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English 4995

Spring 2018

The End of Cape Town: Neoliberal Deception in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*

Centuries ago, white settlers arrived at the area that would become modern day Cape Town, making their first contact with Southern Africa. Today, the city emulates its past role by continuing to host foreigners. Cape Town stands as the premier tourist destination in Africa, popular among Western visitors who are drawn to the area's warm climate, beautiful landscape, and the natural environment. The city's prevailing mythic image, however, conflicts with late South African writer K. Sello Duiker's perception. He described how he experienced Cape Town in an interview with Victor Lackay saying, "I immersed myself in the culture of Cape Town, but in the end I had to run. I was too absorbed; I needed to escape. It was just meant to be a stopover" (Mzamane 20). Duiker's need to "run" and "escape" indicates his sense of urgency amid some danger in Cape Town from which he needs to flee, a subtlety appropriate for the interview. His statement here comes across as light criticism whereas his literary works more vehemently problematize the city. In his first two novels, *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, Duiker's characters experience a Cape Town that would make the city's tourists reconsider their choice of destination. In particular, Duiker appears ready for the city to come to an apocalyptic end, and the following discussion begins by questioning why Cape Town deserves such a demise.

Duiker's issue with Cape Town seems to lie in the covert ways the city operates, as evinced by his novels. In *Thirteen Cents*, Duiker concludes by depicting a Cape Town

apocalypse during which natural forces destroy the city and its inhabitants. Before the catastrophic end, however, the protagonist Azure directly discusses the advent of such an event in a loaded exchange with Sealy, a gang member with a vendetta against the city. After Sealy calls for Cape Town's demise, he responds to Azure's reluctance by invoking three reasons:

"We have to destroy Cape Town," he says.

"Why?"

"God's instructions."

"But why Cape Town?"

"You ask that after what they did you you?"

I say nothing.

"It's because evil is subtle," he says. "Evil hides itself." (161)

The first reason that Sealy feels inclined to destroy Cape Town derives from divine appointment, a notion which aligns with previous statements he makes, claiming to be an angel. Sealy's second reason deals with the ways that people in the city have exploited Azure. But Sealy's third and most poignant reason implies that Cape Town's most fundamental problem is not the pimps, gangsters, and street kids that dwell in the city but the institutional forces that have allowed these conditions to persist in secret, blinding people to the rampant evil in plain sight. This secretive side of Cape Town is what Duiker aims to expose by subjecting the city to an apocalyptic end in *Thirteen Cents*.

Unlike *Thirteen Cents*, Duiker does not destroy Cape Town in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, but apocalyptic notions still pervade the novel. The book mostly covers the lives of characters so captivated by Cape Town that they seem blind to the evil in their midst. Near the end, however, Tshepo wanders to a township on the city's margins and realizes Cape Town's

secrets. Upon this revelation, Tshepo describes an irredeemable city that has fallen from grace and envisions impending destruction:

No matter, our luck has run out. The forces of light and darkness have united in an unholy marriage that will cleanse the ugliness that we are left with. For even darkness aspires for better, higher...It is too late for talk and fancy words. The bell tolls past midnight. Someone is blowing the ancestral horn heralding the end of time, history. (436-437)

Again, Duiker ascribes the decision to end Capetonian life to transcendent forces looking with disgust at what they observe in the city. The idea that even forces of darkness would prefer a better reality in Cape Town makes the city's prospects all the bleaker. While the excerpt suggests that the end is coming not merely for Cape Town but the world at large, Tshepo's retreat to Johannesburg at the end of the book communicates that something special about Cape Town's corruption designates it as the initial site of destruction. Lastly, the apocalypse that Duiker envisions may be tragic for those destroyed, but for the world at large, the end of Cape Town would be a restorative cleansing. This is also the case in *Thirteen Cents* where the decimation of Cape Town frees Azure from his oppressors. And after all the strife that the novelist puts the characters of both books through, the destruction of Cape Town can be a relief for readers as well.

In addition to the apocalyptic notions, *Quiet Violence* also comments on the nature of evil. However, Duiker reveals another dimension of evil that seems to contradict the way *Thirteen Cents* presents the concept. While roaming the streets of Cape Town, Tshepo ponders the evil around him and addresses his thoughts to his dead mother: "Evil cannot hide, Mama, it is too proud and wants to be seen. It comes with different faces: itinerant hawkers, salesmen,

beauticians, housewives, fruit sellers, students, children” (92). Out of context, the first sentence of the passage goes against Sealy’s notion that “evil hides itself,” but by taking on different faces, evil, in fact, hides, especially since the faces that evil takes on are not inherently evil. Here, Tshepo conveys that evil can assume any form. Most importantly, though, Tshepo characterizes evil as prideful, implying that evil may be covert, but it cannot help but reveal itself in subtle ways. The evil in Cape Town takes pleasure in taunting people who do not notice it, but people like Tshepo can identify it when they look beneath the surface of Cape Town.

The evils of Cape Town that the books describe can be characterized through the concept of neoliberalism; this economic system, as enacted by the post-apartheid South African government, greatly influences Duiker’s work. In examining *Thirteen Cents*, Tim Johns uses the concept to discuss how *laissez-fair* economics allow market forces to reign supreme in Azure’s narrative, especially considering the child sex market. In essence, a hands-off approach to economic regulation renders the poor and vulnerable defenseless against exploitation by wealthy. Whereas Johns focuses on the *laissez-fair* dimension of neoliberal economics, I will invoke another dimension of neoliberalism, namely the deceptive nature of the system.

Neoliberalism, as practiced in political economic policy, is often presented deceptively and, in turn, influences other deceptive behaviors. Political theorist Wendy Brown affirms this notion, casting neoliberalization as a “stealth revolution”. David A. McDonald also implies deception when he mentions “the shifting nature of neoliberalism and how it is that apparently progressive policy reforms (e.g. ‘free water’) can actually be just the opposite, serving the interests of transitional capital rather than the urban poor” (68). Here, McDonald correlates neoliberal policies to deceptive attempts to convince the public that policies which ultimately hurt them are actually positive.

In his book, McDonald identifies Cape Town as a world city on the level of other world cities like London and New York, then as a capitalist city, and finally as city where neoliberalism thrives. Cape Town's neoliberalization results from South Africa's historical shift from an apartheid state to a democracy. McDonald even describes South Africa's shift in terms of neoliberal deception:

Taken on their own, the 'destruction' of race-based welfarism and the subsequent/simultaneous introduction of strengthened and democratized forms of national and local government are positive developments. They are not, in and of themselves, inherently 'neoliberal'. But with the insights of theory – and the benefits of hindsight – we can see these developments for what they really are: part of a larger dialectic of neoliberal reform designed to assist with a new capital accumulation strategy in a globalized economy. (83)

McDonald recognizes the good results stemming from the formal end of apartheid, but the extension of social protections that once solely benefited the white population in South Africa to people of other races was done strategically for South Africa's future enactment of more direct neoliberal policies. The country has taken issues of social justice and used them to amass capital similar to the way that corporations market themselves through activism. Or, in Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith's words, "What used to be matters of political belief and social justice... are now wholeheartedly endorsed by corporations committed to whatever proves best for business" (10). These corporate responses to issues of social justice can mask a company's unethical practices from the public. As such, these are all ways in which evil hides itself as something good or something harmless, and they match Duiker's perception of Cape Town, a perception most clearly depicted in *Thirteen Cents* with legitimate support in *Quiet Violence*.

Therefore, I contend that the content of *Thirteen Cents* combined with the context of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* supports the claim that Cape Town's participation in neoliberalism and the results of that practice contributes to the city's culpability in the secret evils that persist, making its destruction justifiable in the context of these novels.

*Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* stand on their own as distinct literary works, but they complement one another so well that examining them together allows for a more encompassing analysis. The novels have a number of overlapping characteristics and thematic elements that justify reading them together. The protagonists alone are both males navigating their sexuality, both have experienced childhood traumas that rendered them orphans in some form, both move from a Johannesburg township to the Cape Town area, and both perform sex work in some capacity. Both novels also have an overwhelming concern with the sense of sight and the ability to notice what is hidden. Further, the books are so connected that Tshepo apparently dreams of Azure at one point in *Quiet Violence*. In the dream, Tshepo climbs Table Mountain amid ensuing chaos in Cape Town. When it begins to rain, he takes shelter in a cave where he encounters "a small boy crouched in the corner, a scared, hungry look on his face. He looks at me tenderly but I sense desperation behind the soft eyes. I need to eat; his eyes seem to say." (368). The similarities between this small boy in Tshepo's dream and Azure abound in the excerpt. Azure also takes refuge in a cave on Table Mountain in *Thirteen Cents*, hunger and fear plague Azure throughout his narrative, and the focus on the boy's eyes alludes to Azure's oddly blue eyes which are often a talking point in *Thirteen Cents* because they seem out of place with his dark skin. Suffice to say that Duiker's first two novels are like kin.

The shared characteristics between Duiker's novels are unsurprising given that Duiker wrote the manuscripts for both novels in conjunction with one another. He first drafted *The Quiet*

*Violence of Dreams*. But before completely revising the manuscript, Duiker's frequent experiences with street kids in Cape Town – particularly the three-and-a-half-week search for a boy named Sammy – inspired him to write *Thirteen Cents*. After *Thirteen Cents* was published, Duiker proceeded to finish *Quiet Violence* (Mzamane). And due to their close creative proximity, often questions that arise in one book have answers in the other.

Still, the thematic overlap between *Thirteen Cents* and *Quiet Violence* that will guide my discussion is their shared interest in how economic forces contribute to Cape Town's cultural climate. Economic policy matters are the initial sphere where neoliberalism manifests and from there, it influences other spheres of civil life. Brown posits that “neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic” (10). In this image, humans knowingly and unknowingly participate in every action and interaction with the purpose of enhancing their economic worth. In *Thirteen Cents*, for example, the pursuit of money and the power that comes with it is the main reason that Azure performs sex work. The pursuit is more complex in *Quiet Violence*, however, because money is inextricably linked to Tshepo's exploration of his sexual desires in a larger capacity than for Azure. Regardless, both characters initially view money as a means to some form of freedom but eventually become disillusioned. For Azure, the money he accumulates actually leads him into more exploitation, and for Tshepo, economic gain cannot fully subvert the South African cultural fixation on race. But in each case, being in Cape Town makes the false prospect of freedom through economic means seem attainable. That deception exemplifies Sealy's idea that “evil hides itself” and that deceptive atmosphere pervades the Cape Town of Duiker's books in various forms.

Despite the expository economic notions prevalent in Duiker's novels, scholars tend to elevate the aspects dealing with sexuality, thereby overshadowing the economic. As a result, more criticism has been published on *Quiet Violence* than on *Thirteen Cents* because the author makes Tshepo's sexuality clearer, whereas Azure's age and exploitative sexual experiences trouble his sexual development. In Azure's case, critics have tended to focus on the survivalist nature of his sexual encounters that derives from his economic straits, causing some critics like Mamadou Ngom and Osita Elziora to completely disregard questions of Azure's sexuality. These survivalist readings have often had homophobic undertones which Shaun Viljoen problematizes in his introduction to *Thirteen Cents*. In truth, Azure consistently assesses his sexuality while engaging with the men that pay for his services even though he pushes against identifying sexual queerness in himself. And considering the neoliberal context, where every human action, inaction, and interaction has economic implications, Azure's sexual development is inexorably linked to the economic dimensions of his sexual transactions. In that regard, the importance of Cape Town's economic realities in Duiker's novels deserves more attention than it has received because they further expose the evil of the city, especially as depicted in *Thirteen Cents*.

An evident contrast between *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is that *Thirteen Cents* strays from the often mythic perception of Cape Town found in those who are blind to its dark secrets, while *Quiet Violence* indulges that notion to an extent. For example, Tshepo's early evaluation of Cape Town in *Quiet Violence* is filled with optimism:

Like every growing metropolis Cape Town aspires to be the next best thing. And why shouldn't it? It has a lot going for it. The burgeoning modeling agencies, the politicians who act like celebrities, the scandals, the crude flaunting of money – they all point to a city that wants to be New York, London or Paris (35).

Here Tshepo idealizes Cape Town's potential to rise to the level of other major world cities, cities where neoliberal policies thrive. But the unusual examples he uses to signify progress reveal his perception that excess makes a city great. Scandalous politicians typically bring shame upon a city, but in Tshepo's mythic conception, political corruption becomes like an urban status symbol. The excerpt comes from Tshepo's lengthy meditation praising Cape Town's progressive, nonracial environment, and moments like these in Duiker's novels further emphasize the city of Cape Town's ills as opposed to other cities in South Africa or the nation as a whole. Duiker's specificity renders critical conclusions like those of Ngom, whose essay conflates Cape Town and South Africa, lacking. The distinction is key to understanding the mythic perception of Cape Town to which Tshepo initially ascribes, and his recognition that the illusion can only be sustained by wealth leads him to chase wealth in the novel.

Unlike Tshepo, Azure exists without the mythic illusion of Cape Town in *Thirteen Cents* and so do many of those around him. Duiker's depiction of Cape Town here is bleak. The first evaluative expression of the city comes when Auntie Joyce says "Cape Town can be so lonely" (12) while explaining the reason that another character has left the city for a time. The feeling of loneliness translates to Azure's experience in Cape Town that comes through in his narration. This is why Viljoen characterizes Azure's narrative syntax as "childlike" and "egocentric" (x), referencing the character's frequent use of the pronoun "I". But we can also attribute this frequency to the loneliness he feels in a city that seems to oppose his will for himself at every turn. Azure is orphaned at the age of ten, and the few characters that can be considered his companions all leave him in some way. Liesel, a female sex worker living on the streets, who Azure calls "the only grown up I can trust" (4), disconnects with Azure when she suspects that he has become a gang member. Bafana, a fellow street kid, functions more like a son to the

young Azure than a friend, and Bafana is nowhere to be found during the most crucial moments of Azure's narrative. Lastly, Vincent, a friend of Azure's from before they journeyed to Cape Town, leaves the city well before Cape Town's demise in the book. So in a sense, Azure has been alone far before the novel's end when he is the only one left in the destroyed Cape Town.

Vincent's departure significantly affects Azure because their relationship had been healthy. Vincent is the most important confidant in Azure's life to the effect that when Azure learns of Vincent's plans to leave Cape Town he panics saying:

Vincent can't go he's my connection. And everyone has a connection even if its just one person in the whole world... I think of Vincent as my eyes. He's older than me he's seen more, done more. I don't think anything scares him any more. Everything seems to make sense to him. Vincent, he's grown up but not like the others... He always looks out for me. All the things he tells me, they help me. They help me become like him, a man, a grown up. (109)

Azure understands what he will lose in Vincent; his value equates that of Azure's eyes. Vincent also nuances Azure's perception of adults. Azure espouses an ardent disdain for grown-ups in *Thirteen Cents*, but Vincent acts differently. Although Vincent is only a little older than Azure, their life on the streets has caused both of them to grow up faster than others their age. So much so that Azure basically perceives Vincent as a grown up. Vincent also possesses a level of bravery that Azure lacks; he feels protected when he is with Vincent. Finally, Azure values conversations he has with Vincent that provide a sense clarity in his life; Vincent seems to orient Azure in the direction he needs to go. One instance in which Vincent shows his discernment is in his evaluation of Cape Town. When Azure makes a claim about grown ups, Vincent offers another view:

“Grown-ups are fucked up.”

“No, Cape Town is fucked up. Really.”

“You’re right, it’s Cape Town, not the people.”

“And the people. Don’t forget about the people they’re also fucked up.” (42)

Vincent does not subscribe to the mythic illusion of Cape Town, and here he introduces the idea that a city in and of itself can be corrupt while also acknowledging that the city and the people that inhabit it are so inseparable that the corruption can’t be wholly attributed to one party or the other. Vincent’s words in the extract mirror Sealy’s comments about Cape Town later in the book. Like Sealy, Vincent is also a member of Gerald’s gang until his departure. But in contrast to Sealy, Vincent chooses to leave rather than destroy the city. One may ask whether Vincent’s departure contradicts Azure’s noble depiction of him given that by leaving, he abandons Azure, leading Azure to seek protection from the gang leader Gerald. Has Vincent betrayed Azure? Brenna Munro certainly believes so when she implicates Vincent among the collective that leaves Azure. However, Duiker troubles this notion by situating Vincent’s choice in the context of Cape Town’s evil. The reason Vincent gives for not being able to take Azure with him relates to monetary means. Vincent says “you don’t have enough money. I’ve been saving up. I’m going by train” (113). The statement shows that the economic barriers in Cape Town that force these characters to live on the streets are too great for even a close friendship to surmount. Instead, Vincent offers Azure directives that guide Azure through the rest of the novel, the most important of which states, “if you’re ever in trouble, always go towards the light” (113). Ultimately Azure takes this advice and follows the sun to Table Mountain. Because of the impending apocalypse, Vincent should not be blamed for acting on his knowledge of the real

Cape Town. He, as well as Azure and all the characters who live on the streets, see beyond the illusion of the city.

Not all the characters in *Thirteen Cents* see the Cape Town that Azure sees. To illustrate this, the author brings a number of characters that reside off the streets into contact with Azure. These people are either oblivious to the dark secrets of Cape Town or they purposely turn a blind eye. And the other defining characteristics of these people is that they are white and rich, signaling their privileged lifestyles. In one instance, Bafana introduces Azure to two rich white kids not much older than themselves that are enthralled by Bafana and Azure's life on the streets:

“You two are cool, man. You know what I mean? Urban culture. Like urban living. You guys are living the concrete jungle scavenging. Fuck, you don't need our help. Fuck, that would be an insult. You guys are like cats, Urban cats, urban cats. Survivors, man.” (24).

While Bafana enables them, Azure acts insulted. The reason is that these observers have ascribed to a mythic perception of street living, characterizing that life as an adventure that street kids have freely chosen. There is some truth to this as Bafana has chosen to live on the streets despite having a home and a family, but Azure was forced into this lifestyle and feels disrespected by these characters. The rich kids also want to experience life with them briefly for the rush of excitement and offer them acid in exchange for food, a gesture which Azure rejects. These outsiders' behavior contrasts heavily with Tshepo's behavior around street kids in *Quiet Violence*. Tshepo shares their company, “smokes zol” with them, and observes them, but he does so respectfully and with an awareness of their dignity because the secrets of Cape Town have been revealed to him. But the rich kids in *Thirteen Cents* come into direct contact with the dark side of Cape Town yet cannot not see the darkness.

The same is true of the rich white men to whom Azure sells his body; they come into contact with Azure yet evade revelations of his life on the streets. In one exchange, Azure enters one of the men's houses and is struck by the silence in the house because he does not experience this sort of silence on the streets, as he implies when the man inquires about his silence:

“Why are you so quiet?” he says while the water runs.

“I'm just listening.”

“To what?”

“Your house. It's so quiet”

“Oh that. Do you want me to put on some music?”

“No, I like it like this. Please.” (9)

The man who hires Azure does not press any deeper into his reason for liking the silence. And the questions he asks signify a discomfort with Azure's silence, as though the silence would reveal more information than he wants to know. But Azure understands the man's behavior because he has often experienced avoidance from the men that hire him. “They don't like you to know their names, in case you bump into them on the street. Most times they don't even nod or say hi, they walk past as if they don't know you” (9). Azure describes clients who are unconcerned about the lives of street kids. They would rather keep their illusion of Cape Town intact even though their exploitation of these child sex workers is one of Cape Town's dark secrets.

One of the other men that pays Azure for sex in the novel falls into the same pattern despite claiming to be different. He is a married man called Mr. Lebowitz who hires Azure while his wife and children are away. In addition to the sexual favors, Mr. Lebowitz plays classical music for Azure and tells Azure about his investment banking career. Nabutayni states that by

interacting with Azure in this way, Lebowitz “cultivates a veneer of respectability that contrasts starkly with what he really is – a mere exploiter” (46). In this sense, we can read Lebowitz’s cordiality as an act, a means toward satisfying his sexual desires. But as they become more acquainted, Azure treats Mr. Lebowitz with more respect than other clients. “By using a title indicative of respect and conferring authority, Azure seems to assign fatherly qualities to Mr Lebowitz: he is portrayed as a mentor beyond the fact that he is a customer” (Nabutanyi 46). Nabutanyi here relays a common claim in Duiker scholarship that Azure’s search for a surrogate father contributes to the boy’s exploitation at the hands of questionable male figures. However, Nabutanyi also implies that Azure has fallen for the act, whereas I contend that Azure exhibits confusion more than anything because never before has he been treated like Lebowitz treats him. While he does warm up to Lebowitz, Azure is not surprised when the man changes behavior after being confronted with the reality of Azure’s life. When Lebowitz asks if Azure needs more pillows to sleep, Azure’s answer triggers him:

“Will this pillow be enough? I can get you another one if you want.”

“No, it’s fine. Actually I like sleeping without one.”

“The street, I can hear him thinking, but his maddening manners prevent him from saying it” (107).

Azure can see Lebowitz getting angry at the thought of Azure’s daily conditions. The unsettling notion causes a slight hostility in him toward Azure, who is ousted from the room immediately and subsequently ousted from the house the following morning. Lebowitz’s actions further support Nabutanyi’s claim that “notwithstanding the socially interactive connection between Azure and Lebowitz in this episode, Azure is still that ‘flea-infected dog’ whose sexuality is all that has allowed him to cross divide between post-apartheid luxury and its ugly twin, urban

poverty” (46). Apart from the sexual exploitation, men like Lebowitz castigate Azure to the underbelly of Cape Town in order to retain a sense of peace.

The final major contact that Azure makes outside of street life is Oscar, a strange, wealthy white man whom Azure encounters on Table Mountain. Unlike the others, Oscar does not exploit him sexually nor does he desire to. Instead he attempts to better acquaint himself with Azure by inquiring about his life. In this exchange, Azure does the work of informing Oscar about street life. What becomes evident in the conversation is that Oscar’s perception of Cape Town is a distorted version of Azure’s, especially considering the bridge area Azure calls home at this point in the novel:

“I live under a bridge”

“Which one?”

“The one near Green Point.”

“Oh, you mean the one that was under construction but was never completed.”

“If it is, I never noticed.” (133)

Oscar’s confidence about the status of the bridge signals his familiarity with the city of Cape Town even though, as he admits, he has only lived there for three months. And the fact that Azure has never noticed that the bridge is incomplete shows that those living on the streets and those with traditional dwelling places may interpret even tangible things like a bridge in different ways. Because these distinct perspectives exist, it is so poignant when Azure later corrects Oscar about calling people on the streets homeless saying, “We have a home. It’s just not your normal kind of home with a kitchen and all that stuff but it’s still a home” (136). Azure here defends the dignity of those living on the streets in a statement that represents an alternative form of queerness that goes beyond sexuality. Although Azure never accepts a queer sexual identity in

*Thirteen Cents*, his queerness centers on non-normativity. Scholars like Judith Halberstam have argued for thinking “about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” (1). The idea of eccentric economic practices, in particular, relates to Azure’s way of life on the streets, and his refusal to be disregarded because of his alternative lifestyle speaks to the struggle for acknowledgment and representation among those living in Cape Town’s underbelly, the struggle that people like Oscar miss when assessing aspects of their lives like the bridge.

Along with the status of the bridge itself, Oscar and Azure have a different perception of what goes on under the bridge. Oscar’s description is as follows: “Well there’s this guy who lives there right, and he’s supposed to control the entire rat population in Cape Town. It’s kind of an urban legend” (134). To which Azure replies: “That’s nothing. I know a guy who lives there and he can make anyone, take you right, he can change you into a pigeon or a rat” (134). Azure’s line of reasoning follows from his earlier claim in the book that street kids turn into rats and pigeons at the hands of evil men. More specifically, Azure speaks of Gerald the gang leader. And even though Oscar had already dismissed his story as an urban legend, Azure knows that he lives it. The rats and pigeons are not merely a story, but a reality.

Considering Oscar and Azure’s differing perspectives, Duiker’s genre-blurring technique here makes the exchange between the characters even more interesting. The narrative form of magical realism pervades the world that Azure lives in, but the world that people like Oscar live in fits more with the social realist form. A similar genre dichotomy manifests in *Quiet Violence* as well in which because of the novel’s polyvocal narrative style, certain characters’ accounts – Tshepo’s included – have magical realist sensibilities that conflict with other characters’ social realist perception. In both novels, though, when the worlds make contact, the genre lines become

blurred. This reading affirms the way that many scholars discuss street life in Cape Town by using language that evokes the coexistence of different worlds. Johns even goes so far as to speculate that the people living on Cape Town's streets "live in a parallel universe" (254). In the case of *Thirteen Cents*, the bridge functions as a motif for the barrier between the worlds. And if Oscar is correct that the bridge is incomplete then the magical realist and the social realist worlds are not completely separate from each other. Thus, what happens above the bridge affects what happens below the bridge and the conditions of those that reside there and vice versa.

The permeability of the bridge barrier also speaks to how issues regarding South Africa's apartheid past translate to post-apartheid neoliberalism. Meg Samuelson connects these eras in her discussion about the temporal borders in Duiker's novels by assessing the way Tshepo and Azure wander the city:

"Such movements through the city, and the multiple transgressive selves these movements produce, testify to the passing of the temporal boundary as the borders segregating the apartheid city are erased by the footsteps of our narrators. At the same time, they urge us to revisit past urban worlds, as the reader tacks back and forth between apartheid past and post-apartheid present." (255).

The spaces that Tshepo and Azure pass through in their respective narratives subvert the pass laws of the apartheid era in which black South Africans were segregated into townships and prohibited from the urban areas of cities like Cape Town. In the post-apartheid South Africa that these characters exist in, however, economic borders become just as significant as the racial; this is even more so the case for those residing under the bridge in *Thirteen Cents*. The economic gap between blacks and whites may have improved, but the effects of neoliberalism post-apartheid have progressively stratified the wealthy from the impoverished. The negative effects

of neoliberalism affect the society as a whole not just those under the bridge. So symbolically neoliberalism may play out in the Cape Town above the bridge and affect those below the bridge in subtler ways, while what happens below the bridge affects those above. Since, as Sealy points out to Azure, “evil hides itself”, and the evil of neoliberalism as I have defined it disguises itself as something else – typically something that seems good – then any instance of something bad being made to look like harmless or good in the novel can represent neoliberalism, particularly when it occurs to those living in the underbelly of Cape Town. Ultimately, the evil created this way brings Cape Town to a catastrophic end.

Many moments in *Thirteen Cents* seem harmless on the surface but are quite sinister in actuality, and many things are done for the sake of preventing harm that actually bring more harm. A perfect example is Mr. Lebowitz, whose act of constructing a respectful environment for Azure was actually a guise for exploitative activity and a display of his wealth and power. Still, other characters exploit Azure besides the men he sells sex to. Azure entrusts the money he makes mostly from selling his body to Auntie Joyce, who has also garnered a level of respect from Azure. Auntie Joyce supposedly deposits Azure’s money in a bank account, but she keeps it for herself instead. Azure does not find out that he has been betrayed until he needs the money later in the novel. As Nabutanyi suggests, “Auntie Joyce exploits Azure’s longing for a (maternal) figure of authority to swindle him of the money he gets for making himself available for anal sex with men” (39). She too treats Azure well for her selfish ulterior motives, and the deceptive pretense she fosters by lying about where the money goes and feigning a familial connection to the orphaned boy make her all the more exploitative.

Azure is also exploited by two characters that he pays for protection: Allen, a pimp, and Gerald, the gang leader. With Allen, Azure acknowledges that “knowing him has actually helped

me a lot in the streets. I can't say that we are friends. But if I'm ever in trouble I just have to say that I know Allen and I'm usually left alone" (15). Azure here affirms that protection from Allen is, in fact, valuable. Allen must be well known in the area; either he has many connections or he strikes fear into those in the community. A strong case can be made for the latter as the first time Azure encounters Allen in the novel, he is both verbally and physically abusing one of his female sex workers for retorting against his will. In the case of Gerald, he has his men kidnap Azure and assault him physically and sexually before renaming him "Blue" and demanding money from Azure in exchange for protection. In each case, the money is meant to ward off harm, but it seems that the money he pays also goes to protecting him from the very people he pays while simultaneously enabling his oppressors to cause more terror. And in this vein Gerald is worse than Allen.

In regards to Gerald, though, Azure is not the only factor contributing to his evil agenda. The law enforcement officials also allow it. Azure finds out about Gerald's leverage over the police from Vincent who relays that Gerald once "took out a powerful drug lord" (69) for the police and as such "he can blow their whole cover. So they give him breathing space under the bridge. (69). Vincent implies that if Gerald were to inflict his terror on those above the bridge, the police would intervene, but as long as he remains under the bridge the police will relent their authority. Thus, an attempt to rid people of harm above the bridge actually causes more harm to those below the bridge. And subsequently, Gerald's death, which seems like a solution to the evil, actually propels Sealy to cause even more harm by traversing the bridge boarder as part of his divine appointment to destroy Cape Town. Duiker seems to foreshadow this earlier in the novel when Auntie Joyce criticizes an Islamic vigilante group in Cape Town saying, "these Pagad mense they say they are God's people but they preach the devil's work" (14). Similarly,

Sealy claims to do what is right for Cape Town, but he actually exacerbates the evil to maintain his feeling of power.

Instances when people with power use that power to take advantage of Azure and people like him abound in *Thirteen Cents*, but for a majority of the book, Azure does not understand the extent of the exploitation he has been subjected to. He makes observations of exploitative behavior but does not identify as a victim of exploitation until the latter portion of the novel. And no part of the book better reveals his attitude toward his experience of exploitation than when he describes the dynamic between pigeons and seagulls. Azure makes this observation on a roof after Gerald's men have battered and raped him. When a flock of pigeons settles on the roof, Azure becomes annoyed and responds by scaring them away. His hostile response follows from the same statement he makes at the beginning of the novel that exploited street kids are under an evil spell that transforms them into rats or pigeons. Throughout the book he, distinguishes himself from other street kids like Bafana, talking about them as though he is not one himself. As such, Azure takes pleasure when seagulls settle on the roof and begin terrorizing the pigeons:

I laugh when one seagull attacks a man pigeon. It isn't much of a fight. With its strong beak the seagull rips off some of the pigeon's feathers before the pigeon flies away. It takes only a few seagulls, nine of them to scare away maybe thirty stupid pigeons. (60)

The kind of terror that the seagulls inflict symbolically aligns them with powerful people like Gerald and Allen. While they are only two people, they exercise power in ways that allow them to control others and cause harm like the seagulls in the excerpt. But Azure does not connect this reality to his life, so he laughs and continues looking down on the pigeons to the point of equating himself to the seagulls. But after the seagulls briefly fly away, Azure reflects on the injustice he has observed and the injustice he has experienced and adjusts his perspective on the

pigeons. “After a while I start to feel sorry for the pigeons. They’re not strong like seagulls. Some of them have one leg and bad rashes that leave them with patches of pink flesh where there were once feathers. But they’re stupid for not living like seagulls” (61). In his pity, Azure takes into account the disadvantages that the pigeons have and the weaknesses that the seagulls are exploiting. The same can be said of street kids, and in *Quiet Violence*; Tshepo observes that “they’ve been trained into the ways of evil much against their will. Street children have run away from me because I saw demons in their eyes. Rats scurry, pigeons flutter” (93). Not only does Tshepo follow the same line of reasoning as Azure, but Tshepo takes the condition of street kids further by conveying that the evil forces within them desire their influence to go unnoticed, which connects their oppression to neoliberalism. It is also important to note that Tshepo can see the evil in the street kids’ eyes because of the apparent connection to Azure. Azure’s blue eyes – that do not match his complexion – distinguish him from other street kids. There is no evil in him, and he knows it. However, Azure does not grasp the way his circumstances still connect him to the other street kids. For this reason, he expresses compassion for the pigeons but still remains frustrated with them. He still considers himself more of a seagull than a pigeon at this point.

Vincent actually helps Azure understand his exploitation, once again displaying his insightfulness and worth in Azure’s life. After Gerald fully asserts dominance over Azure, Vincent subtly articulates Azure’s status by directing him to a nearby pigeon which is enough to elicit the following response from Azure: “I don’t say anything. I feel my throat tightening up with fear” (74). Azure becomes terrified here because of the way he has classified pigeons earlier. At this point, the notion that he has been exploited – just like so many other street kids – solidifies in his mind. Once again, we see Vincent functioning as Azure’s eyes.

When Vincent leaves, a shift occurs in Azure. He becomes more insightful and starts seeing the situation that surrounds him clearer; he can better identify the evil in his midst. His strengthened sight is precisely what allows him to escape the catastrophic event that destroys Cape Town at the end of the novel. And no passage best captures Azure's heightened sensibilities than his closing declaration in the book. "I open my eyes. I have seen the centre of darkness. I have seen the slave-driver of darkness and he is a mad bastard. I know his secrets. I know what he does when we sleep. My mother is dead. My father is dead" (190). Amid the decimated terrain, Azure evinces a clarity of mind along with an assuredness of the evil he has witnessed and experienced. And although Azure has repeated the same line about his mother and father's death throughout the book, his utterance here carries a sense of finality. As Viljoen states, "'my mother is dead. My father is dead' is no longer merely an ever-present refrain; it is now also an acknowledged fact that the boy begins to grasp" (xvii). In the context of destruction, the final statement about his mother and father also ties to his exploiters, many of whom have tried to fill paternal and maternal roles for Azure in order to take advantage of him; they too are dead. Finally, by mentioning the secrets kept by darkness, he implies that the essence of evil forces is hidden from plain sight. And that people are often oblivious to the evil within their midst. He takes Sealy's earlier statement and repurposes it for himself. In this way, the final statement also engages the notions of neoliberalism that pervade *Thirteen Cents*.

Considering all the evils presented in the form of something good, it is appropriate that the natural disaster which wipes out Cape Town – something that would be considered tragic – actually accomplishes good because it liberates Azure from his oppressors. Regarding the reality of the apocalyptic ending, though, scholars have put forth varying interpretations. Viljoen implies that Azure imagines the forces that destroy Cape Town, while Munro suggests that the

tidal wave that destroys Cape Town is a manifestation of Azure's fury, or of AIDS, even though there is no mention of the virus in *Thirteen Cents* amid the novel's depicted sex acts. Duiker leaves the ending ambiguous, but connecting the ending to Sealy's statement about how evil hides itself and allowing the magical realist form that pervades Azure's narrative to triumph, supports the notion that Cape Town is actually destroyed in the book. The ending exists as a fantasy for readers rather than Azure because Duiker suggests that "it is probably only in fantasy that the evil forces exploiting children like Azure get (spectacularly) punished and eradicated, Armageddon style" (Nabutanyi 47).

For a book that mostly avoids mentioning South Africa's political climate, *Thirteen Cents* speaks volumes about the condition of urban Cape Town in a nation trying to move past the evils of apartheid. Duiker shows that replacing old evils with the newer hidden evils of neoliberalism obstructs justice and allows for the exploitation of people like Azure.

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