

The Road Not Travelled: Tracking Love in Frank Anthony's *The Journey*: *The Revolutionary Anguish of Comrade B*

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ABSTRACT

The Journey (1991) is a virtually unknown “struggle” novel by Frank Anthony (d. 1993), a senior member of the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA), who was incarcerated on Robben Island for six years. The novel and its author have been elided from South African history as a racialized literary establishment and the defensiveness of the resistance organization of which he was a member reinforced each other in tacit censorship. Anthony’s novel presents revealing insights into the repression of the personal in the anti-apartheid movement, which reflected the “liquidation” of love in leftist discourse of the period. The importance of love, especially romantic love—the highly volatile emotion which is often boundary-breaking and radically transformative—has been recognized in contemporary post-Marxism and critical race theory. Blindness to the potential of love in dominant struggle politics is reflected in the protagonist of *The Journey*, whose passion for social justice leads, paradoxically, to repression of the empowerment and emancipation of self(lessness) through other(s), enabled by eros.

KEYWORDS

South African novel, Frank Anthony, resistance literature, romantic love, art and politics.

I awakened from my trance state and was stunned to find the world I was living in, the world of the present, was no longer a world open to love. And I noticed that all around me I heard testimony that lovelessness had become the order of the day. I feel our nation's turning away from love as intensely as I felt love's abandonment [...]. Turning away we risk moving into a wilderness of spirit so intense we may never find our way home again. I write of love to bear witness both to the danger in this movement, and to call for a return to love. Redeemed and restored, love returns us to the promise of everlasting life. When we love we can let our hearts speak.

–From the Preface to bell hooks's *All about Love*

The revolutionist is a person doomed [obrechennyi, in older usage signifying also "consecrated"]. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution.

–Article 1 from Sergey Nechayev's
Catechism of a Revolutionist

The Journey: The Revolutionary Anguish of Comrade B, a little-known "struggle" novel by Frank Anthony, a social justice activist for the greater part of his life and prisoner on Robben Island for six years, is a work with pronounced contemporary relevance for its tracing back of political betrayal to the period of anti-apartheid resistance, as opposed to the recent phenomenon linked with career politics. In this respect, one may read the novel as a political journey, like the spiritual journey of the pilgrim in Dante's *Inferno*, to the inner circle of the netherworld, the frozen heart of hell reserved for traitors. But *The Journey* may also be read as itself a narrative of betrayal, which in its protagonist's total commitment to a hard-hearted idea of revolution, wholly purges the novel of love—romantic love, in particular, that risky, volatile and transformative emotion so intimately intertwined with the most profound radicality of revolution. In the protagonist's total commitment to revolution, one sees much bleaker shades of the author Frank Anthony's own devotion to social justice in a life of sacrifice which, for complex reasons, has been lost to history.

Frank Anthony (1940–1993) embodied an uncompromising allegiance to non-racism and social equality in his life. His politicization occurred early, while he was still at Lückhoff High School, an apartheid-designated "Coloured" school in the rural town of Stellenbosch. There he was

taught history by Ronnie Britten, a member of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM, later Unity Movement) (Luiters). Anthony met and married Lorraine Britten, the sister of Ronnie Britten, with whom he had two daughters, Renée and Lynn (Luiters). Through Britten, Anthony also joined the NEUM, which was later affiliated with the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA). Anthony met, and subsequently, after his divorce, married fellow APDUSA member and message courier, Valma Abrahams (Valma Anthony). Anthony's son from his second marriage, Richard, was born one month after his father's death from a heart attack in Cape Town (Valma Anthony). Anthony remained a member of APDUSA until he was expelled for his exposure of the ineptitude and centralization of power among the leadership, expressed, in part, in his allegorical novel. Anthony, who was fully bilingual and had a keen interest in literature and culture (Valma Anthony), had previously published a collection of Afrikaans poetry, *Robben Eiland: My Kruis, My Huis*, drawing on his Robben Island prison experience. Frank Anthony has largely been lost to South African history for "party" political reasons, and rendered invisible to South African literature in English and Afrikaans, partly because of the racially inflected ways in which literary value gets assigned.

Anthony was arrested and convicted in April 1972 on four counts under the Terrorism Act, along with fourteen other men, also members of the Unity Movement and APDUSA, in the Pietermaritzburg Magistrate's Court, in what came to be known as "The Maritzburg Trial" (Unity Movement of South Africa). After spending three months in Leeuwkop Prison in Johannesburg, he was incarcerated on Robben Island from 6 April 1972 to 23 March 1978, before being transferred to Victor Verster Prison until 5 April 1978 (Robben Island Museum Fact-File). In terms of Act No. 44 of 1950 Sec. 9 (1), Anthony was then banned and restricted to Kraaifontein from 5 April 1978 to 30 April 1983. The *Weekend Argus* reported on the lack of job prospects for those affected by banning orders and the fact that Anthony would have to be financially dependent on his first wife, Lorraine, a nurse. The article recounts Anthony's bewilderment driving home on the day of his release from Victor Verster Prison "because all the familiar landmarks had disappeared" (Williams 8). (Anthony subsequently found work at the Brackenfell Pick n Pay Hypermarket, which fell within his area of restriction [Luiters].) In the period of his banning, Anthony was detained for a further four months from February to May 1982 under Section 22 of the General Laws Amendment Act ("Former Robben Island Man Held," 3). In the newspaper article describing Anthony's homecoming and banning, his ex-wife, Lorraine,

observes that their two daughters, both of school-going age, had been emotionally prepared by herself for their father's return, especially since the younger daughter, Renée, had been only two months old when her father was imprisoned. Anthony, who had studied at the University of the Western Cape, had been a schoolteacher at Trafalgar High School in Cape Town, and had further "obtained a BCom (Admin) degree with a major in Economics by studying through correspondence while on Robben Island" (Williams 8). The degree in commerce allowed Anthony in 1986, after his banning order had lapsed, to lecture Economics at Khanya College, a project that sought to challenge black exclusion from higher education, run by the South African Committee on Higher Education (SACHED) Trust in Cape Town and Johannesburg (Rassool, "Personal Interview").

Anthony made his literary debut in Afrikaans with *Robbeneiland: My Kruis, My Huis*, a collection of poetry, published in 1983. Anthony's poetry collection received more recognition on publication than his novel since it was noteworthy in several literary-political contexts. *Robbeneiland: My Kruis, My Huis* was the first work of Afrikaans apartheid prison literature, and received some attention, though the reception was ambivalent. The collection pushes generic boundaries, through an author's introduction that expresses the intent of the poetry to transcend the political and physical exigencies of its author's ordeal on Robben Island, which included torture (APDUSA Newsletter No. 5 n. pag.) while striving to encompass more abstract, universal themes. The grounding of the poetry in the lived reality of Robben Island is, by contrast, indicated by explanatory footnotes clarifying the quotidian experience of life on the Island. The poetry collection, thus, by its form alone, joined debates in South African literature at the time regarding the role of the writer. Is the writer's responsibility only to their art and individual vision, or should s/he bear witness through writing that is relevant and committed? Reviews of the collection in the popular media at the time pick up on the trans-generic impulses of the work both negatively (JHP, Marais, Britz, Cloete) and positively ("Op die Boekrak," Esterhuysen). Negative reviews deplore the collection's lack of literary merit, finding that the work is redeemed only by providing an insider's view of Robben Island, moreover one in Afrikaans to counter the many English depictions of incarceration by the apartheid regime. A review that stands out for the wrong reasons presents the racially toxic, but strangely generous, opinion that Anthony's "poems do have merit," and that they "clearly reveal someone of intellectual capacity, presumably a coloured person whose subjection to prison life has left him wholly unrepentant" (Kromhout 8). The reviewer goes on to suggest that it is a voice "in fluent, educated Afrikaans, of an avowed



Frank Anthony and Walter Sisulu gardening on Robben Island.
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revolutionary seeking to speak beyond the confines of Robben Island for political malcontents universally” (Kromhout 8). The prodigious Afrikaans writer, André P. Brink, using a more sophisticated idiom, makes the same observations as most other reviewers. Brink asserts that the significance of the work lies in its composition in the language of Afrikaans, noting that the survival of Afrikaans will depend on its evolution as a revolutionary language, a language of protest (40), rather than as the language of the oppressor. Another Afrikaans writer, Jan Rabie, makes much the same point, avoiding the minefield of questions of literary standards and quality. P. J. J. Conradie’s scholarly article on the collection deftly relocates the debate from questions of ethics and aesthetics to a constructivist stance recommending that the conditions of emergence and existence of the work be considered instead (9). The reception of Anthony’s poetry collection, which largely found merit in the fact that it was written in Afrikaans, may have led Anthony to conceive of his next, bigger literary project as a work to be written in English.

The writing of Anthony’s novel *The Journey* was inspired by its author’s experience as a longstanding member of APDUSA, his imprisonment, and his commitment to the central political principles of the revolution as defined by APDUSA. As a result of the controversy created by the novel’s trenchant criticism of APDUSA’s central leadership, Frank Anthony’s presence and contribution have been entirely expunged from the organization’s website. APDUSA was formed in 1961 as an affiliate of the Non-European Unity Movement, informed by the principles of “seeking to build black political unity” to “overthrow [...] white supremacism,” of non-collaboration and boycott of all racist institutions, and of placing “the land question at the centre of the liberatory struggle in South Africa” (Kayser and Adhikari 5). Isaac Bangani Tabata was elected president of APDUSA at its first national conference in Cape Town in 1962 but, by 1964, Tabata had been forced into exile in Lusaka, and then later Harare. Shortly after its formation, APDUSA began recruiting members in the Western Cape, especially in the Boland towns of Franschhoek and Pniel, but also Anthony’s hometown of Stellenbosch. By the late 1980s, Anthony seems to have become increasingly frustrated by the lack of political progress being made in South Africa. He embraced APDUSA’s recognition of the need to shift to armed struggle and was supposed to have led a group of recruits across the border to be trained (Valma Anthony). He decided first to make the journey solo to test the APDUSA organizational infrastructure, thus lessening the risks to recruits (Valma Anthony). It was when he made this trip out of South Africa to meet the leadership in exile that he realized many obstacles to political progress were actually

internal to APDUSA itself. These obstacles were shoddy organizational infrastructure, and, crucially, the decline of former icon, I. B. Tabata, as well as the authoritarian leanings of the leadership that surrounded him.

Ciraj Rassool, historian and scholar of South African political biography and autobiography, proposes that the drift to autocracy was inherent in APDUSA's paternalistic structure:

The ambiguities of affinity and authority, of enablement and obedience are characteristics of the institutions of the family and the school, both of which are useful metaphors for understanding the rituals and relations that unfolded in the political organizations that Tabata was associated with. The position of mentor and advisor which Tabata adopted was often like that of a father figure in a social unit that in many ways resembled a family.

("Making and Challenging" 150)

Caught in the maelstrom of the struggle, the narrator in Anthony's novel lacks the distance to attribute the fall of his hero into an Ubuesque tyrant to anything other than senility and personal corruptibility. It is this fictional representation of the leader that resulted in Anthony's becoming a persona non grata in APDUSA, an experience tracked by Rassool. APDUSA's response to the novel saw the author reviled and then expelled, and the book itself suppressed. This had much the same effect as South Africa's harsh censorship laws, although ironically—unlike many comparable novels—*The Journey* was not banned. In a further irony, APDUSA's denialism and the racially modulated South African literary scene combined to make Anthony's novel, and Anthony himself, "disappear" from the historical and literary archive, perhaps even more effectively than what the apartheid censors might have achieved on their own.

Both Rassool and the APDUSA leadership that condemned the novel read *The Journey*, which was published shortly after the death of Tabata, as autobiographical and factual. Comrade B, the protagonist in the novel, is taken to be Anthony himself, and Comrade Chair is read as Tabata. Rassool finely tracks the stages of disillusionment of Anthony/Comrade B on his visit "to meet the man of legend, his hero Tabata" (Rassool, "The Individual" 485), culminating in the recognition of "someone who 'had become reduced to the crustaceous remains of his once pregnant voice'" (Rassool quoting Anthony, "The Individual" 487). In an effort to commandeer the biography of the APDUSA president, its remaining leadership produced a story of Anthony's mental illness to account for

his denunciation of “party and prophet.” Rassool mentions a “critique” of *The Journey* by Tabata’s partner, Jane Gool, where she refers to the novel as a “strange and disturbing” book, which is “an exorcism of a mind plagued and tormented by a host of sick visions” (“The Individual” 488). The narrative of Anthony’s psychic breakdown is expanded in 2010 in a lengthy APDUSA rebuttal, six years after the appearance of Rassool’s PhD, where the controversy was first broached in a scholarly context. Although the rebuttal is published anonymously, it was, in fact, authored by Kader Abdool Hassim, a Natal-based member of APDUSA, who is referred to in Anthony’s novel as Moonsami, the only character given a name rather than a *nom de guerre*, making him stand out as potentially problematic. The pamphlet, published as a special issue of *Apdusa Views*, the organization’s newsletter, suggests that, relying upon the “insanity-drenched pages of Frank Anthony’s book ‘The Journey’ (sic)” (“Rebuttal” 4), Rassool made sure that “[a]ll the worst vices of politicians, especially those from the Third World [...] were visited on Tabata’s head,” including “[s]enility, mental degeneration, [and] abandonment of the revolutionary struggle.” The rebuttal shows how “Rassool scrapes the barrel by relying on a dubious ‘work of fiction’ by Frank Anthony” (8), offering a lengthy critique of the novel as it is contrasted with the “facts” as the author perceives them. The novel is described as a “pouring out of all the nauseating contents of a gigantic carbuncle” with no one in the organization escaping being vilified except “Comrade Z, Frank’s *girl* for whom he left wife, children and South Africa” (emphasis added, 24). Again, the rationale given for Anthony’s deprecation of the organization and its leader is his state of mind: “the writer is deeply mentally disturbed or is describing a deeply mentally disturbed character” (25). Because of the strong autobiographical overlap between Anthony’s life and the book, these interpretations read the narrative for evidence of biography and political history, regarding the representation as either capturing or distorting the real facts of lives and times.

By contrast, the minutes of Ravan Press meetings show that *The Journey* was considered for publication wholly as a work of fiction, a novel. The manuscript was first tabled for consideration in September 1989 and was discussed at monthly meetings till June 1990. It was assessed by Peter Randall, one of the founding figures of the anti-apartheid publishing house, as well as Ivan Vladislavić, the multi-award-winning South African author, distinguished for his experimental narrative techniques. The minutes of the first meeting record that Randall found the novel “interesting” (Ravan Minutes 13 September 1989) and that Vladislavić, at the November meeting, having done a partial reading, “was very

impressed thus far” (17 November 1989). A decision regarding acceptance was made quite quickly thereafter—at the December meeting, the minutes of which also indicate that Peter Randall would do a first edit, followed by a second round of editing by Vladislavić. Randall reports at the January meeting that editing was “more difficult than anticipated” (Ravan Minutes 10 January 1990), but by the middle of March, the manuscript was ready to be sent to Anthony for “corrections and comment” (Ravan Minutes 15 March 1990). Vladislavić was tasked with proposing the blurb and an idea for the cover (Ravan Minutes 14 June 1990), and the book was planned to be ready for print by the end of September 1990. The minutes suggest that, to the editors, the literary quality and interest of the work were beyond doubt, which is evident also from the speed with which the book was taken through production and publication. Even though, as discussed above, the novel has been read as thinly-veiled autobiography, or as a political critique of APDUSA, Vladislavić remarks that, “[a]lthough the minutes don’t specify a category for the book, I don’t think there was ever any doubt in my mind that it was a novel, one that clearly drew on the writer’s personal experience, as novels do” (email correspondence with the publisher, 19–30 August 2022).

Anthony’s novel has not to date been the subject of literary scholarship, and there were only three reviews in the popular media at the time, with one further review in a political/trade union magazine. The reviews in the popular media, both in the English and Afrikaans press are, without exception, positive. Zachariah Rapola, writing for the *Weekly Mail*, is impressed by *The Journey* as a political novel which breaks the mould of South African struggle literature for its controversial critique of political leadership, the depth of its psychological revelation, and its authenticity. (Rapola suggests, in closing, that his only criticism is of the language, which “labours for page after page” (4), a point contradicted by lyrical descriptions of nature and purple patches of philosophical insight.) JB in the *Sunday Tribune* is impressed by the “tragic humour” of the scenes that describe the protagonist’s meeting with his political hero and suggests the novel is “[a] thought-provoking read” (9). The review in the Afrikaans-language newspaper *Beeld* foregrounds the novel’s allusions to other literary journeys and compares Anthony’s *The Journey* with Gillian Slovo’s *The Betrayal*, remarkably similar in theme and published in the same year. For this reviewer, Anthony’s novel comes off the better for its “reddende satiriese inslag” (redeeming satirical insight) (my translation), which Slovo’s book seemed to lack (Nel 8).

The review in the leftwing magazine, *Work in Progress (WIP)*, is noteworthy not only because it is written by the South African poet

and political icon Jeremy Cronin, who remains a member of the central committee of the South African Communist Party, but also because the review approaches the work rigorously as literature while, at the same time, recognizing its presentation of local political history. Cronin's review, "An Ultra-Left Pilgrim's Progress," regards the novel as an important work where aesthetic choices open up the text to truths more profound than the particularities of the experience on which it appears to draw: "Frank Anthony has written a remarkable novel. Like many works of significant literature, what it discloses goes way beyond its own up-front theorizing or probable intentions. It displays, half knowingly in its structure, language and storyline, the anatomy of a certain brand of ultra-leftism" (47). Here Cronin directly links the politics presented through the literary techniques of the novel with the politics of APDUSA, but also, more broadly, a politics that can be traced back to nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary discourse and forward to contemporary national politics in many geographical contexts. (Although Cronin uses the term, "ultra-Trotskyan," this was not a term with which APDUSA directly identified, since APDUSA saw itself as Leninist in its orientation [Kayser and Adhikari 5]). Cronin identifies such politics as "a politics of the strictest and most abstract dogmatism, a politics of the straight and narrow, of walking the brink" (47). This politics for Cronin produces a dichotomy between the elision of the revolutionary subject and the total valorization of the revolution as object of endeavour. "Ultra-Trotskyan" politics tend to efface the self so that it is "abstracted out into virtual nothingness, into insularity—the Prophet Unrecognized" (48), while "over against the self as nullity, is the sweeping romantic revolutionary vista" (48). Indeed, the grand romantic revolutionary horizon of the novel is conjured up by writing which is strikingly literary, perhaps too intensely so for some tastes. The novel is also a product of aesthetic choices regarding its motifs and tropes, and its particular juxtaposition of the personal and the political.

Even though Cronin's review does not address the personal life of the protagonist at all, contemplation of the intimacies, which form such a significant part of the consciousness of the troubled hero, endorses Cronin's observations, albeit askance. Looking through the lens of an erotic politics, that is, a politics of romance rather than the aesthetic of romanticized politics, what may be observed is a slightly different critique of "ultra-Trotskyanism." Foregrounding romantic love in the novel suggests, by contrast, not the erosion of the subject, but rather the production of a hyper-individualism, which, despite the heroic resurrection of the ending, means that the lonely, loveless futility of the protagonist's vision leaves the reader cold. While the novel may be read as Anthony's insider critique

of APDUSA, which, if presented as memoir or history may have opened him up to litigation, its strongly developed literary qualities intimate a contemplation much more reflective, widening the range of suggestion well beyond parochial intra-party tensions.

Odyssey Without an Ithaca: The Revolutionary Betrayal of Comrade B

The Journey: The Revolutionary Anguish of Comrade B is a first-person narrative that centralizes the thoughts and opinions of the individual subject, the "I," through whose eyes experiences are filtered, and through whose mind's eye the past is recalled in memories and dreams. It is 1988, and Comrade B, codenamed after his nickname, "The Bear" (33), undertakes a journey by train from Bellville Station in the Western Cape, which is unlike any other journey he has made in two decades. While in the "pre-revolutionary" (1) past his journeys were to clandestine meetings all over the country to strengthen the underground networks of the political organization of which he is a member, the journey focalized in the narrative's present is a journey that will catapult the struggle for justice in South Africa into a new phase. Comrade B is the second in command of an organization whose members shun the "populist exuberance of the day" and stand "in merciless judgement on the bankruptcy of the slogans, the revivalist incantations, the 'Vivas' and 'Amandlas,'" which are seen as the "scourge" of the liberation struggle (1). Instead of these "illusions of short-term solutions and cheap hopefulness," Comrade B's journey, this time crossing the borders of the country, will precipitate the Marxist revolution anticipated by his organization, ushering in the true liberation of workers and peasants from apartheid capitalism: "What counted now was the breakthrough itself: the potential, at long last, to raise the revolutionary working class army, and therewith to launch, in earnest, the long overdue armed struggle; the potential to undermine the influence of the current militarist terrorism and anarchy which had reduced the working class and its allies to pawns in a petit bourgeois game of chess" (20). The journey is thus a mission in which the self-discovery so often associated with journeys, literal and metaphorical, is replaced by revelation about the organization to which Comrade B is committed.

The expedition is in many ways an "odyssey" (156), a term used by Comrade B himself towards the end of the narrative, when the risks, impediments, and frustrations of the prolonged journey become retrospectively exaggerated through the ultimate failure of his mission.

The first stage of the journey ends in the Northern Cape city of Kimberley, where Comrade B is met by a longstanding co-revolutionary who has gone to ground. Comrade M is described by Comrade B as a “true son of the soil,” a teacher by profession, born in the Ciskei and educated at Lovedale mission school. He had come to Cape Town to attend university, where the two young men shared their “scintillating days of political studenthood” (29). After being imprisoned for five years, Comrade M was banished by the apartheid government to the remote town of Postmasburg, where he has effectively disappeared from the political scene. The reunion of the fellow activists is joyful, and Comrade B stresses that, although Comrade M is no longer politically active, he never “surrendered his belief in the revolutionary doctrine of the movement” and continued to be a “man no revolutionary had to fear” (30). But on the trip to Postmasburg in Comrade M’s rattletrap car, Comrade B finds himself irritated by his erstwhile friend’s provincialism and “parochialism” (31). Supercilious irascibility escalates into fully-fledged antagonism when Comrade B discovers that “Moonsami,” another cadre of the organization whom he has always considered a snake, has been to visit Comrade M to sow seeds of doubt about Comrade Chair, the leader of the organization. Moonsami presents Comrade Chair to Comrade M “as an unmitigated dictator” who has “destroyed the organization by destroying all of its notable leaders” (34). This attempt to tarnish the leader, whom Comrade B reveres, reveals to him the “petty bourgeois worldview” of Moonsami and also of Comrade M, whom Moonsami has brought round to his point of view. But even more striking than Comrade B’s rejection of his former trusted friend and ally is his utter revulsion at Comrade M’s attempts to hide the abject poverty in which he has been living for the past decade, and his embarrassment at the lack of sophistication of his rural wife:

It took me long to come to the realisation that my state of shock was not in itself caused by the poverty I had witnessed [...] but by its effective concealment over more than a decade. It was not the degree of poverty or even just the poverty; it was the kind of horror that would strike one if one turned over the good-looking corpse of a friend only to discover the nausea of a million maggots writhing away underneath with their white repulsive gluttony. There was more deceit in M than I had hitherto imagined.

(50–51)

The generosity and hospitality shown by his friend against the backdrop of his destitution are entirely missed by Comrade B who concludes, viewing life only through single-minded ideology, that “the bastard [Comrade M] was unmistakably petty bourgeois” (51) since, influenced by a presumably middle-class ethic, Comrade M had tried to save face and hide his poverty instead of exposing it to show economic and political injustice. This is the first in what B perceives as a series of betrayals, provoking the “revolutionary anguish” of the title.

Perfidy, increasingly as the novel progresses, is presented as absurdity or farce. Comrade Z, the intermediary between Comrade B and Comrade Chair, meets Comrade B in Postmasburg to inform him of the arrangements made for his border crossing. He is to travel by bus from Kimberley to the border of the first neighbouring country, which he must cross illegally and make his way to the northern border, where he will receive travel documents to enter the second country, in which Comrade Chair is exiled. Comrade B explodes at the bungling of these arrangements, which will leave him exposed as an illegal immigrant in the neighbouring country. He demands that Comrade Z get clarity when she returns to Comrade Chair's base and refuses to set out on what he sees as a suicide mission. Comrade B travels by train again from Kimberley to another town near the first border, where he waits for Comrade Z's telephone call with its encoded message. Comrade Z reassures B that he will get travel documents to legitimize his presence in town Y of the neighbouring country. Crossing the border is B's rubicon, signifying the irrevocable transition from one phase of struggle to another: “Crossing a border on pain of death was, in itself, an act of supreme absurdity! But in the South African context, the crossing of a border seemed to me the necessary act of transition from passive to active revolution, the transition from the revolution of the mind to the revolution of blood” (91). The point at which the border crossing becomes an imminent reality is also the point at which the narrative seems to slow down and become less purposeful. From now on, B's journey is marked by a kind of animated suspension, beset by delays, deferrals and purposelessness. First B misses his mark. Losing track of the movement of the sun in the bus which travels along the border posts, he goes too far and then has to double back to the point he had identified for his crossing. He has thereafter a sense of “utter dislocation and rootlessness,” a sense of being a “permanent sojourner” (107). He also experiences a feeling of “futility” about whether this “mad little act” constitutes “a component of the liberation struggle” (107). The experience on the other side of the border, impacted by B's hyper-anxiety, is engulfed in an atmosphere of shrill tension. Without any foreign currency, and without any sense of how

to get to town Y, B is forced to rely on a young English-speaking peasant. B is wholly dependent on the feckless young man but is also tortured by doubts about his honesty. It is consequently in the balance whether the young man betrays B to the local police or not. B is then subjected to rounds of interrogation and incarceration by authorities at various levels, finally getting the travel document which grants him standing in the country three weeks after crossing the border.

The mounting sense of betrayal, disillusionment and absurdity reaches its apogee in B's final meeting with Comrade Chair. After his release from prison, B is finally officially recognized as a refugee and is given the travel document that will allow him to cross another border to meet for the first time with Comrade Chair. But again there is an "obstacle." The "document man" whom B holds most responsible for the delays and humiliation he has suffered, to the extent that he considers the mission a deliberate act of sabotage, instructs B to check he has "confirmation of a return clause incorporated into [his] passport or as a separate document before [he] can proceed with [his] journey" (174). This instruction from a man whom B considers the architect of his misery causes B to fly off the handle. But even B's righteous anger is an absurdity since the return clause has, in fact, been in the travel document all along. His fury is ignited again, however, when arriving at his destination, there is no one from the organization waiting to meet him as had been arranged. Despite accumulating evidence of either the incompetence or the Machiavellian authoritarianism of Comrade Chair, B holds on to the almost idolatrous image he has of the leader of his organization until the very last: "The man I was about to meet was a giant not only of my own creation. He had towered over many of his peers for as many decades as I could remember. He had silenced people with his intellectual power, the readiness of his words, the committedness of his purpose, his sheer revolutionary potency. This was the man I was now to meet with all his monumental past rising up before me like a great wall" (185). The language suggests clearly that the leader is an idol, placed upon a pedestal.

The idea that his hero may have fallen causes B the greatest anguish: "This was the man I now felt compelled by my own revolutionary committedness to censure, to challenge. How did one do a thing like that? Where did one draw the courage from, or even just the sheer audacity?" (185). Comrade B, after the perils of his journey, is received as an unwelcome pariah by the "grande dame" (185) of the organization, the wife of Comrade Chair. When B finally meets his "hero among heroes" (188), he discovers a man who is a ridiculous shadow of B's mystification of him, and who has no idea why B is there. The initial meeting is followed

by a farcical formal meeting where B has to supply the agenda and do most of the talking. B's indignation is countered at a second meeting by the ire of Comrade Chair's wife, who gaslights B by suggesting that his entire mission was unsanctioned by the organization and that he has acted like a loose cannon. After enduring several other insults, B departs by plane to the first neighbouring country, his revolutionary dreams and ambitions dashed. With the hope of revolution, and the social utopia it promised destroyed, one chapter in the anguish of Comrade B is concluded. But B still has to face the anguish of a life torn between two commitments, the commitment to revolution and the commitment to his wife and family. The focus now falls on the latter.

Love in Revolution/Loving Revolution: Liquidating an Erotics of Politics and a Politics of Erotics in *The Journey*

Comrade B is a tragic Odysseus, a diminished epic hero who thinks in terms of ideological totality and is closed off from the immanence and effulgence of meaning in his life. The potential for meaning to emerge from precious intimate relationships, which is a strongly developed alternative narrative trajectory, becomes for B, paradoxically, yet another source of anguish along the way. Comrade B enjoys the unwavering support and loyalty of a wife as well as the attention and adoration of a woman outside of his marriage. The unnamed wife is strongly developed in the novel as a faithful Penelope to B's Odysseus, an allusion echoed in Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Ndebele's meditation on the costs of struggle for Winnie Mandela in her relationship with Nelson Mandela. Comrade B's "siren song" is sung by a fellow revolutionary, identified only as Comrade Z, who, in her role and character, replicates the fidelity of a Penelope rather than the wiles of the temptresses who try to bewitch Odysseus on his journey.

Comrade B is locked in a relationship with his wife that shuttles between gratitude and guilt, once his early possessive passion is spent. In the first years of their marriage, B's jealous love for his wife leads him to behave irrationally and unfairly, so that he can now reflect that the "source of the canker" (9) was himself. He recalls an occasion when he returns home unexpectedly after a two-year period of banishment by the state, and responds violently when he sees a man helping his heavily pregnant wife at the train station. His wife is a paragon of patience and strength who capably manages this situation, and other similar ones, enabling B to recognize his unreasonableness: "Out of such repetitive defeat was born the

defence mechanism of indifference. To become immune to the devastation of jealousy, I had to learn to love less intensely. It was negative but it was effective. I knew no other way” (10). Passion is transmuted, not into a love which is comfortable and companionable, but into a steely indifference from which the relationship is ironically “saved” by B’s imprisonment for six years on Robben Island. Into the world of imprisonment, which B likens to “unadulterated barbarism” (10), steps his wife “as a truly heroic person, to minister to [his] emotional survival and sustenance” (10), while she also cares for their two children. He becomes “the utterly dependent partner in an emotionally unequal relationship, a receiver of charity” (10). His conflicted emotions cause him to perceive his wife negatively, seeing her “hold” over him as a “weapon of marriage” (10).

B, in addition, is left with a double guilt: guilt about the harm caused by jealous chauvinism, and guilt about the hardship his family endures because of his political activities. B is left in a no-man’s-land of indecision where he cannot resolve either to continue or end his marriage. It is an “ambivalence which wreaked havoc with the resolve [he] had acquired as a revolutionist, and defied [his] revolutionary consciousness” (9). Thus, when he leaves on the fateful journey he reflects:

I had left my wife and I had left my children in pursuit of the revolutionary goal. I had drawn over my head a veil of existential darkness. But it was a darkness which left me with the expectation of the penetrating light of the revolution: for my wife and our children there was only the darkness of death. Whatever was redeeming to me was no redemption at all: the dread of my family was my dread!

(8)

The love that once existed between Comrade B and his wife is in this way transformed into an emotional morass that he sees only as an impediment to his revolutionary goal. Rather than the romantic love of the devoted wife of the revolutionist inspiring him with a greater love, a love extending from the couple to wider society, he perversely forsakes love entirely in single-minded pursuit of an isolating ambition.

Paradoxically, even in a relationship outside of the conservative constraints of monogamous marriage, Comrade B is not open to the inspiration and transformation—the revolution—potentially embodied by eros. In the psychological stalemate of B’s marriage, B makes a move towards Comrade Z. B reflects that his relationship with Comrade Z “complicated” the “situation” with his wife “a million-fold.” He rues its

discovery by his wife because it “caused cataclysmic emotional upheaval in her life, shattering to witness, self-destructive to be the cause of” (27). Instead of liberating him from the tyranny he perceived his marriage to constitute, B suffers “excruciating anguish and bitter self-reproach on account of it” (27). Comrade Z is presented by B as devoted primarily to the revolutionary cause, and, through the revolutionary cause, to him, Comrade B. Sergey Nechayev, a nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary who anticipated the characterization of the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, and also influenced the political philosophy of Lenin, proposes in the first article of his revolutionary catechism, used as one of the epigraphs to this essay, that the revolutionist eradicate all other desires in the “passion for revolution.” (Nechayev is elaborating here on the principle enshrined by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*.) Even romantic passion for an idealized woman is subordinated to a patriarchal passion for revolution. Nechayev, in Article 21 of his revolutionist's catechism, lists categories of women among whom one may see shades both of B's wife and Comrade Z. In Article 21, Nechayev refers to “women who are ardent, capable, and devoted, but whom (sic) do not belong to us because they have not yet achieved a passionless and austere revolutionary understanding.” Here one recognizes the wife of Comrade B. Nechayev proposes as the pinnacle of womanhood “those women who are completely on our side—i.e., those who are wholly dedicated and who have accepted our program in its entirety.” These women, he suggests, should be regarded as “the most valuable of our treasures” since “without their help, we would never succeed.” Comrade Z is such a woman, serving as a crucial intermediary between the senior leaders in the organization, who are planning the final “convulsive” stage in the “struggle for liberation” (72), and the rank and file. B, somewhat avuncularly, notes that Z had performed her task with “almost professional efficiency and efficacy” and that he “was greatly impressed with the painstaking and meticulous manner in which she carried messages back and forth between Comrade Chair and [himself]” (72). Z performs her perilous role “with an unconcern bordering on naiveté” (73), a style she consciously cultivates to evade the attentions of the security police and their spies. B subordinates his attraction to Z and admiration for her personal qualities to the function she fulfils in the organization's infrastructure. Purporting to be impressed only by Z's official significance, B rationalizes their intimate relationship as existing mainly to minimize the risk of her selling out to the authorities: their affair provides a convincing motive for their clandestine meetings. In almost every respect, B embodies Nechayev's revolutionist whose nature “excludes all sentimentality, romanticism, infatuation, and exaltation,”

whose “[r]evolutionary passion” needs “to be employed with cold calculation” so that “the revolutionist must obey not his personal impulses, but only those which serve the cause of the revolution” (Article 7).

Comrade B’s relationship with Comrade Z could be construed punitively as “adultery,” or, transgressively, as revolutionary and liberatory, challenging the modern Western, Christian prescription of monogamous marriage for life. Adultery, as Tony Tanner, Laura Kipnis and Lisa Appignanesi remind us, is constituted in modern Western culture as an act of treachery since it fundamentally undermines the social contract of monogamous marriage at the heart of the nuclear patriarchal family. Breaching the marriage contract thus signifies a rending of the broader social fabric. But B does not read his passion for Comrade Z as possibly revolutionary in this way. Instead, his response is shaped by a Christian ethos, which, in his case, ratchets up his sense of guilt. Although B’s primary allegiance is to revolutionary doctrine, the Christianity of his childhood is seen at every level to shape his moral and imaginative world. He therefore construes his relationship with Z as sinful, even though “adultery” is a term he uses only at the very end of the narrative: “You who have left your wife and children! Your punishment will be great, and beyond endurance. Thou shalt not commit adultery!” (201). However, as we have seen, for its transgression of socially conservative norms, adultery could also be regarded as a challenge to the hierarchical, unequal exchange upon which marriage and the patriarchal, nuclear family are based. But B is closed to the ways in which a transgressive intimate relationship might, in some contexts, be revolutionary. Instead, he subordinates the personal to a political discourse that has become distinctly unfeeling.

Since B sees the love of Z, not as a “communism for two” (112), as Srečko Horvat succinctly sums up love’s revolutionary potential, but as functional within a narrowed vision of revolution, he must necessarily construe Z as a version of himself. Somewhat patronizingly, B reflects that he “was pleased with this woman whose personal sacrifices had shown me that it was not only in me and in romantic trivia that she was interested” (84). B admires the “strength of [Z’s] character [...] because in the revolutionary world romantic attachments, however serious and profound they may be, take a distinct second place to the revolutionary cause” (84). Thus, in B’s representation of the relationship with Z, we do not see the emergence of a transformed revolutionary “romantic manifesto,” such as that which Mallarika Sinha Roy observes in her study of women’s “outlaw emotions” in the Maoist Indian Naxalbari movement. There, women’s transgressions and negotiations of intimacies produce an understanding of “love and revolution [that] are not reducible to each

other but find their fullest potential in their simultaneity” (219). Roy finds that “[i]t is in the intimate romantic relationships of activists that were forged through sharing the emotional commitment to the revolutionary politics that a dissident, or outlaw reading of the [masculinist] romantic manifesto, becomes possible” (219). Neither is B’s presentation of the relationship with Z a negotiation of the complexities of romantic love in political struggle that leads to a resolution—as one sees in the novels of Kenyan Marxist novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. The tension between love and revolution may be tracked in romantic subplots in Ngũgĩ’s novels, which finally get resolved in a mutually constitutive “dialectic” of love and revolution presented in the love affair of the hero and heroine in *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngũgĩ’s final novel (Annin). Instead, in the narrative of *The Journey*, romantic love is wholly eradicated.

Z is tasked at M’s home in Postmasburg with relaying to B the final instructions for his momentous border crossing. B has a vague idea that for Z her work is a labour of love, a union of romantic desire and political commitment. By contrast, B appears to become increasingly agitated about the meeting, especially since M will meet Z. In the context of B’s “hesitation, prevarication . . . [and] uncertainty,” he says that he “would like to get Z’s visit behind [his] back” (57). Thus, a rare and fleeting opportunity for the lovers to meet is not treasured, and its passion does not ignite a shared passion for the struggle but is regarded as yet another obstacle on the journey, whose ultimate destination (in revolution) is never reached. B experiences great anxiety when Z’s bus arrives and she does not appear to be on it. But his concern is only about the communication he is supposed to receive, rather than the possible thwarting of his desire to spend time with his lover. B moves straight into operative mode and remains that way for the duration of Z’s visit. The shift to the personal is cautiously broached by Z. Looking B “in the eye,” she asks, “[s]hall we have time together, at all?” (82). B responds, practical to the last, that they will have a little time on that day, and a short period on the next day. However, these brief intimate interludes are not considered, even briefly, in the narrative urgency to return to the arrangements for the ultimately futile journey. In this respect, the aesthetic choice made by Anthony is very different from the approaches of novelists J. M. Coetzee, André Brink, Lewis Nkosi and Nadine Gordimer, writing at roughly the same period in South African history. Emily S. Davis asks in her study of global intimacies: “[a]t such a politicized moment both at home and abroad, in which mass protest and targeted public violence had become key organizing strategies, how do we interpret the decision [of the authors identified] to maintain a focus on the

very element so often defined against politics—the realm of interpersonal desire?” (28). She suggests that

sexuality [which is a key element of eros] plays such a dominant role in the work of these novelists because it bridges the gap between the public and the private; thus it allows them to point outward toward the social system of apartheid even as they demonstrate the extent to which apartheid as a social system depends on rigidly defining and policing the intimate space of the body and its desires.

(28)

In *The Journey*, the political potential of eros is not recognized. Neither do we see in the novel a turn to the romantic love relationship as perhaps the more significant matrix for the formation of the activist subject—rather than the family or the nation—as suggested in the recent life narratives of social justice advocates Fatima Meer and Ayesha Dawood (Moolla). In eliding affect Anthony misses an opportunity to enter revolution into a dialectic with love that could lead to its reinvigorated reinvention.

By contrast, B is presented in the narrative as the ultimate revolutionist who strives single-mindedly, indefatigably, and with an icy heart, only for his goal of revolution, a goal that does not appear to be shared with such intensity by any of the other characters in the novel, including the leadership of B’s organization. It is also a goal that does not enter into a dialectical relationship with his personal life, where the joys and/or trials of one dimension of experience might engage and transform the other dimension. For Comrade B the “life of revolutionaries was a life of incalculable self-denial, of superhuman sacrifice, of bitter betrayal,” over which death hangs “like a pestilence descended from the throne of judgement itself” (21). The commitment to a puritanical ideal of revolution that allows turning “neither right nor left” and leads “inexorably to self-annihilation” (70) causes B to shed his nuclear and extended family along the way, and also his comrades, one after the other. This is vividly dramatized in his exchanges in the course of his journey, especially in his renunciation of Comrade M. In this respect, B is not a Che Guevara who is torn between revolution as hatred and revolution as love. Srečko Horvat suggests that out of the paradox of Guevara as “passionately preaching hatred as the crucial fuel of struggle” (109), and the revolutionist guided by “feelings of love,” emerges a “third instance” articulated by Guevara’s daughter: “My father knew how to love, and that was the most beautiful feature of him—his capacity to love. To be a proper revolutionary, you

have to be a romantic" (110). This is the synthesis that cannot be made in the narrative of Comrade B since it utterly excludes romance, or twists love perversely into conflict and guilt.

Some inkling of this contradiction is apparent to B. In the sleepless anxiety caused by his recognition that as his personal relationships have failed, so too will his revolutionary ideals, B speculates: "Was it possible that *that* was the irresistible (sic) fate of the revolutionist? Could one be a revolutionist *only* if one's life was so reduced to a single dimension and poised on the edge of total personal catastrophe; that to be an instrument in the service of humankind, of the masses, one had to become so insular?" (87). It does not strike B that embedded in the very word "revolution" is the word "love," albeit spelled backwards. The French philosopher, Alain Badiou, active in Algerian decolonization, proposes that the "truth" of love consists in its potential to experience the world from the "point of view of two and not one" (22). He suggests that the world experienced through two and not one is open to difference, not identity, releasing two into multiplicity (22). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri allude to something similar in their concept of a "politics of love," which "is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude" (351–52). In B's total, self-annihilating and socially destructive duty towards revolution, a politics of love is denied.

At this point, we need to return to Cronin's review of *The Journey*, which alerts us to the emergence of a Romantic conception of revolution. Love, a "communism for two" which is potentially open to multitudes, is transmuted in the novel to a Romantic conception of both the man and his mission. Romance in the sense of love, and Romantic in the philosophy of radical European poets and writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, share a commonality in the vision both have of an alternative reality. B's revolutionary vision is finally a Romantic vision of the revolution, a term he himself uses on occasion in the narrative to describe his dream (11, 12). Nowhere is the Romantic tendency clearer in the novel than in its closure, where Romantic hope averts B's impending suicide.

The novel closes with B returning to town Y in the neighbouring country, rather than to his own home in South Africa. He is summarily dismissed by Comrade Chair who is "lavish in his exposure" of B's "personal immorality" in deserting his wife and children (204). When he reaches town Y, he reflects on the real and emotional loss of those close to him, and the hopelessness of his revolutionary dream. Even though he is cognizant of the continued love of Comrade Z, whose life he presents as having run "itself onto the rocks" in "pursuit of [his] love" (209), he

nonetheless entertains increasingly suicidal thoughts. At sunrise, he makes an almost mystical ascent to the hillock above the house, described in the idiom of lyrical Romanticism in which he features as the lonely reflective wanderer. The philosophy of the Romantics is clearly familiar to B since he refers earlier to a desire that his daughters come to live a pastoral idyll which would “make the art of the romantic era seem crude and brutal” (209). B presents himself in tableau as Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*:

Still cast in the deep grey of approaching dawn, the ugly hillock seemed to embrace all the peace of the world under its huge hump. Its east-facing slopes were gathering the first silver light of the impending day. The sheer cliffs, which had so enthralled me that first day of my infatuation, were already taking command of the new day. They looked magnificent. The deep folds, sweeping downwards, loomed like a rich velvet cloth, warm and protective. They climbed high up to the very crest of the hillock. To reach that beauty, I would have to climb the hill to its summit.

(210)

B ascends to the top where, in solitude, he surveys the scene below and then, in his mind’s eye, completes his journey to Cape Town, where he surveys a pageant culminating in the march of a working-class army which, hypocritically, defends capitalism. B stands aloft upon a rock and addresses the workers, the “thunder” of his own voice making him “reel back” (223). When the crowd asks who he is, he somewhat grandiosely replies that he is the one “who has come to speak on behalf of the working class!” (223–24). The crowd replies: “We are the working class! We don’t know you!” (224). To which B replies, “Yes, you do. Only you don’t know it yet” (224). There is a cacophony which may signify B’s plummeting to his death from the rock on which he stands naked. But we discover that he has merely passed out, and when he picks himself up, he resolves to continue his revolutionary journey, observing that: “There [is] work waiting, a hell of a lot of work” (225).

Where Cronin in the review of *The Journey* identifies the ultra-Trotskyan self “that is abstracted out into virtual nothingness,” a self “that is reduced to virtual inactivity” (48), I would like to suggest that what we find instead is a strongly individualistic self, inspired by its own genius and uniqueness, a self with its philosophical origins in Romanticism. Comrade B’s subjectivity could even be regarded as Byronic because

of his solipsism, his dark, brooding, eccentric nature, and his almost megalomaniacal sense of his own power. The strong Romanticism of the ending of the novel obliges the reader to cast a backward glance at the foregrounding of the natural environment, in the form of B's nostalgic memories of childhood experiences of nature in the countryside where he grew up. Indeed, it might be in the deeply personal relationship with nature, which may be tracked throughout the narrative, that the redeeming opening up to others, albeit non-human others, might be found, rather than in eros which, as we have seen, is completely effaced. Love thus seems to be entirely liquidated in *The Journey's* vision of a utopian social formation. The value of the "micropolitics" of love in the "macropolitics" of South African cultural discourse.

Frank Anthony's *The Journey* is thus a highly sophisticated novel in which one sees the tensions of contemporaneous South African literary debates about the role of the writer and the significance of art playing out in fascinating ways. For many major South African writers of the period, both black and white, it was unquestionable that meaningful art necessarily and inescapably was a politically engaged art: Mbulelo Mzamane, for example, suggests that "[a]rt and politics in South Africa [...] have become inseparable for the simple reason that politics pervades all aspects of a Blackman's existence" (123). Dennis Brutus, encapsulating remarks made by Keorapetse Kgositsile, underscores that, even more generally, "there is no uncommitted writing" (35) since writing that is noteworthy is inherently moved by a vision. In essays like "A Writer's Freedom" and "The Essential Gesture," Nadine Gordimer takes a similar position on the responsibility of the writer and the fundamental qualities of relevance and commitment in good writing. But Gordimer also cautions against the imposition of an orthodoxy of commitment. *The Journey*, quite obviously from its theme, plot and characters, constitutes political literature in the narrow sense of being a piece of writing against the apartheid state by an author who himself was an activist. Picking up on Gordimer's point about the internal censorship of struggle aesthetics through the prescription of theme and technique, *The Journey* is controversial for striking against the orthodoxy of uncritical commitment to a "party line" through the vein of satire in the novel. But the vision of the novel is narrowed since it is implicitly impacted by the political demand that a focus on romantic love be deemed retrograde. The dictum that art is a weapon in the struggle, furthermore, often puts the literariness of writing at odds with its broader ethical commitments. Because of its strong literary qualities that find expression in a lyrical realism, particularly in descriptions of the natural world, *The Journey* transgresses the boundaries of the strongly politicized

aesthetic of its period in South African history. It is precisely because *The Journey* has here been treated as a literary work of fiction rather than as autobiography that one can ask questions about the constraints of the political aesthetic that obliged Frank Anthony to repress the erotics of politics—a concern that has gained considerable traction in the discourses of Marxism and black politics in the twenty-first century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to Richard Anthony, who introduced me to his father's novel, and to Trevor Fortune of the University of the Western Cape library for establishing contact with people who knew Frank Anthony. Without Hein Willemse's collegiality, I would not have had access to newspaper clippings on Anthony that he has painstakingly saved over the years. My appreciation also to Mark Espin for sharing his familiarity with anti-apartheid publishing.

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