IDENTITY, BELONGING AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SPECULATIVE FICTION

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Just as the new worlds and galaxies of science fiction are often models of already known worlds and galaxies (literary ones, too), so also future history is plainly modeled on past history – Frederick A. Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*

ABSTRACT

This study examines a range of South African speculative novels which situate their narratives in futuristic or 'alternative' milieus, exploring how these narratives not only address identity formation in a deeply divided and rapidly changing society, but also the ways in which human beings place themselves in relation to Nature and form notions of 'ecological' belonging. It offers close readings of these speculative narratives in order to investigate the ways in which they evince concerns which are rooted in the natural, social and political landscapes which inform them. Specific attention is paid to the texts' treatment of the intertwined issues of identity, belonging and ecological crisis.

This dissertation draws on the fields of Ecocriticism, Postcolonial Studies and Science Fiction Studies, and assumes a culturally specific approach to primary texts while investigating possible cross-cultural commonalities between Afrikaans and English speculative narratives, as well as the cross-fertilisation of global SF/ speculative features. It is suggested that South African speculative fiction presents a socio-historically situated, rhizomatic approach to ecology – one that is attuned to the tension between humanistic- and ecological concerns.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This study examines a range of South African novels which situate their narratives in futuristic or 'alternative' milieus. It investigates the ways in which these texts, despite their association with the 'pulp' genres of science fiction and fantasy, are in fact deeply concerned with the very issue that 'serious' South African authors have been examining for many years – alterity. Whilst many of the texts in question contain elements of the fantastic and/or tropes common to the SF genre, they have been broadly categorized as 'speculative narratives' for the purpose of this dissertation. The term 'speculative fiction' is often used interchangeably with 'science fiction', but can be more narrowly defined as "a particular subtype of science fiction in which 'established facts' are extrapolated to produce a new situation" (Wolfe *Critical Terms* 122). Judith Merril locates 'speculative fiction' as

> stories whose objective is to explore, to discover, to *learn*, by means of projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, of 'reality'… I use the term 'speculative fiction' here specifically to describe the mode which makes use of the traditional 'scientific method' (observation, hypothesis, experimentation) to examine some postulated approximation of reality, by introducing a given set of changes – imaginary or inventive – into the common background of 'known facts', creating an environment in which the responses and perceptions of the characters will reveal something about the inventions, the characters or both. (Merril 60)

'Speculative fiction' has been identified as the most appropriate designation for the remarkable set of Southern African texts under consideration since the term suggests an element of 'fancy' distinct from the realist mode, whilst at the same time not foreclosing a substantial relation to the 'real'. In this sense, speculative fiction shares a common trait with satire: its "bite", to use Dustin Griffin's word, lies in the knowledge that the alternative, sometimes seemingly alien, realms presented by the speculative narrative in many ways reflect, with a calculated degree of distortion, the very *real* historical, socio-political and economic concerns of the society which informs such a text (132). Commenting here specifically on the genre of satire, Griffin asserts:

> Satirists are released from certain restraints – about violating particular truth or fairness, about exaggeration or bias or evidence, whether in drawing or in applying a character. They have a license to lie. Yet they do not simply create a world of make-believe. The excitement of satire (its bite) is based on our knowledge (or just our suspicion) that the victims are "real", even if we can't always identify them. Our interpretive task as readers is not simply to identify the victim; it is also to identify the principles of selection and distortion that shape the satirist's "facts", and the ideological bias – perhaps invisible to the satirist – that undergirds the enterprise. (Griffin 132)

Similarly, authors of speculative narratives operate within a flexible literary landscape that allows them the opportunity to test the borders of the realm of possibility, to exaggerate, and even to "lie" (Griffin 132).[1] However, in much the same way as the "victims" of the satirist's wit are "real" (Griffin 132), speculative novels cannot be removed from their specific socio-historical contexts, often serving as dire warnings

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[1]Of course, this may be said to be true of all writers of fiction. However, by placing their narratives in alternate realms in which certain laws may not apply, speculative authors certainly have more freedom in this regard.

to societies regarding the possible future crises that could result from their current political, historical, environmental and/or economic trajectories. In an article titled "Aliens Have Taken the Place of Angels", Margaret Atwood, one of the few writers of speculative fiction to have achieved a great measure of success within the academic sphere, comments on the social role of science fiction: "We want wisdom. We want hope. We want to be good. Therefore we sometimes tell ourselves warning stories that deal with the darker side of some of our other wants" (Atwood "Aliens" n.pag).

However, in both "Aliens Have Taken the Place of Angels" and "Perfect Storms", an essay in which she gives an account of the events and influences which led to the conceptualization of her post-apocalyptic novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Atwood distinguishes her 'social' speculative work from what she classifies as 'science fiction proper'. In "Perfect Storms", Atwood controversially separates her speculative narratives from the genre of science fiction on the basis that "[i]t contains no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians" (Atwood "Storms" n.pag). She continues to assert that her two speculative novels, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), invent "nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent", and suggests that each novel simply "begins with a *what if* and then sets forth its axioms" (Atwood "Storms" n.pag). This "distinction between science fiction proper and speculative fiction" is again emphasized in "Aliens Have Taken the Place of Angels":

> For me, the science fiction label belongs on books with things in them that we can't yet do, such as going through a wormhole in space to another universe; and speculative fiction means a work that employs the means already to hand, such as DNA identification and credit cards, and that takes place on Planet Earth. (Atwood "Aliens" n.pag)

Whilst Atwood's seemingly dismissive attitude towards SF has dismayed many of its supporters[2], her eagerness to separate her work from *otherworldly* fiction can be understood as an attempt at emphasizing the legitimacy and social relevance of her novels. In a review of Margaret Atwood's most recent novel, *The Year of the Flood* (2009), Ursula Le Guin recognizes Atwood's desire to renounce a connection with SF, a genre which is so often dismissed as uncultured escapism, but also suggests that such a refusal is ultimately impoverishing:

> To my mind, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* and now *The Year of the Flood* all exemplify one of the things science fiction does, which is to extrapolate imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire. But Margaret Atwood doesn't want any of her books to be called science fiction. [Atwood's] arbitrarily restrictive definition [regarding what constitutes science fiction] seems to be designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awarders. She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto. Who can blame her? I feel obliged to respect her wish, although it forces me, too, into a false position. ...I must restrict myself to the vocabulary and expectations suitable to a realist novel, even if forced by those limitations into a less favourable stance. (Le Guin np)

Indeed, *Oryx and Crake*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Year of the Flood* have all been positively received as social speculative fiction (rather than science fiction) within the field of literary studies, and acknowledged as valuable critiques on the issues of genetic engineering, the destructive impact of human societies on the natural environment, and gender inequality. Although speculative fiction differs from science

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[2] Science fiction author Robert J. Sawyer, for example, indignantly exclaims: "Margaret Atwood doesn't like being called a science fiction writer. Tough beans, say I. When she writes a novel set in the future that purports to be firmly rooted in contemporary scientific thought [here referring to *Oryx and Crake*], she is indeed writing science fiction."

fiction in the sense that it doesn't utilize the heavily technologized aspects of SF, Atwood's adamant distancing of her speculative tales from "science fiction proper" in order to affirm her novels as *legitimate* social commentaries is not only an impoverishing exercise (as Le Guin suggests), but also a redundant one. SF and fantasy authors often take it upon themselves to act as the social conscience of the societies which produce them, despite their ostensibly 'low-brow' roots.

In the preface to William Gibson's collection of cyberpunk short stories, *Burning Chrome* (1995), Bruce Sterling states:

> If poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, science-fiction writers are its court jesters. We are Wise Fools who can leap, caper, utter prophecies, and scratch ourselves in public. We can play with Big Ideas because the garish motley of our pulp origins makes us seem harmless. (Sterling 9)

Sterling's assertion that the science fiction writer assumes the role of the Wise Fool in the modern-day literary 'court' implies that beneath all the leaping, capering and unpalatable public scratching there often rests a frightening wisdom. Science fiction is a genre which reflects, in an exaggerated and sometimes quite literally *monstrous* form, the fears, hopes and preoccupations of a culture. Moreover, the Wise Fools do indeed utter prophecies, presenting their readers with visions of apocalyptic futures marked by barren wastelands, genetic mutations and hostile artificial intelligence. Strange as science fiction's representations of future history may seem, these Big Ideas are often firmly rooted in the 'real' world and the various crises which continue to unfold in it.

In "Why Science Fiction?" Janet Kafka argues for the introduction of science fiction texts in the classroom, suggesting that the rise of the SF novel (as opposed to

now mostly defunct pulp SF magazines such as Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*) has resulted in SF becoming "more and more concerned with ideas and with such un-alien entities as social forces" (Kafka 47). She asserts:

> Much of [science fiction] bears analysis according to the same criteria you apply to other works of fiction. And unlike many other things your students will have to read, SF provides a critical vantage point for commentary on people and societies as we find them today, as well as extrapolating from this to give us a view of some possible alternate futures. Historically a pariah, free from the conventions and demands of the mainstream, SF can deal with any socio-political, ethical, or technological problem that the human race might meet, from nearly any point of view. (Kafka 46)

Correspondingly, Rosemary Jackson argues that SF's neighbouring genre, fantasy, "is produced within, and determined by, its social context" (3). Jackson asserts:

> Though [literary fantasy] might struggle against the limits of its context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it. The forms taken by any particular fantastic text are determined by a number of forces which intersect in different ways in each individual work. Recognition of these forces involves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinates, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy, and makes it impossible to accept a reading of this kind of literature which places it somehow mysteriously 'outside' time altogether. (Jackson 3)

In an essay titled, "Science Fiction" (1988), Raymond Williams speaks out against the neglect of the genre of science fiction as an area of critical inquiry. He asserts: "When we look, then, at a contemporary phenomenon like SF, we must be careful not to dismiss it because it is fanciful, extravagant, or even impossible, for, on the same

limited grounds, we could dismiss *The Odyssey*, *The Tempest*, *Gulliver's Travels*, or *The Pilgrim's Progress*" (Williams 356). Nearly twenty-three years after the publication of this essay, the once marginalized field of SF criticism has garnered a significant degree of interest amongst American and British scholars such as Adam Roberts, Sharon DeGraw, Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James.

Within a South African context, however, the value of science fiction to the field of literary studies has yet to be fully recognized. This is partially due to science fiction's association with 'pulp' fiction and low-brow escapism, but can also be attributed to the widely-held perception that SF has more to do with shiny machines and spaceships than with actual people. Due to the country's complex history of colonial and apartheid oppression, South Africa's literary landscape is highly politicized and much attention is paid to the narrative representation of human conflict, particularly the issues of race and gender. This is evidenced in the great emphasis that has been placed on the works of authors such as Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee[3], writers who are almost exclusively concerned with the negotiation of 'otherness', in South African syllabi.

Ursula Le Guin addresses the notion that science fiction is more concerned with technology than human lives in "Science Fiction and Mrs Brown". In this essay, Le Guin employs Virginia Woolf's conception of 'Mrs Brown'[4], as representative of a fully-rounded, 'human' literary character, in order to comment on the apparent lack of "real people" in fantasy and science fiction narratives (Le Guin 90). Le Guin questions whether there is room for the "too *round*" (87) Mrs Brown in the "gleaming

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[3]Incidentally, the first chapter of this thesis is devoted to Gordimer's *July's People* and Coetzee's *Life &Times of Michael K,* both texts belonging to the genre of South African speculative fiction. These texts' commitment to issues regarding alterity suggests that speculative elements and social responsibility are not mutually exclusive.
[4]Introduced in Woolf's essay, "Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown" (1923).

spaceships" of science fiction – in short, whether "a science fiction writer [can] write a novel" (88). She writes:

> There [Mrs Brown] sits. And what I am curious about is this: can the writer of science fiction sit down across from her? Is it possible? Have we any hope of catching Mrs Brown, or are we trapped for good in our great, gleaming spaceships hurtling out across the galaxy, antiseptic vehicles moving faster than the Richmond-Waterloo train, faster than the speed of light, ships capable of containing heroic captains in black and silver uniforms, and second officers with peculiar ears, and mad scientists with nubile daughters, ships capable of blasting other, inimical ships into smithereens with their apocalyptic, holocaustic rayguns, and of bringing loads of colonists from Earth to unknown worlds inhabited by incredibly sinister or beautiful forms of alien life, ships capable of anything, absolutely anything, except one thing: they cannot contain Mrs Brown. She simply doesn't fit. (Le Guin 87-88)

Le Guin, inspired by a hobbit named Frodo who looks very much like Mrs Brown, concludes that science fiction *is* "worth talking about, because it is a promise of continued life for the imagination, a good tool, an enlargement of consciousness, a possible glimpse, against a vast dark background, of the very frail, very heroic figure of Mrs Brown" (Le Guin 102). The questions surrounding Le Guin's Mrs Brown are equally important from a South African perspective. What place does Mrs Brown's South African counterpart – let's call her Mrs Khumalo, or Mrs van der Merwe for that matter – have in a spaceship equipped with rayguns? Surely we cannot merely dismiss the plight of Mrs Khumalo, for she has for too long been restricted to impoverished townships, forcefully displaced, left to die in concentration camps, subjugated, ignored. The region's legacy of violence demands that the stories told in post-apartheid South Africa should be those of *real* people. But can we successfully

write about real South Africans who happen to be clones, or genetically engineered donors, or cyborgs?

In "Subversive, Undisciplined and Ideologically Unsound or Why Don't South Africans Like Fantasy?", originally a paper presented at the 1991 AUETSA Conference hosted by Fort Hare University, Felicity Wood asks: "Why is there so little fantasy in English South African literature?" (32). Wood, writing prior to the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, suggests that the tendency to utilize the realist mode in English South African writing

> can be related in part to the way in which the South African situation has been perceived as so huge, all-important and dramatic that many South African writers seem to think that to write something gripping and powerful, all one needs to do is reflect the situation, in as straightforward a manner as possible. (Wood "Subversive" 32-33)

Wood further attributes the "resistance to fantasy" in English South African literature to the fact that "it's sometimes perceived as being distinct from reality, an escape from it, and thus the way in which fantasy serves as a means of exploring reality has often not been adequately acknowledged" (34). This paper focuses largely on magical realism as a literary off-shoot of fantasy and does not include any discussion of (arguably) the two most important works of speculative fiction to emerge in English South African writing prior to 1994, namely J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* and Michael Cope's *Spiral of Fire* (1987). Wood does, however, point to an aspect of fantasy that is relevant to the study of the related genre of speculative fiction in South Africa – its ability to "open up new spaces" (35). She writes:

[Fantasy is] undisciplined and does away with conventions and restraints. Fantasy often results from a certain dissatisfaction with the way things are or the way they are interpreted, and is concerned with viewing things in a different way or exploring them from other angles. (Wood "Subversive" 33)

Furthermore, Wood predicts the growth of fantasy in South African writing, arguing that the major political shifts taking place in South Africa in the last decade of the twentieth century were conducive to the development of this genre:

Things are changing in South African society; thus there is a possibility of new developments in South African literature, which might result in conditions that are more favourable for the growth of fantasy. The political terrain is shifting and things are far less clear-cut and there is less uncritical allegiance and adoration and far more cynicism. (Wood "Subversive 36)

Despite this prediction, Deirdre Byrne, in a 2004 essay titled, "Science Fiction in South Africa", laments "the regrettable dearth … of published science fiction and science fiction readers" in South Africa. Byrne attributes the lack of interest in science fiction in South Africa to a "restricted degree of knowledge about technology" (522). She writes:

A complex contrast, but one that is relevant to science fiction, is the disparity between levels of technological literacy. Some of the country's population have access to advanced technology, such as Internet connections and cell phones, but most citizens have a monthly income well below the comfort level. Illiteracy is extremely high, despite the efforts of a large number of educational organizations. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has reached crisis proportions; by 2010, approximately sixty-five percent of the country's adult population will have died of the disease if the current rate of infection continues unchecked. In this context, one cannot expect an advanced

awareness of technological or scientific developments; neither can one assume
even a basic acquaintance with published literature. (Byrne 522)

However, the success of South African-born Neill Blomkamp's Oscar-nominated SF film, *District 9* (2009) has resulted in an unprecedented boom in local science fiction and fantasy. Lauren Beukes's SF *noir*, *Zoo City* (2010) has recently been bestowed the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke award, indicating growing international interest in South African SF. In a recent article featured on *The Guardian*'s popular book blog, "Putting South African Science Fiction on the Map", David Barnett predicts that "it might well be that South African spec fiction is going to be this year's Scandinavian crime novel scene for British readers" (n.pag.).

Despite these achievements within the fields of science fiction film and literature, very little has been done in the way of scholarly articles examining the role of science fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction in South Africa literature. The field of South African speculative fiction presents a rich, uncultivated area of study which allows for the exploration of a range of themes relevant to the South African condition, including (but by no means restricted to) the issues of gendered and racialized inequity. This dissertation aims to address this dearth, examining how South African futuristic narratives not only explore identity formation in a deeply divided and rapidly changing society, but also the ways in which human beings place themselves in relation to Nature and form notions of 'ecological' belonging.

As stated earlier, the Southern African texts chosen for the purpose of this study exhibit traits common to both the SF and fantasy genres, as well as certain elements of satire, thus maintaining numerous structural links with traditionally

'socially conscious' genres.[5] This study offers close readings of these speculative narratives in order to investigate the ways in which they evince concerns which are rooted in the natural, social and political landscapes which inform them. Specific attention will be paid to the texts' treatment of the intertwined issues of identity, belonging and ecological crisis.

Given the broad scope of this investigation, readings are informed by a wide range of theoretical works. This study draws on the field of eco-criticism, most notably the work of post-colonial eco-critic, Anthony Vital, South African eco-critic, Julia Martin, and the eco-philosophy of Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as put forward in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Post-colonial theory will be applied where it relates to the construction of the self in relation to (an)other. In this regard, Homi K. Bhabha's seminal work, *The Location of Culture*, has proved invaluable. The philosophical writings of Jacques Derrida, Freya Mathews and R.D. Laing on the subject of the problematic relationship between self, other and non-human other will also be utilized. Furthermore, this dissertation will also make use of critical theories in the field of science fiction studies, including the work of Adam Roberts and Donna Haraway, with particular focus on the role of the hybrid other (i.e. the cyborg, the clone, the alien and the genetically engineered donor) as symbolic novum in science fiction narratives.

A range of historically, geographically and culturally diverse Southern African speculative texts will be examined. These include novels published during the height of the apartheid era in South Africa (J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, and Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land*); several contemporary post-apartheid speculative narratives (Eben Venter's *Trencherman*,

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[5] There are of course plenty of examples of socially conservative speculative fiction and this thesis by no means suggests that all speculative texts can necessarily be considered socially transgressive. The texts included in this study have been chosen specifically for their socially conscious elements.

Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*, Jane Rosenthal's *Souvenir*, and Jenny Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD*); a popular South African film (Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*); and three short stories (Nick Wood's "Thirstlands" and "Of Hearts and Monkeys" and Henrietta Rose-Innes's "Poison"). This study assumes a culturally specific approach to primary texts while investigating possible cross-cultural commonalities between Afrikaans and English speculative narratives as well as the cross-fertilisation of global SF/ speculative features. Firstly, however, it is necessary to expound the very unique and intricate web of factors which influence the South African experience of notions of identity, (national, familial, ethnic and/or group) belonging and the interrelated idea of belonging-in-Nature.

The impossibility of a 'South African' identity:

With eleven official languages, innumerable ethnic groups and severely entrenched racial divides, the idea of a 'South African self' is by no means a stable, monolithic concept. This cultural melting pot was dubbed 'the Rainbow Nation' by Archbishop Desmond Tutu immediately after the first democratic elections in 1994 in a desperate effort to provide an intensely traumatised people a sense of nationhood. However, as Shaun Irlam points out in "Unraveling the Rainbow", Tutu's insistence that "[South Africans] are sisters and brothers in one family – God's family, the human family" and his simultaneous emphasis on the need to "celebrate our diversity" (Tutu, cited in Irlam 695) is a "dual and difficult invitation" (Irlam 696). Irlam points to the fact that South Africa's post-apartheid image as culturally diverse but united nation has yet to be realized:

The international media fantasy of the New South Africa, widely sustained abroad, is belied at home, in the cities and townships of South Africa, where, despite modest moves towards integration, the society remains deeply divided racially and the gulf between rich and poor gapes wider than ever. (Irlam 697)

The demise of formal apartheid and South Africa's transition to a democratic state required the renegotiation of South African identities and the slippery boundaries between 'self' and 'other'. In the introduction to *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media*, Hadland et al state that "[a] complex process of identity construction, deconstruction and reconstruction has effectively characterised post-apartheid South Africa" (9). They write:

Since 1994 South Africa has experienced a significant transformation of its political and media landscapes. Not surprisingly, these transformations have impacted on both collective and individual identities of South Africans. On the one hand, those identities that had emerged and grown under apartheid were destabilised by post-1994 hegemonic shifts. On the other hand, the reconfiguration of the country's socio-political and media landscape created the conditions for – and promoted – the emergence of new individual and collective identities. (Hadland et al 9)

Similarly, Robert Thornton asserts:

There is no fundamental identity that any South African clings to in common with all, or even most other South Africans. South Africans have multiple identities in multiple contexts, depending on factors of experience, recruitment and mobilization, and the company one keeps. (Thornton 150)

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that issues of identity construction, and particularly concerns regarding the problematic relationship between self and racialized/gendered other continue to emerge as overarching themes in both apartheid and post-apartheid Southern African speculative fiction. Two apartheid-era English speculative texts, Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and J.M.Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, generate alternative South Africas (in both cases embroiled in a violent civil war) in order to stage encounters between self and other which force their respective protagonists to critically re-examine the ways in which they have constructed their identities. Similarly, Afrikaans author Karel Schoeman's speculative novel of the same period, *Promised Land* (published in Afrikaans as *Na die Geliefde Land*) re-interrogates beleaguered Afrikaner identity. This novel questions the place of white Afrikaners in a majority-ruled South Africa by drawing on widespread fears of the impending demise of the Afrikaner people and the threat of a civil war fuelled by racial tension. According to Rebecca Davies, apprehension regarding the future of the Afrikaner *volk* was particularly prevalent immediately after the first democratic elections in 1994:

> With the end of minority rule, many analyses painted a bleak future for Afrikanerdom subjugated beneath a state dominated by the ANC government and broadly aligned against Afrikaner interests. Some scholars predicted the tendency of important groups and sectors to simply 'opt out' of the state, whilst a resurgence of rightwing militancy and the Boeremag's thwarted bombing campaign raised the spectre of a race war. None of these situations has materialised. (Davies 2)

Despite the relatively peaceful manner in which democracy was achieved in South Africa and former presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki's conciliatory

approach to Afrikaners, pessimism regarding the continued existence of the Afrikaans language and culture, as well as the possibility of a race war, has persisted into the post-1994 period. The metaphoric unravelling of Afrikaner identity serves as the primary focus of Eben Venter's *Trencherman* (first published in Afrikaans as *Horrelpoot*), a futuristic novel which stages a return to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Venter's afro-pessimistic vision of an apocalyptic future South Africa will be discussed in full in Chapter Two, along with Karel Schoeman's speculative work, *Promised Land*.

Identity formation in post-apartheid South Africa is a multifaceted, entangled process influenced not only by a traumatic history of racial segregation and oppression, but also by increased exposure to globalizing supranational factors. In an era of genetic engineering, plastic surgery and "transnational technoscience" (Haraway 300), questions regarding what constitutes a human being have become ever more complex. Darryl Jones suggests that advances in technology, special effects and Computer Generated Imagery in the 1980s allowed producers of horror films to present audiences with grotesque bodies which were "not only technically impossible but probably literally unimaginable to previous generations of moviegoers" (Jones 176). These representations

> encompasse[d] a specific view of the human body as unstable, adaptable not only through prosthetics but through mechanics – the flesh machines of William Burroughs, J.G. Ballard, or David Cronenberg, and of cyberpunk; the cyborgs or computer-people of *Robocop* or *Strange Days*; the bleak vision of a mechanized humanity, complete with terrifying drill-bit phallus, in *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. (Jones 176)

Jones asserts that "the advertising, entertainment and sex industries have colluded to present an idealized, aspirational vision of the human body literally unobtainable without technological intervention" (176). The human body

> is variously pushed, pulled, shrunk, inflated, sucked dry, discoloured, frozen, invaded, or mechanized to produce such varieties as the current incarnation of Michael Jackson (looking far more disturbing than he did as a zombie or a werewolf in John Landis's *Thriller* video), or images of desirable womanhood from, say Pamela Anderson to Jordan, which posit vast, solid, dirigible breasts, the narrow waist of an adolescent, and the effectively hairless genitalia of an 11 year old. These are grotesque, an impossible combination of infantilism and fecundity, and they are also, strictly, cyborgs. (Jones 177)

The horror genre, then, reflects in exaggerated form the altered/alterable modern-day human body: "Technology and ideology are indistinguishable here, as many of these works anticipate, caricature, or simply reflect the *actual* condition of the human body after 1980" (Jones 176). The contemporary South African speculative texts examined throughout this study are influenced, in varying degrees, by this predominantly North American horror and cyberpunk tradition. Jane Rosenthal's *Souvenir* has as its protagonist a young female clone modelled after a Barbie doll; Jenny Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD* is concerned with the issues of genetic engineering and/or mutation; Nick Wood's protagonist in "Thirstlands" has cyborg attributes; Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* features mechanical body armour and an alien transformation; and both Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* have much in common with the work of American cyberpunk author Neal Stephenson.

Despite such reflection of globalized concerns regarding the impact of genetic engineering and other technological advances on the human body, the above-

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mentioned South African 'cyberpunk' narratives are still very much concerned with what has become the backbone of South African literature: the representation of race and gender. The altered bodies presented in these texts are often used metaphorically in order to comment on racial and gendered relations in South Africa, and related manifestations of alienation and displacement.

In *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*, Jenny Wolmark suggests that "[s]cience fiction provides a rich source of generic metaphors for the depiction of otherness, and the 'alien' is one of the most familiar: it enables difference to be constructed in terms of binary oppositions which reinforce relations of dominance and subordination" (2). Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* in particular uses the figure of the alien in order to comment on the legacy of racialized segregation and ongoing xenophobic violence in South Africa. However, the figure of the clone, the genetically engineered donor, the cyborg and the mutant serve equally well as representations of otherness. The question at stake here is the ways in which South African speculative fiction interrogates the notion of a nuanced and complex identity and its relation to a myriad of hierarchized other(s). This dissertation examines how the speculative mode serves to propose afresh the slipperiness of the boundaries between self and seemingly 'alien' other.

Belonging and the Self in Nature:

Another motif which emerges in the Southern African speculative text, a motif which is directly related to the struggle to negotiate a sense of national and ethnic belonging, is the notion of belonging to a specific *place*. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill

Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin identify "place and displacement" as "a major feature of postcolonial literatures" (8). They write:

> It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place … A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal from indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model … Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English. (Ashcroft et al 8-9)

In view of South Africa's unique history of oppression at the hands of colonial forces and, subsequently, the Afrikaner Nationalist government, "the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" is a fraught and difficult process (*ibid*.).The idea of environmental belonging, the positioning of the self in relation to the *natural* world, is inevitably problematic for a nation still very much burdened by a violent past characterised by racial segregation, land disputes, forced removals and the restriction of movement across the land in the form of pass laws. In the introduction to *Toxic Belonging*? *Identity and Ecology in Southern Africa* – a volume of essays resulting from the third Literature and Ecology Colloquium held in Grahamstown, South Africa in October 2006– Dan Wylie asserts:

> In a region scarified by centuries of pre-colonial migration, colonial invasion, internecine conflicts across every conceivable ethnic, gender, political and geographical frontier, massive industry-fuelled migrancy, apartheid-era

removals and dislocations, and accelerated blurring of almost all formerly accepted categorisations through globalisation, the notion of *belonging* becomes ever more fraught – and ever more important. (Wylie 3)

Here, the notion of 'belonging' to a specific place refers not only to the formation of a national identity, but also to the ways in which human beings situate themselves in relation to their natural environment. This sense of belonging to a particular environment or eco-system is inevitably interwoven with questions regarding the adequate distribution and conservation of natural resources. The apocalyptic element prevalent in many of speculative fiction's future histories points to an engagement with ecological concerns, particularly the dire threat to the earth's ecosystem due to the massive impact of global warming, pollution, the human population's over-exploitation of natural resources and ruthless experimentation with weapons of mass destruction. Lawrence Buell asserts that "[f]or half a century science fiction has taken a keen, if not consistent interest in ecology, in planetary endangerment, in environmental ethics, in humankind's relation to the nonhuman world" (56). Similarly, Bennett Huffman, in "Postmodern Ecocriticism in the Science Fiction Novel", argues that "ecologically-minded texts, especially those written in the science fiction genre, are explicitly activist in their orientation and intent, and are thus pedagogic warnings about the coming realities of the planet's ecological demise and ways in which humans will have to deal with it" (Huffman 65).

The trope of environmental catastrophe is also taken up in South African speculative fiction, and barren post-apocalyptic wastelands often serve as the backdrop to human (or humanoid) conflict in these narratives. In the case of South African tales of apocalypse, however, the ecological agenda is almost exclusively subordinate to the human drama, which is predominantly centred on the negotiation of

alterity. This element of anthropocentrism, this insistence on the centrality of humanistic concerns, is largely a result of the gross violation of human rights that South Africans suffered at the hands of colonial settlers and apartheid-era leaders, and particularly the ways in which environmental policy-making was used in the service of such oppressive institutions.

In order to come to an understanding of this desire to emphasize inter-human relationships above environmental concerns, it is necessary to turn to the field of South African ecocriticism. While there has been some dispute regarding the term (proposed alternatives include 'literary ecology', 'environmental literary criticism' and 'ecopoetics'), ecocriticism can be roughly defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xix). The term 'ecocriticism' was first coined by William Rueckert in a 1978 essay titled, "Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism". The possibility of an intersection between literary studies and environmental concerns is further developed in seminal works such as Annette Kolodny's eco-feminist work, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience in American Life and Letters* (1975), and Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). Green literary studies continues to gain relevance as "environmental and population pressures inevitably and increasingly support the position that any literary criticism which purports to deal with social and physical reality will encompass ecological concerns" (Love 1). In *Practical Ecocriticism* Glen A. Love asserts:

As the circumstances of the natural world intrude ever more pressingly into our teaching and writing, the need to consider the interconnections, the

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implicit dialogue between the text and the environmental surroundings, becomes more and more insistent. Ecocriticism is developing as an explicit critical response to this unheard dialogue, an attempt to raise it to a higher level human consciousness. Teaching and studying literature without reference to the natural conditions of the world and the basic ecological principles that underlie all life seems increasingly short-sighted, incongruous. (Love 16)

Ecocriticism, and particularly the related environmental philosophy of Deep Ecology (a term coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss in 1972), is concerned with the interconnectedness of all ecosystems and life forms on earth. In "Beyond Ecology", Neil Evernden points to the interdependence of humans and their natural environment:

Where do we draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one organism stop and another begin? Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world, or will the atoms on this page be a part of your body tomorrow? How, in short, can you make any sense out of the concept of man as a discrete entity? How can the proper study for man be man if it is impossible to exist out of context? (Evernden "Beyond" 95)

Within a South African context, however, the possibility of establishing a nonanthropocentric eco-sensitivity based on the location of the self as a *part* of the natural environment, a notion propagated in dominant Northern American ecocritical studies, is rendered problematic. The history of conservationism in Africa is not only blemished by the violent displacement and dispossession of indigenous peoples, but is also associated with European mastery over the natural resources of its colonies[6]. In *Environment and Empire*, William Beinart and Lotte Hughes explore the ways in

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[6]See Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900 – 1900* for further discussion of the link between environment and empire.

which "European imperialism was... inseparable from the history of global environmental change" (1). In the African continent, Beinart and Hughes suggest, anticolonial sentiments were fuelled by conflict arising from Empire's exploitative and exclusive conservationist practices:

> In parts of the British Empire, land was not only appropriated from indigenous people, but racially based legislation restricted them to reserves or limited their capacity to purchase in areas that had been privatized. Conservationist controls could be linked to the management of reserved areas, and where this was the case, they exacerbated political tensions over dispossession. In African countries, some of the most intense conflicts had their origins in the assertion of local rights to land and natural resources, in the face of colonial conservationism. After the Second World War, when colonial states became more assertive in respect of development, and as intervention escalated, environmentally linked protests began to feed into mass anticolonial movements. (Beinart and Hughes 16)

Ecocriticism is still very much an *emerging* discipline in Africa, with relatively few scholars committing themselves to environmental literary studies. William Slaymaker points to the "general absence of ecocriticism and literature of the environment as noteworthy and attractive topics for research and creative writing" among black African artists and Africanist critics in recent years (132). Slaymaker suggests that "(f)or some black African critics, ecolit and ecocrit are another attempt to 'white out' black Africa by coloring it green" (132). He further argues that ecocriticism "appears as one more hegemonic discourse from the metropolitan West" (132).

Such "ecohesitation" is also present within the South African academy, particularly among black literary critics and authors (Slaymaker 133). That is not to say that environmental literary criticism has not to *some* extent been pursued in South

Africa. Since the 1992 AUETSA conference titled 'Literature, Nature and the Land: Ethics and Aesthetics of the Environment', which is credited with "effectively introducing ecocriticism to the South African academy", several theorists have turned their attention to the study of the relationship between Southern African literature and the environment (Barker 55). One of the contributors to this seminal conference, Julia Martin, especially, has emerged as one of the foremost ecocritics of the region. However, South African academe has for the most part been slow to acknowledge ecocriticism as a valid mode of inquiry, opting instead to focus their attention on the significant challenges still facing scholars with regards to the issues of race, class and gender. In "Hippos, Forests and Environmental Literacy", a paper presented at the historic 1992 AUETSA conference, Julia Martin addresses the South African academy's reluctance to embrace ecology as a valuable approach to literary criticism. She asserts:

> I imagine a package of lit. crit. breakfast cereal, the staples of race, class and gender supplemented with a new ingredient: "New, improved, with added ecology!" says the green-ink text, printed on unbleached, recycled card. The product is marketed throughout a chain of academic shopping centres, but unfortunately many people are reluctant to buy. Perhaps this is not surprising. The majority of South Africans have reason to find environmental-friendliness unpalatable, tasting as it so often does of white privilege and forced removals. What does saving rhinos, rain forests and the ozone layer have to do with poverty and oppression, anyway? (Martin 75)

Martin continues to suggest various approaches to the intersection of the concerns of literary studies and eco-politics. Such a connection must acknowledge that environmental degradation is irrevocably intertwined with social and political injustice. Martin asserts that "[w]e need to begin by acknowledging that most people

in this country have historical justification for seeing ecological issues as irrelevant, and even inimical, to the struggle for social and political justice" (76). Indeed, the "theoretical perspectives" outlined by Martin as useful for such an eco-political approach to literature, deep ecology, eco-feminism, eco-socialism and theology, all "foreground the correspondence between human and environmental exploitation" and "assume there's some hope in intervening in the process" (80). Thus, Martin suggests, "[w]e're back to race, class and gender after all…" (80).

In an essay titled "Situating Ecology in Recent South African Fiction", Anthony Vital recognizes the entanglement between environmental and socio-political concerns, and envisages a "postcolonial environmentalism" which successfully negotiates the "inevitable friction between the tendency to value human need and the recognition (supplied by ecology) that the natural world has its own value" (299). Vital identifies South Africa's environmental justice movement as already exemplifying such an integrated approach to environmentalism:

> This movement, perhaps more than other similar tendencies, develops an environmentalism that could be called postcolonial, asserting the need for a 'people-centred' interest in the environment while being alert to both South Africa's colonial legacies and its peripheral position within a globalised economy. To anyone interested in a specifically South African ecocriticism, the environmental justice movement thus offers a useful context in which to re-envisage and evaluate South African writing. (Vital "Situating Ecology" 298)

Vital also recognizes the ways in which "ecology can still be seen as deeply implicated in the bureaucracies of the land-owning classes, in the ideologies protecting the material comforts which modernity is spreading with great unevenness

across the planet" (299). However, he suggests, this tension can also result in productive ways of engaging with the contested postcolonial space "in both social and ecological terms" (Vital "Situating Ecology" 299). Vital asserts

[E]cology can serve as a rallying point for local resistance to the encroaching forces of global capital. Postcolonial understandings of ecology in this way exist in the spaces defined by wariness towards the power, both economic and cultural, that flows from metropolitan centres, subverting what is perceived as damaging while engaging with what can be strategically useful in defence. (Vital "Situating Ecology" 299)

In "Toward an African Ecocriticism", Vital again puts forward the possibility of "a new kind of concern for the environment emerging in the post-colonial era, one attuned to the histories of unequal development and varieties of discrimination, including, of course, racism and sexism" (90). For Vital this socially aware approach to environmental concerns "can be understood as developing a postcolonial understanding of ecology" (Vital "Situating Ecology" 297).

In "'Back to the World': Reading Ecocriticism in a Post-Colonial Context" Susie O'Brien points to the ways in which social and environmental concerns are inter-related, suggesting that "ecocriticism is worth investigating as a critical movement that has the potential to contribute to the understanding of the ways in which cultures and environments shape each other – an understanding that becomes particularly urgent in the current period of environmental crisis" (178). Similarly, Graham Huggan, in "'Greening' Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives", argues that there are "grounds... for a productive overlap between the tasks of ecocriticism and those of postcolonial criticism" (701). He suggests that postcolonial criticism has "effectively renewed, rather than belatedly discovered, its commitment to the

environment, reiterating its insistence on the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse" (Huggan 702).

In a later essay, titled "Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Limits of Green Romanticism", Huggan again asserts that the fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism "have more in common than is usually acknowledged" (Huggan "Postcolonial Ecocriticism" 6).[7] He writes:

> Both are invested, for example, in the situated critique of current globalizing practices that use capitalist ideologies of development to justify corporate expansionism and technological managerialism; and both are equally concerned with critically analysing the representational mechanisms that lend legitimacy to these practices, demonstrating the power of culture to (re)shape the word and, through it, the world. ... Both, finally, are deeply ethical in their commitment to ideals of social transformation and improvement, and to bettering the conditions, in particular, of the impoverished, exploited and oppressed. (Huggan "Postcolonial Ecocriticism" 6)

Despite these commonalities, postcolonial environmentalism, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin suggest in *The Empire Writes Back*, "must deal with a number of deeply problematic issues and conflicting interests" (215). In order for postcolonialism to articulate and theorize fully its commitment to ecocriticism (and vice versa), these disciplines will need to address anxieties surrounding their notoriously nebulous parameters. Graham Huggan argues that postcolonialism is

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[7]The possibility of a useful intersection of the fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism is also addressed in Rob Nixon's "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism", Maggie Ann Bowers's "Eco-Criticism in a (Post-) Colonial Context", Travis Mason's "Lick Me, Bite Me, Hear Me, Write Me: Tracking Animals between Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism", and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Green Postcolonialism*.

a field which, much like ecocriticism, is racked by its own internal conflicts and which, also like ecocriticism, has been haunted by its almost congenital inability to determine its own parameters or even to provide a convincing explanation of itself. Part of the difficulty for both fields is their respective practitioners' heightened – some might say suffocating – awareness of the provenance of their own critical and theoretical vocabularies, vocabularies arguably indebted to the very small-"r" romanticisms that postcolonial critics, in particular, often explicitly reject. (Huggan "Postcolonial Ecocriticism" 6)

Huggan further warns against "the small-"r" romanticization of perceived 'peoples of nature' that has more in keeping with western cosmopolitan conscience-making than with the solidarity of the oppressed" and "another small-"r" romantic formulation that undermines the situatedness and variability of social conflicts over natural resources, preferring instead to assimilate these to a master narrative of resistance that pits local (grassroots) heroes against global (corporate) villains" (Huggan "Postcolonial Ecocriticism" 7). This thesis is particularly alert to the dangers of "romantic formulations" which serve to flatten out the differences between various post-colonial experiences and ecologies under umbrella terms such as 'postcolonial ecocriticism'.

In *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*, David Attwell proposes the rejection of postcolonial theory as a "foreign, homogenising, ahistoricising, 'poststructuralist' import" and suggests that South African scholars should "reinvent it on [their] own terms and thereby re-enter an international conversation in which [they] could not fully participate during apartheid" (ix). Attwell argues for a South African exceptionalism, pointing to the region's "textured postcoloniality"– the unique combination of "the histories of settler-colonial and migrant communities with that of indigenous societies", which "in a sense … combines in one country the histories of Australia and Nigeria" (1). "In South Africa", he asserts, "the heirs of settler and autochthonous cultures have gone

together down the road of finding a common basis for their political, economic, and cultural life, following the departure of the colonial and later the imperial powers – first the Dutch, then the British – which so decisively shaped the region" (Attwell 2).

Attwell further draws on Fernando Ortiz's concept of *transculturation* in order to explicate his notion of a 'textured' South Africa postcoloniality:

> Ortiz offers the term in dialogue with Bronislaw Malinowski, as an alternative to the latter's notion of *acculturation* as a general condition of postcolonial societies, a term that implies a degree of passivity on the part of 'recipient' cultures. Transculturation, by contrast, suggests multiple processes, a dialogue in both directions and, most importantly, processes of cultural destruction followed by reconstruction on entirely new terms. Transculturation goes further than the weaker concept of cultural translation, which would be the translation of material from one culture into the terms of another. (Attwell 17-18)

Ortiz's notion of *transculturation*, then, does not merely suggest the acceptance or rejection of certain elements of one culture by another, but rather emerges as a process which allows for a more complex relationship between discourses[8]. These "multiple processes", which suggest the deconstruction of existing cultural artefacts and the subsequent reconstruction of these in entirely new, previously unconceived of ways, invokes Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's unorthodox geophilosophy (Attwell 17).

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[8]The concept of transculturation is usefully illustrated in Joni Adamson's *Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocritcism*, which introduces the concepts of an "inclusive environmentalism" or a "multicultural ecocriticism" (xix). Driving through the Sonoran Desert from Sells, the capital of the Tohono O'odham Nation, to the small village of San Simon, Adamson becomes increasingly aware of the ways in which the natural surroundings are infused with the history, myth, creative expression and hardships of the people who have inhabited the region for centuries, as well as the ways in which the Tohono O'odham people preserve traditional culturewhilst "surviving among the people who created the atom bomb, cable television, and 7-11s" (30).

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari challenge the hegemony of binary logic by introducing the concept of an "assemblage" or "multiplicity" that is organized according to "lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories", but is also necessarily subject to "movements of deterritorialization and destratification", i.e. rupture and destabilization (Deleuze & Guattari 3-4). Thus, the assemblage is in constant flux, subject to "lines of flight" which result in deterritorialization and subsequent reterritorialization. This process of destabilization and restabilization is explained through the concept of the rhizome, which "operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" (Deleuze &Guattari 21). That is, the rhizome signifies a dynamic which allows for multiple, heterogeneous connections, an "acentered, non-hierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states" (Deleuze and Guattari 21).

This concept does not disallow the existence of structured, segmentary "strata" or "territories", but rather suggests that those planes are subject to multiplicity and processes of deterritorialization and subsequent reterritorialization, that is, the re-establishing of an aspect of the original plane in new, previously unthought-of ways. Deleuze and Guattari suggest:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. (Deleuze and Guittari 9)

Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is useful for the conception of a localized, postcolonial ecocriticism not only because of its utilization of ecological concepts and metaphors, but also due to its articulation of a kind of resistance to the authority of binary logic which is not hinged on the disavowal of organizational structures, but rather suggests that there exists exciting, fruitful spaces or 'lines of flight' between structures or at the point of structural collapse (deterritorialization).

Both Vital and Martin suggest a kind of rhizomatic approach to social and ecological issues within the contested South African space. In this sense, a localized ecocriticism does not attempt to dismiss the complex and violent history of conservationism in South Africa, but rather suggests ways in which the tension between ecological and humanistic concerns can be negotiated. Through a process of deterritorialization or (to return to Ortiz) *transculturation*, an approach to ecology which remains aware of local needs, histories and concerns can be established. This study investigates how South African speculative fiction's rejection of purely misanthropic environmentalism, despite its obvious concern with ecological crisis, can be viewed as exemplifying a postcolonial or rhizomatic approach to ecology. It raises questions regarding the ways in which speculative texts can strike a balance between presenting distinctly localized approaches to the relationship between self, socio-historic situatedness, and the natural environment, and responding to global discourses of exploitation and inequality.

Chapter one of this thesis examines two speculative novels dating from the late apartheid era in South Africa, namely Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) and J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* (1974). These novels have in common the representation of a racially-fuelled South African civil war, and both texts see the displacement of protagonists from besieged urban settings to unfamiliar, imagined

rural environments. Coetzee's elusive protagonist, Michael K, embarks on a journey from the war-torn city of Cape Town to the farm of his mother's youth in Prince Albert. In a similar shift, Nadine Gordimer's Smales family is forced to flee their urban home and take refuge in the rural village of July, their former servant. These geographical moves to speculative non-urban spaces allow for the questioning of entrenched categories, boundaries and identities and stage encounters between self, other and environment whilst acknowledging the interconnectedness of these sites of conflict. This chapter explores the intersection of social and environmental injustices in these two novels.

Chapter two focuses on the Afrikaans farm novel (*plaasroman*) in English translation and highlights the ways in which this genre has traditionally served to justify and naturalize the Afrikaner farmer's right to the land. Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* (1972) and Eben Venter's *Trencherman* (*2006*) are identified as speculative, parodic returns to the *plaasroman* which illuminate ambivalences and aporic moments inherent in the trope of the *boereplaas*. Both these texts question the traditional *plaasroman*'s validation of the myth of a spiritual *verflechtung* between the farm and its paternal heir, and suggest that the untenable systems of control and regulation imposed on the ecology of the farm in these novels are analogous to unsustainable attempts at preserving the insularity and exclusivity of Afrikaner culture. In many ways, these speculative rewritings of the traditional *plaasroman* signal a return of the repressed, laying bare all that must necessarily be disavowed in order to maintain the myth of the *boereplaas* and its 'rightful' heirs.

Chapter three of this study introduces Jenny Robson's speculative Young Adult novel, *Savannah 2116 AD* (2004), which is set in a futuristic South Africa in which a group of elitist conservationists institute an accord allowing ordinary citizens,

known as Homosaps, to be herded together in reserves in order to save endangered African wildlife. This chapter examines the ways in which Robson not only utilizes the familiar trope of the child as mediator of environmental and moral redemption, but also identifies the South African landscape as a fraught and contested space in which the founding of (to use Freya Mathews' phrase) an 'ecological self' is necessarily problematic. Social concerns have become irrevocably intertwined with the global issue of environmentalism and it is suggested that this novel questions the relation between the environmental degradation of the Southern African landscape and social and political exploitation. *Savannah 2116 AD* draws on both local (i.e. South African) and global experiences of oppression and displacement, as well as the relationship between such injustices and certain modes of conservationism, in order to create a fantastic world in which the tension between the redemptive impulses of the natural self (the child) and the devastating effects of institutionalized segregation and subjugation is explored.

Chapter Four draws on Adam Roberts's notion of the symbolic "novum" as the embodiment of alterity or the "point of difference" (6) in a science fiction text, as well as Donna Haraway's conception of the cyborg in order to explore the ways in which the figure of the clone in Jane Rosenthal's speculative novel, *Souvenir* (2004) represents gendered difference and fragmented female experience. This chapter also explores the ways in which Rosenthal utilizes the South African trope of the Karoo landscape as 'belonging to no one and therefore to everyone' and the tradition of the Karoo travelogue in order to address questions of belonging and identity formation in relation to an increasingly ecologically threatened world.

Chapter five compares Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009), and Lauren Beukes's recent cyberpunk novel, *Zoo City* (2010) and suggests that both texts not

only address local concerns such as racism, xenophobia, violence and poverty, but also make use of a boundary-blurring cyborg or trickster figure in order to interrogate the conceptual divides which continue negatively to affect human/animal relations. This section draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of 'becoming-animal' and shows how this idea is exemplified by the interstitial characters of Wikus van der Merwe, whose transformation from human to 'prawn' is chronicled in *District 9*, and Beukes's protagonist, Zinzi, who is both physically and psychically linked to an animal familiar (a sloth) due to an error in judgement which results in the death of her brother. Both these speculative human/non-human couplings, calls to these protagonists to engage their sympathetic imaginations in hitherto unheard-of ways, can be seen as resulting in a heightened sense of responsibility and hospitality towards a non-human other, which can also be interpreted as the racial other in both instances. Such rethinking of human/animal relations allows for the imagining of productive and absolutely just spaces between fixed territories or boundaries, a kind of multiplicity that is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the rhizome.

Chapter six of this thesis focuses on South African speculative short fiction, specifically Nick Wood's futuristic short stories, "Thirstlands" and "Of Hearts and Monkeys", and Henrietta Rose-Innes's "Poison". Each one of these stories evinces the need for social and environmental responsibility in an environmentally devastated future realm, and highlights the interconnectedness between self, human and non-human others and environment. This section offers discussions on theories from the field of Environmental Psychology, R.D. Laing's writings on the process of identity formation, and Freya Mathews's notion of an ecological self and explores the ways in which these concepts relate to the above-mentioned short stories and their treatment of questions of the self's entanglement with and accountability for both human and

animal others as well as the natural environment. This final chapter will also establish

the extent to which the theme of an intertwining between conceptions of the self, the

other and the environment as another relational other can be read as central to the

South African speculative novel.

CHAPTER ONE
'Living as a speck of ant-feet': Ecological and Social Responsibility in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*

This first chapter introduces two very central and conventionally 'scholarly' speculative South African texts. Not only are there no Martians or clones present in either of these novels, but both authors are Nobel laureates who are more or less sacrosanct within the Southern African literary academy. Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) and J.M. Coetzee's *Life &Times of Michael K* (1974) are comparable in a number of ways, most notably in their interrogation of racial subjectivity within apartheid-era South Africa. While the historically-grounded, socio-political aspects of both *Life & Times of Michael K* and *July's People* have received much attention, the significance of these novels' utilization of the speculative mode has been largely ignored. The subtlety of the speculative elements in both novels is such that they at times read like realist texts. In both cases very little is revealed about the brutal civil wars that have erupted in Gordimer and Coetzee's alternative South Africas, and the characters' violent and discriminatory encounters are not entirely incompatible with the bizarre occurrences which characterised the late apartheid era in which they were written.

Nevertheless, the use of the speculative mode in *July's People* and *Life & Times of Michael K*, however subtle, is important in the sense that it allows the characters to occupy spaces from which they can imagine the collapse of, or at the very least question the validity of, entrenched categories, boundaries and power dynamics. In both novels this is facilitated by a forced removal from a besieged urban environment and subsequent settlement in an unfamiliar rural location. These shifts from one physical situation to the next necessarily result in conflict between self,

other and environment. These texts also acknowledge the *interconnectedness* of these various sites of conflict.

Nadine Gordimer's writings often lend themselves to ecocritical readings, most notably *The Conservationist* (1974), *Get a Life* (2005) and the short story, "Tape Measures", which is included in *Beethoven Was One-sixteenth Black* (2007). "Tape Measures" is of particular interest due to its problematization of the boundaries between self and non-human organism. Told from the perspective of a tape worm unhappily trying to weather its human host's attempts to expel it, the story briefly interrogates what constitutes the self, the arbitrary division between inside and outside and the question of responsibility towards the organic others *inside* us. This quirky reworking of Levinasian notions of responsibility and hospitality in relation to a non-human other echoes some of the concerns addressed in *July's People*.

Although perhaps not as overtly concerned with environmentalism as *Get a Life* or *The Conservationist*, Gordimer's *July's People* is as much an enactment of a confrontation between self and physical environment as it is of an encounter between self and racial other. The novel suggests that these encounters, and the sense of responsibility that they evoke, are not unrelated: social responsibility is irrevocably intertwined with *environmental* responsibility. Environment then assumes the role of Levinas' 'third': another other that is always already present, the entry of whom demands the question: "What do I have to do with justice?" (Levinas *Otherwise than Being* 157). Levinas writes:

> In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness. A face obsesses and shows itself, between transcendence and visibility/invisibility. Signification signifies in justice, but also, more ancient

than itself and than the equality implied by it, justice passes by justice in my responsibility for the other, in my equality with respect to him for whom I am a hostage. The other is from the first the brother of all the other men. The neighbour that obsesses me is already a face, both comparable and incomparable, a unique face and in relationship with faces, which are visible in the concern for justice. (Levinas 158)

In the translator's introduction to Emmanuel Levinas' *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Alphonso Lingis clarifies this concept, suggesting that for Levinas the entry of the third party is "to discover the exigency for justice, for an order among responsibilities" (Lingis xli). Due to the entry of the third party, I (the self in relation to the others) become "someone to be concerned about, someone to answer for" (Lingis xli). However,

It is from the first an ethical obligation, the sense that one is answerable for one's own being too. It is then not the reversibility of the relationship with alterity that produces it, but its multiplication to the second power. For Levinas [concern about oneself] originates in a subjectivity whose responsibility has become a problem for itself, which has discovered the exigency for an order among responsibilities. With the entry of the third party, there arises a problem of co-presence and synchronization, of distributive justice. (Lingis xli-xlii)

The presence of a third other – in the case of *July's People* the 'entry' of the environment – demands a kind of introspection, a re-placing of the self in relation to others and the responsibilities evoked by such encounters (what Levinas refers to as 'proximity').

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In *Betrayals of the Body Politic*, Andrew V. Ettin asserts that the staging of encounters between the self and its relational others in the work of Nadine Gordimer is haunted by a sense of alienation. He suggests:

> The frequency with which [Gordimer's] characters, throughout her career, leave, come back, flee into exile, or are in prison at the end implies how tension-laden the attachments to home, to Africa, are. But so are all close attachments, within which we make lives of sensual experience, attempt to communicate with one another, fail and are failed through secrets and deception, and dwell inside our anxieties about home and family relations. We live, her work suggests, perplexed by strangeness to one another and ourselves, seeking our native land, our home. (Ettin 59)

Ettin's suggestion that our alienation from one another is ultimately related to our estrangement from the natural world or "our native land" points to this notion of an interconnectedness between self, other and environment (or the self, the 'first' and the 'third'). However, Gordimer herself asserts that this sense of estrangement is necessarily interspersed by moments in which we have knowledge of our others, both human and non-human. In "Living in the Interregnum", Gordimer declares that "there is no representation of our social reality without that strange area of our lives in which we have knowledge of one another" (27). This knowledge can never be complete, yet "there are things we know about each other that are never spoken, but are there to be written" (Gordimer 27). For Susan Greenstein, *July's People* "is set in that 'strange area', not in the heart of darkness which is the outsider's Africa" ("Miranda's Story" 242). She states:

> Instead of appropriating black experience for the needs of her art, Gordimer succeeds in bearing witness to the story she cannot tell while at the same time

freeing the life of the imagination from the unacknowledged impress of the past. (Greenstein 242)

If we concede that Gordimer not only "bear[s] witness to the story" of the black other, July, but also expresses that area in which we bear knowledge (however incomplete) of another, non-human other, *July's People* must necessarily be read as a novel of both social and environmental responsibility and of the ways in which these concerns intersect (Greenstein *ibid*).

    July's People envisions a future South Africa in which a violent civil war has erupted in reaction to the oppressive policies of the ruling Afrikaner Nationalist Party- an event which spells an uncertain and dangerous future for previously advantaged white South Africans. Among those white families who are driven from their suburban homes are the Smales, who, with the help of their servant, July, seek refuge in his remote rural village which is as yet removed from the violence that has engulfed the city.

    Once marooned in July's village, Maureen and Bam Smales and their three children become increasingly reliant on July for their survival. The Smales are stripped of all their worldly possessions, the artefacts of their cultural and economic supremacy, and they must find a way to relate to July, who is now not only their loyal servant, but also their host and protector. In his monograph *Nadine Gordimer*, Dominic Head suggests:

    The situation of the Smales' new dependence on their former servant creates a simple reversal of their power relationship, but it also produces a complex analysis of the network of forces that has created these individuals and the matrix in which they interact. (Head 125)

In the unfamiliar locale of July's homestead, the relationship between the Smales and July can no longer be reduced to the performative roles of 'master', 'mistress' and 'servant'. Maureen in particular is painfully aware of the disparity between July, the "decently-paid and contented male servant" (Gordimer 9), and Mwawate, the man July becomes once the power structures which have served to confine him to the role of Homi K. Bhabha's "reformed recognizable Other" begin to crumble. In his position as 'good' servant, July comes to represent a system of "colonial mimicry" which produces an Other who is "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha 86). For Bhabha, the discourse of mimicry is "constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 86). In this sense, mimicry is always already unstable, threatening to collapse in on itself.

For the first time in their fifteen-year acquaintance, Maureen is required to acknowledge the aporia inherent in the discourse of colonial mimicry and she is compelled to engage with July as *wholly* other. Through her removal from the highly regulated world of apartheid politics, Maureen now occupies a precarious position *outside* of the law, a site of undecidability which Jacques Derrida views as the condition for justice and responsibility. In "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility", Derrida suggests:

> [A] decision has to go through some impossibility in order for it to be a decision. If we knew what to do, if I knew in terms of knowledge what I have to do before the decision, then the decision would not be a decision. It would simply be the application of a rule, the consequence of a premiss, and there would be no problem, there would be no decision. Ethics and politics, therefore, start with undecidability. (Derrida "Hospitality" 66)

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For Derrida, *absolute* responsibility, a decision made from a position of undecidability, resides within a response to the call of the wholly other, that is, "through the relation to *every other (one) as every (bit) other*" (Derrida *Gift of Death* 79). Maureen then, in the absence of law, in a previously unthinkable situation which precludes the mere "application of a rule", must not only respond to July as *wholly* other, but must also recognise her own complicity in his former subjugation (Derrida "Hospitality" 66).

When Maureen is suddenly encircled by the sounds of July's mother tongue during an argument, his speech, much like Friday's final, silent scream in Coetzee's *Foe* – that "slow stream, without breath, without interruption" which "beats against [Susan Barton's] eyelids, against the skin of [her] face" – is a torrent of otherness that is felt as a physical force (Coetzee *Foe* 157):

> Suddenly he began to talk at her in his own language, his face flickering powerfully. The heavy cadences surrounded her; the earth was fading and a thin, far radiance from the moon was faintly pinkening parachute-silk hazes stretched over the sky. She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. (Gordimer *July's People* 152)

In this instance, July need no longer maintain the façade of the 'mimic man' and sheds this imposed role in a powerful utterance of self-assertion. And in her recognition of July's absolute alterity and the ways in which his identity has hitherto been constructed, Maureen is "behaving like [a] knight of faith", infinitely responsible and absolutely ethical (Derrida *Gift of Death* 79).

It is significant that Maureen experiences July's declaration of autonomy not only in racial terms but also in relation to their physical environment. Her awareness of the way in which the earth fades and the moonshine colours the clouds with pink, as well as the suggestion that the force of July's words is somehow affecting these changes in the surroundings, points to a relationship between shifts in the self/other dynamic and variation in the ever-present 'third', i.e. the environment. In this instance, a relationship is also established between the fragility of the "fading" and "thin" (Gordimer 152) earth and Maureen's own delicate sense of self. The subtle richness and beauty of the landscape also serves to contrast the poverty of Maureen's psyche as she is gradually stripped of all the trappings of middle-class white existence.

Maureen's growing awareness of the ways in which her relationship with July has been regulated by a variety of social constructs is accompanied by a similarly fledgling understanding of the ways in which her attitude towards the African landscape has been shaped by a colonial upbringing. As Maureen comes to acknowledge her unwitting participation in the suppression of July, she also begins to recognise the fact that she and Bam had adopted decidedly exploitative attitudes towards the African 'bush' prior to their dislocation. In the time before the political upheaval, Bam frequently "went trap-shooting to keep his eye in, out of season, and when winter came spent his weekends in the bush, within a radius of two hundred kilometres of his office and home in the city, shooting guinea-fowl, red-legged partridges, wild duck and spur-wing geese" (Gordimer 5).

Bam's gentlemanly hunting trips, never staged too far afield and reminiscent of the fowl-hunting tradition of the British aristocracy, are leisurely pursuits which require him to engage only superficially with his prey, for "a guinea-fowl head

doesn't look much different, dead, from alive" (77). It is only once he is forced to shoot two warthog piglets in order to provide meat for the village that Bam, who "would no sooner shoot a buck than a man" (6), is confronted with the true horror of killing a fellow living creature: "It was horrible, the bloodied pig-face weeping blood and trailing blood-snot; the clean death from the chromed barrels that smelled aseptically of gun-oil" (77). Similarly, Maureen had maintained a disinterested, romanticized view of July's homestead prior to their arrival in the village. She admits to Bam that she had imagined a scenario in which the family visits July's home during a school vacation, "[w]alking in [there] with presents for them, all lined up clapping their hands together in greeting" and "[t]elling everybody at home [they] actually drove [July] all the way to the bundu, visited him as a friend" (38). In this flight of fancy, the Smales are angels of mercy condescending to visit the home of a subordinate, and they are received with humble gratitude. This idealistic view of July's home is extended to the view of the African wilderness as something containable to be enjoyed only from the comfort of Kruger Park rondavels with "concrete floors, thickly shined with red polish" (6). Maureen realises that

> [s]he could name the variety of thorn-tree – *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *sekelbos* – with its yellow tassels dangling from downy pink and mauve pom-poms, both colours appearing on the same branch. Roberts' bird book and standard works on indigenous trees and shrubs were the Smales' accommodation of the wilderness to themselves when they used to visit places like this, camping out. At the end of the holiday you packed up and went back to town. (Gordimer 147)

As her immersion in the stark rural surroundings of July's village displaces her further from the clinical safety of her suburban home, Maureen is compelled to reflect on the

subjection of the African landscape to imperial imposition, not only through physical colonization and the large-scale harvesting of its resources, but also in terms of the dissemination of an 'official' imperial version of Africa which has served to establish the continent as the exotic other to normative Europe. Gordimer's sparse description of July's neglected and environmentally degraded village alerts us to the disparity between the Eurocentric view of Africa as an Edenic 'garden' or pastoral idyll and the very real effects of over-population and over-grazing on the rural environment due to the restriction of indigenous peoples to undersized homeland reservations. Such an acknowledgement is also found elsewhere in Gordimer's work. In *The Lying Days*, for example, Helen Shaw asserts that the Africa of her youth is not

> ...anything like the life of Africa, the continent, as described in the books about Africa; perhaps further from this than from any. What did the great rivers, the savage tribes, the jungles and the hunt for the huge palm-eared elephants have to do with the sixty miles of Witwatersrand veld that was our Africa? (Gordimer *The Lying Days* 97-98)

In *July's People* Maureen experiences a moment in which the artistic, sanitary European vision of pastoral Africa briefly coincides with reality:

> The mists of the night left a vivid freshness that dispels the sickly ammoniacal odour of fowl droppings, the fetid cloying of old thatch, the stinks of rotting garbage – rags, the jaw-bone of a calf, scaly with big glistening flies – that collect wherever the rains have hollowed the ground between the huts... [The sun] glosses the grass roofs and the mud walls change under it to golden ochre; the stuff of which these houses were made is alive. At this moment in its span, its seasons, the village coincides with the generic moment of the photographer's village, seen from afar, its circles encircled by the landscape, held in the pantheistic hand, the single community of man-and-nature-in-

Africa reproduced by skilled photogravure processes in Holland or Switzerland. (Gordimer 156)

This image, however, serves to highlight the disparity between mediated reality and experienced reality rather than the concurrence thereof, and Maureen remains acutely aware of the fact that the "real fantasies of the bush delude more inventively than the romantic forests of Grimm and Disney" (160). This encounter with aversion of the rural landscape which has been specifically divested of its romantic appeal, recast as a barren, post-apocalyptic space through the utilization of the speculative mode, suggests the novel's concern with the relation between social and environmental injustice and the sense of responsibility that is necessarily evoked through such an exaggerated confrontation. July's dusty, dilapidated settlement is placed in direct opposition to the Smales' suburban house with "a room to sleep in, another room to eat in, another room to sit in, a room with books", highlighting the very real economic divides between people in apartheid South Africa (19). Moreover, the distinction between the July's barren and eroded homestead, the adjacent Kruger National Park and the affluent city of Johannesburg makes clear not only the ways in which the land and its resources have been unfairly divided in favour of those in power, but also the manner in which conservationism has been utilised in the service of such oppressive ideologies.

The Kruger National Park in particular has become associated with a type of eco-management which entails the displacement of certain impoverished people. In *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History*, Jane Carruthers argues that national parks cannot be separated from "the real world of conflicts within society, of national politics or economics" (2). Whilst "the white public of South Africa has come to regard its national parks with a considerable degree of pride", this system of

conservationism is not altogether as altruistic and moral as is proclaimed (89). As Carruthers asserts, "'on the other side of the fence' from the relatively intact protected ecosystem with its lush grassland and abundant wildlife, live impoverished communities, desperate for land and for access to natural resources" (89):

> The emergence of a substantial African middle class which might have had the money and leisure to join whites in enjoying the Kruger National Park was blocked by repressive social economic legislation. Africans were forced to live in overcrowded, degraded and unattractive rural and urban environments. In general, any appreciation of the aesthetic elements of the landscape has consequently been sacrificed to land-hunger and poverty. For a large proportion of Africans, the Kruger National Park – far from being a symbol of national pride – is perceived as part of a government structure from which they have been systematically excluded. (Carruthers 89)

This connection between the abuse of the human other and the exploitation of the environment is again highlighted in *July's People* when a distinction between mediated reality and experienced reality is drawn in relation to the interaction between self and other. Maureen recalls an incident from her youth when a photographer captured her innocent friendship with Lydia, the family's domestic worker. The photograph, depicting Lydia carrying Maureen's school suitcase, later appeared in a *Life* coffee-table book as illustration of "[w]hite *herren-volk* attitudes and life-styles" (Gordimer 33). Maureen muses: "Why had Lydia carried her case? Did the photographer know what he saw, when they crossed the road like that, together? Did the book, placing the pair in its context, give the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know?" (Gordimer 33). Here, Maureen's suspicion that the photographer's lens captured an unequal power relation that she, in view of the ease of the camaraderie between herself and Lydia, could not yet

comprehend is once again suggestive of a new-found sense of responsibility, a re-examination of the ways in which she has been complicit in the propagation of racist ideologies. However, the Smales family's *absolutely* responsible confrontation with a wilderness that cannot be neatly categorised in glossy coffee-table books on indigenous birds and trees, and their encounter with a version of July that cannot be confined to the role of 'good servant', results in a crisis of identity and belonging.

With their removal from the city, a site of privilege which has allowed for a disinterested colonial view of both black people and nature, the Smales are deeply unsettled and must come to terms with the fact that they can no longer maintain a sterile distance between their bodies and their environment. Both Bam and Maureen become increasingly aware of the natural processes of their bodies as they engage with the rural landscape. The couple are horrified by the bodily excesses that can no longer be concealed by artificial means. Maureen finds "for the first time in her life that she smell[s] bad between her legs" and is disgusted by her children's unwillingness to bury their pieces of toilet paper after relieving themselves in the bush (9). Bam, too, experiences a "moment of hallucinatory horror" when he finds what he believes to be the blood of the slaughtered pig on his penis, only later realizing that it is his wife's (80).

The feelings of horror evoked by these natural bodily functions suggests that the Smales' confrontation with an uncontainable 'wilderness' does not lead them to establish themselves as natural beings intimately connected with and absolutely responsible for a natural environment, but rather results in feelings of alienation and displacement. From the outset of the novel, Maureen views her family as "white pariah dogs in a black continent" (8). This sense of not belonging is intensified when Maureen finds herself in July's village, viewed by the other women as "this white

woman who had had to be taught the difference between a plant that even a cow knew better than to chew, and the leaves that would make her children strong" (131).

Thus, the traumatic, simultaneous encounters with the 'first' and the 'third' results in the unravelling of a sense of self that is entirely hinged on the containment of both the black human other and the threatening wildness of the non-urban environment. Maureen recognises the fact that identity is formed in relation to a complex network of social and cultural forces, but fails to discover a sense of self which stands outside of the (rapidly collapsing) discourse which locates her as "Maureen Hetherington from Western Areas Gold Mines. Under 10s Silver Cup for Classical and Mime at the Johannesburg Eisteddfod" (2). Once stripped of her cultural accoutrement, Maureen begins to view herself as redundant, without any sense of purpose or consequence:

> Again, she had the feeling of not being there... The slight rise and fall of her breathing produced no ripple of her counter-existence in the heavy peace. The systole and diastole needed only to cease, and she would be ingested, disappeared in this state of being that needed no witnesses. She was unrecorded in any taxonomy but that of Maureen Hetherington on her points to applause in the Mine Recreation Hall. (Gordimer 148)

Similarly, Bam struggles to relate even to Maureen outside of their constructed world of suburban privilege, failing to recognize the person with whom he now shares a mud hut. He can no longer identify her as "the daughter of the nice old fellow who had worked underground all his life" or as "the girl in leotards teaching modern dance to blacks at night-class" (104-105). He cannot speak to her about his certainty that July's chief will order them to leave the village "because he did not know to whom to speak these days, when he spoke to her" (104):

Her. Not 'Maureen'. Not 'his wife'. The presence in the mud hut, mute with an activity of being, of sense of self he could not follow because here there were no familiar areas in which it could be visualized moving, no familiar entities that could be shaping it. With 'her' there was no undersurface of recognition; only moments of finding each other out. For the children she chose to appear as 'their mother', 'his wife', this morning. But she was no one to whom he could say that the chief was going to tell them to go. (Gordimer 105)

In the final moments of the novel, Maureen instinctively runs towards an unknown helicopter without any thought for the safety of her husband or children:

She runs: trusting herself with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime, alert, like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility. (Gordimer 160)

Maureen's 'escape' is puzzlingly ambiguous, suggesting at once the rejection of any sense of responsibility towards others (which does not fit with the novel's commitment to the ethics of accountability), and the kind of identification with and immersion in nature which stands in opposition to her earlier colonial attitude to the environment and others. Maureen's identification with a lone animal accountable to nothing and no-one appears to be a refusal to engage with the unravelling of her sense of self which directly results from an encounter with now uncontainable others, rather than a positive attempt at establishing a responsible sense of self-in-nature. Gordimer utilizes the speculative mode in order to stage a scenario in which this final crisis of self can unfold. The outbreak of civil war and the Smales' subsequent removal to

July's homestead allows for the shedding of constructed cultural and racial identities and makes possible hitherto unthought-of interactions between the Smales family and July. Maureen's final flight suggests her failure to come to terms with such a traumatic loss of identity and call to responsibility. However, in the haunting ambiguities of the novel's closing scene lie the unspoken questions: What could be different? What change is necessary for the successful negotiation of an absolutely responsible encounter between self and (both human and non-human) others? In this sense, the novel is successful in one subversive aim – the critical questioning and indictment of South Africa's then apartheid government and its systemic subjugation of its people and their environments.

The issue at stake, then, is not the success or failure of Gordimer's re-territorializing mission, but rather the role of the speculative mode in facilitating such a project. *July's People* is for all intents and purposes a realist novel. The *suggestion* of civil war is all that is necessary to ensure the Smales family's exile to July's village. If we assume that the Smales' confinement to the smallholding of their servant is the primary catalyst for Bam and Maureen's critical re-thinking of their positions within the totalizing system of apartheid, a less fanciful explanation (an empty tank of petrol, a flat tyre) for such a geographical shift would have been equally effective. In this view, Gordimer's reliance on the speculative element of implied civil war makes sense only as a kind of disclaimer: the removal of the novel from the 'real' South Africa of the time safeguards the author from censure and embargo.

However, I wish to argue that the seemingly understated speculative element of *July's People*, i.e. the outbreak of civil war and the violent expulsion of the Smales family from their comfortable, white, middle-class, urban home, is in fact vital to the

novel's philosophical and political agenda. This imagined scenario stages the complete collapse of the status quo in Gordimer's alternate realm (presumably based on late apartheid South Africa) and ensures the *absolute* disenfranchising of Bam and Maureen Smales. There can be no hope of returning to their former lives and selves for the Smales family – they have crossed the Rubicon and must confront their fall from grace for better or for worse. It is only from a position entirely removed from what appeared to be, at the time, an insidious and indomitable system of oppression that Gordimer can begin to imagine an escape from inscription and subjugation.

The utilization of the speculative trope of civil war in order to create characters who attempt to live outside of history can also be found in Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*. Coetzee, like Gordimer, provides very little detail regarding the unrest. In *Michael K*, however, the speculative element is not limited to the mere suggestion of violent conflict, but is also evident in the elusive magical realist quality of the text. In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Derek Attridge observes that the allegorical, elusive nature of Coetzee's narratives "encourage[s] the reader to look for meanings beyond the literal, in a realm of significance which the novel may be said to imply without ever directly naming" (32). Attridge identifies two types of allegorization commonly applied in Coetzee's fictional work. The first form of allegorical reading is reliant on the generalizing supposition that Coetzee's "novels... represent the truths – often the dark truths – of the human condition" (32). The second form

> is a different and more specific type of allegorization that Coetzee's fiction invites, deriving from the widespread assumption that any responsible and principled South African writer, especially during the apartheid years, will have had as a primary concern the historical situation of the country and the

suffering of the majority of its people. The consequence of this assumption is the impulse to translate apparently distant locales and periods into the South Africa of the time of writing, and to treat fictional characters as representatives of South African types or even particular individuals. (Attridge 33)

This 'impulse' to historicize is particularly alluring in the case of *Life & Times of Michael K*, a text that is so very clearly concerned with the politics of space. Despite Attridge's suggestion that such an approach may result in an impoverished reading of the text, it must be acknowledged that no text can exist in a void. As Terry Eagleton suggests in "The Rise of English":

To speak of 'literature and ideology' as two separate phenomena which can be interrelated is... in one sense quite unnecessary. Literature, in the meaning of the word that we have inherited, is an ideology. It has the most intimate relations to the questions of social power. (Eagleton 22)

When reading *Life & Times of Michael K*, a novel which offers a vision of a (then) future South Africa ravaged by civil war and has as its central theme the act of gardening, as a comment on apartheid South Africa and the subjugation of its others, the novel's concern with cultivation practices has wide-ranging implications within a South African context. For, in view of South Africa's complex history of violence and imposition, any consideration of the systematic ordering of the natural environment (and gardening by definition *is* the methodical management of the natural world) must take into account the relationship between the division of landscape and the legitimization of oppressive ideological systems such as the European imperial enterprise and the apartheid regime's policy of institutionalized racism.

I propose a historically-situated reading of Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, focusing particularly on the ways in which the novel reads the act of gardening as

always already inscribed by a myriad of social, historical and political processes which have contributed to the physical and ideological shaping of the South African landscape. However, such a historically-situated approach must inevitably address the criticisms levelled against Coetzee which suggest that the very elusiveness that allows for such historicization – and politicization – also problematizes this kind of reading. In a review of *Life & Times of Michael K*, titled "The Idea of Gardening", Nadine Gordimer considers that "the unique and controversial aspect of this work is that while it is implicitly and highly political, Coetzee's heroes are those who ignore history, not make it" (Gordimer "The Idea" 3-4).

Indeed, if Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* points to an experience of self in relation to the natural world which is necessarily mediated by discursive forces, it also does not appear to offer any unambiguous, historically viable alternatives to this quandary. The novel problematizes the idea of gardening as a viable site of resistance against oppressive historical and ideological impetuses, depicting Michael K as ultimately failing in his attempt to live *outside* of history. In "Nationalism in the Farm Novel, 1883-2004", Nicole Devarenne defends Coetzee's notion of refuge in gardening, suggesting that such a retreat should be read within the context of Coetzee's "challenge to the farm novel genre['s] ... glorification of an imagined past in which white South Africans exist in undisturbed symbiosis with a land depicted as being theirs by right" (Devarenne 634). She argues:

In *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*, particularly, individuals whose private lives are encroached upon by a deterministic public (political) realm take refuge in an 'idea of gardening', as Nadine Gordimer once put it in an infamously uncomprehending review. Where Gordimer, in her early reading, saw Coetzee cloistering himself in an Edenic space 'above history', recent critical opinion allows that Coetzee's fiction, even in these moments of

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apparent withdrawal, might be more politically engaged. In the context of Coetzee's critique of the *plaasroman* in *White Writing*, the refuge of gardening, of proximity to the earth, seems not so much a retreat from politics as a willed engagement with the way politics inscribes the story of the individual's relationship with land, nature, earth – a desire to write a different kind of story about that relationship, as well as an acknowledgement of how historically determined the telling of the story must be. (Devarenne 634)

Such a reading of the text as conscious of the ways in which an individual's relationship with the physical environment is necessarily coloured by politics is in line with the aims of this study. This chapter suggests that a reading which situates *Life & Times of Michael K* as articulating a localized understanding of self-in-nature which is alert to the complex entanglement between social injustice and the aggressive containment of the natural environment will prove valuable in light of the current global environmental crisis and the ever-increasing need for the founding of a *localized* Southern African ecocriticism. In this regard, I am indebted to the work of Anthony Vital, and particularly his article on *Life & Times of Michael K*, "Toward an African Ecocriticism", which explores the possibility of an intersection between postcolonial theory and ecocriticism in relation to this novel. Firstly, however, it is necessary to pay some attention to the ways in which the history of gardening in South Africa is interconnected with this region's colonial and racialized past, and to what extent this tension is addressed in Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*.

The novel's elusive protagonist, Michael K, is a gardener. Initially employed by "the Parks and Gardens division of the municipal services of the City of Cape Town", K, a disfigured coloured individual disadvantaged by an oppressive system in the throes of a violent political war, is embedded in a complex network of colonial and apartheid legacies which must come to bear on the act of 'institutionalized'

gardening (Coetzee 4). Coetzee's narrative, foregrounding as it does the act of government-administrated gardening in the colonial 'mother city', Cape Town, draws on the historical entanglement between settler cultivation practices and European aspirations of imperial expansion and control in Southern Africa.

From the earliest moments of Dutch settlement in Southern Africa, the Cape of Good Hope was cast as Paradise regained – a kind of unspoilt Edenic garden. The VOC garden at the Cape, which was initially founded as a provision garden, and the subsequently established Rondebosch garden are the first examples of botanical gardens in South Africa and, along with rigorous Company policies regarding timber conservation, exemplify, in the words of Richard H. Grove, "the highly regulated approach to land management adopted at the Cape from the beginning of settlement in 1652" (Grove *Green Imperialism* 133). Grove notes that extreme timber shortage in the Cape Colony during the seventeenth century resulted in the legally-enforced construction of wild almond barriers between cultivated Dutch land and the territories of indigenous peoples, "creating a highly symbolic hedge between the white settlement and the Hottentots" (136). Due to the scarcity of timber as a resource, trees in the Company garden were fervently protected against vandalism. Grove further asserts:

> Some of the stiffest rules were those intended to protect trees growing in or adjacent to the Company Garden. The first one, dated 21 December 1653, fixed the penalty for robbing or damaging the garden at two years in chains. A further placaat, of 21 February 1660, fixed the penalty for injuring trees at twelve months' hard labour. (Grove 136)

This example of the colonial garden as a quartered-off, legally-protected "administrative island" (Grove 136) is a particularly useful one, as it reveals the ways

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in which institutionalized gardening has reflected imperialist attitudes towards a colonized landscape and its indigenous inhabitants. What is most apparent in this particular instance is the division between this botanic island and those (presumably indigenous) peoples from whom it must be protected. In *Nature and Power*, Joachim Radkau asserts that "[m]ore so than the field, the garden is characterized by the fence, the impenetrable demarcation against wilderness" (55). The rigorously patrolled fence of the aforementioned colonial garden similarly suggests the desire for a regimented European natural order which is dependent on the disavowal and suppression of its exoticized others, the impulse to impress a logic of cultivation and control on a seemingly wild and unmanageable natural site. Grove's account of the lawful protection of the Company garden's trees is also significant in that it points to the treatment of the natural capital of the colonized space as valuable *only* in relation to the imperial project, as either a consumable resource (e.g. timber) or object for scientific study.

The notion that natural resources can be inscribed as signifiers of colonial control can also be found in Beth Fowkes Tobin's *Colonizing Nature*. This text deals specifically with the British imperial project, but is of great relevance to South Africa, which fell under British rule from 1795 to 1803 and again from 1806 to 1910. Tobin suggests that the English greenhouse of the late eighteenth century, stocked with an array of Tropic and sub-Tropic specimens from distant parts of the world, came to signify Britain's mastery over its colonies. Drawing on Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard's writings on the act of collecting, Tobin suggests that within the controlled environment of the English greenhouse the tropical plant becomes "divested of its use-value" (170) and is re-inscribed as a collected item which serves to strengthen and legitimate British colonial identity. She asserts:

Plants, which may have been used in their indigenous environments to make clothing, food, medicine, and shelter, once they entered the greenhouse and the "stove" (a heated structure that enabled tropical plants to weather the harshest cold), became ornamentals, occupying the categories of the "new, beautiful, or rare." Tropical plants, thus divested of the use-value, circulated as social signifiers within British society, most often appearing as collected objects – as live specimens on display in gardens and in greenhouses, as dead specimens in herbariums, or as illustrations and descriptions collected in botanical books, such as floras and hortuses. These collections of tropical plant matter performed significant ideological work within narratives of self and nation. British identity was fuelled by such collections. (Tobin 170)

Thus, Tobin concludes, "as markers of elite status, cultural capital, and scientific expertise, tropical plants within these various botanic and horticultural discourses were also suggestive of British mastery over the globe's natural resources" (171). This kind of systematization of the botanical capital of the colonies was not limited to the sterile herbariums and greenhouses of England, but can also be seen in the ways in which settlers within these conquered regions viewed, organized and utilized indigenous colonial environments.

Since its first introduction to Dutch tenacity, the South African landscape has been subjected to cultivations, excavations, land disputes, the shifting of national borders and various dubious eco-managerial drives. The apartheid era in South Africa saw the continuation of a hyper-controlled, segregational approach to landscape. The interwoven institutions of the botanical garden, government park and wildlife conservatory continued to flourish along with the strict demarcation of white urban centres, black rural homelands and white-owned farmlands. As with early Dutch environmental laws, apartheid legislation effectively displaced and dispossessed

indigenous and other 'non-white' peoples under the veil of environmentalism, progress and 'separate development'. In this later context, the act of gardening is equally fraught, associated with the perfectly manicured lawns of white suburbia, tended by those who were legally barred from entering these cityscapes after curfew. By invoking this intricate historical web of land-management, oppression and unequal power relations, Coetzee is able to offer not only a critique of colonial and apartheid segregational policies, but also the (thwarted) hope of an interaction between self and environment which is not guided by such restrictive ideologies.

Coetzee's gardening protagonist gradually becomes aware of the various restrictions placed on himself and his environment, and ultimately rebels against these physical and imaginary boundaries through a radically ascetic and non-linear approach to cultivation. Michael K is initially curiously uncritical of his complicity in a tradition of cultivation in which his own oppression is ultimately rooted. He performs his daily tasks as municipal gardener with the purposelessness of an automaton: "Sometimes on Saturdays he failed to hear the boom of the noon gun and went on working by himself all through the afternoon" (Coetzee 4). It is only once K undertakes an arduous journey to return his sickly mother, Anna K, to her birthplace, a farm in Prince Albert, that he begins to reflect on the South African landscape and the contentious issues of land ownership and cultivation. The farm of Anna K's youth is invoked as a pastoral idyll, a place where she experienced "a time of warmth and plenty" (8). It is this promise of a return to a convivial ancestral home that compels K to persist in his quest. K's vision of the ancestral farm is strongly romanticised, reminiscent of a typical childhood representation of a homely abode. He envisions "a whitewashed cottage in the broad veld with smoke curling from its chimney, and

standing at the front door his mother, smiling and well, ready to welcome him home at the end of a long day" (9).

The reality of K's journey is, however, far from romantic. Anna K dies *en route*, and due to his position as coloured individual travelling across a war-torn South Africa without the required documents, Michael K must negotiate police barricades, forcible assignment as a member of a railway labour gang, and detention in various government camps and hospitals. These experiences of confinement and discrimination allow for the interrogation of the right to land-ownership and division. When K veers from the road in order to rest on an adjacent farm, he is warned off the land by an old man. Looking across the outstretched farmland, K considers that

> he could understand that people should have retreated here and fenced themselves in with miles and miles of silence, he could understand that they should have wanted to bequeath the privilege of so much silence to their children and grandchildren in perpetuity (though by what right he was not sure); he wondered whether there were not forgotten corners and angles and corridors between the fences, land that belonged to no one yet. (Coetzee 47)

Here K's questioning of the right to land conferral echoes Coetzee's critical work on lineal consciousness in *White Writing*, particularly his concern with the farm novels (*plaasromans*) of Afrikaans author C.M Van den Heever and their representation of Afrikaner family farms as "the seats to which their lineages are mystically bound, so that the loss of a farm assumes the scale of the fall of an ancient house, the end of a dynasty" (Coetzee *White Writing* 83).

Coetzee's Michael K stands in direct opposition to this particular version of lineal consciousness. Once K arrives in Prince Albert, he occupies a deserted farm which he believes to be his mother's childhood home. Here K establishes a vegetable

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garden, planting melons and pumpkins from leftover seeds found in the abandoned shed. Although motivated by a desire to settle on the ancestral farm, to "live where [his] mother and grandmother lived", K practices a form of cultivation that is deliberately at odds with the approach of the farm's previous occupants, the Visagie family (99). He shuns the farmhouse in favour of a hovel in the ground close to his vegetable patch and is careful to use only bio-degradable materials for his daily tasks:

> He scratched among the odds and ends in the shed and there was nothing for which he could not imagine a use. But he was wary of conveying the Visagies' rubbish to his home in the earth and setting himself on a trail that might lead to the re-enactment of their misfortunes. The worst mistake, he told himself, would be to try to found a new house, a rival line, on his small beginnings out at the dam. Even his tools should be of wood and leather and gut, materials the insects would eat when one day he no longer needed them. (Coetzee 104)

Michael K's distancing of himself from the legacy of the Visagie family can be read as a critique of the traditional *plaasroman*, and shares a thematic overlap with the parodic *plaasromans* of Eben Venter and Karel Schoeman, which will be discussed in chapter two. His refusal to adopt the role of Crusoe-like pioneer constructing a new kingdom out of deserted wreckage also suggests the rejection of a model of cultivation which is dependent on mastery and social visibility. His haphazard, non-linear brand of survival or guerrilla gardening is entirely removed from any element of public display or performativity, and thus stands in opposition to gardening as *demonstration* of mastery over the physical landscape. Although K draws pleasure from the act of cultivation, his vegetable garden is maintained primarily for sustenance and has little aesthetic value. In fact, K goes to some lengths to conceal his crop, folding grass over his pumpkins in order to make them less conspicuous.

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Ironically, given his vehement demand for a non-conspicuous, non-invasive approach to land-management, K proves to be quite skilled at erecting fences, a trade which he acquires in a vagrant camp. The discomfort which he experiences whilst occupied in this activity further points to the fact that K is deeply suspicious of the linear division and control of land:

> Ducking through the fences, he could feel a craftsman's pleasure in wire spanned so taut that it hummed when it was plucked. Nonetheless, he could not imagine himself spending his life driving stakes into the ground, erecting fences, dividing up the land. He thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind it, but if anything as a speck of ant-feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust. (Coetzee 97)

This desire to live lightly off the land gradually evolves into an asceticism which amalgamates certain principles of deep ecology and Buddhist, Hindu and Roman Catholic practices of inedia (breatharianism), a belief system which holds that food and water is not essential to human subsistence and that energy and nutrition can be obtained from the sun and air. K's need for nourishment gradually fades as he becomes increasingly immersed in cultivating his pumpkin garden:

> As he tended the seeds and watched and waited for the earth to bear food, his own need for food grew slighter and slighter. Hunger was a sensation he did not feel and barely remembered. If he ate, eating what he could find, it was because he had not yet shaken off the belief that bodies that do not eat die. What food he ate meant nothing to him. It had no taste, or tasted like dust. (Coetzee 101)

Finally, K is not merely living harmoniously on and from the land, but becomes *one* with his natural environment. He is seemingly endowed with a kind of arcane knowledge which allows him to avoid poisonous plants, an ability which is tentatively attributed to a mystical soul tie with the animal world: "He also ate roots. He had no fear of being poisoned, for he seemed to know the difference between a benign bitterness and a malign one, as though he had once been an animal and the knowledge of good and bad plants had not died in his soul" (102).

Although K's localized experience of self-in-nature is related to the acknowledgement of the ways in which the South African landscape has been appropriated in the service of violent and oppressive ideologies, Coetzee also seems to be suggesting that K's approach to gardening can exceed such constraints. K's Prince Albert vegetable garden is offered as a 'drier' alternative to the damp soil of Cape Town's Wynberg Park, which is composed of layers of rotten history. K muses:

> When he thought of Wynberg Park he thought of earth more vegetal than mineral, composed of last year's rotted leaves and the year before's and so on back till the beginning of time, an earth so soft that one could dig and never come to the end of the softness; one could dig to the centre of the earth from Wynberg Park, and all the way to the centre it would be cool and dark and damp and soft. I have lost my love for that kind of earth, he thought, I no longer care to feel that kind of earth between my fingers. It is no longer the green and the brown that I want but the yellow and the red; not the wet but the dry; not the dark but the light; not the soft but the hard. (Coetzee 67)

Coetzee most explicitly attempts to separate K from any political agenda in a much-cited scene in which a group of rebel soldiers pass through K's farm. K briefly considers joining their group, but finally decides not to make his presence known on the basis that some men must avoid war in order to continue the idea of gardening:

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Yet in the same instant that he reached down to check that his shoelaces were tied, K knew that he would not crawl out and stand up and cross from darkness into firelight to announce himself. He even knew the reason why: because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why. (Coetzee 109)

Here, the representation of the Earth as mother figure and human beings as children of the Earth evokes James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, which sees the Earth as a self-regulating entity capable of healing itself. Lovelock's *The Revenge of Gaia* (2006) predicts that continued abuse of the Earth's resources by humans will result in the earth becoming uninhabitable to human beings, what Michael K describes as "the earth … grow[ing] hard and forget[ting] her children" (Coetzee 109). *Life & Times of Michael K*, then, hints at the possibility of an approach to the natural world which exists apart from everyday wars, a return to nature as children of the earth. However, a non-invasive return to nature must not only acknowledge the power of Gaia to turn on her abusive children, but also be aware of the brutal political history which has hampered such an uncomplicated engagement with the environment in order to exceed it. It is here that Coetzee's attempt to escape the weight of history collapses in on itself. Despite K's final assurance that one can live from only a teaspoon of water, this promise is undermined by the fact that such a way of life is ultimately presented as unattainable. Gaia is an unforgiving mother and Michael K is dying of starvation. Bodies that do not eat, die.

Anthony Vital is particularly concerned with the ways in which "*Michael K* explores how life outside Empire is unsustainable" (99). Writing in response to

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Dominic Head's "The (Im)possibility of Ecocriticism", Vital notes that Coetzee's novel may be useful to an African ecocriticism due to its awareness of "the complex interplay of social history with the natural world, and how language both shapes and reveals such interactions" (90). Yet, Vital argues, "the narrative offers no reason to believe that nature, written as subject to institutional and discursive power, can serve as point of resistance, whether to modern institutions or to history's dominating discourses" (98). He further observes:

> The narrative through its images and allusions organizes the reader's own awareness of history's oppressiveness – while simultaneously supplying images of an alternative kind of life, not historically possible, but haunting history with its combined impossibility and ethical necessity. And the closing pages make this complex effect most clear, as they appeal to a utopian intuition that there has (somewhere) to be a life lived differently, lived better, more worthy of what we could be as humans. (Vital 102)

Vital's negotiation of this double bind is tentative, hinting at the possibility of progression *within* these confines. *Michael K*, he suggests, "serves warning of what any popular movement ... will need to compromise with, enter into complicity with, as it advances its interests within the current nation-state system" (101). There may be no escape from the oppressive mechanisms of the nation-state, but there *is* room for some subversive manoeuvring: "K, after all, with a little help from the state, survives to avoid (for the moment) confinement by the state. K in his evasiveness does indeed endure" (Vital 101).

Michael K's inability to sustain a life outside of the oppressiveness of history, and his forced collusion with the totalizing systems that keep him enclosed (in the form of his own reluctant fence-building) is comparable to Maureen Smales' final

escape into an unknown wilderness. Whilst Maureen and K's ultimate 'failures' may appear to belie the idea that here is room for some "subversive manoeuvring" (Vital 101) within the confinement of oppressive apartheid state policies, both *July's People* and *Life and Times of Michael K* present entry points into the critical rethinking of entrenched categories and boundaries. In both texts the speculative element is the destabilizing factor, the catalytic agent for subversion.

CHAPTER TWO

Elegy for the *Plaasroman*: Afrikaner Identity and the Ecology of the Farm in Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* and Eben Venter's *Trencherman*

I've seen the future, brother: it is murder – Leonard Cohen, "The Future"

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In an essay entitled "The Potentials of Boundaries in South Africa", Robert Thornton remarks:

> Both White and Black people who call themselves Africans identify with the land, and claim it as their inalienable right. Both appeal to the blood that has been spilt on it, the dead that have been buried in it, the food that can be coaxed from it and, again and again, the beauty of it. The aesthetic beauty of the landscape is thus a political resource. (Thornton 153-4)

Such "transcendental justification for the ownership of the land" is an established leitmotif within the literary tradition of the Afrikaans *plaasroman* or farm novel (Coetzee *White Writing* 106). This subgenre emerges as ripe for re-examination in view of current debates regarding land reform in post-apartheid South Africa as well as renewed, more critical interest in the farm as locale in contemporary South African fiction – as evidenced in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002) and Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2004).

John Coetzee asserts that "[f]or two decades of [the last] century, the Afrikaans novel concerned itself almost exclusively with the farm and *platteland* (rural) society" and identifies a type of "story of the farm" which is based on a

"venerable Old-World conception of farming" (Coetzee "Farm Novel" 1-3). He writes:

> In such a story, the farm is not simply a place – a house or settlement in the middle of a space – but a complex: at one and the same time a place, an economy, and all the creatures which participate in that economy, in particular the members of the family (in however extended a sense) who both own the farm legally and are owned by the farm – owned in that they owe it their truest labour, their livelihood, and ultimately their lives. In this story, the farmer has both rights and obligations. However absolute his ownership, he has duties to the land, to his heirs (as well as, to a lesser extent, to his forebears), and even to the ecology of the farm – that is, to the farm as part of nature. (Coetzee "Farm Novel" 2-3)[9]

In *White Writing*, Coetzee traces this "myth" in the *plaasromans* of Afrikaans author C.M. van den Heever (Coetzee "Farm Novel" 3). Coetzee suggests that the Afrikaans novel of the 1930s acted as a response to the emergence of a class of impoverished, landless Afrikaner farmers who were forced into the cities and mines due to the tradition of sub-dividing the paternal farm as well as "years of poor rainfall, low wool prices, and general economic depression" (Coetzee *White Writing* 82). The *plaasromans* of this era, including those of C.M. van den Heever, reacted to this crisis by valorising lost rural values and warning against the debauchery or *verval* (regression) to be found in the city.

Coetzee identifies a "lineal consciousness" at work in the novels of Van den Heever (Coetzee *White Writing* 109). In works such as *Somer* (1935) and *Groei* (1933), the ancestors are "hagiographized as men and women of heroic strength, fortitude, and faith, and instituted as the originators of lineages" (83). The family

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[9]The notion that the paternal heir has a responsibility towards the *ecology* of the farm is of particular concern to this chapter and will be taken up at a later stage.

farms then "become the seats to which their lineages are mystically bound, so that the loss of a farm assumes the scale of the fall of an ancient house, the end of a dynasty" (83). Thus, there appears to be a certain level of *verflechtung* (what Coetzee refers to as *vergroeidheid*) between the paternal farm and its steward – the farmer's sense of self and his right to ownership of the farm is entirely dependent on his good management of the land. At a semantic level, Coetzee's use of the Afrikaans term, *vergroeidheid*, signals the entanglement of the personal growth of the paternalistic farmer and the natural growth – or ecology – of the farm. Coetzee suggests:

> In the myth of natural right elaborated by Van den Heever, the founding fathers pay for the farm in blood, sweat, and tears, not in money: they hack it out of primeval bush, they defend it against barbarians, they leave their bones behind in its soil. Inherited ownership of the farm therefore becomes a sacred trust: to alienate the farm means to forsake the bones of the ancestors. (Coetzee *White Writing* 85)

In this sense, the farmer invests something of his physical being in the land, literally becoming one with the farm, and therefore a part of its natural economy. Thus, the paternal heir's right to ownership of the farm is *naturalised*. This is in line with the ideal farmer Coetzee identifies in "Farm Novel and *Plaasroman* in South Africa":

> At a mythic level, the farmer I am describing is forbidden to rape the land. Instead he must *husband* it, giving it a devoted attention which will bring it to bear manyfold, yet remain fertile for succeeding generations. In the logic of the myth, the sons who inherit the farm husband the same land; or, to put it in another way, the generations of husband-farmers are the same (mythic) man. (Coetzee "Farm Novel" 3)

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Correspondingly, Hein Viljoen points to the entanglement between identity construction and land ownership in C.M. van den Heever's *Somer*, suggesting that Wynand's

> loss of land... also means loss of identity. Wynand's identity as a wanderer is a non-identity: he stands outside the usual matrices in which identity is constructed: he has no family, no heritage, no future; he is always yearning for the faraway horizon; he has no security and no responsibility; and above all, no land. He is stigmatized as a vagabond and people are suspicious of him, accusing him of drinking too much. As such he is obviously not a good marriage prospect for Linda. (Viljoen "Land" 115)

In "From Boereplaas to Vlakplaas", Malvern Van Wyk Smith argues that the idea of the "boereplaas" was "a capsule of all the racially and culturally exclusive myths and doctrines on which Afrikaner nationalism had been nurtured for decades and which were to underpin half-a-century of Nationalist ideology from 1948 onwards" (Van Wyk Smith 17-18). According to Van Wyk Smith, the *plaasroman* "thematised the nexus of the "boer" and his "plaas" as a timeless icon of national and numinous identity, not only validating an unquestioned right to the land but expressing also the very soul of the Afrikaner's being" (18). In this way, the Afrikaner "boer" quickly became a "Boer", a term still used as a metonym for white (often, but not exclusively, male) Afrikaners, regardless of their occupation.

However, Van Wyk Smith also points to the fact that "the trope of the "boereplaas" has always been an ambivalent one, an ideality which always depended for its potency and charm on as much denial as affirmation, on as much suppression as transcendence" (20). He further suggests that the Afrikaner "plaas" is characterized by a sense of "belatedness" –

an expression of nostalgia for something always already in the past, an articulation of a hallowed space that was always itself as much of a cultural construct as the many novels, poems and songs that celebrated it. Furthermore, hindsight allows us to see that the farm as nexus of promise and menace, eden and demon, has always been a central trope in South African white writing. (Van Wyk Smith 20)

For Viljoen, the ambivalence identified by Van Wyk Smith "is a kind of postcolonial unconscious – a vague, repressed unease that the land had been taken away from its original inhabitants, a suppressed history of colonial conquest and occupation" (Viljoen "Land" 109). In the introduction to *Storyscapes*, a collection of essays concerned with the issues of space and identity within a South African context, Viljoen identifies "the farm as an icon of Afrikaner identity symbolizing a heroic struggle against the wilderness" (Viljoen "Introduction" 10), but also points to the precarious position of the farm in Afrikaans fiction:

[The farm] is marked with ambivalence: on the one hand it is a safe place, home; on the other there is a constant fear of loss, an anxiety about the land, a feeling of insecurity. Safety from the forces of nature and the threat of wild animals and "uncivilized" men is only temporary. (Viljoen "Introduction" 10)

It is here that the notion of a *natural* claim to ownership of the land is subject to a moment of slippage. The "boereplaas" is at once an invention, a regimented refuge that has been painstakingly "hack[ed] ...out of primeval bush" and also presented as a natural economy in which the paternal heir plays an essential role (Coetzee *White Writing* 85). As Viljoen indicates, Afrikaner identity, within the context of the farm, hinges on the successful protection of the insularity of the homestead from the

wilderness which surrounds it, and is thus reliant on an anti-ecological approach to agriculture which serves to flatten out and refuse wildness. However, it is exactly that which has been disavowed (i.e. the natural) which ultimately enables the essentializing of this particular identity. It is perhaps this element of (dis)ease evident in the early *plaasroman* which allows for the emergence of a range of Afrikaans novels "in which the subgenre [of the *plaasroman*] is used in a parodic way as a vehicle of criticism of the ideological order of apartheid", later farm novels which "interrogat[e] the farm as foundational icon" and "imagin[e] alternatives to the traditional history and teleology of the farm" (Viljoen "Land" 109).

These parodic returns to the *plaasroman* appear sporadically in both English and Afrikaans literature in South Africa from the 1960s onwards. In "Nationalism and the Farm Novel in South Africa", Nicole Devarenne asserts that "in Afrikaans, the farm narrative has not surprisingly become a lodestar for a leftist literary tradition that has interrogated, since at least the 1960s, the mythical underpinnings of a white supremacist definition of Afrikaner identity" (Devarenne 634). Ampie Coetzee attributes the rise of the parodic *plaasroman* in the 1960s to a growing awareness amongst writers of the "imminent catastrophe of a political explosion in South Africa" (A. Coetzee "Os" 4, my translation). Coetzee writes:

> Apartheid as staatsbeleid het in die sestigerjare gelei tot 'n ekonomiese opbloei; maar ook tot die verbreding van die perspektiewe van 'n nuwe geslag skrywers, wat hulle begin verset het teen die Afrikaner-hegemonie. Gedurende hierdie era vind die tweede stuwing plaas. Die plaasroman het weer "ontstaan", maar anders: modernisties in die parodieë van Etienne Leroux en in die simbolies-allegoriese in die familiesage van Anna M. Louw. Die naderende katastrofe van 'n politieke ontploffing in Suid Afrika en 'n verskerpte bewustheid van die betekenis van *teks* binne die postmodernisme

het aanleiding gegee tot die plaasromans van Karel Schoeman, Etienne van Heerden en Eben Venter. (A. Coetzee "Os" 4)

[In the 60s, Apartheid as a state policy led to an economic boom, but also to the broadening of the perspectives of a new generation of writers, who began to oppose Afrikaner-hegemony. During this era the second surge occurred. The farm novel once again took off, but different: modernistic in the parodies of Etienne Leroux and in the symbolic-allegorical in the family sagas of Anna M. Louw. The imminent catastrophe of a political explosion in South Africa and the sharpened awareness of the meaning of *text* gave rise to the farm novels of Karel Schoeman, Etienne van Heerden and Eben Venter.]

Ampie Coetzee identifies an apocalyptic element within the later parodic *plaasromans* of Schoeman, van Heerden and Venter, suggesting that the apocalyptic signifies a "will to justice and retribution" and the subversion of a seemingly unified (or *naturalised*) group identity that was always merely a construction, threatening to collapse in on itself (Coetzee "Os" 4, my translation):

Die apokaliptiese as vernietiger van die ou orde, 'n handeling wat inherent aan hierdie postmoderne plaasromans is, hoef nie noodwendig 'n einde te beteken nie, soos wat in die sin van 'n teleologiese ontwikkeling na 'n einde beweeg word. Daar was eerder 'n onderliggende wens of begeerte by die skrywers van hierdie tekste dat 'n apokalips die koms van geregtigheid sou beteken – 'n wil tot geregtigheid, tot vergelding, soos wat brandende plaashuise 'n teken van wraak is. …'n Mens kan dan die apokaliptiese sien as 'n versteuring van wat slegs 'n verbeelde eenheid was, dissosiasie van identiteit, en nie 'n sintese nie. (A.Coetzee "Os" 4)

[The apocalyptic as destroyer of the old order, an action inherent to these postmodern farm novels, does not necessarily have to signify an end, as there is in the sense of a teleological development a moving towards an end. There was rather an underlying wish or desire amongst the writers of these texts that an apocalypse would signify the advent of justice – a will to justice and

retribution, just like a burning farm house signifies revenge. One can then see the apocalyptic as a disturbance of what was always only an imagined unity, a dissociation of identity, and not a synthesis.]

While the Afrikaans novel of the 1930s responded to a widespread crisis of land ownership by staging a nostalgic, mystical return to the land, and bemoaned the loss of the ancestral farm as an offence against providence and nature, the parodic plaasroman of the 1960s recovers justice in the debris of a derelict farmstead. The *plaasroman*'s apocalyptic turn continues well into South Africa's second decade as democratic state.

This is because the loss of the ancestral farm has once again become a possibility for (particularly white) South African farmers. In contemporary South Africa the question of land ownership has become more fraught than ever. The post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis, together with the South African government's policy of quiet diplomacy regarding this urgent situation, has many white farmers fearing that the occurrences of violent land-grabbing in neighbouring Zimbabwe might spread to South Africa. Such fears are fuelled even further by the mounting tension caused by the less than satisfactory progress made by South Africa's current 'willing seller, willing-buyer' land reform policy.

Recent news reports investigating the possibility of a Zimbabwe-like land-grab policy being introduced in South Africa have been decidedly pessimistic, offering sensationalist, doom-and-gloom accounts of genocide and impending famine. In a 2005 *WorldNetDaily.com* article titled, "South Africa to mimic Zimbabwe on farms? Marxist government's land-grab policy against whites intensifies", Anthony C. LoBaido charged Thabo Mbeki's government with "relentlessly harassing and hobbling South Africa's commercial farming sector" and suggested that "deliberate

efforts by the SA government and its cohorts to drive South Africa's white farmers off their land" were "bringing the spectra of famine ever closer" (LoBaido n.pag.). LoBaido further asserts that, "according to groups like Genocide Watch", the exceptionally high rate of farm murders in South Africa in 2005 (a crisis that persists in present-day South Africa),

> is not justice, but genocide. There are only about 40,000 white farmers in South Africa. The 1,700 murdered from that group is the highest per capita murder rate in the world. The average murder rate is 7 out of 100,000 worldwide. For the South African farmer it is 313 out of 100,000. The second-highest per capita murder rate in the world is that of the South African police. (LoBaido n.pag.)

Despite its sensationalist nature, reports such as LoBaido's point to the fact that the personal safety of white South Africans, and particularly Afrikaner farmers, is certainly under threat in contemporary South Africa. There exists a general feeling of besiegement amongst white Afrikaners, and a large number have already fled to 'safer' destinations such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Stephanie Marlin-Curiel ("Rave New World" 152-153), in an article examining the ways in which Afrikaner 'raves' (disco-like parties) are used to redefine Afrikaner identity, asserts: "Feelings of marginalization, criminalization, and general nervousness about their place in the new South Africa are common among Afrikaners, from the right-wing extremists to the progressives or *verligte* ('enlightened')".Marlin-Curiel further suggests:

> By the end of the 1980s, Afrikanerdom, however defined – as a national destiny, a white supremacist regime, or a path-builder to economic success –

unequivocally had failed. When Nelson Mandela and his African National Congress (ANC) at last gained power in South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Afrikaners felt their rights and self-determination to be in jeopardy. (Marlin-Curiel 153)

The fears of present-day Afrikaners reflect the findings of a 1988 study (six years prior to the first democratic election) investigating Afrikaner attitudes towards the possibility of majority rule in South Africa. In "Afrikaner Fears and the Politics of Despair: Understanding Change in South Africa", Kate Manzo and Pat McGowan examine the findings of a questionnaire completed by 438 white Afrikaners in top-level positions in "politics, the civil service, public and private sector business, the two major Dutch Reformed Churches, universities, and the print and electronic media" (5). This study revealed that the vast majority of respondents feared majority rule and expressed particularly concern about "personal security and cultural identity and survival" (22).

An overwhelming 86.9% of respondents believed that white prosperity would decrease in a black-ruled South Africa, 84.6% believed that white safety and security would decrease, and the majority (60.9%) of respondents anticipated a decline in white employment. Furthermore, 88.6% of respondents predicted an increase in white emigration in a majority-ruled South Africa. The researchers, through comparisons with studies of a similar nature and "the content analysis of South African newspapers", assert that the opinions expressed in this study are "long standing, deeply felt beliefs" and point to the "great homogeneity of Afrikaner attitudes" (17). The threat to Afrikaner culture, however, cannot merely be ascribed to besiegement by 'external' forces, but is also generated from within Afrikaner ranks itself. In *Afrikaners: Kroes, Kras, Kordaat* (*Afrikaners: Sickly, Drastic, Bold*), Willem de Klerk controversially states: "Afrikanerdom has been sickly in the last few years.

Literally curled up, sick, unwell" (9, my translation). De Klerk recognizes "identity withdrawal" amongst modern-day Afrikaners, declaring that "survival forces you to shake off your Afrikanerdom in education, language usage and social group" (13, my translation). He foresees the end of "Afrikaner consciousness", unless Afrikaners can divest themselves of this "sickliness":

> En só kan die Afrikanerbewussyn binne twee tot drie dekades uitgerafel wees. Afrikaanse media, teater, televisie, radio, boek en lied verweer as Afrikaans as gebruikstaal 'n nou-en-dan en hier-en-daar-verkynsel word. (De Klerk 13)
> [And so the Afrikaner consciousness can be worn out within two to three decades. Afrikaans media, theatre, television, radio, literature and song can erode if Afrikaans as everyday language becomes a now-and-again and here-and-there phenomenon. Afrikanerdom has become sickly. Other small peoples have been obliterated in their sickliness.]

In post-apartheid South Africa, then, the Afrikaner people not only face expulsion from the ancestral land, but also potential physical injury and the unravelling of their cultural identity. Annette L. Combrink declares the post-Apartheid Afrikaner "a mythical beast, glimpsed only imperfectly through the dense undergrowth of stereotype, convention, ignorance and hostility" (60). Despite such pessimism regarding the future of the Afrikaner 'volk', it has been suggested that the current crises of identity and land ownership facing the Afrikaner people can also be viewed as a site of liberation. Jennifer Wenzel points to the "reconciliatory potential" of the trend which sees both black and white farmers and farm workers in South Africa drawing on the notion of lineal consciousness in order to assert their right to ownership of the land (102). She writes:

> At such a moment, when the very nature of land ownership is being reconsidered, it is not surprising that fears about losing land expressed by white and black farmers and black laborers draw on the primary trope of the *plaasroman*, lineal consciousness. (Wenzel 100)

In order to illustrate the "reconciliatory potential" (102) of this shared reliance on the trope of lineal consciousness, Wenzel cites the case of *Inala Farms*, where "farm workers recognized the white managers' ties to the land when they stood together, successfully, to protest evictions planned by the farm's new owners" (103). United by their love for the land, the workers and the managers succeeded in securing a joyful outcome for the almost 600 evicted workers – together the labourers become majority shareholders, having invested in equity shares in the farm. Here, the acknowledgement of one another's right to the land brings the *Inala* farm workers and their white managers together.

Correspondingly, Njabulo Ndebele suggests that "the ordinary Afrikaner family, lost in the illusion of the historic heroism of the group, has to find its moral identity within a national community in which it is freed from the burden of being special" (Ndebele qtd in Combrink 63). In this way

> Afrikaner culture and its language will triumph from the resultant honesty of self-revelation, the resonances of which will appeal to many others whose humanity has been newly revealed by a liberated present. ...Somewhere the story of the agony of the contemporary Afrikaner family will converge with the stories of millions of those recently emerged from oppression. (Ndebele qtd in Combrink 63)

This chapter examines two parodic *plaasromans* which envision futures in which the Afrikaner volk has indeed been "freed of the burden of being special" (ibid.).

However, the "reconciliatory potential" of such a loss of cultural identity is largely ignored or denied in these texts (102). This chapter compares the English translations of Karel Schoeman's *Na die Geliefde Land* (*Promised Land*), first published in 1972, and Eben Venter's 2006 dystopian novel, *Horrelpoot* (*Trencherman*), and focuses specifically on their parallel use of the post-apocalyptic in order to "interrogat[e] the farm as foundational icon"(Viljoen "Land" 109). Both these novels seek to undermine the traditional *plaasroman*'s use of the notion of a spiritual *vergroeidheid* between self and land as a justification for land ownership, and both draw a parallel between the unsustainability of the kind of anti-ecological agricultural practices presented in the tradition of the *plaasroman* alongside the unsustainability of the cultural insularity of the Afrikaner 'volk'. These texts lay bare the gaps, silences and disavowals on which these two constructs (the "boereplaas" and the "volk") are hinged. In *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, Stephen Gray argues that the notion of a "white enclave", as an aspect of what he refers to as the "frontier myth", is always already subject to penetration from external elements (38). He asserts:

> The frontier myth itself, however, is devised not only to describe and assess a cultural gulf, but to bridge it. The history of 'Europeans' in South Africa cannot be reduced to a view of a mere private war having been continually waged from behind a border, because no matter how much the South African white enclave behind its frontier has resisted impregnation from Africa and from its indigenous peoples, the frontier myth itself, even in its most negative aspects, is an expression of interdependence, of involvement across barriers. (Gray 38)

Both Schoeman's *Promised Land* and Venter's *Trencherman* acknowledge this inevitable "interdependence" and stage a return of the repressed, unearthing that

which is disavowed – the wilderness, the wild other, and the element of wildness to be found in the self – in order to haunt the last, displaced heir of the boereplaas.

Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* stages a return to an imagined South Africa where the balance of power has been shifted completely by a political upheaval, referred to only as "the troubles" throughout the novel. Written at the height of the apartheid era, *Promised Land* presents a complete reversal of the power dynamic of its time in that it depicts the persecution of Afrikaner nationalists by an unknown group of insurgents. The protagonist, George, returns to South Africa after a lifetime abroad when he inherits the family farm, Rietvlei. In this barren, isolated farming district, George encounters a group of Afrikaners who live under impoverished conditions and constant threat from the police force of a seemingly tyrannical regime.

This dwindling farm community, seemingly the last bastion of Afrikaner nationalism, continues to preserve what remains of their culture, despite the wretchedness of their situation. On the Hattingh farm, George is received with typical rural hospitality, particular interest is expressed in the fate of Afrikaner acquaintances abroad, and "photographs of leaders and national heroes among heavily-framed portraits of solemn men and women in their best clothes" (19) still adorn the neglected home. To the people of the district, George's arrival is a sign that those Afrikaners who fled the country during the 'troubles' and their descendants will return to help restore the Afrikaner people to their former glory.

George, however, struggles to identify with the land and its people. Having lived abroad since the age of five, South Africa has become alien to him, and the purpose of his visit unclear to even himself. At times it would seem as if the landscape stirs some recognition and emotion within George, but these moments are fleeting:

And what were the feelings which now overwhelmed him? Heartache and longing and hope, a whole world waiting to be conquered, safety, security and illusion, and the turning of a windmill in the long silence of a summer's afternoon, in the vast dusk of the summer night. He walked on to the house, astonished at the emotion which possessed him, and it was as if he were coming home. (Schoeman 93)

Here, the image of the windmill is invoked as symbol of pastoral prosperity and comfort, but the feeling of home-coming it evokes is only transitory, quickly replaced by a sense of detachment and alienation. George confides in Carla, the Hattingh family's wayward daughter:

'I didn't expect this strangeness; this visit was a return as far as I was concerned, a home-coming. I grew up among people who spoke only about this country and could think about nothing else. I had to learn about it as if there were no other countries in the world, and yet I can barely recognize it.' (Schoeman 126)

George's inability to connect with the people of the district is undoubtedly related to his growing awareness of a sinister air surrounding the farm community's attempts to regain a lost lifestyle. The most zealous defenders of this way of life, Johannes and Gerhard, are portrayed as frightening and cruel. George is unsettled by Johannes's "mask-like face" (Schoeman 108) and recognizes cruelty in Gerhard's seemingly attractive exterior:

Yes, George thought again: they were cold eyes; the face was handsome but if one looked carefully, one could see a hardness, a total lack of human warmth in the features. From him one could expect no mercy. (Schoeman 182)

George soon discovers moral decay behind the façade of rural hospitality, communal spirit and old-fashioned values. Paul is eager to divulge the promiscuous and adulterous behaviour of his neighbours, and George must endure the unwanted advances of Tant Loekie and her daughters. It seems Karel Schoeman already recognizes a "sickliness" within the Afrikaner ranks three decades before Willem de Klerk points to such a phenomenon.

Despite this element of moral decay, the community continues to extol the justness and sanctity of their cause. Gerhard and Johannes evoke the trope of lineal consciousness in order to persuade George to rebuild Rietvlei and join their cause against an unspecified, oppressive regime. In a toast to George, Gerhard draws on the notion that "inherited ownership of the [ancestral] farm" is "a sacred trust" (Coetzee *White Writing* 85), as well as the assumption that there exists a mystical bond of love between the farm and its heir:

> May he show his love for the farm and the country, his respect for his ancestors, their trials and their struggles, and his feeling of being at one with his people, may he show all this in deeds as well. (Schoeman 164)

George, however, remains unmoved by Gerhard's appeal and, in a final effort to persuade George to "fight and if need be to die" (Schoeman 183) for his country and his people, Gerhard must draw on what Willem de Klerk (15) deems the "verkorenheidswaan" (an illusion of holy elitism) of the Afrikaner: the notion that "Afrikaners have a special esteem and status before God" (De Klerk 15). When George questions why he should give up his comfortable lifestyle in order to "hazard all, here in a strange place" (183), Gerhard responds: "'Because you have a duty to

your country, your people, your forefathers; there is a holy command laid on you which must be obeyed'" (183).

This notion of a chosen people who enjoy an elevated status before God is also evoked by the English title of Schoeman's text. The 'promised land' of the title can be read as a Biblical reference, the promise of a land of milk and honey by God to the Israelis. According to De Klerk, "identification with the Old-Testament's Israel as nation of God has occurred very strongly within Afrikaner ranks" (15). Such identification with God's chosen nation, serves as further mystical justification for the ownership of the land. Ownership of the ancestral farm then is not only a right earned by the "blood, sweat, and tears" (Coetzee 85) of the ancestors, but also a God-given concession. In an article titled "Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender", Elsie Cloete asserts:

> Armed with the belief of being God's elect people, the Afrikaner identified strongly with the Israelites of the Old Testament. Parallels were found between the Israelites' epic journey through the desert on the way to the promised land and the Great Trek. As much as the people of Moses proclaimed their religious beliefs, the Afrikaners believed in the Christianisation of the non-believers. The Israelites had a pact with God and the Afrikaners made one too (the Day of the Vow, 16 December). (Cloete 43)

This "verkorenheidswaan" is also present in the elaborate poem recited by Fanie Raubenheimer, the schoolteacher of the district, at the get-together at Kommando Drift. With great pomp and ceremony, Raubenheimer recounts the events of the battle of Bloodriver, where a small group of Voortrekkers' victory over a Zulu army came to be seen as proof of God's protection and favour. Here, the Voortrekkers'

'holy' struggle and the plight of the community gathered at Kommando Drift are conflated, assuring the audience of the justness of their cause:

'Civilization's torch, with brave and steady hand/They bore across the void and darkling land...'/...'Then clattered spears upon white wagon-hoods...'/...'Heroes were all – man, woman, child alike,/ No sacrifice withheld, no gift refused...'/ ...'Thy wisdom gave us light, Thy power led,/ We neither strayed nor fell, nor shall we fail./ Hallowed our struggle and it will not end/ Until the truth and justice of our cause prevail.' (Schoeman 176-178)

Raubenheimer's recitation, however, is recognized as absurd and overly self-important and Raubenheimer himself is portrayed as a pompous sycophant who is best avoided. His nostalgic rhetoric is mere lip service to an era that will never be regained, and even his supposedly appreciative audience remains unconvinced.

In fact, this besieged Afrikaner community's attempt at maintaining a sense of cultural authority is much like Raubenheimer's poetry: a façade that is easily collapsed. Not only does the community fail to uphold the strict moral code of their Calvinistic origins, but the district's farmers also fail to measure up to their own cultural criteria for rightful ownership of the land, that is, good stewardship of the land. Hattingh is in fact what Coetzee deems an *agteruitboer* – a farmer who does not heed the call of the ancestors to cultivate and preserve the land properly:

'…The farm's been badly neglected in the last few years: it's no longer what it was when I began farming, but we must be grateful that we still have it. It's family land, an inheritance from my great-grandfather, but in his day they still had money and labour to maintain it. He wouldn't think much of us if he were to see it today; even my late father wouldn't be pleased with it. He died at a time when everything was still going well.' (Schoeman 9)

Schoeman foresees the collapse of Afrikaner authority and culture in South Africa, but also retains a degree of optimism about the future of the Afrikaner race. The new generation, and particularly Carla, represents a shift away from the resentments of the past and a willingness to adapt to a new order. Carla asserts: "The old world has disappeared and it will never, in all eternity, come back, even if we give our lives to try to regain it. We must learn to live in the new world" (219).

This character displays the pluckiness, adaptability and survival instinct that has always been associated with the Afrikaner people. Schoeman suggests that ultimately, through a Calvinistic work ethic and sheer determination, the Afrikaner people will succeed in putting old resentments and fears behind them. This sentiment is illustrated by Carla's reluctance to roam the abandoned Rietvlei with George, reminiscing about bygone days. She claims:

> 'I don't know how it was and I don't want to know either. I'm tired of all the dreams and memories; I don't want to live in the past, I don't want to come and grieve over an old overgrown garden. There's work to do, life must go on. I want to go home.' (Schoeman 68)

In an essay titled, "'You Can't Go Home Again': From Karel Schoeman's *Na die Geliefde Land* to Jason Xenopoulos's Promised Land", Lesley Marx juxtaposes "the uncertainty that shapes [Schoeman's *Promised Land*'s] engagement with land, identity and homecomings" with Jason Xenopoulos's film version's "resolute … refusal of ambiguity" (25). In the novel, Marx argues,

> George moves between exile and Diaspora. The overthrow of the regime that employs his father defines him as an exile, while his travelling back in space

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and time places him in limbo, profoundly uncertain of his identity. The dream

that precedes his decision to return to Switzerland, the delicate and difficult

bond he seems to have formed with Carla … propose, perhaps, the embrace of

a diasporic identity, where he has not cut ties – at least imaginative ties – with

his origins, but where those origins have become deeply infused with his

engagement with his adoptive country and culture. He cannot go home again

in any material, absolute sense, but this does not mean a cauterising of the

reality of those beginnings. (Marx 25)

In contrast, Xenopoulos's *Promised Land* (2003) re-envisions Schoeman's novel as a

horror film, and in this adaptation "George appears to have very little trouble with his

identity as he is re-written as sleuth, lover and scourge" who "returns to the farm in

order to exorcise his past and break his connection with the diabolism of Afrikaner

identity" (Marx 26, 28). This notion of a return to the family farm in order to break

with a problematic Afrikaner heritage is echoed in Eben Venter's *Trencherman*. If

Schoeman's novel maintains some hope for the continued survival of the Afrikaner

volk in its representation of George as embracing a diasporic identity, Venter adopts

no such optimism. *Trencherman* deconstructs the farm novel's trope of lineal

consciousness, pointing to the *aporia* inherent in such mystical justification for land

ownership.

Such questioning of the consecration of Afrikaner ownership over the land is

possible because recent land claims by previously disadvantaged groups inevitably

undermine the very basis of an appeal to spiritual *verflechtung* between Afrikaners

and the land. The fact that those people who have lived on the land for generations as

labourers are now drawing on the very logic that has thus far secured and sanctified

Afrikaner land ownership in order to justify their own claims to the land has resulted

in the destabilisation of the rationale of lineal consciousness. Venter not only stages a

return to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but also re-interrogates the tradition of

the *plaasroman* in order to paint a disturbing portrait of the future of the white Afrikaner in South Africa. Set in the not-so-distant future, *Trencherman* sees the protagonist, Marlouw, leave the safety of Melbourne to return to South Africa in order to track down his wayward nephew, Koert. Marlouw follows Koert's trail through a decimated, post-apocalyptic South Africa and finds that his nephew has barricaded himself on the old family farm, Ouplaas, now owned by its former labourers. Here Koert has established himself as the King of Meat in the district.

Marlouw's return to Ouplaas does not signify the reestablishment of a lost connection between the ancestral land and its rightful heir, but rather a final farewell to an order which has allowed for such mystical justification for land ownership and cultural supremacy. Venter invokes the *plaasroman* in order to respond to the moments of slippage present within this tradition, to lay bare the gaps and silences that have served to naturalize Afrikaner dominion over the land and secure the disavowal of those whose bones, blood, sweat and tears also line the earth. Venter *entirely* removes the possibility of a spiritual reconnection between his Afrikaner protagonist and the land. The decimated Ouplaas is beyond recovery: "Everything's finished, everything destroyed: the farmyard is almost unrecognisable" (116). Marlouw actively distances himself from the farm and its problems, thus relinquishing his claim to the land of his ancestors.

During those brief moments when he does succumb to nostalgia, Marlouw admonishes himself for the lapse: "Past now, I must journey past the memories, they have all passed and have nothing to do with me now" (106). The assertion that the fate of Ouplaas and its people is no longer any of Marlouw's concern is repeated throughout the novel. Koert and his safe extraction from South Africa becomes Marlouw's only objective and he comes to resent the former workers' attempts to

divert him from his 'true' mission. When he is persuaded to drive into town to purchase dose for the dying sheep of Ouplaas, Marlouw adamantly refuses to accept the role of saviour of the derelict farm:

> Hell, what's it got to do with me? I've lost my way, impatient with myself, irritated at my concern. In any case, what am I doing on a road that's taking me away from Koert? I'm battling upstream for the sake of sheep dose – is this why I've come to this country? To be swallowed up by other survival issues? To exercise my compassionate heart and eventually to succumb: Here, have it all, my real mission is to help you. (Venter 151)

As Marlouw dissociates himself from the memories of Ouplaas and his parents, he is also distancing himself from the belief that he has a right to the land. While Marlouw's deceased father could resent, with true conviction, his family's description as "*amaYurophu*" or 'Europeans' by the Landless People's Movement and show hands "that could sift the soil to test its colour and fertility" and eyes "that could read the clouds" (106) in their defence, Marlouw declares: "I must get out of here, I never *was* part of this" (124).

Paradoxically, Marlouw honours the memory of the ancestors not by assuming his place as the 'rightful' heir to the ancestral land, but through the removal of the very thing on which the validity of lineal consciousness is hinged: the appeal to the ancestors who lie buried in the soil of the farm. Marlouw's father appears to him in a vision and orders him to destroy the family cemetery in order to prevent desecration of the graves:

> Marlouw, there's one last thing I want you to do for me, otherwise Mammie and I will never be at rest. I want you to go back to the graveyard on Oupa and

Ouma Rhynie's farm. Destroy everything. Everything. Burn the wreaths, flatten the whole graveyard. I don't want a single trace of me or Mammie or our family to remain in this land. That's my last request. (Venter 207)

Here, the complete removal of the bones of the ancestors from the earth indicates Marlouw's final surrender of his 'sacred' inheritance. With this act of destruction completed, "to alienate the farm" no longer "means to forsake the bones of the ancestors" (Coetzee *White Writing* 85), and Marlouw allows himself to turn his back on Ouplaas. *Trencherman*, then, exploits the growing fear amongst white Afrikaners that there will be no place for them in a future South Africa, as well as the fear that their 'inheritance' will be squandered by those who come after them.

Marlouw cannot re-establish a sense of belonging on this strange, ruined Ouplaas, because very little about the farm is still recognisable to him. He catches glimpses of the familiar in the new owners' continued use of his father's names for the camps and his childhood caretaker Mildred's strange misappropriations of his mother's mannerisms and sayings. However, the vague familiarity of these appropriations does not signify the possibility of a reconnection, but rather evokes Homi K. Bhabha's acknowledgement of the ambiguity and undecidability inherent in colonial discourse (for the imposition of the totalizing system of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa during the apartheid era was certainly a 'colonizing' mission). In "Signs Taken for Wonders", Bhabha (107) illustrates the ways in which the European text is displaced, distorted and repeated in the colonial sphere, suggesting "it is in-between the edict of Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of repetition, that the colonial text emerges uncertainly". For Bhabha (107), "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split

between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference".

The peculiar "display of hybridity" performed by Mildred and her extended family indeed "terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" (Bhabha 115). The Afrikaner culture of Marlouw's youth, the authority of which is dependent on the disavowal of the other, is ultimately unsustainable because, as Bhabha suggests, "the paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" (116). In the 'unruly' colonial space that is South Africa, the authority of Afrikaner nationalism is necessarily undermined through a process of repetition and displacement. Reminiscing about lazy days spent eating cake from dainty floral plates on his grandmother's patio, Marlouw recognizes that "it was a culture that never suited this land; from the very beginning, it was impossible to maintain it" (Venter 154).

Such a moment of colonial appropriation is also present in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Venter's matrix text. Marlow notices that a dying worker had "tied a bit of white worsted around his neck" (43) and struggles to understand the significance of the piece of thread:

> Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge – an ornament – a charm – a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas. (Conrad 43)

Bhabha identifies Marlow's interrogation of "the odd, inappropriate, 'colonial' transformation of a textile into an uncertain textual sign, possibly a fetish" in *Heart of*

*Darknes*s as exemplification of the notion that "the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Entstellung,* a process of displacement, dislocation, repetition (Bhabha 105).

In *Trencherman*, the inability to contain the "paranoid threat" from the hybrid other, and the accompanying fear of the disintegration of Afrikaner cultural identity and authority is manifested in a dream which plagues Marlouw – a dream that has tormented generations of Louw males. In this dream, experienced by thirteen generations of Louws, a man with a butcher's knife looms over the patriarch's bed in the dead of night. In a vision, Marlouw's deceased father asserts that the dream signifies the demise of not only the Louw family, but also the entire Afrikaner race:

> Listen carefully: it's easy to misinterpret the dream. I'm not afraid of dying, or even that I'll be killed in some cruel way. Even if it's with a knife in the night. My fear goes much further and deeper. I was afraid we Afrikaners would be wiped out roots and all. That's the heart of my fear. (Venter 205)

Ultimately, this "primal fear" that is "rooted in [the patriarch's] amygdala" (205) results not from external threats to Afrikaner authority, such as the recent shift to a black-ruled, democratic South Africa, but rather from an internal source: the sickliness within Afrikaner ranks identified by Willem de Klerk. Koert Spies, Marlouw's elusive nephew, comes to embody this sickliness. Much like Conrad's Kurtz, Koert represents the decay of a supposedly 'civilised' and enlightened people: the "horror" that is generated from within the colonial apparatus itself.

Koert has become a grotesque figure; the embodiment of the guilt, fear and greed that plague the Afrikaner people. His obese body is covered with festering boils; gangrene has claimed his right foot and shin and he has adopted a strange

pidgin language which consists of snatches of English, Afrikaans, Dutch and the contractions often used in cellular phone text messages and internet chat rooms. Marlouw recognizes the fact that this 'horror' is generated from within:

> Here is the embodiment of the fear of all our forebears. The fear that the man with the knife beside the bed of the forefather will gain the upper hand and that nothing will remain of us: here it is now, the nothing, writ large. An abomination that has retained merely a splutter of the original language. But it's not the man with the knife who is the father of the monstrosity – it's us. He came forth from our loins. (Venter 240)

While the ghost of Marlouw's father refuses to acknowledge Koert as a Louw and considers him a "bastard-Afrikaner" who has "abandoned his mother tongue" and "trampled [his] inheritance" (207), Koert represents the next generation of Louws and all that remains of the once powerful Afrikaner people. Echoing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Koert declares: "I am he, I am the *taal*, the volk, I am your destiny, your fear, das Ende des Lebens, the one who shits last, the very heart of darkness who has remained" (247).

Upon Koert's death, the unborn child that Esmie Phumzile, Koert's lover and Mildred's daughter, is carrying becomes the last descendent of the Louw family. Esmie uses her child and her new position as "family" to demand an escape from devastated South Africa:

> 'You have to take me, I've got Koert's child.' It's her trump card. She pulls back, grabs her belly and points to herself. 'I'm family Marlouw, I'm carrying your family's child. Koert said I must stay on the farm and plant your people on this soil again. Here he is,' – she grabs her belly again – 'here is your child, it is the future of your race.' (Venter 305)

Here, Esmie Phumzile assumes the role of the "Hottentot Eve" whose "presence on the frontier", according to Stephen Gray, "lends the myth a quality of potential interchange, since she, as pastoral ambassadress, temptress, mediator and, ultimately, miscegenator, comes to symbolize both the attractions and the intractabilities of inland, that unknown terrain across the ever-shifting frontier (38-39). However, the possibility of a fruitful interchange between the black Eve and Marlouw, the last remaining heir of the *boereplaas* is ultimately dashed. The promise of a new generation, born to a black mother, does not signify a hopeful turn in the novel. There is no suggestion that the fourteenth generation will be shielded, by virtue of their hybridity, from the fear and guilt that so plagued their forebears, but rather that they too will ultimately perish in an unforgiving land: "The fourteenth generation will be born in this land, will live, prattle away and die" (Venter 306). In fact, the demise of the people of Ouplaas is imminent. When the last windmill breaks, there remains no hope for survival:

'*Le windpipe yophukile*! The windmill is broken. The last one that was still working is broken now. It's broken. The pipes have to be pulled up. There are holes in those pipes. The water that's in the tank at the house is the last water on the farm,' Headman announces… 'It's finished for the people on Ouplaas. *Ebesingayo iphelile*! Everything's finished.' (Venter 277)

Reading the windmill as a symbol of pastoral prosperity, Venter is bidding a final farewell to the *plaasroman* ideal – and with it the view of Afrikaner cultural authority and ownership of the land as a sacred inheritance – with its destruction. Having condemned the people of Ouplaas to an inevitable demise, the novel takes a non-

anthropocentric turn. In the final chapter of the novel, Venter envisions a scenario in which Ouplaas, in the absence of any human activity, is returned to its natural glory:

> But no human footprint or human voice ever again existed on that piece of land. The name of the farm was also long forgotten. Imagine: wind blowing through the ruins of the farmstead as if no one had ever lived there. (Venter 315-316)

Here we find the first hopeful moment in the text. Despite suggesting the demise of the human race, or at least those inhabiting Ouplaas, this section is also concerned with healing and renewal. The unraveling of the myth of the *boer* and his *plaas* signals the return of unregimented wilderness, that which can no longer be contained in defense of an insular, ultimately defunct identity. Venter's misanthropy is in stark contrast to the sentimentalism of the selected post-1994 English speculative texts which will be discussed in the following chapters of this dissertation. Venter's impulse to condemn not only the Afrikaner nation, but also the entire human race may be attributed to the fact that *Trencherman* is informed by two separate (but in some ways inter-related) crises: the culmination of fears regarding the collapse of Afrikaner identity and culture under the threat of violent extermination (in the form of farm murders and other racially-motivated crimes) in contemporary South Africa, as well as the imminent threat of a global ecological catastrophe which could result in the mass extinction of the earth's most unsustainable species – humankind.

CHAPTER THREE
Sinister Ecology: The Figure of the Child as Mediator of Moral and Environmental Redemption in Jenny Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD*

There can be few ideas in Western culture as intimately connected and intertwined as 'nature' and the 'child'. The child as the natural, the natural in the adult as the child, the child of nature, the child in nature, the nature of the child; these concepts permeate the processes of self-definition of adults and adult society. – Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Children's Literature and the Environment"

There has indeed, as Karin Lesnik-Oberstein suggests in the epigraph above, been a long-standing entanglement between the concepts of the 'child' and the 'natural' in Western thought. The notion of the 'natural' child is perhaps most commonly associated with the Enlightenment philosophies of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the idea that children experience intuitive and spiritual connections with non-human sentient and non-sentient beings is still widely extolled today. Such conceptions of the child as intimately connected with nature almost certainly pre-date these thinkers, as well as found expression in other discursive fields of the time. The idea of the natural child remains influential and has also been established as one of the signature tropes of Romanticism. Rousseau's assertion that "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil" (11) survives in the concept that entry into adulthood signals the loss of a natural self, an intimate bond with a fragile and wondrous world that lies just outside the reach of even the most pious adult.

In children's literature, the 'natural' child is frequently presented as both teacher and pupil, at once awakening others to moral and environmental accountability and nurturing an awareness of her own complicity in a complex and interconnected ecological system. The children's book is a genre which has always been very much concerned with the natural world and in view of the current global

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environmental crisis has been increasingly utilized as a didactic tool in relation to ecological issues.[10] Karin Lesnik-Oberstein observes "that children's literature offers one of the most extensive sources for the study of ideas about nature, the environment, ecology and the role of humans in relation to all of these, in contemporary society" (216). In her view, children's books' preoccupation with animals and the environment has a redemptive function, the child not only assuming the role of "the agent of its own environmental redemption", but also of the "enlightener and redeemer of the adults" (213). This chapter builds on Lesnik-Oberstein's insights by particularizing the notion of the natural child as vehicle for ecological redemption for a South African context, a site where the notion of *belonging* is deeply contested due to a unique and complex history of colonial oppression and apartheid segregation, through a close reading of Jenny Robson's futuristic Young Adult novel, *Savannah 2116 AD.* This remarkable text ironizes the contemporary trend of didactic, eco-conscious children's books, particularly the sentimental reproduction of the trope of the child as mediator of environmental and moral redemption in Southern African children's literature.

Examples of Southern African children's tales that employ an eco-didactic style are John Struthers' *A Boy and an Elephant* (1998) and Jack Cope's short story, "Power" (1986). Both texts introduce youthful protagonists who come to experience a sense of connection and responsibility towards a particular animal and subsequently attempt to persuade the adults who surround them to view the natural world and its inhabitants with respect and compassion. Struthers' novel follows the exploits of a young boy and his elephant companion who travel to the Zimbabwean capital of Harare in order to question the state president regarding the human population's

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[10]Well-known examples of such eco-conscious children's tales are Bill Peet's *The Wump World* (1970), Dr Seuss's *The Lorax* (1971), Carl Hiaasen's *Hoot* (2002) and the controversial *The Secret World of Terijian* (2007).

indiscriminate killing of animals. Despite being threatened and forced to flee the city, the duo return safely to the Zambezi Valley, Gerry the elephant's home, where they are joined by the boy's uncle. Touched by the extraordinary relationship between human child and elephant, Uncle Lou vows to establish an environmental trust. When the boy, Jamie, asks if he will be sent back to school, his uncle replies: "It's you who'll be teaching us" (Struthers 124).

A thematic parallel can be drawn between Struthers' novel and Cope's "Power", which sees the eight-year old André rallying his parents and Eskom (the South African electricity provider) in order to save the life of a swallow that has been caught on the powerline which runs past his home. Here, as in *A Boy and an Elephant*, the child experiences a moment of identification with the animal and comes to view the suffering bird's pain as his own, thus displaying complete empathy and responsibility towards this non-human other. André "thought the bird on the powerline would get free soon, but looking at it there he had a tingling kind of pain in his chest and in one leg as if he too was caught by the foot" (Cope 3). Once again the previously reluctant adults who stand witness to this stirring scene are spurred into action, redeemed by the natural child and the lessons he has to teach them.

It is perhaps unsurprising that African children's literature should draw on the notion of the child as defender of the natural realm. After all, pervading Western stereotypes regarding the 'wild' continent make it easy to envision the African child as a care-free, barefooted individual more at ease with exotic animal companions than with gaming consoles or cellular phones. As suggested earlier, Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD* problematizes the uncritical utilization of this trope. Whilst the novel is ultimately a tale of ecological and moral redemption, it also identifies the South African landscape as a fraught and contested space in which the founding of what

Freya Mathews refers to as an 'ecological self' is necessarily problematic. Robson draws on both local (i.e. South African) and global experiences of oppression and displacement, as well as the relationship between such injustices and certain modes of conservationism, in order to create a fantastic world in which the tension between the redemptive impulses of the natural self (embodied as the child) and the devastating effects of institutionalized segregation and subjugation is explored.

A brief summary of this unfamiliar novel is necessary. The prologue effectively introduces the frightening perspective on wildlife conservation that informs the narrative. This is expressed through a fictional newspaper article in which the 'reporter' suggests:

> Africa is wildlife! That is how the rest of the world sees our continent. When they speak about Africa, they speak of the magnificent elephant, the heart-stopping lion. They are concerned that the animals of Africa are losing their habitat to human encroachment. They worry that the wildlife populations are endangered by human development. Sometimes it seems to this writer that the rest of the world wants to turn Africa into one giant wildlife conservatory, cleansed of its people. I have nightmares in which we African humans are herded into small areas behind barbed-wire fences so that magnificent elephants and heart-stopping lions can roam the savannah unhindered. And the rest of the world nods its head in approval. (Robson 9)

While this report is, as far as could be established, fictional, it is not an uncommon sentiment in the critical conversation taking place on conservation in South Africa today. An echo of this suggestion that the urgent need to conserve African wildlife and biodiversity is more often acknowledged by those outside of Africa than by the continent's own inhabitants can be found in William Slaymaker's "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses":

There is a great deal of exotic appeal and much hype in the efforts and advertisements to save the Serengeti for megafauna and the mountain environments of Burundi and Zaire for the great apes. The narratives that have promulgated these fashionable appeals for natural and environmental preservation are recognized and rewarded more often outside Africa than in. (Slaymaker 133)

The nightmarish scenario sketched by the fictional reporter is envisaged as unfolding in Robson's dystopian vision of twenty-second century South Africa. In the year 2116, South Africa is ruled by a group of elitist conservationists who have instituted an accord which allows ordinary citizens, known as Homosaps, to be herded together in reserves. This is in order to allow endangered African wildlife to replenish their dwindling numbers without human interference. The privileged group of Conservationists ('Armbanders') maintains power by means of brute force. Any notion of rebellion is effectively quelled by sedating the Homosap population through their water supply and individuals are indefinitely detained in mysterious prison compounds ironically known as 'zoos'. It also becomes evident that the Armbanders are conducting macabre experiments which involve harvesting the organs of genetically engineered male children in order to transplant them into sick animals. On their eighteenth birthdays, young genetically engineered donors (Geds) embark on what is known as 'the long walk' (a morbid nod to Nelson Mandela's biography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*) to be sacrificed for a futile experiment. For, unbeknownst to the Geds, the procedure has never been performed successfully:

It had never worked, the great species-to-species transplant scheme. Dr Marais should have known, but he had been blinded by his own delusions. It was Dr

Marais who had pioneered the Ged procedures, and his dream had never faltered, no matter how many failures and rejections he produced. No matter how many gorilla corpses had joined the mound at the Fortress crematorium. (Robson 132)

Furthermore, there also appears to be a backlog of young victims. In fact, ailing Armbanders, not animals, become the recipients of their youthful organs. The Armbanders maintain this façade by brandishing the same ageing gorilla, Lucy, as supposed animal beneficiary. It is against this extraordinary backdrop that Savannah, a young Homosap who falls in love with a Ged nearing his eighteenth birthday, must interrogate the systems of power and knowledge that keep her both physically and metaphorically enclosed, and attempt to establish a sense of self and belonging outside of these restrictions. Savannah, in contrast to the other children who occupy this futuristic world, is represented as a 'natural' child. Despite her physical separation from the 'Wilderness', Savannah maintains an intuitive connection to the natural world. Even as she is being forcibly removed from her 'Rural' home and spirited away from her family, she cannot help but pause to take in the beauty of the surrounding wildlife:

Beyond the fence, Savannah sensed the animals stirring in the Wilderness, calling to each other in the pre-dawn light. A hyena coughed from the thick grass. Beneath a grey shadowed tree, a small family of impala stretched graceful necks and flicked nervous tails. Even now, even on this most terrible of mornings, Savannah was moved by their beauty. (Robson 14)

Savannah's intuitive response to her natural surroundings is in direct opposition to the eco-resistance of the other young characters. For the Homosaps forced to live in cramped enclosures, wildlife is a source of hatred, resentment and rage. Savannah's

uncle, a Rural Homosap who is 'zooed' for fathering a second child, is especially expressive in his repugnance towards the animal population. He declares: "Bloody animals! Miserable bloody animals. If I had a gun, I'd shoot every last one of them. Bloody well clear them off the face of the earth for all time!" (16). This sentiment is shared by the majority of Rural denizens, although their expressiveness on the topic is curbed by the presence of the punitive Armbanders who demand absolute adherence to their sinister approach to conservation:

> That was the way Uncle always spoke about wildlife. It was the way most Rurals spoke about wildlife. Well, except when black-armbanded Guards were on patrol, and except when the Cons with their shining armbands of gold visited the area, checking that all was quiet and under control. (Robson 16)

Despite their natural names (e.g. "Breeze", "Valley" and "River"), the girls Savannah encounters when she is placed in the Ocean Children's Home are equally resentful towards the animals that effectively keep them imprisoned. The girls residing in this austere orphanage (their parents presumably 'zooed' or executed by the ruling conservationists) are coerced into pledging allegiance to the eco-fascist regime, surrendering their freedom for the good of the environment. This sacrifice is chillingly illustrated in the 'Anthem of Salvation', which the girls are required to sing every evening:

> *Till all our rivers run clear and free*
> *Till our earth is restored to its first majesty*
> *Till then, whatever the price*
> *We take this vow we will pay.*
> *On the altar of green we will lay*
> *The sacrifice of our humanity.*(Robson 26)

The inhabitants of the Ocean Children's Home are also subjected to propaganda newsreels which offer skewed updates on the Armbanders' greening project and are exposed only to government-approved wildlife documentaries on television. Here, parallels can be drawn between the Armbanders' regime and the strict censorship of the media maintained in South Africa during the apartheid era. While the rest of the girls struggle against the burden of censorship and yearn for "[s]tories about people, not stupid animals" (Robson 28), Savannah is enthralled by these films:

> The screen filled with deep green spaces, with trees silhouetted against a startling sunset. Then three giraffes. Savannah gasped at the sight of them. She'd seen giraffes once or twice from the look-out post back in the Rurals, but only in the distance, fascinating shapes without feature. Yet here they were, large as life... They were so beautiful it made her chest ache. (Robson 28-29)

In contrast to Savannah's sense of awe at the sight of the wild animals on screen, the rest of the group grows riotous, demanding to "see [the animals] do something interesting for a change" (30). Dune, one of the more outspoken girls, takes up a cry calculated to rankle the orphanage's staid matron – "Come on, wildebeest, let's have a bit of bonking" (30). She is soon joined by her peers, who are eager to give outing to their frustration: "Around the room, girls giggled and took up Dune's cry. 'We want bonking! WE WANT BONKING!' They stamped their feet on the wooden floor in time to the rhythm of their chant. On the screen, the first wildebeest launched itself into the raging waters" (30).

While the girls of the Ocean Children's Home are certainly justified in their mutinous response to indoctrination and incarceration, it is, however, the genetically

engineered donors, morally bankrupt boys who are over-indulged by their minders and reared on a steady diet of junk food, pornography and violence, who have the most reason to hate wildlife. These male donors are made aware of their 'noble' purpose from a young age and are encouraged by their psychologists and minders to engage in an array of unsavoury, licentious activities, presumably on the basis that they are needed for their strong bodies rather than their moral or intellectual astuteness. Their rage and frustration towards the natural world is expressed in a scene in which Savannah stumbles across the boy she loves, D-nineteen, and another young Ged, P-six, while they are engaged in a frenzied attack on the paintings they themselves had created of animals:

> Savannah was wholly unprepared for what happened next. She watched in shock as the two Geds raised their fists against their paintings. In their fists were sharp knives, catching the electric light as they slashed. And slashed. They lifted their knives and stabbed and ripped and slashed at the animals they had created, in an attack that was wild and violent and out of control. (Robson 51)

Savannah's attempts to cultivate a sense of respect and compassion for animals in D-nineteen seem destined to fail. Although moved by his affection for Savannah to attempt to appreciate wildlife the way she does, it would seem that D-nineteen's violent response to wildlife cannot be tempered:

> D-nineteen and P-six got out of the vehicle too, stretching. D-nineteen looked across at the kudu, trying to see it the way Savannah did, but it was hopeless. At the sight of this animal, any animal, the rage pounded through his head. Rage and helplessness and images of blood and ripped-out organs and torn-out hearts and lives ended before they had even begun. Animals always had that

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effect on him. The closer they were, the stronger his reaction seemed to be. (Robson 114)

The aggressiveness of these young characters towards animals and the environment points to Robson's problematization of the trope of the child as agent of moral and environmental redemption. Robson is able to challenge the notion of a redeemed 'ecological self' or 'natural child' because she is acutely aware of the various anxieties surrounding the relationship between the South African landscape and its inhabitants.

Savannah's world, where ordinary people are violently oppressed by an elite few, is clearly a restaging of late-apartheid South Africa, an expression of the continued influence of this system's violent legacy on present and future generations of South Africans. Most of the children of this future space resist the stereotype of the 'natural child' because the issue of redemption (be it ecological, moral or political) is a tender point for a nation still very much traumatized by the lengthy, harrowing and ultimately unsatisfactory Truth and Reconciliation Commission trials which offered amnesty to certain apartheid offenders[11]. Furthermore, their resentment towards the environment is rooted in the fact that the history of conservationism in South Africa is structured by the legacies of European imperialism and institutionalized racial segregation, characterized by the violent displacement and dispossession of indigenous peoples, as explored in the introduction to this study.

Savannah's highly segregated world, which is divided into Rural and Urban Homosap enclosures, Armbander Ranches and the great Wilderness recalls the ways in which apartheid legislation served to 'fence off' the South African people and their

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[11]The TRC Amnesty Committee granted successful applicants immunity from prosecution for politically-motivated crimes committed during the Apartheid era. Certain parties within the anti-Apartheid movement vehemently opposed the amnesty process, arguing that the victims of these crimes were deprived of justice.

environment. Apartheid legislation not only allowed for the displacement of indigenous peoples from their territories and their subsequent banishment from urban areas to degraded 'homelands', but also restricted their movement across these designated areas through pass laws.

Robson's novel interrogates the role conservation practices have played in this unequal division of the land and is also aware of the impact of such a violent legacy in the global context of the current environmental crisis. The past practice of forcibly removing people from their ancestral land in order to make way for animals and its concomitant violence has resulted in a deeply-rooted resentment towards any environmental system which appears to deem wildlife more important than *certain* people. Robson's representation of Armbander Ranches where elite conservationists can enjoy pristine environments and wildlife from luxurious cabins invokes the history of national parks in South African as "divisive institutions" (Carruthers "Past and Future" 262) associated with "narratives of violent displacement and dispossession" (256). In "An Unnatural State: Tourism, Water and Wildlife Photography in the Early Kruger National Park", David Bunn explores the ways in which "the Kruger National Park routinised class and race forms of ideological interpellation" and "provided a scene for significant fantasy investment" for white South Africans during the first half of the twentieth century (212). Bunn argues that amateur wildlife photography within the Reserve "provided a means for white tourists to structure their unbound desires" (212). He asserts that "waterhole photographs, huts and the Reserve landscape as a whole" (213) are "part of a larger system of homological structures in which the white presence is able to stage itself as though adapted to the African environment" (212). However, this kind of 'framing' project

also requires the careful negotiation of the presence of the African residents of the Reserve. Bunn writes:

> But the intense national longing evident in these scenarios finally depends on the management of another framing presence: that of Africans themselves. … In many English tourist accounts it is clear that the experience of proximity to 'raw natives', as they were called, was a crucial aspect of enjoyment for whites. The Native Reserves themselves around the Park were advertised as an appropriately archaic scenic domain that formed a pleasing backdrop to a motor tour to the Lowveld with the game reserve as its final destination. African staff in Kruger were representative of another order of time, an older domain of loyalty and precapitalist value that appeared already passed away beyond the borders of the Game Reserve. … Kruger, in this sense, was a place of primal misrecognition, where whites were investing in the notion of loyal labour that had chosen, so to speak, to give up its rights for the sake of an older fealty. (Bunn 213-214)

In contemporary, post-liberation South Africa, the institution of the national park, despite attempts to redress its role as divisive 'white-owned institution', is still at the center of debates regarding the equal distribution of land. Jane Carruthers writes:

> Until recently, national park landscapes minimised differing cultural heritage values because the built environment was absent and no resident communities were allowed. They epitomized 'nature' as national symbol and their purpose was to protect aspects of the common landscape, making it available to all. That they are now contested, and indeed *owned* by what can be regarded as ethnic communities, marks an enormous shift in national park policy. Land ownership in South Africa has been determined on a racial basis, and the interesting debate is whether national parks, once having been divisive institutions when owned by the 'white nation' as public property, become

more or less divisive when they have been formally parceled out and given by the state to other population groups. (Carruthers "Past and Future" 265)

Given the violent history of environmentalism in South Africa, any engagement with ecological issues within this context necessarily has to contend with a tension between humanistic and ecological concerns, the successful negotiation of which is dependent on the recognition of a unique form of environmental justice which acknowledges a connection between localized political and social injustices and the degradation of the environment. While ecocritics such as Anthony Vital have made some strides towards the establishment of a unique, localized Southern African ecocriticism which will successfully negotiate the "inevitable friction between the tendency to value human need and the recognition (supplied by ecology) that the natural world has its own value" (Vital "Situating Ecology" 299)[12], such theorization is of limited comfort to those disempowered South Africans who stand outside of the academic sphere. It is this tension between theory and practice that is highlighted in *Savannah 2116 AD*. How, Robson asks, can South Africans heed the global call for environmental responsibility and the founding of a self-in-nature, when local past experience has taught them that the natural world poses a threat to their humanity?

As much as *Savannah 2116 AD* is an expression of localized anxieties, it nonetheless seeks to situate South Africa in relation to global concerns. The novel reads as a parable for human/animal conflict everywhere and also addresses the universal theme of human suffering and cruelty. The universality of such oppression is established through some references to Nazi Germany, most notably the armbands worn by the tyrannical conservationists and the references to mysterious prison

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[12]See also Anthony Vital's "Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and *Life and Times of Michael K*" in which Vital again puts forward the possibility of "a new kind of concern for the environment emerging in the post-colonial era, one attuned to the histories of unequal development and varieties of discrimination, including, of course, racism and sexism" (90).

compounds, which are presumably modelled on the German concentration camp. This motif is also relevant within a local context, as the concentration camp occupies a dominant position in South African history. During the South African War between the independent Afrikaner Republics of Transvaal (the South African Republic) and the Orange Free State and the British Empire (1899-1902), countless Afrikaner women and children were forced into concentration camps after their farms were destroyed under Lord Kitchener's 'Scorched Earth' policy. In fact, the term 'concentration camp' has its origins in this war.

Robson's 'zoos' can also be read as an indictment of humans' treatment of captive animals. Indeed, there have been some controversial comparisons between Nazi death camps and drug-testing laboratories or abattoirs. In J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, Elizabeth Costello draws a comparison between the Polish extermination camp, Treblinka and animal slaughterhouses. In an address to the fictional Appleton College, Costello argues:

> 'They went like sheep to the slaughter.' 'They died like animals.' 'The Nazi butchers killed them.' Denunciations of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and the slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals. …Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them." (Coetzee *Lives* 20)

Costello's condemnation of the self-regenerating nature of abattoirs and stockyards, the breeding of animals for the sole purpose of killing them, is reminiscent of the fate

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of Robson's genetically engineered donors. The issue of genetic experimentation explored in *Savannah 2116 AD* reinforces parallels with experimentation on animal subjects in laboratories, as well as Holocaust atrocities (invoking the horrific practice of conducting medical experiments on prisoners by doctors and scientists in Adolf Hitler's employ). This trope also points to concerns regarding global developments in the field of genetic engineering, and more specifically stem cell research. In this instance, Robson, as writer of Science Fiction, is tapping into an anxiety that has become a dominant theme in international works of Science Fiction, most notably in the cyber-punk narratives of William Gibson, Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* (1990) and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Thus, Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD* can also be situated within a global tradition of 'post-human' Science Fiction. As such, Robson is able to interrogate not only the concept of the child as intimately connected with the wonders of a lost natural idyll, but also the very question of what it means to be a 'natural' human.

While *Savannah 2116 AD* clearly offers a critique of the notion of ecological and moral redemption, it should be made clear that the central theme of the novel remains the triumph of romantic love and redemption in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Savannah emerges not only as the saviour of her people, having orchestrated the fall of the tyrannical Conservationists' regime, but also as the "enlightener and redeemer" (Lesnik-Oberstein 213) of D-Nineteen and P-Six. Following a heroic stand-off between Savannah and those who wish to rob her of her first love, D-Nineteen is awed when he wakes up on the first morning of his eighteenth year, a day that he was never meant to experience. He places his new future firmly in Savannah's hands:

It was a strange feeling to have a future. Strange and a little frightening. A future with no purpose, when all his life he had been conscious of a purpose with no future. But Savannah would be there. Savannah would show him the way, just as she had shown him the way through the Wilderness.(Robson 138)

Savannah becomes akin to a goddess figure, a guiding light illuminating the path towards enlightenment, the broker of peace and reconciliation between human beings, the natural world and the animal population. She renames D-Nineteen "Adam - the first man in a wonderful new world" - and charges him, like the first Adam, with the stewardship of his newfound paradise (Robson 141).

This idyllic conclusion sits uncomfortably with the cynical adult reader who must be suspicious of such a sentimental reconciliation. Robson, as much as any other author of children's fiction and, for that matter, Science Fiction, is restricted by her chosen genre. The publication mill demands palatable and marketable stories of hope and redemption for children, and Robson certainly delivers. However, *Savannah 2116 AD* contains within the predictable parameters of the Young Adult novel a subtly subversive edge, a strategy that has been exploited with great success by Science Fiction authors. This genre's reputation as frivolous low-brow entertainment has allowed Science Fiction writers to deliver social commentary under the guise of satire, allowing them to become, as Bruce Sterling (9) suggests in the introduction to William Gibson's *Burning Chrome*, the "jesters" of the literary court, to "play with Big Ideas because the garish motley of [their] pulp origins makes [them] seem harmless (Sterling 9).

It seems appropriate to dress Jenny Robson in the multi-coloured garb of the Wise Fool. She plays with the 'Big Ideas' Science Fiction has to offer, presenting a vision of South Africa that is undeniably relevant to the many difficulties that still

plague this fledgling democracy. *Savannah 2116 AD* is as much situated in a violent past as it looks towards a challenging future on both the local and global stage. The novel explores the tension that exists between the desire for spiritual and ecological reconciliation, the notion that there is indeed a lost world in which human beings can be reunited with their pure, natural, child-like selves, and the many social factors that keep them bound to an unjust and violent reality. The figure of the natural child is utilized as both icon of salvation and reminder that such deliverance is not without obstacles within a fraught South African context. Robson's problematization of the issue of moral and ecological redemption is rooted in the local, informed by the brutal legacies of colonial and Apartheid oppression, and in particular the relationship between historical injustices and systems of environmental control. *Savannah 2116 AD* is also, however, concerned with universal models of oppression as well as the ever-increasing threat of a global environmental crisis. The novel not only situates South Africa in relation to global concerns, but also responds to outside concerns regarding the future of African wildlife which neglect to take into account the fate of the *people* (of all races and social classes) of Africa. *Savannah 2116 AD* suggests that South Africa and the rest of the African continent can stand firm against the uncomfortable gaze of the rest of the world and declare: 'Nothing about us without us.'[13]

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[13]A popular mantra in South Africa, used particularly by trade unions such as SADTU (the South African Democratic Teacher's Union) to resist decision-making processes that do not take into account the will of the people.

CHAPTER FOUR
Expressions of Alterity: The symbolic novum of the clone in Jane Rosenthal's *Souvenir*

South Africa is inside of me. When they open me up they'll find that my heart is old Karoo stone. – Athol Fugard, "South Africa is Inside Me"

In *Science Fiction*, an introductory guide to SF and its history, Adam Roberts examines the ways in which alterity is encoded in science fiction narratives. In order to come to an understanding of what constitutes science fiction, Roberts outlines three definitions of the genre by three prominent SF critics: Darko Suvin, Robert Scholes and Damien Broderick. He concludes that "implicit within these three definitions is a sense of SF as a *symbolist* genre, one where the novum acts as symbolic manifestation of something that connects it specifically with the world we live in" (16). For Roberts, the symbolic 'novum' (a term coined by Darko Suvin in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, meaning 'new' or 'new thing' in Latin) is the physical manifestation of alterity, the "point of difference" in a science fiction text (6). He writes:

> What these various definitions of SF have in common, then, is a sense of SF as in some central sense about the encounter with difference. This encounter is articulated through a 'novum', a conceptual, or more usually material embodiment of alterity, the point at which the SF text distils the difference between its imagined world and the world which we all inhabit. For Scott McCracken, 'at the root of all science fiction lies the fantasy of alien encounter' ...This serves as the basis of many critics' affection for the genre, the fact that SF provides a means, in a popular and accessible fictional form, for exploring alterity. Specific SF nova are more than just gimmicks, and much more than cliches [sic]: they provide a symbolic grammar for articulating the perspectives of normally marginalised discourses of race, of gender, of non-conformism and alternative ideologies. (Roberts 28)

Roberts is particularly concerned with the ways in which the alien "embod[ies] some degree of awareness of difference, which might be encoded in various ways such as race, culture or gender" (102). Here, the figure of the *alie*n, as an expression of alterity, serves as a stand-in for any number of SF nova, including the spaceship, the clone or the cyborg. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which the SF novum "can be used to encode the female experience" (101). Roberts suggests:

> SF properly located in the discourse of difference...would examine the ways gender constructs difference, the way a person's gender is conceived in terms of difference. It might use an expression of material difference, which is to say, non-humanity – a space alien, a machine, a symbolic novum – as a means of exploring what it is like to have the label 'different' imposed on a person by some normalising system. (Roberts 100)

Roberts' conception of the SF novum as a means of exploring gendered difference proves particularly valuable when considering Jane Rosenthal's recent speculative South African novel, *Souvenir*. Set in late twenty-first century South Africa, *Souvenir* is explicitly concerned with the fractured nature of the female experience, a splintering which is expressed through the symbolic novum of the clone.Rosenthal's young protagonist, Souvenir Petersen, or Souvie, is a 'barbiclone' – one of "various types cloned from the ideal women of the early years of the century, whether blonde, oriental or dark" (4). Viewed by some as little more than a cloned sex slave and domestic worker, the extraordinarily beautiful, blonde Souvenir attempts to escape the discriminatory treatment of others by seeking solitude on a journey across a vastly altered, futuristic Karoo landscape.

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Rosenthal draws on scientific postulations, specifically Andy McCaffrey's article "Antarctica's "Deep Impact" Threat", in order to explore the possible ramifications for South Africa if West Antarctica's ice sheet were to melt. Souvenir's South Africa is geographically and climatologically altered by storms and tsunamis caused by exactly this ecological catastrophe.[14] The effects of global warming and the disintegration of Antarctica's ice sheet on Souvie's late twenty-first century landscape are effectively illustrated in the following two extracts:

> The science of weather prediction had long been in disarray, and the only thing that could safely be predicted was that it was hot and would get hotter. The interior was slowly turning into a desert. Farms in the Karoo no longer ran thick-fleeced merino sheep, but had gone back to indigenous short-haired sheep and goats, and some kept small herds of Nguni and Afrikander cattle. The farms along the river over the mountains had long since taken out the old citrus orchards and planted dates and olives – on that side of the mountains citrus was now mostly grown in domes, like vegetables. Europe and the east coast of North America were now growing oranges for themselves. (Rosenthal 12)

And:

> It was the icebergs that caused the storms. For decades, the western portion of Antarctica had been shedding huge mountains of ice that drifted towards the south-eastern coast of Southern Africa, and then encountered the Agulhas current which took them into a westerly direction. The prevailing south-easterly winds carried icy air inland, and the meeting of this with the hot air off the interior caused these spells of turbulent weather and heavy rain. It was

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[14]*Souvenir* echoes other works in this genre, for example Kim Stanley Robinson's *Forty Signs of Rain* (2004), which has as its focus the effect of global warming in the near future.

something that had to be endured while the icebergs passed by, sometimes taking several weeks. (Rosenthal 138-139)

Souvenir can be read as a recasting of the popular genre of the Karoo travelogue. Souvie's expedition is as much a journey of scientific endeavour (she travels with an itinerant lepidopterist) as a quest for self-discovery, not only a means of coming to terms with her own contradictory feelings regarding her clone status, but also an attempt to inscribe herself in the history of her adoptive family, the Petersens. The novel is interspersed with diary entries by Aunt Jem, Souvie's adoptive father's aunt "from the days when everyone had families", a farmer and artist who, seventy years prior to Souvie's tale, made a similar passage across the Karoo (Rosenthal 18). A kind of freelance gardener, Aunt Jem travelled the Karoo, leaving behind rosebush hedges and avenues on several farms in the area. Guided by the journal, Souvenir retraces the footsteps of her non-biological aunt, finding in what remains of Jem's rosebushes and hedges a connection not only to a family, but also to an otherwise hostile and unpredictable landscape.

In "Whales, Clones and Two Ecological Novels", Wendy Woodward suggests that Obed Will Obenbara, the lepidopterist who later becomes Souvenir's husband, "exhibits nostalgia for the days of colonial exploration and scientific amateurism in the best meaning of the word, as one who loves what he does" (Woodward 142). Obed Will sees himself as

a gentleman-adventurer of scientific bent..., modelled on explorers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that tribe of Europeans – Dutch, French and English – who came to Africa. He felt he was dressed in the manner of Le Vaillant or Lichtenstein. (Rosenthal 35)

Parallels can be drawn between Woodward's reading of Obed Will as intrepid explorer, interested only in the pursuit of knowledge, and the reputation of François Le Vaillant, the eighteenth-century French ornithologist on whom Obed Will Obenbara models himself, as a gentleman traveller and "energetic naturalist of serious intent, and a pioneer" (Mundy n.pag.). Le Vaillant undertook two journeys across the Cape Colony between 1781 and 1784: "one to the east, reaching the Great Fish River and returning through the Karoo, and one to the north, reaching the Orange River" (Mundy n.pag.). Large parts of Le Vaillant's accounts of these journeys (published as two volumes in 1790 and 1795 respectively) are considered to be embroidered. Similarly, his *magnum opus*, the six-volume *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique* (1796-1810) is riddled with inconsistencies and mere fabrications:

> Within 50 years, Carl Sundevall of the Stockholm Museum made a critical review of the book, in both Swedish and Latin, and demonstrated that the list of species included 50 that Levaillant [sic] claimed to have collected during his travels but which in fact did not occur in the cape (most did not even occur in Africa!). In addition there were 10 birds that were unidentifiable, and another 10 that were 'fabricated' or composite birds. (Mundy n.pag.)

Despite these discrepancies, Le Vaillant is defended as a naturalist of great importance. In a seminar held at Christian Brothers College in Buluwayo on 26 May 2005, Peter Mundy, promoting his co-authored book, *François Levaillant and the Birds of Africa* (2004), warns that "one must not throw out the baby of historical fact with the bath water of imaginative fiction" (n.pag.). He further claims that Le Vaillant's "peccadillos, and even sins, are overwhelmed by the weight and abundance of his achievements", most notably his documentation of various species of birds, mammals, plants and insects previously unknown to science (n.pag.).

In "Disowning Ownership: 'White Writing' and the Land", Stewart Crehan also comes to Le Vaillant's defence, arguing that the "insatiable curiosity which we find in Le Vaillant … is not the same as a repressive, egocentric desire for control … His visit to South Africa as a student of natural history was motivated not by acquisitiveness but by a desire to discover new information" (58-59). Similarly, Ian Glenn suggests that Le Vaillant's extremely detailed (if somewhat inaccurate) map based on his travels in the Cape colony – a present to King Louis XVI of France – was not merely a way of "marking his presence in the colonies", but was rather borne of an interest in serious scholarship (33). Glenn further argues that King Louis XVI had a particular interest in exploration and voyages, pointing out that "on the scaffold, he is reported to have inquired if there were any news of the La Perouse expedition" (33). Thus, the King's interest in Le Vaillant's map would not have been entirely motivated by fantasies of French imperial expansion:

> [W]hile the King might have been keen to rival the British in wanting to see French exploration and French influence expand, he was also intellectually and perhaps even emotionally involved. Details like the Danish captain's tomb, if they were inspired by a hint that the King had found this passage particularly interesting, would suggest that it was the power and curiosity of the narrative, rather than a wish for an instrument of power, that was the driving force in the King's use of the map. (Glenn 33-34)

In a brief section on travel writing in South Africa included in the brochure accompanying the National English Literary Museum's 2011 'Landscape in South African Literature' exhibition, Thomas Jeffery remains sceptical of claims regarding the supposedly innocuous nature of Le Vaillant's often untrue accounts of his voyages into Southern Africa. He argues that "this sort of invention of the landscape is typical of the colonial exoticization of the landscape, that is, representation of the landscape

and its inhabitants, both human and animal, in fantastic or fabulous terms" (18). Jeffery draws on Harry Garuba's essay, "Mapping the Land/Body/Subject" in order to show that

> imperialism went hand-in-hand with mapping, by which Europeans imaginatively and materially possessed much of the rest of the world … Cartographers charted areas of geographical knowledge and *terra incognita*, and through their maps they possessed real geography. In cartographic and literary maps, Europeans charted the world then colonized it. The late nineteenth-century scramble to map was also a scramble to colonize and consolidate imperial power. European imperialism and mapping reached a simultaneous climax at the end of the nineteenth century. (Garuba cited in Jeffery 20)

Jeffery further asserts:

> Map-making played a powerful role in this process of exoticization of the landscape and the effacement of the indigenous populations. To map a place was a claim of ownership over that place; and the very notion of 'discovery' implicitly denies the presence and the rights, and even the humanity, of the indigenous peoples whose lands the colonizers were 'discovering'. (Jeffery 21)

In some ways, Le Vaillant's fabulous accounts of the animals and inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope (and specifically the Karoo) in the late eighteenth century can be seen as the precursor to Rosenthal's fantastic travel narrative. As much as the entertaining nature of Le Vaillant's penchant for exaggeration belies the more sinister expansionist agendas of his colonial counterparts, Rosenthal's account of Obed Will's encounters with fabulous composite creatures such as the 'badass' (a genetic mutation that is part donkey and part baboon) is rooted in suspicion regarding modern-day

advances in genetic engineering and the possibility of the ruthless exploitation of such technology for profit. Obed Will's mapping of the butterfly population of the Karoo, and Souvenir's retracing of the journey documented in Aunt Jem's botanical journal (an artefact similar to Le Vaillant's illustrated map of his voyages) are indeed attempts at claiming ownership over a place, inscribing the Karoo with their presence. However, much like claims surrounding the intrepid Le Vaillant's benign exploration, these characters' attempts to write themselves into the landscape is motivated by a nonthreatening desire to belong. Obed Will's nostalgia for a world still untouched by humankind is reminiscent of Coetzee's Michael K's wish for a piece of land, existing outside the violent grasp of history, where he can live lightly off the land:

> Obed Will knew that this old, almost pre-colonial world was long gone. Yet whenever he thought this he immediately felt a desire to deny or contradict it, arise in him. Somewhere there must be pockets, small corners, tops of mountains, difficult and inaccessible ravines, dry inhospitable canyons where there were no traces of the present, where no one had ever lived or farmed, not even the Khoikhoi. Obed Will, suffering from a surfeit of the crowded present in city life, longed for that past wilderness. (Rosenthal 35-36)

In "Beyond Ecology", Neil Evernden suggests that the "act of naming" can be a fruitful process through which one may learn to see oneself as imbedded in the physical environment, as part of a complex network of life forms:

> The act of naming may itself be a part of the process of establishing a sense of place. This is fairly easy to understand in a personal sense, that is, giving personal names to special components of a place, but it also may apply in the case of generic names. Perhaps the naturalist, with his penchant for learning the names of everything, is establishing a global place, making the world his

home, just as the "primitive" hunter did on the territory of his tribe. (Evernden 101)

Rosenthal's nostalgia for the spirit of exploration and scientific endeavour of South Africa's settler past is extended to the character of Souvenir, who is herself described by her adoptive mother, Mara, as being "in a way...a relic of the settler past" (19). As a clone, she represents a scientific frontier, and specifically one that has come to define the twenty-first century as much as the space race defined the twentieth-century – what Joan Slonczewski and Michael Levy refer to as "the quest for the genome" (174). In an entry in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, titled "Science Fiction and the Life Sciences", Slonczewski and Levy write:

> Over the past decade…writers more often have turned to biology as the 'hard science' frontier of the future. The quest for outer space has given way to the quest for the genome. The great adversary is no longer an alien superpower, but the enemies within – cancer, AIDS, and bio-weapons – as well as the accidental results of genetic manipulation, and our own lifestyle destroying our biosphere. The engineering challenge of the future is less a matter of machines replacing living organisms than of machines imitating life's complexity. (Slonczewski & Levy 174)

The threat of genetic engineering and cloning has long been a trope in science fiction, with concerns regarding the creation of artificial life dating as far back as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The fear that machines may somehow come to "imitat[e] life's complexity" has never seemed more realistic than in this the twentieth century (Slonczewski & Levy ibid.). In *A Clone of Your Own?*, Arlene Klotzko suggests that fears regarding cloning and genetic engineering are symptomatic of the threat of anonymity experienced by the post-modern subject:

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Perhaps some of our unease about cloning – about becoming a devalued copy or the template for one or twenty or one hundred copies – has more real-world roots. So many of the stereotypical associations that surround cloning (loss of individuality, control, uniqueness, and our essential humanity) seem all too applicable to the lives we lead. Especially for those of us who live in large cities, work for big companies, and dress very much the way other people do. We seem anonymous, in danger of not being appreciated for our uniqueness, in danger of not even being noticed. Many of our encounters are with people we don't know and will never know; these strangers certainly don't see us as individuals, as special. The fear of cloning resonates so powerfully because of our suspicions that, metaphorically speaking, we already are clones. (Klotzko 150)

In the case of *Souvenir*, however, anxieties surrounding the issue of cloning are employed in order to explore "what it is like to have the label 'different' imposed on a person by some normalising system" (Roberts 100). Souvenir's femaleness is ultimately the site of her difference. Her blonde hair, blue eyes, long legs and ample breasts mark her not only as female, but as über-female, the perfect specimen in terms of the western ideal of feminine beauty. However, these features are also what mark her as a clone, genetically engineered to conform to such an idealized vision of femininity.

Here, Roberts' theory of the encoding of otherness by means of the SF novum intersects usefully with Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto". Haraway suggests that women are already cyborgs: "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (150). Haraway comments on the fragmented nature of feminism, and indeed femaleness, suggesting that it "has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective" (155). She challenges the essentialist

notion of a collective state of "'being' female… itself a highly complex category" (155). Haraway states: "Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of woman elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's dominations of each other" 155).

For Haraway, the interstitial position of the cyborg is a fruitful space. The "cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (154). Here, Haraway draws on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'lines of flight'. The cyborg, as representative of female identity, is an 'assemblage' – what Haraway calls "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" –and thus subject to deterritorialization and reterritorialization (163). In this way, Haraway, like Deleuze and Guattari, challenges the hegemony of binary logic and particularly "the traditions of 'Western' science and politics" (150). She argues for "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction" (150).

Rosenthal's barbiclone is the embodiment of such a "fabricated hybrid" or "cyborg" (Haraway 150). Souvenir is indeed a 'postmodern collective', a kind of simulacrum which no longer has an original. She is haunted in her dreams by a mysterious connection to other clones who share her DNA, experiencing memories that she does not recognize as her own:

> Perhaps it was the heat that woke her, perhaps anxiety about the dirigible, perhaps – and this she thought the most likely of all these possibilities – she'd been dreaming again. A short dream, a fragment, in which she heard her name called, though it was not Souvenir, but some other name which she nonetheless knew to be hers, and when she looked around she saw mirror reflections of herself, all looking around at her, all answering to that name, all

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making identical movements of head and eyes and hands. They were, she knew, not reflections, but others, and this frightened her even though she knew, had known from infancy, that she was a cloned child. (Rosenthal 6)

Souvenir, at once a representation of ideal femaleness and an *unnatural* product of genetic manipulation, problematizes the essentialism of "contested sexual scientific discourses" with regard to what it means to be female (Haraway 155). Throughout the novel, Souvenir must negotiate not only her own unease about her clone status, but also the suspicion and prejudices of others. Although Souvenir is assured that people from the rural areas are more tolerant of cloned individuals, some tension is evident almost immediately after her arrival on the Karoo farm, Springfontein. Here she meets ten-year-old twins, Uzi and Clara, whose perfectly formed features cause her to wonder whether they are cloned children or "Dollybabies" (Rosenthal 7). The term 'dollybaby' is a reference to Dolly the sheep, the first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell, but can also be read as referring to the doll-like features of the children. Here the association with a doll or plaything reinforces the view of 'barbiclones' as submissive sex toys and servant expressed in the novel. The children's mother, Magda, immediately insists that the twins are naturally born children, and Souvenir is disturbed by her defensive attitude:

[The twins] had the same shapely hands and identical faces, and this made her wonder whether they too were clones. Earlier Magda, the matriarch of this homestead, she of the concentrically shaved rings on her head, had seen Souvie looking around from the twins to the adults present and, divining her train of thought, said, These are my twins, naturally born children. She looked at her in a challenging way, but Souvie only said, Beautiful children, and went on preparing the ironing. There was something she could not quite put her finger on, a certain defensiveness, perhaps, as though Magda was used to

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having to put people straight about her children. And of course, the undercurrent of disapproval – there were lots of old conservatives who thought clones were an abomination. (Rosenthal 5)

However, this small confrontation is relatively insignificant in comparison to accounts of other, more vicious, prejudices against Souvenir as barbiclone. It soon becomes apparent that barbiclones are often adopted solely as "indispensable sextoys and household skivvies" (Rosenthal 6). In this sense, the barbiclone is representative of not only the fragmented nature of female experience, but also of the sexual exploitation of women. Rosenthal is also critical of the ways in which women are held hostage by unattainable versions of feminine beauty perpetuated by western-centred mass media: that double-edged sword which proclaims a woman unattractive if she does not conform to the pin-up ideal, and frivolous, incompetent, unintelligent and sexually available if she does.

[Souvenir had] met same-set barbiclones at Study Group and desperately avoided them when she realised how some people thought of her when she was in their company. She'd heard the sayings about barbiclones: One's your slave, two's a harem, or, One might, two will, and more of the same. Over the years she had met one or two who made a point of resisting the stereotype – in fact it was a common enough reaction for psychologists to have labels for them: Charlizes, for the blondes. The rather unusual brunette barbiclones who resisted were known as Greers, the dark-skinned ones, Sindiwes, and the orientals were known as Arundhatis or Jungchangs, depending on whether they were more Indian- or Chinese-looking. (Rosenthal 24)

It is telling that the labels reserved for rebellious barbiclones almost invariably refer to feminist activists and writers, including South African-born actress Charlize

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Theron, Germaine Greer, Sindiwe Magona, Arundhati Roy and Jung Chang. The systematic labelling of these 'rebels' suggests their re-absorption into the hegemonic discourse against which they struggle, pointing perhaps to the "[p]ainful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line [which] has made the concept of woman elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's dominations of each other" (Haraway 155).

The novel, however, cannot be said to be fatalistic in its approach to the plight of the barbiclone. Rosenthal suggests, as does Gilles Deleuze, that difference and repetition can be used as a means by which "privileged positions" can be "challenged and overturned" (Deleuze 69). Souvenir must first resolve her own disquiet regarding her clone status before she can be released from the shackles of the totalizing systems which hold her captive.

When Souvenir first encounters the sinister van der Bijl family and their genetically engineered baboon-donkey, she feels "confused" and "contaminated" and wonders if the repulsion expressed by her young friends, Uzi and Clara, at the sight of this creature can be extended to include her (Rosenthal 69). Obed Will Obenbara, the lepidopterist of Nigerian descent whom she meets on her journey and later marries, also causes Souvie some discomfort when he admits that he does not map cloned butterflies.

> Souvie looked away. There was a short silence in which Obed Will realised there was no quick way to undo the damage of this remark, especially as he had been quite truthful – so how could he now smoothly offer her assurances about her own clone status? But Souvie, as it happened, was thinking about the apricots, how she herself had sought out Old Gene varieties. (Rosenthal 112)

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Here, Souvie's own preference for Old Gene varieties invokes the essentialist debate concerning what it means to be naturally female/male/human/apricot. These boundaries are even further transgressed when Souvenir falls pregnant despite the fact that she is a cloned individual. Frightened by the prospect of bearing a child, Souvenir visits the Eugenics Unit at Groote Schuur hospital for an amniocentesis. Here, she is told that it is not uncommon for barbiclones to fall pregnant.

It may be argued that Souvenir has to relinquish a measure of difference, i.e. take on the traditional role of mother and wife, in order to find true contentment. This sits uncomfortably with the novel's commitment to overturning notions of 'normalcy'. If, however, this is viewed from the perspective of Haraway's argument that women – and this group must surely include mothers and wives – are always already cyborgs, inscribed by difference, this difficulty is somewhat assuaged. When bearing in mind that the fertile female alien is in fact a popular SF novum (a few examples include the *Alien* and *Species* franchises and the recent television re-make of *V*), the potential of the female body to produce offspring need not be precluded in order for it to serve as a symbolic site of difference. Admittedly, Souvenir's children are not alien spawn set on world-domination and carnage, but they are undoubtedly hybrid. Born to a barbiclone mother and a Nigerian father, these female children, "all of them café au lait with dark hair and eyes, except the youngest, who had blue eyes like her mother's", are triply marked as different – through their race, gender and genetic legacy (Rosenthal 177). Indeed, Souvenir's husband, and the children's father, Obed Will Obenbara, is also of mixed descent, his father being Nigerian and his mother Tswana.

Obed Will Obenbara can also be read as a means of overturning established positions of privilege. Although published a few years prior to the wave of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, *Souvenir* nonetheless draws on the long-existing stereotype

which typecasts Nigerian nationals as violent criminals and drug-dealers in order to subvert this preconception. In Souvenir's world, Nigerians wield great political power and are revered in South African society. It is suggested that Nigerian nationals are at the head of the ruling party of the day:

> After so many decades of on-and-off war, the Congress party, which had restored the country to the African people back in the previous century, had been ousted by the All Africa Nigerian Party. Weakened by the devastating Aids epidemic in the first two decades of the century, the seemingly invincible Congress began to collapse; thousands of supporters died, and of those who survived, many rejected their old liberators, blaming them for not arresting the epidemic. (Rosenthal 35)

In addition to exerting political power, the Nigerian inhabitants of this future landscape also seem to be in possession of large incomes:

> [Souvenir] was not unacquainted with Nigerians. Cape Town was full of them living high up on the slopes of the Lion Mountain above Sea Point and Bantry Bay, owners of personal dirigibles, yachts, and the best horses, and packing out street committee meetings. She was accustomed to meeting them on the street where she and Mara lived, had grown up with their tall languid presence, with their candid and faintly arrogant way of looking them up and down. (Rosenthal 38)

In this way, the difference which have earned Nigerian nationals the unpleasant label of 'makwerekwere' in present day South Africa is recast as "magnificent blackness" (Rosenthal 173). Alterity, then, becomes a powerful position from which normalizing systems can be interrogated and subverted.

Souvenir does not propagate the abdication of difference in order to belong, but rather the desire to belong despite difference. In order to provide her unorthodox family of hybrids a place to call home, Rosenthal draws on an established trope in South African literature: the Karoo as timeless landscape, which, belonging to no one, belongs to everyone. In his popular weekly *Brouhaha* column, Eben Venter devises a strategy for living without cynicism in crime-ridden South Africa, what he calls "die land van melk en moorde" (the land of milk and murders). Thinking back to the sense of peace he experienced at a small café in Uniondale, he advises his (presumably white, beleaguered Afrikaans) readers:

> [S]tap Fanta in die hand uit op die stofstoep van die kafee en onthou maar: Oor daardie ruggens van die Swartberge begin die Groot-Karoo, asvaal en gedaan van oudgeid. Daar bly mense so lank as 'n mens kan onthou en dit is ook joune, dit maak nie saak wat daar gesê word nie. En daar mag jy gaan áánlewe. (Venter 57)
> [With a Fanta in one hand, walk out onto the dusty stoep of the café and remember: Across those peaks of the Swartberg begins the Great Karoo, ashy and worn from age. There people have been living for as long a person can remember and it is also yours, no matter what is said. And there you are allowed to go and live forth.]

In his autobiography, *Karoo Morning* (1977), Guy Butler similarly depicts the Karoo as a primeval landscape, a region that pre-dates human beings and will in all likelihood continue to flourish long after humankind is eradicated from the planet. Butler describes the Karoo's vast presence as a humbling, near-religious experience:

> The Karoo, once you have been given the hint, is the eroded ruins of a world, the great lake and its giant reptiles gone but for a few bones and ripple marks, gone like Sodom and Gomorrah in earthquake and fire, epochs of reptilian life

abolished, stone scorched and purged, and then sculpted clean and bare into noble shapes, the tactics of the elemental artist spelt out in the fine sand of the watercourses, his signature clear in the cirrus clouds. You can see all this because the air is dry, distances clear, and scarcely a shrub grows higher than your knees. In that vast semi-desert it is difficult to forget your smallness; the colour and the size of the shrubs are shy; growth slow and stubborn; the dinosaurs seem to be saying, through the small swift lizard, the camouflage snake the armour-plated tortoise: we've learned our lesson, we'll stay small. (Butler n.pag.)

Souvenir's version of the Karoo landscape may look vastly different to Venter's and Butler's, plagued by severe weather and strange genetically-modified creatures, but the sentiment that the Karoo can provide those who feel themselves beleaguered by a hostile dominant system with a safe haven of peace and acceptance remains the same. *Souvenir*, then, like many of the speculative works examined in this study, suggests that a sense of self is firmly rooted in place. The Karoo belongs to Souvenir by virtue of her Aunt Jem's legacy of rosebushes and hedges. She is inscribed in the landscape through a shared history, a legacy. Rosenthal's futuristic novel is also comparable to other speculative South African texts such as Jenny Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD* in the sense that ecological disaster is used as a means of exploring human relationships, and particularly what it means to be different. As this study has suggested, such emphasis on humanistic concerns through the lens of the popular SF trope of ecological crisis is not uncommon in South African speculative fiction. Due to the country's violent legacy of human rights violations, South African literature continues to be concerned with questions of alterity and belonging. Wendy Woodward notes that the human drama in *Souvenir* does not detract from the novel's ecological message. She writes: "In spite of the unfolding romance between Souvie and Obed Will, the ending of the novel foregrounds, rather

than rendering as lesser, the ecological drama, with the earth as an intentional subject responding to the imbalances of global warming" (Woodward 347).

Science fiction provides a rich language through which notions of otherness can be expressed. Through the novum of the clone (comparable in to Haraway's cyborg), Rosenthal is able to challenge the logic of binary oppositions, overturning positions of privilege and offering us room to imagine a fruitful space between supposedly 'fixed' territories. The following chapter explores other productive imaginings of hybridity in the form of human/animal couplings which serve to destabilize hierarchized binary oppositions. Like Rosenthal's *Souvenir*, Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* and Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* not only highlight the myriad forms of otherness through the introduction of a trickster figure, but also turn the gaze inward, exploring moments of self-awareness of alterity.

CHAPTER FIVE
Familiar Animals: 'Becoming-Animal' in Neill Blomkamp's
District 9 and Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*

There's not much to let go of in Africa anymore. It is all gone. But there are people living there. No, you're wrong. People are dying here. And everything else is dead as well. The economy, the nation-state, universities, the public clearings of morality and debate. Even the dreams. Only nightmares survive and grow. Soon everybody in Africa will be Nigerian, fearless and bold and criminal. We have no more credible shared discourse that could shape behaviour, so the mind has grown dark. – Breyten Breytenbach, *A Veil of Footsteps: Memoir of a Nomadic Fictional Character* (300)

Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" has served as the theoretical basis for the preceding analysis of Jane Rosenthal's futuristic homage to the Karoo, *Souvenir*. This chapter once again turns to Haraway's ground-breaking study, this time for its controversial views on the ways in which the myth of the cyborg can be used to challenge the human/animal divide. Haraway asserts that "the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached", and argues for the "pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures" (151). She writes:

> Biology and evolutionary theory over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced modern organisms as objects of knowledge and reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle or professional disputes between life and social science. (Haraway 151-152)

For Haraway, the cyborg, "appear[ing] in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed", does not signal "a walling off of people from other living beings", but rather "a disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling" (152). In this sense, the cyborg remains, as Rosi Braidotti suggests,

> a connection-making entity; a figure of interrelationality, receptivity and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions

(human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/non-oedipal). It allows Haraway to think specificity without falling into relativism in the quest for adequate representation of a generic postnaturalistic humanity. (Braidotti 200)

As has been suggested elsewhere in this study, the "connection-making entity" of the cyborg is fruitfully embodied within science fiction, a genre which regularly relies on the trope of the novum as expression of alterity (Braidotti ibid.). Science fiction authors, as the "jesters" of the literary court, have the freedom to create fictional landscapes in which the borders of the realm of possibility can be shifted, stretched, and even ignored altogether (Sterling 9). However, SF, much like its distant cousin, satire, invariably maintains a relation to the 'real', in order to

show, with exaggerated clarity, the hidden bulk of a iceberg of social change. This iceberg now glides with sinister majesty across the surface of the late twentieth century, but its proportions are vast and dark. (Sterling 11)

Sterling's description of science fiction as harbinger of social change is echoed in a recent article by Delphi Carstens and Mer Roberts, titled "Protocols for Experiments in African Science Fiction". This article explores an intersection between the genre of science fiction and African "migratory mythology", which "draw[s] strongly on motifs of transformation, hybridity, gender-blending and extra-sensory" [sic] (Carstens & Roberts 79). It suggests that science fiction may serve as a productive conduit for the creative reinvention of the African mythological narrative "in the context of contemporary and global information culture" (79).

For Carstens and Roberts, the value of the science fiction genre is closely related to its capacity for articulating the anxieties associated with social change, the ability to "describe the collision of the past and the future – the wavering ontological

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certainty in the face of rapid change" (83). They locate science fiction's ability to articulate the consequences of social change as useful to African authors. The intersection between the African oral tradition and the science fiction mode allows for not only productive engagement with Africa's past, but also for the articulation of the challenges which face the continent as it "enters the 'no-time' of an uncertain global future" (84). They write:

> By shifting to the SF mode, African authors might begin to re-articulate oral histories whilst engaging with and creating a future for Africa – a task currently left mostly to jaded historians, world-weary journalists and cynical social commentators. SF, does not only concern itself with the articulation of techno-enhanced futures, but also accommodates mythic journeys into the distant past. What SF does, however, is create a link between past, present and future projecting the mythic mode of orality into the future, situating it as a valid alternative to techno-culture, or expressing potent fusions and intersections between myth and technological rationalism. (Carstens & Roberts 81)

Here, it is exactly the *interstitial* positionality of the science fiction genre (its ability to fuse past, present and future) which is important within an African context. The value of the boundary-blurring quality of SF to Africa is once again highlighted as Carstens and Roberts (86) argue "that the ubiquitous African trickster entity, analogous to the cyborg, could embody the translation between African orality and SF." The trickster

> is the prime agent of boundary dissolution ... This avatar can shatter and rearrange human society into many-faceted and deliberately destabilizing matrices, destroying stasis and presenting the opportunity for re-evaluation

and revelation – typical motifs of SF – in an often deeply ironic vision. (Carstens & Roberts 86)

In *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde also points to the boundary-blurring nature of the Trickster in literature and oral tradition:

> [T]rickster is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We constantly distinguish – right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead – and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction … Where someone's sense of honourable behaviour has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again. Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox. (Hyde 7)

However, Hyde argues that "there are also cases in which trickster creates a boundary, or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight" (Hyde 7). In these cases "boundary creation and boundary crossing are related to one another, and the best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found – sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms" (Hyde 7-8).

The South African incarnation of trickster, commonly found in Khoisan mythology and oral tradition, similarly serves the dual function of creating and dissolving rules. In *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society*, Mathias Guenther notes:

The Bushman protagonist, like his trickster colleagues all over the world, on the one hand, is a creator of beings and things, as well as of rules and categories, and on the other, transforms, distorts, and inverts what he has created or decreed. As creator, as well as cultural hero, he may bring into the world beings, things, and conditions of importance to nature and human kind, as well as structure and order. (Guenther 101)

Guenther further identifies a politically subversive aspect of Khoisan trickster tales, suggesting that the various Khoisan 'Jackal' stories "may take on the flavour of oral protest literature" (Guenther 103), with Jackal pestering, and in certain cases even violently killing, his Afrikaner '*baas*':

The tales that feature Trickster within the present order, usually a farmhand on a European farm, also dwell on the theme of the inversion and flouting of rules, in this case those set by the oppressive and irascible Boer *baas* … The most common theme of the stories about Jackal-*jong* ("boy") feature him shirking work and keeping others from work, thereby sabotaging the farmer's enterprise, stealing the *baas*'s property, and sleeping with his womenfolk … As flouter and saboteur of the new rules brought into the land by the oppressive colonists who have taken this land from the bushmen and decimated its game animals and plants, the trickster-wayward-farmhand becomes a symbol of resistance. (Guenther 103)

The Khoisan trickster is also "capable of transforming his shape or guise, from human to animal and back, or from one animal species to another" (Guenther 99). In this sense, trickster has in common with Donna Haraway's cyborg the tendency of "appearing in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed", embodies "a disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling" of human and animal (Haraway 152).

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This chapter focuses on Lauren Beukes's recent cyber-punk novel, *Zoo City* (2010), and Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009) – remarkably similar narratives which exemplify Carstens and Roberts' argument for the value of the science fiction mode to African authors. The trickster figure is central to both narratives and these characters embody the subversive, boundary-blurring qualities of both Hyde and Guenther's versions of Trickster.

Although *District 9* is the only film to be discussed in this study, it has been included for two reasons – the first being that the excitement generated by this particular film has simply been too overwhelming (and too infectious) to justify its exclusion from any study of Southern African speculative fiction. Secondly, as mentioned above, *District 9* intersects in interesting ways with Beukes's *Zoo City*, most notably in its representation of an alternate Johannesburg, its concern with the issue of xenophobia in South Africa, and its challenging of the kind of anthropocentricism which serves as justification for the human population's continued dominion over our animal others.

District 9 utilizes conventional SF tropes in order to express anxieties regarding social, political and economic uncertainty within a specifically South African context. Much of the film's impact as social and political commentary hinges on its commitment to destabilising and "destroying stasis and presenting the opportunity for re-evaluation and revelation" (Carstens & Roberts 86). The trickster or cyborg figure, in the form of the hapless Wikus van der Merwe, is central to the film's destabilizing effect, but it is also necessary to note that the utilization of the SF mode already allows for such destabilization at the very level of structure.

The definition of what does and does not constitute science fiction remains relatively unfixed, with many distinguishing between 'soft' and 'hard' SF, space

operas, cyber-punk, fantasy, horror, and, of course, speculative fiction. *District 9*, a film which depicts an alien spacecraft coming to a halt above the city of Johannesburg, is clearly a work of science fiction, but can also be classified as a *fantastic* narrative – a genre which is characterised by undecidability at a structural level. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov suggests that the fantastic is characterized by uncertainty and hesitation. Todorov (25) asserts that whenever an event occurs which cannot be explained by the laws of nature, the person experiencing this event must decide between two explanations: either the event is an illusion (or the laws of nature remain intact) or the event has indeed taken place (and is governed by laws unknown to us). According to Todorov

> the fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 25)

In *District 9* this moment of hesitation or uncertainty is prolonged by the striking familiarity and ordinariness of the setting. South African audiences in particular (perhaps expecting the sterile glamour of a typical Hollywood production) may initially be struck by the gritty realism of the film's depiction of the bustling, dirty streets and shantytowns of Johannesburg, the commentary by unpolished local 'actors' and the authenticity of the various South African accents and languages. The film maintains a playful attempt at verisimilitude, presenting its 'findings' and interviews in documentary style, juggling between polished, edited scenes and unsteady handheld footage, and even featuring a mock television news report in which real-life SABC (the South African Broadcasting Corporation) news anchor

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Mahendra Raghunath delivers an update on alien/human conflict. It is only once the camera pans out to reveal a colossal alien spacecraft hovering over the familiar outline of the city of Johannesburg and the audience is given its first glimpse of the 'prawns' (presumably named after the Parktown Prawn, a kind of cricket common to the Johannesburg area)[15], the bizarre alien creators of the spaceship, that the very fantastic nature of the narrative is revealed.

When the hesitation characteristic of the fantastic is no longer sustained, Todorov asserts, "a transitory sub-genre appears: between the fantastic and the uncanny on the one hand, and between the fantastic and the marvellous on the other hand" (44). In the sub-genre of the fantastic-uncanny, supernatural events are explained rationally towards the end of the narrative. In contrast to this, the sub-genre of the fantastic-marvellous sees an acceptance of supernatural events towards the end of the narrative. In the case of *District 9*, we are required either to accept or reject the seeming impossibility of alien refugees settling in the slums of Johannesburg: as their presence can clearly not be dismissed as an illusion by either the audience or the characters, the film enters the realm of the fantastic-marvellous.

For anyone familiar with the SF genre, and particularly the Hollywood-style 'alien' film, such suspension of disbelief is not difficult. However, this acceptance of the alien presence takes on a different level of significance in *District 9*. Here, the alien is accepted not only as a terrifying, unnatural presence that threatens the lives of the heroic human characters, but as a protagonist with whom the audience gradually begins to sympathize. The audience's growing empathy with the plight of the 'prawn' is due to the development of a relationship between Wikus van der Merwe and an

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[15] This aspect of *District 9* evokes Andrew Buckland's play *The Ugly Noo Noo*, first performed in 1988, which depicts the fantastic battle between a man and a Parktown Prawn. This conflict between man and insect is representative of Buckland's own struggle against the restrictive apartheid government of the time, but can also be seen as a critique of irrational fear and intolerance of difference.

alien individual known as Christopher Johnson. Whilst heading up an MNU operation to vacate the alien population from District 9, Wikus is accidentally infected by an alien fluid (carefully collected by Christopher from discarded alien devices in order to power the abandoned prawn spacecraft) which causes him to transform into a 'prawn' gradually. Driven by the promise of a reversal of this metamorphosis, Wikus undertakes to help Christopher regain the fluid from MNU headquarters.

It is at this juncture in the film, when Wikus and Christopher storm MNU headquarters with guns blazing and stumble across a torture chamber used to do medical experiments on alien individuals, that Andries Du Toit notes a radical shift in the way both Wikus and the audience respond to Christopher, the 'prawn'. He writes:

> By now we are used to anthropomorphising 'Christopher', and we can see the horror and the pity – and the rage – that we imagine flowing through him as he looks at the ravaged body of his murdered kin. We can see that he would be entirely within his rights to smear Wikus then and there, and go his own way. But he runs across the passage to join him, and together they crouch behind a bulkhead, the room filling with smoke and the thunder of gunshots, firing madly round corners, covering each other as they dash down the passage. And suddenly we are watching a buddy movie... There are many movies in which the aliens are good guys – but never aliens that look like this. Wikus has crossed over to the other side. And so have we. (Du Toit n.pag.)

Du Toit's suggestion that we can 'imagine' the outrage Christopher Johnson experiences when he discovers MNU's gruesome laboratory implies that we can imagine Christopher's revulsion at the sight of such slaughter, because we can think ourselves into the situation. It is the same revulsion we experience when visiting similar sites of torture and captivity at Dachau or Auschwitz or, closer to home, Robben Island and Vorster Square. Despite the strangeness, the complete *alienness* of

the 'prawns', the audience is called on to develop a sympathetic imagination, to *empathize* with the suffering of the extra-terrestrial other.

It is Wikus van der Merwe's Kafka-esque metamorphosis, his process of 'becoming-prawn', which allows for some critical reflection on the ways in which the film's human characters, and particularly MNU employees, have treated non-human others. Wikus occupies a precarious interstitial position between being human and being prawn, thus taking on the role of the 'trickster' and destabilising distinctions between lawful and unlawful behaviour and self and other. In the instant – for "a just decision is always required *immediately*" (Derrida "Force of Law" 26) – that Wikus decides to take up arms and fight alongside Christopher, he is responding to the call of the *wholly* other. This decision to act is made from a position of 'undecidability', which Jacques Derrida considers to be the condition for ethical responsibility and hospitality. Thus, Wikus's actions can be considered absolutely just and responsible.

Wikus's unique hybridity and his journey to reclaim his former life, set against the backdrop of a bizarre fictional landscape, also becomes the vehicle for Blomkamp's commentary on contemporary South Africa and its many social and political problems. The film also invokes the country's violent past, whilst simultaneously succeeding in situating South Africa in relation to a *global* future.

The title of the film clearly references District Six, a former residential area of Cape Town from which the apartheid government forcibly removed tens of thousands of citizens in the 1970s, immediately suggesting that *District 9* can be read as a response to South Africa's policy of institutionalised racism (apartheid) prior to 1994. Casting the alien refugees as representative of the millions of disadvantaged black South Africans who were oppressed by the tyrannical system of apartheid is not by any means a stretch of the imagination: these aliens live in an informal settlement on

the outskirts of Johannesburg under the threat of forcible removal, speak a San-like 'click' language, and are derogatorily referred to as 'prawns' in the same way that offensive, racist terms were used to describe black South Africans in the past and, in some cases, even today.

District 9's marketing campaign relied heavily on this association with apartheid segregation policies in order to generate interest in the film. For example, *District 9* promotional posters representing 'human only' bus stops (see figure 1.1) invoked the 'whites only' signs (which served to bar black people from certain public sites) commonly used in South Africa prior to the collapse of the apartheid system (see figure 1.2). These promotional images not only possessed the necessary shock value required to lure audiences to cinemas, but also made clear to potential viewers the allegorical nature of the film, thus acting as a kind of 'key' to the film's subtext.

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

If *District 9* is a reflection on South Africa's traumatic history of epistemic violence and oppression, it also allows for the imaginative rethinking of present-day concerns, particularly the issues of continued racialized discrimination and xenophobia in South Africa (the film was coincidentally released in the wake of a series of violent xenophobic attacks which spread across the country in 2008). *District 9's* seemingly insensitive treatment of Nigerian nationals is of particular interest in this regard.

Blomkamp's depiction of Nigerians as ruthless criminals who exploit the aliens' weakness for tinned cat food in order to amass 'prawn' weapons and technology has been dismissed as discriminatory and offensive by some, including Dora Akunyili, Nigeria's information minister, who requested that the film be banned from cinemas in Abuja. However, the film appears to be lampooning the Nigerian-as-violent-criminal stereotype rather than reinforcing it – suggesting a certain level of self-awareness and ironic distance. The notion of trading cat food for advanced alien weaponry is clearly an exercise in *reductio ad absurdum* and can thus be seen as a *critique* of such negative stereotyping. In this regard, the film's position as Hollywood blockbuster must also be considered. It appears that Blomkamp is at once lampooning *and* buying into Hollywood's need for 'recognizable' villains (mostly Russian, German, South African or Nigerian). Such mimicking of the American action film, along with the film's neat Hollywood ending, is certainly problematic and threatens to undermine the socio-political impact of the film. However, informed viewers (and specifically a South African audience more sensitive to the nuances of the film) will be alerted to the element of playful critique at work here. Those viewers with little or no awareness of South African political history may walk away from the cinema thoroughly entertained, at the very least touched by the 'human' drama that has unfolded on the screen.

As suggested earlier, *District 9* not only addresses past and present concerns of racial discrimination and oppression within South Africa, but also seeks to situate the country in relation to a global, "techno-enhanced future" (Carstens & Roberts 81). The science fiction mode allows for the creation of a dystopic future world in which alien spacecraft and mechanical combat suits (presumably inspired by Japanese anime) are not out of place, and a militant corporation (MNU) can run amok – a scenario which does not seem too unbelievable in view of increasing globalization, rapid technological advances and the continued rise of the multi-national corporation.

In addition to addressing questions of human injustice in the face of an uncertain future, *District 9* is also concerned with human-animal conflict. Thus far, it has been suggested that the alien refugees can be read as representative of disempowered black South Africans. However, the film's use of the word 'non-human'[16] to describe the alien other, as well as the term 'prawn', also suggests a connection with the *animal* non-human (a notion that is strengthened by the a fact that the aliens' main source of nourishment is tinned cat food). In this sense, the torturing of captive 'prawns' raises debates regarding the ethical treatment of animals used for medical experimentation. Once his metamorphosis is uncovered by his colleagues, Wikus is himself subjected to violent experimentation, forced to murder a hapless 'prawn' in order to demonstrate his control over alien weapons. In this way, the boundaries between cold-blooded torture and 'necessary' scientific experimentation are blurred.

Similarly, human consumption of animal flesh is rendered morally suspect through Wikus's transformation. As Wikus's body is comprised of both human and alien flesh after his exposure to the alien liquid, the Nigerian gang's attempt to

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[16]This also echoes the term 'non-white', which was commonly used in apartheid legislation.

consume his alien arm then constitutes a kind of cannibalism. This is reminiscent of the revulsion experienced by Elizabeth Costello, J.M. Coetzee's protagonist in the *Lives of Animals* (1999), at the thought of eating animal others. Elizabeth Costello relies on what her son dubs "The Plutarch Response" when called on to defend her vegetarianism –her use of the word "flesh" rather than "meat" here suggesting that she finds this act as distasteful as she would the consumption of human flesh:

> The response in question comes from Plutarch's moral essays. His mother has it by heart; he can produce it only imperfectly. "You ask me why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you can put in your mouth the corpse of a dead animal, astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallow the juices of death-wounds." Plutarch is a real conversation-stopper: it is the word *juices* that does it. (Coetzee 55)

Wikus's metamorphosis from human to 'prawn' invokes the geo-philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, particularly their concept of 'becoming-animal'. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari assert: "We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human-beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human" (237). The event of becoming-animal, then, is seen as a means of undoing anthropocentric identities, of occupying (however briefly) the consciousness of an animal, rather than merely *resembling* that animal (233). Deleuze and Guattari recognize the violence associated with such a "sweeping away" of human identity (337). They ask:

> Who has not known the violence of these animal sequences, which uproot one from humanity, if only for an instant, making one scrape at one's bread like a rodent or giving one the yellow eyes of a feline? A fearsome involution calling us toward unheard-of becomings. (Deleuze and Guattari 240)

Here, Deleuze and Guattari are not referring to 'actual' metamorphosis à la Kafka or Ovid, but rather use the concept of 'becoming-animal' in order to suggest a productive, empathetic space from which to readdress human/animal relations. The image of the human eye suddenly taking on the yellow glint of a feline eye is almost uncannily reproduced in *District 9*. As figure 1.3 shows, one of the earliest 'prawn' characteristics that Wikus's body assumes is one yellow, distinctly cat-like eye. This process of 'becoming-animal' is indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, a *violent* transition. Wikus is abruptly torn from his human self and forced to occupy the physical and psychological position of a 'prawn'. Despite the violence of this transition, the film suggests that Wikus now occupies a productive and *just* space – and paradoxically a more *human(e)* space. As a human, Wikus is a one-dimensional caricature of the 'idiot Afrikaner' or 'van der Merwe', but as a 'prawn' he becomes the visual embodiment of the psychological and ethical processes associated with Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-animal'.

Figure 1.3

Such fluid interchange between human and non-human other can also be found in Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* (2010), a South African cyberpunk novel in the tradition of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson. Bruce Sterling defines William Gibson's cyberpunk style as a "classic one-two combination of lowlife and high tech" (Sterling 12). A more comprehensive definition of this genre can be found in Claire Sponsler's "Cyberpunk and the Dilemmas of Postmodern Narrative", which examines the intersection of cyberpunk and postmodernism. Sponsler writes:

> [D]eveloping in the eighties as an exploration of human experience within the context of media-dominated, postindustrial, late capitalist society, cyberpunk is in many ways quintessentially postmodern. [C]yberpunk typically presents a montage of surface images, cultural artefacts, and decentred subjects moving through a shattered, affectless landscape. Its protagonists are antiheroes set adrift in a world in which there is no meaning, no security, no affection, and

no communal bonds – except for those they themselves tenuously create. Antifoundational, sceptical of authority, suspicious about the possibility of human autonomy, and fascinated by the way technology and material objects shape consciousness and motivate behavior, cyberpunk would seem to square with postmodern culture as it has been amply described by Baudrillard, Jameson, and Jean- François Lyotard, among others. (Sponsler 626-627)

Both Beukes's *Zoo City* and her earlier novel, *Moxyland* (2008), indeed introduce a cast of antiheroes cast adrift in a fragmented world in which relationships are often tenuous or transitory. In both novels lasting "communal bonds" (Sponsler ibid.) are established not with other people, but rather with animal others that are somehow genetically linked to the protagonists. The notion of a genetic and psychic link between human and animal individuals is tentatively introduced in *Moxyland* (2008), which Beukes describes as an "allegory for a corporate apartheid state" (Beukes *Zoo* n.pag). In this novel, Kendra, a 'sponsorbaby' who has been injected with nano technology, experiences a frightening moment of connection with 'aitos' – police dogs that have been injected with the same technology. This connection is further strengthened when Kendra is exposed to a deadly virus and is apparently 'put down' by her company in the same way that defunct aitos are disposed of.

Such an interchange between human and animal is more fully explored in *Zoo City*. This dystopic noir is set in an alternative Johannesburg in which criminal offenders are mysteriously 'animalled' – any act of violence by any person is followed by the sudden appearance of an animal familiar to which they are then psychically linked. The 'animalled', or 'zoos', live in fear of the inevitable approach of the Undertow, an inexplicable and deadly blackness which consumes them once their animals die. With these animals serving as constant evidence of their criminal transgressions, the 'zoos' are forced into the slums of Zoo City, a law-less urban

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ghetto. This notion of forceful segregation is a recurring theme in South African speculative fiction. Beukes's debut novel, *Moxyland* is set in Cape Town in 2018, a sectionalized dystopian space controlled by powerful corporations. This futuristic city is divided between the corporate haves and have-nots (those whose cellular phones, and thus their access to amenities, have been disconnected), and the novel's representation of exclusive subways, beaches and suburbs can be read as a reprisal of the segregational policies of late-apartheid South Africa. As discussed in chapter three of this study, the division of landscape also features prominently in Jenny Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD*, which depicts a South Africa divided into Rural and Urban spaces, as well as elitist Armbander Ranches. Similarly, Lily Herne's futuristic zombie-narrative, *Deadlands* (2011) also divides Cape Town into a city enclave, rural farmlands or 'Agriculturals', and the Deadlands – the ruins of the city of Cape Town which has been overrun by the flesh-eating living dead.

Like Neill Blomkamp's permutation of the city in *District 9*, Beukes's Johannesburg is frighteningly familiar. The Johannesburg streets that the protagonist Zinzi and her sloth negotiate are filled with familiar sights such as "Zimbabwean vendors" selling "crates of suckers and snacks and single smokes" (6) and "flyers advertising miracle Aids cures, cheap abortions and prophets" (7). Even the peculiarity of zoos is couched in local, or at least African, belief: the animalled each possess a special talent known as a *mashavi*. The Shona people of Zimbabwe acknowledge *mashavi* as the wandering spirits of people who have died without any descendants. These spirits make themselves known through possessing a living person. An encyclopaedic entry states:

> When a spirit selects an individual to possess, the individual becomes ill or has strange dreams. This will continue until the person consults an n'anga

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(witchdoctor) who will reveal that a spirit possessing him or her is causing the sickness or dreams. If the individual accepts the spirit, a ceremony is prepared during which the spirit "comes out" and introduces itself and its intentions. If the person accepts and welcomes the spirit, it remains with him or her and the person becomes the svikiro (medium) for that particular spirit. In this way, the possessed individual could receive special powers or abilities that he/she did not have before. For instance, it is believed that each shavi has a particular skill or talent such as artwork, hunting or healing. When a person becomes the medium for a shavi skilful in healing, for instance, that person would then also become a skilful healer. (n.pag.)

The use of a Zimbabwean belief in order to explain the supernatural talents of those affected by the 'Zoo Plague' points to the novel's interest in the plight of foreign refugees in South Africa, many of whom are Zimbabweans fleeing the tyrannical rule of Robert Mugabe and his Zanu-PF party. Like Blomkamp, Beukes is very much concerned with 'real-life' South African problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, global warming, racism and xenophobia, poverty, and 419 scams.

Zinzi's lover, Benoît, is a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The reader's introduction to this character in the opening paragraphs of the novel already hints at a tragic past. Benoît's "calloused feet" are compared to "knots of driftwood" (1). Zinzi muses: "Feet like that, they tell a story. They say he walked all the way from Kinshasa with his Mongoose strapped to his chest" (1). Zinzi and Benoît's relationship is threatened when he discovers that the wife and three children he left behind may still be alive. Benoît's tale of loss is horrific:

The last time he saw his family, they were running into the forest, like ghosts between the trees. Then the FDLR beat him to the ground with their rifle butts, poured paraffin over him and set him alight. That was over five years ago. He'd sent messages to his extended family, friends, aid organisations, refugee

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camps, scoured the community websites, the cryptic refugee Facebook groups that use nicknames and birth orders and job descriptions as clues – never any photographs of faces – to help families find each other without cueing in their persecutors. No dice. His wife and his three little children had vanished. Presumed dead. Lost forever. (Beukes 56)

Although Beukes colours her novel with elements of the fantastic, Benoît's account of the loss of his family and his subsequent flight to South Africa is a realistic representation of the atrocities endured by people in a number of war-torn countries across Africa, and indeed the world. In an interview with Sarah Lotz included in the Bonsela edition of the novel, Lauren Beukes confirms that Benoît's character is based on the very real concerns around refugees in South Africa:

It was inspired by the shame and horror of the xenophobic attacks in 2008, my visit to the Central Methodist Church (which has all the ravages of a refugee camp trapped in a building) and interviews I did with Rwandan refugees for an Italian documentary I was involved in a few years ago. The tensions around refugees in South Africa are nowhere near resolved and we've already seen outbreaks of new violence, albeit on a smaller scale. It's horrific that people fleeing war and rape and famine and genocide, giving up everything they know, should be treated this way. (Beukes *Zoo* n.pag.)

Beukes's treatment of the issue of xenophobia is comparable to Blomkamp's interest in the question of responsibility towards the 'alien' other. Like Wikus Van der Merwe's growing awareness of the plight of the 'prawn', Zinzi's decision to travel to Kigali to find Benoît's family in the final moments of the novel is redemptive and absolutely responsible. Despite the sense of anonymity, dislocation and detachment that prevails in Zoo City, Zinzi is ultimately driven by an unselfish responsibility

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towards unknown (alien) others. She concludes: "It's going to be awkward. It's going to be the best thing I've done with my miserable life" (309).

In addition to Beukes's concern with the 'real-life' issue of xenophobia, *Zoo City* can also be read as a comment on the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa and the stigmatization of those infected and affected by the disease. It is clear from the outset of the novel that the animalled are forced to live as disgraced pariahs. Zinzi informs us: "The truth is we're all criminals. Murderers, rapists, junkies. Scum of the earth. In China they execute zoos on principle. Because nothing says guilty like a spirit critter at your side" (Beukes 9). The stigma associated with the 'Zoo Plague' or 'Acquired Aposymbiotic Familiarism' (AAF) invokes the issue of the othering of those affected by Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in present-day South Africa. In "HIV/AIDS and 'othering' in South Africa", Petros et al identify "factors contributing to the [HIV] epidemic" as "stigma, denial and active 'othering' of people living with HIV/AIDS" (67). "Stigma", they assert,"has been cited as the greatest obstacle the world over in combating the epidemic" (Petros et al 67).

The connection between AAF and AIDS is further strengthened through the novel's inclusion of a review of a fictional documentary, *The Warlord and the Penguin: The Untold Story of Dehqan Baiyat*, which supposedly examines the life of Dehqan Baiyat, an Afghan warlord incorrectly identified as Patient Zero for Acquired Aposymbiotic Familiarism. According to this mock review, Baiyat was "unfairly compared to Gaëtan Dugas, the Canadian flight attendant alleged to have been at the centre of the spread of HIV in the US" (Beukes 62).

Beukes also touches briefly on the topical issue of environmental crisis and global warming in one of Zinzi's speculations regarding the cause of the Zoo Plague. Zinzi flippantly explains the theory of "Toxic Reincarnation":

'It's very now. Global warming, pollution, toxins, BPA from plastics leaching into the environment has disrupted the spiritual realm or whatever you want to call it, so, if you're Hindu, and you go through some terrible trauma, part of your spirit breaks away and returns as the animal you were going to be reincarnated as.' (Beukes 154)

Here it is implied that environmental concern is often considered a trendy activity rather than a serious cause worthy of more than lip service. Although the issue of ecological degradation is not explored at length, the novel is centred on an irrevocably intertwined theme – the relationship between human beings and their animal others.

The concern regarding the animalled or zoos expressed by other characters in the novel appears to be based not so much on the fact that they are criminals, but rather the suspicion that they can no longer be considered wholly human. The fanaticism with which the animalled are rejected and stigmatized is expressed through a particularly venomous online 'comment' relating to the aforementioned review of *The Warlord and the Penguin*. This fictional user writes:

[126 out of 527 people found the following review helpful]
28 December 2009
Username: Patriot 777 0/10
Give me a break
Get it together, people, apos aren't human. It's right there in the name. Zoos.Animalled.Aposymbiots. Whatever PC term is flavour of the week. As in not human. As in short for 'apocalypse'. This is part of the stealth war on good citizens disguised as apo rights.
It's in Deuteronomy: Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Also Exodus: Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

Do I need to spell it out for you? Familiars. Hell's Undertow. Destruction of the detestable. God is merciful, but only to actual, genuine, REAL LIFE human beings. Apos are criminals They're scum. They're not even animals. They're just things and will get what is **[MORE]**

[1031 Comments](Beukes 64-65)

The notion that aposymbiots are less than human and therefore a threat to 'real' human beings is once again reminiscent of Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*, and particularly the figure of Wikus van der Merwe. Like Wikus, in the process of becoming-prawn, the aposymbiot takes on the role of the cyborg – a boundary-blurring figure which suggests a "tight coupling" between human and animal other (Haraway 152).

Zinzi and her sloth are not only psychically and emotionally linked, but also share physical experiences. For example, Sloth's distaste for alcohol requires Zinzi to remain abstemious, they cannot be separated for long periods of time, and ultimately the death of one results in the death of the other. This imaginative coupling suggests the kind of sympathetic experience that challenges the perceived divide between humans and animals which allows for the domination of the latter by the former.

Zoo City relies on the (con)fusion of animalled humans and their familiars for its humour and satiric bite. The following exchange between Zinzi and a group of perplexed non-animalled acquaintances is amusing, but also points (if once again rather flippantly) to the issue of animal experimentation in the name of science and medical advancement:

'Who knows how it works.' I know I'm being antagonistic.
'But aren't there tests? I thought they did a full analysis?'

'Human lab-rats!' says Henry enthusiastically. 'Only I guess sometimes there are actual rats, right?' That must be confusing.' (Beukes 128)

The confusion here between human lab-rats, lab-rats, and familiars in the form of rats is once again reminiscent of Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*, which blurs the boundaries between experimentation on animals, 'prawns' and Wikus. In this way, both texts problematize the practice of scientific experimentation on animals.

In addition to this thematic overlap, both *Zoo City* and *District 9* also share an interest in everyday South African concerns such as racism and xenophobia, and couch these in the fantastic. Both Wikus and Zinzi occupy the interstitial position of the cyborg or trickster and fall outside of the category of 'genuine' human, thus exposing its instability. However, both protagonists are more humane in their actions than the wholly human characters around them. Both Wikus's rejection of his own family and organization in favour of the hapless Christopher and Zinzi's final resolution to undertake a treacherous journey across Africa in order to find her lover's family (her literal *and* metaphoric crossing of borders) are ultimately responsible and just decisions. As we have seen, the notion of a call to responsibility as a result of an encounter with (an)other is a recurring theme in South African speculative fiction. South African speculative fiction exposes not only the urgency of this call to accountability, but also the risks associated with it. This thought can also be traced throughout the short fiction of Nick Wood and Henrietta Rose-Innes, which will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
How to 'learn the words of the monkeys and the crocodiles':
The Speculative Short Fiction of Nick Wood and Henrietta Rose-Innes

The Mayans and Nostradamus had been wrong after all. Or so we thought. And who could blame us for being at least cautiously optimistic about the future? – Koos Kombuis, "The Last Coffee Shop Philosopher"

This chapter examines three speculative short stories by two South African authors and suggests that these narratives have in common many of the themes already identified as central to the South African speculative novel. Each of the short stories included in this discussion, namely Henrietta Rose-Innes's "Poison" and Nick Wood's "Thirstlands" and "Of Hearts and Monkeys", has as its basis the occurrence of an ecological disaster in an alternate or futuristic realm. The need for social responsibility in a 'brave new world' is a recurrent theme.

The apocalyptic imaginings of both authors call attention to the issue of human survival. These literary landscapes have been devastated by natural disaster or disease and in each case the continued existence of the human race is at stake. At the centre of this theme is the question of the individual's responsibility towards others in the face of possible mass extinction. The survival and sense of identity of the protagonists become deeply entangled with those for whom they have taken responsibility. This notion of a *verflechtung* between self and other in a post-apocalyptic space is reminiscent of the relationship between father and son in Cormac McCarthy's novel, *The Road* (2006). Left to fend entirely for themselves in a ruined world, this pair becomes "each the other's world entire" (McCarthy 5).

This is an intensification of the kind of entanglement of identities explored in the work of R.D. Laing. In *Self and Others*, Laing introduces the idea of

complementarity, arguing that "all 'identities' require an other: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized" (66). According to Laing, "other people become a sort of identity kit, whereby one can piece together a picture of oneself" (Laing 70). He writes:

> A person's 'own' identity cannot be completely abstracted from his identity-for-others. His identity-for-himself; the identity others ascribe to him; the identities he attributes to them; the identity or identities he thinks they attribute to him; what he thinks they think he thinks they think... (Laing 70)

For Laing, this kind of identity construction in relation to an other is necessarily based on an imposition. He asserts that "even an account of one person cannot afford to forget that each person is always *acting* upon others and *acted upon* by others" (66). Theorists within the emerging discipline of Environmental Psychology argue that a similar kind of relation links the individual's identity to the physical environment. They are concerned with the ways in which "the non-human environment can function in the development of self" (Twigger-Ross et al 213) and suggest that "objects and places can become part of the generalized other and thereby incorporated into the self-concept" (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell 206). In an article titled "Place and Identity Processes", Clare Twigger-Ross and David Uzzell argue that

> identity processes have a dynamic relationship with the residential environment. The development and maintenance of these processes occurs in transactions with the environment. In acknowledging this, the environment becomes a salient part of identity as opposed to the merely setting a context in which identity can be established and developed.(Twigger-Ross & Uzzell 206)

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In conclusion, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell recommend that the link between the "disruption of identity because of the disruption of…place" should "be examined more systematically in order to gain a closer understanding of the relationship between identity and change in the physical environment. Under what conditions of change to the physical environment do people perceive a threat to identity?" (219) The notion of an intersection between Nature, self and social relation is explored in Freya Mathews's seminal work, *The Ecological Self*. Mathews argues that

> culture is [not only] the prerequisite for the blossoming of those genetically in-built powers associated with human-ness, but is itself one of the principle genetic endowments of human beings. On this view, culture (or 'nurture') is in no way opposed to Nature, but is itself a direct expression of human nature or instinct, the genetically transmitted, biological constitution of the human species. (Mathews 137)

Such a questioning of the Cartesian notion of human beings as "detached observers of Nature, logically distinct from it even though casually dependent on it" (Mathews 138) allows for an ecological view which acknowledges an interconnectedness between human selves and what Mathews refers to as "the *ecocosm*", that is, the "universe seen as a self-realizing system which is eternally interconnected in an ecological – and therefore also in a topological and substantival – sense" (147).

Mathews uses certain American Indian and Australian Aboriginal cultures as examples of the interdependence of culture and local ecosystems. She suggests:

> These cultures may be essentially buffalo and kangaroo cultures, let us say, physically, technologically and spiritually centred on those particular animal species. To sever the connection between such societies and the species around which their cultures are constellated would be to destroy the identity of

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those cultures. Typically the dependence of such societies on their local ecosystem is mutual. Their interaction with their environment contributes to the viability of the ecosystem. (Mathews 139)

In *The World Without Us* Alan Weisman identifies a similar inter-dependency between human society and natural environment within an African context. In a chapter titled "The African Paradox", Weisman suggests that most African megafauna have survived extinction due to the fact that they have evolved alongside humans and have developed ways to elude them (69). Weisman asks:

> If Africa's animals evolved learning to avoid human predators, how would the balance swing with humans gone? Are any of its megafauna so adapted to us that some subtle dependence or even symbiosis would be lost along with the human race, in a world without us? (Weisman 71)

As an example of a "balance between humans, flora and fauna", Weisman turns to the practices of Kenya's nomadic Maasai people (76). Much as "zebras, wildebeest, and ostriches have forged a triple alliance on open savannas to combine the excellent ears of the first, the acute smell of the second, and the sharp eyes of the third", so too these animals have hitched their evolutionary wagon to that of the Maasai people in Kenya. Weisman writes:

> Farther South, equatorial Africans have herded animals for several thousand years and hunted them even longer, yet between wildlife and humans there was actually mutual benefit: As pastoralists such as Kenya's Maasai shepherded cattle among pastures and waterholes, their spears ready to discourage lions, wildebeest tagged along to take advantage of the predator protection. They, in turn, were followed by their zebra companions. (Weisman 76)

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The questions of the self's entanglement with and responsibility for both human and non-human others and the physical environment explicated in the above examples seem to be at the centre of the post-apocalyptic tales to be examined in this chapter. In many ways, the protagonists in these stories are equally *acted upon* by those who see them as protectors and their physical environments. The environment can be seen as another relational other that has an effect on identity formation.

The devastating changes to natural environment brought about by the ecological disasters depicted in these texts not only pose a direct threat to the physical and mental well-being of the characters, but also to the processes of identity formation. In the wake of a collapse of all systems of government and social regulation, these protagonists can no longer identify themselves in relation to factors such as their occupations or their social- or financial status. Instead, they recast themselves as survivors, aids, providers, or simply human beings. Their new-formed identities are established not only in relation to the physical environment, but also with regards to their fellow survivors, be it human or non-human. Thus, these stories deliberately evince an entanglement between self, environment, and human and non-human other, and stress the need for a sense of responsibility towards one another by engaging in an exercise of exaggeration, which is invited by the speculative mode.

In "Science Fiction in South Africa", Deirdre Byrne comments on the dominance of landscape in South African science fiction. She offers as examples the correlation between the description of an alien landscape and the geological features of the Great Karoo in Michael Cope's *Spiral of Fire* (1987) and William Gunter's depiction of a desert landscape in the opening paragraph of his science fiction story, "The Hissing of the Snakes" (2002). Byrne suggests:

By situating their stories in hostile settings, reminiscent of frontier existence and difficulty, Cope, Gunter, and many other South African writers foreground the scarcity of resources and the inevitable competition for them. Adjectives such as "undulating" (used for "desert"), "desolate" and "abandoned" abound, as if to highlight the country's resistance to being inhabited. (Byrne 524)

This theme is taken up in Nick Wood's "Thirstlands", a South African-set short story included in Ian Whates' anthology, *Subterfuge*. As the title suggests, "Thirstlands" addresses a major consequence of the global phenomenon of rampant eco-mismanagement and the related threat of global warming – the unsustainability of water as a natural resource. Wood presents a vision of a futuristic Southern Africa in the grips of a dire water shortage, an extrapolation which is easily substantiated by current scientific writings on the impact of climate change on the Southern African region. In a recent publication, *Scorched: South Africa's Changing Climate*(2006), Leonie Joubert presents sobering statistics regarding the effects of global warming on the African continent:

Historically, it appears that during the past century Africa has warmed by 0.7∘C with rainfall declining in the Sahel region but increasing in east central Africa, a trend that is going to continue into the future. The IPCC predicts that warming across the continent will range from 0.2∘C to 0.5∘C per decade, with greater warming occurring in the 'interior of semi-arid margins of the Sahara and central Southern Africa'. Predicting seasonal rainfall is a little more problematic: modelling of global change suggests that by 2100 rainfall will increase in the high latitudes and in some equatorial regions of the globe while a decrease will occur in many mid-latitude, sub-tropical and semi-arid regions, increasing water stress in the regions. (Joubert 50)

While these projected increases in temperatures may appear relatively insignificant upon first glance, the long-term consequences of these changes for both the human and non-human inhabitants of Africa are severe –

> Troubled times are coming to the continent, both in South Africa and further north. The World Resources Institute's 2003 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment said that the collective problems of AIDS, population growth, urbanisation, disease, low literacy, poverty and political instability in regions of Africa would profoundly impact upon the cumulative effects and related pressures on biodiversity. Changes in land cover, spreading deserts and soil erosion, continued evasion by alien species, pollution and unsustainable use of resources will continue to grind biodiversity into the ground. (Joubert 52)

The opening scene of "Thirstlands" imagines the terrifying extent of this futuristic space's water crisis. Wood's protagonist, Graham Mason, is introduced as he gazes across the once mighty Victoria Falls, now reduced to "sparse, thin water curtains dropping from the escarpment into the sludgy green river over a hundred metres below [him]" (Wood 243). Mason muses that the diminished waterfall can no longer be named 'Mosi-oa-Tunya', the 'smoke that thunders': "*No, there was no 'smoke that thunders', no constantly roiling crash of water anymore – all that's left is an anaemic spattering of water, me, and a few other tourists scanning the ridge for a riverine surge that would never come*" (244).

A parallel exists between the aridness of the Victoria Falls and Mason's seemingly unquenchable thirst. As a by-product of an advanced neurosurgical procedure which allows his brain to act as a highly sophisticated cybernetic communication centre, Graham Mason, like the mythical Tantalus, is condemned to a

state of eternal thirst. From an eco-critical perspective, this correlation between the extreme desiccation of the African landscape and the protagonist's state of perpetual dehydration points to the interconnectedness of the embodied self and its physical environment. This notion of the "individual as a component of place, defined by place" (Evernden "Beyond Ecology" 103) seems to allow for a Deep Ecological reading of the text, but is destabilized almost immediately, as Graham Mason appears to be experiencing a crisis of belonging.

Whilst still contemplating the decline of the great 'Mosi-oa-Tunya', Mason is approached by a tourist with a "vaguely Pan-European" accent wishing to compare neuro-implants (245). At first smugly amused by the man's obvious inability to withstand the brutal African heat, despite the aid of an expensive heat-regulating 'Smart Suit' and a generous layer of SPF 100 sunscreen, Mason is soon forced to interrogate his own precarious position as a white South African, and thus as a product of a violent colonial history:

> *So his Rig was better (bigger) than mine…big bloody deal. He's not an African, just an effete tourist in a harsh land his skin can't deal with, filtering it through his foreign money, fancy implants and clever clothes.*
> *…And me…?*(Wood 247)

This moment of introspection points to the contentious nature of the notion of belonging, and particularly the issue of white belonging, within a South African context. The hostility of the landscape, expressed through descriptions of the diminished Victoria Falls and the insufferable heat of "the bloating red sun" which can burn a protruding tongue into "biltong steak", indeed highlights, to return to Byrne's observation, the struggle for resources in South Africa and the country's resistance to inhabitation (Wood 244).

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"Thirstlands" raises the issues of the right to ownership of the land and the social responsibility to share its resources. When Mason momentarily reflects on his right to view himself as African, he is inevitably questioning his right to inhabit the land, to *belong*. This tension is further explored when the action shifts to the Kwazulu-Natal Midlands in South Africa, a region very much troubled by racially- and politically-motivated violence and disputes regarding land ownership.

The current festering hostility between the black and white inhabitants of this region is grippingly explicated in Jonny Steinberg's *Midlands* (2002). Steinberg, an investigative journalist, investigates the murder of a young white farmer in the Southern midlands of KwaZulu-Natal in 1999. Here he stumbles upon a complex web of political intrigue and deep-seated resentment, anger and hatred, which is threatening to erupt into a full-blown frontier war. For Steinberg, this beautiful valley becomes "a myriad dramas [sic] of human anger and violence" (3). After a year spent steeped in the politics and history of the KwaZulu-Natal countryside, he comes to question the outsider's view of the landscape as evoking a "sense of the natural as an infinite and unreadable being", and instead begins to "imbibe the landscape as a native does; everything marked by a thousand particulars; the history of power and people engraved in every mutation" (257-258). Steinberg writes:

> Another countryside began to intrude. It was as hazy and ephemeral as the first, but it sprang unmistakably from the knowledge I had absorbed during the past year. The roadside was almost entirely deserted for the duration of my drive. I must have passed five or six souls on the 50-kilometre journey to Sarahdale and back. And yet the anger of those who had grown up in that district was there. The emptiness echoed with the people who trod that road every day, and in the silence I saw their ghosts; generation upon generation steeped in bile and hatred and disappointment. The social history in my head

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mingled with the landscape outside, invaded it, came to own it, and soon all I could see was an ancient and silent battle. (Steinberg 257)

The clattering "noise of [the Kwazulu-Natal Midlands'] cruel politics" (Steinberg 258) is echoed in Wood's "Thirstlands". Graham Mason returns to his Kwazulu-Natal home after his assignment to record a riverine surge at the Victoria Falls ends in disappointment. Wood highlights the general sense of fear and besiegement experienced by South Africans, who continue to live at the mercy of rampant violent crime. Mason's home is an impenetrable fortress, equipped with password-protected electrified gates, CCTV cameras and a "weapon rack behind the door" (252). It is also revealed that Mason's son, Mark, has fled to Australia after being robbed and stabbed in the face on the family's land. Haunted by the memory of his son's attack, Mason is unable to return to the foot-path where the assault occurred.

Graham Mason also adopts a decidedly hard-edged attitude towards the plight of the local inhabitants of his home town. As he drives past the town on his way to his smallholding, Mason notices the pirate electrical cables "snaking down from Council Electric grids and pylons into the shacks along the roadside" (Wood 247). Whilst he declares it "crazy, man, absolutely bedonered, holding an impoverished community to electric ransom, when there's so much sun for free", he is not inclined to become involved in the community's problems: "One old man near the road held out pale palms to me – but I've always avoided paternalistic gifts and dependency; this is Africa. I kept my windshields up, my doors locked"(Wood 247-248).

Mason's detachment regarding the neighbouring community's troubles appears to be extended to his relationship with his wife, Lizette. Despite the fact that Liz has free access to Graham's mind via his neural rig, it seems that they have very little physical contact. When Mason returns home to find Lizette in a distraught state

because a little black girl, dangerously dehydrated, had appeared at their gate the previous day, his first thought is to send her "comforting emoti-messages from LoveandPeace Dotcom" (251). It is only when he "awkwardly wrap[s] [his] arms around her taut, trembling body" that he realizes that "it must be years since [they'd] really held each other" (251). This scene closes with an allusion which, aside from its obvious sexual implication, also serves as the first indication that Graham Mason's thirst can only be quenched by human connection: "And in the end – despite my constant thirst – I wasn't nearly as dry as I feared I might be either" (Wood 251). Mason's perpetual thirst, then, derives from a sense of isolation – alienation not only from a hostile land, but also from his fellow human beings.

Graham Mason's reluctance to engage with the African environment at a social level is reminiscent of David McDermott Hughes's views on the "self-imposed isolation" (5) of white Africans in Zimbabwe. In *Whiteness in Zimbabwe*, Hughes suggests that white Zimbabweans forged a sense of belonging, an inclusion of the self in the land, that was entirely dependent on the *exclusion* of the rights and efforts of black others. According to Hughes, this "project of belonging" found expression in white African literature and art (2). He writes:

> In the past, many writers, painters, and photographers felt the need to belong in Africa and creatively imagined a means of doing so. They accompanied and partly steered the white population away from social engagement and toward environmental engagement. Metaphorically and sometimes literally, artists pushed blacks out of sight. The move preserved white identity and, especially among farmers, fostered the fabrication of a secure, geographically grounded, and forceful persona. (Hughes 130)

Thus, many Zimbabwean whites "swam in the ocean of social knowledge without getting wet" (Hughes 5). However, such social myopia can no longer be maintained in present-day Zimbabwe where continued racially-motivated and political violence has resulted in the fact that "the fait accompli of black majority can no longer be concealed or ignored" (Hughes 131). In order to remain, Hughes cautions, whites in Zimbabwe will have to accept "a costly, truly postcolonial deal –relinquishing entitlement in exchange for participation in African social life" (131), a compromise he describes as "belonging awkwardly" to the land (143).

Graham Mason is called upon to accept exactly such a "postcolonial deal" (*ibid*) when Liz, moved by her encounter with the dying girl on her doorstep, contacts the traditional leader of the nearby village in order to offer him three-quarters of the couple's personal well supply. Mason resents this decision, convinced that they will now "be the target of every Water-Bandit and tsotsi in Kwazulu-Natal" (Wood 250). He is, however, confronted with the moral legitimacy of the community's claim to the water supply when Busisiwe Mchunu, a hydro-geologist representing Chief Dumisane and the FreeFlow Corporation, arrives to survey the Mason family's underground well. Busisiwe remarks that "of course, *before* the white man, all of this land was [the Zulu people's] anyway" (Wood 253), forcing Mason to question his own authority over the land and its resources and come to terms with the fact that he is living what Alfred López names "post-mastery whiteness" (cited in Hughes 131).

The encounter with Busisiwe and the prospect of losing his precious water supply to the hapless villagers prompts Mason to escape via the path where his son was attacked. As Mason confronts the paralyzing fear that has kept him captive in his own home, daring to walk down the path which has been closed to him for so long, he comes to terms with his own place in his home country, South Africa. Thinking back

on the elephant graveyard he saw near the Victoria Falls, Mason realizes that he wants to belong to Africa:

> *This is a hard place to be, but all I know right now is that this is where I want to die… this is where I want to lay down my bones, just like the elephants. Why? I have no bloody idea. Maybe it's to do with the light on the hills, or perhaps just the bite and smell of an ant.* (Wood 254)

Mason's epiphany is inspired by a collection of sensations and identifications with other beings which translates into a utopian wish to absorb himself in Nature and the human population in more organic ways, an integration with the natural world that, it is suggested, can only be achieved in death. Such an eco-topian turn suggests the desire for a symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural world which allows for the adequate and peaceful distribution of natural resources. When Mason returns from his walk, he agrees to help the village by sharing his water supply despite his earlier misgivings. Once Mason accepts a sense of social responsibility, a willingness to reconnect with his fellow human beings, his thirst becomes more tolerable: "*Bloody weird, but I'm not* quite *so thirsty anymore either. Long may this last too*" (Wood 255).

Such a utopian resolution glosses over the very real conflicts surrounding the issues of the right to land-ownership and the division of natural resources in post-apartheid South Africa, and stands in opposition to David McDermott Hughes'snotion of belonging awkwardly. Hughes advocates an awareness of one's own limitations within a contested space – a kind of deferred belonging in complete opposition to vacuous utopianism. In Wood's Graham Mason we have glimpses of such an awkward relinquishing of mastery over the landscape in favour of engagement with

its people. In contemporary South Africa such an intersection between social and environmental concerns is in line with the aims of the environmental justice movement. In *The War Against Ourselves*, Jacklyn Cock writes:

> [T]he environmental justice movement is bridging ecological and social justice issues, and in this sense there are strong connections being forged among the 'red', 'the green' and the 'brown'. …There are strong links between the environmental justice movement and the wider and more diffuse movements that have been termed 'the environmentalism of the poor'. (Cock 181)

The need for social justice and accountability especially in the face of a global cataclysm is continued in Nick Wood's "Of Hearts and Monkeys". This short story is set in South Africa's Western Cape Province and takes place a few days after the decimation of the world's human population by the HIV/AIDS virus. The protagonist, Noluthando Ngobo Bhele, an elderly Zulu woman, is one of the few South Africans who has survived "the Week of Invisible Death" (Wood "Of Hearts" 360). The rapidity and extent of the loss of human lives is made clear early in "Of Hearts and Monkeys":

> All over town, all over the land, all over the world, people lay dying to the final deadly twist of *Umbulalasizwe*, this Nation-Killer virus, which takes to the winds like an Invisible Angel of Death. At the end of a week of global carnage, very few were still there to watch and share the dying. There is just a sprinkling of us left now, spared by God for an unknown reason. (Wood "Of Hearts" 355)

Although it is indicated that this fictional medical disaster has global repercussions, the rampant spread of HIV infections is a relevant concern in contemporary South Africa: Statistics South Africa's mid-year population estimates the total number of new HIV infections in 2010 to be 410 000, with an estimated overall HIV-prevalence rate of 10,5%.

In addition to the demise of the majority of the human population as a result of HIV/AIDS infections, it is also revealed that a "Big Burn tore through Cape Town and across the Flats, reducing so much to blackness and charcoal" (Wood "Of Hearts" 356). In the wake of this 'perfect storm' of ecological and medical catastrophe, Noluthando, a clairvoyant who is followed by the spirits of the dead, must struggle for survival. Hiking along a mountain path near Cape Town, Noluthando's niece, Penny, and her partner are abducted and murdered by two men. The loss of her last remaining family members forces Noluthando to join a diverse group of survivors, and together they journey up the west coast in search of food and safety.

The members of this group almost immediately come to view one another as family members, and make use of the traditional Zulu form of address of "brother" and "sister". When Noluthando acknowledges her fellow-traveler, Habib, who is of Khoi-San descent, as "cousin", she is briefly concerned that he would take offense at her familiarity. However, his later reference to her as "*gogo*" (grandmother), and her own observation that racial squabbles seem silly given the drastic decline in South Africa's human population, suggests that they are united by the common need for survival:

He looks at me with narrowed eyes. Is it that my comment was over-familiar? Or perhaps he is one of those who think we have taken everything from them since the white man finally gave power over to us; one of those who claim

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they are the sole indigenous people of this area and country? If so, a silly squabble to hold onto, with such a large and empty space now left for so few. (Wood "Of Hearts" 359)

Wood interweaves African mysticism and oral tradition with more traditional aspects of speculative fiction, such as speculation regarding space travel. Noluthando briefly considers the impact of the AIDS pandemic on lunar colonies, now stranded without access to supplies: "The moon is an alien world, scarred, old and barren. There must be dead men and women there too, I think, the lunar base now filled with emaciated corpses rotting in diminishing air; supply rockets from China and America stranded like huge, empty steel candles on Earth" (Wood "Of Hearts 365).

As with "Thirstlands", Wood again appears to be concerned with the need for a sense of responsibility in a barren and hostile world. In the case of "Of Hearts and Monkeys", however, this sense of moral accountability is extended not only towards fellow human beings, but also towards other non-human others. This is suggested through Noluthando's retelling of a Zambian folktale about a mischievous monkey, which is worth quoting rather than paraphrasing for its richness in language:

So I launch into the story of how God had created the world of man and animal as separate and they had never seen each other, until Monkey was elected by the animals to visit man, as he was both clever and quick. Once Monkey saw man from a distance, all fur-less and carrying shiny tools that were planting and harvesting strange foods in the field, he was not so sure it was wise to meet them, however. So he waited until it was night and then he stole into the field and ate the wonderful food until he was stuffed like a melon. As he was about to head home, a man leaped out with a net to catch him saying: "In my culture, we take the heart of all who steal from us. I know not what manner of creature you are, but I want your heart…"

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…So Monkey thought quickly and told the man that animals don't keep their hearts in their bodies but their Lion king keeps their hearts for them and could the man row him to the king so he could give him his heart. The man agreed but as he rowed Monkey to the forest shore, Monkey started singing, calling on the crocodiles to help him. The man could not understand the animal language and so the crocodiles surrounded them, forming a bridge from the boat to the land. The Monkey ran across their backs and shouted back from the safety of the jungle: 'Foolish man, don't you know that animals keep their hearts in the same place that men do?' Today, if you see a Monkey, watch what they do to their chests. They beat their fists in the place their hearts live, as a reminder to man they have hearts also… (Wood "Of Hearts" 361-363)

This tale demands the re-assessment of human beings' problematic relationship with other animals. The separation of the human and animal worlds in Noluthando's tale and the hostility and suspicion with which the monkey delegate is met in the human land reflects what Jacklyn Cock sees as "the deeply Western belief that human beings are the source of all value and meaning in the world" – a conviction "that has allowed animals to be excised from the everyday lives of people, and confined to zoos, animal toys and films, and non-autonomously as pets" (132). The reminder that monkey hearts can be found in the same place as human hearts suggests a biological and spiritual connection between human beings and their animal counterparts, the heart being the organ most often associated with emotion and soulfulness.

The suggestion that survival in this newly purged world is reliant on a holistic approach towards the environment is continued throughout "Of Hearts and Monkeys". After the "Big Burn", a process of purification through fire, nature begins to restore itself, and appears to be adapting to the absence of human beings. Marlene, a member of Noluthando's group, sees in these changes a mystical element:

[Marlene] looks at the plant ground-cover underneath us with some curiosity: a strange mix of thick succulent creeper leaves with thorny *aloe* edges, trailing from the bushes we'd just gingerly negotiated. "Better put plenty of soft reed bedding underneath, this fynbos is *deurmekaar* – weird man, true's God, I don't know this plant. It's like things have changed since it's re-grown from the Big Burn."

Habib snorts: "Evolution doesn't work that fast, 'Lene."

She looks at him severely: "I'm talking God and devil stuff here, 'Bib, not science." (Wood "Of Hearts 362)

Whatever the cause of these changes, scientific or mystical, it is made clear that those few remaining humans "must learn the words of the monkeys and the crocodiles if [they] are to survive in this burnt but flowering world" (Wood "Of Hearts" 367). Thus, Wood stresses the necessity of a connection between human and non-human others in a new world.

Towards the end of the story, Noluthando briefly considers committing suicide by drowning herself in the ocean, but decides against it. Her decision not to kill herself is motivated by a sense of responsibility towards Shannon, a young member of the group who has lost her ability to speak. Noluthando reflects: "[Shannon] is building a story inside her and I want to be there when her mouth opens to speak, for it will be a strange and terrible story indeed" (Wood "Of Hearts" 366). As Noluthando walks back "to [her] new family" she repeats the mantra of the *ubuntu* movement: "'Umuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu.' We are only human through sharing our being with others" (Wood "Of Hearts" 367). And here the "others" include the monkeys and the crocodiles, whose hearts beat in the same place as humans'.

Nick Wood's "Of Hearts and Monkeys" once again suggests an eco-topian desire to establish a nonviolent integration between self and environment, but also remains aware of the social challenges specific to the South African context which

may impede such a harmonious relationship, including the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS, racism, violence, and disputes regarding the distribution of resources and land.

Henrietta Rose-Innes's "Poison", the 2007 winner of the HSBC/SA Pen Literary Award, is a curiously elusive short story that resists any such utopianism. Set in no specific time, the narrative relies on extrapolation rather than references to technologically advanced gadgets to suggest a near-future or alternate space. It is made apparent that a chemical explosion in Cape Town has necessitated a mass evacuation of the city. However, no detail is given regarding the cause of the disaster and the protagonist, Lynn, seems herself unsure: "The explosion had been at a chemical plant, but which chemical? She couldn't remember what they'd said on the news" (Rose-Innes 5).

Similarly, not much is revealed about Lynn. Throughout the story, the reader remains uninformed of her age, occupation, or even her last name. She is an individual set adrift, with seemingly no emotional or familial connection to anyone. Stranded at a depleted petrol station outside of Cape Town without electricity or cellphone service, Lynn casually decides that "there wasn't really anyone she wanted to call" (2). She is curiously apathetic about her own safety, waiting until the third day after the explosion before attempting to leave the city. Despite mention of friends, no one accompanies her when she finally decides to flee Cape Town. Lynn's actions in the days leading up to her evacuation lack any sense of urgency:

> It had taken a day for most people to realise the seriousness of the explosion; then everybody who could get out had done so. Now, Lynn supposed, lack of petrol was trapping people in town. She herself had left it terribly late, despite all the warnings. It was typical; she struggled to get things together. The first

night she'd got drunk with friends. They'd sat up late, rapt in front of the TV, watching the unfolding news. The second night, she'd done the same, by herself. On the morning of this the third day, she'd woken up with a burning in the back of her throat so horrible that she understood it was no hangover, and that she had to move. By then, everybody she knew had already left. (Rose-Innes 2)

Confined to the petrol station along with a group of other stragglers, Lynn observes without any alarm that "people were growing fractious, splitting into tribes" (Rose-Innes 2). She makes no effort to form an alliance with any of these groups and does not seem to share their desperation in procuring enough petrol to flee the scene. Sitting in the petrol station's cafeteria, Lynn feels happy "in a secret, volatile way", relieved from the burden of responsibility that everyday life brings: "It was like bunking school: sitting here where nobody knew who she was, where no one could find her, on a day cut out of the normal passage of days. Nothing was required of her except to wait" (4).

The mercenary impulse of human beings in a desperate situation where the law is no longer enforced and the veneer of politeness and humaneness can be cast aside is illustrated when a taxi driver reveals that he had petrol all along and was merely waiting for people to pay for a seat. Lynn refuses to accept a seat in the taxi, choosing instead to pin her hopes on the possibility of a rescue party: "I'm sure someone will come soon. The police will come. Rescue services" (4).It is only once Lynn refuses to join the rest of the refugees in their escape that the full extent of the effect of the explosion on the human body is revealed. Lynn experiences sudden digestive distress and makes her way to the restroom. The bathroom mirror reflects her alarming physical deterioration:

Earlier there'd been a queue for the toilets, but now the stalls were empty. In the basin mirror, Lynn's face was startlingly grimed. Her choppy dark hair was greasy, her eyes as pink as if she'd been weeping. Contamination. Sitting on the black toilet seat, she felt the poisons gush out of her. She wiped her face with paper and looked closely at the black specks smeared on to the tissue. Her skin was oozing it. She held the wadded paper to her nose. A faint coppery smell. What *was* this shit? (Rose-Innes 5)

Despite the fact that she is slowly being poisoned by the chemical fumes of the explosion, Lynn experiences only a brief moment of fear when she sees thousands of birds "sprinting away from the mountain", an instinctual response to a potentially lethal threat which Lynn does not seem to share (6). This moment of alarm is, however, short-lived. Soon Lynn declares herself "confident" and "prepared" for the challenge of survival, and even feels "a tremor of adventure" at the prospect of being stranded at the deserted petrol station for several days (6-7).

Lynn's bizarre lack of survival instincts is briefly overturned when she discovers an old lady sitting on the back seat of a rusted old Toyota behind the petrol station's main building. The prospect of assuming responsibility for a frail dependent shatters Lynn's carefree attitude towards the chemical explosion and her subsequent confinement to the petrol station: "So. Now there was another person to consider, an old frail person, someone in need of her help. Lynn felt her heaviness return" (Rose-Innes 8).

The old lady's refusal to speak (other than twice repeating the words, "My grandson") is a source of frustration, and Lynn experiences the old lady as an "expectant presence in her rear-view mirror" (Rose-Innes 9). The silent old lady, representative of the burden of responsibility towards an(other), is reminiscent of the

mute Friday in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. In *Foe*, Susan Barton and Friday's fates become irrevocably intertwined not only because Friday is helpless, having "no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others", but also because Friday's lost history is the key Susan's successful retelling of the story of Cruso and the island, and thus her ultimate survival (Coetzee *Foe* 121).

In the short period that Lynn is responsible for someone other than herself, her own survival becomes entangled with the survival of the helpless, silent old person and she is finally spurred into action, for the first time walking away from the petrol station in order to seek help. This identification with another human being is, however, short-lived as the elderly woman's grandson returns with petrol, stealing Lynn's car and abandoning her.

Rose-Innes more prominently associates Lynn with the natural environment, and particularly endangered animal others. Lynn's reliance on an external locus of control, her refusal to accept responsibility for her own survival, is analogous to the nonchalance with which the threat of global ecological collapse has been perceived by many during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Lynn's remaining inactive despite being slowly poisoned can be read as a comment on consumers' sluggishness in addressing the threat of global warming. Although it becomes increasingly obvious that the "ambulances with flashing lights, the men in luminous vests with equipment and supplies" are not going to come to her rescue, Lynn chooses to remain in denial until the very end of the narrative (Rose-Innes 10). She quite literally turns her back on the signs of environmental devastation: "Behind her, the last of the sunset lingered, poison violet and puce, but she didn't turn to look. She wanted to face clear skies,

sweet-smelling veld. If she closed her eyes, she might hear a frog, just one, starting its evening song beyond the fence" (10).

The implication here is that Lynn is unlikely to hear a frog singing in the veld adjacent to the petrol station, as they have already succumbed to the poisonous atmosphere. It is generally accepted that declining frog populations serve as a warning for imminent ecosystem collapse, and the rapid increase in deformities amongst frog populations across the globe is a topical concern. In an article titled "Human population growth and the accelerating rate of species extinction", Gary W. Harding makes clear why frogs are indicators of an ecosystem's health:

> The frog is the "miner's canary" for our environment. Frogs and toads have passed through numerous mass extinctions for nearly 300 million years. What has made them such robust survivors is their remarkable skin. It is permeable to water and air borne substances such as oxygen. Frog skin is a complex chemical factory as well. It produces a protective coating to prevent desiccation. The skin of several species of frogs and toads produces potent antibiotics and predator repelling toxins. Frog skin is vulnerable to ultraviolet light. Frogs may, therefore, be the first casualty of ozone-layer depletion. Because its skin is so permeable, the frog is also sensitive to air, water, and soil pollutants. Dying frogs may indicate that the worldwide concentration of pollutants has reached a lethal level for them. If frogs go, can we be far behind? (Harding n.pag.)

Like the frogs, Lynn too will succumb to the toxic pollutants in the air. This association with beleaguered animal populations is continued when Lynn is later compared to an oil-splattered penguin, washed up on the shore. "It seemed the pollution had created its own weather system over the mountain, a knot of ugly cloud. She felt washed up on the edge of it, resting her oil-clogged wings on a quiet shore"

(Rose-Innes 10). The helplessness of animals in the face of man-made ecological crises, such as penguins affected by oil spills, mirrors Lynn's inability to save herself, her reliance on someone willing to, as it were, scrub the toxins from her body. This comparison establishes a connection between human and animal, suggesting the vulnerability of both in an ecologically threatened world.

In conclusion, the short narratives discussed in this chapter have in common not only the representation of a South African landscape devastated by ecological disaster, but also the expression of an entanglement between, self, other and environment. This is evinced as the need for a sense of responsibility towards and connection with both human and non-human others in the face of global ecological disaster. The speculative mode is a useful means of staging such an encounter between self, environment and human and non-human other because the established SF trope of the apocalyptic wasteland allows for the creation of a literary space in which all established boundaries between selves and others can be erased and re-established in different ways. This trope highlights the issue of survival and suggests that continued existence of any individual is interdependent on that of others, be it human, animal or environment.

Rose-Innes's "Poison" is reminiscent of the speculative narratives of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee examined in chapter one in the sense that its speculative element is limited to the mere suggestion of an off-scene disaster. Like in Gordimer's *July's People* and Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, the reader is not privy to details regarding the speculative catalyst which forces the protagonist to reconsider her relationship to others and the natural environment, but rather the impact of this change on the character's sense of self and belonging. "Poison" also has in common

with these earlier texts a fatalistic turn – ultimately predicting the death of its protagonist, her environment and its non-human life forms.

In contrast, Nick Wood's short fiction utilizes the speculative trope of environmental disaster in order to propagate a kind of afro-optimism. In the face of ecological catastrophe and the mass extinction of the human race, racial and cultural differences are erased and a shared struggle for survival results in alliances between unlikely groups. Racial tension and social concerns such as poverty, dwindling natural resources, crime and the spread of HIV/AIDS are hinted at, but ultimately glossed over to accommodate the reconciliatory thrust of the narratives. Similarly, any awareness of cultural difference is limited to the romanticized use of indigenous aphorisms, the notion of *ubuntu*, and African folk tales. The apocalyptic landscape is presented desolate and deadly, but also as the site of a possible re-connection between humans, non-humans and a fresh, new environment that has been purified through fire (quite literally in the case of "Of Hearts and Monkeys").

Wood's reconciliatory approach can easily dismissed as mere sentimentalism, serving only to whitewash ongoing racial and gendered division in South Africa. However, I would argue that these narratives are representative of the spirit of reconciliation which has come to characterize post-apartheid South African rhetoric. Wood's short stories in many ways lack the subversive edge of the late apartheid speculative narratives of Coetzee and Gordimer, but ultimately their projects are not dissimilar: all of these texts employ the speculative mode as a means of imagining a position beyond imposed divides between people, animals and the natural world. In this sense, Wood is engaging in an exercise of imaginative re-territorialization, his protagonists emerging as connection-making entities, testing the boundaries which separate them from others.

CONCLUSION

In *The Environmental Imagination*: *Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, Lawrence Buell calls for the rethinking of the ways in which human beings imagine themselves in relation to their natural environment. He asserts:

> If, as environmental philosophers contend, Western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today's environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it. (Buell 2)

If we consider Buell's conception of "Western metaphysics and ethics" (2) to suggest a Cartesian view of self in relation to nature (i.e. an outlook that is rooted in a logic and discourse of mastery that places human beings apart from and in control of their natural environment), the alternative appears to be a more eco-centric approach that places a self *in* nature, as an integral and indistinguishable part of a larger ecosystem. This study highlights the many difficulties associated with such a re-envisioning of the relationship between self and environment within a South African context, pointing specifically to the region's history of colonial oppression and racial segregation, and the relation of these violent legacies to current debates surrounding the issues of land ownership, the distribution of natural resources and ecological concerns. However, this dissertation argues that the speculative literary mode can be used as a valuable means of re-addressing and further problematizing the complex

historical and ideological inscription of landscape, self and other(s), as well as the relationship between these three factors.

The speculative texts discussed in this study employ common SF tropes such as environmental catastrophe and disruptive civil war in order to create imaginary landscapes in which central character are forced to re-think their former (often abusive and acquisitive) attitudes towards human and non-human others and the natural environment, and must reconsider their ethical accountability.In "Imaginary Landscapes", a brief introduction to speculative fiction in South Africa, Marike Beyers and Crystal Warren conclude:

> Setting their novels in an imagined future enables authors to explore the implications, for land and society, of global climate change, of genetic and social engineering, and to examine recurrent themes in South African literature such as self and other, identity, the struggle for resources, and of course, the land. (Beyers & Warren 43)

Speculative fiction, then, has its roots in material conditions, and its writers act, in much the same way as satirists do, as the conscience of the societies which produce them. However, these texts also imagine spaces that are in many ways removed from the limitations of the 'real' world, both reflecting and *envisioning* realities. The element of play which characterizes the speculative mode enables its authors to re-think, expand and contest entrenched categories and restrictions, and particularly those which govern the relationships between self, other and environment. In fact, the speculative narrative transgresses boundaries at the very level of structure: it combines aspects of satire, fantasy, science fiction and the fable. The characters who traditionally inhabit this genre are frequently trickster figures, occupying marginal

spaces which challenge hierarchized binary oppositions, such as self/other, human/animal, human/machine and self/environment.

This study has examined the ways in which the speculative mode has been utilized across a broad spectrum of South African speculative texts, ranging from novels, films, short stories and young adult novels. Both novels published prior to the first democratic elections in 1994 and contemporary post-apartheid texts have been discussed. A concern with notions of identity, ecological belonging and the relationship between self, other, non-human other and the environment has been traced throughout these speculative texts.

The speculative narratives explored in this study approach the question of identity formation in South Africa as a complex process, influenced not only by violent legacies of oppression and institutionalized racism, but also by the effects of global technological advances on the human body. Many of the contemporary, post-apartheid South African speculative narratives included in this study draw on the technological aspect of the SF genre, introducing non-human or post-human characters such as clones, genetically engineered donors, extra-terrestrial aliens, technologically-altered humans, and high-tech equipment such as spaceships and heat-regulating suits. Thus, these narratives insert themselves into a larger SF discourse whilst simultaneously particularizing this discourse for a South African context. Through these SF novums, the speculative narrative is also able to challenge the imprecise boundaries between self and seemingly 'alien' other, interrogating what it means to be different.

Related to the question of identity formation in an increasingly technological world, is the issue of ecological belonging. This study has shown how local speculative narratives explore, through the SF trope of ecological disaster, the

contentious nature of issues surrounding land-ownership, environmental policy-making, the distribution of natural resources, and the founding of a sense of self in relation to place. It has been suggested that South African speculative fiction presents a socio-historically situated, rhizomatic approach to ecology – one that is attuned to the tension between humanistic- and ecological concerns. The ecological messages of the speculative texts included for discussion in this study are without exception accompanied by an acute awareness of pressing socio-political issues in South Africa such as continued racism, xenophobia, the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS, crime, unemployment, poverty, technological division, and the rapidly shifting notion of what it means to be human. In view of this insistence on anthropocentrism in the face of global environmental disaster, the question posed in the introduction to this dissertation – Can we successfully write about real South Africans who happen to be clones, or genetically engineered donors, or cyborgs? – must be answered with a resounding 'yes'.

The introduction to this study also raises questions regarding the ways in which speculative fiction and postcolonial theory can fruitfully intersect. South African speculative texts indeed appear to be concerned with traditionally 'postcolonial' issues, and display an acute awareness of history and the situatedness of historical subjects. However, these texts also gesture beyond historical discourse to a global context by particularizing issues that affect the planet as a whole for a specifically South African framework. In this sense, these speculative narratives acknowledge the ways in which the discourse of colonialism feeds into a global discourse of exploitation and seek to address new inequalities by taking part in a global conversation on fear and the instrumentalist use of others.

Due to its restriction to the field of English Studies, this dissertation has focused almost exclusively on English-language South African speculative narratives, with the exception of two Afrikaans novels in English translation, namely Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* and Eben Venter's *Trencherman*. However, it must be noted that there exists a rich tradition of science fiction and speculative fiction within Afrikaans literature, which regrettably falls outside of the scope of this study. Afrikaans speculative novels, such as Jan Rabie's *Die Groen Planeet* (1961) and *Swart Ster oor die Karoo* (1957), C.J. Langenhoven's *Loeloeraai* (1923), Karel Schoeman's *Afskeid en Vertrek* (1990) and Koos Kombuis's *Hotel Atlantis* (2003) may be of further interest to scholars working in the field of South African speculative fiction.

In the interest of succinctness, South African speculative narratives not explicitly concerned with environmental crisis, the notion of ecological belonging and human/animal relationships have not been included for discussion in this dissertation. Speculative narratives such as Lily Herne's zombie-apocalypse novel, *Deadlands* (2011), South African vampire film, *Eternity* (2010), and S.L. Grey's (the combined pseudonym of Sarah Lotz and Louis Greenberg) *The Mall* (2011) are resources which may provide future researchers with a range of unexamined themes.

Speculative fiction is also on the rise elsewhere in Africa. Popular African SF texts include Nigerian-American SF author Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*? (2010), Kojo Laing's Ghanaian speculative novel, *Big Bishop Roko and the Altar Gangsters* (2006), Zimbabwean children's writer Nancy Farmer's *The Ear, the Eye and the Arm*(1995) and Mia Couto's Mozambican magical realist novel, *Under the Frangipani* (1996). A comparative study of Sub-Saharan African speculative texts is also a possible area for further enquiry.

Given the themes examined in the present study, one might expect that future speculative narratives in South Africa will continue to contend with already pressing concerns such as xenophobic violence and racism, poverty and unemployment, crime, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the threat of a global environmental crisis. In the years to come, writers of speculative fiction in South Africa will also increasingly turn their attention to the threat of climate change due to high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. In a special report titled, "The Influence of Climate Change on Health and Disease" Bob Mash asserts that "climate change poses one of the most profound challenges to the future public health of South Africa" (22). Focusing on the health effects of global environmental change on South Africa, Mash identifies "six specific ways in which climate change may impact on the health of the nation: food supply, water supply, rising sea levels, air quality, ecosystem changes and extreme weather events" (22-23).

Although the impact of climate change on South Africa's economy, national health and ecological well-being has received little attention at the level of policy-making, the phenomenon of global warming has far-reaching implications for the sustainable development of the country. South Africa will host the United Nations' 17th Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP 17) in December 2011, an event which will undoubtedly draw much attention to the impact of climate change on developing countries. Given science fiction and speculative fiction's penchant for offering warnings about impending ecological catastrophe, South Africa's very high levels of greenhouse gas emissions are bound to spark further alarm within the ranks of speculative fiction authors. In addition to speculative fiction, contemporary literary South African fiction and other genres will also reflect a concern with the threat of environmental collapse.

In their attempts to address the ills of the present and future, authors of South African speculative fiction have failed to recognize many possibilities of ecological change. A number of other concerns, related to the issues of climate change and the ecological fragility of the planet, such as changes in animal migration, toxicity, problems surrounding waste disposal, and disease (for example shifts in high-risk Malaria zones due to climate change), might also be fruitful topics for further exploration by speculative writers.

Another potential source of inspiration for speculative authors in South Africa is the possible collapse of Western economies and its impact on the African continent. Current local speculative works have been fairly vague regarding the question of economy, not fully unpacking the inner-workings of their future societies' fiscal systems. The recent demotion of the United States of America's credit rating from AAA to AA+, and the threat of a double-dip recession in this country, as well as the threatening financial collapse of many European countries such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland may result in the decline of economic growth in South Africa and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. A speculative scenario premised on the complete financial collapse of Western Europe and Northern America and its impact on a future South Africa would allow for the introduction of a vast array of themes, questions and concerns relevant to the present South African condition. Such a setting would also allow for speculation regarding greater African union, such as the possibilities of a Pan-African United States or a collective monetary unit. This would offer an alternative framework to centre/periphery flows of power – fiscal and otherwise.

Given the challenges that South Africa is faced with in the present, speculative fiction offers another imagining of alternative futures urgently needed in the present. Much remains to be done in the field of speculative fiction studies in South Africa and

this study offers a contribution to what must be a larger and evolving conversation. Recognizing the epistemic work being done in South African speculative fiction not only enriches the present critical conversation, but opens up additional future possibilities – literary and otherwise.

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