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I. INTRODUCTION

Bitter Fruit is a work from South Africa's transition era that offers insightful glimpses into the chaotic social and political conditions of a new nation rising from a violent past and seeking reconciliation and identity. The story focuses on the Ali Family, haunted by traumatic memories and the need to confess unspeakable experiences. It not only parodies the Truth and Reconciliation Commission but also highlights "traumas born from a Janus-faced conception of race superiority and prejudices" (Diallo 64), through symbolic patterns. Through the novel, Achmat Dangor explores ways to confront the past, reexamining the complex choices available to former targeted communities of the state's repressive machinery and expressing the inexpressible traumas they endured during the height of oppression. As a sensitive point of his community, the core of his writing is to imagine how his multicultural country can handle the hectic present and look toward what seems to be an uncertain future. He weaves *Bitter Fruit* as "an appropriate metaphor for the tragic mulatto. It combines the notion of ripe possibility with sour prospects, which is the tragic inheritance of his literary character. (…) The novel is set on the cusp of the new millennium, at the end of Nelson Mandela's presidency and at the conclusion of the TRC hearing." (Mafe 113)

Bitter Fruit is a Dangor novel that has received significant critical acclaim for its skillful thematic and aesthetic depiction of the traumas rooted in South Africa's social and political history. From magical realism in his first published book, *Kafka's Curse* (1997), to realism in *Bitter Fruit*, Dangor, as Meg Samuelson notes in "Speaking Rape 'Like a Man': Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*," returns to realism to document South Africa's transition and its confrontation with the past. Indeed, as further discussed by Irele Abiola, the South African writer's work reflects a core belief that "the burden of past atrocities, is not confined to the victim, but leaves its marks on the victim's family." (255) This image of burden reverberates in the words of Diana Adeselo Mafe who argues, in her exploration of Mixed Race Stereotypes in South African and American Literature, that "the bitter legacy of the old South Africa and the ripe promise of the new nation thus coexist in a fragile stasis, which is captured by the public and political TRC and its mediation of private and

personal stories. (113) This taste of political democracy was made sourer by the somehow deliberately lacunary account of the sexual abuse of women, as part and parcel of the apartheid state repression, noted by members of the hearing like Dangor. The South African writer buttresses this view through these words of his, reported by Ronit Frenkel in his analysis of the close ties between race, memory and apartheid: "the fact that sexual abuse of women in the struggle against apartheid was far more systematic and widespread than we want to believe or that the TRC has addressed... So, all I did was try to address a viewpoint.t" (161) In an interview with Stacy Knecht (March 2005), Dangor explained how during hearings "often the sexual abuse ones" were held in closed sessions, frequently at the victim's request (Knecht 1). Watching these hearings, he felt it was something that "needed to be done from a re-imagined point of view" (Knecht, 1).

Though Akpome Aghogho points out that "analyses of *Bitter Fruit* have so far tended to focus on its critique of such issues as identity, cultural (re) construction, historicization, gender, and juridical inadequacies, of the TRC" (6) still, Dangor takes up the gauntlet to address the issue of rape and its aftermath, as a core means to stifle political dissidence. In this way, the story further raises critical scholarship, with special attention laid on the lamentable condition of "a coloured woman who refuses to allow her personal experiences of trauma to be undermined and defined as merely wartime 'collateral damage'." (Bhardway 83) Such an insight into the psychological dimension of the narrative is stirred by Dangor's decision, as a mapmaker of truth, to re-enact, in the narrative landscape, the traumas caused by intimate assaults on individuals and the nation, providing thus both victims and perpetrators with a space to express unspeakable experiences. Unlike other authors like John Maxwell Coetzee, who chose not to disclose the sexual violation of women as a weapon to quell dissent, Dangor held firm on his belief that the rainbow's colors would fade from the young nation if victims of intimate violence were not only recognized but also given avenues to verbalize their unshareable traumas. This is the thought flow of Madeleine Laurencin's comparative study of John Maxwell Coetzee's and Achmat Dangor's narratives of the transition, titled "A Polychromatic Approach to the Rainbow Nation Today" (2012). By exploring how aspects of the rainbow nation grapple with questions of Black, White, and Coloured identities, as well as reconciling the past and present (Laurencin 51), she suggests that in "Bitter Fruit," Dangor depicts the unraveling of the Ali family through the resurgence of a secret that tears a hole in the web holding Silas, Lydia, and Mickey together, exposing old wounds and new desires (Laurencin 51). The strength of her argument lies in calling to attention the symbolism of the narrative condition of the family members, struck by a heartbreaking experience: Lydia's rape and the birth of her child. This bitter fruit forever distances them. Laurencin's discussion emphasizes the textual and semiotic elements embedded in the historical context of South Africa, evoking a country long broken and yearning for healing and unity to become what Nelson Mandela described as "a Rainbow Nation... at peace with itself and the world" ("Inauguration Speech," 1994). This historically informed reading offers a comprehensive view of the story's symbolic power and lays the groundwork for analyzing Dangor's work through a semiotic lens. Such an approach could reveal the many signs and rhetorical devices within the text, offering parallel interpretations of the patterns of trauma and posttraumatic disorder experienced by the Ali family and South Africans. It could also show that some ambivalent semiotic images whisper a less rigid and more hopeful outlook from the author. These embers fuel Dangor's pursuit of reconciliation and "transnational connectivity" (Frenkel 149) in post-apartheid South Africa.

While supporting the ideas developed in scholarly work on *Bitter Fruit*, it must be recognized that few have approached Dangor's core gesture of portraying the problems that weaken the new nation, as ciphered in the array of signs (linguistic and literary) that fill the narrative. This research paper argues that *Bitter Fruit*, through a set of linguistic and narrative devices, acts as a

profound silence of the layered suffering of individuals and a nation still struggling with past demons. By conducting a semiotic reading of the story, our study offers new insights into the literary significance of Dangor's text, explaining that the disconnected lives of characters and their post-traumatic stress disorder can symbolize the historical aspects of the story.

In this way, its foremost aim is to explain that building on signs is a crafty way for the author to connote that characters' bodies and minds in pain are a semiotic text of inexpressible traumas. Second, through ambivalent semiotic patterns, it brings to light the author's conviction that dealing with unsaid traumatic experiences like rape is a *sine qua non* of reconciliation and identity, in a nation staggering out of doom.

Meanwhile, the research paper seeks to illuminate a set of questions: how is Dangor's text, a sign system symbolically "telling" through linguistic and nonlinguistic objects or behaviors, traumas that cause family breakdown? How can a semiotic reading of Lydia's posttraumatic stress disorder allow for a comprehensive interpretation of the psychological sequels of oppression and their symbolic bearing on the overall situation of South Africa? To what extent does *Bitter Fruit* help excavate the lingering effects of apartheid traumas on the Ali family and on the democratic nation? How can building on ambivalent semiotic patterns representing these traumas be interpreted as the author's brushing off the TRC's *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*, on the one hand, and his whingeing obstinacy to participate in the building of a society where individuals are stripped of the personae of race, on the other hand? To what extent can ideas from Saussure, Peirce and Morris spell out the characters' behaviors, expressed in linguistic and non-linguistic elements, that are a covert expression of unspoken pain?

Since the study is limited to a text, the methodology relies on textual analysis, drawing on developments in signs from literary semioticians within the frameworks of structuralism, wedded to trauma and deconstruction theories to clarify research questions.

Saussure and Pierce are foundational figures of semiotics. Their works are useful forerunners to semiotic analysis, with the groundbreaking dissection of the multiple aspects and interpretations of the sign. Their developments are resourceful documents for our discussion because the linguistic approach, at the core of the literary dimension, they both elaborated – through different perspectives – are a map road that can allow expressing that Dangor's text is steeped in South African historical context, and that the sign, whether interpreted in a binary (Saussure) or triadic (Pierce) angle, can only be analysed in close relationship with its context. Their contributions to the field of semiotics can lead to a multilayered interpretation of patterns of trauma in the story. This will help demonstrate that the language of intimate and public wounds bears the same echo, and that the emotional recovery of the collective is concomitant with the individual's reconstruction from traumatic experience.

Thus, the study first elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings, with a cross-discussion of full-blown theories on the sign. This will allow elucidating and better defining the scope, as a primary development of the study. On a second level, it evidences that *Bitter Fruit* is a semiotic text of inexpressible traumas, an audible silence of the pain collectively felt and individually reenacted, the impacts of which are deftly insinuated in the myriads of rhetorical devices. Finally, it explores, from a *semiotic- deconstructive* perspective, the ambivalent aspect of sign systems in *Bitter Fruit*, to affirm that this is a symbolic expression of the writer's optimism in the quest for reconciliation and identity redefinition in the new South Africa.

II. SEMIOLOGY, SEMIOTICS, SEMIOSIS: NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF SIGNS

Diving into the sea of signs, the reader encounters layers of harmonious and sometimes conflicting developments regarding signs, created by foundational figures through extensive work in semiotics. "In its broadest sense, semiotics comprises all forms of formation and exchange of meaning on the basis of phenomena which have

been coded as signs." (Johansen & Larsen 4) What appears to be an overabundance of signs is further buttressed by Umberto Eco in *A Theory of Semiotics*, where he maintains that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else." (7) If a sign can be substituted or interpreted through something else, it implies a certain inter-connectedness that can form a whole, composed of components that can be autonomous, yet, part of a coherent sign system. As Dmytrenko and Khailuna rightly put it, "semiotic analysis is designed to perceive and understand the context transmitted by the sign system and translate it into the language of another sign system. (104) Such a position gives credit to Yu Lotman's stance, expressed in *The Structure of an Artistic Text,* which has it that signs in language, in a text, carry a semantic load, due to their interaction and interrelation. Roland Barthes proceeds to a structural analysis of narrative in *Elements of Semiology*, to argue that within or outside the borders of a text-a word, a compound, a sentence, a piece, or a whole-the element must be part of a system to qualify as a sign (190). Any explanation of the intended meaning of a sign outside a system will not be relevant, as proponents of semiotics like Saussure, within the framework of structuralist linguistics, believed that language should be understood "… not as a collection of individual words with individual histories but as a structural system of relationships among words as they are used at a given point in time, or synchronically. This is the structural focus" (Tyson 217).

The Swiss linguist further develops his structuralist approach to language in *General Course of Linguistics*, through the science of semiology, a major influence in structuralism. Saussure's semiology not only leads to a dualistic analysis of the sign (signifier and signified) but also sheds light on the crucial point that a word is not merely a "sound-image' (signifier), nor is it simply a concept; a sound-image can only be a word, can only have an intended meaning when it is closely related to a concept. If it is a truism that structuralism "sees itself as a human science whose effort is to understand, in a systematic way the fundamental structures that underlie all human experience and, therefore, all human behaviour and production," (Tyson, 217) then, it is easy to grasp Saussure's core principle in semiology, which states that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is merely conventional, a matter of consensus within the sign system, involving a networking relationship between signs and arbitrary systems.

Semiology[1], as "science of signs", which, according to Saussure, was destined to become basically a *linguistic science* "thus limited to human communication" (Merrel 5), finally distinctively embraces all modes of communication found in human societies, "including both human linguistic expressions and nonverbal devices such as gestures and signals along nonlinguistic channels" (Merrel 5). Based on this new turn of Saussure's semiology, then, the description of the facial expression, the moan, and the behavior of Lydia during and after the sexual assault all constitute signs that can be further interpreted as images of trauma syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Such breakthrough developments from Saussure have inspired the sound contribution of the American Charles Sanders Pierce, in his discussion of the sign. Both theorists wished to ring the bell of a rigorous study of systems and signs. From a pragmatic perspective, however, Pierce rows against the tide of Saussure's semiological bent to introduce "the term 'semiotics', which, according to him, is synonymous with the concept of logic that focuses on the knowledge of human thinking process as portrayed in his writing published in 1931/1958" (Yahkin & Totu 6). Although both theorists of the sign were motivated by the same desire to expand the domain of signification and subsequently

[1] In his semiology, Saussure excluded the writing aspect, in his dichotomic language premise (langue-parole). Such a position, inherently contradictory, was deconstructed by theorists like Jacques Derrida. This urged semioticians of the 1960s to thrust language to even greater prominence. A groundbreaking step was taken with Roland Barthes' averment that "linguistics is not part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics". (1968 11)

decode the relativity of meaning behind signs and symbols, their approaches differed.

Indeed, unlike Saussure's dualistic methodology (sign=signifier+signified), Peirce's semiotics, built on a triadic structuration, splits the signifier to fill it with "objects, gestures, activities, sounds, images, in short anything that the senses can perceive. Clearly, semiotics gives the signifier a wide range of possibilities" (Tyson 217). Peirce encapsulates the breadth of his vision of semiotics thus: "I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the later [sic] is thereby mediated, determined by the former." (EP2 478). Thus, in this tryptic method of Pierce (sign = sign[2]+ object + interpretant), Lydia's silence in *Bitter Fruit* is the sign or *representamen*, or even the *ground* for the deleterious atmosphere in the family; the *object/referent* or cause is her rape by the police man; the *interpretant*, "a sign system, [that can be] a linguistic or nonlinguistic behavior [to be] analysed as a specialized language" (Tyon 214), is the repercussion of the rape on her husband, Silas and family. This symbolic bearing around Pierce's semiotics is corroborated by its structuralist ground that favors interpreting the sign system by foregrounding a group of similar objects – rape victims in South Africa-, synchronically (under apartheid/postapartheid periods). If for Pierce everything can be a sign, as long as it has the power to "represent" something, or symbolically "tell" something, according to individual's interpretative thought, then, the *competent readers* of Dangor's text can easily interpret the gallery of images and other rhetorical devices as possible *representame* signifying the backbreaking experiences individually and collectively undergone by South Africans. The meaning of patterns of trauma in Dangor's story, then, is not directly attached to the sign system at the surface level of the text; instead, it is mediated through the interaction between the *representamen*, *interpretant*, and *object*. This is for Peirce, the process of semiosis.

The signifier or symbol in Pierce's theory is then the subject and object of multiple and continuing interpretations; this is foregrounded by the fleeting nature of the symbolic aspect of the sign, which explains the fact that "the relation of ground[3] and object is not immediately posited but is rather represented to mind through a mediating representation, or interpretant." () Such is the bedrock idea of his *semiosis*, which has been further expanded by Charles William Morris, another seminal figure of the field, who brought forth the philosophical issues of signs, and who strongly influenced, with his work in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938b) and *Significance and Signification* (1964) linguists and philosophers. This is how he explains his developments, inspired by the contributions from Peirce's semiotics:

> On some interpreter in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter. These are three components in semiosis that may be called, respectively, *the sign vehicle*, the *designatum*, and the *interpretant*. The *interpreter* may be included as a fourth factor. These terms make explicit the factors left undesignated in the common statement that a sign refers to something for someone. (1938b 3)

Morris's comment not only expands Pierce and Saussure's postulates but also brings to light a

[2] Like many semioticians, Pierce recognized the threefold dimension of the sign: sign Index + icon, + symbol. An index is a sign in which the signifier has a concrete causal relationship to the signified; with an icon, the signifier physically resembles the signified. However, with a symbol, the relationship between signifier and signified is not natural but arbitrary; what we put within a symbol is decided on by conventions of a community or and social agreement. Of the three, only the symbol is the object of interpretation.

[3] For Pierce, going against the line of thought of Descartes, instead of a self of which we are conscious, through a special power of introspection, a sign is considered to have a ground. Such ground is not an object of immediate cognition. It is, rather, the element of immediate consciousness in the cognition of the object, "the thought itself, or at least what the thought is thought to be in the subsequent thought" (CP 5-285). This ideological stance of the theorist is suggestive of the ongoing interpretation of sign systems, driven by the immediate consciousness of the object, a cognition not subjected to the Cartesian ego, which analyses the ground of the object through immediate cognition.

new allure in the domain of sign systems, which is a flurry of intellectual perspectives. Through his contemporary contributions to semiotics, Morris deflects Peirce's *ground* by introducing the concept of *sign vehicle* (that which acts as a sign), and *object* to mean *designatum*[4] (what the sign refers to). The only difference between Morris's line of thought and Pierce's is that

> These *designata* seem to correspond to what Pierce called the dynamical object, and the designatum to the *immediate object*, except that Pierce argued that the sign object is an element prescinded from process and therefore can be known only as it is represented to be in further signs, and not immediately (Rochberg-Halton & McMurtrey 142).

Therefore, following Morris's logic, the Ali family's disunity in *Bitter Fruit* can either be a symbol of past demons that have suddenly arisen from Silas's unexpected encounter with Du Boise, the policeman who raped his wife before his eyes, or a motif of meeting that, according to Pierce's argument, gives rise to new forms of drama. All of these are representations, symbols of new specters that the family, in pain, must confront and which can only be understood through ongoing interpretation.

Given all these complementary and sometimes conflicting theories about signs and although the current lack of consensus on what defines semiotics might insinuate its vitality and broad scope, "(…) its practitioners share a common concern with (…) the role of signs and symbols in whatever the object of study happens to be." (Rochberg-Halton & McMurtrey 142) Therefore, if we agree with Lois Tyson that instead of examining the *parole* of literature, which is a surface phenomenon, "structuralism seeks instead the *langue* of literary texts, " (220), and bearing in mind with Yu Lotman that the literary text is hierarchically organized[5], an interpretation of these structures allow texts to create meaning, often referred to as grammar, then we can set out to explore our object of study, through the lens of literary semiotics. In this case, the objective is to decipher the world of signs in *Bitter Fruit,* to understand how they generate meaning from the syntactic allure, and from the semantic and pragmatic dimensions, and to analyze the interactions between them and the ways they are symbolic of characters' semiotic meaning (behaviors, gestures, expression, etc.).

In doing so, we wed the myriads of semiotic postulates with theories of rape trauma syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder (Herman 1992; Caruth, 1995, 1996; Luckhurst, 2008; Schonfelder, 2013), to decode how the universe of signs is a textual device, images hinting at patterns of traumas of individuals and a nation staggering out of the doom of physical and emotional abuses. Interpreting Dangor's text under the prism of trauma theories and semiotics serves as a theoretical background, making *Bitter Fruit* a *representamen* of private words of wounds echoing the social disintegration of a society, generated by the dry white season of apartheid.

More importantly, analyzing patterns of trauma and characters' various reactions to posttraumatic stress disorder through semiotic and trauma theories helps highlight Dangor's moderate stance, especially when compared to other writers of the transition period regarding the future of the new nation. Indeed, by allowing victims of sexual abuse to carry their burdens and confront past demons through self-chosen paths, the South African writer, as our discussion will show, transforms his story into a sign system, leading to other subtexts that can be the subject of later interpretations. In this respect, he epitomizes Pierce's more flexible approach to the sign, which bears ideological underpinnings of deconstruction theory. For the American semiotician, "the sign as proxy cannot properly carry out its role of incessantly becoming other signs, along the flow of semiosis. With each new instantiation a sign has invariably become a difference; it has become a new sign; not merely the same standing for the same object or event" (Merrel 3). In other words,

[4] Actual or not

[5] The text is segmented into subtexts (levels, phonological, grammatical, syntactic, rhythmic, etc.), and each segment can be considered part and parcel of the semiotic analysis of literary texts.

Lydia's silence, at the beginning of the story, is a symbol of posttraumatic stress disorder; the same silence cannot be interpreted as suggesting the same "object of event" because, a psychoanalytic reading can consider it an *interpretant* of her recovery. Dangor's narrative bears, thus, ambivalent signs whose exploration will certainly support Pierce's position, in line with Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, which shuns any immediacy of the sign process of which we are conscious here and now.

III. THE ALI FAMILY IN PAIN: A SEMIOTIC EXPLORATION OF UNSPOKEN TRAUMAS

The story in *Bitter Fruit* unfolds the horrendous experiences of a family that has forever been torn apart, after the sexual violation of the mother figure, Lydia, by a white policeman, Du Boise. "Under apartheid, sexual violation was an expression of white power over blacks; it was a *verb* with which white racists communicated with black combatants; rape was a means to create and reproduce multiple systems of domination, including racism and colonialism." (Diallo 61) The disintegrative effects of the rape memory have been revived by the impromptu meeting between Du Boise and Silas, a motif for the narrative voice to put the reader at the heart of the trauma borne by Lydia, but also to make him aware of how severe the consequences of the violation are, almost twenty years later. The anger and hyperarousal raised in Lydia by the evocation of the name of her rapist are signs of posttraumatic stress that she thought she had repressed, but which, unfortunately, ended up destroying the couple's life. Indeed, "Lydia straightened her leaning body as the car straightened, peering into the side mirror as she entered the slow city traffic" (10), is not only a *representamen* of an unhealed wound, a sign of a persistent fear, but also the image of a "caught moon" (11), as the narrator describes her in the lines below, a metaphorical pattern, that can be interpreted as a symbol of the woman's entrapment, while being molested by the white policeman. This is how the scene is disclosed, from the perspective of Silas:

> And then, one day, the moon was caught in the bars of a window that seemed familiar yet very different somehow, further away than even that distant township window that the architects had put it as an afterthought. (...) He heard Lydia's voice, different as well, hoarse and rich, vibrating like a singer's voice too deep to be played loudly through a set of worn-out speakers (...) while someone laughed above the sound of an idling engine and then Lydia's voice was sharp, ascending into a scream, before fading into a moan so removed it seemed to come from his dreams. (11-2)

This metaphorical part is a sign system that provides symbolic elements of the traumatic effects of the sexual assault upon the direct victim, but also on her husband. Like in *Disgrace*, where we have a pronounced encoded expression of the rape of Lucie by four black men, Dangor also makes an exquisite resort to sensory imagery that functions as a signifying system to share the horror heaped on Lydia in the van. In this reenactment of the trauma scene, Silas describes, through the changing tempo of Lydia's scream, the agony she was subjected to. The "moon" as cosmic image is used as a *designatum* (following Morris' terminology) of the innocence and liveliness of Lydia before the abuse, set against the cold and hyperaroused one, after the assault. As an innocent "moon", Lydia was one day caught in the cloudy atmosphere of her country, having to bear the brunt of her husband's commitment to the struggle against the pecking order of races in South Africa. Lydia's scream is presented in an oxymoron allure, a semiotic pattern that further expresses the acute pain of the woman; "hoarse and rich" at the same time, "vibrating like a singer's voice" and yet unable to be accompanied by a symphonic assemblage, "too deep to be played loudly through a set of worn-out speakers", reaching the apex before fading into a "moan", the expression of inexpressible pain. Indeed, as Meg Samuelson correctly reasons, "rape causes physical and psychological dissociation as it 'robs women of speech, reducing their voices to screams and moans..." (1). Thus, Dangor has well understood with Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*, that "traumatic memory lacks verbal

narrative and context. Rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensation and images." (1992 n.p.), Elaine Scarry, in " *Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, further foregrounds the resistance of physical pain to verbalization, when she relevantly pinpoints that

> Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language. (...) Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to sounds and cries a human being makes before language was learned. (4)

Therefore, Lydia, Silas, and Mikey, the bitter fruit from the rape, are all in pain in their bodies and minds because they are caught in a web of unspeakable memories. The abuse of Lydia, like the devastating pain caused to the whole nation by the apartheid system, whose bitter fruits are still sour to swallow in the transition era, has become what Crista Schonfelder called "family trauma". It denotes "how the whole family may be affected by the individual jarring moments and how, in particular, interpersonal trauma within a family tends to shatter the group's sense of safety and stability as well as to damage the bonds of the familial community" (18).

The family disintegration, born and bred by the rape, is made more pronounced in this cold exchange between the couple, a syntagmatic pattern made of short cut sentences, that are *representamen* of the emptiness, rage, and feeling of void tearing Lydia, ever since that night. This is not only a signifier of the distance between them, but also a sound object, following Saussure's structural approach that symbolically translates the sentiment of angst that gnaws at a whole nation, after the demise of apartheid, where citizens, like walking ghosts, are overloaded by unexplainable private trauma and pain:

> "Fuck you, Lydia, I know the difference, I know pain from pleasure."
>
> She stood up, her angry reaction showed by the coldness in her body. 'You don't know about the pain. It's a memory to you, a wound to your ego, a theory.' She thrust her face into his. '*You can't even begin to imagine the pain*' (...)
>
> "What else do you remember?"
>
> "That Sergeant Seun's face, our black brother, the black, brutal shame in his face.'
>
> "You don't remember my face, my tears..."
>
> He closed his eyes almost as she closed hers. When he opened them again, she was inside, busy dialling on the phone. He followed her." (Dangor 14)

The narrative option to detach the voice from this cold, ideologically driven exchange about the meaning of pain for the victim and their community and how it can be expressed (Scarry), is a semiotic image that provides an encoded way to depict the conflicting perceptions of agony-both physical and psychological—that the direct victims of rape and collateral parties experience. Vipasha Bhardway pertinently argues that "horrific memories of the past strike the Ali family with renewed viciousness, and this time, the family disintegrates irrevocably. Following the rape, Lydia and Silas had been trapped in a loveless and non-communicative marriage, drifting away from each other emotionally and physically" (85). Lydia is seething because, convinced she is, like all rape victims, that her husband will never be able to grasp the pain she was enduring, the tears, and the expression on her face during the act. These are, in light of Morris's semiotic thought, sign vehicles, *representamen of the object* (the rape), the remembrance of which can be taken as an interpretant of lingering traumatic spin-offs, in Pierce's semiotics.

Lydia's ire and spitting her truth at Silas's face is one ultimate expression of her post-traumatic stress disorder. Unlike what she admits to her husband after the latter announced bumping into her violator-"Silas, I'd forgotten..." (13)-her agitation, delineated in the above quotation, is a sequel to an uncured wound, the symptoms of which are intrusiveness, reexperiencing, avoidance, hyperarousal, and hypervigilance, with a general feeling of anxiety and dysphoria. Her

conviction that Silas cannot understand what she experienced, her refusal to speak about the unspeakable, her attempt to banish it from her consciousness, give credit to Judith Herman's belief that "certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud (1992 n.p.)

These alterations of the dissociated mind of the rape victim are symbolically drawn at the horizon of Dangor's text, especially through the syntactic and semantic registers used by the voice to give another textual *designatum* of the backlashes sexual violence has on Lydia and the family. Lydia's dance on the broken beer glasses can be called a *semiosis of suffering*. Read in light of Pierce's triadic approach, it is composed of the sign (silence/coldness), the object (referent/the rape), and the interpretant (dance on the jagged glasses as symbol/*representamen* of the trauma). The three concepts at the core of Pierce's theory of semiosis always interact and interrelate, as is the case in posttraumatic stress disorder, with the cause, manifestations, and consequences of the dissociation of the body and mind of the victim.

Therefore, dancing with delicate feet on broken, bloody glasses is Lydia's non-verbal language, a semiotic expression of her desire to forget the demon of the past. However hard she tries to forget, through intrusion, the atrocities from rape are tenacious as they refuse to be buried: the desire to avoid and deny the terrible past is made impossible by the conviction that denial does not work, due to a continual reenactment (traumatic neurosis for Freud) of the dreadful event. Hence, Lydia's conflict "between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (Herman n.p.). The dancing scene is pregnant with symbolism as it sends back Dangor's text into signs of individual and family disintegration. It makes his narrative become what Yuri Tynjonov calls in his essay "on Literary Evaluation" (1927) a system with a semiotic status in relation to other historical series (or orders), implying a dynamic interplay where one system mediates meaning for another. This leads to approaching *Bitter Fruit* within "the cultural semiotic framework in which literary discourse is understood as a set of cultural texts mediated/translated through and with other cultural texts." (Kroo' 248) In other words, by bridging the ordeals suffered by Lydia and the ones of all rape victims to the cultural *con-text* underlying the narration, *Bitter Fruit* provides the system of South African culture with new textual internal translations through its poetic practice of intertextuality and intermedialitity (Kroo' 249); from a structuralist perspective, a semiotic analysis of patterns of trauma gives way to exploring the novel as a sign system by foregrounding similar objects (all rape victims of the apartheid regime, the unsung heroines of the struggle), synchronically, according to Saussure's semiological line. Thus, to highlight the historically and culturally imbued aspect of the narrative, the position given by Madeleine Laurencin must be taken at face value: "The description of the ordeal Lydia suffers is harsh and unforgiving. It forces the reader to recognize the weight of characters and of the country's past. (56). This is given credence by psychologists who often theorize trauma as an experience that is not easily represented, because the "unspeakability of trauma constitutes a pathology of history itself" (Frenkel 160), which can be interpreted, in the South African context, as a specialized language, bearing intertextual connections.

Still in on the path to seeking the *langue* of *Bitter Fruit*, the structure that allows its text to make meaning, our focus shifts, with the narrative perspective, from the couple to the bitter outcome of the rape, Mickey, to further exemplify the interrelated condition of all victims of the violation apartheid was, and through whom other signifying elements are provided about the deleterious atmosphere in the Ali abode. Reading with him the diary of his mother, we discover

> A ghost from the past, a mythical phantom embedded in the 'historical memory' of those who were active in the struggle. *Historical memory. It is a term that seems illogical and contradictory to Mickey;* Yet, it has an air of inevitability, solemn and compelling, especially when uttered by Silas and his comrades. It explains everything: the violence periodically sweeping the country, the crime rate, even the strange 'upsurge' of brutality against women. It is as if history has a

> remembering process of its own, one that gives life to its imaginary monsters. How his mother and father have received a visitation from that dark past, some terrible memory brought to life. (32, our emphasis)

The pervasive and unavoidable historical memory is, actually, the focus on the breakdown of the Ali family. In fact, the intense trauma experienced by Lydia and Silas, along with its lasting effects, is conveyed here through Mickey's consciousness. The widespread presence of historical memory in the South African context-the root cause of uncontrolled violence-is symbolically expressed through the use of the tense that defies time: the simple present. This not only allows the narrator to spotlight the tension between Silas's generation, which clings to historical memory as a semiotic object to facilitate remembrance and sharing experiences in the process of healing, and Mickey's different perspective, but it also underscores the cultural and psychological disparities involved.

Thus, the unwarm condition of Silas, Lydia and Mickey is an allegorical image, a sign system representing three crucial stages in the country's historical evolution. From Pierce's semiotics, Silas, as *representamen* of former anti-apartheid activists, who look back in time, is an *interpretant* of South Africans holding desperately on to memories to avoid the challenging and uncertain reality after the official end of racial discrimination; Lydia symbolizes the many unsung preys to white repression who pluck up courage to face their so-long stifled traumas, through different avenues; and Mickey, 'the bitter fruit' of the violation of the mother/country, is a sound-image that signifies the youth, lost bitter fruits of the system, less blissful by the political transformation, alienated from family and society and who slip into zones of violence.

In this way, shifting the narrative perspective from one character to another, placing the reader at the heart of a textual web of accounts of the same experience-the sexual abuse of Lydia and its lifelong impacts - is a sign system activated by the author to encode the *langue* of his text. This is done through a large use of the technique of psycho narration, which opens the door to the minds of characters to foreground the mental dissociation caused by the traumatic experiences that have befallen the family and nation. A telling illustration is in this section of the narrative where Lydia's posttraumatic stress not only triggered inclement family environment but also utterly destroys couple life which progressively drifts away to fall into unbearable silence, to such a point that "their time spent together passed quietly, each one reading on their, or listening to their own music through earphones or in their separate sanctuaries." (61) This humdrum family life, expressed through the continuous regime of the verbs in the passage is actually a *representamen* of the general condition of South Africans in the transition, lost, disconnected, and paining to give meaning to the new political system. The silence and separation in their 'sanctuaries' are symbols of a persistent separation between racial communities, consequent to past traumas. Reading this passage as a semiotic pattern of past traumas for the whole county is all the more grounded because, as Luckhurst rightly puts it in his seminal work *The Trauma Question*, "the traumatic memory persists in a halflife, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in our time". (81) Each moment of the past stubbornly clings to the affected mind of Lydia, Silas, Mickey, to South Africans, who pain to forget, a sign of trauma-born trouble in which "the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them." (Caruth 151) These intrusive images and thoughts repeatedly imposed and thus making it difficult for Lydia to explain to her husband what it's like to be raped is, in reality, a symbolic pattern of South Africa's difficulty to give words to moral wounds. On this, we partly concur with Meg Samuelson's interpretation when she avers that with her words flung to her husband,

> Lydia breaks the gender divide that names what happens to men's bodies as torture and what happens to women's bodies as rape. The implication is that to speak of rape within the structure of the TRC would only confirm its

production of women as the victims of sexual abuse and of sexual abuse as a special category of harm pertaining only to women." (2)

On the contrary, knowing with Elaine Scarry that rape as a form of psychological suffering does have referential content and is susceptible to verbal objectification (11), Dangor offers possibilities for the victims of sexual abuse to choose their path to therapy. This is what Lydia has done by refusing to share her story with the TRC. Instead, she uses her diary, which is a third space of enunciation (Homi Bhabha), as an alternative to get psychological aid and public confession. The diary, unfolded to the reader by Mickey, is a private space to tell what rape trauma is to her, a space of reenactment of the rape scene, where she can speak of the trauma in crude detail. In that therapeutic space, Lydia can journal the utter transformation that occurs in her life, "to speak of that which remains unspeakable within available public discourse" (Samuelson 2). Such a narrative formulation from the victim's perspective gives another swell attention to the semiotic dimension of the story in *Bitter Fruit* and the diversified use the author makes of images and other linguistic turns at the core of the narrative grammar of his text, through a well-set semantic relationships (between the signs evoked and the objects they stand for) and a pragmatic dynamic that allows discussing signs and how they can be interpreted as symbols of Dangor's commitment to bring light to the contradictions and traumas bred by apartheid. It also allows a critical exploration of his unflinching hope for a safer and more humane South African nation, which he somewhat manages to express through a hybridized use of sign systems.

IV. DANGOR, A MAPMAKER OF HOPE THROUGH AMBIVALENT SEMIOTIC PATTERNS

The discussion on the Ali family's body and mind in pain has foregrounded insights into the debilitating effects of sexual assault during the anti-apartheid struggle. The set of semiotic images explored in light of the theories of Saussure, Morris, but also Peirce, has allowed us to conclude with Frenkel that, "Dangor's texts reveal the nexus between the ambiguities of identity and the ambiguities of history that characterizes contemporary South African culture as a place of indeterminacy." (11) Truly, sexual assault is a running theme in *Bitter Fruit*, the symbolism of which is under the form of an allegory of the assault of the country as a whole by white zealots, with its mortifying consequences on the psyche of the victims, fighting to meet up with the blurred identities and contradictions that hinder the quest for reconciliation, so longed for by political leaders.

Such a cultural indeterminacy can account for the presence of ambivalent signs that whisper, at the same time, the harshness of the themes unfolded at the textual level, and a glimmer of hope sprouting, despite contradictions, uncertainties, and frustrations in the transition period. In this way, *Bitter Fruit* can be approached as *cultural semiosis* because it imbues its universe of signs with the cultural realities of South African society. Indeed, unlike the somewhat rigid structural perspective-"that language is *nonreferential* because it doesn't refer to things in the world but only to our concepts of things in the world" (Tyson 256)-Dangor disseminates in his story a system of signs that endlessly interact and interrelate with other signs "out there", (as *sign-events*), and in the minds (as *thought signs*), following Peircean semiosis. These signs are nothing outside the entire community of sign producers and processors to which South Africans belong (Merrill 3). The multilayered rhetorical turns and linguistic systems that wrapped the thematic line of the story is the product of Dangor's commitment to read and interpret the South African culture-world at the time of the transition; "he fashioned semiotic patterns that not only translate the traumatic experience lived by the family and nation, but also that constitute a *representamen* of the historical condition, the sign vehicle as Morris labels it.

Knowing that no "sign is a full-blown sign without all the signs for they are all interdependent, and they incessantly engage in interrelated interaction with one another (Merrell 2), it will be more relevant to explore Dangor's atypical technique to express hope, through a sign system that seems to

suggest, at the surface level, the difficulty for his fellow citizens to step out of the zone of racial conflict, but which, at an underlying level, is a resounding expression of his optimism as far as the future is concerned. This ambivalent nature of the sign system in *Bitter Fruit* can be dissected through the variable analysis of the sign conducted by Pierce, combined with Jacques Derrida's deconstructive theory, informed by Bakhtin's polyphonic method of text analysis. Should we recall it, while Peirce, in his work, sets out to develop the idea of the sign's mediary role, because he was convinced that there is no immediacy of the sign, as Cartesian philosophy postulated it, of which we can have immediate consciousness, Derrida demonstrated, first in *Of Grammatology* and in *Positions* (1981) that the sign (at the core of language, culture, human being, literature and even identities) is dynamic, ambiguous, and unstable, continually disseminating possible meanings, because of the interplay between language and the construction of meaning. Consequently, if, as Peirce posited, the concept of mediation resists taking signs in a rigid binary correspondence with their respective objects as they are in the here and now, a literary text like *Bitter Fruit* is made, according to deconstruction theory, of multiple, overlapping, and conflicting meanings in dynamic, fluid relation to one another and to us. (Tyson 259) The consequence of such dynamic interrelationships is an ambivalent and shifting meaning of semiotic patterns of trauma in the story that resist what Derrida refers to as the "myth of presence."[6]

The following examples from the story serve as evidence of the impossibility of interpreting symbols and other semiotic images of the trauma experienced by the Ali family and the country in a fixed and immediate manner. It rather calls for a mediatory reading of the signs and their ever-shifting signifying system, because, should we repeat it with Derrida, "language has two important characteristics: (1) its play of signifiers continually defers, or postpones, meaning, and (2) the meaning it seems to have is the result of the differences by which we distinguish one signifier from another.[7]

What strikes the competent reader of *Bitter Fruit* is a constant shift between tenses, in the temporal axis of the narrative, shown in tense change between "past" and present." Dangor appropriates the position of French theorist Roland Barthes, who stipulates that the role of the writer is to tackle the why of the world in a how-to-write. In this way, attention should be put on this unstable verbal regime that is, actually, a sign of hybrid narration at the first level, impersonal (with the past tense, recalling historical events) that constitutes underlying elements of the narration, at the second level (with the timeless present tense) where characters are monologuing. The interpretation of the signifying system of this change in tenses can be expanded to infer that the breaks in the temporal line of the story are semiotic patterns suggesting the rape victims' inability to control the continuity of life after the trauma. One telling example is when Mikey's psycho narration is disclosed to the reader after having discovered that he is the bitter fruit of the rape (30). Such a traumatic experience is expressed through a Mickey cloaked in deep silence, the symbol of South Africa itself, at the moment, lost in a transitional condition, unable to reconcile with himself and his family. The discovery is a sign, representing the trauma borne by South African youth during that tumultuous period, from which the reader-interpretant can infer, following Peirce's triadic semiotics, uncertainty about the future that lies ahead.

More importantly, knowing that the sense made of the sign is in the mind of the observer (*Sanford Encyclopedia*, online), another meaning can be

[6] Derrida delineates his deconstruction ideology, the opposition between speech and writing, which he considers a manifestation of the logocentrism at the core of Western culture. Through the latter concept, he infers the general assumption that a certain homogenized truth exists priorly to and independently of its representation by linguistic signs. Such a logocentric approach to truth and reality as existing outside language derives in turn from a deep-seated prejudice in Western philosophy, which Derrida features as "myth or metaphysics of presence", a process that fundamentally ignores the crucial role of absence and difference in the conceptualization of such phenomena as truth, identity, and reality.

[7] Derrida combines the French words for "to defer" and "to differ" to coin the word *différance,* which is his name for the only "meaning" language can have.

inferred: the *representamen*, which is the discovery that he is the child of sexual abuse, stirs in the young man an existential quest, symbolized by his decision to step out of the comfort zone of his family house and to go and roam the street of Soweto. Indeed, conscious with Judith Herman that a consideration of the past is a prerequisite to heal from psychological trauma, Michael, who shuns the sobriquet Mickey, which is itself a semiotic image of a new personhood-"like traumatized people [needs] to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future" (n.p.)

Thus, through the technique of the story in the story, a large window is opened to the story of Hajera, aged sixteen, a distant relative of the Ali family, raped by a British officer. This is a second-level narration through which the reader listens to the story, mediated through Michael's consciousness, told by Moulana Ismail (198-204-205), where the 19-year-old man realizes that rape was a long-time weapon used not only to dampen resistance but also as a sign to represent power dynamics, in colonial India. We learn along with Michael that

> In the middle of all this historical ennui-how else can I describe it?-a British officer, a lieutenant, rapes Ali Ali's sister. She is sixteen years old, one year younger than Ali Ali. Her name is Hajera (...). Of course, no action is taken against the soldier! He is English, he is white, and a commissioner officer! Untouchable! No one believes Hajera. (...) Ali Ali decides to act. He manages to get a message to the officer, through one of the Indian workers (...) The officer goes, hoping to pay another bribe. (...) They meet in the same mango grove where Hajera used to walk, on the banks of the river where she sat dreaming of another world. They find the officer, days after he has been reported missing, hanging from a tree, his hand bound by his back. Ali Ali flees away from Bombay, in the opposite direction to the one the British think he will take. (200-1-2)

The use of the timeless tense, the simple present, is a fully-fledged semiotic image that implies a shared method used in all regions where the subaltern, to borrow Spivak's term, are subjected to silence through rape. Hajera's story is the only one among many dishonored women, violated, and left with lifelong scars from abuses inflicted by those in power. Such a story can symbolize sexual violence, if interpreted as Pierce suggests, through the interaction between what it signifies in the South African context (as a form of subjugation) and its interpretation and object. In other words, in India and South Africa-where there is colonial rule and resistance to domination-rape was an unconventional weapon, a carefully considered technique at the core of power relations between oppressor and oppressed. Indeed, Moulana Ismaila's powerful words echo in Michael's mind:

> There are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating their women. It is an ancient form of genocide. It does not require a Sufi prophecy to see the design in that. *The Romans and the Sabine Women, the Nazis and Jewish women in the concentration camps, the Soviets in Poland, Israeli and Palestinian refugees, white South African policemen and black women*. (my emphasis)
>
> You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children. (204)

The enumerative style of the passage (highlighted here) is a literary device used to drive at the repetition and even trivialization of a means of using women's bodies as a terrain to inscribe lifelong sign patterns of trauma. Their bodies serve as a means to conquer a nation through rape, but more importantly, they can also be interpreted as a sign that stimulates and emulates Michael in his quest for justice. The story of Hajera, then, functions as a catalytic semiotic system with an ambivalent meaning for the young man. First, he has now fully understood the past and has begun to confront his present traumatic experience, aiming to face the future with peace, like Ali Ali. As he listens to the story of Ali Ali, Michael endorses the mission to seek justice

through regenerative violence, "to negotiate and recreate his uncomfortable identity as a child conceived in shame and terror." (Mafe 114) Second, he believes that the last cancerous seeds of the past, symbols of apartheid, must be uprooted to foster hope for the future. In this context, the killing of his genitor, Du Boise (253), is narrated in a straightforward style that involves the reader. The killing regenerates the dislocated identities-the bitter fruits of abuses inflicted by those wielding power over the more vulnerable community segments. After the murder of his father, his "heritage," he whispers, unwanted, imposed, "his" history, "his" beginning (276), Michael, the bitter fruit, the bastard, is dead and is reincarnated into a new version—"Noor/light" (277), the seed of a new identity. Such a new name, expressed in an indirect thought, adds to the ambivalent nature of the story, which allows a dialogic interpretation: *Noor* is a sign of an assumed hybrid identity; "Even at its most private and silent, that is nonetheless a dialogue between [Micheal's] self at one moment and [his] oncoming self of the next moment." (Merrel 12)

Still, the ambivalent image of Michael the justice seeker can be read differently, in a Peircean and Derridean perspective, especially when connected to the fleeting nature of the sign, which automatically leads to the instability, and even *(im)possibility* of constructing a new identity in the South African context. Jacques Derrida, in his ideology about the deconstruction of human identity, rightly believes

> that by the language we speak, and because all language is an unstable, ambiguous force-field of competing ideologies, we are, ourselves, unstable and ambiguous force-fields of competing ideologies. The self-image of a stable identity that many of us have is really just a comforting self-delusion, which we produce in collusion with our culture, for culture, too, wants to see itself as stable and coherent when in reality it is highly unstable and fragmented. (in Tyson 257)

If in Peirce's *infinite semiosis*, "the importance of the interpretation (…) is that signification is not a simple dyadic relationship between sign and object [because] a sign signifies only in being interpreted" (Stanford), this argumentation of Derrida holds ground in the context of South Africa, where the quest for a new identity seems daunting for the young like Micheal. The instability of the social and cultural fabric, born from the conflicting ideologies between apartheid upholders and combatants, but subsequently between the new authorities and the younger generation, leads to the fragmented personhood of the latter, who no longer know on which foot to stand. Therefore, it is the meaning, the signifying element (Peirce), and not the quest itself that is more important. In the same vein, Michael's determination to deconstruct what his person symbolized before he knows the truth about his birth and reconstruct himself is part of the healing process from a traumatic family/social past, the sequel of which still follows him in his street roaming. This is articulated in monologues and questioning-"a written manifestation of doubt, incomprehension, a request for an explanation…" (Aiuthier-Revuz)-that are signs of posttraumatic stress disorder, but also in his social bonding with his friend Vinu, a victim of incest, and Moulana Ismaila. Judith Herman rightly posits that "to hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victims and that joins victims and witnesses in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers and family." (n.p.)

In the story, Lydia's transformation from victimhood to healing is also expressed through a double-meaning sign system that avoids strict correspondence between the signs used to depict her healing journey and the signifiers, and whose meaning, within the narrative context, is always fleeting and variable. In the reconceptualization of rape in new feminism, it is argued that rape is a form of violence that destroys the person's sense of self, yet from which the survivor can recover. Dangor reinterprets this core belief by creating a character who is found in the darkest part of her life but becomes a woman who fully embraces her past and is aware of her new identity. Her directly quoted thought, "only women, wombed beings, can carry the dumb tragedy of history around with

them" (251), serves as a symbol of a more confident woman on her way to recovery, and also as a sign of her acceptance and subsequent healing from past trauma. Let's consider this part of her routine:

> "She *sips the tea she has made - ritually heating the teapot, spooning in the exact measure of green leaves, inhaling the jasmine fragrance* (…) She would also sleep with someone younger now, if he – or she- could offer their bodies *unselfishly as her instrument of release*. From the years, the decades of sexual hunger, a simple, unadorned and unpretentious tapping of the swollen darkness, bruised, discoloured, of the place in which she has imprisoned her sensuality. She no longer needs to protect herself from her rapist, from her husband's fierce but all transient desires. She wants now to be lowered into an *abyss of the flesh*, *unquestioned and unquestioning*, to descend as if she is drowning, she wants the death of her sexual being, and thinks it could only happen dramatically, sinful and sinned against, sacrificed like Sister Catherine on the Cross of her Christ's disembodied lust. (Dangor 248)

This long psycho narration directly quoted by the voice is the ultimate expression of Lydia's long way to psychological recovery from trauma and her total break away from rape trauma syndrome. The sign of the slow but progressive recovery, wrapped in a curative silence, is hinted at in the meaningful routine (*sips the tea she has made - ritually heating the teapot, spooning in the exact measure of green leaves, inhaling the jasmine* fragrance) she builds around herself, and which is delineating her determination to take back her social, cultural, and sexual life in hand. The passage shows not only her decision to no longer let her abductor traumatize her but also it can be further interpreted as the imposition of her own therapeutic method: to sleep with someone younger, (…) to quench the decade long sexual hunger, "a simple, unadorned and unpretentious tapping of the swollen darkness, bruised, discoloured, of the place in which she has imprisoned her sensuality." Through this, Dangor's text can be approached as a narrative language system that defies Western psychological assumptions holding that the victim of rape trauma can only be cured through well-established 'scientific' methods. Instead, through Lydia, the author believes that the victim-survivor can overcome the burdensome past through a conversion, a confession to themselves. The narrative option to foreground the character's thought, wrapped in the present tense, is another telling sign that symbolically whispers that now she has a greater command of her emotions, motivated by her dogged will to free herself from the swamp of smothering social and cultural expectations. Lydia moves from a haunted subject to a full actor of her sexual life; from an eerie past life to a more peaceful one. He is conscious that her desire can only be fulfilled through an "unquestioned and unquestioning sexual relationship.

This is suggested in the enumerative allure and imperative verbal regime of this other thought of hers directly reported by the narrative voice: "Hand Silas his heritage, say, something short and profound, kiss him on the cheek, then walk away, free of him and his burdensome past." (251) These elements of narrative grammar of the story are *representamen* of the Lydia's fraught relationships with Silas, based on the conviction that he is part of the object that caused her trauma. Thus, in her will to deconstruct the old Lydia and to construct the new one, Silas, symbolizing the haunting days of the past, must be effaced. This is another expression of the ambivalent meaning of the semiotic image of trauma at the textual level in *Bitter Fruit*. Although Silas, following Pierce's ideology, is a textual semiotic sign, symbolizing the victims of the apartheid repressive apparatus, for Lydia, Silas's inactivity translates the *dynamical object* (the *denotatum*, according to Morris) of the inevitable dislocation of the couple. That is the reason why she does not shiver to step into "transgressive" sex publicly. This is how the narrator, using an iterative design, draws a painstaking image of Lydia's sexual intercourse with a young man, the agent of her freedom from sexual dormancy:

> *He remembers Lydia lying on the billiard table, that young Mozambican, Joao, perched above her, birdlike, a heron, uncommonly black, his awkwardness given grace by her arched body. Silver shadows lighting up the loveliness of their coupling: green upon her olive skin, deep blue against his dark, dark back*. She held him, no more than that, moored him, as if to prevent him from drifting into space, his head in her hands, whispering in his ear, as if instructing him in the art of sex. On the other side of the room, lit up by a full moon, stood Silas, staring intently, like a voyeur. Then he stumbled away, as if intoxicated. (Dangor 268-9)

The nominal structure opening the passage, introduced by the verbum dicendi "remembers", indicates a meticulous rendering of the action of lovemaking, and these are syntactic elements that infer the passion that drove Lydia in the act. The narrative choice, to come back, through the son's perspective, to the scene of Lydia's releasing sexual act is another way for the narrator to reveal that the event was at the same time so liberating for Lydia, so shameful for the husband, as well as so indifferent to Micheal, who no longer feels a sense of belonging with the 'family'. This "adulterous" act of love, which is, according to Silas, Lydia's "public declaration of freedom" (272), is wrapped in an evocative style, (asyndetic enumerative structure, "birdlike, a heron, uncommonly black (...) body"), framed with intensifiers ("*dark, dark back*"), and other animal images that constitute grammatical devices expressive of the intensely healing nature of the sexual intercourse. The overall structure of the passage (short cut and enumerative) keeps pace with the mating couple and Michael's eyes watching his mother's uncommon "boldness grudging but irresistible" (266).

The iterative mode of presenting the scene takes on a new allure when relayed by Silas; it is composed of a set of questions that are both a sign of the husband's agitation and a certain tranquility raised in him by the recovery of his wife (272)

Therefore, Lydia is no longer the embodiment of the caught moon, the victims of sexual abuse evoked in the first part of our discussion. She has become a full-blown moon, an ambivalent image that translates Dangor's shifting images to give body to his hope, and through which he calls the bitter fruits of South Africa's past demons to bear on retributive acts and engage the demanding process of healing.

The sexual relationship with the young man, which is the verbalization of her psychological recovery, can be further interpreted, following Peirce and Derrida's postulates. The love scene is a reflection of Peirce's infinite semiosis of the sign itself, as the multifocalised approach to present it supposes a plurality of meanings and interpretations, if we refer to Derrida's ideas in *différance*. If it is true that in Peirce's semiotic model, "the interpretant is created by the observer, the object is not given, but inferred, this makes a sign's meaning highly dependent on context (San Diego). Thus, it can be the object of a context-bound interpretation, through which Dangor, as both a detached and committed observer of his society's walk from doom to gloom, seems to whisper that each South African woman victim of sexual abuse should have the liberty to define their own way to deal with the traumatic experience, to meet the challenge of the present and look ahead to the future. Thus, the question of sex itself is highly symbolic in the narrative world of Dangor; through it, he sends snippets of his optimistic vision, based on an ambivalent approach to the possibilities for national reconciliation. From a sign bearing subversive overtones to a signifier of renewal with life and intimacy, sex (the consensual one with the young Mozambican) has helped Lydia survive rape trauma syndrome. Its ambivalence can be further expanded to explain that, by representing the question of sex as a therapy to address and eventually redress the tragic history of his country, Dangor takes his narrative as a pretext to map the road that should lead to a brighter future. This is further accounted for by the symbolic connection that can be made between Lydia's journey to an unknown and yet safer place and South Africa's one, a journey where "time and

distance, even this paltry distance, will help to free her. Burden of the mother. Mother, wife, lover, lover-mother, lover-wife, unloved mother…", free from past demons. The motif of the journey is another encoded expression of the author's hope that is dissonant with the cold and close textual patterns of trauma at the surface level of the narrative, through which the author refuses to turn a blind eye to a certain unidirectional option for healing that is proposed to victims, through the TRC. However, beneath that apparent coldness of the text lies his unflinching hope, symbolically designed in the open-ended aspect of the story. In this way, Laurencin is right to affirm that Dangor, compared to other writers of the period, "has a much more positive vision. The ambiguous citation of Leonard Cohen's *Last Year's Man at the end* of *Bitter Fruit*, provides the reader with an interpretative key to the novel." (58-9) This paratextual inscription-the song-is highly symbolical as it sets the primal step for the author's quest for reconciliation: he is calling his fellow countrymen to carry the burden of the past, should they want, like Lydia, "to claim for themselves the metaphor of past and future from last year's labor to tomorrow's crops." (Laurencin 59) *Bitter Fruit*, then, straddles between the rigid structural binary division of the South African world under apartheid, reflected in the textual patterns of trauma and the more flexible, open, and fleeting realities symbolized by the ambivalent signs swarming the story, through which the author is mediating the possibilities for traumatized individuals and communities to deal with the past.

V. CONCLUSION

This discussion has aimed to analyze Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* through semiotic principles, seeking to decode the underlying sign system that shapes the surface meaning of the troubled transition period in his country. The analysis shows that his narrative revolves around signs that symbolically represent the intense suffering and experiences of characters dealing with the brutality of apartheid, whose lingering effects are still felt both individually and collectively. By integrating ideas from Peirce, Saussure and Morris, the discussion has tackled the complex question of the trauma of characters who endure pain to rise above the chaos of the transition era. Through a cross-analysis of literary semiotics and trauma theories, the study demonstrates that the characters' bodies and minds in pain serve as a signifying system reflecting the widespread feeling of angst affecting and afflicting South Africa. As a skilled writer, Dangor constructs signs that act as symbols addressing the urgent issue of national reconciliation and identity in a multicultural society. Using the Ali family as the representamen of the entire nation, the story initially depicts the breakdown of family and national ties, but also reveals what the author strongly believes are the prerequisites for reconciliation: the crucial need for individuals and communities to confront past demons directly and in their own ways if they hope to recover from the dissociative trauma caused by abuses like rape and other dehumanizing methods used by the repressive apartheid system. In this way, Dangor challenges the approach of the TRC, expressing this counterposition through various fleeting signs in the story, implying that South Africans, in general, still hold many possibilities for rebirth from the system's oppressive grip.

The ambivalent aspects of the sign system, deciphered through Peirce's semiosis approach informed by deconstruction ideas, have led us to foreground the open-ended aspect of the story, which is the ultimate expression of the author's unblinking faith in the future, after the transition. Such an open-ended closure, reminiscent of Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, is a symbol of his role as mapmaker of truth and justice seeker, who needs, like Michael/Noor, to explore other horizons, but also his decided will, along fellow writers like André Brink, to become the sensitive point of his community, the torch bearer, as Achebe has it, that should walk his community from the throes of apartheid to the more clement spaces. As cold and painful images of trauma seem to be at the surface level of the text (symbolizing the binary rigidity of the racist system and the lingering social tension in the new democracy), the underlying signs, beneath the text and composing the *langue* of the story, analysed from a deconstructionist perspective, are

interpretants of a loud yet unsaid optimism that counters the unspeakable trauma suffered by characters. By their polyphonic meanings, the system of signs, in *Bitter Fruit,* like deconstruction theory, "defies institutionalization in an authoritative textual paradigm." (Turner, "Jacques Derrida", online) In a parallel thought flow, the symbols of characters' recovery from trauma, and their construction of a hybrid identity (through Micheal's reincarnation into Noor), and the author's optimism, "overturn the hierarchy imposed by any system of dominance of one particular way of thinking over others, and belies the idea of fixed meaning, overturning, and therefore exposing, the existence of the binary and destabilizing previously fixed categories of understanding" the South African society. (Turner "Jacques Derrida", online) This is the artistic expression of the author's unwavering belief that all the Lydias, as *sign-agents* of the transformation from victim to survivor, are representamen of multiple possibilities offered to South Africans to not only carry the burden of the past, but also to look ahead to the future, humming a new song of life.

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