Tracing the (Post)Apartheid Novel beyond 2000
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Interviews with Selected Contemporary South African Authors

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For uMama Lindiwe Stiebel and the ‘four-leggeds’ of the ‘magic house’ at the end of Pinsent Road. For your love, generosity, encouragement and warmth.
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Reconceptualising (post)apartheid literature beyond 2000

In a 2003 article, André Brink, commenting on the development of post-apartheid anglophone South African literature, asks: ‘One question no South African writer can escape these days is: Is there anything left to write about after apartheid?’1 Brink’s answer – in stark contrast to the pessimism he harboured ten years earlier when he claimed that with the advent of South Africa’s democracy, the country’s authors had run dry of their main cause, that is, the anti-apartheid struggle (1993) – is a resounding ‘yes’ in two respects. On the one hand, he argues that, due to the disillusionment with the democratic government’s endemic corruption, post-apartheid writers are not in danger of running out of issues to deal with any time soon. On the other hand, he posits that while the apartheid regime dominated the country’s literary output both in its thematic and imaginary scope, in post-apartheid,

the spectrum of choice has widened immeasurably. One of the first, and most obvious, discoveries made by the writers has been that apartheid, operating primarily as racial oppression, was never the only form of oppression the country knew. Other forms of domination and subjection were always operating in its shadows – the oppression of women, gays and all kinds of

minorities. And these territories are now being reclaimed with an incisiveness, a determination and often an exuberance that lends diversity to much of the new writing in South Africa.²

Brink corroborates his ‘(re-)assessment’ by making reference to a number of texts from the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as his own novels *Imaginings of Sand* (1996) and *Devil’s Valley* (1998), Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying* (1995) and *Heart of Redness* (2000) and Diane Awerbuck’s *Gardening at Night* (2003).

In a similar vein, Michael Chapman, in his and Margaret Lenta’s essay collection *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*, argues that South African English literature after 2000 has, both quantitatively and qualitatively, departed from South Africa’s literary output in the preceding decade (2011). To account for this shift, Chapman conceives of the label ‘SA Lit beyond 2000’ to describe ‘South African literature in the transnational moment, “transnational” denoting the nation caught in movement – possibly transformational movement – “in-between” local and global demands’ (2011: 1). He uses J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) as the ‘jump-off point’ for his proclamation of a new phase within post-apartheid anglophone literature, maintaining that *Disgrace* marks Coetzee’s shift ‘beyond his traumatised version of his home country’ (2011: 1). Coetzee’s works of the 2000s indeed move away from a predominantly South African focus to a more global range, both in terms of setting and theme. Nevertheless, Chapman rightly argues that despite its strong concern with innovation, South African anglophone literature beyond 2000 is still deeply invested in its connection to, and (continuation of) working through, the country’s apartheid past (2011). While we second Chapman’s delineation of a new phase within post-apartheid literature and focus on a fictional text in his theorisation, we would like to add the following works that have, in our view, significantly influenced South Africa’s literary landscape after 2000: Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) as well as K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* (2000) and *The Quiet Violence* ². See https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2003/12/07/imagination-after-apartheid/1e4b0891-ec53-4270-b576-8834856fb4b5/ (accessed 16 April 2019).
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of Dreams (2001). The influence of these two writers, particularly on younger black authors – such as Niq Mhlongo and Kgebetli Moele, who started publishing in the mid-2000s, and more recent ‘newcomers’, such as Perfect Hlongwane and Songezwiwe Mahlangu, whose debuts, Jozi: A Novel and Penumbra, were published in 2013 and 2014 respectively – cannot be neglected.3 If we consider Mpe’s and Duiker’s works in conjunction with the significance of Disgrace, the momentum of the shift within South African literature beyond 2000 thus becomes even more substantial.

In ‘The End of “South African” Literary History? Judging “National” Fiction in a Transnational Era’ (his contribution to Chapman and Lenta’s book), Leon de Kock laments the decrease in ‘detailed stocktaking’ of more recent literary texts within South Africa’s academia (in Chapman and Lenta 2011: 21).4 The reason for this neglect, according to De Kock, is twofold. In accordance with Chapman, De Kock firstly highlights that the number of publications within South Africa’s literary scene – and with it the number of new voices – has grown exponentially since 2000, making it increasingly difficult to keep abreast of the country’s contemporary fiction. Secondly, he states that contemporary academics are more concerned with writing about particular themes, such as the importance of the city or the ocean, in post-apartheid literature. De Kock regards this trend of neglecting the larger bulk of texts in favour of a selected handful in order to feed the interest in, what he calls, ‘sexy topics’ as problematic (in Chapman and Lenta 2011: 20). According to him, this overlooks and marginalises texts that do not neatly fit into the thematic interests pursued by academia.

While Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie also acknowledge the rapid growth of post-apartheid literature, they do not share De Kock’s

3. In Mzamane (2005), Mpe and Duiker’s untimely deaths were commemorated, and their work celebrated, in a collection of interviews, tributes, essays and poems.

4. De Kock (2005) hints at this in his article ‘Does South African Literature Still Exist? Or: South African Literature is Dead, Long Live Literature in South Africa’, where he proclaims the death of a ‘unified’ (or singular form) of South African literature, as it was known under apartheid, in order to announce the birth of a more pluralistic form that reflects and acknowledges the country’s diversity.
anxiety about the narrow focus of South Africa’s academia. Instead, they celebrate the ‘extraordinary range and diversity’ of South African literature in what they call ‘the post-2000 period’ (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010: 1). Frenkel and MacKenzie suggest the term ‘post-transitional’ as a theoretical framework to conceptualise the developments within South African literature from 2000 onwards. Conceiving of it as a temporal marker rather than an artistic movement (such as romanticism, realism, modernism, and so on), they describe ‘post-transitional South African literature’ as writing ‘which is often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid writing was, but may still reconsider it in new ways. Equally it may ignore it all together. Other features include politically incorrect humour and incisive satire, and the mixing of genres with zest and freedom’ (2010: 2). Frenkel and MacKenzie emphasise that while these characteristics are not, in any way, all-encompassing, they mark a distinct departure from apartheid writing, which they see as typically tied to resistance, realism, moral seriousness, race and expectedness (that is, in terms of plot). What Frenkel and MacKenzie label as post-transitional literature may, as Olivier Moreillon argues elsewhere (2019), display a broader range of both form and content. The realist mode, however, is still prevalent, despite the growing body of speculative fiction, and thus far from being obsolete. The work of Lauren Beukes, Charlie Human and Fred Strydom, for example, should be seen as a valuable counterpoint to the realist genre in that they offer alternative modes of writing and reading rather than being a competing genre outstripping the realist mode. South African literature beyond 2000 is, furthermore, by no means devoid of moral seriousness. While sexuality and sex, as well as moral dubiousness more generally, for instance, may have become more visible in literary texts, such as in Nthikeng Mohlele’s *Rusty Bell* (2014) and *Pleasure* (2016), Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013) or Charlie Human’s *Apocalypse Now Now* (2013), they serve to expose socio-cultural and socio-economic shortcomings within South Africa’s new dispensation; the continuing importance of race, which Frenkel and MacKenzie see as sidelined, being one of them. Humour and satire are predominant features of South African literature beyond 2000. Yet, many authors whose early work is characterised by its humorous stance can be said to have ‘sobered up’ in their later writing. Zukiswa Wanner’s *London, Cape Town, Joburg* (2014), Imraan
Coovadia’s *High Low In-Between* (2009) and *Tales of the Metric System* (2014) and Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013) are indicative of this point.⁵

Even though the post-transitional is local in nature, Frenkel and MacKenzie ask for the concept to be understood within a more global framework. Based on Ashraf Jamal’s contribution to their special issue, ‘Bullet through the Church: South African Literature in English and the Future-Anterior’ (2010), they suggest the post-transitional to be ‘a zone of activity’ and argue:

As such, post-transitionality is Janus-faced, as one transitional experience is already present in another in some form but, as a signifier, it can be situated in, rather than bounded by, a timeframe. As a zone of activity and a discourse, it points to a broadening of thought and form that is context-bound but global in orientation as it attempts to frame South Africa in the present, as well as in terms of the transnational relations that connect it to the globe (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010: 4).

Frenkel and MacKenzie see South Africa’s growing visibility after the demise of apartheid within the global context as inextricably linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). According to them, ‘the spectacle of the TRC’ faded fifteen years into the country’s democracy, a development they use as a catalyst for their re-conceptualisation of post-apartheid South African literature (2010: 4). While we agree with Frenkel and MacKenzie that the importance of the TRC, with regard to South Africa’s (re-)emergence within the ‘global consciousness’, cannot be emphasised enough and that with the end of the TRC hearings, ‘the spectacle’ and international media presence that came with them have indeed ‘worn out’, they fail to specify what this means on a more local scale, both with regard to South African politics and literary and/or cultural production. With the benefit of hindsight and with a focus on the country’s literary output (paying attention to fictional texts), the

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⁵. See Demir (2019) for a similar argument with regards to this shift away from humour and satire.
TRC has been both in the public eye and visible within literature far beyond the hearings, the Commission’s reports, and the media attention that surrounded them, that is, far beyond what Frenkel and MacKenzie call ‘the TRC spectacle’. Pivotal literary examples are Ishtiyaq Shukri’s *The Silent Minaret* (2005), Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light* (2006), Imraan Coovadia’s *Tales of the Metric System* (2014) and – even if more implicitly – C.A. Davids’ *The Blacks of Cape Town* (2013), Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013), Mongane Wally Serote’s *Rumours* (2013) and Mandla Langa’s *The Texture of Shadows* (2014). These texts speak to the continuing importance of the TRC as they all, in one way or another, confront issues such as the African National Congress’s detention camps (Mhlongo and Langa), betrayal within the liberation movement (Davids, Mhlongo and Langa) or the intrusion of the TRC hearings into people’s quotidian lives (Wicomb, Serote and Coovadia). Such topics were sidelined during the TRC proceedings as they did not fit the overarching grand narrative of South Africa as the ‘rainbow nation’. We thus concur with Aghogho Akpome, who criticises Frenkel and MacKenzie’s conceptualisation of the post-transitional as a combination of both a fruitful discursive marker and, at the same time, a mere temporal marker along an overarching timeline of South African history. Akpome argues for the impossibility ‘to separate post-transitionality from the discursive idea of “the transition” as little more than a set of discrete fleeting past events. Such an understanding consequently renders the post-transitional as a short-lived moment on a linear historical timeline . . .’ (2016: 48).

In addition, we suggest that Frenkel and MacKenzie’s conceptualisation tries to unify the country’s ‘entangled’ socio-economic realities (both past and present), to borrow Sarah Nuttall’s concept (2009), in an overly simplistic temporal marker, which is an aporia. Such a

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6. See, for example, Cleveland (2005).
7. Nuttall defines ‘entanglement’ as ‘a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication’ (2009: 1).
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A simplistic concept of time is surprising, considering that Frenkel and MacKenzie do position South Africa within the broader postcolonial context by means of Achille Mbembe’s postcolonial theory. What they disregard, however, is that with the ‘time of entanglement’, Mbembe convincingly argues for the need for a multi-linear concept of time in the theorisation of postcolonial subjectivity in order to avoid overarching grand narratives and, instead, to account for the many nuances of co-existing (hi)stories within the postcolonial world (Mbembe 2001).

Consequently, it is not unexpected that, in response to Frenkel and MacKenzie, Chris Thurman cautions against the use of the post-transitional. Firstly, he argues that the innovations of the country’s more recent literary output are not significant enough to distinguish post-apartheid literature from what came before (Thurman 2010). Secondly, and more relevant to our argument, he poignantly remarks:

How can there be such a thing as ‘post-transitional literature’ (which would imply that we have completed a transition)? Aren’t we still in a process of transition from apartheid to something else? What is that something else? We have done away with legally enforced segregation, but we certainly cannot claim to be ‘beyond’ apartheid. Ongoing social, racial and economic divisions are evidence that even terms such as ‘post-apartheid South Africa’ are problematic (Thurman 2010: 91).

In contrast to Thurman, we see, alongside Lenta (2011), significant genre-related and topic-related changes in more recent South African literature. We agree, however, with Thurman’s second premise. We think there is good reason for the claim to be sceptical of post-apartheid as a term in itself due to the country’s ongoing socio-economic disparities (see, for example, Bundy 2014), but we would argue that the end of apartheid

8. While we fully support Akpome’s critique of Frenkel and MacKenzie’s concept at large, we find his alternative of a ‘post-TRC literature’ instead of a ‘post-transitional literature’ equally problematic as we ask ourselves whether Akpome’s term, which he borrows from Shane Graham (2009) without elaborating on the basis and supposed usage, does not hold the same pitfalls for which he reproaches Frenkel and MacKenzie.
marks such a momentous event in the country’s history that there is no way around ‘post-apartheid’ as a term, just as one cannot avoid the ‘post’ in the ‘post-independence’ of formerly colonised countries, ‘post-Second World War’ or, more recently, ‘post-9/11’. Especially if embedded within a more global context, we contend that in the long run, the term post-apartheid will supersede any term attempting a categorisation on a smaller scale, which is what Frenkel and MacKenzie attempt with their concept. We therefore share Meg Samuelson’s concerns about ‘over-categorizing what remains an emergent, amorphous body of work’ (2010: 113) and David Medalie’s (2010) hesitation to endorse the post-transitional, or any other concept for that matter, other than the broad category of ‘post-apartheid literature’, at least for the time being. This is why we also align ourselves with the usage of the purely temporal marker ‘beyond 2000’ as suggested by Chapman and Lenta (2011).

The continuing importance of the apartheid past in the post-apartheid present has been theorised at length by Derek Hook in (Post) Apartheid Conditions, where he posits: ‘[E]veryday South African experience is characterised by historical dissonance, by the continuous juxtaposition of forward- and backward-looking temporalities’ (2013: 5). Basing his argument on Sigmund Freud, Hook calls this affliction of South Africa’s post-apartheid present with its apartheid past ‘apartheid nachträglichkeit’ (2013: 185; original emphasis). In essence, apartheid nachträglichkeit implies a deferral of the apartheid past’s impact on the present. Since the present is thus under a constant threat of the past, it is always a precarious one at best. Nevertheless, this precarious situation offers the possibility of a temporal oscillation between past and present, as the past can be (re-)visited and (re-)gauged. However, this prospect of the past’s (re-)evaluation bears both risks and chances, as it might become a ‘future past’ (Hook 2013: 186–7). In its undesired form, such a future past will, for example, manifest in the form of restorative

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9. Samuelson, even though not with the direct intention to theorise a new term, sees the ‘post-transitional’ as a new moment within post-apartheid South Africa when “‘rainbow nationalism’ increasingly drops its variegated visage in order to reveal its deathly xenophobic face’ and a new place where ‘[t]he discomfiture or sense of stasis entailed in inhabiting the transitional margin is met by a desire to move on – to enter into a post-transitional state in which to create new structures of intimacy’ (2008: 133, 134).
nostalgia, in other words, a form of nostalgia seeking a return to a lost home and the wish of its re-creation (Boym 2001).

Using the term ‘(post)apartheid literature beyond 2000’ is thus a compromise. On the one hand, we feel that it is paramount to acknowledge the qualitative and quantitative shift within South Africa’s literary landscape since 2000. Hence the temporal marker ‘beyond 2000’ (Chapman and Lenta 2011), the strength of which lies in its ‘contextual neutrality’, that is, the fact that it is not linked to a particular historical event in potential need of later re-evaluation. On the other hand, the usage of the term ‘(post)apartheid’ – and we follow Hook in putting the ‘post’ in brackets to account for apartheid nachträglichkeit – emerges out of our interest in a (more) ‘distant reading’ (Moretti 2000, 2013) of more current South African literature. In doing so, we follow the recent interest in Transnational Studies within South African academia, even if our analysis is carried out within the framework of ‘world-literature’, and thus under slightly different auspices. Within the field of (South African) Transnational Studies, the work of various scholars comes to mind, such as Isabel Hofmeyr (2010), Isabel Hofmeyr, Preben Kaarsholm and Bodil Folke Frederiksen (2011), Lindy Stiebel (2016), Rachel Matteau Matsha and Lindy Stiebel (2017) and Stefan Helgesson (2009).

The consolidation of various attempts at tracing the developments within South Africa’s more recent literary production and our suggestion to apply the term (post)apartheid literature beyond 2000 is, however, only one of two aspects that we would like to raise.

10. Boym understands restorative nostalgia as opposed to a reflective (or more critical) form thereof. While restorative nostalgia is tradition-oriented, totalitarian and nationalist in its tendencies, reflective nostalgia realises and accepts the imperfections in the act of remembrance and consequently is both of a more flexible and individual character and can be critical, ironic or humorous (2001).

11. We have to mention Jane Poyner’s The Worlding of the South African Novel: Spaces of Transition (2020) here, which was published after the completion of our manuscript. Despite the similarities between the theoretic frameworks in Poyner’s and our own work – we both draw on the Warwick Research Collective’s conceptualisation of world-literature – we could not engage with her arguments here in detail, but intend to do so in a subsequent publication.

12. Although Afropolitan Literature as World Literature (2020) does not specifically focus on South African writing, this book might be of interest in the framework of world-literature and African literature within a global(ised) context.
In a next step, we propose a way of reading (post)apartheid literature that is a combination of the classic ‘close reading’ with a (more) ‘distant reading’, thus heeding De Kock’s call for a literary stocktaking of (post) apartheid literature (2011: 21).

In favour of a ‘distant close reading’ of (post)apartheid literature beyond 2000

As mentioned above, De Kock criticises the lack of a broader engagement by academics working within the context of South African literature with a larger corpus of texts. In the concluding remarks to his essay ‘The End of “South African” Literary History?’, De Kock asks the somewhat sarcastic and rhetorical question as to who, apart from the judges of the country’s literary prizes, ‘is conducting a critical audit of everything written by South African writers in every given year and rating/evaluating it as well as making notes on it’ (2011: 36). Besides the fact that the judges’ notes are generally not accessible to the public, which De Kock identifies as an essential issue, there are, in our opinion, two further concerns here. We would argue that there are certain publications that are not entered for any of the country’s literary prizes and therefore not considered, either because they are not submitted by the respective publishers or, more often than not, because there is an increasing number of self-published and independently published texts. This in itself already undermines De Kock’s rather grand claim of an all-encompassing literary stocktaking. (Nonetheless, the literary prizes and their long lists and short lists offer a broad range of literary texts to newcomers and established academics working within the field.) Furthermore, we question the extent to which the judges have the capacity to critically engage with each and every entry and take extensive notes on them. We do, however, support De Kock’s call for a need to review the methodological engagement with literary texts within the global/globalised context. He states: ‘What we increasingly have, I suggest, is a “problem” rather than a “literature” and that problem remains, how do we best read the writing by and among South Africans, wherever they are, in the context of, and in relation to, the much larger world to which we have become integral?’ (2011: 36–7). De Kock does not offer further theorisation on the matter, which, to be fair, is not his primary concern in the article. Nevertheless, the fact that he outlines
this need as a ‘problem’ is an entry point to reformulating De Kock’s concerns within the theoretical frame of ‘world-literature’.

‘World-literature’ has become a thriving field over the last twenty years. The coinage of the term can be traced back to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and is mentioned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848). With the world’s increasing globalisation, particularly during the twentieth century, the access to, and interest in, literatures from nations further afield grew significantly. ‘World-literature’ became a field of study of its own in the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), the interest in ‘world-literature’ grew out of the crisis of the Humanities in general, and literary studies in particular, and their respective veins of (periodic) ‘disciplinary rethinking and reorientation’, with both fields sharing a fundamental concern regarding the effect and relevance of ‘globalisation’ on cultural developments and production (WReC 2015: 4). ‘World literature’, for the research collective, can thus be seen as ‘the remaking of comparative literature after the multicultural debates and the disciplinary critique of Eurocentrism’ (2015: 4; original emphasis). Leading scholars within the field, besides the WReC, include Manfred Schmeling (1995), Franco Moretti (1998, 2000, 2005, 2013), David Damrosch (2003, 2009), John Pizer (2000, 2006), Christoph Prendergast (2004), Pascale Casanova (2007) and Emily Apter (2013).


Moretti, in his seminal but controversial essay, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, defines ‘(world) literature’ as a problem, rather

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13. For a concise overview of the concept’s genealogy see Pizer (2000, 2006) for a more detailed account.
14. The WReC self-ironically states: ‘[A]cademics are rather given to pronouncing the fields or sub-fields in which they themselves work as moribund or in crisis’ (2015: 3).
15. Chapman, in his article ‘Introduction: Conjectures on South African Literature’ (the introduction to the special issue for the 21st anniversary of *Current Writing* – the issue that was, in its revised version, to become the 2011 book *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*), makes a brief reference to Moretti to acknowledge the provenance of his article’s title and a brief comment on the fact that Moretti’s approach serves as a starting point for the special issue (2009). However, Chapman does not, as one might expect, further elaborate on the concept of ‘world-literature’ in relation to Moretti’s ‘Conjectures on World Literature’ (2000), but instead opts for positioning (post)apartheid literature within the rhetoric of transnationalism.
than an object, in search of new methodological approaches to reading literary texts (2000: 54–5). According to Moretti, we need ‘a little pact with the devil . . . Distant reading: where distant . . . is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems’ (2000: 57; original emphasis). Moretti prompts scholars to abandon ‘close reading’ in favour of ‘zooming out’ of a single text and, instead, adopting a (more) ‘panoptic view’ of literature. He is well aware that this implies a loss in scholarly appreciation for an individual text in order to look at ‘the bigger picture’ (2000: 57–8). This requires a careful outline of what exactly ‘close reading’ and ‘distant reading’ entail.

In an attempt to define close reading, Jonathan Culler provocatively states: ‘We don’t really seem to have an antonym for close reading, which may be part of the problem. The most obvious might be Franco Moretti’s “distant reading,” but this is scarcely reading at all’ (2010: 20; original emphasis). Since Moretti’s approach disregards the individual text in favour of identifying larger patterns, such as the development of the novel as a genre across Europe or marriage patterns in Jane Austen’s oeuvre, Culler further argues that seeing distant reading as the opposite of close reading ‘would turn any sort of attention to an individual text into close reading’ (2010: 20). Culler’s comment on Moretti’s approach should not be taken entirely at face value as it is used for dramatic effect in constructing his argument in favour of ‘close reading’. Reaching a working definition of ‘close reading’ as paying particular ‘attention to how meaning is produced or conveyed’ in a text, which therefore ‘involves poetics as much as hermeneutics’, Culler then moves on to suggest a tentative typology of various forms of close reading, which, as the article’s title suggests, displays different degrees of ‘closeness’ (2010: 22).

Moretti’s ‘distant reading’, in contrast, certainly is a radical suggestion, one that could be considered to have been carried to extremes if one, for example, looks at his book *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005) that seems to be reducing literature to statistical data. De Kock comments on Moretti’s work as follows:
Moretti’s controversial advocacy of *not actually reading writers*, but taking a distant, conceptual-theoretical-historical view of them as part of a trendline (because there are too many of them to read in the quest to describe the arc of ‘world literature’) represents the acme of Readerly authority over writers. Of course, Moretti belongs to the Academy. He gets paid to put writers in their place, literally. It pays him to consign writers to categories, or in his fabulously disdainful book title, to *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, where ‘distant reading’ means writers become micro-points somewhere on a graph, a map or a conceptual tree (De Kock 2010: 111; original emphasis).

In De Kock’s defence, he immediately relativises what, out of context, may seem an overly pointed critique of Moretti’s suggested method. De Kock is aware that in an increasingly globalised world the growing abstraction, also within literary studies, is (in the long run) an inevitable development.

The approach has since been further developed, particularly with the advent of ‘literary big data’ and computational criticism in places such as the Stanford Literary Lab, which Moretti, together with Matthew Jockers, founded in 2010, and within the field of Digital Humanities at large (Jänicke et al. 2015). Yet, we would argue that it is not a prerequisite to retain such a great distance for a reading to fall into the category of a distant reading. The usefulness of Moretti’s approach, in our opinion, lies in the vertical axis that opens up through his proposed method. As Moretti’s quote above suggests, it is the thematic focus of a particular study that will influence the degree of distance involved. We furthermore agree with Julia Flanders and Matthew L. Jockers in that rather than seeing close and distant reading as two incommensurable methods, they are two sides of the same coin, and distant reading is just as ‘interested in the careful and sustained explication of detail’, only on a different level. Moretti and other scholars working within the field are hence invested in what we call different forms of ‘close distant reading’.

17. See https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1106&context=englishfacpubs (accessed 16 April 2019).
A statistical analysis of (post)apartheid literature beyond 2000 is, however, not our aim. In contrast to a close distant reading, we opt for a (more) ‘distant close reading’, where the ‘distant’, as suggested by Moretti, involves the engagement with, or reading of, a greater number of texts under the auspices of various thematic and, to a certain extent, formal aspects, as we show in the final section of this introductory chapter, though without compromising appreciation for the individual text and thereby maintaining a certain closeness in our reading of the texts in question. In order to do so, we follow the WReC in its theorisation of ‘world-literature’ as ‘the literature of the world-system – of the modern capitalist world-system’ and the concept’s hyphenation in analogy to the term ‘world-system’ (2015: 8, original emphasis). The starting point for the WReC is, as for many scholars working within the field of world-literature, Moretti’s landmark essay. Following Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system theory (1974, 1980, 1989, 2011), Moretti defines world-literature as anchored in the world-system and thus as:

. . . simultaneously one and unequal, with a core and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One, and unequal: one literature (Weltliteratur, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it’s profoundly unequal (2000: 56; original emphasis).

The WReC appropriately reminds us of the fact that any description of the world-literary system ‘as one, and unequal’ leads back to the theory of ‘combined and uneven development’, such as championed by Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and, in particular, Leon Trotsky. The latter’s work is based on his analysis of the socio-economic and socio-political situation in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century and that of China in the mid-1920s. According to the WReC: ‘The theory of “combined and uneven development” was therefore devised to describe a situation in which capitalist forms and relations exist alongside “archaic forms of economic life” and pre-existing social and
class relations’ (2015: 11). This, consequently, allows us to conceive of
the world as consisting of many sub-systems within the larger ‘world-
system’, all of which change simultaneously but not necessarily at the
same pace.

It is a direct consequence of the WReC’s inclusion of ‘combined and
uneven development’ in their conceptualisation of world-literature that
leads to their following Fredric Jameson’s understanding of modernity
as a singular and (globally) simultaneous event (2015: 12). In doing so,
the WReC highlights:

Modernity is neither a chronological nor a geographical category.
It is not something that happens – or even that happens first – in
‘the west’ and to which others can subsequently gain access; or
that happens in cities rather than in the countryside; or that, on
the basis of a deep-set sexual division of labour, men tend to
exemplify in their social practice rather than women. Capitalist
modernisation entails development, yes – but this ‘development’
takes the forms also of the development of underdevelopment,
of maldevelopment and dependent development. If urbanisation,
for instance, is clearly part of the story, what happens in the
countryside as a result is equally so (2015: 13; original emphasis).

There are, hence, three pillars to the WReC’s world-literary theory, which
they themselves succinctly summarise as follows: ‘A single but radically
uneven world-system; a singular modernity, combined and uneven; and
a literature that variously registers this combined unevenness in both
its form and its content to reveal itself as, properly speaking, world-
literature’ (2015: 49).

In contrast to the vertical component of Moretti’s distant reading,
the WReC’s theorisation provides an additional horizontal flexibility,
as their approach opens up avenues for investigating different (literary)
centres and their (semi-)peripheries as well as their positions within
the world-literary system at large. South Africa, for example, can be
regarded as a centre as well as (semi-) peripheral. If one looks at southern
Africa, one could argue that South Africa might be regarded as one of its
literary centres due to its size and current global ‘visibility’. Angola and
Mozambique, for example, could be seen as further centres, but of the