Youthful Fantasy and Wisdom of Experience in Mzobe's *Young Blood* (2010) and Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000)

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Abstract

The coming-of-age narrative framework has become the most popular literary form for black writers in the re-imagination of post-apartheid social realities. This paper delves into how Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* (2010) and Sello K. Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000) challenge not only the foundational assumptions of the bildungsroman genre but also the bleak pessimistic vision of the anti-bildungsroman. Both *Thirteen Cents* and *Young Blood* are thought-provoking novels that examine the complexities of identity in a changing society. They both offer a unique perspective on the post-apartheid experience in South Africa and the ongoing struggles faced by young people. They both explore the themes of identity and self-discovery through the narrative perspective of two young black men. However, scant attention has been paid to how these narratives relate to the principles of the bildungsroman genre within the context of the post-apartheid black experience. I argue that the logic of the coming-of-age narrative framework in these two novels defies both the conventional bildungsroman and anti-bildungsroman because they are a symbolic response to a specific historical context. While there have been few references in critical sources to the resonance of these narratives with bildungsroman principles, a comprehensive exploration of how these narratives are rooted in the uniqueness of the post-apartheid black experience is lacking. Therefore, this paper contends that Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Mzobe's *Young Blood* demonstrate and illustrate how 'narrative and the imagination become crucial sites at making sense of and alleviating experiences of disenchantment' (Peterson 2019: 348).

Keywords: Bildungsroman, Mzobe, Duiker, postapartheid narratives, youthful fantasy and wisdom of experience.

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Introduction

While the coming-of-age narrative framework has been widely recognized as a productive literary form through which post-apartheid reality is reimagined for most black writers, there has been little attention *paid* to how they relate to the principles of the bildungsroman genre. This genre reveals, in its delineation of the individual's development, that personal identity is a process of becoming. The best examples are Sello K. Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004), and *After Tears* (2007), Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007), Thando Mqolozana's *A Man Who Is Not a Man* (2009), Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* (2010), Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy* (2011) and Nadia Davids' *Imperfect Blessing* (2014).

In the specific narratives under study, the narrator-protagonists in both *Thirteen Cents* and *Young Blood* are telling their coming-of-age stories in a social context still deeply affected by the legacy of apartheid. . They both offer a unique perspective on the post-apartheid experience in South Africa and the ongoing struggles faced by young people. They both explore the themes of identity and self-discovery through the literary form of the bildungsroman genre. These journeys take them through various experiences as they try to navigate the complexities of life. Both writers paint a vivid picture of the challenges faced by young black men in post-apartheid South Africa and how they cope with these challenges.

In this article I will investigate how Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* (2010) and Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (1999) obey and observe the constitutive presuppositions of the idealist bildungsroman and its opposite anti-bildungsroman, but also challenge the very principles that constitute them. There have been casual references in critical sources on how both narratives reflect and embody principles of the bildungsroman but without any reference to the theory of the genre and its relationship to the specificity of the post-apartheid black experience.

The significance of reading these two award-winning debut novels by Duiker and Mzobe through the lenses of the bildungsroman genre is underscored by Fredric Jameson who argues that theory and ideological bias are inevitable in any act of reading:

> [W]e never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-

> read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand-new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretative traditions (Jameson 1989: 9).

Indeed, both narratives feature narrator-protagonists who exhibit typical bildungsroman traits. Daniel Just's observation about the dilemma at the heart of this genre is evident in both novels: '… Bildungsroman takes as its subject the paradoxical nature of the modern age, namely the socialization of characters who are simultaneously in need of individuation' (2008: 383). The two texts are structured around two opposing concepts which are typical of the bildungsroman genre, that is, individual autonomy and social integration, youthful fantasy and mature sobriety, and individual fulfillment and practical reality. In Duiker's narrative, the youthful hero chooses individual autonomy over social integration, youthful fantasy over mature sobriety, and individual fulfillment over practical reality. In Mzobe's narrative, the youthful hero learns to forego his autonomy in favor of social integration, his youthful fantasy is ultimately tempered by mature sobriety, and sacrifices his fulfillment by acquiescing to practical reality. Duiker's hero attains maturity by deliberately and calculatedly defying social norms, while Mzobe's hero's quest for individual fulfillment is constrained by the need to adjust to social norms as a way of survival. The trajectory of Mzobe's hero is a transformation from anti-social conduct towards a more socially acceptable behaviour as a pathway to maturity. In Mzobe's narrative, the youthful protagonist outgrows the folly of naive hopefulness to embrace pragmatic maturity and practical realism. However, Duiker's narrative depicts a socially disruptive youthful hero whose growth and development resists reconciliation with the conventions of adult society.

While, in Mzobe's narrative the bildungsroman form is embraced and observed, the nature of society into which the individual is supposed to integrate is hardly questioned and the validity of the maturity to be attained is never interrogated, whereas in Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, the universality and ahistorical nature of the Bildungsroman is disrobed of its innocence and objectivity. In Duiker's narrative the youthful hero's growth and maturity leads him to question society and its norms. Azure's maturity is never attained by adjusting to the norms of society, in fact he attains his growth by rejecting the received wisdom and social norms.

Maturity as Repudiation of Youthful Fantasy in Mzobe's *Young Blood* (2010)

Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* is a novel of education whose important lessons for the narrator-protagonist is that he must outgrow his youthful fantasy and learn to adjust to the world of mature sobriety.

The protagonist's first rebellion against social norms is when he decides to abandon school against the advice of his parents and other family elders. The narrator-protagonist's defies parental authority and expectations regarding school as an essential rite of passage in a life of young black man. He says:

> When I told my parents of my decision to drop out of school, my mother went into a rage that lasted two days. My father promised me a beating to end all beatings. I showed them my F's. After her anger has subsided, Ma listened to my explanations, but it was clear she did not understand. Nothing in class made sense, I told her. I was in grade ten, yes, but the last concepts I had really understood were at grade seven level, and I was average at those. In class, my mind was there for the first five minutes – five minutes in which I focused intently. But for the next thirty-five minutes my thoughts would wonder, lost into a maze of tangents (2010: 7 - 8).

The accepted and traditional wisdom that education or school environment is a space of self-actualisation and self-determination for a young man clash with the narrator-protagonist's experiential reality about school as an unproductive and meaningless experience. For this young man, the school is experienced differently from the parental expectations, as much as the parents are also at pains to understand the young man's explanation of his experiential reality. Before, he even told his parents this how the youthful narrator-protagonist shares his experience of the school environment:

> It was exactly thirteen days to the day that I gave up on my high school education. There was absolutely nothing for me in school. My reports were collections of F's. I was a master mumbler in class. In mathematics I was far below average. Nothing in school made sense, and nothing had since grade one. By grade ten I knew it was not for me. A childish hope of someday understanding had carried me through the lower grades. By May that year, that hope ran out of steam (7).

The mother trying to bridge the gap between her expectations about the potentiality of school environment as space of self-actualisation for a young man and her son's feelings of alienation about the same school environment, reacts as follows: '… Ma shouted, shook me, asked for more explanations; she tried to understand but could not - the same way I tried to understand in school but didn't. She even cried' (8). To her mother's distress, frustration and disappointment, the narrator-protagonist responds as follows:

> 'I don't know what I will do, Ma, but I am not going to school. You see my reports; there is not one subject I pass. I can't do anything right in school. Every day I go there it's like a part of me dies. Ma, you see my reports every year, there is nothing for me there', I explained (8 - 9).

The mother responds by making an impassioned plea to her son but to no avail. She says:

> 'But in this world you don't just give up. You must keep trying', she said (9).

What we witness here is the clash and divergence of views between the youthful experience of the narrator protagonist and the received wisdom of the elders. The experiential reality of the young man about school and what the parents know about school are two contrasting realities. This is the contradiction the parents, learn to live with. They console themselves that at the least the young man informed them before he executed his decision to leave school. However, the mother never gave up on her conviction that her son needs to return to school as we shall see at the end. The narrator-protagonist reflects as follows:

> My parents tried. My uncles and aunts tried. Days rolled on, and their calls dried up. The tension in our house slowly lessened.
>
> 'At least he was honest with us about his decision. We know where he is. At least he is not like the others who pretend like they are going to school when they are not', I overheard Ma say to Dad (2010: 9).

Initiation from Innocence to Experience

Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* is also a story of a young black man whose

ambitions to change his social status leads him to a life of crime. Following his acrimonious disagreement with his parents and relatives about leaving school, Sipho has no plan about what he wants to do. Fortunately, or unfortunately his longtime friend Musa just arrived in the township of Umlazi from Johannesburg to help celebrate the young narrator-protagonist's birthday. During their interaction, Sipho is inspired by Musa who has achieved enviable success through his hustling and has climbed the ladder within the criminal underworld. The narrator-protagonist is therefore enticed into the adventurous and exhilarating life of crime as a way to make a living. Sipho's admiration of Musa is registered as follows: 'He left for the City of Gold with only the clothes on his back. His return from Joburg … was drenched in a glorious "I have made it" glow' (2010: 15). By the time Musa recruits him into his lucrative criminal enterprise it presents the narrator-protagonist with a real prospect of realising and attaining a life of material prosperity which he had never experienced before in his life.

The narrator-protagonist's transition from the world of innocence to the world of experience is captured as follows:

> I knew I was saying goodbye to my childhood, embracing manhood from a different angle. If there was a moment I could point to and say, this is when I left childhood behind, Vusi's phone call was that moment. It was the bridge. Before stolen cars, there was no substitute for soccer in my life. When the ball was at my feet, I was completely free, Soccer made sense to me. Unfortunately, in the township it rarely paid. Car theft was a better bet. I had the luxury of feeling sad for a minute, said a quick farewell to my dreams, spat on the tarmac and went to home and changed. Vusi and the call to get the 740i- that second was the bridge. I chose money over freedom (2010:107 - 108).

In this specific case of the narrator-protagonist the only way a young hero has a realistic chance of attaining material prosperity and changing not only his social status but that of his family as well is through series of tests in which he attains self-knowledge and about his society.

In this regard Sipho undergoes a transformation that has been observed by Susan Suleiman as quoted by Justyna Kociatkiewicz (2008:7).

> we may define a story of apprenticeship (of *Bildung*) as two parallel transformations undergone by the protagonist: first, a transformation

> from ignorance (of self) to knowledge (of self); second a transformation from passivity to action. The hero goes forth into the world to find knowledge (of himself) and attains such knowledge through a series of 'adventures' (actions) that function both as 'proofs' and as tests …. In effect, the hero's 'adventures' are but the prelude to genuine action: a story of apprenticeship ends on the threshold of a new life for the hero which explains why, in the traditional Bildungsroman the hero is always a young man, often an adolescent.

Indeed, the young narrator-protagonist in Mzobe's novel undergoes this double transformation hinted by Suleiman. He is transformed from his childhood innocence through an apprenticeship to a seasoned criminal, Musa, who has attained a rank of a General amongst the 26's gang. Sipho is inducted and initiated into the criminal enterprise of stealing cars by his mentor Musa who says to them:

> I know both of you are serious about money. Well, here is a chance to make it. My friend … no my brother, Sibani, told me about a hustle he has for me and two other people. What we'll do is steal cars – real cars, six cylinders and above – change the tags, engine numbers and colour, and sell them. We'll take them across the borders if we have to. Sibani and I will raise the cash for paperwork and extras. All you two must do is get the cars (52).

To reflect his innocence and novice status within the criminal enterprise Sipho replies as follows to Musa: 'I hear, Musa. I understand you, my brother. The problem is, I have never stolen a car before', I said (53). Musa responds by reassuring his new apprentice by saying:

> It is not the hardest thing in the world, Sipho. Otherwise, there would not be so many car thieves in the townships. The actual stealing is not complicated. Finding the heart to go steal is the hard part. You have to want to do it; that is the only way you will learn (53).

Once he is inducted and initiated into the criminal enterprise Sipho's life is transformed from the passivity towards action as Suleiman asserts. He is transformed from of complaining about why he doesn't like school towards an adventurous, exhilarating and glamorous lifestyle as a car thief alongside his

more experienced partner and accomplice Vusi.

What motivates him further in this direction is his family background especially after he had abandoned school. His father who is a township mechanic and his mother who is a cleaner at the hospital make enough for the family to survive with no prospects of transforming the family's social status. They struggle to make ends meet just to finish the modest renovations they want to make to their township house.

Through his criminal activities the narrator-protagonist suddenly manages to buy a fancy car, can afford the branded clothes he has always dreamed of, he can keep a stash of money in his bedroom, and is on the verge of growing and diversifying his income in the criminal enterprise.

Maturity as Acquiescence to Practical Reality and Rejection of Individuality

His luck finally runs out when he is stopped and arrested on the highway with a stolen car. What makes matters worse, he soon discovers that his mentor and friend Musa was involved in a shootout with the rival gang and later admitted to the hospital under police guard. He later succumbs to his bullet wounds and dies in the hospital. The situation is so tense and risky that he can't even go to the funeral of his friend to bid him farewell. The story concludes with the narrator-protagonist going back to school and leading a normal, less risky life but with no prospect of realising and fulfilling dreams of material prosperity and changing his social status. In short, the narrator-protagonist learns to live with the limitations and restraints imposed on his ambitions by the social environment as a law-abiding citizen. He learns to acquiesce to the dictates of practical reality against his moral, intellectual, and emotional inclinations.

Dennis Washburn describes the essence of coming-of-age novel in a way that is vindicated in Sifiso Mzobe's debut novel: '… the subject matter of a Bildungsroman is the realisation of the protagonist's self-identity through his integration into society and its values' (1995:1). The narrator-protagonist learns through a series of exhilarating adventures and daredevil escapades that it is wise and prudent to heed the advice of the parents not the one gets from his youthful peers in the streets of Umlazi, Durban.

In this way, Mzobe's *Young Blood* also confirms Joseph Slaughter's definition of the Bildungsroman genre as: '… as the didactic story of an individual who is socialized in the process of learning for oneself what everyone else (including the reader) already knows' (2007: 3). In this particular

narrative, it is worth noting that the implied contract between the youthful individual and the statist modernity is that it can either be honoured or disrupted. In Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* this contract which is initially disrupted, is honoured and restored at the end but without witnessing the moral, intellectual, and emotional transformation of the errant tragic hero.

Mzobe's novel confirms how Kociatkiewicz (2008: 9) has interpreted Hegel's definition of the essence and purpose of the classical bildungsroman as the limitation and denial of individual autonomy:

> Focusing on the result of any formation, Hegel saw it as a necessary subjugation of the individual ambition to the external requirements: Bildung is not a development of personality but a moulding of it into a specific pattern approved by the social forces ruling the world and ensuring the perfect non-individuality of its members.

One can't help but think of Mzobe's narrator-protagonist as having forfeited his potentiality and uniqueness by conforming to the established social norms at the end of the narrative. He was more free, more spontaneous, and more autonomous in his adventurous and purposeful life as a criminal than in his mundane and uneventful life imposed on him at the end of the narrative. There is nothing unique or exciting about him as a typical township student seeking a qualification that might not lead to any secure and gainful employment or provision of the means of making a decent living. It is vastly different from the feeling of excitement and adventure the narrator-protagonist expressed when he was newly inducted into the criminal enterprise:

> My life had moved at a higher tempo since Musa's return from Joburg, and I needed to take a breather, a few minutes to make sure it was still me, to maybe pinch myself and ensure that it was not all a dream. I had dropped out of school but was yet to decide what to do with my life. I fixed cars with Dad in our back yard, but it was a hand-to-mouth existence. Musa's plans promised money in large amounts; they also brought endless possibilities to my mind. It was my chance to build something. My chance to break the cycle of nothingness. To step into better things (101).

The safe, socially compliant life he chooses or is forced to lead at the end of the narrative is secure and is done in compliance with the advice and help of

the parents especially his mother but it is a hand-to-mouth existence' offering no promise that his future will be different from that of his parents and has no prospects of any real transformation and social betterment that the criminal enterprise held in store for him which enabled him to dream and imagine a different future and possibilities that are and were seen as within his reach when he used to reflected as follows: 'The air you breathe changes in the suburbs. There are more trees than houses, more space than you can imagine. The silence is healthy, the peace of mind a priceless asset. It is the kind of place you should be in if you want to be the fastest forward' (46).

Megan Jones (2013) in her analysis of Mzobe's debut novel says:

> *Young Blood* and *African Cookboy* are coming of age narratives centered on individual mobility, with a subversive twist emerging in an emphasis on criminality and the material successes it supports. If the principles of the European bildungsroman necessitate the integration of the individual into society via reconciliation of interiority to exteriority, then these fictions appear to unsettle attendant conventions of progressive morality (211).

Jones emphasises the unconventional adherence of Mzobe's narrative to the generic rules of bildungsroman.

A few years later Michael Wessels (2016) perceives the innovative ways in which the novel expresses the lived reality of post-apartheid social reality:

> The novel shows how the spatial arrangements of power and control associated with apartheid are increasingly undermined and reconfigured by new practices of everyday life (87).

The article focuses purely on spatial arrangement in the city of Durban and how they are subverted and undermined by the narrator-protagonist and his crew of outlaws.

Young Blood's narrator-protagonist establishes his youthful identity against his adult social environment by saying:

> I remember the year I turned seventeen as the year of stubborn seasons Summer lasted well into autumn, and autumn annexed half of winter. It was hot in May and cold in November. The older folk in my

> township swore they had never seen anything like it. Winter nibbled on spring, and spring on summer (2010: 7).

The narrative vehicle in the novel is the youthful figure who articulates an alternative understanding of society outside of the conventional adult ways of apprehension. It reflects how this kind of youthful identity arises as a response to a generational crisis and a sense of disorientation when stable formulas of selfhood are subverted by a lived experience.

Mzobe's youthful protagonist seeks to establish his identity and that of his peers by distinguishing himself from the previous generation by saying:

> Both my maternal and paternal grandparents were of the last generation that lived in the same place for their whole lives. Times changed fast. Even, I, bush mechanic that I was, vowed not to die in a township, let alone in my father's house (54).

The narrator-protagonist emphasizes not only the possibilities that are available to them in the current dispensation but also highlights the boldness of their ambitions and irrepressible hopefulness as a distinguishing mark of their generation despite their modest means and humble social stations in life.

The basis of Mzobe's narrative is the tragic collision of desire with the unbending logic of reality or the tempering of youthful fantasy by the sobering reality. The adventure and excitement that came with the growth and attainment of an alternative understanding of the world different from the one dictated to by adult social norms is grasped and registered as follows by the narrative voice:

> I knew I was saying goodbye to my childhood, embracing manhood from a different angle. If there was a moment I could point to and say, this is when I left childhood behind, Vusi's phone call was that moment. It was the bridge (Mzobe 2010:107).

However, Mpolokeng Bogatsu's observation about youth culture aptly captures the ambivalence which characterises Mzobe's narrator-protagonist and his vision in the novel, '… contemporary black youth finds itself straddling cultural spaces. On the one hand, this generation is linked to its collective political and cultural past. On the other, it seeks through conscious innovation to establish an identity apart from (though not free from) its parent culture'

(Bogatsu 2002:2).

Bogatsu's observation is crucial for understanding Mzobe's narrative because it draws our attention to the contradiction and ambivalence that characterises the novel's narrator-protagonist youthful identity about the elders and social norms. Indeed, despite his initial rebellion at the beginning of the narrative when he stubbornly refuses to heed his parents' advice to go back to school, he surprisingly expresses gratitude for having a dad who is his mentor and coach. The narrator-protagonist fondly reflects on the connection he has with his father by saying:

> I had a Dad at home. I was glad there was a man who told me something about life, who put his hand on my shoulder when I took a life and told me the hurt would pass. Who drilled me on engines so that I could also eat. Who showed me the stars on his shoulders and told me 'never'. In his few words, Dad told me all he knew and left out all he wished he never knew. When I thought I was at a dead end, my father took me to a man who told me I would get what I wanted. Dad told me I was in the real world. Money is what I wanted from the real world. My father told me something about life, at least. Most of the people I knew never had this privilege. When Dad told me he did not need to know what old man Mbatha had told me, it was another lesson in the real world. A man keeps his secrets (64 - 65).

These are apt examples of the ambivalence Bogatsu observes as 'contemporary black youth seeking to establish an identity apart though not free from its parent culture'.

According to Franco Moretti, bildungsroman narratives are not just stories of individual growth and development but also reflect broader social, cultural, and historical changes. Franco Moretti defines the logic and rationale for a Bildungsroman in the context of European modernity as follows:

> The Bildungsroman as the symbolic form of modernity: … is connected to a specific material sign [here, youth] and intimately identified with it. A specific image of modernity: the image conveyed precisely by the youthful attributes of mobility and inner restlessness. Modernity as a bewitching and risky process full of great expectations and lost illusions. Modernity as in Marx's words a permanent revolution that perceives the experience piled in tradition as a useless

> dead weight, and therefore can no longer feel represented by maturity and still less by old age (Moretti in McKeon 2000: 555).

Mzobe's narrative observes and emulates the literary form of idealist bildungsroman without true reconciliation of youthful individuality with practical maturity. The mature sobriety attained and calmly accepted by the narrator-protagonist towards the end of the narrative is imposed on him by circumstances against his will and inclination. The achieved growth and development of the youthful protagonist is not a consequence of an emotional, intellectual, and moral maturation but is acquiescence to a sobering reality that leaves him no options.

Sipho the narrator-protagonist reflects as follows: 'November turned into a buzzing December. The trees on my street were covered in lush green leaves. Under cars with my father, I made some cash – not crazy hustler money but survival cash for smokes and the occasional day out with Nana' (227).

The narrative concludes with the narrator-protagonist reflecting and explaining his coerced transformation by saying:

> My mind never again drifted in class. They teach about things of interest to me, I told myself. But, in retrospect, I know that I concentrated in class because of everything I saw in the year that I turned seventeen (228).

It is interesting to observe that the narrator-protagonist gives two reasons for his sudden and inexplicable transformation. His first reason which is perfectly understandable is qualified by the explanation that that's what he told himself. But it is the second reason which he knows in retrospect is the real reason that he changed because of what he saw in that year he turned seventeen. While the first reason sounds voluntary, the second reason gestures towards a choice that has been imposed on the narrator-protagonist against his volition. The transformation of the youthful hero is not linked to the ideological and intellectual conversion to an achieved maturity.

Maturity as Repudiation of Society and its Norms in Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*

Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* is also a novel of education whose important lessons for the narrator-protagonist, is that he must learn to distrust and

repudiate human relations as he attains maturity and achieves wisdom of experience. It is the story of Azure (an allusion to his enigmatic blue eyes) as a homeless and orphaned thirteen-year-old child who makes a living by parking cars and working as a male sex worker. As a powerless and vulnerable urchin on the mean, brutal Cape Town streets he survives by buying protection from various gangster bosses. Azure's struggle for survival against the dominant instrumentalist and materialist values of society is a moral and ethical one. The story of the novel explores the nature of a world run by adults, seen from the perspective of an innocent thirteen-year-old child. The narrator-protagonist shares his subjective observations about the nature of his social environment: 'There is nothing for mahala [free] with grown-ups. You always have to do something in return …. Grown-ups are strange people' (2000: 6 - 7). Azure is torn between a need to survive by appeasing the materialistic values of society and upholding his ethical principles.

For most of the narrative, the protagonist is powerless against the violent and materialist ways of society, which are embodied by gangster bosses, his wealthy clients, and devious female characters. Azure's powerlessness derives not only from his age but also from his estrangement from his ways of living. He constantly expresses his displeasure against the prevailing norms and practices in his environment.

Young Hero's Initiation into Experience

A young solitary figure as a narrative strategy also functions to defamiliarise the world of social conventionality through the protagonist's naïve incomprehension of society. In *Thirteen Cents*, Azure reflects on this healthy failure to understand conventional falsehoods on which society is based by reflecting:

> Joyce understands banks and how they work. Me, I have forgotten even how to hold a pen, so how can I go to the bank myself? Grown-ups ask many questions there. You must remember when you were born and exactly how old you are. You must have an address and that it must be one that doesn't keep changing. Like you must stay in the same spot for say maybe five years and when you move you must tell the bank. They must know everything about your movements. Like how many homes you have and whom must they call when they want to do something with your money. If you ask me, they are a bit like

> gangsters, they want to know everything so that you cannot run away from them. And you must have an ID and a job that pays you regularly (2000: 11 - 12).

The vagabond status of the protagonist enhances and exacerbates the alienation of the narrative consciousness from the conventions of society. He is a solitary adventurer who lives outside of any social routine and predictable habits.

In a telling moment, the narrator-protagonist explains his superficial allegiance to the adult world as a means to survive: 'I am forced to smile. That's what they expect. Grown-ups, I know their games. I smile' (8). However, this precarious compromise is a temporary and uncertain solution. Azure soon gets into trouble with Gerald, the feared gangster boss, and is later betrayed by Joyce. He goes through a series of humiliating and degrading experiences, including a gang rape.

From the outset, the narrative emphasises the protagonist's individualist ethos and his lack of social belonging: 'I live alone. The streets of Sea Point are my home' (2000: 1). Sea Point and the adjacent Green Point used to be exclusively white suburbs during the heydays of the apartheid era. By contrast, these suburban streets are home to those who would not have found homes in houses or flats either before or after 1994. Although the streets are conventionally considered the opposite of home in *Thirteen Cents*, Azures embraces them as homely social spaces.

Despite his marginal social position, he projects himself as a morally upright and ethically sensitive voice in a morally flawed social environment:

> I sleep in Sea Point near the swimming pool because it's the safest place to be at night. In town there are too many pimps and gangsters. I don't want to make my money like them (2000: 3).

The culmination of the protagonist's alienation and estrangement from his social environment is dramatised by his abduction, incarceration, and gang rape. Gerald, who is the protagonist's new boss, explains the rationale for the assault on Azure by saying:

> You had to understand that. You had to understand what it means to be a woman. That's why they did that to you. I know that you understand what it means to be a woman already. You bleed through the anus when you shit don't you? (2000: 71).

Gerald depicts the feminisation of Azure as a process for growth, maturity, and the acquisition of wisdom. Even the protagonist himself acknowledges this fact by saying: 'Grown-ups this is how they teach me to be strong' (2000: 47). The motif of suffering as an uncanny source of insight shapes character development and defines the course of events in Duiker's narrative. Women are portrayed as envious of male power and are constantly conspiring to disempower and dispossess men of their mystical power.

Eventually Azure seeks sanctuary in the mountain where he finds fulfillment and seems to gain agency and control of his social environment. He is inexplicably empowered to overcome his vulnerability and helplessness as a child. He constantly speaks of his yearning for revenge against a variety of adult figures in his life from gangster bosses who tormented him, devious female characters to his wealthy white clients. When he returns from the mountain his tormentor Gerald is unexpectedly dead. Sealy (one of Gerald's foot soldiers), in the meantime, is now the boss of Cape Town's criminal underworld. The closeness between the narrator-protagonist and Sealy, who is now a new boss of the underworld, is noted thus: 'I follow Sealy around wherever he goes. I have become his second shadow' (2000: 150). Sealy informs Azure that: '[I]t's our turn to rule' (2000: 137).

However, the identity of that collective Sealy claims to be part of is never made explicit in the story. Azure, who is unsettled by this unsolicited inclusion in this undefined collective identification, seeks clarity from Sealy by asking: 'Who's we?' (2000: 138). Sealy's answer to Azure's first question is cryptic and to Azure's other question about the 'others', he is equally vague. Azure asks: 'Who's they?'(139). Then, Sealy responds: 'Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, gangsters, the mafia, the government … who else do you want me to name? All of them are looking at you' (2000: 139). What is emphasised is that Sealy's rise to power (from being a mere foot soldier to being newly crowned gangster boss) is linked to a wider contestation over space between the two ill-defined conflicting groups and is also associated with broader social and political change in the city.

Azure witnesses this change in Sealy's character by remarking:

> I slowly watch him change. First, he gets a gold filling in his front teeth and then he starts buying flashy clothes. And the kind with expensive labels. Arrogance grows in his eyes. When he looks at people it is with a sort of hatred. He even stops eating with me. He starts reminding me of Allen but doesn't have Allen's dirty mouth. I don't know who's

> worse. On the streets, they start to know about him (2000: 152).

Azure narrates Sealy's acquisition of power and rise to prominence within the criminal underworld as a symbol of the expected social promise of liberation that is betrayed and aborted by greed and corruption. Indeed, Sealy's newly acquired powerful position does not last. He is apprehended by the police and the residents who stay under the bridge that have formed the foundation of his power are evicted and their dwellings are destroyed. Following Sealy's arrest and subsequent dissolution of his criminal enterprise, Azure seeks refuge in the mountain sanctuary, which he regards as the basis of his miraculous strength and magical powers.

Maturity as a Refusal of Normative Social Norms

Andrew Van der Vlies in his overview of what he terms the 'black fictions of the present' validates the bleak pessimistic vision embodied in Duiker's debut novel by saying:

> Over the past decade and a half, several important voices have emerged, each concerned to engage with the experience of black urban subjects, in particular in novels that offer powerful indictments of the promises of the liberation movement – and of the neo-liberal consensus that has stymied any real socio-economic revolution in South Africa. Representations of the seeming dead-ends to which many young South Africans have been consigned by the legacies of structural inequalities fostered by apartheid and by the accommodations with local and global capital of the post-liberation government … (2017: 153).

The narrator-protagonist in *Thirteen Cents* would seem to confirm this bleak and pessimistic vision expressed by Andrew Van der Vlies above by introduce-ing himself as follows:

> My name is Azure. Ah-zoo-ray. That's how you say it. My mother gave me that name. It's the only thing I have left from her …. I live alone. The streets of Sea Point are my home. But I'm almost a man, I'm nearly thirteen years old (Duiker 2000: 1).

Duiker's narrator-protagonist aptly introduces himself as a solitary figure

alienated from society. Indeed, the trajectory of the narrative highlights the protagonist's sense of apartness from society and refusal to be reconciled with the social norms as part of his growth and attainment of maturity. The novel's narrator-protagonist who is an orphan, struggles throughout the narrative to form durable and lasting relationships.

The solitary and alienated youthful figure in Duiker's novel is a strategy of estrangement that enables a representation of society beyond a familiar and conventional gaze. As Mikhail Bakhtin observes:

> The device of 'not understanding' … always takes on great organizing potential when an exposure of vulgar conventionality is involved. Conventions thus exposed − in everyday life, mores, politics, art and so on − are usually portrayed from the point of view of a man who neither participates in nor understands them (Bakhtin 2004: 164).

This literary device of the marginal position of a solitary narrator-protagonist who refuses to participate in 'vulgar conventionality' by repudiating human relations enables a fresh and unconventional perspective exposing injustices and irrationalities present in the adult discourse on social reality.

Mandla (who is renamed Vincent by Gerald) prefigures the individualist and anti-social ethos which is embraced in the novel when he says to Azure, 'You must look after yourself, bra. Do you understand that? No one's going to help you in Cape Town. You must do everything yourself' (2000: 98). The novel enacts a youthful figure who negotiates and fashions his own unique identity in a hostile adult world. The conflict between an idealistic youthful figure and a problematic society is resolved through an anti-modern pastoral utopia and the apocalyptic demise of the world.

It is this peculiar uneasiness with socialisation in a bildungsroman that is defined by Justyna Kociatkiewicz as Anti-Bildungsroman. Duiker's novel would seem to confirm this model of the coming-of-age narrative which Kociatkiewicz perceives as based on the philosophical and cultural complex of postmodernism by saying:

> The Antibildungsroman as defined by Gerhard Mayer indicates the awareness of the equivocal character of human maturation; individual formation, ideally leading to the accommodation in the society, becomes an ambiguous process in which apparent social gains are juxtaposed to obvious limitations of personal independence and

> spiritual ambition. The evaluation of the benefits and the disadvantages a protagonist's apprenticeship in the art of living, the assessment of his progress toward the fulfillment of his human potential, the revelation of his dubiousness of the human condition- such would be the marks of the Antibildungsroman … (Kociatkiewicz xii).

In sum, *Thirteen Cents* offers valuable insights into the complexities of personal development and identity in the post-apartheid landscape, by observing and imitating the literary form of Anti-Bildungsroman yet refusing its bleak and pessimistic vision.

Textual Deviation and Socio-Historical Context

Fredric Jameson regards textual deviation from the norm, as evident in these two novels, as an entry point of history into a narrative genre and literary form by saying:

> [T]he deviation of the individual text from some deeper narrative structure directs our attention to those determinate changes in the historical situation which block a full manifestation or replication of the structure on the discourse level (Jameson 1989:146).

From what Jameson implies, the textual deviation can be regarded as evidence of how the narratives are transformed from their generic and universal models to respond meaningfully to a specific historical situation and its anxieties. The two bildungsroman narratives cannot be understood only in relation to their conformity or deviation from the generic conventions of the bildungsroman. This paper argues that we need to understand them beyond their adherence or subversion of the bildungsroman generic rules. The uniqueness of these narratives is properly contextualised and aptly clarified by Bhekizizwe Peterson (2019). Peterson notes the significance and role of narrative in black identity formation and lived experience by saying:

> Narrative and the arts function to a degree in ways similar to the unconscious and are therefore important in mediating 'the black collective psyche' in its cultural historical unconscious … (346).

The rationale for the narratives within the context of intergenerational black experience is the production of knowledge, affirmation of identity and

deployment of ideology to organise life's events and experiences into a coherent story. Peterson elaborates further by saying:

> In contexts of subjugation and exploitation, narrative and the imagination also become crucial sites from which the black radical imagination could embark on a wide range of personal and social imperatives aimed at making sense of and alleviating experiences of disenchantment (Peterson 2019: 348).

Indeed, the two narratives, Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Mzobe's *Young Blood* can be seen as fulfilling this imperative to make sense of and alleviate the experiences of disenchantment emanating from the new dispensation. It is these specific and unique characteristics which make these two narratives under study ill at ease as atypical Bildungsromans.

Peterson (2019: 356) gives us insight in understanding better the character of the narrator-protagonists in both novels when reflects:

> All of these happenings have profound implications for the formation of subjective and political identities and they also either temper or amplify the dissonances that come with the deferred expectations of freedom.

The character, rationale and purpose of these narratives can be perceived as Bhekizizwe Peterson further observes and elaborates:

> The dilemma then, is how to grasp, narrate and transcend the un-unfinished business of colonialism and apartheid and to lay to rest all sorts of ghosts that continue to haunt post-apartheid South Africa (Peterson 2019: 356).

Conclusion

Mzobe's *Young Blood* and Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* offer contrasting interpretations of key themes typically explored in the bildungsroman genre, particularly individual autonomy versus social integration, youthful fantasy versus mature sobriety, and individual fulfillment versus practical reality. In *Thirteen Cents*, Duiker's youthful protagonist prioritises autonomy over social integration, choosing fantasy over sobriety and personal fulfillment over the

constraints of reality. In contrast, Mzobe's hero in *Young Blood* undergoes a transformation, relinquishing his autonomy in favour of social integration, tempering his youthful fantasies with the wisdom of maturity, and sacrificing personal desires in favour of practical realities. While Duiker's protagonist reaches maturity through deliberate defiance of societal norms, Mzobe's hero comes of age by adjusting to these norms, viewing them as necessary for survival. The trajectory of Mzobe's protagonist reflects a shift from anti-social behaviour towards socially acceptable conduct as a path to maturity, eventually shedding the naivety of youthful hope for pragmatic realism. In contrast, Duiker's narrative portrays a protagonist whose growth defies social expectations, resisting the reconciliation of individuality with the conventions of adult society.

While *Young Blood* adheres more closely to the traditional bildungsroman form, it does not critically examine the nature of the society into which the individual is expected to integrate, nor does it question the value of the maturity that is attained. Mzobe's narrative upholds the genre's typical arc, portraying maturity as an inevitable adjustment to social norms. However, Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* challenges the universality and supposed objectivity of the bildungsroman. Azure's journey toward maturity does not involve conforming to societal norms but rather rejecting them, with his growth and wisdom stemming from this rebellion against the received wisdom of elders.

Ultimately, these two novels resolve the paradox inherent in the bildungsroman genre – between individuality and socialisation – in opposite ways. In *Young Blood*, individuality is sacrificed for the triumph of socialisation and adjustment to practical reality. On the other hand, *Thirteen Cents* celebrates individuality and rebellion, rejecting socialisation and the practicality of adulthood. To fully understand the coming-of-age narrative frameworks of these two novels, we must recognise both their grounding in the bildungsroman tradition and the ways in which they reflect the unique historical and cultural contexts in which they were written.

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