

clearly framed as deplorable in his willingness to engage in sexual acts with minors, Cas's over-enthusiastic desire for authority in the encounter together with her righteousness in doling out punishment to a stranger hints at something problematic below the surface of her tough façade. Cas and Layla take things a step further when they pose as a young girl in an online chatroom and meet a paedophile, planning to shame him in punishment for his behaviour when they arrange to meet him at a restaurant. Although the reader is still sceptical about the activities Layla and Cas are engrossed in, Layla shows confidence and unwavering courage in her convictions during the encounter, as well as a well-defined value system that has no doubt been gleaned from Gabi.

Cas and Layla are thus shown to be growing up in an age when a sexually confident version of femininity is being glorified, and Beukes demonstrates how this can be dangerous in a society that still fosters problematic attitudes with regard to gender, especially for young women who may find themselves in situations that they are ill-equipped to handle. This is demonstrated when Cas and Layla sneak out to an art-show party, and Cas is accosted by a group of boys from school. It transpires that in the past Cas has been the victim of sexual harassment and cyberbullying, and while drunk at a party one night some of her peers undressed her and filmed her naked, and then posted the video online. The boys have evidently discovered the video, and they begin to taunt her claiming, "We've all seen the video, *slut*" (emphasis in original, p. 254). The boys' use of the word "*slut*" stands in sharp contrast to the way Layla and Cas use it throughout the novel to refer to each other, and try as they might have to reclaim the word as a sign of affection and closeness, when it comes out as an insult from the boys it is laden with all the negative connotations they have tried to eclipse by framing it in more positive terms. Delighting in Cas's discomfort, a boy named Travis grabs at her breasts, and the others begin to jeer and shout. Cas's distress seems to only spur them on, rather than stop them, and Cas – usually so tough, confident and unaffected by the opinions of others – finds herself forcibly made vulnerable and uncomfortable through the boys' bid to refer to her in such a sexualised manner.

Layla's sense of justice is heightened after she finds out about the video, and, enraged, she confronts Travis at school. He tries to play down his behaviour and claims: "We were drunk, just fooling around [. . .] I didn't mean anything by it. Why you being so uptight? It was a joke" (p. 290). Layla, however, warns him that his actions could be seen as sexual assault and his sharing the video online as disseminating child pornography. "Disseminating shit! It's the Internet," (p. 290) Travis responds, voicing the naive and ill-informed opinions of many young people who do not understand the consequences of their online behaviour. Travis goes further to excuse the boys who actually made the video of Cas, claiming: "They didn't do nothing except take some pictures. It's not like they *raped* her"

(emphasis in original, p. 290), showing a complete disregard for the traumatic and damaging effects the experience has had on Cas, as well as excusing all forms of sexual assault on women that fall short of rape. Travis's comments speak to a problematic societal rhetoric on the topic of sexual assault, as he is growing up in a society where he is led to believe that undressing and filming a girl who is inebriated and unconscious, and putting her naked body on a public forum for all to see and mock, all without her consent, is a minor offence, and something that can be easily excused as a joke. In claiming that "It's not like they raped her", he distances their actions from the severity of rape, and refuses to acknowledge that both instances are examples of the violation of a woman's body – a violation that is not only unjust but also has dire effects on the victim. As a result of the video, Cas and her family have been forced to move cities, she and her brother have had to move schools, and Cas's father focusses his work on trying to write a programme that will help them to control the viewing of the video. More serious than these consequences is the effect that the video has had on Cas emotionally and psychologically, and it becomes clear that her tough "don't-give-a-fuck" attitude is a defence mechanism used to avoid forming social bonds with peers she does not trust, that her excessive use of crude language and sexual references is an over-compensation for her vulnerability, that her lack of romantic interest in boys and her tendency to hide her body spring from a fear of being sexualised, and that the aggression with which she tries to teach sexual predators a lesson is a bid to try and regain some degree of power and control in the wake of an experience that left her entirely powerless and exposed.

Layla is outraged by Travis's remarks, and, forgetting she has her mother's heavy ashtray in her bag as a prop to use in drama class, she swings her schoolbag at his head, knocking out some of his teeth. Questions surrounding Gabi's ability to be a working woman and a good mother arise when Gabi goes to see Travis's parents following the confrontation. Travis's mother comments that as a single mother Gabi is providing second rate parental care, claiming: "You can't be there all the time. You don't know what she's doing. Where she's going. What she's taking" (p. 323). Gabi is highly offended by her comments, claiming that "it's worse than patronising. It's *matronising*" (emphasis in original, p. 323), illustrating that it is not only men who attempt to put women down, but women too. Gabi attempts to settle the dispute amicably, but Travis's parents are quick to blame Layla and frame her as a troubled, dangerous teenager who is out of hand as a result of a lack of parenting from Gabi. Pushed too far, Gabi turns the full might of her legal knowledge on them, informing them that Travis's decision to share the video of Cas can be considered to be distributing child pornography, and his actions at the party could be termed sexual assault. Where Travis's parents were quick to exaggerate Layla's actions, they try to downplay their son's, trying to excuse his actions because he is only a child. Once

again, Beukes thus offers an account of how easily sexual assault can be excused or downplayed by the perpetrators, and society at large, who may find anything less than full rape easy to dismiss without due consideration of the effects of these attacks on the victims. The age-old issue of sexual violence towards women is brought into the twenty-first century through the added element of the video being posted online and easily shared and commented on. Gabi makes mention of the fact that there are, at this point, no firm laws regarding cyberbullying, and points to the problematic nature of this in a world so governed by the internet.

As Gabi closes in on Clayton, she mistakenly puts a fellow officer in danger and is taken off the case. The detective who replaces her tells her to cheer up, claiming: “You’ve got your kid to worry about. You can’t be a good mom *and* a good cop” (emphasis in original, p. 350), and his comment highlights the difficulties Gabi faces at challenging a conventional version of femininity in her decision to become a detective, as well as emphasising the fact that in Layla’s life she must take on the role of both mother and father. Gabi is constantly straddling the line between traditional femininity and masculinity, showing that these are not essential categories while simultaneously highlighting the difficulty of this interstitial position for women within present social structures and norms. The detective’s comment also throws a sharp light on what it means to “be a good mom”, for although Gabi is not the kind of mother who is always available to foster a warm domestic environment for Layla, she has raised a teenage girl who is an independent thinker, who is empathetic, and who stands up for herself and others. This undoubtedly has merit in a world depicted as being so full of corruption and selfishness, and in which young women can be made vulnerable by their participation in a sexualised rendering of femininity. That Layla is so often left without parental supervision or guidance at times when she definitely needs it proves to be problematic; however, unlike Travis’s mother and the other detective Beukes holds *both* parents accountable for this, and refuses to frame Gabi as the only one at fault.

Masculinity in *Broken Monsters* is represented predominantly through the characters of Clayton, Jonno and TK. All three men fail in various ways to fully embody the ideals of Western hegemonic masculinity, and they respond to this in various ways: Clayton’s failings result in feelings of alienation and hopelessness that attract the dream which possesses him to disastrous ends, while Jonno uses arrogance and misogyny as a kind of shield to try and over-compensate for his shortcomings, showing complicity with hegemonic ideals. In contrast TK, like Benoît in *Zoo City*, chooses a path marked by selflessness and sincerity despite the hardships he has endured, and the highly marginalised and subordinated position he holds in society as a homeless man. Through these three characters Beukes provides a sensitive consideration of the effects of societal influences on the construction of

contemporary masculinities, but simultaneously demonstrates that individuals are not chained to a singular pattern of response and that hope exists for more positive patterns to become dominant.

Beukes continues in her refusal to glamorise serial killers through her characterisation of Clayton. Although not repugnant in the same way Harper Curtis is in *The Shining Girls*, Clayton is a pitiable character who displays none of the intelligence or sophistication that often typifies serial killers in fiction. The reader's opinion of him is often made ambivalent, however, as through the chapters he focalises Beukes encourages us to sympathise with a man who has tried but failed to be successful in a world he does not understand, while third party accounts of him encourage the reader to see him in more negative terms. Clayton is a fifty-three year old man who by his own and others' accounts is a social outsider who does not find it easy to fit in with people or form meaningful relationships. Clayton identifies himself as an artist, although he has never been able to make a living off his art, and is forced to undertake a number of odd jobs in order to survive financially. Clayton finds it increasingly hard to find work as he is repeatedly passed over for younger, stronger men. As well as failing professionally, Clayton does not have any family or friends, and is described by other people in the art community as being socially awkward and unable to relate to others. The curators of the art-show party that Layla and Cas attend, who have known Clayton for several years, claim that he has "always been peculiar" (p. 330), and recall an instance when he stole a bloodstained hospital sheet and displayed it as artwork, and another when he glued dried-up sheep's intestines onto a portrait of a girl that he had painted after she had claimed that the painting was ugly. "No-one really liked him – he was very intense" (p. 331), the curators claim, positioning him as having always been a social outcast and prone to acting in strange ways. Clayton himself acknowledges his outsider status as he reminisces about the time he tried to live in a house with a number of other artists, claiming that "he didn't fit in. He was too old, his work too strange" (pp. 75-76). He drank heavily during this time "to make it bearable" and would wake up,

oblivious to whatever had happened the night before, stumbling out into the shared living space to ice-cold vibes. He would spend the day miserable, waiting for someone to finally confront him about what he'd done. Some inappropriate thing he'd said, some dumb practical joke that everyone had taken too seriously. (p. 76)

Clayton is repeatedly positioned as 'other' in his failure to project a 'normal' version of masculinity. Although Connell (2005) argues that in Western society patterns of dominance and subordination among men are most obviously played out between heterosexual men and homosexual men, because of his failure to embody hegemonic ideals, Clayton is similarly subordinated. This occurs through "an array of quite material practices" (Connell 2005, p. 78), such as when he is passed over for work in

favour of younger and stronger men, and the social exclusion he undergoes while living with the other artists. He is a failure of a man by Western hegemonic standards – professionally unsuccessful, unauthoritative, and isolated – and the ‘abnormal’ version of masculinity that he projects is socially marginalised, and subordinated in various ways to more ‘normal’ hegemonic ideals. Clayton is aware that other people find him strange, but completely unable to understand what it is he says or does that makes them feel this way, resulting in feelings of loneliness, frustration and hopelessness. It is these negative feelings that seem to attract the dream to him, and allow it to rush in and possess him in the novel.

The point at which this occurs happens when Clayton hits a new low after trying to locate a woman named Lou, and her son, Charlie, who he believes is his child. That they have run away from him shows Clayton to have furthermore failed in the roles of romantic partner and father. Clayton finds them and tries to convince them to come home with him; however, it becomes painfully obvious that Lou wants nothing to do with him, and she adamantly claims that Charlie is not his son. Clayton refuses to believe her, and ignores her request for him to leave them alone. Completely oblivious to her clear discomfort he also tries to embrace her and keeps calling her “baby”. Lou’s response to him starts to cast doubt in the mind of the reader, as through her distress Clayton is positioned as being slightly sinister in his relentlessness to convince her to leave with him. Lou manages to escape, but Clayton chases after her, and the image of her frantically trying to speed up and get away makes Clayton seem even more deranged. During the chase, Clayton loses control of his vehicle, and it veers off the road and into the woods, hitting the deer that he will later attach to his first victim’s body. Clayton continues to display a complete lack of comprehension for the situation as he sits waiting, thinking “Lou was probably making her way toward him right now with a flashlight, picking her way along the trail of devastation his truck had left through the undergrowth, holding Charlie’s hand because she wouldn’t leave him in the car” (p. 49). The thought of Charlie being scared touches Clayton, and, completely deluded, he thinks: “it would become a family story they would tell at Thanksgiving” (pp. 49-50). At this point the reader’s feelings towards him are highly ambivalent: we are encouraged to be sympathetic to his desire to look after Lou and Charlie, and his desperation for the normalcy of a family. However, this is tinged with overwhelming relief that Lou has managed to escape from a man she clearly has no desire to be with.

It is at this point, having failed yet again, that Clayton becomes possessed by the dream. Clayton is shown to be someone who is open to the irrational through his repeated mention of the strange dreams and hallucinations that he has. He tells Lou that the dreams have worsened, that sometimes

he even dreams with his eyes open: “I see things,” he says to her earnestly; “Maybe some people are more open to it. I think some places the walls are thinner, like a cheap motel” (p. 44). Clayton claims that night is “when the borders are the most porous between the worlds, and unnatural things leak out of people’s heads and move freely” (p. 42), and after hitting the deer a second consciousness inexplicably enters his body.

At first Clayton’s consciousness and the dream’s consciousness fight for primacy in his body; however, the dream quickly becomes more dominant and it is as if “Clayton [is] the skin and bones *he* pulled on” (my emphasis, p. 76). The dream eventually takes full control, “navigating the city in Clayton’s body, pulling on his thoughts like strings in a labyrinth to guide it through the streets” (p. 102). Clayton’s body is described as simply a vehicle for the dream, as “his muscle memory manages the brute mechanics, shifting the stick, applying the brake, obeying the rules of the road” (p. 102), and his consciousness seems to now have disappeared entirely. It is at this point that it comes across a young boy and fires a nail gun into the base of his neck, and significantly it is the dream, and not Clayton, who is described as the active agent in the murder, lending ambiguity to Clayton’s responsibility for this, and subsequent, acts of violence.

The dream is described as being an entity with agency, and it is desperate to find a way back to its own realm. It describes finding Clayton’s body by accident in the woods, drawn by “the lure of uninhabited spaces – a vacancy that dream can rush in to fill, a door to step through” (p. 105). Its explanation of how it came to pass through the barrier between its own world and Clayton’s world suggests that the emptiness and despair that Clayton feels as a result of his failure to lead a successful and fulfilling life have provided an environment that invites this dark force into his life. That Clayton’s body has indeed been taken over by a supernatural force and that these are not just symptoms of a possible psychosis is suggested when people other than Clayton are able to observe its effects. The dream’s second murder victim is the owner of a pottery studio, and during her attack she describes how the flowered patterns on tiles in the gallery start to move. By portraying Clayton as being merely the physical body that carries out the murders, with the dream being the controlling force behind them, Beukes thoroughly clouds the issue of accountability for them, even more so than in *The Shining Girls* where Harper appeared to have a degree of personal investment in the killings he commits. Clayton is furthermore dubbed “the Detroit Monster” (p. 349) by the media, and through this Beukes seems to speak explicitly to Scaggs’s observation that crime fiction tends to frame serial killers in terms of monstrosity in a bid to disconnect the motivations for their crimes from any social influences. Beukes complicates this trend, as it is clearly because Clayton is ostracised from society all his life and

made to feel inadequate and unwanted that he becomes ripe for appropriation by the dream. Stuart Kelly (2014) argues that Clayton is the only character who has not been made hard or cynical by his life experiences, and that his consciousness of his failings and his desperation for connections with others make him extremely human. “He’s an inadequate, maladjusted and disappointed individual – human, not superhuman” (n.p.), Kelly says, positioning his argument in direct opposition to discourses that position criminals as being non-human in a bid to exonerate social forces from any culpability in producing crime and to assure people that ‘normal’ humans are not capable of such actions. However, the dream is non-human – a monster, so to speak – and the force which commits the murders, making criminality in this case the result of both social influences and supernatural influences. The dream furthermore seems to have no understanding of what it does, and its goal has not been to kill people but to create art. It is completely nonplussed that the boy/deer hybrid does not come to life once it completes the piece, and its only motivation for its actions is to try and open the doors between realms so that it can return home.

Like Clayton, Jonno has also been unsuccessful in terms of his career and relationships; however, he shows a markedly different response to these failings. Although middle-aged, Jonno displays a very immature attitude towards life in general: he lives alone in a flat strewn with underwear, empty pizza boxes and soggy towels, writes superficial “listicles” (p. 57) for websites and magazines, and treats women as expendable sex objects. At one point he drives past a beach and he recalls being a teenager on holiday,

watching the girls rub coconut oil into their skin, or run shrieking into the waves. Such an assortment of girls. It seemed they were all available to him, that he could work his way through all of them, the same way he was going to be able to travel to all the different countries, try his hand at different jobs, all the branching possibilities. Keep your options open, his parents told him, but they didn’t tell him that growing older is about your options shutting down, one by one. (p. 60)

His unsettled nature, and refusal to commit to a job, a home, or a woman suggests that Jonno is trying to cling to his youth in some way, and to all the possibilities and excitement it held. He appears to resist taking on the basic responsibilities of adult life and instead shows a desire to continue to live the relatively unburdened life of a younger man. His resistance to taking on responsibility in his life is further suggested when he recalls how his only significant relationship ended after his girlfriend, Cate, fell pregnant. Jonno recounts how he tried to force her to go for an abortion, and describes looking up the details of the procedure online, claiming it would have been “easy-as-pie [. . . ] He tried to tell her about it in their neighbourhood vinoteq, how you could insert some pills and forty-eight hours

later, problem solved. They could order pizza, watch some movies – he'd take care of her" (emphasis in original, p. 148). His thought process is simplistic, and shows a lack of regard for the emotional implications of abortion for women, as well as a desire to control Cate's body in his neglect to even ask her what she wanted.

Like Clayton, Jonno is thus shown to be failing at living up to a hegemonic ideal of masculinity, in his lack of career success, and his aversion to taking on the roles of partner and father. At the point at which readers are introduced to Jonno, however, his internal thoughts suggest that he has become painfully aware of his shortcomings, and although he still passes some highly arrogant and sexist comments, these seem to be merely an overcompensation for his underlying insecurities. Through his sardonic inner commentary, he often makes disparaging comments about himself and puts himself down, especially with regard to his career and the loss of his relationship with Cate. Jonno's treatment of women, his need to belittle them and reduce them to sexual objects, thus seems to be a means by which he attempts to make up the shortfall between the version of masculinity he represents, and the ideals of Western hegemonic masculinity, by almost over-asserting his allegiance to a patriarchal conceptualisation of gender roles. Although Jonno is not "rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety" (Connell 2005, p. 79), he thus does display a complicity with Western hegemonic ideals in his endorsement of traditional gender roles.

Jonno's ideas about gender are, however, destabilised to a certain degree when he meets a young disc-jockey named Jen Q. Initially, Jonno tries to treat her with the same condescension and flippancy that he has treated all women in the past, obnoxiously claiming that the lack of books in her bedroom would be "troubling if he intends to fall in love with her" (p. 13), and intimating with great bravado that he has just used her for casual sex. He arrogantly congratulates himself for being able to draw the attention of a much younger, attractive woman, and glibly comments that he cannot recall whether or not they used protection, because he was drunk. His attitude is casual and dismissive, in a bid to foster a stereotypically dominant, emotionless, sexually-conquering masculine persona. Jonno is unnerved and upset, however, when Jen treats him and their encounter with an equally indifferent attitude. When she mistakenly calls him "Tommy", he claims that "it stings much more than it should" (p. 16), and when she dismissively asks him to leave it is Jonno who desperately tries to ensure that they will see each other again, and begs her to meet him for breakfast the next day.

Jen is a bold, self-assured and sexually confident woman, and her refusal to conform to a more traditional version of femininity causes a shift in Jonno's thoughts and behaviours. Jen's lack of

attempt to try and impress Jonno makes him unsure of himself, and desperate to try and win her approval. The next day Jonno waits at a restaurant to meet Jen, but as time draws on he grows anxious that she may not be coming. His initial response, in his usual arrogant manner, is to claim, "She is forty-six minutes late. And that's thirty-one minutes longer than you should be expected to wait for any girl, unless she's a certified supermodel or the producer on the biopic of your awesome life" (p. 57). Despite his bravado, as the reality sets in that she may well have stood him up he starts to feel foolish and disappointed, and claims, "this is such a disaster, it mitigates his Total Failure As A Writer" (p. 58). Jen's apparent lack of interest in him makes him feel ineffectual as a man, which is suggested when he claims that even the small table that he sits wedged at in the back of the restaurant "seems specifically designed to be emasculating" (p. 58). When Jen finally walks into the restaurant, Jonno is overcome with an excessively romantic air as "he swears to fucking God that all the atoms in the room recompose themselves around her" (p. 58). Jen is completely cavalier about the situation and does not apologise for being late.

In many ways Jen seems to be an older, more empowered version of Cas, exuding the same "don't give a fuck confidence" (p. 28). She doesn't try to impress Jonno, and while this unnerves him it also makes her even more attractive to him. Jen is positioned very similarly to Cas in terms of her confidence and her lack of a need to seek approval from others, and together they seem to embody the "fierce, optimistic attitude" (Showden 2009, p. 172) typical of Girlie feminism, and positioned in the novel as a version of femininity that is being exalted in contemporary Western culture. Jen becomes a very positive influence in Jonno's life, and encourages him to actively do something about his career. Together they film a number of short videos exploring Detroit that they post online, and inadvertently they become involved in following Clayton's murders, providing video coverage on the investigation to the public. Jen helps Jonno to feel good about himself, and he calls her "his muse, his saviour, his Joan of Arc with braids" (p. 110), viewing meeting her as "a chance to reboot his whole life" (p. 150). Through her character Beukes additionally demonstrates that the idealisation of a sexually-empowered version of femininity can be empowering for a more mature woman, to an extent, although she, like Carisa Showden (2009), remains cognisant of the fact that while women can indeed choose how they dress and act, they have no control over how they are read in a society marked by "the still-existing political inequalities of women" (p 177).

The influence of this is demonstrated through Jonno's response to Jen. While Jonno is attracted to this empowered version of femininity that Jen represents, he still clings to more traditional conceptualisations of gender. This is subtly suggested, for example, when Jen slips while climbing on

some rocks, but Jonno is able to catch her and pull her to safety. It is at this moment, with their roles more traditionally aligned so that he is the 'hero' and she the woman who needs saving, that he feels happy and comfortable and thinks "this could be alright" (p. 62). Later in the novel, Jonno also makes a strange passing comment that he would like to have a baby with Jen, and this seems rather outlandish given that Jen is still young, their relationship is very new, and at no point has she made any mention about having a family. That Jonno so quickly clings to the idea suggests an attempt to try and push Jen to take on a more conservative feminine role in order to make him feel more secure and potent. As Jonno becomes more confident with the success of his online videos, he also starts to find her less enthralling and subtly puts her down. At the art-show party when Jen gently reprimands him for making fun of one of the art pieces he is extremely angered, and later when she checks her sugar levels (she is diabetic) and tells him she is all right he sarcastically responds, "Well, thank fuck for that" (p. 248). He also comments that "he wishes she would wear sexier lingerie" (p. 378) than the pale green polka-dot bra she chooses, and tells her that because she has "spent her whole life being scared" (p. 376) she is a disc-jockey who still lives with her parents.

Although Jonno appears to become more open to this empowered version of femininity, he ultimately still clings to a hierarchical view of gender relations, and the legitimacy of his apparent enthrallment with Jen's confidence and self-assurance is called into question as he tries, in subtle ways, to maintain a sense of masculine dominance in their relationship. Jonno continues to show complicity with patriarchal ideals as far as gender roles are concerned, and demonstrates how this complicity has transformed presently into a very subtle, but nonetheless significant, dimension of heterosexual relationships. Through her characterisation of Jonno, Beukes demonstrates Connell's description of complicit masculinity as being that which explicitly supports the empowerment of women, but which still seeks to protect the benefit it receives by virtue of the patriarchal dividend by undermining equality between the sexes in subtle ways. Readers are urged to be highly critical of Jonno's character throughout the novel, especially with regard to his treatment of women.

Beukes thus encourages us to be critical of the versions of masculinity embodied by both Clayton and Jonno, but offers a third, more positive version in her characterisation of TK, a homeless man with a troubled past. TK grew up in a poor neighbourhood, with a mother who was constantly "hanging around evil men, having more kids than [she] could look after" (p. 159). From the age of nine TK carried around a gun, "so he could be her protector, fetch her from the bar where some man would be making demands that he weren't willing to pay for" (p. 159). From a young age TK was thus forced to take on a parental role looking after not only his younger siblings but his mother as well, and in the moments

in which he recalls his early life he depicts a world characterised by poverty, crime and violence. The turning point in his life occurred when he arrived home one day to find his mother had been stabbed to death by her twin sister's abusive boyfriend, who had mistakenly attacked the wrong woman. Believing he was doing the right and honourable thing, TK took it upon himself to avenge his mother's death, and shot the man who had killed her, calling the police afterwards to turn himself in. That from a young age TK felt that it was his responsibility to be his mother's protector, and not the other way around, speaks to the socialisation of a young boy into a patriarchal world, and shows that this can be a traumatic experience. That it further placed such a heavy burden of responsibility on him demonstrates the price of privilege that Nancy Down (2010) refers to in arguing that patriarchy does not necessarily confer privilege on all men. TK's belief that he needed to avenge his mother's death personally, and in a violent manner, landed him in jail, during which time he became an alcoholic in an attempt "to drown the memories with whatever he could get his hands on, which would get him in trouble all over again" (p. 23). His attempt to uphold patriarchal hegemonic ideals thus proves to be his undoing, setting him on a downward spiral that results in his homelessness.

Despite his dismal circumstances it is TK who is always extremely respectful, kind, and compassionate towards others. "You got to treat people like people" (p. 21), he says. TK finds what work he can in order to make an honest living, and despite struggling financially, he "never accepts money from underage kids looking for someone to buy them a six-pack of Coors the way some homeless do" (p. 22). He also volunteers at a soup kitchen run by one of the local churches, and is particularly adept at calming down some of the more unstable people who pass through their doors. He is also a man of principle and chooses to sleep under a table in an abandoned house he finds at the beginning of his narrative, as "the family took the big mattress with them and it wouldn't feel right to sleep in one of the little kids' rooms" (p. 19). Although he finds a pair of sneakers in the house that he needs, he decides that his friend, Ramón, needs them even more desperately, and selflessly gives them to him. "I never did like red shoes," he tells Ramón; "Which is not true, but hell. Ramón's face brightens like a lightbulb turned on inside it" (p. 25). Like Benoît, TK has thus not let his past turn him into a bitter, hateful person, but instead displays compassion and selflessness in all his dealings with others.

Through TK Beukes demonstrates that people have some agency in deciding how they respond to their circumstances. While Clayton, Jonno and TK have all undergone hardships and all find themselves failing in some way, while Clayton's shortcomings make him ripe for corruption by an evil force, and Jonno's failings make him arrogant and sexist, TK refuses to perpetuate problematic patterns of interpersonal relations or social hierarchies. Like Benoît, TK does not show any desire for power or

authority over others, and instead represents a version of masculinity that is predicated on respect for others despite their race, gender or class, compassion and sympathy for all humans, a strong value-system, selflessness and altruism. TK is the most positively portrayed male character in the novel, despite his troubled beginnings, and through him Beukes shows that despite social influences people are not “chained to gender patterns they have inherited” and that “men too can make political choices for a new world of gender relations” (Connell 2005, p. 86).

The characters’ narratives intertwine at the novel’s climax, as the dream lays out its final ‘art’ show in an abandoned factory and for various reasons each of the main characters arrives at the building. It is at this point that the realism of the narrative unravels as the supernatural power of the dream takes hold of each of them. The bird tattoos that cover Jen’s back and shoulders come to life, and Jonno watches on in horror as their beaks puncture her skin and burst out of her body, killing her. Layla comes face to face with the paedophile she and Cas had earlier confronted, “swollen into morbid obesity, his skin yellow and waxy” and “sitting in front of a massive control panel, complete with screens, jabbing at dials and gauges” (p. 395). The paedophile launches into a tirade that suggests that modern young femininity, with its emphasis on being empowered by being sexy, is ultimately a collusion with a patriarchal status quo, and as Layla tries to run away she is attacked by the numerous arms of a massive robotic contraption that he operates, one of which holds a welding torch that burns her shoulder. She manages to escape and finds TK being chased by a pack of snarling wild dogs, urged on by Jesus “mounted on the cross-beams above” (p. 394). At this point the reader is given no reason to doubt what the characters are seeing, and the fact that both Layla and TK can see the dogs, and that some of the characters are physically injured, suggests that they are not merely hallucinations. However, as Layla desperately tries to fathom a way to help TK, she realises that what they are seeing is real, but “*also* a dream [. . .] and you can control your dreams if you try, if you’re aware you’re dreaming” (emphasis in original, p. 402). Taking control of the dream, Layla summons an enormous cat which battles the dogs and enables her and TK to get away. Layla’s ability to influence what she experiences casts doubt on the ‘realness’ of the supernatural elements that have been described, which is further enhanced when Gabi enters the building and she sees only a dingy, abandoned factory. She claims that “a trick of the light makes it look as if the remaining robot arms are moving” (p. 399), and sees only a number of Clayton’s artworks arranged around the building, including a model of Jesus which is strung up on a railing and a “fat figure made of discoloured beeswax” (p. 400) which has been wedged into an office chair facing a wall of screens and buttons. Her rational description of the scene, which includes the elements that Layla and TK have just described in more supernatural

terms, casts doubt on what the other characters have seen, and the narrative becomes highly confusing, as readers are left unsure how to interpret what is happening.

Jonno is confronted by the Clayton/dream hybrid, which tells Jonno it never meant for anyone to die, that all it wanted was for them to “change” (p. 407). He explains that he opened up his victims to “let their dreams out” and then “made them into the dreams they wanted” (p. 408), but it did not work the way he had planned. “Everything is so *physical*,” he laments; “I wanted to get at the meaning [. . .] There are places that are borders. Where something was but isn’t anymore, and other things can surface” (emphasis in original, p. 408). His comments bring up the theme of embodiment, introduced in the very first line of the novel when Gabi looks down at the boy/deer corpse and mutters “*The body. The-body-the-body-the-body*” (p. 9), together with the idea of crossing boundaries and creating something new. In his own strange way, the dream seems to be talking about the idea about moving beyond the limits of embodiment, considering the idea that if we can move beyond the confines of our physical bodies there exist endless potential and opportunities for “change”, and for creating something new and valuable. Through its failure to make its victims “change”, however, Beukes seems to suggest that this may be a utopian idea within present conditions.

Gabi, Layla and TK all arrive at the scene, and a fight ensues between Gabi and Clayton. Gabi does not appear to be able to see any of the supernatural elements that the others can see, and is surprised by the speed with which Clayton is able to grab her by the foot, causing her to lose balance and fall over, mistakenly firing a shot through a window, which shatters glass everywhere. Layla, however, observes the same scene, describing Clayton’s hand as transforming into “a black tentacle that snakes across the room” to yank Gabi off her feet, and watches in amazement as the glass shards of the shattered window “turn into crows, fluttering round the room” (p. 415). When Gabi finally shoots Clayton in the head, Layla sees “a great cloud, like grey candyfloss” (p. 415) come spilling out of his head, and condensing in the air above his body. Jonno and TK can see it too, and as it begins to grow Layla realises that it is the dream looking for a new body to inhabit. TK and Layla grab Gabi and try to escape, but Jonno insists on trying to film the scene, perversely wondering “if he should be adding commentary” (p. 417). Layla realises that the camera is making the cloud more powerful, and tries to wrestle it away from Jonno, who punches her in the face. With TK’s help Layla is eventually able to get the phone and end the recording, and “everything collapses, just like that” (p. 420). Layla experiences some kind of strange connection to the dream, and claims that she can “feel what’s inside it” (p. 420). “You really didn’t know,” she says, referring to its lack of understanding of having killed innocent people; “She is furious that anything could be so fucking stupid, so naive. But this is what she does. Finds the empathy

to step into even the most hideous roles” (p. 420). Together Layla and Gabi are able to send the dream back to its own realm, and they escape from the building, together with TK and Jonno.

The climactic scene of the novel is strange and confusing, and no clear or coherent explanation is given for the events that occur. That the different characters see different things, but are all convinced that what they are experiencing is reality speaks to the subjective nature of reality and truth: Beukes’s message seems to be that there is no objective way of describing the scene as what each character experiences is his/her reality, and they are all equally real and valid. This point is further emphasised by a chapter which is fashioned to look like an official police report on the incident, which claims:

EPA examination of the building and blood tests have proved inconclusive on possible hallucinogenic toxins. However, the witnesses’ testimonies, interviewed separately, confirm that many of them experienced vivid and subjective hallucinations consistent with psychotropic drugs. (p. 426)

The report also posits that the hallucinations could be the result of post-traumatic stress disorder, as all of the witnesses had seen at least one of Clayton’s victims. The police report thus rationalises the incident, and attempts to find justifications for the supernatural elements of the scene, grounding them in the possible result of hallucinogenic drugs or psychological trauma. The report also claims that Jonno’s video footage of the incident has been entirely discounted, as the footage is “shaky and dark and hard to discern”, and “cyber-crimes conclude that the footage was doctored in-camera using a more professional version of live-filtering effects software than is widely available” (p. 426). In contrast, in the following chapter, which is constructed to look like Jonno’s blog, he vehemently argues that “there was no filtering software or effects added” to his footage. However, he uses his broadcast as a means to solicit funding for a new documentary he plans to make, thereby also casting doubt on the truth of his statement. As in *Zoo City*, Beukes thus refuses to provide any singular, coherent explanation for the *novum* of her narrative, but instead offers multiple possible avenues for interpreting the stranger elements of the text, some of which are fantastical and others of which are more rational.

Through the use of interstitial writing and span fiction techniques Beukes thus once again provides a text that addresses a number of social issues that are relevant at present through an innovative and engaging lens. Beukes challenges the realism of the police procedural by imbuing it with speculative elements, which prevent order from being restored through good, methodical police work. Significantly, it is only Gabi who cannot see the supernatural elements in the final scenes of the novel, which suggests that her bid to cling to reason, order and rationality limit her ability to understand the

world. Through Gabi's characterisation Beukes continues to challenge the centrality of white masculinity in crime fiction, providing a sensitive consideration of the difficulty modern women face in trying to establish themselves in previously male-dominated careers and in trying to balance motherhood and work. Through Layla's narrative Beukes also considers the socialisation of young women in a modern world, and points critically to the role of social media in the idealisation of a highly sexual version of femininity, especially among young women. She considers the way in which this may be exploited through Cas's story, and seems to question whether the idealisation of a sexually-confident version of femininity is viable as a means of female empowerment at a time in which patriarchal notions of gender remain a significant, if more subtle, feature of societal attitudes. Ultimately, she seems to suggest that there may be more beneficial means of enforcing strong femininity through her positive portrayal of Jen's coupling of sexual confidence with self-assurance and her sympathetic characterisation of Layla as an assertive, but empathetic individual. Beukes also demonstrates how patriarchy is not a system that necessarily confers privilege on all men, and shows how Clayton's failure to embody a Western hegemonic version of masculinity leaves him feeling desperately unhappy and ripe for appropriation by a dark force. The reader's feelings towards Clayton are often rendered ambivalent, and his accountability for the murders is made thoroughly ambiguous through the influence of the dream. Through Jonno's narrative Beukes shows how a complicity with patriarchal ideals is still evident in contemporary times, and suggests that underlying apparent male support for female empowerment there may often be a resistance to fully surrendering the benefits that a patriarchal status quo confers on men. Readers are urged to be highly critical of the version of masculinity that Jonno embodies, and are instead encouraged to support the compassionate version portrayed by TK, and to valorise the importance he places on interpersonal relationships, as well as the respect and compassion he shows for all people.

Through *Broken Monsters* Beukes provides a perceptive view of contemporary gender arrangements in Western society, considering the influence of both social and technological developments on the multiple ways in which gender is constructed, experienced and perceived. She also touches on the issue of embodiment through the dream's utopian wish to extend the potential of its victims beyond their physical limitations, and although like the dream we are forced to acknowledge that we cannot escape the world we find ourselves in at present completely, she does suggest that we are in a time of hope when the doors – and our minds – may be opened to new possibilities.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

In all four of her novels Beukes engages in play with genre, mixing various categories and creatively manipulating their conventions. In doing so, she extends storytelling “into and across various gaps and fault lines” (Moulthrop 1999, p. 200), amplifying the usefulness of the genres as social commentary beyond their initial limits. All of the novels can be considered examples of interstitial fiction, and reading them requires a tenuous balance of identifying how they conform to various well-known genres, and recognising how they deviate from those genres by manipulating or subverting their conventions in order to broach certain issues and offer different viewpoints. With regard to interstitial works, Stuart Moulthrop (1999) argues that we must “try to understand these odd cultural objects according to their departures from established forms, the mediations and affordances they offer” (p. 200). Thus, analysing Beukes’s novels using textual analysis has been a process of placing them tentatively within the bounds of pre-existing genres, and then considering how they move beyond those boundaries, and the implications of this for the representation of gender and sexuality in each case. Beukes expertly manages the balance of convention and invention in her texts with regard to genre, “maintain[ing] a consciousness of the boundaries [she] has crossed or disengaged with” (Insu-Fenk 2007, p. 4), and she enthusiastically demonstrates the creation of a third space in terms of genre in which readers are invited to view relevant contemporary social issues in new and engaging ways.

In doing so, Beukes’s texts also challenge literary hierarchies, merging together the genres of science fiction, fantasy and crime fiction – widely thought to be ‘low-brow’ literature in the past – with literary techniques such as magical realism and polyvocality, and valuable social commentary. The incorporation of speculative elements in Beukes’s texts further make them prime examples of slipstream or span fiction, and provide unique, engaging lenses through which to consider a number of social issues that are relevant at present, including contemporary gender issues. The social commentary of her novels relies on the balance of the familiar and the unfamiliar in her texts, and on readers’ ability to recognise their own reality within the supernaturally enhanced settings of her narratives. Beukes’s handling of the *novum* in each case is particularly noteworthy, as she repeatedly moves away from providing a clear explanation or adhering to rigid internal logic in her texts, but instead posits the supernatural elements of her novels as something to be taken for granted, or conversely provides a wide array of equally plausible, but often contradictory explanations. Either way, she leaves it up to readers to decide how they will understand the presence of the extraordinary within the ordinary, and encourages them to be willing to hold multiple possibilities simultaneously, and come to embrace the ambiguity and contradiction of doing so. Beukes’s use of interstitial and

span fiction techniques provide a literary structure that favours multiplicity, challenges categorisations, and refuses to impose a singular worldview on her readers. These elements make her writing distinctly postmodern, and provide a framework that encourages a reading of gender and sexuality in the texts in a similar manner.

Beukes's manipulation of genre tropes has a profound effect on the way in which gender and sexuality are read in each of her novels. In *Moxyland*, Beukes carries cyberpunk's boundary-crossing and category-defying ethos into new territory in her refusal to reproduce the genre's tendency to depict gender and sexuality in traditional terms through the glorification of its heterosexual male protagonist and the undermining of empowered female characters by representing them in hyper-sexualised terms. Instead, she disperses the characteristics of the cyberpunk hero and his cyborg sidekick among four protagonists of varying genders, races, classes and sexual orientations, thereby decentring the dominance of heterosexual masculinity in the text and allowing space for the voices of women and non-heterosexual individuals. Toby embodies nearly all of the traditional cyberpunk hero's characteristics, rendering them negative in their excess, and readers are constantly encouraged to be critical of his selfishness, detachment and sexist attitude towards women. In contrast, the cyberpunk hero's most positive quality – his determination to fight against the corruption in his society – is transposed on to Tendeka, a black homosexual man, whom we are urged to see very sympathetically. Lerato challenges essentialist notions of gender through her embodiment of many traditionally masculine traits, and although she is portrayed as a highly sexual individual she is never sexualised in the text. It is moreover she, rather than one of the male characters, who is positioned as the hacker character who is most adept at using the technology in her world. Kendra takes on the role of the cyborg in the narrative through her decision to accept nanotechnology into her body, although, significantly, she does not choose to undergo such a procedure for the purpose of aesthetic enhancement or in order to render herself more desirable for a male gaze. Instead, the health benefits of the procedure are emphasised, and the decision to take control of her own body in this way becomes a source of empowerment to her. These characters try in various ways to exert their agency in an oppressive society, but all except Toby are thwarted. In constructing her narrative in this way, Beukes reminds us that attempts to challenge an unjust social structure are always played out within that structure, which curtails the impact of individual choice and agency. She calls on her readers to be critical of such a society that functions on the basis of categories and hierarchies, through which it attempts to control people, and instead advocates connection, compassion, openness, and acceptance of others.

In *Zoo City*, Beukes expands the possibilities of *noir* with regard to gender by recasting her detective as an African woman, thereby challenging the traditional centrality of Western masculinity in the genre. Through Zinzi, Beukes challenges simplistic conceptualisations of femininity by offering a version of contemporary femininity that is complex, existing as it does at the intersection of multiple identity categories. Zinzi's investigative quest is inextricably bound to her quest for identity as a postfeminist subject, in which she is able to become more open to alternate worldviews, and to embrace ambiguity, multiplicity and contradiction in her identity, portraying a version of contemporary femininity that is multifaceted and fluid. Significantly, unlike most of the characters in *Moxyland*, Zinzi retains agency at the close of the novel, and is not punished or reintegrated into patriarchal society by being made submissive. Through her, Beukes advocates an empowered version of femininity, which is also compassionate and values connection. Beukes's criticism of traditional notions of gender is further enhanced by her sympathetic portrayal of Benoît, and the compassionate, selfless, loving, principled version of masculinity he portrays. Despite the violence and injustice he has been subjected to, Benoît refuses to perpetuate a problematic cycle of interpersonal relations, and advocates respect and compassion for all. This seems to be the key message of the novel, as it is ultimately in Zinzi's decision to follow Benoît's lead in this regard that the novel offers a vision of hope. The novel shows that gender identity is a complex, multifaceted construct that is influenced by multiple identity categories that intersect in unpredictable ways. It advocates an understanding of identity as fluid, challenging essentialist notions of gender by depicting masculinity and femininity as sets of attitudes and behaviours that can (theoretically) be embodied by anyone, and challenging notions of 'male' and 'female' as homogenous groups by showing how various planes of identity such as race, culture and class intersect to influence the individual's experience of gender. The novel also advocates a postfeminist openness to alternate worldviews, challenging Western metanarratives and elevating the value of African belief systems, which the text suggests still have a place in the modern world.

In *The Shining Girls*, Beukes contorts the conventions of crime fiction in her refusal to cast her serial killer in the mould of a 'Hannibal Lecter' sophisticated genius, and her determination to make her victims the focus of the text rather than a side-note to the detective's investigative narrative. Beukes engenders sympathy in her female characters through her emphasis on their lives, rather than on their deaths, and by making them well-rounded, interesting and appealing characters whom readers are encouraged to identify with. Although the novel deals with a violent theme, and with a violent killer, in most cases the actual murder scenes are not described in explicit detail, and Beukes thus avoids sensationalising violence against women, and instead encourages her readers to be outraged that

such an issue has been, and continues to be, such a prevalent feature of modern society. The brutality that the women undergo is implied rather than described, and clearly meant to ignite reader indignation rather than excitement. In addition, the attacks are told from the points of view of the victims rather than that of the killer, and we are thus urged to identify with their fear and anger rather than with his sadistic enjoyment. The reader's alignment with the victims rather than the killer is further encouraged through Beukes's depiction of Harper as a vile, impotent man who displays no remorse for his actions, but is concerned only with gaining some measure of control and authority over others in the most violent ways. Harper's murders can furthermore be read as an example of sexualised serial murder, a modern social phenomenon that serves as means of protecting patriarchal privilege at a time when gender relations are in flux. Although his actions are no doubt motivated in large part by feelings of incompetence in a society that valorises a strong and authoritative version of masculinity, Harper chooses to actively take up the protection of a patriarchal order rather than pushing against it by choosing to embody a more egalitarian version of masculinity. Despite the grim tone of the novel it is not entirely pessimistic, as it celebrates the steps that have been taken for female advancement and empowerment in the twentieth century, and suggests that despite society's best efforts to thwart them, there will always be shining girls who will continue the fight for equality. Beukes, however, questions why violence against women remains such a relevant topic in contemporary times, suggesting that it points to a patriarchal system in crisis, and that in desperately trying to maintain authority has been forced to resort to the most extreme means of protecting itself.

In *Broken Monsters*, Beukes challenges the realism and rationality of the police procedural by imbuing it with speculative elements. As in her previous crime novels, she also makes the detective of her narrative a woman, and explores the challenges she faces because of her gender in the patriarchal world of the police force. Despite embodying many of the 'masculine' qualities of an ideal detective, Gabi is repeatedly reduced to her physical body – to her femininity and sexuality – by the men she works with. The police force functions as a microcosm for contemporary society at large, demonstrating the way in which many men uphold the appearance of being progressive and supportive of female empowerment, while asserting patriarchal ideals in subtle, everyday ways. Through Gabi, Beukes also sympathetically demonstrates the pressure that modern women face in attempting to juggle both their careers and motherhood, especially without the help of a partner. Through Layla and Cas, Beukes demonstrates the problematic nature of growing up in a time when a sexually-confident version of femininity is being glorified as the epitome of female empowerment, and suggests that this can be dangerous for young girls who can find themselves in situations that they are ill-equipped to handle. She acknowledges that sexual confidence can be empowering for more

mature women, like Jen Q, who are able to couple it with self-assurance and assertiveness, although, even in this case she is wary that the degree of power it affords may only be illusory and very easily re-appropriated to support patriarchal views. Through the male characters in the novel Beukes also demonstrates the multifaceted nature of masculinity by depicting a number of men who do not embody the Western hegemonic 'norm' of masculinity. Beukes considers various possible responses to this: Clayton represents a subordinated version of masculinity whose feelings of incompetence and social exclusion make him ripe for appropriation by a violent force, while Jonno represents a version of masculinity which shows a complicity with Western hegemonic masculinity in his bid to assert an allegiance to a patriarchal system through his treatment of women. Like the police force, Jonno appears to express a more progressive version of modern masculinity that is supportive of empowered femininity in his relationship with Jen, but ultimately clings to conservative notions about gender and tries to undermine her in subtle ways. Through TK, however, Beukes once again champions a compassionate, egalitarian version of masculinity that refuses to perpetuate the damaging cycle of attitudes and behaviours that he has been subjected to. Through the novel, Beukes portrays gender as a complex construct, influenced by both social and technological advancements, and demonstrates that subject positions in terms of gender are currently difficult to negotiate. She demonstrates that while in contemporary times people are empowered in theory to be whoever they want, this is difficult to enact in practice where conservative notions about gender and sexuality remain ingrained in society at large and protected by various individuals and structures.

Marie Jakober (2008) claims that speculative fiction is an important form as it encourages us to think about the societies we live in and "makes us think, makes us question, makes us wonder what is, and what is not, changeable" (p. 30) about them. What Beukes points to again and again in her novels is that conceptualisations of gender and sexuality certainly are changeable. Through her manipulation of genre tropes, Beukes encourages her readers to see that traditional patterns and conventions of thought need not just be mindlessly reproduced over and over again, but points to the possibility of questioning and challenging these, and in so doing creating something new and valuable in their places. Similarly, in all four novels Beukes demonstrates that gender and sexuality are social constructions that through their repetition over time have gleaned the appearance of being natural and inevitable, but that have the potential to be constructed in many varying, potentially more positive ways than they have historically been conceptualised in order to support and perpetuate a reigning system of gender inequality. Beukes demonstrates that gender is not essential, inherent or biologically determined but, as Judith Butler argues, rather social constructions of what men and women should be in any particular cultural or historical context, which inform a set of corporeal

performances that can, in theory, be embodied by anyone, regardless of biological body. Lerato, Zinzi, Kirby and Gabi are all female characters who are described as embodying a complex combination of both traditionally 'feminine' traits and traditionally 'masculine' traits, and by depicting them in this manner Beukes creates a third space beyond binary gender categories that is both subversive and generative. In doing so, she challenges stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, demonstrating that there are alternate ways of performing gender that do not "reinforce existing power structures" (Salih 2002, p. 10). As can be seen through their narratives, however, this "[provides] far from straightforward subject positions as they produce both possibilities and troubles for young women attempting to manage the difficulties of enacting ideals associated with both traditional femininity and masculinity", which "places demands on young women which are difficult to resolve within current social arrangements" (Budgeon 2011, p. 285).

Beukes also demonstrates that 'men' and 'women' are not homogenous groups, by taking into account the role of race, culture, class, and sexual orientation on her characters' different representations of gender. In addition, she shows how the ideal of hegemonic masculinity is not the norm in society, by depicting a vast array of male characters who fail to embody this ideal, and she considers the different responses that men may have to this, making quite plain the fact that patriarchy is not a system that confers privilege on all men in doing so. Through Harper and Clayton, Beukes demonstrates how the subordination and marginalisation of non-hegemonic masculinities to a largely unattainable, socially glorified, hegemonic ideal can result in feelings of isolation, failure and anger which can erupt in violence. Through Toby and Jonno, she depicts how a feeling of having failed at a patriarchal masculine ideal can result in an over-compensatory desire to assert one's allegiance to it, particularly with regard to one's treatment of women. Both Toby and Jonno are aware of their own shortcomings, and attempt to make up for their lack of success and authority in other areas of their lives by lording a lofty, misogynistic attitude over the women they are involved with. Through their casual attitude towards sex and relationships, and their arrogant, superior attitude towards women, both of these characters display a complicity with patriarchal masculinity, although they do not embody the ideal in its entirety themselves. Through the characters of Tendeka, Benoît and TK, Beukes offers a very different version of masculinity that does not define itself in relation to a patriarchal hegemonic ideal, but instead shows a dissatisfaction with the traditional patterns of thought and behaviour in society, and thus chooses to define itself on its own terms. Tendeka actively fights against the oppressive forces in his world, choosing to leave a privileged life in favour of living among the people who need his help, and ultimately sacrificing himself in order to try and save them, while Benoît and TK choose to opt out of society in a sense through their decisions to refuse to

perpetuate a system that they see as problematic. All three of them represent subordinated masculinities – Tendeka as a homosexual, Benoît as both a refugee and a zoo, and TK as a homeless man – but fighting against this in an attempt to gain authority in society is not the defining struggle of their lives. All three characters portray a version of masculinity that is compassionate, kind, highly principled and uninterested in seeking power over others. Their interpersonal relationships are characterised by love and respect for other people, and it is through them that Beukes imagines a more egalitarian version of masculinity that has the potential to become hegemonic in society.

Beukes ultimately demonstrates in her novels how complex and multifaceted issues of gender and sexuality are, especially in contemporary times where the celebratory voice of Girlie postfeminism meets with the more critical voice of third wave feminist arguments. Beukes portrays a number of empowered female characters together with a number of alternate versions of masculinity, and on some level advocates a Girlie ethos that one should be able to be whoever one wants, “to do or wear whatever [one] wants, so long as it’s done with an appropriately fierce, optimistic attitude” (Showden, 2009, p. 172). However, accompanying this is an awareness of the fact that displays of personal empowerment will not necessarily translate into an effective form of gendered protest within present social conditions. Through many of her characters, Beukes demonstrates that the issue of female empowerment is not just dependent on an internal feeling accompanying a certain attitude or behaviour, but reliant on an external reading of that attitude or behaviour as well. Beukes points repeatedly to the continued existence of patriarchal attitudes in contemporary society, which, although more subtle, continue to be problematic for women who seek to attain equal positions to men in various spheres, but are constantly undermined because they are women. She furthermore suggests that female sexuality is an area that deserves great consideration in this regard, and points to the problematic nature of the idealisation of a sexually-confident version of femininity in a world where “women’s sexuality is still objectified, rather than being subject-centred” (Showden 2009, p. 176), and thus often results in “a hypersexualised collusion with the gender status quo” (Showden 2009, p. 177). Beukes also demonstrates how the ‘enemy’ of patriarchy is being increasingly decentralised in contemporary times, morphing into a more subtle, difficult to detect element of social relations that is often veiled by a seemingly celebratory discourse of female success. She further acknowledges that the continuation of patriarchal power in contemporary society is not only problematic to women, but to men as well who must constantly compare themselves to a patriarchal ideal that they cannot or do not wish to embody.

Beukes pays due consideration to the role of social forces in shaping the way in which individuals conceptualise, embody and experience gender in her novels, and demonstrates that attempts by individuals to challenge problematic notions of gender and sexuality are always constrained by the fact that they take place within a system of gender inequality which is constantly attempting to protect its interests. She also demonstrates that the subject is inscribed “not just from outside of herself [or himself], but through actively taking up the values, norms and desires that make her [or him] into a recognisable, legitimate member of her [or his] social group” (Davies and Gannon 2005, p. 318), and thus remains cognisant of how difficult it is to change patterns of thought and behaviour that are deeply ingrained in a culture. However, she repeatedly provides a sympathetic portrayal of those characters who push against problematic conventions of gender and sexuality, while retaining compassion, openness and acceptance of others. Through these characters she demonstrates the role of personal choice in deciding to reiterate problematic gender patterns, or to oppose them, and remains hopeful that through the efforts of some individuals to continue to question and challenge ideologies that are taken for granted, the possibility remains for more egalitarian conceptualisations of gender to become the norm in the future.

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