Dogs who appear in South African fiction from the nineteenth century to the present are represented as socially and historically located. As living examples of breeding they embody a commentary on vacillating fashions. As non-human companions to human animals they are deemed capable of complex interactions. Like other animals they serve as sometimes contradictory metaphors and metonyms. Dogs enable writers to structure notions of human identities and to incorporate broader ecological views of relationships between human and non-human animals.

Nineteenth century writers, Olive Schreiner in *The Story of an African Farm* and Percy Fitzpatrick in *Jock of the Bushveld* not only attribute sentience to the named dogs they represent, but ascribe a rich and complex consciousness to them. Within colonial discursivities, however, so-called ‘kaffirdogs’ are othered as unworthy of characterization and, sometimes, as metonymic of racialised constructions of their ‘owners.’

Conversely, dogs may function as ciphers, as hated signs of racialised privilege. In the apartheid era, Njabulo S. Ndebele and Es’kia Mphahlele, in ‘The Prophetess’ and ‘Mrs Plum’ respectively, represent urban dogs either as watchdogs in the townships or as coddled and infantilised pets in white suburbia with a better material existence than the workers who care for them. The lacuna in these narratives is the longstanding symbiosis between the indigenous African dog and what Johan Gallant

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1 While the terminology ‘human and non-human animals’ is more politically and ecologically correct, it is too prolix to sustain throughout this essay.
terms ‘human pack partners’. Another lack is the correlation which Mocambican writer Luis Bernardo Honwana makes between manifestations of dualistic thinking in his short story, ‘We Killed Mangy-Dog’.

White writers during apartheid did not have dogs as significant figures in their narratives perhaps because to do so might have engendered criticism of foregrounding animals at the expense of humans. This is exemplified in Burger’s Daughter, a novel published by Nobel prize winner, Nadine Gordimer, in 1979: Rosa, the eponymous protagonist, comes across an indigent, drunk black man whipping his donkey in the shafts of a cart while his wife and children huddle in terror. Rosa Burger has to make the ethical decision of whether to intervene or not, to ‘stand between them and suffering—the suffering of the donkey’, but the political compromises of such an action paralyse her, and she drives on. Although the animal’s convulsed pain becomes the ‘sum of suffering’ to her, she reasons that ‘a kind of vanity counted for more than feeling. I couldn’t bear to see myself-her-Rosa Burger-as one of those whites who can care more for animals than people’.

If, like Rosa Burger, South African writers felt similarly constrained in their subject matter before the new political dispensation, since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 writers have been freed up, judging from the number of novels which have animals as central to their narratives, from the imperative to focus on the iniquities of the apartheid regime, even while much of our racialised history remains intact. The post 1994 novel, Triomf, by Marlene van Niekerk has dogs as an integral part of a dysfunctional family; Disgrace by J.M. Coetzee represents the euthanasing of ‘excess’ township dogs as well as dealing with the issue of animal slaughter. Njabulo Ndebele is currently writing The Night of the Dying Dogs about soldiers killing dogs in the townships and how the dog who generally ‘occupies the lowest end of the hierarchy of social concern…suddenly becomes something of value’.

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10 M. van Niekerk, Triomf (Johannesburg, 1994 [1999]).
11 J.M. Coetzee, Disgrace (London, 1999 [2000]).