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Grant Andrews

The emergence of black queer characters in three post-apartheid novels

Before the end of apartheid, queer lives were almost entirely unrepresented in public literary works in South Africa. Only after the fall of institutionalised apartheid could literature begin to look back at the role of queer people in the history of South Africa, and begin to acknowledge that queer people are a part of the fabric of South African society. A number of celebrated authors emerged who were exploring queer themes; however, most of these authors and the stories they told were from a white perspective, and black queer voices were still largely absent in literature, especially novels. This paper explores the limited number of black queer literary representations following the influential work of K. Sello Duiker. I explore the social dynamics that might have influenced the fact that so few examples of black queer characters currently exist in South African literature. Through an analysis of novels by Fred Khumalo, Zukiswa Wanner, and Chwayita Ngamlana, I show how black, queer characters in post-apartheid novels confront ideas of culture, race, and sexuality as they wrestle with their identities and with questions of belonging and visibility. **Keywords:** African queer studies, post-apartheid literature, queer identity, queer studies, South African literature.

Introduction

In a system as imposing and horrifying as apartheid, the suppression of 'unwanted' voices is a necessary component. The apartheid state relied on propaganda to function, and the founding myth of independent racial and ethnic 'nations' that would only be able to optimally develop separately was the system's lifeblood. Ryan Richard Thoreson explains that "the official fear of racial mixing was closely tied to the preservation of the white, heterosexual, reproductive family, spawning unforgiving prohibitions—on miscegenation, homosexuality and non-procreative sexuality" (680). Any deviance from this official narrative was seen as threatening; any voices which resisted it were often violently silenced.[1]

Literature was one of the great victims of this silencing, and in light of the homophobia inherent in apartheid structures, queer literature suffered greatly.[2] The reliance on a particular form of patriarchal masculinity, and the strict gender roles which complemented the project of separate development, purposely excluded queer voices and sought to oppress representations of queer lives. Same-sex desires and queer realities were consequently almost never represented in published literature during apartheid. While these voices have found expression in post-apartheid South Africa, there are still notable racial divides, and very few black queer characters and authors are included in discussions of recognised post-apartheid literature.[3]

This article explores queer voices and visibilities in South Africa in order to consider the dynamics which led to this dearth of black queer representations in literature. I briefly outline the queer rights movement during apartheid, and the tumultuous positioning of black activists like Simon Nkoli in fighting against apartheid but also fighting for gay and lesbian rights. I look at the silencing of queer voices within literature through censorship and social stigma, and how this silencing has been addressed in post-apartheid queer literature through a "retrospective cartography of the previously occluded queer nation" (Stobie, "Postcolonial pomosexuality: queer/alternative fiction after Disgrace" 320–1). These compounded silencings have led to black queer authors and characters still facing multiple barriers in post-apartheid South Africa. The extraordinary work of author K. Sello Duiker in the late 1990s and the early 2000s seemed to usher in a new era of queer black representation, and Duiker's novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) was at once revolutionary and a seemingly natural extension of the truth-telling and democratisation which the country was undergoing after the end of apartheid.

The themes of Duiker's novel are explored in this paper as a way to demonstrate the conflicts inherent in queer black fiction and to revisit the potential of what Duiker had produced. Unfortunately, Duiker's powerful

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literature has not led to the emergence of a great deal of queer black voices in South African literature, and his death in 2005 spelled the loss of one of the most dynamic young writers in the country. Since Duiker's breakthrough novel, there have been sporadic contemporary examples of authors exploring queer black characters in literature, at least in ways that were used to demonstrate diversity in the 'rainbow nation' or to explore questions of gender and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. A selection of three novels is discussed in this paper to demonstrate recent developments in queer black representation. Fred Khumalo's *Seven Steps to Heaven* (2007), Zukiswa Wanner's *Men of the South* (2010), and Chwayita Ngamlana's novel *If I Stay Right Here* (2017) will be briefly explored at the end of this paper to exemplify some of the recent queer black fiction in South Africa, and to show how representations have responded to social changes after the end of apartheid.

While scholars like Cheryl Stobie and Brenna M. Munro have done detailed, extensive studies of many South African texts representing queer realities, this paper will build on their work to investigate representations particularly of black queer characters in novels and how these texts function within and respond to historical context in recent years. Other black queer characters have been imagined within South African literature, such as in Lauren Beukes's futuristic science fiction novel *Moxyland* (2008) and the short story collections *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* (2013) and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* (2017). In addition, black queer lives have been represented in nonfiction works like Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* (2008). While these texts add to the mosaic of representations, the novels outlined above will be the primary focus of this paper in order to demonstrate the nuanced subjectivities afforded to black queer characters in these extended works of fiction. This paper is therefore not comprehensive, and does not explore every instance of black queer literary representation; instead, texts have been selected to demonstrate some of the dynamics of cultural and sexual identities in South African fiction. These representations in novels can provide an intimate look at how these characters understand their identities, their Africanness, and their sense of belonging within contemporary South Africa. When read within the context of the 'silencing' inherent in apartheid structures and rigid traditionalist cultural mores, they offer the opportunity for voicing realities which are often suppressed.

The struggle for queer rights and the suppression of queer voices during apartheid

The role of queer rights and queer visibility had always been contentious during apartheid. Sheila Croucher explains that "policing of sexual minorities was consistent with repressive apartheid ideology" (317) and opposition to repressive legal frameworks was scattered since the gay organisations within the country were divided, and "a staunchly apolitical stance continued to characterise white gay South Africa" (317). Although various queer groups existed, they were still racially divided, which resulted especially in the silencing of black queer voices. Additionally, these gay organisations were mostly unwilling to outright oppose apartheid. The Delmas Treason Trial in 1985 saw one of the most important conflicts within the liberation movement with regard to gay rights, as Simon Tseko Nkoli, a gay man and United Democratic Front activist, was among the twenty-two people charged with treason. Nkoli came out to his fellow activists, and was shunned by many who felt that his homosexuality somehow tarnished the image of the struggle against apartheid (Reid 29). Thoreson explains that "Nkoli publicly insisted upon the inseparability of the struggles against apartheid and homophobia, challenging his comrades in both movements to fight together" (680). One of the few gay organisations in the country at the time, the mostly white Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), decided not to support Nkoli, himself a member of GASA, during the treason trial. GASA received local and international scorn for the stance of trying to remain 'apolitical' in the face of the injustices of apartheid.

The conflicting dynamics of the South African gay rights movement demonstrate various forms of silencing: firstly, the silencing of queer realities in service of the 'purity' of the liberation movement; secondly, the political voicelessness of the gay rights movements against apartheid; and thirdly, the silencing of black concerns in the early gay organisations in the country which had mostly white membership.

Another form of silencing was found in the paternalistic censorship during apartheid. Queer fiction under apartheid faced severe censorship, and likewise queer visibilities were socially shunned, to the point where representations of queer lives were almost nonexistent in the country. For example, Michael Power's 1972 novel *Shadow Game*, about an interracial love affair between two men, was banned despite positive international reception. Furthermore, even though it was not banned, J.M. Coetzee's novel *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) depicting same-sex desire between the white character Magda and the black farmworker Klein-Anna, emerged as one of Coetzee's least-discussed novels, and the queer elements in the text were almost completely ignored by critics at the time

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(Briganti 42). This again indicates a type of silencing and the obscuring of a text that depicts queer themes.

Only after the unbanning of the ANC and other political parties, a moment which signalled the fall of formal apartheid, were queer voices given more space to find expression.[4] Due to legal and social changes during the 1990s, these previously marginalised realities were finally given the chance to reach mainstream audiences. Transgressive and diverse voices were celebrated, and queer literatures were being released by major publishers.

What emerged was literature that gave nuanced, sensitive portrayals of queer identities and experiences within South Africa. In post-apartheid South Africa, even though the majority of South Africans still seem to be vehemently homophobic, a space was created for queer voices to find large-scale expression and for queer realities to be a part of the "rainbow nation," a phrase which Munro notes "encodes the intersection of multiculturalism and gay rights" (vii). Munro explains that public opinion in the early 1990s saw the acceptance of gay people as symbolic of a discourse of freedom which had swept the country, and that representations of queer lives were in some ways embraced because "the *idea* of gay rights […] [made] South Africans feel modern and magnanimous as they watched, or took part in, multiple dramas of acceptance" (xxiv; emphasis in original).

Queer literature and voicing silences

In post-apartheid South Africa, authors have looked back at the lives of queer people during apartheid, offering a view of the history of South Africa that includes queer lives (Stobie, "Pomosexuality" 320–1). This reclamation of a past, a stake in the history of South Africa, allowed for queer characters to assert their belonging in the country and to voice the realities of queer South African lives. Asserting belonging in fiction was a form of "writing back" (Munro xxvi) against systems which sought to oppress queer people.

However, queer literature by black authors or the representation of black, queer characters is still rare, even in the post-apartheid milieu. Cultural factors might have limited black South Africans from writing about queer themes, as Stobie notes that "the appellation 'un-African' is used as a means of controlling variant sexualities, and punitive behavior includes beating, rape and even murder" ("Pomosexuality" 322). This social context could play a role in why black writers have largely resisted queer themes and, where there are queer characters in the works of black authors, they are often shown to have great conflict between their sexuality and their cultural heritage, as in the works of Wanner and Duiker discussed later in this paper.

Due to the conflicts highlighted above, black, queer writing seems to be charged with a political imperative. Barbara Boswell, in her introduction to the short story collection *Queer Africa 2*, writes that cultural and artistic expression can be sites of "resistance" (2) against oppressive homophobia on the African continent. Representation, particularly the type of representation that challenges concepts of the assumed incompatibility of same-sex sexualities and an essentialised 'Africanness,' are in many ways still viewed as politically important in the South African context. By asserting the black, queer subject and their place in South Africa, these texts offer vital counternarratives to widespread homophobia.

K. Sello Duiker and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*

Duiker's novel serves as an important starting point for discussions of post-apartheid black queer representations. Debrota Pucherova asserts: "Duiker is the first South African novelist to create a black gay protagonist, whose quest for identity eventually brings him to see his homosexuality as an inalienable part of his African identity" (936). Tshepo reconciles his sexuality and embraces it as a form of celebrating his Africanness, despite the many tensions he faces like the homophobia of his father and the sense of exclusion he feels from white queer characters. The novel presents an important narrative during the transition from apartheid where such depictions of race and sexuality faced overwhelming barriers. As Nonhlanhla Dlamini explains while discussing the normalisation of queer desire in the novel, "apartheid permeated the public and private spheres of life including quotidian experiences. For example, it impinged on the type of love, objects of sexual desire, and bodies to be desired" (69). The novel offered a ground-breaking representation of sexuality, race, and desire in post-apartheid South Africa, and intersections between these categories are reimagined in ways that open spaces for self-expression and reworkings of stifling categories for the characters. Analysing the themes of Duiker's text can offer a useful point of comparison for the more recent queer black representations.

The novel is highly meditative, with the young characters spending long passages ruminating on their situations and describing their vivid dreams and multilayered subjectivities. This process of introspection and maturation can be linked to the time period of political uncertainty, where the confusion of the characters reflects

a country still searching for a new identity when the oppressive apartheid regime, represented by Tshepo's cruel, violent father, is a dying, yet inescapable, reality. Michael Chapman explains that Tshepo's rejection of his father can be read symbolically as the young South African who "ditches the Father figures of the struggle years for […] harrowing adventures" (3). Chapman sees the novel as indicative of a trend of "postindependence disillusionment" (3), where the utopic promise of the 'rainbow nation' and widespread acceptance do not materialise for the characters. This analysis highlights the process of individual identity formation within changing national systems. The characters in the text reimagine the possibilities of gender, race, sexuality, and social class within a changing country, and Tshepo uses this framework to find a sense of freedom and hope while accepting himself as a black, queer man.

Tshepo eventually becomes a sex worker at a massage parlour in Cape Town called Steamy Windows, and he connects with the mostly white queer characters in the space, feeling finally accepted for his same-sex desires. Viljoen notes that, for Tshepo, "[a] sense of family is finally regained […] and the bond that exists among them, black and white, is likened to a pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, until racism exposes that sentiment as fraudulent" (50–1). Annie Gagiano adds that the brotherhood "has its own, racist, frayed edges" (74) despite seemingly being embracing of Tshepo and allowing him to inhabit his queer sexuality. Furthermore, the realisation echoes the trend that Pucherova identifies in post-apartheid South African novels which "[express] disillusionment with the fashionable middle-class multiculturalism that only disguises thriving racism, xenophobia, and homophobia" (937). Tshepo is still excluded because of his race, even in the seemingly embracing brotherhood where same-sex sexuality and intimacy are celebrated in almost religious terms.

Tshepo begins to notice how he is objectified and how his sexual appeal is reduced to fetishisation based on his race for the consumption of wealthy, white men. He becomes merely a "black stallion" (Duiker 204), as the massage parlour's owner Shaun calls him, or "Exotic Angelo" (333) as his line in a classifieds publication reads. He is no longer the son or brother to other gay men which he might have imagined himself to be. The sense of exclusion and exploitation which Tshepo experiences can be read as representative of how black, queer voices are seen as out of place in mainstream queer culture in South Africa, a trend which is still apparent today.[5]

However, despite his conflicts around race and the way that he is unable to truly be a part of the queer brotherhood, Tshepo directly challenges the assumed tensions between blackness and same-sex sexuality in one of his meditations:

> I mean, people always say that black culture is rigid and doesn't accept things like homosexuals and lesbians. You know the argument—it's very unAfrican. It's a lot of crap. In my experiences that kind of thinking comes from urbanised blacks, people who've watered down the real origins of our culture and mixed it with Anglo-Saxon notions of the Bible. It's stupid to even suggest that homosexuality and lesbianism are foreign to black culture. (250)

Tshepo sees no conflict between his race and his sexuality, and he uses the period of self-exploration to develop a philosophy that integrates the different parts of his identity as almost inextricably connected. Tshepo sees this link between Africanness and same-sex desire as a philosophy that he applies to a country transitioning into democracy and experiencing a new sense of freedom. Pucherova notes that in the novel, "Gay desire is presented as liberation from aggressive heteronormative masculinity and an opportunity for the redefinition of the entire society" (937). Representing black queer sexuality in the way that Duiker does in his novel offers great subversive potential, and his enduring legacy is a testament to the impact that these types of representations can have.

Seven Steps to Heaven, *Men of the South*, and *If I Stay Right Here*

The three more recent novels under discussion speak to the themes highlighted in Duiker's text, reassessing the conflicts of black queer subjects in a country where queer people have found more public spaces for self-expression, particularly in urban centres. The texts all seem to demonstrate more integrated identities for their protagonists, who are still cognizant of the conflicts of culture and sexuality in South African black queer identities, but resist these conflicts vocally and with less internal anguish than Tshepo displayed in Duiker's novel. The queer characters find spaces, both internally and in their social environments, where they can express their desires and assert their queer identities.

Fred Khumalo's *Seven Steps to Heaven* was published in 2007, the year after the passage of the Civil Union Act in South Africa. The story follows two boys, Sizwe and Thulani, who grow up together in a township and form a deep bond. Sizwe becomes an author and decides to publish, as a work of fiction, the autobiographical novel

which Thulani wrote. The novel explores the relationship which Sizwe later develops with Patrick, a sex worker and drug addict whom Sizwe meets at university, and who encourages him to pursue his writing career. Even though the story is set in the early 1990s, with the accompanying conflicts around race and class in the transitional South Africa leading up to the first democratic elections, there is an indication that the representation of sexuality might be much more modern.

Patrick is in a relationship with a female student, Thembi, when he first meets Sizwe. However, after Patrick tells Sizwe about being a sex worker, he breaks down in tears in Sizwe's room. Sizwe comforts him, which leads to the friends having sex. Sizwe reflects on this moment with an atemporal, meta-analytical approach which suggests that the homophobia that might have haunted him, and might have curbed his true feelings for his childhood friend Thulani which are only hinted at earlier in the text, seems not to exist when he finally crosses the boundary of same-sex sexuality with Patrick: "Much later, Sizwe lay on his back staring at the ceiling. He was waiting for the feelings of strangeness, of disgust, to engulf him. A century later, the feeling hadn't even quivered on the horizon" (152–3). This stance could link to Kgomotso Masemola's assessment that the novel "marshals allochthonous memory and transcultural intertextuality to the extent that race, gender and masculinities are represented through a multiplicity and temporality that are sophisticated enough to transcend and/or implode the binary oppositions between men and women, gay and 'straight'" (370). Sizwe seems to easily reconcile his sexual relationship with Patrick, as Stobie notes that the "shift into same-sexuality occasions no guilt or angst" ("Reading Bisexualities From a South African Perspective—Revisited" 485), and soon after this first encounter, the two move in together and live openly as a same-sex couple.

Later, Patrick suggests that Sizwe should write an article under the title "The Politics of Being Gay in the Black South African Community" (155), and explains that it "will get people talking, how this young, straight black dude suddenly finds the urge to come out unashamedly in the face of a barrage of vilifications and insults" (155). The labels 'gay' and 'straight' are both applied to Sizwe in Patrick's suggestion; he is a "straight black dude" who somehow "finds the urge to come out". This links to Masemola's analysis of the novel as blurring boundaries, and indicates a complex sexual identity which neither of the characters seems to want to crystallise. This fluidity is compounded by the fact that Sizwe was attracted to Patrick's ex-girlfriend, Thembi, and seems to easily transition to his first same-sex relationship when he had not acknowledged attraction towards men before.

The depiction of same-sex desire in the text has still proven controversial, and has been read in ways which reinforce the assumed incompatibility of blackness and same-sex sexuality. Literary scholar David Magege, in his doctoral dissertation at a major South African university, has echoed the ideas of the 'unAfricanness' of homosexuality in analysing the novel, with the contention that this representation in Khumalo's novel "threatens the very social fabric upon which the majority of the South African society has been constructed" (Magege 250). Magege argues that the same-sex and interracial relationships in the novel "amount to a complex denial of practiced social norms" (248) and that "[w]orse still those who indulge in the acts do not seem to have agency but find themselves performing the act" (250). Magege's reductive analysis divorces the characters from their sexual agency in service of racialised ideas of sexuality. Magege explains that "the only female character engaged in such kind [sic] of deviance is Sheree, a white woman. It is clear that Patrick and Sizwe indulge because of pressure to survive, not necessarily sexual desire as is the case with the German nationals [in the novel]" (250). Magege situates 'authentic' homosexuality outside of South Africa, with the German characters who pay Patrick for sex, and aligns it with whiteness. This analysis strips the characters in the text of their desire for same-sex sexual pleasure, negates the closeness they find with each other in their long-term relationship, and discounts the fluidity of their sexuality. It is telling that even in post-apartheid South Africa, such ideas can still find currency in scholarship about same-sex sexualities in literature.

Adding to this sense of tension around same-sex sexualities in the novel, Patrick imagines that Sizwe has suffered "a barrage of vilifications and insults" (Khumalo 155) about his sexuality, when the novel does not show this. There is no blatant homophobia shown towards Sizwe in the text, and despite Patrick's suggestion of the article Sizwe should write, showing that he assumes a great deal of conflict between blackness and same-sex desire, Sizwe does not express any such conflict.

In Zukiswa Wanner's *Men of the South* (2010), published three years after Khumalo's text, urban black masculinities are represented in ways that disrupt patriarchal conceptions of fatherhoods and men's societal roles, representing a stay-at-home father who is denigrated by his wife and a Zimbabwean immigrant who impregnates a South African woman in an attempt to gain citizenship in South Africa. The middle section of the novel focalises

the character Mzilikazi, who is gay and a father to two children from his previous marriage to a woman. When women flirt with him, he imagines responding that he is gay, and he reflects: "But I cannot say that, of course. It would definitely be the death of my relationship with my father" (85). Even though Mzilikazi lives as an out gay man in Cape Town, he still fears disclosing his sexuality freely. The idea of homosexuality being an affront to the father echoes the concerns of Duiker's novel, where traditionalist and patriarchal cultural conceptions underpin the relationship between father and son. Mzilikazi, as a gay father, disrupts this positioning of fathers as propagators of stifling gender roles or custodians of heterosexuality. However, Mzilikazi still suffers from conflicts between his racial and cultural identity and his life as a gay man, reflected through the disapproval of his own father.

Mzilikazi particularly remembers his father's disdain towards the idea of same-sex marriage: "I remember watching the news with [my father] the one time. A clip about same-sex marriages having finally been permitted in South Africa by the Constitutional Court came on, and a look of disgust came over his face" (122). The passage of same-sex marriage legislation indicates the fundamental shifts which have occurred around the strict patriarchal conceptions in South African society. The law begins to recognise a multiplicity of realities which run counter to established gender norms, and this is met with resistance by fathers like Mzilikazi's.

He reflects on the fallacious appeals to authenticity which are captured in his father's reaction to same-sex marriage and how it is seen as 'unAfrican': "Deep down I thought of the hypocrisy of my father, talking of what is not African when he could not find it in him to embrace other Africans unless they were South Africans. Or talking of Christianity, at that, when he himself had not been to church since I was in Standard 5" (123). The challenges to sexual diversity on the grounds of religion and culture are thus used by Mzilikazi's father to maintain hierarchies of power in hypocritical ways. This realisation, and the fact that Mzilikazi can challenge stifling conceptions of religion and culture, shows the highly critical nature of the post-apartheid black queer character, a stance which was also evident in Tshepo in Duiker's novel and Sizwe in Khumalo's novel. These characters subvert and challenge ideas of culture and tradition, resist boundaries in their sexual identities, and take a great deal of agency in their self-definition.

When Mzilikazi moves to Cape Town, he experiences a new sense of freedom, finally finding both physical and psychic distance from his father. He escapes the influence of stifling patriarchal conceptions and begins to narrate his own life, reflecting: "Now I could be the person I always wanted to be, but downplayed because of my and society's skewed expectations of what an African man should be like" (127).

After his father dies, Mzilikazi begins to wrestle even more with how his sexuality conflicts with ideas of masculinity, tradition, and culture. He imagines that his father might see him in death, even allowing for the possibility that his father might understand the fact that he is gay, just like Tshepo in Duiker's novel finds a new appreciation for his father in death. At a ritual after his father's funeral where Mzilikazi is given his father's traditional weapons to signal that he has become the "man of the house", he reflects on his family members who perform the ritual:

> I wonder how these snuff-taking, mqombothi-drinking uncles of mine would react if they were to know that the man of the house is gay? Would they still give me the weapons? Would my father turn in his grave if, looking from above [...] he got to know that his eldest son is not Zulu enough in his sense of the word? Or would he perhaps start having a good debate with some long-dead Zulu warrior on the untruths of how homosexuality is human and has nothing to do with Africanness or Zuluness? (150)

Mzilikazi is able to imagine his father finding acceptance for him being gay. He presents a multi-layered, dynamic version of masculine expression, incorporating both the traditions and expectations of his father as well as his own gay identity which his father disapproved of. By reconciling homosexuality as "human" and not in conflict with "Africanness or Zuluness", Mzilikazi imagines his father as reflecting the democratic values which allow him to live openly as a gay man in Cape Town in post-apartheid South Africa.

The final text under discussion is Chwayita Ngamlana's *If I Stay Right Here*, published in 2017. The novel depicts the abusive relationship between Shay, a student and a journalist for an online publication, and Sip, an ex-gang member whom Shay meets in prison shortly before Sip is released. The two young women find themselves quickly developing a close relationship and move in together once Sip is released from prison, but Sip soon becomes violent and controlling with Shay.

Interestingly, Shay symbolises the violence in their relationship through the image of the fist, and likens it to clenched fists raised in protest against repressive laws. She reflects, in one of the meditative sections of the

novel: "In this place a fist represents strength, freedom and empowerment" (45). She conflates the violence in her relationship with the liberation movement, and imagines that the fist which has just struck her face is somehow paralleled with the fight for freedom in South African society.

The juxtaposition suggests a sense that the violence constitutes a perversion of liberation, a perversion of the freedom that both women ostensibly enjoy in post-apartheid South Africa as black, queer subjects. Shay was taught in school about the liberation leaders, how their fists signalled change, but the fists here seem to signal imprisonment with Sip. Simultaneously, and ironically, the fists represent a type of normalising of their relationship. They are two young, black women who are able to live together and publicly show affection for one another because of the struggle against oppression which had come before. Even the very act of emphasising the violence in their relationship, rather than the conflicts of culture, race, and sexuality, is a subversive moment. Primarily, their relationship is represented as violent and dysfunctional; the fact that it is a same-sex relationship is often secondary in the text.

This signals a major shift from the earlier texts under discussion. The characters, being young, urban black women, do not seem concerned with conflicts between their Africanness and their same-sex sexualities. Shay and Sip express their desires openly, as do the many other queer characters in the text, both male and female. The characters are all complex and conflicted in multiple ways, but hardly ever show tensions around the expectations of traditional cultural mores and their queer identities.

However, there is still a recognition in the text of the particular struggles that queer black women face in South Africa, especially the violences and patriarchal oppression which are everyday realities for many in the country. Sip recounts the violence she suffers when she trespasses on a rival gang's territory before she meets Shay. The rival gang members kill her friend and rape Sip, and use the moment to target Sip's non-normative gender expression. Sip tells Shay, in a quiet moment that the two of them share in their bed in Shay's flat: "I remember [the man who attacked me] saying he's about to show me that I'm a girl, not the boy that I think I am. 'Ek sal jou wys, ek sal jou wys,' (I'll show you, I'll show you) he kept saying while thrusting into me repeatedly. I had never felt dick before" (56–7).

The rival gang member tries to dominate Sip by quashing her masculine gender expression, and enacts a patriarchal power-dynamic by asserting that Sip is feminine. This moment shows that even though the queer characters in this text feel a relative sense of social freedom to express themselves openly, there are still forces which seek to oppress them, and they still deal with homophobia and the oppression of their queer identities in various ways.

However, the characters exhibit much less conflict about remaining closeted than earlier texts demonstrate. Sip and Shay experience a mixture of public reactions when they go shopping for clothes together. Some of the store assistants look at them with desire as they presumably are seen as representing a sexual fantasy to male onlookers. However, there are also disapproving looks, especially towards Sip who tries on traditionally male clothing in the shop: "We were this female couple that danced and kissed between racks, called each other 'baby' all the time, made sexual gestures, took pictures and then left" (61). It would be hard to imagine earlier black queer characters feeling comfortable enough to publicly express their desires or to practise gender nonconforming behaviours in the way that Sip and Shay are able to. While it is significant that these are female characters in contrast to the male characters represented in earlier texts, which might link to different expectations in terms of gender and sexuality, the shifts in representation are still significant. This moment, just like others in Ngamlana's novel where the characters openly show affection in public spaces, suggests changing social attitudes that allow for more openness for queer characters. The two women are proud of their relationship, and while they recognise social unease at certain points, they grate against these restrictions and perform their attraction in ways that challenge heteropatriarchy.

Conclusion

Duiker's novel provided a powerful template of a black, queer voice wrestling with identity in the democratic South Africa, and many of the later texts echo the tensions which Tshepo raised. However, the changing representations of black queer characters show a sense of a more accepting social climate, even when there are recurring moments of homophobia and unease around black same-sex sexualities. The way that characters wrestle with the assumed conflict between their Africanness and their same-sex desires in these texts is important, as it shows a recognition of the previously ignored and suppressed queer black identities and also demonstrates how

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significant the recent representations are in confronting social values and reflecting on social change. Sip and Shay signal a very decisive shift in queer black representations, in that their sexuality is shown to be significant in the text, but causes much less conflict for them than demonstrated in earlier texts. Yet, even though they are less conflicted, face less public resistance, and are therefore less afraid of expressing themselves and demonstrating their affection, they are still victimised and vulnerable. The future of black, queer representation might see further acknowledgement of changing attitudes in South Africa. There is still much space for representations which assert the voices of black queer individuals, be they authors or characters in texts.

Notes

1. See, for example, the history of anti-apartheid activist and Black Consciousness thinker Steve Biko who was killed in detention in Pretoria in 1977, as well as the many authors who were banned during apartheid like Earnest Cole, André Brink, and others.
2. By queer, I refer to individuals belonging to sexual and gender minority groups, or those with non-normative gender expressions and same-sex sexual behaviours, desires, and identities. 'Queer literature' refers to literature depicting queer characters, as well as literature with expressions or suggestions of same-sex desire.
3. The terms 'black', 'African', 'Africanness' and 'race' are used throughout this discussion. These are widely contested terms, and they are used in this article in ways that align with South African racial categories that still persist in the post-apartheid milieu and to a large extent impact on the lives and experiences of South Africans (Seekings 2). The ways that characters in the texts define their own identities in terms of race will be prioritised in how they are framed in this discussion; the characters see themselves as black and African, and use these ideas to define their experiences. Broadly, in keeping with South African racial categories that are used in social and political contexts, the term 'black' is used in this discussion to refer to those people or characters who would identify with the racial majority in South Africa who are descended from indigenous African groups. 'Black' is often interchangeable with 'African', but the latter term, especially in relation to the idea of 'Africanness', also has links to the cultural heritage and traditional practices of black ethnic groups in the country. For more clarity on this racial category and the uses of the terms black and African in the South African context, see Seekings. The term 'identity' is used in relation to the way that characters define themselves in relation to being African, being queer, and being black.
4. The late 1980s saw the release of novels like those by Stephen Gray and films like Helen Nogueira's *Quest for Love* (1988) which represented queer realities. This was a time of great social upheaval in the country, and national states of emergency were declared in the period as the apartheid government struggled to cling to power. The period seemed to open the space for queer representations to begin to emerge. However, these examples were still incredibly rare and became more common after the major changes that came in 1990.
5. Many public queer spaces are still seen as exclusionary in terms of race. For example, the Johannesburg Pride Parade in 2012 saw the feminist group One in Nine disrupt the parade, and racist insults and even threats of violence were hurled at the mostly black protesters by the mostly white participants in the parade (Schutte). Cape Town also launched an Alternative Pride Parade after accusations that the mainstream Pride celebrations were racially exclusionary (DeBarros).

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Letterkunde as kulturele ekologie in *Die Bergengel* (Carina Stander)

Susan Meyer

Literature as cultural ecology in *Die Bergengel* (Carina Stander)

Die Bergengel (The Angel of the Mountain), with its striking nature centeredness, is characterised by poetical and lyrical use of language. This aspect is drawn into the ecocritical study of the novel in this article. Hubert Zapf's theory on literature as cultural ecology, placed within the theoretical frame of material ecocriticism, supplies the foundation for this study. An ecocritical reading of *Die Bergengel* leads to uncovering a counter-discourse in the novel aimed at disrupting prevalent anthropocentric views on nature and environmental issues. Narrative events reveal the agentic power of nature and its dynamic influence on human conditions; the novel challenges the long taken-for-granted dominant position of humankind. The poetic language effectively functions in highlighting the interconnections between different forms of life where previously we had seen separations, suggesting more thoughtful interpretations of human-nonhuman-relations underlying the practices of environmental violence and exploitation the novel speaks of. Where the play with language and words is so directly connected with the ecocritical discourse, literature's potential in bringing together the supposed separated spheres of culture (language) and nature becomes clear. ***Die Bergengel*** cogently voices the idea of the "reintegrative interdiscourse" which is central to Zapf's viewing of literature as cultural ecology. **Keywords:** Carina Stander, cultural ecology, ecocriticism, Hubert Zapf, reintegrative interdiscourse.

Inleiding

Die Bergengel, die eerste roman in Carina Stander se beplande drieluik, word beskryf as 'n subtiele vervlegting van maatskappy- en ekokritiek (Myburg). Dis 'n "enigmatiese" roman, moeilik om te kategoriseer (Steenkamp, "Bergengel"; Amid). Amid lewer positiewe kommentaar op Stander se eiesoortige interpretasie van die *Bildungsroman*—met magiese elemente, 'n deurlopende reismotief, klem op ouer-kindverhoudings en die gelaagdheid van die innerlike en uiterlike konflik van die jong protagonis. *Die Bergengel* volg op *Wildvreemd* (2011), Stander se debuutroman, en twee digbundels, *die vloedbos sal weer vlieg* (2006) en *woud van nege en negentig vlerke* (2009).

In my ekokritiese benadering tot die *Die Bergengel* is my eerste doelwit om vas te stel op watter wyse die *taalgebruik* in die roman benut word om die leser te beïnvloed ten opsigte van die kwessie van natuurbeskouing. Tweedens word die roman in sy hoedanigheid as 'n ekologiese krag ondersoek, oftewel as 'n roman wat 'n teengesprek ten opsigte van heersende mensgerigte beskouings van natuur- en omgewingsake tot stand bring.

Ek verskaf 'n kort oorsig oor die verhaalgebeure, verwys op bondige wyse na die ontvangs van die roman in literêre kringe en beweeg in die volgende afdeling na die ekokritiese uitgangspunte vir die studie. In die derde afdeling word die roman volgens die vasgestelde doelwitte geanaliseer.

Die verhaal se buitelyn sien só uit: Die dertienjarige Eron Verberger, die seun van die klokgieter-egpaar Alida en Gibor Verberger, vertrek saam met sy pa op 'n reis wat hom dwarsoor die wye Gabriëllië neem. Die geografiese ruimte van Gabriëllië word voorin die roman gekarteer en ook later breedvoerig beskryf; die leser word gelei om Gabriëllië as 'n reële ruimte te beleef. Die twaalf regione van die land bestaan uit stede, landbougebiede en vissersdorpies, bergstreke met groot ekologiese verskille, vlei-eilande, oerwoude en kusstroke, met "die magtige Reënrivier [wat] deur 'n kwart van die regione vloei" (16).

Op sy avontuurtog leer Eron die fyn kunste van klokgiet en manwees met sy pa as wyse leermeester. Dit is egter gou duidelik dat die rede vir Eron en Gibor se skielike vertrek uit hulle tuisdorp *meer* behels as 'n blote vader-en-seun-uittog. 'n Sinistere kulkunstenaar is op Eron se spoor, met moorddadige bedoelings. Boonop dreig 'n Vuurstorm om die ganse Gabriëllië te verswelg, skares mense word vermis en daar is gerugte dat die slagoffers as slawe op walvisbote gebruik word. Daar is net een persoon wat 'n Vuurstorm kan stuit: die mitiese Bergengel, 'n besonderse verkose persoon wat die betrokke amp vir twintig jaar beklee voordat die vaandel aan 'n opvolger

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oorhandig word. Daar het egter reeds dertien jaar verloop sedert daar enige teken van 'n Bergengel in Gabriëllië was. Sonder die hulp van die Bergengel is dit nou Eron se taak om die Vuurstorm te blus en sy geliefdes teen die gevare van Die Uitdooftyd te beskerm. Hy word ondersteun deur mentorfigure, sy pa se broers Rauch en Korban, en moet menige toets deurstaan en struikelblok oorkom.

Die fisiese reis gaan gepaard met 'n reis na binne, 'n reis waarop die jong held sy vrese en skuldgevoelens in die gesig moet staar en uiteindelik moet afskud. Rauch waarsku: "[J]y gaan die kuns van selfloosheid moet bemeester, die kuns om mense ver buite jou lewe so lief te kry dat jy ook hulle wil beskerm. Jy gaan 'n honderd maal van jouself moet sterf, opstaan uit die graf en nuut begin" (151).

Kritici merk op dat *Die Bergengel* op verskeie vlakke gesprek voer met Deon Meyer se roman, *Koors*, wat in dieselfde jaar verskyn het (Steenkamp, "Bergengel"; Amid). Steenkamp sien die besonderse pa-en-seunverhouding, wat ook die goue draad deur die verhaalverloop van *Koors* vorm, en die genreverbuiging wat in beide romans voorkom as sterk parallelle. In *Die Bergengel* skep elemente van onder andere spekulatiewe fiksie, allegorie, magiese realisme, die *Bildungsroman* en ekokritiek die geheel.[1] *Koors* besit eweneens elemente van spekulatiewe of bespiegelende fiksie; die jong protagonis bevind hom in 'n postapokaliptiese Suid-Afrika, 'n "sê nou maar"-situasie gebou rondom die vraag hoe om 'n samelewing weer van voor af, en uit niks, op te bou. Vanuit 'n ekokritiese perspektief beskou is die ooreenkomste duidelik; *Koors* se leser word, net soos dié van *Die Bergengel*, gekonfronteer met vrae oor die mens se reg op die aarde se hulpbronne en oor daardie fyn balans tussen die beskawing en die mens se animalistiese aard van vernielsug (Steenkamp, "Koors").

Wat literêre verdienste betref, trap Stander se roman stewige spore. Dit word bestempel as 'n betekenisvolle verruiming van die Afrikaanse letterkunde in 'n genre wat "bra beperk is", naamlik fantasie (Myburg). Steenkamp ("Bergengel") is van oordeel dat die verwewing van natuur, bo-natuur en die menslike elemente aangevul word deur "'n intelligensie en literêre diepte wat die roman verhef tot een met meer om die lyf as 'n blote fantasievlug". Amid se waardering is op dieselfde kwaliteite geskoei: "Die roman is fabelagtig mooi en volwasse, met groot diepte en insig." Dis 'n allegoriese fantasieverhaal wat as "uitgebreide metafoor" gelees kan word (Steenkamp, "Bergengel"); Stander beaam dat sy met *Die Bergengel* 'n metafoor wou skep "van 'n groeiende gees, van 'n mens se reis na jou binnelandskap—met berge en vlerke vir skuiling".

Universele temas dra by tot die literêre diepgang van die roman. Amid verwys na die universele stryd van die ontluikende bildungsheld: Eron moet homself leer ken en vertrou te midde van onsekerheid en skuldgevoelens, hy veg om uit sy pa se skadu te kom. Daarteenoor is die Verbluffende Bluffer (oftewel Velvel Azazel), met sy oëverblindery en sy verterende drang na erkenning en mag 'n geslaagde uitbeelding van die mens se donker kant, of "skaduself". Hierdie roman verwoord diep nadenke oor die "universele aard van boosheid en broosheid in die mens se strewe na vrede en vryheid" (N. Meyer).

Die Bergengel as allegorie kan ook gelees word as besinning oor die rol van die skrywer/digter as Bergengel-figuur, meen Amid. "Soos met die profetiese Bergengel, wat in geheimhouding lewe en slegs sy verskyning maak wanneer die volk hom die meeste nodig het, word dit algaande duidelik dat daar besin word oor 'n samelewing wat gekenmerk word deur hebsug, magsug, ekonomiese verval, onverdraagsaamheid, onbeholpe leiers, sinnelose geweld en gebrek aan sosiale kohesie". Die moontlikheid dat die Bergengel inderdaad as allegoriese beeld vir die digter of profeet optree, word bevestig in die verhaalgegewe waar dit oor die anonimiteit van hierdie karakter gaan: "Die boodskap is belangriker as die Bergengel, net soos wat 'n profesie groter is as 'n profeet en 'n gedig langer leef as 'n digter" (25).

Wanneer die literêre meriete van Stander se roman in besprekings daarvan ter sprake kom, word telkens teruggekeer na die element van fantasie (Myburg; N. Meyer) en die roman se bydrae tot "die afgeskeepte fantasiegenre" (Steenkamp, "Bergengel"). Die term "wêreldbou" (*world building*) word dikwels in fantasie en wetenskapfiksie gebruik in verband met die skep van fiktiewe wêrelde.[2] Dié konsep verskil van milieubeelding in die sin dat die konstrueerder nie bloot die agtergrond waarteen 'n verhaal afspeel, skets nie, maar met toewyding en in fyn besonderhede 'n verbeelde wêreld skep wat beskik oor sy eie geografie, geskiedenis, kultuurgebruike, en so meer (Steenkamp, "Bergengel"). Steenkamp beskou die aandag aan die besonderhede van die natuurlike omgewing in *Die Bergengel* as die opvallendste aspek in die proses van wêreldbou: "Die skrywer skryf lewe in die geografie van die vasteland, sy uiteenlopende ekosisteme en groot verskeidenheid plant- en dierelewe in".

In die gekonstrueerde wêreld van Gabriëllië word inderdaad talle geografiese besonderhede vir elke regio betrek: weerstelsels, plantegroei, dierelewe, landvorms en ander natuurverskynsels. Daar is die seelewe van die kusdorp Skittering, die voëllewe van die waterland Eziovlei, die vulkaanklipstrande en vlambome van die tropiese

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Eiland van Ure. Die parallelle werklikheid wat hier geskep word, word uitgebeeld met besondere aandag aan die mens-omgewing-interaksie. Die naamgewing in die roman verraai reeds veel hieroor. Die meeste inwoners in die Tzurregio het vanne waarin die noue verbintenis met die natuuromgewing blyk: Storm, Moerasser, Rietbos en Wolker. Ook 'n aantal "boomryke familiename" het in die streek ontstaan, soos Vertakker, Agterstam en Peulenaar (16). 'n Algemene familienaam in hierdie streek, Verberger, het sy ontstaan te danke aan die berge wat in Tzurse volksverhale en -musiek "in verhouding gestaan het met die hemelse, aardse en onderaardse" (16). Alida Verberger, eens Alida Skemersee, kom uit 'n familie wat die Vinke genoem is, aangesien dié familie sulke voortreflike wewers was (17).

Die Bergengel vra dus uit die staanspoor om gelees en geïnterpreteer te word deur die lens van die ekokritiek, oftewel met die doel om die verhouding en interaksie tussen die mens en sy omgewing sentraal te plaas in die ontrafeling van die verhaal en sy betekenis.

Naas die sterk natuurgerigte aard van die roman word die taal- en woordgebruik beskou as 'n uitstaande kwaliteit. "Stander se talent as digter is onmiskenbaar in die liriese prosa van *Die Bergengel*", beweer Steenkamp ("Bergengel"). "*Die Bergengel* is meer as net 'n roman," verklaar Amid, "dit is 'n kunswerk wat die woord tot heiligdom verhef." Hierdie spesifieke aspek van die roman sal ook in die ekokritiese bestudering daarvan betrek word. Die doel daarmee word in die volgende afdeling, saam met die teoretiese vertrekpunte vir die studie en 'n fermer belyning van die doelwitte daarvan, verantwoord en gemotiveer.

Ekokritiese uitgangspunte vir die studie

Die ekokritiek is, soos reeds gesê, die voor die hand liggende teoretiese raamwerk waarop die ontleding van die roman geskoei kan word; die ekokritiek spits hom daarop toe om letterkunde (en ander kultuurprodukte) te ondersoek aan die hand van die wyse waarop dit die verhouding tussen die mens en al die organismes van die natuurlike wêreld wat hom omring, uitdruk. Die tweede sin in die roman, met die beskrywing van Gabriëllië as 'n wêreld "waar lokomotiewe nog nie tonnels deur die berge oopgefluit het of rokerige longe oor die valleie en weivelde uitgehoes het nie" (13), vra reeds dat die ekokritiek in die ondersoek betrek sal word en bring ook Lawrence Buell se definisie daarvan ter sprake. Buell (11), een van die baanbrekers vir die ekokritiek, definieer hierdie dissipline as die bestudering van die verhouding tussen letterkunde en omgewing wat onderneem word in 'n gesindheid van toewyding aan omgewingskundige praktyke of -gebruike. Buell, Heise en Thornber beklemtoon, in hulle meer volledige definisie van die ekokritiek, die etiese element daarvan:

> Ecocriticism is a cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature and other creative media in a spirit of environmental concern not limited to any one method or commitment. Ecocriticism begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study thereof—by virtue of their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern—can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems [...]. Ecocriticism holds that environmental phenomena must be comprehended, and that today's burgeoning array of environmental concerns must be addressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. (Buell, Heise en Thornber 418)

Gelees deur die lens van die ekokritiek, skuif 'n spesifieke aspek van *Die Bergengel* op die voorgrond: die roman ondersoek die verhouding tussen tegnologiese vooruitgang, hebsug, magsug en die verwoestende impak hiervan op die natuurlike omgewing. Steenkamp ("Bergengel") vat hierdie kwessies op kernagtige wyse raak:

> Die pre-industriële Gabriëllië staan op die drumpel van 'n industriële revolusie. Nuut-aangelegde treinspore deurkruis die voorheen ongerepte landskap en lei tot die migrasie van velddiere (41); 'n korrupte bewind stook met geweld die vure van 'vooruitgang'. Die heersende regiohoofde, in sameswering met die ryk en magtige walvismagnate, loods 'n veldtog om die selfonderhoudende agrariese gemeenskappe van Gabriëllië stelselmatig uit te wis en te vervang met onvolhoubare industrie ter ondersteuning van die winsgewende walvisjagbedryf."

Die inwoners van Gabriëllië, verblind deur wanhoop en die belofte van goudwater (die walvistraan wat hulle vasteland skynbaar tot 'n wêreldmag sal verhef), sien die verwoesting as 'n uitkoms, "'n skoonbrand, 'n nuutbegin" (*Bergengel* 163). Eron luister met ontsteltenis hoe 'n houtkapper wat hy in Slagtingstrand raakloop die Vuurstorm wat die stad Barbel in puin gelê het, afmaak as "hoop vir die land":

> Die nuwe Regiohoof, die vrygewige Strasius, [het] die versukkeldes uit hulle ou krotjies verwyder, die bourommel verbrand en sy stad herbou tot iets nuttigs. Fabrieke en goeie geriewe, daardie klas van ding—alles gebou met die fortuine van die walvishandel wat nou die streek instroom. Veral aan die kus waar die walvisbote aandoen is daar baie bouwerk

aan die gang. Van die ander Regiohoofde is glo ook deel van die plan om van Gabriëllië 'n wêreldmag te maak. (132)

Aangesien ekokritiek beskou word as 'n sambreelterm vir 'n hele spektrum van literêr-teoretiese benaderings met 'n "earth centred approach" ten opsigte van die bestudering van die menslike en die niemenslike (Childs en Fowler 65), is die kwessie van 'n spesifieke en gepaste teoretiese grondslag van besondere belang in 'n ekokritiese studie. 'n Punt van kritiek wat in die ontstaansjare van die ekokritiek dikwels geopper is, is die gebrek aan 'n behoorlike metodologie en teoretiese basis (Gifford 15), terwyl die interdissiplinêre aard van ekokritiek as die belangriker aspek voorgehou is. Sedert die middel 1990's word daar egter gereeld ekokritiese navorsing met 'n sterk teoretiese basis gepubliseer as bewys dat die ekokritiek wel toenemend gesofistikeerd vertoon (Fiedorczuk 11).

Hubert Zapf se boek *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts* (2016) is een van die onlangse publikasies met groot waarde vir die ekokritikus wat na teoreties gefundeerde werkwyses soek. Die beskouing van letterkunde as kulturele ekologie bied, volgens Salovaara (222), 'n sinvolle teoretiese instrument en 'n stewige metodologiese raamwerk in die ekokritiese bestudering van tekste.

Zapf (*Literature* 3) definieer kulturele ekologie op bondige wyse as die bestudering van en teorievorming oor die interaksie en lewende onderlinge verband tussen kultuur en natuur. Daar word gefokus op die funksie van letterkunde as ekologiese beginsel of energie binne die groter sisteem van kulturele diskoerse (27). Die sogenaamde "ekologiese" funksie van letterkunde manifesteer op verskeie wyses. Letterkunde is 'n gebied van voortdurende, kreatiewe vernuwing van taal, persepsies, kommunikasie en verbeelding. Hierdie herstrukturerende en selforganiserende beginsels van letterkunde herinner Zapf aan die ekologiese prosesse met behulp waarvan alle lewe op selforganiserende wyse voortbestaan ("The state of ecocriticism and the function of literature as cultural ecology" 56). Een van die wyses waarop die ekologiese funksie van letterkunde manifesteer, lê in die beskouing van letterkunde as klankbord vir verskuilde probleme, tekorte en wanbalanse in die groter kulturele werklikheid (Zapf, "State" 56). In Amid se bespreking van *Die Bergengel* word die vinger netjies op hierdie funksie van die roman gelê waar verwys word na die besinning oor 'n samelewing "gekenmerk deur hebsug, magsug, ekonomiese verval, onverdraagsaamheid, onbeholpe leiers, sinnelose geweld en gebrek aan sosiale kohesie".

Tweedens behels die ekologiese funksie van letterkunde dat dit help met die afbreek van geslote denkpatrone onderliggend aan dogmatiese wêreldbeskouings en om eksklusiewe aansprake op die waarheid te vervang met 'n verskeidenheid van perspektiewe en veelvuldige interpretasiemoontlikhede (Zapf, "State" 56). Die beskouing van letterkunde as ekologiese krag in die groter kultuursisteem lei tot die beklemtoning van die potensiaal daarvan om bepaalde werklikheidsaspekte wat deur konvensionele denke uitgesluit is van die kulturele werklikheidsgeheel daarmee te herenig. Letterkunde sou dan deel wees van wat Zapf ("State" 64) die diskoers oor herintegrasie (*reintegrative interdiscourse*) noem. Hy illustreer die konsep van die "geskeide werklikheid" met verwysing na voorbeelde van die verskillende samelewingsfere wat ontstaan deur ekonomiese differensiasie, die openbare en die private rolle van die self, die bewuste en die onbewuste en ook—grondliggend aan verskeie manifesteringsvorms van hierdie skeidingsbeginsel—kultuur en natuur (64–5).

In *Die Bergengel* mag die aanwending van taal, as deel van die literêre skeppingsproses en ook van kulturele aktiwiteit, 'n bydrae lewer om dogmatiese natuurbeskouings en eksklusief menslike aansprake op eienaarskap van die natuurlike omgewing af te breek. Dus is die eerste doel van hierdie artikel, soos reeds genoem, om die aard van die taalgebruik, die affektiewe trefkrag daarvan en die funksie van die taalspel spesifiek ten opsigte van mens- en natuurbeelding te ondersoek. Met ander woorde, die funksie van taalaanwending, uit die sfeer van kulturele aktiwiteit, word binne konteks van die ekokritiese diskoers in hierdie roman beskou. Die vraag wat as vertrekpunt dien, is: Op watter wyse dien *taalgebruik* die diskoers oor omgewingskwessies deur die beïnvloeding ten opsigte van natuurbeskouings? Oftewel: Hoe realiseer die integrering van die konvensioneel geskeide kultuur- en natuurwêrelde in hierdie roman, en word *Die Bergengel* deel van wat Zapf die diskoers oor herintegrasie noem?

Ek het ook reeds verwys na die tweede doel vir hierdie studie, naamlik om uit die denkraamwerk van letterkunde as kulturele ekologie nog 'n teoretiese beginsel te identifiseer en te benut in die ontleding van *Die Bergengel*. Daar word gefokus op die roman as 'n ekologiese krag—"ecological force" (Zapf, *Literature* 27)—die tipe letterkunde wat oor die potensiaal beskik om téengesprekke tot stand te bring, "challenging current unsustainable societal and economic practices, operating as a medium of radical civilizational critique" (Zapf, *Literature* 28). Die aard van dié teengesprek in *Die Bergengel* word ondersoek, die aandag word toegespits op die wyse waarop 'n koersverandering téén vaste denkpatrone in oopgeskryf word; hoedat antroposentriese beskouings—en daarmee saam onvolhoubare ekonomiese praktyke—uitgedaag word.

Die teoretiese raamwerk waarop Zapf die sterkste steun, is dié van die materiële ekokritiek en die insigte van Jane Bennett, Serenella Iovino en Serpil Oppermann aangaande niemenslike liggaamlikheid en magte van beïnvloeding.[3] Die nuwe materialisme is 'n teoretiese terrein wat verskeie dissiplines dien, onder andere dié van die natuurwetenskappe, filosofie en literatuurteorie en -kritiek, en waarbinne herbesinning plaasvind oor die materialiteit waaruit ons liggame en die natuurlike wêreld gemaak is.[3] Binne die teoretiese raamwerk van die nuwe materialisme word natuurelemente nie as passiewe sosiale konstruksies beskou nie, maar eerder as vorms van bemiddelende krag wat interaksie met en verandering of beïnvloeding van ander elemente teweegbring, ook van die mens (Alaimo en Hekman 7). Oppermann ("Feminist ecocriticism: the new ecofeminist settlement" 72) stel dit só:

> The new materialists perceive nature as an active, signifying force; an agent in its own terms […]. Being thus liberated from its previous conceptualizations as a blank, silent resource for the exploits of culture […] nature is discussed as a significant participatory force field in the entanglement of meaning and matter.

Die idee dat materie 'n mag van beïnvloeding ("agentic power") uitoefen, ook oor die mens, lei tot Bennett (xvi) se gevolgtrekking dat menslike magte en beïnvloedingsvermoë weerklank vind in dié van niemenslike bestaansvorme, sodat daar 'n teenvoeter bestaan vir die antroposentriese idee dat die mens in beheer van die wêreld is. By die begrippe *materie* en *materialiteit* word menslike en niemenslike liggaamlikheid ingesluit, en lewende sowel as nielewende stowwe, substansies of kragte (Oppermann, "Feminist ecocriticism" 71). Hierdie konsepte is dus nie geskoei op die eng dualisme van lewend/nielewend, menslik/niemenslik nie. Coole en Frost (9) vat die sleutelinsigte van die nuwe materialisme soos volg saam:

> Conceiving matter no longer as simply passive or inert, disturbs the conventional idea that agents are exclusively human and possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature. Instead, the human species is being relocated within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain agentic capacities.

In noue aansluiting by bogenoemde gedagtes kan die teorieë van die objekgeoriënteerde ontologie ("object oriented ontology") gelees word, spesifiek betreffende die ommekering van aanvaarde subjek- en objekrolle en -posisies.[4] Morton (165) verduidelik die objekgeoriënteerde ontologie se beskouing dat die objek 'n sentrale posisie kry; die stel van die mens (subjek) se bestaan bó die van niemenslike objekte word verwerp. Met hierdie standpunt word antroposentrisme sterk teengestaan en word direkte skakeling met die teorieë van die nuwe materialisme duidelik.

In die volgende afdeling word die taalgebruik in *Die Bergengel* onder die soeklig geplaas en gefokus op die rol van taal, as kultuurmedium, in die uithef van die natuur en omgewingskwessies. Die doel is om vas te stel op watter wyse die taal- en woordspel in diens van die diskoers oor natuur-/omgewingskwessies staan deur die bydrae daarvan tot die uitdaag van eksklusief menslike aansprake op eienaarskap van die natuurlike omgewing. Hieruit sal die hereniging van die apart gewaande wêrelde van die woord (kultuur) en die natuur blyk, en sal die roman se bydrae tot die diskoers oor herintegrasie duidelik word.

Die Bergengel **as ekologiese krag: nuwe denke oor mens en natuur**

Die taalgebruik in *Die Bergengel* word gekenmerk deur die meesleurende poëtiese aard daarvan. 'n Eerste opvallende aspek is dat natuurtaal en poëtiese natuurbeelde in die uitbeelding van mense gebruik word. Alida Verberger se swangerskap bring iets dromerigs uit haar te voorskyn, "iets herfserigs" (18) Eron is 'n seuntjie met 'n "eekhoringgesiggie" en donker rugdonsies (19); hy het "vuurvliegieklein" pinkienaels en "wangkuiltjies die vorm van waterdruppels" (20).

Eron se waarnemings word dikwels poëties getint deur beeldspraak swaar belaai met metaforiek uit die natuurwêreld. Die reis wat hy saam met sy vader onderneem, neem hulle bo-oor verysde berge. 'n Yspunt teen 'n berghelling waaraan Eron vashou, breek af en hy vrees hy gaan val, maar skielik staan Gibor agter hom om hulp te bied, "'n vaste dop oor 'n skilpad" (61). Gibor druk sy seun se gesig teen sy bors vas voordat hulle saam aanskuif, "sy pa 'n skulp rondom hom" (62). Die Gubbrivier wat die stad Barbel omarm, se brug is gebou met gebuigde latte, "tonnelagtig, soos die ribbekas van 'n walvis" (69).

Eron neem dikwels 'n natuurelement waar in die mense wat hy op sy uitgebreide reis teëkom: kleuters hang "soos vlermuisies" aan 'n ma se sye (70), 'n groep meisies is "lawwe, luidrugtige mossies" (73) en daar word na 'n paar ou vroue langs die rivier buite Barbel verwys as "dié ry knopperige, klamp sampioene wat op 'n omgevalle

boomstomp gesit het" (77). Op hierdie moeilike tog vind hy dikwels krag in die beeld van sy moeder; hy herroep haar gestalte soos sy aangestap gekom het op die dag van hulle vertrek, "haar regop nek, 'n trotse kraanvoël" (100).

Deur die beskrywing van die natuurelement wat Eron in mense vind en deur die poëtiese beelde wat deur sy waarneming daarvan opgetower word, word 'n kwessie uitgehef wat sentraal staan in die posthumanistiese denke wat die materiële ekokritiek onderlê. Dit behels die herbesinning oor die konsep wat Wolfe (*Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of the "Outside"* 42) die "human *tout court*" noem, oftewel "rethinking the conceptual frameworks within which we have defined human subjectivity, agency, identity and self, acknowledging the permeable boundaries of species in the natural-cultural continuum, and recognizing the profound interconnections between different forms of life in the composite world where previously we had seen separations." Wanneer die waarneming en beskrywing van die menslike deurtrek is van verwysings na niemenslike eienskappe, soos in *Die Bergengel* gebeur, word 'n belangrike doelwit in posthumanistiese denke bereik, naamlik die ongeldigverklaring van die standpunt van menslike uitsonderlikheid.

Hiermee word die weg gebaan vir die tersydestelling van dogmatiese idees oor die mens-natuurdigotomie en word 'n denksfeer betree waar dit sin maak om Wolfe se uitdrukking "humans and other animals" te gebruik, soos in die boek *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* gebeur. Eron beland in Barbel byna-byna onder die invloed van Bluffer, die kulkunstenaar, en probeer desperaat wegkom—"hy was 'n rot wat wou vlug voor 'n glimmende reptiel" (*Bergengel* 83). Ná 'n woeste vlugtog deur die brandende stad duik hy in die rivier en probeer sy roetbesmeerde lyf was, "sy vingers soos glippende visse" oor sy oksels en skouers. In die wyse waarop Eron homself waarneem, naamlik in terme van die niemenslike, word veel sigbaar van die opvatting van die mens wat Wolfe (*Before the Law* 34) huldig, naamlik "joined together, in a dynamic co-evolutionary spiral with other biological species with whom we share the planet". Die metaforiese taalgebruik in hierdie roman dien 'n beskouing van die mens wat nie meer op die eng dualisme van menslik/niemenslik berus nie; die poëtiese beelding lig hierdie beskouing uit en brand dit skerp in die leser se bewussyn vas. Selfs die mens se innerlike wêreld word verbeeld in terme van 'n verknooptheid met die natuur: Eron ontdek "dat skuld 'n kragtige stroom is wat klippe kan verteer" (*Bergengel* 88); kwelvrae klou "soos 'n wurgslang om sy keel" (89).

Terwyl bepaalde idees oor die gebruikswaarde van en menslike gesag oor die natuur sterk in sekere verhaalgebeure teenwoordig is, dien die liriese aard van die prosa in die roman kragtig ter bewusmaking van téénvrae betreffende mensgesentreerde houdings en natuurbeskouings. Deur die rykheid van die taal word eer aan die natuur gebring, die intrinsieke waarde daarvan word erken en die diversiteit daarvan besing. Eron se verwondering oor die natuur, reeds as 'n kind, en sy sintuiglike verering word duidelik juis in die poëtiese terme waarmee dit verwoord word: "Hy het paddavissies dopgehou wat uit hul jellieomhulsels glip en wriemel in die stroom agter die huis waar sy blaarbote dryf; […] deur die biesies waar die blougroen naaldekokers flits tot waar die stroom uitmond en sy blaarbote ingesluk is deur die koue oseaan" (21). Die grootste respek blyk ook uit Gibor se poëtiese beskouing van natuurskepping versus menslike skepping: "Geboue is versteende gedagtes. Berge is heiligdomme wat aanhou groei" (59).

Op sekere punte op sy reis word Eron deur uitputting en vrae oor die sin van hierdie oorweldigende onderneming oorval. Hy vind perspektief en emosionele ewewig terug in die versekering van 'n groter plan van orde en betekenis rondom hom:

> 'n Rooiborsie wat onder 'n brug van boomwortels vlieg: onwerklik rooi, asof sy inwendig bloei. […] Die spore van 'n wildsbok wat 'n roetekaart in die riviersand teken—die varser spore van 'n vos kort op sy hakke. In die verte het 'n lammervanger met gepunte vlerke op 'n krans afgepyl, gevolg deur 'n jammerlike gekerm. Die pieke […] heidepers. (89)

Die gerusstellende effek van hierdie natuurtekens op Eron se gemoed word uitgehef deur die liriek en die rykheid van die taal. Op 'n jeugdige ouderdom het beelde uit die natuur reeds vir Eron lesse ingehou, byvoorbeeld dat 'n dier se spoor sy angs kan verraai (59). Die impak wat hierdie beelde op sy jong gemoed gehad het, word onderstreep deur beeldryke taal wanneer Eron sulke lesse herroep. "'Spore is die stemme van diere,' het Gibor gesê. 'Elke spoor vertel 'n storie. 'n Mens moet jou eie voetspoor ken.'" (60)

Hierdie verwysings na die natuurkennis en ook die diep respek wat Gibor aan Eron oordra, versterk die vrae wat die mens se seggingskrag oor die natuurlike omgewing uitdaag. Die idee van menslike besitreg word saam met dié van menslike uitsonderlikheid bevraagteken.

Die gebeure in *Die Bergengel* vloei voort uit tegnologiese vooruitgang in Gabriellië en word gedryf deur menslike hebsug en magsug. Die roman wentel, op eerste verhaalvlak, om die gewetenlose uitbuiting van die visbedryf,

winsbejag wat berus op die uitbuiting van hulpbronne, en om natuuruitwissing ter wille van onvolhoubare industrieë, alles in die naam van "vooruitgang". Op 'n ander vlak word daar egter 'n helder teengesprek op die been gebring—een wat die sienings onderliggend aan hierdie praktyke beveg en wat verband hou met die ontkieming van alternatiewe persepsies oor die plek van die mens in die omgewing. In ryk, poëtiese taal word die stryd aangepak ter afdwing van die aandag aan die deurdringbare grense tussen spesies in die menslike-niemenslike kontinuum en aan die erkenning van die diepgaande onderlinge verbondenheid tussen verskillende vorms van lewe in die saamgestelde bestaansgeheel. In *Die Bergengel* wil die gebeure op die primêre verhaalvlak die magsmisbruik van die mens uitspel; die taal wil teenstand bied daartéén—om te praat, met besondere estetiese krag, oor die besondersheid, broosheid en onvervangbaarheid van die natuur.

Zapf se beskouing van letterkunde as kulturele ekologie, oftewel vernuwende krag, word relevant en taal word hier funksioneel betrek. Die ekologiese funksie van letterkunde word duidelik wanneer die moontlikhede van die affektiewe reaksie van die leser op die taalgebruik in *Die Bergengel* verreken word. Zapf (*Literature* 32) verduidelik, omtrent die krag van die gevoelskomponent in die estetiese teks:

> The particular aesthetic force of an Emily Dickinson poem can awaken in the reader an affective response that initiates intellectual investigations into the validity of long taken-for-granted "culture-nature binaries". […] Understanding the coexistence of humanity with the nonhuman world as a "mutual relationship" instead of seeing the nonhuman merely in 'utilitarian' ways is one particular function of sustainable texts.

Taal en die besondere affektiewe funksie daarvan staan sentraal in die uithef van die deesdae bykans vergete belang van die natuur in *Die Bergengel*. Die mens word, by wyse van kragtige beeldspraak, herinner aan die dwaasheid van omgewingsverwoesting, aan die noodsaak om "jou eie voetspoor (te) ken" (87) en om dáárdie impak te oordink.

Nie slegs op taalvlak nie, maar ook op inhoudsvlak word die ekologiese krag van die roman duidelik in die oopdwing van nuwe denkpatrone oor mens en natuur. Die teengesprek, wat as duidelike beskawingskritiek gemik is teen onvolhoubare samelewings- en ekonomiese praktyke, vind op die tweede verhaalvlak plaas en is geskoei op die gegewe van die verweefde lot van die mens en die niemenslike in die uitbuiting daarvan. Die bloederige handel van die walvistraanbaronne het nie net 'n effek op die walvisbevolking nie, maar eis ook menslike slagoffers in die vorm van slawe, diegene wat ontvoer word tydens Vuurstorms om die walvisskepe te beman (94).

Die verweefdheid van menslike en niemenslike eienskappe in die uitbeelding van menslike karakters, waarop tevore reeds gewys is, word verder versterk deur die parallel wat tussen menslike en niemenslike kinders getrek word. Alida offer 'n handgemaakte poppie wat haar doodgebore dogtertjie verteenwoordig aan die see en "toe sy die serp oopvou, het die kind verander in 'n bloupers seester wat stadig, stadig tuimelswem, al dieper in die baarmoeder van die oseaan" (18). Tydens Eron se besoek aan die Eiland van die Ure ontmoet hy Olga, wat desperaat probeer om 'n gestrande walviskalf veilig terug aan die see en sy moeder te besorg. Olga is die ma van die "verlore seun" en kulkunstenaar, Velvel Azazel, en van 'n dogter met wie sy kontak verloor het. Haar worsteling met die walviskalf word gedryf deur die voorspelling dat "sy haar seun aan die wêreld gaan afstaan, maar haar dogter sal terugvind as sy 'n ander ma help om haar verlore kind te vind" (186). Hierdie belofte—'n kind in ruil vir 'n kind—dui op 'n verweefdheid, 'n komplekse verhouding tussen die mens en sy natuurlike omgewing.

Die materiële ekokritiek en spesifiek die idee van materie—"human and nonhuman bodies, and organic and inorganic substance and forces"—as 'n aktiewe krag (Oppermann, "Feminist ecocriticism" 71), bring insig in die mens-natuurverhoudings wat in *Die Bergengel* uitgebeeld word. Hier is natuurelemente veel meer as 'n passiewe agtergrond vir die menslike drama. Daar word gereeld iets duidelik van die beskouing omtrent die interaktiewe en handelende aard van die natuur, en spesifiek as 'n krag van beïnvloeding van ander elemente, ook van die mens (Alaimo en Hekman 7).

Gibor word in sy karakter, identiteit en in die daaglikse omgang met sy ambag deur die natuur beïnvloed. Die berge waardeur Gabriellië ingeperk word en die impak daarvan op die inwoners se lewens, is nie slegs teenwoordig in Gibor se van (Verberger) nie. Hierdie berge is ook 'n vaste deel van sy verwysingsraamwerk en vind weerklank in die krag van sy persoonlikheid. "Jou pa sou oor 'n duisend berge reis om jou lewe te spaar", vertel Eron se ma vir hom (93).

Gibor word beskryf as 'n aardse mens met 'n skaapveljas en "duifgrys hare" (90), gevolg deur "die reuk van metaal, hout en vuur" (23). Wanneer Gibor hout op die vuur gooi, sien Eron saam met hom hoe die reuk en die kleur van die vlamme met elke houtsoort verander. Gibor glo dat kennis van hout en die wyer natuur jou in die kader van die superieure plaas. "As jy die taal van hout verstaan, sal jy ook […] die taal van engele verstaan" (40).

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Hy wys sy seun om rigting te vind uit die skadukant van die maan en die posisie van die sterre; wanneer hy oor dié dinge praat, is sy stem vol ontsag, "asof dit 'n aandgebed is" (41).

Gibor het geen twyfel dat die natuur met die mens kommunikeer nie. Eron wil by geleentheid weet of ape kan praat; Gibor antwoord sonder huiwering: "Jou ma het jou mos geleer dat alles kan praat, Eron, selfs klippe" (47). Eron se vraag is gemotiveer deur 'n insident op 'n vismark, waar iemand 'n aap aan 'n tou gehad het, 'n kermende bondel. Hier het Eron iets van 'n intieme vervlegting van die menslike en dierlike bestaan beleef, dit was asof sy eie diepste aard aan hom bekend geword het in die oomblikke toe hy sy veronderstelde superieure posisie ontruim en op die vlak van die dier gekom het. "Ek het myself in die oë van die groter aap gesien, Pa. Ek was bang vir myself, omdat ek skielik vir niks bang was nie" (48).

Dis Gibor se natuurgesentreerde ingesteldheid wat 'n goeie klokmaker van hom maak. Hy het fyn insig in die wyse waarop die klank van die klok bepaal word deur die soort metaal waarvan dit gemaak is, want: "Elke metaal praat 'n eie taal" (54). Sy ambag as klokmaker bring hom intiem in kontak met 'n hele aantal natuurelemente, as't ware luisterend na die voorskrif van elke element vir daardie "regte toonhoogte en timbre" (52). Vir elke gietstuk word 'n buiteklok uit leemklip gemaak en met 'n mengsel van strooi en perdemis bedek om droog te raak. 'n Kleibeeld word gevorm volgens die binnekant van die klok wat gegiet moet word en nadat die son dit gedroog het, word byewas oor die klok gegiet en 'n laag klei aan die buitekant gesmeer. Holtes word aan die rante geboor waaruit die warm byewas kan smelt wanneer dit in die vuurput is. Nadat die klok uit die vuurput herwin is, word vloeiwarm metaal in die opening tussen die kleilae gegiet.

Die wyse waarop Gibor die natuurelemente hanteer en vereer waarmee hy op kreatiewe vlak besig is, soos dit in die roman beskryf word (44, 52), skep die indruk dat die nielewende se stem dié van die mens oorheers. Hierdie gedagte sluit aan by een van die kernbeginsels wat die materiële ekokritiek uit die denkwêreld van die objek-georiënteerde ontologie benut, naamlik die opheffing van die mens (subjek) se sentrale posisie, ter beklemtoning van 'n verbintenis van respek met die niemenslike wat ontdaan is van die rol as objek (Morton 165).

Die klokmaker in *Die Bergengel* beleef dat die interaktiewe betrokkenheid van die natuur en die aard van die gawes daarvan, konkreet waarneembaar in terme van die beskikbaarheid en gehalte van die natuurprodukte, die gehalte van klok as eindproduk bepaal. Dit is een van die belangrikste lesse omtrent die ambag wat Eron by sy pa leer. Hy word ook uiteindelik beloon met 'n eerste, voltooide klok uit 'n proses waartydens stap vir stap, en op eerbiedige wyse, met natuurgawes omgegaan is. Hierdie eerste klok is vir Eron meer van 'n natuurproduk as die produk van sy eie hande: "O, die ekstase toe sy heel eerste klok soos 'n ryp, swart saad tussen die gebreekte doppe lê!" (53)

Die ommekeer van die konvensionele subjek-objekverhouding tydens mens-natuurinteraksie is 'n belangrike element in die teengesprek wat in die roman gevoer word ter bevraagtekening van die mens se sogenaamd superieure seggenskap oor die benutting van die gawes van die natuur. Dit herinner ons aan die perspektief op die mens wat Oppermann ("From Material to Posthuman Ecocriticism: Hybridity, Stories, Natures" 276) vanuit posthumanistiese konteks bied: "The shift away from the conjectural singularity of the human agency is not a wholesale rejection of humanism (or the human), but a critical reframing aimed to dissolve the accompanying impulse of exploiting the coexisting sphere of the nonhuman."

'n Lewensles met behulp waarvan Gibor vir Eron toerus en weerbaar maak vir die oomblik wanneer hyself nie meer as gids vir sy seun kan optree nie—soos inderdaad op die reis gebeur—is die volgende: "Jy moet die lewe met jou eie verstand en al honderd jou sintuie ontdek" (19). Met hierdie aanmoediging om sintuiglik te leef, open hy sy seun se oë vir die invloed en gesag waarmee die natuur die mens se lewe in sekere situasies rig. Wanneer Eron van sy pa geskei word in die brandende stad Barbel, skep die rivierdelta vir hom 'n alternatiewe roete terug huis toe, weg van die bekende handelspaaie, om sy agtervolger vry te spring. Hy het die rivierpad na die Tzur-regio waar sy tuisdorp is, nog nooit gevolg nie; dié "waterpad" word egter 'n aktiewe rolspeler wat uitkoms bied uit lewensgevaar. Die delta word 'n stem wat vir Eron lei: "Elke keer voordat hy 'n vertakking van die delta moes neem, moes hy eers stilstaan en die natuur lees soos sy pa hom geleer het. Kyk na die posisie van die son. Voel die westewind vanaf die see […]. Ruik die lug […], die landskap met varings en mos wat aan die skadukante van die bome groei. Kyk, kyk, kyk" (88).

Die rol van aktiewe, kragtige beïnvloeding wat hier aan die landskap toegeken word, strook met die nuwe materialisme se uitgangspunt dat die nielewende 'n mag van beïnvloeding uitoefen, ook oor die sfeer van menslike bestaan. 'n Teenvoeter word dus gebied vir die antroposentriese idee dat die mens in beheer van sy wêreld is. Eron steun dikwels en op verskeie wyses op die rigtingwysers wat die natuur bied en wat hy interpreteer as

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boodskappe van waarskuwing of gerusstelling. Die "weerlose nes" van 'n lyster en die spore van 'n vos op die hakke van 'n wildsbok maak hom akuut bewus van sy eie kwesbaarheid, hulle is "tekens" en "voorbodes van gevaar" (88). Met voete "kloppend van pyn" en in die grootste eensaamheid steier hy soms voort, ondersteun deur slegs die herinnering aan die versorging deur die natuur, "die smaak van bessies en veldkruie, 'n hele somer lank" (88). Ná 'n vreesaanjaende storm tydens die skeepvaart onderweg na sy pa se broer, Korban, put Eron hoop uit "die wit vredesvlag" van 'n meeu bokant die maste", die eerste seemeeu in ses dae (103).

Deur die uitbeelding van hierdie storm word korte mette gemaak van die illusie van die mens se gesag oor niemenslike en nielewende dinge. Die matrose het "verwoed probeer om die seile in te bind en beheer te neem oor wind en weer, maar dit het gelyk of hulle 'n ondier onder 'n laken wou vastem" (103). Met dieselfde onbetwiste gesag as waarmee die storm losgebreek het, "so onverwags as wat dit gekom het", het die storm "bo hulle koppe verbygewaai" (103).

Korban, die oom wat op die verdere reis as mentor vir Eron optree, leef asof volgens volle insig omtrent die dinamiese en handelende aard van die materiële magte en invloede rondom die mens. Met die doel om die seun voor te berei op die res van sy reis, stel hy hom bloot aan die biografieë van die sestiende-eeuse ontdekkingsreisiger en botanis Clover. Dis boeke waarin Eron wêrelddele vind "waar nuwe biosfere ontdek is", hy leer omtrent voëlspesies en woestyne, kosmologie en fisika (120). Deur hierdie blootstelling aan teoretiese aspekte omtrent die natuurwêreld, en deur praktiese bewyse van die effek en invloed van materie uit die sfeer van die niemenslike, word Eron gelei om die natuur te respekteer as 'n aktiewe rolspeler in sy omstandighede.

Bogenoemde idee word baie sterk uitgebou in die roman: die natuur, in samewerking met die bo-natuur, het soms 'n ingrypende effek op die menslike gebeure. Die natuur kan byvoorbeeld in weerwraak op mense se verwoesting en hebsug reageer. So heers daar 'n "onvoorspelbare oorlog tussen walvisjagter en wildernis" op Die Eiland van die Ure, waar walvisskepe halfjaarliks aandoen om voorrade aan te vul:

> Soms, so het Clover in sy opskrywings beweer, het die natuur geantwoord met wraakaanvalle. Onder die walvisbote het riviere van vuur gevloei en uitgebreek in verwoede vlamme. Wanneer puinsteen uit die see spat, was die hawe en huise en alles daarrondom binne 'n oogwink 'n blink begraafplaas. Hoe dikwels dit gebeur, kon niemand voorspel nie. Dalk in hierdie leeftyd, dalk eers in die leeftyd van die tiende nageslag. (174)

Op Eziovlei neem Eron die samevloeiing van die ritmes van mens en natuur waar. Ná weke van winterstorms is die strand platgevee en die seewater stroom land-in. Die water borrel al hewiger op in die leivore en damme, sodat die stroompies spoedig in beweging kom en in riviere verander. Een oggend, toe Eron by die soldervenster uitkyk, is Korban se tuin heeltemal onder water, die huismeisies gryp wasgoed bymekaar op die oewer en die vissers trek hulle nette en skuite inderhaas uit om te verhoed dat dit wegspoel. Nou neem voëls die gebied in besit: "Vanaf die mere van Oborto het die swanevolk gekom, oor land en see […], die horisonlyn was gloeiend terwyl dié welberese voëls met vlerke soos die seile van skepe tussen die geraamtetakke van Korban se boord neergestryk het" (124).

Swaanpare herbou hulle neste en talle voëlspesies neem intrek en broei. Eers wanneer die watervlak ná 'n paar maande sak, neem die voëls en hulle kuikens "met 'n vlerkgeklap en klankryke 'kloo-kloo-kloo'" hulle vertrek en kan die mens weer terug beweeg in die gebiede van die tuine en kus. Die marmerbeelde in Koran se tuin is groen van die slyk en voëlmis; Eron skuur die tuinbeelde, poets die sonwyser met byewas en knap die mure van Korban se werkplek op (124). In die gegewe van die gedeelde lewensfeer van mens en voël is iets herkenbaar van die posthumanistiese beskouing van die mens waarvan die eggo's ook in die sfeer van die materiële ekokritiek opklink. Wolfe (*Before the law* 34) stel duidelik dat die ondermyning van die menslike ontologie nie die beëindiging van menslike aansprake op die benutting van natuurruimtes en -hulpbronne impliseer nie, maar 'n beklemtoning behels van die saambestaan en gesamentlike evolusionêre spiraal van die mens en die biologiese spesies wat die planeet met hom deel. Sy slotsom: "We should read the new category human in terms of co-emergence within a shared field of existence marked by the interdependency of life" (34).

Slot

In die lig van die positiewe ontvangs van *Die Bergengel* is 'n literêr-analitiese ondersoek van die roman aangepak. Met behulp van 'n ekokritiese leesstrategie is daarin geslaag om tot die kern van die literêre gehalte daarvan deur te dring.

Eerstens is bevind dat die sfere van kultuur en natuur met die talent van 'n woordmeester geïntegreer word. Daar is vasgestel hoe die poëtiese taal en die trefkrag daarvan funksioneel benut word in die omdop van vasgestel-

de idees oor die verhouding tussen die menslike en die niemenslike. Deur die spel met taal word 'n konteks van hernude en skerp aandag geskep om oortuigingskrag tot die argument oor die rol en waarde van die natuur en oor die belang van omgewingskwessies toe te voeg. Waar die medium van taal so direk by die doel van die uitbou van die ekokritiese diskoers ingevleg word, word die potensiaal van letterkunde tot die byeenbring van die verwyderd gewaande sfere van kultuur en natuur gedemonstreer. *Die Bergengel* is 'n sterk en geloofwaardige stem in die diskoers oor herintegrasie wat 'n kernkomponent in Zapf se beskouing van letterkunde as kulturele ekologie vorm.

Die ekologiese funksie van letterkunde as herstrukturerende en herorganiserende krag het uit die romanontleding duidelik geword. In die ondersoek na die besonderhede omtrent hierdie ekologiese krag wat in *Die Bergengel* opgesluit lê, is bevind dat 'n koersverandering ten opsigte van die heersende mensgerigte beskouing van natuur- en omgewingsake voorgestaan word. Daar klink 'n oortuigende téénstem op teenoor tematiese gegewens wat 'n antroposentriese houding belig. Groter waarhede ten opsigte van die natuur se aktiewe rol van beïnvloeding van die mens kom onder die aandag en die opheffing van die mens se veronderstelde sentrale posisie, wat in bepaalde verhaalgebeure plaasvind, versterk gesonde nuwe perspektiewe. *Die Bergengel* herinner ons aan die kosbaarheid van 'n gedeelde bestaansfeer, aan die kompleksiteite van die interafhanklike saambestaan met die niemenslike en aan 'n noodsaaklike verbintenis van respek as teenvoeter vir omgewingsverwoesting en menslike uitbuiting van reeds karige hulpbronne.

Aantekeninge

1. Spekulatiewe fiksie word dikwels as 'n breë term ingespan om fiksie met bonatuurlike, futuristiese of fantasie-elemente te omskryf (Steenkamp, "Bergengel"). In hierdie sin is *Die Bergengel* wel spekulatief: die verhaal bevel beide bonatuurlike en fantasie-elemente. Lem (144) beklemtoon egter dat die grense tussen wetenskapfiksie, spekulatiewe fiksie en fantasie soms vaag is: "Most of these subgenres are narratives that elaborate some imaginative or fantastic premise, perhaps involving a postulated future society, or travels between different worlds". Die allegorie kan beskryf word as 'n verhaal waarin die algemene voorgestel word deur middel van die besondere. Die karakters en hulle handelinge funksioneer in 'n allegorie op twee vlakke: hulle bestaan op 'n eerste, konkrete verhaalvlak, maar wys ook heen na 'n stel gebeure of 'n stel morele, geestelike of psigologiese konsepte/idees agter die verhaal (Malan). Die magiese realisme is 'n verskynsel in literêre werk waar die konkreet-reële aspekte soos karakters, ruimte en gebeure geplaas word teen die agtergrond van die magiese of ook die metafisiese. Die magiese realisme is gebaseer op die gedagte dat die mens (en so die karakter in die literêre werk) bande het met 'n bosinlike bestaan, selfs met 'n oerbestaan (Van der Elst). Die *Bildungsroman* word deur *English Oxford Living Dictionaries* beskryf as 'n verhaal oor 'n jong protagonis se reis deur sy vormingsjare tot volwassenheid, uitgebeeld met aandag aan verskeie aspekte van sy ontwikkeling en volwassewording.
2. Vir lesers wat belangstel in die geskiedenis van fantasie en wetenskapfiksie in Afrikaans, is die webwerf www.afrikafiksie.com 'n nuttige bron van inligting. Hier word 'n volledige rekord van Afrikaanse fantasie- en WF-publikasies verskaf en gereeld opgedateer.
3. Wat die terrein van die Afrikaanse literatuurteorie en -kritiek betref, word die invloed van die nuwe materialisme op die ekokritiese lees van tekste deur die navorsing van ondersoekers soos Susan Smith en Susan Meyer erken (Smith, "Ekokritiek en die nuwe materialisme" en "Plek as liggaam"; S. Meyer, "Die allesomvattende materiële dimensie van ons bestaan: aspekte van die nuwe materialisme in *Vuurklip* van Marié Heese" en "Mens-plantverbintenisse in *Die sideboard* van Simon Bruinders").
4. Die teorie van die objekgeoriënteerde ontologie is geskep deur Graham Harman, maar goed uiteengesit en ook verder ontwikkel deur Timothy Morton, onder andere in *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) en *The Ecological Thought* (2010).

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Behind the wall in Kobus Moolman's *A Book of Rooms*

Karen Jennings

Behind the wall in Kobus Moolman's *A Book of Rooms*

Kobus Moolman prefaces *A Book of Rooms* with a quote by Georges Perec. The quote details the irrevocability of the past through memory. However, both Perec and Moolman not only recover memory, but are able to do so in great detail, specifically through thorough catalogic descriptions of spaces and objects that surround them in the domestic realm. Analysis of these catalogic descriptions forms the key component of this article. The structure of Moolman's work, with different rooms used to demarcate different sections, and the significance of objects, further contribute towards his project of recovering the irrevocable. Comparison of Moolman's project with that of Perec, with reference to Bachelard's thoughts on the home, serves in the analysis of how the self is related to the concept of a house, with its many rooms in which are stored those things which contribute to an individual's sense of identity. The generation of narrative via description and cataloguing of these various domestic objects and events is considered, with specific focus given to the 'bed' as it plays a significant role in the formation of the self and the recollection of memories. **Keywords:** Bachelard, catalogic description, domestic sphere, Kobus Moolman, Georges Perec.

1

Kobus Moolman prefaces his autobiographical poetry collection, *A Book of Rooms* (2014), with a quote from the partly-factual novel *W, or the Memory of Childhood* (1975) by avant-garde French author Georges Perec:

> Even if I have the help only of yellowing snapshots, a handful of eyewitness accounts and a few paltry documents to prop up my implausible memories, I have no alternative but to conjure up what for many years I called the *irrevocable*: the things that were, the things that stopped, the things that were *closed off*—things that surely were and today are no longer, but *things that also were so that I may still be.* (emphasis added)

Perec's use of the term "irrevocable" stands out here, for upon reading both *W, or the Memory of Childhood* and *A Book of Rooms*, it is apparent that these "things"—memories—are very much recoverable. In fact, both authors not only recover memory successfully, but are able to do so in great detail.

The past two decades have seen growing scholarly interest in the subject of memory, particularly with regard to its recovery after trauma. Within South Africa, regaining and voicing these memories has been a crucial step towards coming to terms with the gross injustices perpetrated under the aegis of the apartheid government for the better part of half a century. After 1994 the new democratic government encouraged the recovery of such memories through the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Recollections that emerged during these hearings inspired works such as Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull* (1998), and poetry by the likes of Ingrid de Kok and Gcina Mhophe. These texts, and others, have been engaged with in various scholarly articles and books. Shane Graham's *South African Literature After the Truth Commission* (2009) and Mengel and Borzaga's edited collection *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel* (2012) are notable examples. However, other than touching on the TRC poems of de Kok, such works concentrate on fiction or non-fiction. Little attention is given to poetry. This might be a consequence of a lack of poetry either being produced or published within the country, as well as difficulties of access to English translations of poems written in South Africa's indigenous languages. Nevertheless, what is noticeable with regard to academic studies about the recovery of memory in South African literature is that the focus tends to be on the country as a whole, with a largely political and cultural emphasis. Certainly, individual characters are examined, but this is done synecdochally, with the individual representative of the country or of a group of people within the country. In general, the aim has been to determine how the recovery of memory through narrative can help a nation to heal.

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Kobus Moolman's project of memory recovery, however, deals with the personal and apolitical. For him, the reclamation of memory is less to do with trauma and more to do with the everyday, the domestic. Influenced by Perec, Moolman makes use of spaces and objects in order to achieve this end. The structure of his work, with the sections of the anthology corresponding to different rooms, his employment of descriptive writing, and the significance of objects, in this case the bed, all contribute towards Moolman's aim of recovering the irrevocable. Despite being a multi award-winning poet, Moolman has received little scholarly interest, and none with regard to *A Book of Rooms*. This is a sore neglect of one of the country's important and potent voices, whose subject matter includes living with disability, the South African landscape, rural villages, the Border War, and a recurrent questioning of the self and who that self is in relation to others, the past, present, and future. Moolman experiments with forms and ideas, and the way this experimentation in *A Book of Rooms* has been influenced by Georges Perec is the subject of this article. No other contemporary South African author has engaged in a similar project of using catalogic description as a means of recovering memory. For this reason, Moolman's *A Book of Rooms* is unique and deserving of interest. The focus of this article is a comparative analysis of Moolman's project of recovering memory with that of Perec through examination of their employment of catalogic description in the generation of narrative, and with reference to Bachelard's thoughts on the home, which serve in understanding how the self is related to the concept of a house, with its many rooms in which are stored those things which contribute to an individual's sense of identity.

2

In the quote given above, Perec talks about memories that "were closed off", suggesting that some obstacle has been put in front of them, some form of separation; a partition, a wall. The idea of a wall or hindrance to a view is a recurrent theme in Perec's work. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1974), he cites French playwright Tardieu: "Granted, there's a wall, what's going on behind it?" (39). In other words, what might be accessed if that partition were removed? What is the truth behind the wall? Perec's life's work was the subtraction of such walls, and this is perhaps best evidenced by his novel *Life a User's Manual* (1978) which he describes in Species as being about "a Parisian apartment building whose façade has been removed […] so that all the rooms in the front, from the ground floor up to the attics, are instantly and simultaneously visible" (*Species* 40). He further notes that some of the inspiration behind this project "is a drawing by Saul Steinberg that appeared in *The Art of Living* (1952) and shows a rooming-house […] part of the façade of which has been removed, allowing you to see the interior of some twenty-three rooms" (40–1). While well executed and rich in detail, the cartoon style of the drawing lends it a sense of naiveté in which life is depicted very simply. But it is herein that the power and appeal of the artwork lies. Consider a drawing of a house by a small child: though simple, it is effective in conveying some complicated dynamics through "synthesiz[ing] in one structure his or her self, body, parents, and relation to space and others" (Burgelin and Mai 14). This is what Perec achieves in *Life a User's Manual*. He models it on "rudimentary architecture" where he reduces the building to its "simplest form, a grid of ten squares by ten squares" (Burgelin and Mai 14). Within these squares all of life is encompassed—individuals, others, possessions, pasts, futures, presents. This practice recalls Bachelard's observation that "memories are housed" within the house itself and that "all our lives we come back to them", pulled towards that in which we are kept (Bachelard 8). Bachelard further observes that these houses in which our memories are stored "can be drawn" (48) and "we cover the universe with drawings we have lived" (12). The "drawings need not be exact", rather "they need only to be tonalized on the mode of our inner space" (12), with the result that "all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us" (10). In other words, memories, housed memories, are constitutive parts of the self, for it is through them that "we learn to 'abide' within ourselves" (Bachelard xxxvii). The self is a house, with many rooms in which are stored those things which "were so that I may still be" (Perec, *W* 13).

Rooms are not merely emptiness surrounded by four walls. We "write" rooms, we "read them" (Bachelard 14). All of their components—structure, contents, significance—contribute to that which they are, namely "the resultant of living" (Wood and Beck 174). For Perec, the act of living is "to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself" (*Species* 6). In order to understand this viewpoint, it is necessary to remember the extent to which Perec's project was influenced by games with words. For example, he viewed *lire* (to read) as an anagram of *lier* (to join together), and considered there to be a strong connection between the two meanings of *pièces*: pieces (say, of a puzzle) and rooms of a building (Lévy 39). Thus, for Perec, the pieces of a

puzzle are spaces, such as the spaces or rooms that comprise his grid of the apartment block in *Life a User's Manual*, or even as chapters in a book. To read (*lire*) a room, therefore, becomes a significant act. It is a joining together of spaces. Just so is the act of writing, which Perec views as trying "meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive, to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs" (*Species* 92). Retaining those "precise scraps" is to inhabit the spaces or rooms in which they are kept.

It is this relationship between the self and the rooms of memory that Moolman depicts with great effectiveness in his *A Book of Rooms*. He has taken a life (his own) and separated the events and memories of that life into different rooms, where each is a new poem, creating the architecture for an unusual building—the building of the self, where the inhabitants are the same man over time, linked to one another through objects, events, memories, smells, and other people.

The collection consists of 35 poems. They can be read individually. However, approaching the collection as a single narrative, divided into sections, contributes towards an understanding of the poet-speaker's key concerns, allows for recognition of those themes which recur throughout the text as a whole, and gives insight into how those themes interact with one another. Each poem has a title that begins with the words "The Room of", for example, "The Room of Growing", "The Room of Impressions and First Appearances", "The Room of What He Excels At". The poems are separated into four parts—or storeys—*Who*, *What*, *Why*, and *When*. These divisions bring together poems that relate to certain aspects of the poet-speaker's developing identity over the years. *Who*, for example, might be considered the ground floor of the building, and deals with poems related to the poet-speaker's difficult formative years—childhood and the early part of young adulthood. *What* (second storey) engages with what he has become in his troubled adulthood, while *Why* (third storey) examines how he came to be the way he is, what the reasons are behind his choices, thoughts, and actions. Finally, *When* (the attic), the most abstract of the parts, seems to be preoccupied with the past, returning to the when's of his life that have led to what he has become as an adult.

Each room has been given a subtitle. The subtitle gives personal insight into what the poet-speaker identifies with that room/memory. These personal associations can be related to lighting, scent, objects, phrases, or any other thing of significance. Thus, the opening poem, "The Room of Maybe", which houses his earliest memories, is subtitled in the following way: "*Black & white light. Dog-eared*" (13; original italics). The black and white colouring conveys a sense of age, such as an old photograph or film. It also suggests distance—the room is so far away now that it can no longer be seen clearly; it "comes in and out of focus" (13). The colours of it are remote, faded. The fact that the room is described as dog-eared suggests its importance. It is a place that has been returned to often, a place to be noted, remembered. In "The Room of Rural Teaching" it is the different environment that is recalled in "*Hot glare. Cicadas*" (27), while the happier "*Bright sunlight. Fat smell of frying*" precedes "The Room of Family Holidays" (23). Less clear, perhaps, is the subtitle of the poem "The Room of Free-falling, Forever, Not Downhill", which is a sequence of numbers, repeated six times: "*1-2-3. 1-2-3. 1-2-3. 1-2-3. 1-2-3. 1-2-3*" (55). The significance of this—is it counting, is it repetition?—is not readily available to the reader.

Returning to the dog-eared "The Room of Maybe", here Moolman introduces the reader to two bedrooms, the first of the poet-speaker's life. The initial one is "indistinct" (13), and is memorable only in three ways: in the form of an object—"a small wooden bed/ with low sides"—and in the form of two senses:

> […] the *smell* of
> the brown shoe polish
> (always Nugget) that his mother smears onto an old *lappie* at
> night and pins inside
> his little vest to stop him coughing (13; initial emphasis added)
>
> and the
> […] *sound* of
> his own small voice
> calling up to her from out of the drowned end of a dark passage-
> way (13; emphasis added)

The image created by this bedroom is of a small, sickly boy who is afraid in the dark away from his mother.

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The second bedroom (in the same house as the first) has previously been used variously as "a junk room, work room, sewing room" (13). Perec writes that "each room has a particular function" (*Species* 28). It is only when this room has the function of being his bedroom that Moolman's poet-speaker has any interest in it, only then does it have real value and influence, for "the resurrected space of the bedroom is enough to bring back a life, to recall, to revive memories, the most fleeting and anodyne along with the most essential" (21). It is enough simply to know that "the wall was on my right, the door beside me on the left" (21) for a flood of memories to ensue.

The role of the bedroom in bringing memories to the fore is evident in "The Room of Maybe". The bedroom contains two doors, one of which "leads / into the lounge" and the other "into the back garden" (*Book of Rooms* 13–4). This garden has, amongst other things, a "vegetable patch" belonging to his *oupa*, and trees, bricks, and "a stack of rusted metal poles" belonging to his father (14). The effect of this bedroom is very much like that of the child's drawing of a house which was discussed earlier. Here, in this bedroom, a whole life is fused together. It is the place where the young poet-speaker sleeps, the place that connects him to the rest of the house (where he plays, eats, etc.). In addition, it links him to the outside, and to the family members that people his young life.

There is also a third door in the bedroom, a door that "is never opened" (14) and which is blocked by his bed. It is unclear whether this is in fact a real door, for it is never revealed where it leads, and further details of it are limited to the "small things that crawl under this door at night / and scuttle about / beneath his bed" (14). It is because of these things that he is in need of "a plastic under-sheet / to protect the mattress", though he ought long since to have "outgrown the / weakness" of wetting his bed (14). These things "crawl up his trouser / leg every night and / soak into his sleep" (14), with "long wet feelers crawling over his face and rough claws / around his throat/ pulling him down, down into the airless pit beneath his dreams" (15). The suggestion here is that the crawling things are not insects. They are his fears, his weaknesses, his disabilities that find him even in the safety of his bedroom (bolted and secured against the outside), and which continue to find him in all the rooms of his life.

3

Perec, as well as looking behind the wall, is known for the way in which he plays with lists or catalogues, such as when he describes, for example, the contents of a building or room in great detail. It has been suggested that Perec is likely to have been, if not directly inspired, then at least influenced by the artist Daniel Spoerri in this regard (Schwenger 142). Spoerri is known for his *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, a work begun on October 17, 1971 at 3:47. He traced the numerous objects on his desk onto a map, outlining and numbering each item. He then engaged with each object by noting down a description of it, stating how it had come to be in his possession, and what it had been used for. The 'anecdoting' of the items means that a narrative developed where it might otherwise have been absent (Schwenger 142). Perec embarked on a similar project in 1973 in the form of an essay entitled "Notes Concerning the Objects that are on my Work-Table". The essay, as one might expect, details the items present on his desk. Five years later Perec revisited the project, this time at a different desk, with different objects, calling the resultant essay "Still Life/Style Leaf". Here follow the third and fourth sentences, the latter most resembling a list:

> Set next to one another at the left-hand end of the table are two rectangular desk trays of heavy glass. The first contains a whitish eraser on which appear in black the words STAEDTLER MARS PLASTIC; a polished-steel nail clipper; a matchbook proffering on an orange background a red motif in the style of Vasarely; a Casio pocket calculator on which the number 315308 read upside down spells the word BOESIE; a kind of ornament comprising two tiny intertwined crocodiles; a brass fish with glass eyes whose ventral fin is a kind of reel that winds and unwinds the tape measure concealed within the body (its tip is actually the creature's tail); and, pinned to a piece of thin cardboard, three bars of a medal on which oakleaves and acorns are minutely chased and on each of which can be read, respectively, SE BASTO-POL, TRAK-TIR, and ALMA. (299)

For Perec, projects such as these serve as "a way of talking about my work, about my history and preoccupations, an attempt to grasp something pertaining to my experience, not at the level of its remote reflections, but at the very point where it emerges" ("Still Life" 143). In other words, this is not mere descriptive cataloguing. This is autobiography. Some have criticised Perec's style, calling it a "mania of observing and describing all" (Koos 186), however, there is a sense, too, that "as you read Perec's descriptions, you increasingly succumb to the feeling […]that this is important, though you can't say how" (Becker 71). It would seem that the importance that Becker cannot put his finger on lies in the fact that it is through description that the narrative emerges, that the things—

objects, people, situations—are brought to life. The story is not confined to the objects, rather "still life is always capable of generating narrative motion" (Schwenger 143).

Moolman, too, generates narrative by means of description in *A Book of Rooms*. He achieves this in several ways, as can be seen in the second poem in the collection, "The Room of Green". This poem is comprised almost entirely of description in the same cataloguing tradition as Perec's "Still Life/Style Leaf". He describes the bookshelves, windows, views, and walls of the doctor's surgery that he often visits as a child, remembering, too, the various decorations, as well as the doctor himself with "hands the size of a bunch of bananas" (16). Firstly, catalogue-like description enables the narrative to be located securely in place. A room is comprised of its structure, contents, and meaning. It is a place of amalgamation. This description of the doctor's surgery—the contents and structure—establishes its significance. It was important enough to the poet-speaker's young self that he is able to recollect it in later years in such detail. Moreover, it confirms that which has been hinted at in the preceding poem, and which remains a theme throughout: that the poet-speaker suffers from ill health, something which separates him from others and makes him feel isolated. This room, therefore, symbolises the painful reality that he speaks of much later in "The Room of White":

> […] The body he was left with at
> birth after there was
> nothing else left to fill up the blank spaces The body he has always
> been ashamed
> of because it cannot be trusted to stay upright or dry […] (48)

Secondly, through detailed description, the room is animated. This is not any doctor, any place. This is a *specific* doctor—the one who races vintage cars, yes, but also the one who is always changing the poet-speaker's

> bandages, cleaning
> his dressings, removing his stitches, cutting off his old plaster
> casts with a small electric circular saw or a large pair of silver cast scissors, and
> putting on a new one
> all tight and wet and hot, hardening clean and white
> in minutes (17)

It is the specificity that lends the room authenticity as autobiography, and which breathes life into the text. These are not details listed without purpose.

Thirdly, description peoples the poet-speaker's life. Not only is the doctor described—his interests, his soft voice, his hands—but insight is also given into the people in the boy's life and how he engages with them. Thus, the boy's fear of placing his dirty boots on the narrow examination bed arises from a fear of his father's disapproval, and introduces the complicated relationship the poet-speaker has with this parent. It paves the way for his memory of "the voice of his father, saying he will lose it all / everything" (43) and for his confession that "sometimes he / wishes his father did not ever come back" (18). Furthermore, his listing of the "over a hundred toy cars of all makes and models" (17) that the doctor has on display suggests the boy's difficulty around his peers:

> His favourite, though, is the red and white Chevrolet El Camino
> convertible with fins
> Because it looks as if it could swim underwater like a great white
> shark Because then
> all the bigger boys at school (with names like Tasso and Vickus
> and Ferdie) would
> leave him alone (17)

This is the isolated, different child, and within this room, that difference is magnified.

Finally, Moolman, in the long poem, "The Room of In One Place (cont.) aka The Room of Nothing Happened", explains his project clearly, emphasising the importance of the use of detailed description. His aim is to "put down the whole story of what happened and what did not and / what never would" (47),

> […] And in his remembering, and in the putting down on
> paper of all of
> his memories, in the remembering of them there

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[…] he will undo the
knot that had cut off the light to his heart at birth And he will kick
it loose from him […] (74–5)

Through memory, and relentless detail, Moolman seeks to write away his poet-speaker's isolation, and the consequences and experiences of a life always affected by his body's failures.

4

In *Species* Perec poses the question: "How are we to speak of […] 'common things,' how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue […]?" (210). He attempts to answer this question, as has been discussed, in various ways, such as his use of catalogic description. The ordinary objects that comprise his lists are individually important too, for it is through our association with objects that we "make order" of who and what we are; they serve as a "framework of experience […] to our otherwise shapeless selves" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 16) and become representatives of aspects of our lives, able to give insight into our identities at a mere glance.

Having already explored the bedroom, it is now time to turn to that which gives a bedroom its function—the bed. For Perec the bed is "the individual space, *par excellence*, the elementary space of the body" (*Species* 16; original italics). It is a space of privacy and possession. More important, however, is his view of a bed as a place where "unformulated dangers threatened, the place of contraries, the space of the solitary body encumbered by its ephemeral harems, the foreclosed place of desire, the improbable place where I had my roots, the space of dreams and Oedipal nostalgia" (17).

Beds repeatedly appear in *A Book of Rooms*, playing a significant, if understated, role. It is easy to see how they fall into Perec's definition of what beds are. The bed as "a place where unformulated dangers threaten" has already been observed in "The Room of Maybe" where it hosts many crawling things which cause the poet-speaker to wet himself. It is also "the place of contraries" in "The Room of Family Holidays" where the

second bed is a source of continual dispute
between himself and
his brother Because both boys always want to sleep right by the
window so they can
be the first to see the ocean and to see the sun come up (23)

This squabbling is returned to regularly throughout the anthology—"they / argue all the time and / cannot share anything between them" (13)—and lasts until his final year of high school when he considers himself too mature for such pettiness and "magnanimously allows his brother access to the bed by the / window without any / argument, and with only a superior smile" (23). It is the rejection of this bed that gives the poet-speaker the sense that "he is on / the brink of something/ very significant in his life, something almost adult" (23–4). That something leads him to another bed, the bed of a tall blonde girl, where "*together* they listen to a stretched tape of the Beatles" (25; emphasis added). Later, on New Year's Eve, he watches the same girl talk to another boy and he is reminded of who he is: "the boy with a hole in his heart" with "differently- / sized orthopaedic boots" (25). This realisation recalls Perec's consideration of the bed as "the space of the solitary body encumbered by its ephemeral harems" (*Species* 17), a place where Moolman's poet-speaker is troubled for many years by the fact that "he is alone, with only his hands to console him" (42).

But, at last, "at the grateful age of twenty-seven years, three / months and fourteen / days" he "leaves his long childhood behind" (45). Now, his hands, finally, "taste and touch and see everything in the whole world / they have always wanted" (45). The bed, rather than a place of isolation, now becomes a "place of desire" (Perec, *Species* 17), represented as "a white king-sized bed with a red / bolster pillow" (*Book of Rooms* 47). But the bed of desire cannot remain so. It becomes, too, the place of Oedipal nostalgia, though nostalgia is perhaps too gentle a word for what Moolman depicts as a haunting. The white king-sized bed recalls another bed, the "white uniform" one in which the poet-speaker's father died (44). His father now returns to him, causing him to hide

Because the ghost
would not approve of him
sharing a table and bathroom and a white king-sized bed with an

older woman
and divorcee (48)

It is also the place where "his mother's arms rear up suddenly between / him and the woman in / the bed" (53), his mother who always wants to protect him because of his disabilities. Moreover, the bed becomes the site where he is confronted by the deficiencies of his body once more, perhaps more starkly than before, because he hoped "everything small and crawling with feelers / and claws inside him" would "disappear or at least change beyond / recognition" (52) once he had a loving, sexual relationship. The bed is supposed to be a "space of dreams", but in it the poet-speaker is unable to find any escape, not from himself. He is drawn ever downward into "the roots" (Perec, *Species 17*) of what he is.

5

Through *A Book of Rooms*, Kobus Moolman takes us behind the wall, into the building of the self, giving the reader access to its many rooms, and the events, people, and objects that comprise a life. Moolman achieves this by means of his detailed catalogic descriptions of the rooms, and the subtle way in which the objects he lists echo and respond to those in other rooms, bringing to the forefront the preoccupations of his poet-speaker. The past, through this process, is able to be recovered and recorded as narrative.

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"Al half dier": objekgeoriënteerde ontologieë, gestremdheidstudies en *Siegfried* (Willem Anker)

Bibi Burger

"Already half animal": object oriented ontologies, disability studies and Siegfried (Willem Anker)

Willem Anker's debut novel, *Siegfried*, deals with the experiences of the eponymous character, who is mentally disabled and whose hands and feet are webbed. In this article, an attempt is made to investigate how the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as object oriented ontologies, can be used to argue that the representation of the character of Siegfried involves a blurring of the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman. The second aim of this article is to establish whether such a blurring is ethically problematic, given the cruel ways in which people considered less human than others are often treated. Where the first aim is concerned, it is argued that Siegfried's interaction with the world challenges hegemonic ideas of human subjectivity, especially ideas of what constitutes normal humanity. In the character of Siegfried traces are found of what can be described, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, as becomings. These becomings serve as lines of flight from blocked forms of human subjectivity. The boundaries between what is considered human and what is considered nonhuman are therefore indeed blurred. Concerning the second aim, it is argued that the novel can be read as a critique of the ways in which society treats disabled people, and that it can therefore be brought into dialogue with disability studies. The potential for object oriented ontologies to be apolitical (and even unethical, in this respect), is countered in the analysis of the novel by disability studies' activism and social commentary. **Keywords:** becoming animal, Deleuze and Guattari, disability studies, object oriented ontologies, *Siegfried*, Willem Anker.

Inleiding

Willem Anker se debuutroman, *Siegfried* (2007), handel onder meer oor die ervarings van die titelkarakter. Siegfried is 32 jaar oud, maar is sielkundig op die vlak van 'n jong kind: "Hy het die brein van 'n graadeen en die ledemate van 'n eend" (*Siegfried* 125). Hy het "die ledemate van 'n eend", want hy het gewebde hande en voete. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die uitbeelding van Siegfried se ervarings en bou in hierdie opsig voort op twee vorige studies oor *Siegfried*: Babette Viljoen se magisterverhandeling "Fokalisasie en vertelinstansie in die representasie van gestremdheid in geselekteerde Afrikaanse romans", en Joan-Mari Barendse se artikel "'n Kulturele entomologiese ondersoek na insekte in Willem Anker se *Siegfried*".

Viljoen (73) voer aan dat die maniere waarop sekere ruimtes as onherbergsaam vir gestremde karakters voorgestel word en daar teen gestremdes gediskrimineer word, in *Siegfried* gekritiseer word. Sy sê ook dat die grens tussen "normale" en gestremde mense in die roman uitgedaag word, omdat die niegestremde karakters in die roman ook as abnormaal uitgebeeld word (60).[1] In Barendse se artikel ondersoek sy die verhoudings tussen insekte en die karakter van Smit, 'n alkoholverslaafde skrywer wat saam met Siegfried reis. Sy kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat Smit se eet van insekte en die maniere waarop hy sekere mense vergelyk met insekte, nie impliseer dat die grense tussen die menslike en die niemenslike uitgedaag word nie (84). Smit vergelyk mense met insekte om te dui op sy afkeer van hulle; insekte simboliseer dus steeds vir hom die groteske en totaal Ander. Hy eet insekte, maar sy verhouding met insekte verander hom nie en daag, volgens Barendse, nie sy menslikheid uit nie.

Die eerste doel van hierdie artikel is om vas te stel of die grense tussen (wat konvensioneel beskou word as) die menslike en die niemenslike wél in die karakter van Siegfried vervaag. Om hierdie vraag te beantwoord, word teorieë rondom objekgeoriënteerde ontologieë (OO) asook Gilles Deleuze en Félix Guattari se teorieë oor wording in verband gebring met *Siegfried*.'n Tweede doel van die artikel is om te bepaal of die uitbeelding van die vervaging van grense tussen die menslike en die niemenslike problematies is ten opsigte van die etiese beginsels wat daaragter lê. Die beskouing van sommige mense, insluitend gestremde mense, as 'minder menslik' as ander

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lei immers dikwels tot pynlike gevolge. Vir hierdie aspek van my ondersoek word daar aangesluit by Viljoen se argument dat die (wrede en neerhalende) maniere waarop "abnormale" mense deur die samelewing hanteer word, in *Siegfried* uitgebeeld en gekritiseer word.

Viljoen se argument, die maniere waarop dit aansluit by gestremdheidstudies, asook die implikasies van OO en Deleuze en Guattari se teorieë vir die grense tussen die menslike en die niemenslike word in die volgende afdelings toegelig. Michael Feeley se poging om Deleuze en Guattari se teorieë met gestremdheidstudies in gesprek te bring, dien as vertrekpunt.

Die menslike en die niemenslike

Feeley (864) voer aan dat die teorieë van Deleuze en Guattari aangewend kan word in gestremdheidstudies. Die interdissiplinêre en aktivistiese veld van gestremdheidstudies fokus hoofsaaklik op hoe die konsep van sogenaamde "gestremdheid" gekonstrueer word en hoe die samelewing behoort aan te pas om gestremde persone tegemoet te kom. Hierdie fokus veroorsaak egter dat teoretici dikwels die liggaamlike ervarings, insluitende pyn en ongemak, van gestremde persone ignoreer omdat die klem eerder op die samelewing as op die individu se ervaring val. Daarteenoor beteken die hernude fokus op die materiële, wat Feeley die "ontologiese wending" noem, dat aandag aan die verhoudings tussen sosiale konstruksies (soos die onderskeid tussen "gestremd" en "normaal") en die materiële, insluitend die liggaamlike ervarings van mense, gegee word.

Die "ontologiese wending" waarna Feeley verwys, manifesteer in dissiplines soos filosofie, kultuurstudies, en literêre teorie. In laasgenoemde veld word daar tans heelwat navorsing gedoen met die doel om antroposentrisme teen te werk en meer ekologies volhoubare maniere van bestaan te bedink (Smith, "Ekokritiek en die nuwe materialisme: 'n Ondersoek na die nuwe materialisme in enkele gedigte van Johann Lodewyk Marais uit die bundel *In die bloute* (2012)" 749 en "Plek en ingeplaaste skryf: 'n Teoretiese ondersoek na ingeplaaste skryf as ekopoëtiese skryfpraktyk" 892). Ook binne die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie word daar navorsing gepubliseer wat by hierdie tendens aansluit, onder andere deur Joan-Mari Barendse, Franci Greyling, Erika Lemmer, Susan Meyer, en Susan Smith.

Hierdie hernude pogings om die verhoudings tussen die mens en die res van die werklikheid te herkonseptualiseer, spruit onder meer uit die mens se bewuswording van die ekologiese verwoesting wat veroorsaak word deur kapitalistiese leefwyses. Aardverwarming veroorsaak byvoorbeeld dat die mens besef dat teenwoordige bestaanswyses en ingesteldhede nie volhoubaar is nie. Die filosoof Timothy Morton (lok. 178 en verder) verwoord die algemene besef dat aardverwarming en ander grootskaalse ekologiese verwoesting die gevolg van die bevoorregting van die mens en sy behoeftes teenoor dié van die res van die werklikheid is. Verskeie denkers, insluitende Maria Mies, voer aan dat hierdie antroposentrisme verstrengel is met modernistiese denke. Mies (223) verduidelik dat die aansprake op die regte en voorregte van die modernistiese subjek onderlê word deur die weiering van die regte van die abjekte ander; alle mense wat nie wit is nie, vroue, mense met gestremdhede, niemenslike organismes, ensovoorts word gesien as ondergeskik aan die wit, manlike, "normale" subjek se wense, en manipuleerbaar deur hom. Die uitsluiting van hierdie mense en ook die niemenslike word dikwels regverdig deur die teleologiese siening van die geskiedenis. Hegel (86) voer byvoorbeeld aan dat die mens beweeg van barbaarsheid na beskawing en dat dit dus nodig sou wees om die natuur te oorstyg.

Na aanleiding van Julia Kristeva se werk is dit moontlik om die maniere waarop sekere mense en die natuur in Hegel se denke hanteer word, te beskryf in terme van abjeksie. Kristeva (2, 12) bou voort op die werk van Freud en die antropoloog Mary Douglas om aan te voer dat: "*what is abject*, […] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded […]. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. […] The abject confronts us […] with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*". Kristeva se beskrywing van die ego se uitsluiting van die abjekte is vergelykbaar met Hegel (65–7) se argument dat die self sig van die Ander moet onderskei om as volle subjek te realiseer. 'n Sintese word bewerkstellig wanneer die Ander in die self geïnkorporeer word: "Through the destruction of the Other's independence, the Ego realizes its own self-consciousness as being in the world" (Mies 225).

Onder die vaandel van teorieë soos die nuwe materialisme, die akteur-netwerk-teorie, objekgeoriënteerde ontologie, ontologiese realisme, en posthumanisme argumenteer eietydse denkers dat die wêreld nie verdeel kan word in menslike subjekte en niemenslike objekte nie. Hierdie teorieë is uiteenlopend en kan nie noodwendig met mekaar vereenselwig word nie. Tog kan gemene grond afgebaken word deur te stel dat die werklikheid deur

die aanhangers van hierdie teorieë beskou word as bestaande uit objekte, waarvan die mens 'n spesifieke soort objek is (Bryant 18). Volgens die voorstaanders van hierdie teorieë moet die mens as objek nie beskou word as verhewe bo alles anders nie en het die niemenslike nie slegs waarde of betekenis in verhouding tot die mens nie. Dit is om hierdie rede dat in hierdie artikel "objekgeoriënteerde ontologieë" of "OO" as sambreelterm vir die verskeie genoemde benaderings gebruik word. Daar moet egter ook gelet word op die feit dat die "object-oriented ontology" 'n spesifieke manifestering van die pas bespreekte beskouing behels en veral geassosieer word met die werk van Graham Harman.

Die konseptualisering (en vooropplasing) van die modernistiese subjek is reeds uitgedaag deur postmoderne en -strukturalistiese denkers wat die gekonstrueerde aard van hierdie subjek, en die grense tussen die subjek en die abjekte Ander, verken (Smith, "Ekokritiek" 752). Die pogings van poststrukturalistiese denkers om te toon dat realiteit deur taal geskep word (en dat taal nie bloot 'n bestaande werklikheid representeer nie), het volgens Smith ("Ekokritiek" 752) en Meyer ("Die allesomvattende materiële dimensie van ons bestaan: Aspekte van die nuwe materialisme in *Vuurklip* van Marié Heese" 69) tot gevolg gehad dat die klem steeds val op 'n menslike aspek, naamlik taal, en die menslike verstaan van die wêreld.[2] Daarteenoor poog die nuwe materialisme om "die verdeling tussen materie en die kulturele konstruksie daarvan […] te oorbrug" (Smith, "Plek en ingeplaaste skryf" 892).

Sodoende bou die nuwe materialisme (en die ander bogenoemde teorieë wat deel vorm van die ontologiese wending) voort op die werk van vroeëre denkers wat die essensialistiese diepte-ontologieë (waarvolgens daar 'n materiële werklikheid bestaan wat die mens slegs deur taal en representasie kan ken) bevraagteken. 'n Invloedryke voorbeeld is Deleuze se herwaardering van vroeëre denke in *Spinoza: Philosophie Pratique* (1970). Deleuze onderskei nie tussen menslike en ander liggame nie. Alle (lewende en nielewende) liggame is gesitueer in komplekse verhoudings tot mekaar.[3] Deleuze (27) gebruik die term "affek" om te dui op die potensiaal van elke liggaam om op te tree of "to be acted upon". Liggame besit nie 'n statiese identiteit nie, maar is eerder voortdurend in 'n proses van wording wat gedryf word deur affek, die maniere waarop liggame mekaar affekteer of deur mekaar geaffekteer word (48–51). Die manier waarop enige liggaam op enige gegewe tyd verkeer, is nie die resultaat van transendentale essensies nie, maar is eerder die gevolg van stadige of herhalende ("slow, refrained, or looped") wordinge (Bertelsen en Murphie 145).

In sy werk saam met Guattari gaan Deleuze voort om te onderskei tussen twee soorte samevoegings ("assemblages") wat deur middel van affek en wordinge gevorm word: molêre en molekulêre samevoegings (Anker, "Die nomadiese self: skisoanalitiese beskouinge oor karaktersubjektiwiteit in die prosawerk van Alexander Strachan en Breyten Breytenbach" 225). Molêre samevoegings is rigied en hiërargies, terwyl molekulêre samevoegings buigsaam en snel-bewegend is. Die oedipale subjek, soos wat die psigoanalis dit verstaan, is 'n molêre samevoeging. Deleuze en Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia 7*) voer aan dat Freud se oedipale subjek alle verhoudings waarin die mens verstrengel is, reduseer tot "playing mommy and daddy". Anker ("Nomadiese self" 225) verduidelik dat Deleuze en Guattari hierdie konseptualisering van die mens as geblokkeerd beskou, omdat dit die mens beperk tot 'n spesifieke vorm van wees (naamlik 'n subjek wat gevorm word deur verhoudings met die ouers) en min moontlikhede vir wording toelaat. Daarteenoor beskryf hulle verskeie vorms van wording wat as vluglyne kan dien vir die mens om ander samevoegings toe te laat. Waar die Freudiaanse psigoanalise die subjek verstaan as beperk deur verskeie sielkundige komplekse, fokus Deleuze en Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus 7*) eerder op die nuwe moontlikhede wat deur elke affektiewe verhouding ontstaan. Willem Anker ("Nomadiese self" 219) beskryf hierdie vorms van menslike wording soos volg:

> Die subjek bestaan in sy wording—tussen mens en dier, tussen die ek en die hond, tussen die ek en die ma. Die self is die wording. Daar bestaan nie 'n self buite die wording nie. Waarop dit, eenvoudig gestel, neerkom is dat Deleuze/Guattari voorstel dat die subjek in 'n reeks van veel meer direkte verbindings met sy omgewing bestaan as wat die heersende subjektiwiteitsteorieë toegee.

'n Tipe wording waaraan Deleuze en Guattari veral aandag skenk is dié van wordende-dier, soos Anker ("Nomadiese self" 228) die konsep van "becoming animal" vertaal:

> Die wordende-dier kan beskryf word as 'n komposisie van verskillende vorms van spoed en affekte wat totaal verskillende individue insluit; dit laat die dier 'n gedagte word, 'n koorsagtige gedagte in die mens op dieselfde tyd wat die mens dieselfde affek as die dier ondervind […].

Wordende-dier behels dus, onder meer, 'n omarming van dierlikheid—wat tradisioneel beskou word as die ab-

jekte. Waar die modernistiese subjek die abjekte uitwerp of inkorporeer in sigself, voer Deleuze en Guattari (*A thousand plateaus* 88) aan dat die abjekte die potensiaal het om die subjek te deterritorialiseer. Hulle gebruik die term "deterritorialisasie" om te verwys na die maniere waarop samevoegings se grense ondermyn of verander kan word sodat wording kan plaasvind.

OO sluit nie net by Deleuze en Guattari se konsep van wording aan nie, maar ook by hulle opvatting dat 'n komplekse verskynsel soos die menslike subjek "as 'n funksionele struktuur verrys uit 'n veelvuldigheid van laervlak-komponente" (Anker, "Nomadiese self", 28). Enige liggaam is dus nie net voortdurend in wording nie, maar kan ook gesien word as 'n samevoeging wat spruit uit verskeie komplekse verhoudings. Anker ("'n Bosluis, Billy the kid en Coenraad de Buys: Die spore van legendes in die veld") praat van die menslike subjek as "'n gedistribueerde self", omdat dit ontstaan uit die affektiewe verhoudings tussen 'n oneindige hoeveelheid liggame. Ten spyte van OO se kritiek op antroposentrisme, word daar binne OO dikwels aandag geskenk aan die mens se liggaamlike ervarings. Al word die menslike liggaam nie beskou as belangriker as ander liggame nie, word daar ook erken dat ondersoekers nie die spesifieke menslikheid wat noodwendig aan hulle eie perspektief gekoppel is, kan ontken nie (Neimanis). Wat menslikheid betref, word daar aangevoer dat geen van die verhoudings waaruit die individuele mens spruit, beskou kan word as belangriker as ander nie. Waar die menslike brein tradisioneel meer gewaardeer is as ander aspekte van die mens, ontken OO 'n duidelike skeidslyn tussen die brein en die ander verhoudings waaruit die menslike subjek verrys. Astrida Neimanis voer dus aan dat OO sinvol aansluit by die feminisme, omdat dit toelaat dat navorsers aandag gee aan die mens se liggaamlike ervarings—wat tradisioneel, buite die natuurwetenskappe, afgeskeep is omdat dit geassosieer is met vroulikheid, terwyl rasionaliteit assosieer is met manlikheid—sonder dat die individuele mens op essensialistiese wyse gereduseer word tot die eienskappe van die liggaam.

Soos vroeër genoem, voer Barendse (84) aan dat, wat die karakter van Smit betref, daar nie sprake is van wording of "'n postmenslike vervlegting van mens en dier" nie. Smit eet wel insekte en beskryf spesifieke mense en menslike gemeenskappe dikwels in terme van insekmetafore. Barendse voer egter aan dat Smit se entomofagie 'n mate van beheer in sy "andersins betekenlose" lewe verteenwoordig. Smit se interaksie met insekte gee dus "nooit aanleiding tot 'n transformasie waarin die aard van albei verander om nuwe moontlikhede te skep nie" (Barendse 84). In Deleuze en Guattari se terme kan daar gestel word dat daar nie in die karakter van Smit sprake is van wordende-insek nie. In die volgende afdelings word vervolgens geargumenteer dat daar, in die uitbeelding van die karakter van Siegfried se liggaamlike ervarings en sy intieme verhoudings met die res van die wêreld, wél sprake van 'n voortdurende proses van deterritorialiserende wording is.

Die meer-as-menslike

OO stel voor dat die uitbeelding van karakters en ruimtes op vernuwende maniere ondersoek moet word (Dürbeck, Schaumann & Sullivan 122). Ruimtes en landskappe kan nie bloot as agtergrond beskou word nie. Aan die ander kant kan karakters ook nie as die produkte van deterministiese ruimtes beskryf word nie (122). Daar word eerder voortgebou op die fenomenologie, omdat ruimte en die menslike liggaam gesien word as interafhanklik (Merleau Ponty 112). Ruimte word ook deur Dürbeck, Schaumann, en Sullivan beskou as iets wat ontstaan uit die verhoudings tussen 'n groot hoeveelheid liggame (133).

Ruimtes kan dus beskryf word as meer-as-menslik. Die term *meer-as-menslik* (more-than-human) is ontwikkel binne die ekokritiek en sluit aan by bogenoemde fenomenologiese beginsel dat die mens nie onafhanklik van die res van die wêreld kan staan nie en ingebed is in relasionele netwerke (Abram xi). Terwyl daar kennis geneem word van die mens en menslike aksies se plek in hierdie netwerke, word die mens nie sentraal daarbinne geplaas nie (Smith, "Plek as liggaam en liggaam as plek: Tendense van die nuwe materialisme en interaksie tussen mens en plek in enkele tekste uit *Verweerskrif* (2006) van Antjie Krog" 6).

Daar het reeds verskeie artikels (Greyling; Meyer "Ingeplaaste skryf as vergestalting van ekosentriese ingesteldheid in Petra Müller se verhaalkuns"; Smith, "Plek en ingeplaaste skryf" en "Plek as liggaam") verskyn waarin die nuwe materialisme gebruik word om die uitbeelding van ruimte in die Afrikaanse letterkunde te ondersoek. Hierdie studies behels 'n ekokritiese interpretasie van die uitgebeelde ruimtedimensies in die tekste wat ondersoek is. In hierdie artikel is die fokus eerder die uitbeelding van 'n gestremde karakter se ervarings in spesifieke ruimtes. Die uitbeelding van Siegfried se ervarings is hier die primêre oorweging, maar die ruimtes waarin hy homself bevind, word nie bloot as agtergrond beskou nie. Siegfried beskryf die interaksie tussen sy

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subjektiwiteit en ruimte soos volg: "As hy buite is of in plekke wat vol goeters is dan voel hy deel van die goeters wat nie sy lyf is nie dan is sy lyf net 'n stuk van die hele plek" (*Siegfried* 195).

Hierdie aanhaling dien ook as voorbeeld om Siegfried se fokalisasie te illustreer. *Siegfried* het deurgaans 'n eksterne verteller, maar het vier fokalisators: Siegfried, Smit, David ('n webontwerper wat uiteindelik selfmoord pleeg), en Fafnir ('n eksperimentele dramaturg en regisseur wat 'n fratssirkus bestuur). Die derde gedeelte van die roman bevat ook verslae oor Siegfried deur 'n psigiater van die psigiatriese hospitaal, Huis Sonneskyn. In die gedeeltes van die roman waarin Siegfried die fokalisator is, word veral die interaksie tussen verskillende liggame beskryf. Daar word relatief min melding gemaak van Siegfried se emosies of van abstrakte gedagtes. Die roman begin byvoorbeeld soos volg:

> Sy pa loop uit en val om.
>
> Siegfried storm by die huis uit. Sy pa lê in die stof. Wind waai teen sy hande twee seile wat hom wegvat van sy pa se lyf af. Hy wil nie na sy pa kyk nie. Sy pa lê net daar. Hy kyk weg. Hy staan stil hy kyk diékant hy kyk daaikant sy oë gaan vinnig. Hy voel hulle. Alles is strepe lig en donker. (*Siegfried* 9)

Die interaksie tussen Siegfried se liggaam (sy hande en sy oë) en die meer-as-menslike omgewing word beskryf. Daar word wel genoem dat Siegfried nie na sy pa wil kyk nie, en dit impliseer moontlik 'n emosionele reaksie op die gebeure. Hierdie gedeelte, en die res van Siegfried se fokalisering, kan gekontrasteer word met die gedeeltes van die roman waarin David die fokalisator is. Daardie gedeeltes bestaan hoofsaaklik uit 'n interne monoloog waarin David besin oor sy verlede en oor die aard van sy bestaan. Hy dink byvoorbeeld: "Jy is 'n klomp koppies wat hier en daar opskiet uit die grond uit. Elkeen is jy. En word vernietig deur die erosie en die wind. Spring na waar jy die erosie en die wind is, die lug tussen al die duisende plato's. Jy is wat jy nie is nie" (129). Dit is duidelik dat David aan homself dink as intiem verbind aan en ontspruitend uit verhoudings met die meer-as-menslike. Hy dink egter slegs in 'n abstrakte, metaforiese sin daaroor. In die gedeeltes waarin Siegfried die fokalisator is, word hierdie verhoudings op konkrete wyse voorgestel.

Siegfried se wyse van fokalisering kan in verband gebring word met die outistiese dierkundige Temple Grandin se bewerings dat outistiese mense, soos diere, die wêreld veel meer konkreet as "normale" mense ervaar:

> Normal human beings are abstractified in their sensory perceptions as well as their thoughts. […] Animals and autistic people don't see their *ideas* of things; they see the actual things themselves. We see the details that make up the world, while normal people blur all those details together into their general concept of the world. (Grandin en Johnson lok. 525)

Alle outistiese mense sal waarskynlik nie met Grandin se beskrywing van hulle ervarings saamstem nie, en Siegfried word ook nie in die roman as spesifiek outisties beskryf nie. Dit is egter duidelik dat die konkrete sterk teenwoordig is in die beskrywings van die meer-as-menslike vanuit Siegfried se fokaliseringshoek, op 'n manier wat herinner aan Grandin se bewerings.

Siegfried is nie die modernistiese subjek soos deur Mies beskryf (sien die afdeling "Die menslike en die nie-menslike") wat verwyderd van 'n omgewing kan staan om dit op 'n rasionele wyse te manipuleer nie. Vanuit sommige poststrukturele benaderings sou daar aangevoer kon word dat die verhouding tussen subjek en objek deur die teks gedekonstrueer word. Alhoewel só 'n argument geldig sou wees, is dit ook belangrik om te let op die maniere waarop liggaamlike materiële ervaring in hierdie gedeeltes op konkrete wyse uitgebeeld word. In die volgende beskrywing van Siegfried se ervarings in Seepunt is dit byvoorbeeld nie so eenvoudig soos 'n binêre opposisie van subjek en objek wat slegs teoreties omvergewerp word nie. Die groot hoeveelheid liggame (Siegfried se liggaam, sand en seewater, sowel as die verskillende verhoudings waaruit hierdie liggame spruit) wat 'n rol in die interaksie speel, is duidelik, sowel as die konkrete ervaring van 'n konneksie met die meer-as-menslike:

> Die sand is te los onder sy tone dis te warm hy kan nie wegkom nie dis die moeilikste hardloop. Sy voet swik. Die sand is in sy gesig hy kruip hande-viervoet sy oë is nat alles proe sout. Sy stem skree sy gorrel trek uit sy mond uit alles skree. Hy is in die see. Die skree laat hom omval. Gesig eerste in. (*Siegfried* 79)

Dit is duidelik dat nie net die ruimtes waarin hy homself bevind nie, maar ook Siegfried se spesifieke liggaamlikheid, sy ervarings beïnvloed. Siegfried se gewebde hande speel 'n rol in die meeste van sy ervarings—hoofsaaklik op 'n stremmende manier, aangesien tegnologie oor die algemeen ontwikkel is vir gebruik deur mense met ongewebde hande. Siegfried sukkel onder andere met 'n rugsak (19), plaasgereedskap (57), 'n blikkie Coke (91–2), hempsknope (96), eetgerei (113–4), 'n skêr (166), en 'n pen (172). Soos Siegfried se pa vir hom sê (oor boomklim):

"Jy's nie 'n donnerse kat nie mens kan net doen wat jou lyf wil hê jy moet kan en niks meer nie en die Here behoed jou niks minder nie" (113). Ook sy gewebde voete veroorsaak probleme. Hy het aanvanklik "groot stewels [...] spesiaal vir hom gebou dat sy enkels kan reguit bly sy voete is groot sy voete is swaar" (11). Nadat sy skoene gesteel word op die trein tussen Stellenbosch en Kaapstad (71), loop hy die res van die tyd kaalvoet. Dit veroorsaak dat sy voete uitgelewer is aan die omgewing: "Hy is seer alles is stukkende nerwe sy voet is seer so kaal" (75).

Webb Keane (194) is van mening dat die mens se gebruik van ander liggame nie dui op 'n aktiewe subjek wat 'n passiewe voorwerp manipuleer nie. Die verhouding tussen subjek en voorwerpe is nie eenvoudig nie, omdat voorwerpe eienskappe besit wat sekere potensiële interaksies moontlik maak. Soos die menslike liggaam wat "net [kan] doen wat jou lyf wil hê jy moet kan" (Anker, *Siegfried* 113), só laat alle voorwerpe net sekere interaksies toe. Die meer-as-menslike is dus nie passief nie, maar bevat eienskappe wat vergelykbaar is met die agentskap wat tradisioneel slegs aan mense toegeskryf is. In hierdie artikel word die Engelse term "agency", in navolging van onder andere Anker ("Nomadiese self" 261, 412) en Chaudari (76), as "agentskap" vertaal. Soos Chaudari (76) beweer, is 'n "agent" "'n 'wese' met die kapasiteit om op te tree"; "agentskap" dui op "die uitoefening of manifestasie van hierdie hoedanigheid". Die term "agency" sou ook na Afrikaans vertaal kon word deur middel van 'n omskrywing, byvoorbeeld "kapasiteit om op te tree". Die term "agentskap" beklemtoon egter dat dit 'n spesifiek menslike eienskap, tradisioneel geassosieer met 'n menslike figuur (die agent), is wat binne OO met die meer-as-menslike in verband gebring word.

In *Siegfried* kan daar verwys word na die agentskap van niemenslike voorwerpe wat Siegfried se ervarings beïnvloed. Sy reeds genoemde spesiale stewels (*Siegfried* 11), die handvatsel van sy pa se bakkie (27), en sy klere sonder knope (96 en 129) vergemaklik byvoorbeeld sy bestaan. Wanneer hy hierdie voorwerpe verloor, word sy lewe moeiliker. Hierdie voorwerpe is deur 'n mens, Siegfried se pa, aangepas. In terme van Keane (194) se genoemde teorie kan daar egter aangevoer word dat hy hierdie aanpassings net kon maak omdat hierdie voorwerpe eienskappe besit wat hierdie interaksies moontlik maak. Siegfried self manipuleer ook voorwerpe met eienskappe wat interaksies toelaat wat hy as gunstig ervaar. Hy gebruik byvoorbeeld 'n mes om 'n blikkie Coke oop te maak (92).

Behalwe daarvoor dat Siegfried verstrengel is met die omgewings waarin hy homself bevind en met nielewende voorwerpe, is hy ook intiem verbind met diere en plante. Hy het veral 'n verhouding met een dier en een plant: Hond en Plant. Siegfried en Smit beland uiteindelik onder 'n brug waar hawelose mense bly. Hond woon ook hier (75). Hond kry kos by die hawelose mense onder die brug en dien vir hulle as beskerming (82) en vir Siegfried as 'n "kussingwolf" wanneer hy met sy kop op hom slaap (78). Plant is die palmboom wat Siegfried van die plaas af saamneem stad toe en uiteindelik in Seepunt plant (229). Siegfried sorg vir Plant en Plant bied vir Siegfried 'n manier om "immersed, committed, in touch" met die wêreld te wees—soos wat Amin en Thrift (112) beweer oor die belewing van die band met die meer-as-menslike wat in die beoefening van tuinbou moontlik word. Voorbeelde hiervan is wanneer Siegfried vir Plant vryf wanneer hy alleen of gedisoriënteerd voel in die nagklub Squatter Camp (*Siegfried* 137), in Huis Sonneskyn (164), en in die fratssirkus (219).

Abjeksie en wording

In *Siegfried* word abjekte karakters in dierlike terme beskryf. Onder die brug waar die hawelose mense bly, woon byvoorbeeld Mildred, 'n meisie met "'n bos wilde hare" en 'n "eselse gebulk" (82), wat vir Smit voer soos 'n mavoël haar baba (248). Hier woon ook "Philip die Kat" wat "Die Kat Gelyd" maak, "'n klank erger as 'n katwyfie in Augustus" (82). In Huis Sonneskyn (159), en ook in Fafnir se fratssirkus, is daar 'n "voëlvrou" wat "Kwêê"-geluide maak (198). In die sirkus is daar ook 'n "wurmman", 'n vrou met 'n stert, 'n "perdgesigman" en 'n "lelike meermin" (206–7). Siegfried se gewebde hande en voete maak hom in die oë van ander 'n "visman" (15), "paddafiguur" (19), "eend-freak" (104), en "amfibiese monstertjie" (114). Siegfried word nie net met waterdiere vergelyk nie, maar ook met voëls. Maggie (David se meisie) sê aan Siegfried: "Jy fladder jou kos, jy fladder alles in soos 'n voëltjie" (114). Wanneer hy oorweldig voel, doen hy "die voëlding" (120). Dit help hom om te ontspan en behels dat hy "sy arms uitsteek langs die kante en stadig soos 'n voël maak op en af met sy arms soos 'n reier wat stadig vlieg" (129).

Soos reeds genoem, handel wordende-dier vir Deleuze en Guattari nie oor mense wat maak of hulle diere is, of beskryf word as diere nie (Anker, "Nomadiese self" 14), maar eerder oor die deterritorialisering van die molêre samevoegings wat geassosieer word met tradisionele idees oor die menslike subjek. Anker ("Nomadiese self", 221) verduidelik dat Deleuze en Guattari die mens beskou as 'n "ditheid", soos enigiets anders uit die milieu van die

meer-as-menslike. Dit beteken dat die menslike bewussyn "'n stel snelhede tussen ongevormde partikels, 'n stel ongesubjektiveerde affekte" is (221). As die mens beskou word as 'n "ditheid", beteken dit dat dit ook oopgestel kan word tot verbindings met ander samevoegings, intensiteite, en "dithede" (224).

Die 'dierlike' karakters in Siegfried word nie net deur die ander karakters in die roman soos abjekte wesens behandel of met diere vergelyk nie. Die konneksies en samevoegings wat tussen hulle en die meer-as-menslike gevorm word, stem dikwels meer ooreen met dié waaruit diere en plante ontstaan as dié waarmee mense tradisioneel geassosieer word. Siegfried maak nie 'n bewuste keuse om "die voëlding" te doen nie, maar dit is 'n affektiewe konneksie wat hom kalmeer. Dieselfde is waar van sy verbinding met Plant. Wanneer Siegfried aan Plant vat, vorm hy konneksies met die meer-as-menslike en ervaar hy wat Deleuze en Guattari (*Thousand plateaus* 11) beskryf as die wysheid van plante: "Even when they have roots, there is always an outside where they form a rhizome with something else—with the wind, an animal, human beings". In Siegfried is daar dus 'n vervaging van die grens tussen die menslike en die meer-as-menslike—'n vervaging wat, volgens Barendse (84), nie by die karakter van Smit plaasvind nie.

Daar is vroeër verwys na die manier waarop Siegfried se fokalisering ooreenstem met die maniere waarop outistiese mense asook diere, volgens Grandin, die wêreld waarneem. Soos genoem is hierdie vergelyking problematies; daar bestaan immers 'n pynlike geskiedenis, én hede, van mense wat deur hulle gemeenskappe beskou word as minder-as-menslik en dus op wrede en uitbuitende maniere behandel word (sien byvoorbeeld Mbembe 24). Dat die gestremde karakters in *Siegfried* vergelyk word met diere kan beskou word as 'n ontkenning van hulle regte, voorregte, en waardigheid—sake wat gewoonlik slegs met menslikheid geassosieer word. *Siegfried* kan egter ook gelees word as kritiek op die maniere waarop abjekte, 'dierlike' mense deur die samelewing hanteer word. Hierdie oënskynlike teenstrydigheid word in die volgende afdeling aangespreek.

Objekgeoriënteerde gestremdheidstudies

Viljoen bespreek, onder meer, die literêre uitbeelding van die maniere waarop die samelewing mense wat as gestremd geklassifiseer word, behandel. Wat *Siegfried* betref, skenk sy veral aandag aan die uitbeelding van Huis Sonneskyn as 'n ruimte wat veronderstel is om 'n tuiste te bied aan gestremde persone, maar deur Siegfried as onherbergsaam ervaar word. Sy voer aan dat die psigiatriese verslae in die derde afdeling van die roman voortdurend "teenstrydig [is] met Siegfried se ervaring van homself" (Viljoen 63). Sodoende word "die kilheid en onbegrip van die psigiatriese personeel vir die leefwêreld van die gestremde" uitgebeeld en word daar kommentaar gelewer op die manier waarop gestremde persone deur die samelewing hanteer word (Viljoen 73). Viljoen (68) wys ook op die ironie van Fafnir wat sy sirkus sien as 'n heenkome vir mense wat "nooit die status van mens gegun [word] nie" (*Siegfried* 214), maar hulle mishandel en ook hulle leefwêreld misken. Vir hom is hulle net rekwisiete in sy eksperimentele toneelproduksie.

Viljoen fokus voorts op hoe die onderskeid tussen "normale" en gestremde karakters in *Siegfried* vervaag. Haar argument word soos volg saamgevat: "Hoewel Siegfried gestremd is, word hy in hierdie verhaal byna as normaal uitgebeeld in vergelyking met die ander karakters, deur die klem op die nie-gestremdes se ongewoonheid en abnormaliteite" (60). Sy ondersteun hierdie argument deur te verwys na die "normale" karakters se abjekte en sosiaal onaanvaarbare gedrag, byvoorbeeld Smit se entomofagie en David en Fafnir se sadistiese siening en hantering van Siegfried.

Alhoewel Viljoen dit nie eksplisiet stel nie, sluit haar lesing van *Siegfried* aan by die interdissiplinêre veld van "disability studies", wat in hierdie artikel as "gestremdheidstudies" vertaal word. Teoretici binne gestremdheidstudies argumenteer dat gestremdheid 'n sosiale konstruk, eerder as 'n essensialistiese identiteit, is (Feeley 865). Foucault se werk oor geestesversteurings word byvoorbeeld deur hierdie teoretici gebruik om te verduidelik hoe mense hiërargies geklassifiseer word as "normaal" of afwykend (Feeley 865). As hierdie klassifikasies gesien word as arbitrêr, raak dit moontlik om diagnoses te weier en die onderskeid tussen "normaal" en "gestremd" te dekonstrueer (866). Die mediese wetenskap is gewoonlik gemoeid met die diagnosering van afwykings van die norm as siektetoestande, maar gestremdheidstudies fokus eerder op die omgewings, sisteme, en beleide wat gestremde mense se lewens bemoeilik (Cella 578). Dit is dan ook wat Viljoen doen wanneer sy die uitbeelding van onherbergsame ruimtes in *Siegfried* bespreek.

Soos wat OO, en veral die nuwe materialisme, poststrukturalistiese denkers se tekstualisering en abstrahering van die werklikheid uitdaag (Smith, "Ekokritiek" 752 en Meyer, "Allesomvattende" 69), só voer Feely (866) aan

dat poststrukturalistiese benaderings tot gestremdheidstudies problematies is. As daar slegs gefokus word op die sosiale konstruksie van kategorieë wat verband hou met normaliteit, gestremdheid, en geestesafwykings, word die belang van die liggaamlike en materiële dimensie van mense se bestaan misgekyk. Feely redeneer voorts dat Foucault en ander poststrukturele denkers kulturele diskoers sien as 'n aktiewe mag wat passiewe materie manipuleer. Daarteenoor voer Feely (868) aan dat OO gebruik kan word om ook ondersoek in te stel na hoe materie agentskap besit wat diskoers beïnvloed. Feely se argument sluit dus aan by OO se ondermyning van die streng onderskeid tussen die subjek en die objek, soos reeds bespreek. In gestremdheidstudies word kulturele diskoers normaalweg gesien sien as 'n aktiewe agent wat passiewe materie (insluitend menslike liggame) manipuleer. 'n Spesifieke menslike liggaam sal byvoorbeeld binne 'n spesifieke diskoersraamwerk gediagnoseer word met 'n spesifieke gestremdheid. Dié menslike liggaam besit egter ook, in Keane se terme (soos bespreek in "Die meer-as-menslike") sekere eienskappe wat weerstandig is teen hierdie diagnose en wat nie daardeur verklaar kan word nie. As teoretici binne gestremdheidstudies dus kritiek wil lewer op die maniere waarop mense binne sekere diskoerse gereduseer word tot hulle gestremdhede, is dit volgens Feely (868) nie genoeg dat hierdie diskoerse bloot intellektueel gedekonstrueer word nie. Daar moet ook aandag gegee word aan die maniere waarop menslike liggame hierdie diskoerse kompliseer.

Soos die titel van Feely se artikel ("Disability studies after the ontological turn: A return to the material world without a return to essentialism") suggereer, laat OO akademiese aandag aan die materiële wêreld toe, insluitend liggaamlike ervarings, sonder dat daar verval word in essensialistiese denke. Terwyl die werklikheid van liggaamlike pyn en ongemak (insluitend dié gesetel in die brein) nie geïgnoreer moet word nie, moet dit ook nie gebruik word om die essensie van 'n liggaam te beskryf nie. Alle liggame is altyd in wording en ander, minder pynlike, konneksies en moontlikhede kan gerealiseer word (Feely 870).

Hier kan bygevoeg word dat Deleuze en Guattari se fokus op wording, insluitende wordende-dier en -plant, beteken dat idees oor 'normale' menslike subjektiwiteit uitgedaag word. Terwyl Viljoen se argument omtrent die uitbeelding van die omgewing en sosiale strukture in *Siegfried* as onherbergsaam, geldig is, vind daar nie in die roman bloot 'n dekonstruksie van "normaliteit" en "gestremdheid" plaas nie. Die roman verken die lyding van Siegfried en ander abjekte karakters in spesifieke situasies, maar ook hulle wording in interaksie met die meer-as-menslike wat in die vorige afdeling bespreek is. Hierdie wordende-dier en -plant dien vir Siegfried as vluglyne wat hom help ontsnap van geblokkeerde menslike subjektiwiteit.

Terry Eagleton (9–11) waarsku dat daar vorms van die nuwe materialisme is wat materie abstraheer en dat daar bepaalde gevare aan hierdie praktyk verbonde is:

> As such, they run the risk of taking the pain out of it, turning their gaze from its recalcitrant bulk. […] Matter, in short, must be rescued from the humiliation of being matter. Instead, it must be regarded as a sort of materiality without substance, as fluid and protean as the post-structuralist notion of textuality. Like textuality, the stuff is infinite, indeterminate, unpredictable, non-stratified, diffuse, free-floating, heterogeneous and untotalisable.

As daar slegs gefokus sou word op hoe Siegfried en die ander abjekte karakters idees oor molêre subjektiwiteit deterritorialiseer, sou dit beteken dat hulle slegs simbole vir spesifieke filosofiese idees is. Hulle wordingsprosesse word egter nie as pynloos uitgebeeld nie. Hulle status as die Ander word ook nie geromantiseer of geëssensialiseer, soos wat Braidotti (in Dolphijn en Van der Tuin 24) beweer in dekonstruktiewe denke gebeur, nie.

Siegfried is intiem verbind met die meer-as-menslike en hy is voortdurend in prosesse van wordende-dier en plant. Dit beteken egter nie hy ís 'n dier of plant nie. Soos Grandin (in Grandin en Johnson lok. 129) beweer: "Autistic people can think the way animals think. Of course, we also think the way people think—we aren't *that* different from normal humans. Autism is a kind of way station on the road from animals to humans". Dolphijn en Van der Tuin (113) stel dat die nuwe materialiste die verhoudings tussen liggame, "their affect, force, and movement […], speeds and slownesses, [and] how the event unfolds according to the in between, according to intra-action" behoort te ondersoek eerder as die liggame self. Wat gestremdheidstudies betref, beteken dit dat OO daardie "way station on the road from animals to humans", oftewel die verskynsel van wordende-dier, kan ondersoek vir moontlikhede—en vir beperkings. Grandin se beklemtoning dat outistiese mense ook mense is, beteken egter ook dat onderdrukkende sisteme nie geïgnoreer moet word nie en dat die politieke angel nie uit gestremdheidstudies gehaal moet word nie.

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Samevatting

In die artikel is gevind dat die karakter van Siegfried op verskeie maniere intiem verbind is met die meer-as-menslike wêreld. Hy is ook voortdurend in 'n proses van wording. Hy en die ander abjekte karakters in die roman deterritorialiseer dominante subjektiwiteitsopvattings. Die grense tussen wat beskou word as menslik en niemenslik vervaag dus in die uitbeelding van die karakter. Hierdie uitbeelding van die vervaging van die grense tussen die menslike en die meer-as-menslike in 'n gestremde karakter het die potensiaal om vrae op etiese vlak te genereer, gegewe die wrede maniere waarop mense wat beskou word as 'minder menslik' as andere, dikwels hanteer word. Die uitbeelding van Siegfried se interaksie met die meer-as-menslike dekonstrueer egter nie bloot opvattings oor aktiewe menslike subjekte en passiewe niemenslike objekte nie. Die fokus op sy liggaamlike ervarings en op die intensiteit daarvan, asook op die affekte tussen sy liggaam en ander liggame, beteken dat sy pynlike ervarings in spesifieke omgewings en sisteme vooropgeplaas word. Dit is veral waar van sy ervarings in Huis Sonneskyn, waar daar gepoog word om die kompleksiteit van sy identiteit te reduseer tot patologie wat genormaliseer moet word. In aansluiting by Viljoen se studie oor *Siegfried* word geargumenteer dat hierdie gedeeltes van die roman in verband gebring kan word met kritiek uit die gestremdheidstudies op die maniere waarop gestremde mense deur die samelewing behandel word. In die roman word die vervaging van die grense tussen die menslike en die niemenslike in 'n gestremde karakter uitgebeeld en, terselfdertyd, word kritiek gelewer op die maniere waarop die samelewing dikwels gestremde mense (en ander abjekte wesens) hanteer en hulle probeer inperk.

Erkenning

Hierdie artikel is gebaseer op gedeeltes uit die proefskrif, *'n Geokrities-vergelykende analise van Afrikaans- en Engelstalige Suid-Afrikaanse stedelike romans*. Dit is in 2016 aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch voltooi met Louise Viljoen as studieleier.

Aantekeninge

1. In hierdie artikel gebruik ek 'normaal' in aanhalingstekens om te verwys na mense wat nie deur die samelewing geklassifiseer word as gestremd nie. Die term "neurotipies", wat spruit uit die neurodiversiteitsbeweging—sien byvoorbeeld Steve Silberman se invloedryke *Neurotribes* (2015) sou ook gebruik kon word, behalwe dat dit hier gaan oor Siegfried se liggaamlike sowel as sy verstandelike gestremdheid. Ek verkies ook die gebruik van 'normaal' omdat die aanhalingstekens dui op die problematiese aspek van die term, aangesien die woord steeds die voorregte wat 'normale' mense in die meeste omgewings en gemeenskappe geniet, impliseer.
2. Daar moet gelet word op die feit dat dit nie vir alle denkers binne die veld van OO gaan om 'n eenvoudige afwys van die poststrukturalisme nie. Smith ("Ekokritiek" 759) verwys byvoorbeeld na Morton se herinterpretasie van Derrida se bekende uitspraak dat daar niks buite die teks is nie: "Morton se interpretasie is dat wanneer Derrida […] sê: 'there is nothing outside the text' […], hy daarmee saamstem deurdat hy daarin lees dat daar nie 'n groot Ander is nie, 'no device, for instance, that could measure quantum phenomena without participating in these phenomena' […]. Belangriker: 'All observations are inside the system' […] Uit hierdie uitspraak van Morton kan gesien word dat hy Derrida se seminale stelling hier bo interpreteer as 'n verwysing na die saambestaan van alle dinge en dat alle dinge interaktief binne dieselfde sisteem is. Morton voer aan dat Derrida nie 'n veralgemenende stelling oor realiteit maak nie, maar dat Derrida 'n sisteem van interaktiwiteit beskryf".
3. In die res van die artikel word die term 'liggame' ook op hierdie wyse gebruik—as verwysend na menslike en niemenslike, lewende en nielewende voorwerpe wat elkeen ook gevorm word (ontstaan) uit komplekse verhoudings met die meer-as-menslike. Wanneer daar na 'liggaamlike' ervarings of eienskappe verwys word, word daar daarenteen na menslike karakters se liggame verwys.

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Biracialism and trauma in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

Kayode Omoniyi Ogunfolabi

Biracialism and trauma in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

The connection between the discourse of racial purity and its traumatic effects on the biracial woman takes center stage in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, which manifests in valorization and vilification of biracial subjects. Contrary to received and discriminatory knowledge that equated biraciality with degeneracy and hyper-sexuality, this article argues that master narratives of social marginality, and stigmatization of biracial women are undermined through the counter-narrative of subjects that deconstructs the dialectic of visibility and invisibility of the biracial body. Appropriating the stereotypes against them, victims recover their subjectivity by articulating their stories, which transgress an ossified binary perception of race. Though these stories do not provide narrative closure, they embrace the contradictions and ambivalence that characterize existential realities of biracial bodies, and therefore, rupture the singular and normative narrative that names biracial women as 'other'. **Keywords:** biracialism, trauma, visibility, invisibility, testimony.

Introduction

The story of the biracial woman in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* is inscribed indelibly on her body.[1] It is this story that precedes her entry into the narrative of Nigerian ecopolitics; in other words, the story that the biracial body is capable of telling reveals the operation of power in the production of socially sanctioned ordering of bodies. *Yellow-Yellow* contains multiple narratives, one of which is that of repressive dictatorship, which in Nigerian history corresponds to Sani Abacha's infamous regime that executed the writer and environmental activist, Ken Saro Wiwa. Apart from this, Agary's novel presents the struggle of Niger-Delta militants who fight the recklessness and exploitation of the oil companies, and particularly, raises awareness about the negative impact of oil drilling on the social, economic, and political lives of the people of the Niger-Delta. Another important story is that of young girls who migrate to urban centers with the dream of social mobility either through romance with expatriates or prostitution involving a broad range of clients.

Yet within these competing stories is that of the group of female children referred to simply as, "Yellow-Yellow" or "Yellows". The novel focuses exclusively on the women, making it difficult to assess the experience of biracial men. But the fact that the subjects in *Yellow-Yellow* are women shows that their plight is relatively gender-based. Precisely because the experience of these biracial women is intensely personal, it slides under dominant narratives. However, through the narrator-protagonist—Zilayefa—Agary's novel shows that social exclusion of biracial women is not necessarily anchored on white ancestry but is rather legitimized by indirect evocation and valorization of racial authenticity, according to which 'white' and 'black' become uncontaminated and unproblematic racial categories.

On the one hand, society inscribes the biracial body with exotic visibility while, on the other, forces it to social invisibility. In other words, by transgressing black and white, the biracial woman unsettles the normative categories of race and consequently becomes 'the other'. This 'otherness' constitutes the major cause of pain for the biracial characters of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. As the discussion of the text will show, this dialectic of visibility and invisibility produces traumatic experience in the protagonist. In articulating this experience of trauma, the novel rewrites the master narratives of racial exclusivity. By privileging the voices of biracial women, *Yellow-Yellow* appropriates and distorts the narrative of racial chauvinism.

Many critical responses to Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* have addressed the exploitative practices of the oil multinationals, degradation of the environment, violence, impoverishment of the people of Niger-Delta, and the

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predicament of biracial children, especially women. For example, both E. D. Simon and Michael Janis have noted the protagonist's vulnerability to sexual predation (Simon 163; Janis 326).

Charles Cliff Feghabo claims that there are different levels of "otherness" in the novel and that the Ijaw women are the ones that suffer the most because they are oppressed by the state and the patriarchal system. It is for this reason that he refers to the women as triple subaltern (317). In addition, he addresses what he calls the "enormity of the psychological trauma she [Zilayefa] and her like that abound in the Delta have to contend with" (321), which in a way signals the traumatic dimension of being biracial in the Niger-Delta region. Ignatius Chukwumah also claims that the network of oppressive institutions constitutes what he calls the "displaced male image", through which the protagonist's suffering assumes a gendered identity—male (49). Solomon Azumurana contends that the women in Agary's novel appropriate the positions of absent relations as a means of survival (151). While these perspectives on Agary's novel illuminate one's understanding of the text, they also make it possible to discover other aspects of the novel that are germane to analyzing the plight of the biracial woman but which are yet to be explored.

Although Simon, Janis, Chukwumah, and Azumurana have addressed the connection between the excesses of the oil companies in the Niger-Delta, sexual exploitation of Ijaw women, the representation of oppressive state and social institutions as male, and the impact of absent family members on some of the characters in the novel, they seem to have based their claims on the broader issue of family, state, and multinational exploitation of oil resources. While focusing on this systematic exploitation is important in and of itself, it omits the unique experience of the biracial woman, who is a victim in more ways than one. For instance, social subordination of women, economic challenges, sexual exploitation, and stigmatization of the yellow skin, all complicate the daily living of the biracial woman. Unlike Simon and Janis, Feghabo refers to the particular circumstance of biracial women, which he describes as "psychological trauma." Despite Feghabo's reference to psychological trauma, he does not pay close attention to the ways in which the novel creates the narrative of 'otherness', and in particular, how the protagonist functions as a subject of trauma. In other words, by lumping the protagonist and other biracial women together, Feghabo homogenizes all biracial women, implying that their experiences are more or less the same. Agary's text, in fact, resists homogenization by showing that biracialism is over-determined by factors such as class, family backgrounds, and socialization. However, it is in the character of Zilayefa, the narrator-protagonist, that the trauma of racial preferences can be appreciated precisely because the story of *Yellow-Yellow* is rendered through her voice.

After an initial exploration of trauma theory as it relates to the novel, this essay will be in three parts: the first addresses the valorization of racial authenticity and simultaneous vilification of biracial identities. This reading will be done through an interpretation of one of the characters' (Madam George, aka Sisi) story. The second section uses Caruth's template of trauma to demonstrate the sense in which the protagonist is a victim of trauma. Finally, the article shows how the text thematizes narrative agency on the part of the protagonist as a necessary step towards undermining the metanarrative of racial purity and attenuating the traumatic effects of otherness.

Trauma

The term 'trauma' is used in this article, not in the broader and loose description of pain, but in the narrower sense, which consists in how a violent event in the past returns to haunt the survivor. Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma used to be understood as a wound inflicted on the body (3). However, the meaning of the term has undergone changes:

> In its later usage the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that […] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor […] [S]o trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (3–4; original emphasis)

For Caruth, what is important to know about trauma is not just the event, but the impact of the event on the mind of the survivor beyond the moment in which the event occurred. Trauma is therefore crucial for Caruth "not only

because it depicts what we can know about traumatizing events, but also, and more profoundly, because it tells of what it is, in traumatic events, that is *not* precisely grasped" (6; original emphasis). The very thing that constitutes the traumatic is the persistent return of the lacuna in the event, which the survivor is unable to account for.

Discussing the connection between time and the unconscious Victor Burgin seems to corroborate this notion of trauma when he says that "the past event, whether actual or fictional, produces real effects in the present" (118), and affirms Freud's contention that "There is no time in the unconscious" (qtd in Burgin 118). Thus, trauma is contingent upon a traumatic memory's ability to transgress space and time mainly because of the epistemological void that it creates in the survivor: "trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it*" (64; original emphasis). That is, the survivor is haunted by the mystery of survival rather than the actual confrontation with death. It is this mystery that causes the survivor to relive the traumatic event without knowing that the past haunts them because of their inability to understand how they managed to escape such an encounter with death.

Closely related to Caruth's idea of trauma is Felman and Laub's argument that traumatic memory is usually submerged and, in the process of being submerged, gets distorted (76). Their argument suggests that the traumatic event resists full apprehension by the survivor but they suggest as well that the longer the story is withheld, the more distorted it becomes. For them, "[t]here are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory* and *speech*" (78; original emphasis). They advocate telling one's story as a way of liberating oneself from the shackles of the traumatic past. They contend that:

> [T]he 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. (79)

Precisely because the traumatic event is submerged and always already distorted, it is crucial that the survivor tells their story in order to escape its tyranny, which can be as traumatizing as the event.

However, Zoe Norridge argues that "[p]ain, then, in the body of works associated with trauma theory, is enduringly described through its absence" (6). She contends that inability to narrate one's story of pain or inaccessibility of one's story silences that story, in particular when this has to do with colonized societies (8). In her revision of trauma theory, Norridge says that trauma theory can be linked to the ascendancy of post-structuralism, which is skeptical of the reliability of any representational system. She emphasizes this point when she says:

> This concept of unrepresentable lacuna of testimony is based on three lines of thought: deconstruction, with its emphasis on the impossibility of ever fully representing what is sought to be represented in language; psychoanalysis, with its focus on the repression of traumatic memory; and survivor writings, which explore the notion that the extremes of experiences are inaccessible because those who suffered the most are no longer with us. (5)

For Norridge, trauma theory, with its leaning towards deconstruction and psychoanalysis on the one hand, and Elaine Scarry's claim that pain destroys language on the other hand, have the tendency to homogenize the sufferings of colonized societies as universal suffering, the implication of which is denying the subjectivity inscribed in individual stories of pain (7–8). Caruth's notion of trauma, Felman and Laub's emphasis on testimony, and Norridge's idea of pain can enlighten an analysis of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. For instance, Caruth's theory of trauma, contingent upon unavailability of knowledge about the event, is to a large extent valid on the grounds that narratives and testimonies about traumatic events are usually constructed through memory after a particular event has been lost in time and space. This proposition suggests that testimonies are vulnerable to vagaries of the survivor's memory, which is usually elliptical precisely because it is necessarily selective. Some scholars have emphasized the problem of memory in the testimonies of survivors, particularly the way in which traumatic events destabilize memory (Krystal, *et al*. 157; Herman 5; Loftus, *et al*. 66). Felman and Laub also state that, regardless of distortion of memory, telling one's story is necessary for one's survival (78).

Meanwhile, Norridge is sensitive to the power relations that govern the hierarchy of stories, a hierarchy in which the stories of minorities are silenced in the broader discourse of pain as universal experience, through the obliteration of difference. While conscious of the gaps in testimonies of trauma survivors, it is important to acknowledge that all narratives are elliptical. Likewise, rather than homogenizing the stories of minorities as

universal testimony of pain, Norridge resists the notion of the "unspeakable" stories and creates the possibility of empowering the narratives from the periphery of dominant narratives. In other words, while being aware of the limitations of traumatic stories, the survivors nevertheless must retain their narrative agency no matter how elliptical they may be.

Yellow-Yellow begins with the violent displacement of the protagonist's mother from her farmland as a result of oil spillage, signaling one of the prevalent environmental challenges that beleaguers the Niger-Delta. Afterwards, Zilayefa (the protagonist) describes the claustrophobic atmosphere of her village and expresses her desire to escape to Port Harcourt. Her desperation to leave the village brings her in contact with a Spaniard, Sergio, who visits the village to attend the funeral ceremony organized by one of the wealthiest families. For Zilayefa, Sergio is her lifeline out of the village drudgery, and she is dismayed when he disappears. Zilayefa eventually finds a job in Port Harcourt, where she is impregnated by an older predatory man named Admiral Kenneth Alowei Amalayefa. Meanwhile, Zilayefa later re-crosses paths with Sergio and has a sexual encounter with him. Because she is unsure of who is responsible for the pregnancy, she decides to get rid of it. The anguish of the abortion and the relief it brings her can be read as being parallel to the dictatorship and the death of the Nigerian tyrant Sani Abacha. Therefore, the novel ends on the note of a new beginning, both for Zilayefa and Nigeria.

Racial authenticity

One major experience that shapes Zilayefa's outlook on life generally and the lives of biracial women in particular is her encounter with the metanarrative of racial authenticity rendered by another biracial woman named Sisi. This experience emerges from Sisi's story which emphasizes society's expectations of racial purity and its agonizing effects on biracial children who apparently defy the white/black binary. In her story, Sisi tells Zilayefa that her potential father-in-law prevented his son from marrying her because her father was a European (101). When Sisi says, "Because my papa na *oyinbo*. His son had to marry someone whose lineage he knew" (101), there is the temptation to conclude that Sisi's would-be father-in-law opposed the marriage because of her European paternity. Therefore, when Sisi explains that "His son had to marry someone whose lineage he knew", she implies that the father-in-law was unable to see her exclusively as either white or black. This discourse resonates with perceptions of biracial people as unnatural and degenerate. Laura Ann Stoler argues that, within the contexts of British, French, and Dutch colonial projects, "[d]egeneration was defined as 'departures from the normal human type […] transmitted through inheritance and lead[ing] progressively to destruction'" (62). Degeneracy was also believed to have social and political consequences. Stoller states, "Through sexual contact with native women, European men 'contracted' disease as well as debased sentiments, immoral proclivities, and extreme susceptibility to uncivilized states" (67–8). Whiteness may have dominated the colonial situation, but it is blackness that assumes superiority in the postcolonial context of Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. Meanwhile, through her discussion with Sisi, Zilayefa now understands that "knowing my father would not release me from society's judgment" (101). Consequently, since Sisi's and Zilayefa's bodies do not fit into the binary codes of the races, they are pushed to the periphery of racial signification.

The exclusion also operates through the simultaneous visibility and invisibility imposed on biracial bodies. Sisi's identity is denied and is regarded as 'other'. In this way, she is made invisible. However, more insidious working of the discourse of racial authenticity is ironically the visibility accorded the biracial body through valorization of the light skin. Once Zilayefa has been accepted as one of the staff in a hotel in Port Harcourt, her supervisor Mr. Moses announces, "Dem don send us anoder mami-wata o" (They have sent us another Mammy water) (71). Even though the phrase "Mammy water" is used mostly in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria to address any woman who is beautiful and who possesses a very light complexion, its reference becomes more powerful when applied to biracial women. Along with Mammy water come stereotypes, one of which is deadly hyper-sexuality. So, while Nigerian society valorizes the beauty of biracial women, it does so by regarding their beauty and purported hyper-sexuality as destructive. The problem with the stereotype of the Mammy water is that it mythologizes biracial women and deprives them of human value. Also, such women are stigmatized as morally weak. Zilayefa's understanding of these social prejudices is expressed as follows: "I came to understand that people had preconceived notions about others of mixed race—they thought we were conceited, *promiscuous*, *undisciplined*, and confused. A mixed-race woman in a position of power must have gotten there *because of her looks* […] We were products of women […] who did not have morals to pass on to their children" (74; original emphasis). Valorizing the light skin of mixed-race women on the one hand may signify physical attraction but it is also

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coded with fear of unrestrained sexuality that often makes them vulnerable to male sexual exploitation. For instance, Zilayefa later realizes that Admiral has been exploiting her. By stating that "Those promises of 'I will take care of whatever you need' were falling on the ears of another pretty girl" (173), Zilayefa understands that Admiral is interested only in his sexual gratification.

Consequently, biracial women such as Sisi and Zilayefa are targets of reckless male sexual desire. Zilayefa's biracial friend and colleague, Emem, is aware of these stereotypes and has developed her coping strategies. In the first place, she understands that the stereotypes do not entirely define her subjectivity. Also, she undermines the power and authority of the stereotypes by reclaiming them. In other words, Emem self-consciously plays the role of the 'other' by fulfilling men's sexual desire for material profit. This way, she elevates herself from the position of victim to that of subject. Zilayefa says of her: "Emem never seemed to lack for anything […] [S]he took care of her family and even made up tear-inducing stories in their name to get money from her male admirers" (128). Although most of the critical responses to *Yellow-Yellow* represent prostitution as a social vice that suggests women's powerlessness (Simon 157; Feghabo 322; Janis 326), the text appropriates the stereotype of prostitution towards the agency of biracial women.

As the novel demonstrates, the dialectic of visibility and invisibility leads to the hysterization of the female body (see Foucault 103–5). The biracial body becomes the "sexual body" *par excellence*. For example, Zilayefa says Emem has a "string of men who want to date her" (128), and also says of herself: "Attention from men was not a new thing to me […] There were men of all shapes" (71). This hysterization of the biracial body can also be seen when the protagonist reports that village girls bleach their skin to achieve greater sexual appeal for their sex trade in the cities. For these girls, the biracial skin appears to be the most desirable, a point that Zilayefa seems to corroborate when she states that "Some of them would even compare their new complexions to mine, saying how they were almost as yellow as I was" (36). Regardless of this instrumentation of the yellow skin by village sex workers, the fact that biracial bodies are seen almost exclusively as sexual bodies has a painful impact on Zilayefa who discovers that biracial women are stereotyped as hyper-sexual and, at the same time, are expected to serve as disposable tools for the fulfillment of male (hetero)sexual fantasy. It is necessary, therefore, to explore the ways in which this novel constructs its discourse of trauma and shows its impact on mixed-race women, particularly the protagonist, Zilayefa.

Biracialism and trauma

One thing that qualifies *Yellow-Yellow* as a trauma narrative is the effacement of the primal scene from the text. Ina Binaebi, Zilayefa's Ijaw mother, is the primary witness to her father's vanishing act. Right from its opening pages the novel foreshadows Zilayefa's imbrications in her mother's traumatic experience by highlighting the two women's resemblance. She emphasizes this fact when she says, "aside from my complexion, I looked like her, right down to the little birthmark below her left eye" (20). Zilayefa is the younger Binaebi: "When I looked at her, I saw a petite woman with an oval face, big dreamy eyes, a nose that looked like God was running low on clay the day he made it, and small lips that parted to reveal a charming gap-toothed smile. People often said to me, 'Your mother just went and gave birth to her twin'" (20). The similarity between the two women goes beyond mere physical or biological affinities; the adventurous journey to the city of Port Harcourt, the high expectations for success, the pursuit of love with an expatriate, the pregnancy, and the disappointment that follows, all foreshadow a vicious cycle.

Sergio's appearance into the story marks Zilayefa's entry into the domain of trauma: "I didn't care for him one way or another, but seeing this man [Sergio] brought me thoughts of my father" (19). In fact, the attempt to deny the pain of her father's absence ironically attests to Zilayefa's unconscious repression of the anguish of her father's absence. This suggests a "compulsion to repeat", which implies that the subject "repeats exactly what it does not remember or what it would rather not remember mainly because it wants to avoid bringing it to consciousness" (Freud qtd in Burgin 293). Despite her denial of its significance to her life, ironically, Zilayefa simply confirms the operation of the past in her life. Her father's absence will later haunt her when she relocates to Port Harcourt, where she exhibits behaviors more symptomatic of trauma survivors. For instance, Zilayefa's desire to meet her father resurfaces when she encounters Romeo the sailor in Port Harcourt: "I wished I could ask him about my father. […] She [her mother] skillfully avoided the subject when I brought it up […] but with Romeo's stories, my craving for information about Plato resurfaced. My mother's total devotion to me had succeeded only in suppressing, not erasing, my desires to know about my other half" (108). Although she admits that her mixed-race identity

was not an important subject in the village (74), the repressed past breaks through her mother's protective barrier in Port Harcourt.

Zilayefa's life in Port Harcourt epitomizes what Caruth calls traumatic returns, which is, the repeated rupture of a survivor's daily living by the repetition of a traumatic event either through memory or reliving the event (4). In no other act is this experience more emphatic than in Zilayefa's attraction to Admiral Amalayefa. It should be no surprise when she declares, "If I had the luxury of creating a dream father, he would definitely have come out looking like Admiral" (*Yellow* 120). More important, she explains that "I felt a deep sense of longing for him, not because of the comfort Emem hinted at, which was money, but because I was hoping that the relationship would give me a close paternal affection that I had never had" (138). Her first sexual encounter is motivated by the repetitive need and the recurrent desire for fatherly love, which she hopes to obtain from Admiral even if the price she has to pay is sex. More so, Admiral's over-indulgent attitude to her daughter, Alaere, only intensifies Zilayefa's pain of her father's absence and her attraction to Admiral. Both Admiral and Zilayefa are at cross purposes: the Admiral wants her for opportunistic sexual adventure while she wants him for a fatherly emotional bond (149).

Zilayefa is quite ambivalent about the sexual aspect of her relationship to Admiral because she constantly remembers her mother's admonition not to "spoil" herself. However, the prospects of obtaining fatherly love seem stronger than her resistance to sex. Therefore, she recuperates her father's memory in other men, which according to Caruth, only affirms the repetitive return to the primal scene of the father's disappearance. So when she says, "I found myself drawn to Admiral like a fly to a gourd of palm wine. I like the fact that, even though the first thing on his mind might have been getting me into bed […] I wanted him to dote on me as I had seen him dote on Alaere" (139–40), Zilayefa simply confirms her desire for a father and, if there is any exchange between the two of them at all, it is offering her body to Admiral in return for emotional safety and support she had seen Admiral lavish on her daughter Alaere (145).

Meanwhile, the story takes a different turn once Zilayefa becomes pregnant, mainly because she realizes that her story seems like a repetition of her mother's tale. On the one hand, Admiral's almost exclusively predatory sexual interest no longer provides the anticipated fatherly security and reassurance. Zilayefa says, "I was jolted into reality. Admiral did not have the time to commit to me […] I expected that a man his age, with his comforts, would welcome the news of fathering a child. But I should have known better, and I had no one to blame but myself since his reputation with young girls far, far, preceded him" (162). On the other, she is terrified of bearing another child who might have to endure the stigma of biracialism in case Sergio is responsible. This climactic point in the novel marks Zilayefa's admission of the pain that she has tried so much to smother. She exemplifies Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's argument in their discussion of the centrality of testimony to survival. According to them, victims of trauma not only survive to tell their stories, but also need to tell their stories to survive (78). Zilayefa recovers the story of biracial children from the public imagination where biracialism signifies otherness and stereotypes such as hyper-sexuality and racial ambiguity. Although this moment functions as the culmination of the story, it has its roots much earlier in the novel. In order to appreciate the ways in which Zilayefa possesses her story, it is necessary to explore how the text foregrounds and privileges the voice of the 'other'. It is a strategy to reclaim subjectivity, which seems virtually unattainable without a counter-narrative that challenges the grand narrative of racial difference.

Testimony, subjectivity, and survival

Zilayefa's account of her pain does not follow the structure of most testimonies. Felman and Laub explain that "The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (57). In *Yellow-Yellow*, there is no such listener to Zilayefa's narrative. However, the text nevertheless mimics testimony in that the victim speaks for the first time to readers who occupy the space of "hearers". More important, one object of testimony is to empower the victim to witness the past in order to undermine the tyranny of the past (Felman and Laub 79).

Therefore, as soon as the story shifts to Port Harcourt, it is clear that the novel offers narrative agency to Zilayefa. On her arrival at Sisi's office, Clara, one of Sisi's employees, provides Zilayefa with her employer's biography in such a detailed manner, chronicling her success, entrepreneurship, and kindness. However, despite the details, or precisely because of the details, Zilayefa could not help question Clara's story as follows:

> Clara seemed like a nice person, but I could not help but wonder how much of what she had told me was true. Several times as she intimated the details of Sisi and Lolo's lives, I was surprised at how much she disclosed and wondered if she

> discussed these intimate details just as freely with everyone who came into the shop when Sisi was not around. She had given me a lot of information, which I appreciated but did not know what to do with. It was more than I needed, but I did not tell her to stop. On my part, I enjoyed her melodrama as she acquainted me with the two strangers who would become my family, my lifeline, in Port Harcourt. There was no hearsay with her—she narrated with the authority of one who was always present. (60)

This self-reflexive moment connects Sisi and Zilayefa and establishes stigmatization and stereotypes as shared experiences. Clara's story, when juxtaposed with Sisi's own account of her life, is incomparable to the latter's in that while Zilayefa simply marvels at the details and authority of Clara's story, she discovers that her life parallels Sisi's: "I listened to Sisi, slowly appreciating the fact that knowing my father would not release me from society's judgment. At that moment, the realization was comforting" (101). Despite the manifold information provided through Clara's voice, the pain of living in a society prejudiced against biracial people becomes bearable. In contrast, Sisi's story helps Zilayefa to open up about her pain as a biracial young woman.

Therefore, when Sisi claims narrative agency like Zilayefa and Emem, their account displaces Clara's version. Certainly, Clara does not necessarily portray Sisi in a derogatory manner, but the novel privileges witnessing to one's own pain. *Yellow-Yellow* shows that rendering one's own testimony empowers the victim by undermining the terror of the past that inheres in silence. Zilayefa may not have achieved closure, but being able to connect with other victims may serve as a catalyst to healing. For instance, sensing Zilayefa's anxiety, Emem counsels her to ignore stereotypes and judgmental voices of society: "It did not matter what people thought of me because of my complexion" (75). Of course, it matters what other people thought of Zilayefa, Sisi, and Emem because of their complexion because such thoughts make the victims relive their pain. However, the important thing is that relocating narrative agency to the victims becomes the first step towards recreating biracial subjectivity in the novel.

Empowered by her voice, the protagonist confronts the demons from her past for the first time. Towards the end of the novel, Zilayefa expresses her anxiety and pain about exclusion and stigmatization as social outcast and sexual fetish. Zilayefa says, "Maybe when Emem and I shared a private joke, people around us understood that we were just being normal, ticklish young girls and not brats with the conceited sensibilities of which they accused mixed-race people" (75). Despite the magnitude of social prejudice and feeling of estrangement, the opportunity to tell her story helps Zilayefa to confront and transgress the grand narrative of racial purity.

The visibility of biracial children and racial slurs that come with it such as "African profits", "born-troways", "ashawopickins", and "father-unknowns" (171), help Zilayefa to express her frustration with her dual heritage. She therefore describes the extent to which she has been interpellated and caught up in the negativity adduced to mixed-race children by admitting that "I had the blood of a foreigner running through my veins and his genes confronting me every time I look at myself" (75). Therefore, when she encounters Sergio again in Port Harcourt, she cannot help wondering why young twenty-year old girls find their white spouses irresistible. Her inability to comprehend inter-racial love forces her to invisibility: "Maybe then [when she understands the attraction of inter-racial romance] I would not hide from the facts of my birth that my yellow skin and curly hair put on display" (171). The visibility of mixed-race women paradoxically forces them into a state of double effacement, first by social exclusion and second by self-effacement.

In order to demonstrate the uniqueness of her experience, the novel makes a distinction between biracial children and children of endogamous relationships whose fathers are no longer present. Comparing the latter to herself she says, "[T]heir secrets were not revealed in their complexion or the waves in their hair; mine was" (174). Even though this testimony does not automatically signify complete relief of her suffering, it empowers her to reconstruct her subjectivity. For instance, the abortion that ends the story, and which coincides with the death of Nigeria's dictator, Sani Abacha, shows Zilayefa's ability to reach into her inner will-power to initiate a new story. Just as Nigeria begins a new life after the demise of the dictator, Zilayefa also begins to advance towards a future that is uniquely hers.

Conclusion

Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* illustrates a hierarchy of discourses in which racial chauvinism, that is, the essentialist and normative approach to blackness, effaces and silences the voices of biracial people. Therefore, Agary's novel shows that the marginality of biracial people ironically objectifies them not only as objects of male sexual fantasy, but also as easy, inconsequential, and disposable apparatuses of gratuitous male libido. However, the novel also

demonstrates that this traumatic experience is a gendered one, especially because women seem more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than men. Rather than antagonizing this discriminatory discourse and essentializing biracial identity, *Yellow-Yellow* questions the normativity of blackness by foregrounding its logic of exclusion, emphasizes the psychic suffering it imposes on its victims, and empowers victims through their testimonies. Zilayefa's narration of her anxiety, pain, and trauma serves a specific purpose, which is to humanize her as well as to produce her story that functions as counter-narrative to the repressive fallacy of racial supremacy, whether black or white.

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Notes
1. The term 'half-caste' is often used colloquially in Nigeria. Though 'biracial' is not unproblematic (since race is a construct), the term is used here for lack of a viable alternative.

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Identité, langues et savoirs dans *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* de Ken Bugul

Roger Fopa Kuete

Identity, languages and knowledge in Ken Bugul's *Riwan ou le chemin de sable*

This paper, which draws its analytic and hermeneutic postulate from epistemocriticism, studies the mechanism of renegotiation of identity in Ken Bugul's *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* (Riwan, or the Sandy Path). It demonstrates that the narrator decides to return to her native land because she is afraid of losing connection with herself. The study analyses the return to the native land not as a withdrawal to one's identity but as a kind of poetizing of one of many various ways of life found within contemporary Senegalese society. The paper explores different forms of representation in cultural Senegalese knowledge through the perspectives of *savoir-être* (knowledge of how to behave) and *savoir-dire* (knowledge of how to express) which take into account taboo and customary rituals. These articulations of traditional knowledge are the keys from which the narrator reconnects with her origins and thus manages to reconstruct her ethnic identity. **Keywords:** Ken Bugul, *Riwan ou le chemin de sable*, identity, languages, socioculture.

Introduction

En postcolonie, en raison d'une dynamique toujours croissante de la migration du Sud vers le Nord, la question de la *migrance* perçue comme mouvement permanent dans la distance mais davantage comme condition d'un sujet marqué violemment par cette distance constitue l'une des figurations des paradoxes de l'immigration.[1] La caractéristique majeure de ces paradoxes est: "l'illusion d'une présence nécessairement provisoire [qui mute rapidement en] une présence durable, voire définitive" (Abdelmalek 10). Comme le montre Abdelmalek, ces paradoxes ne subsistent que parce qu'ils sont entretenus par trois instances: la société d'immigration, la société d'émigration et les immigrés eux-mêmes. Le démantèlement de ces instances est possible par la défection d'un de ses maillons essentiels en l'occurrence l'immigré. Lorsque ce dernier, plus précisément l'immigré de première génération se trouve pris au piège d'une crise ontologique, c'est-à-dire culturelle et identitaire en raison de l'incompatibilité entre son statut d'immigré donc d'étranger, et son aspiration à demeurer lui-même, l'une des options qui se présente à lui est de retourner en terre natale. Telle est l'alternative que choisit la narratrice de *Riwan ou le chemin de sable*, un roman inspiré de la vie de son auteur Ken Bugul. En effet, cette œuvre est le récit de la vie de quelques femmes sénégalaises engagées chacune dans un mariage polygamique. La narratrice qui n'est pas parvenue à trouver le véritable amour ni même le bonheur en Occident malgré son statut de femme intellectuelle, émancipée et moderne retourne dans son village natal pour tenter de guérir de ses illusions. Elle entreprend donc de se reconnecter avec la culture et les traditions de son village Dianké au Sénégal dans l'espoir de retrouver la paix du cœur et de se réconcilier avec elle-même, puis accepte de devenir la vingt-huitième épouse d'un marabout.

Dans cet article, je montre que la narratrice décide de retourner en terre natale parce qu'elle a peur de se perdre en tant qu'elle-*même*. Je commence par explorer assez rapidement les raisons de son retour puis je me demande à partir de quelles modalités on peut appréhender sa ré-immersion dans sa socioculture; notion que Dassi définit comme une façon particulière d'exister, une approche de la nature qui fonde tout ce qui caractérise génétiquement ou politiquement un individu et qui permet qu'il soit reconnaissable dans une communauté.

Dans un premier temps, j'interroge les procédés esthétiques qui rendent compte de son repositionnement idéologique dans le rapport qu'elle entretient tant avec quelques aspects de la culture traditionnelle de son village Dianké au Sénégal qu'avec la culture moderne. Pour ce faire, je pars du postulat selon lequel il demeure dans l'esthétique bugulienne la permanence de la métaphore du miroir qui aide à mettre en relief et ce de diverses manières le contraste entre un pan de la culture traditionnelle de son village et la culture moderne. Par ce procédé, la narratrice tourne en dérision les mirages de la modernité et offre la possibilité de découvrir sous un nouvel œil quelques aspects de la vie d'une frange non négligeable de femmes de son village. J'explore ensuite les modalisa-

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tions du savoir-être et du savoir-dire qui révèlent chez la narratrice l'acquisition et l'acceptation de codes culturels nouveaux, notamment en ce qui concerne les tabous et les rituels coutumiers du village. Le procédé de miroir et les modalisations susmentionnées permettent de mettre en lumière un aspect spécifique de la compétence de la narratrice sur les sujets de la soumission et de l'érotisme en milieu villageois. Toutes ces formes d'articulations de savoirs tant linguistiques que traditionnels sont la manifestation de la ré-immersion de la narratrice dans sa socioculture et les clés de sa reconstruction identitaire.

Pour conduire cette étude, je m'appuie sur les postulats théoriques et herméneutiques de l'épistémocritique aux fins de comprendre les relations qu'entretiennent les formes d'expressions verbales et mimétiques avec les savoirs culturels et traditionnels qui déterminent un pan de l'identité des habitants de Dianké. En effet, dans un texte, les "objets ne sont pas simplement des symboles servant à figurer l'actualité. Devenus littérature, plus riches alors que leurs modèles réels, ils les transforment en sens à venir, car ils déploient en les mobilisant de nouveaux possibles, encore incompris" (Pierssens 7). Ces indicateurs de savoirs, qu'on appelle des "agents de transfert [constituent] une classe fort nombreuse qui rassemble des objets et des structures qu'on pourrait croire hétéroclites: des métaphores et des chaînes de raisonnement, de simples mots isolés ou des traits descriptifs, des citations et des jeux de mots, etc." (Pierssens 9). Trois moments articulent mon analyse. Tout d'abord, je propose un repérage théorique autour des notions d'identités ethnique et culturelle chez l'immigrée bugulienne ainsi que sur sa condition au moment où elle choisit de retourner en terre natale. Ce préalable me permet d'analyser la métaphore du miroir qui caractérise son expression langagière—langage verbalisé et langage du corps—puis les modalisations du savoir-être et du savoir-dire chez elle comme l'expression de sa ré-immersion dans sa socioculture. Enfin, j'étudie l'esthétisation du thème de la soumission et de l'érotisme en milieu villageois comme argumentation du bonheur et de l'identité ethnique retrouvés.

L'immigré et la question identitaire

Le problème identitaire est immanent à tout processus migratoire car tout individu se définit d'abord par rapport à un lieu et à un groupe d'origine auxquels il est naturellement attaché. Marchal appelle ce groupe d'origine le *groupe ethnique* et il le distingue de l'ethnie en général pour mieux circonscrire les communautés ayant une sphère culturelle homogène et dont "parmi les éléments susceptibles de fonder le sentiment d'appartenance […] figurent la langue, la religion, le partage d'un territoire, la référence commune à des traits culturels, le respect d'institutions ou encore le sentiment partagé d'une différence raciale" (Marchal 100). Tous ces éléments associés à une histoire commune consolidée par l'existence d'un mythe fondateur, développent une identité "enracinée" (100) que Marchal appelle l'identité ethnique, et qui se présente comme ayant une "racine unique et exclusive de l'autre" (Glissant 60). Le sujet appartenant à un tel *groupe ethnique* se conçoit "comme un exemplaire du groupe, plutôt que comme un être unique" (Devos 85). C'est cette identité qui établit la relation qu'un sujet construit avec son environnement et lui permet de se repérer et de se fixer dans le monde. Du fait de sa dimension émotionnelle, elle demeure généralement stable, inamovible même si d'après la théorie du pôle de mobilité sociale, il n'est pas exclut que lorsque:

> *social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive […] to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group.*
>
> l'identité sociale des individus leur paraît insatisfaisante, ils s'efforceront de quitter leur groupe pour rejoindre un autre groupe plus valorisant (Tajfel et Turner 284).

Quoi qu'il en soit, il subsiste la question de ses origines et de la différence qui sont entre autres une source importante de discrimination. Par ailleurs, l'identité générale de l'individu ne dépend pas seulement de son appartenance ethnique. Elle est aussi "envisagée dans le nécessaire rapport à l'Autre [et] définit une culture composite et multiple fondée […] sur des relations tissées dans le présent, entre des éléments radicaux et hétérogènes" (Denooz et Thiéblemont-Dollet 96). En d'autres termes, c'est dans l'interaction entre deux groupes ayant des cultures différentes qu'apparaît l'identité culturelle. Cette interaction est susceptible de provoquer des modifications dans les façons de penser, de faire et d'agir d'un *groupe ethnique* faisant ainsi évoluer les références premières fondant l'identité ethnique. Ce processus de mutation culturelle est résumé dans la notion d'acculturation qui, renvoie aux

> *phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.*

> l'ensemble des phénomènes qui résultent d'un contact continu et direct entre des groupes d'individus de cultures différentes et qui entrainent des changements de modèles culturels initiaux de l'un ou des deux groupes (Redfield, Linton et Herskovits 149).

Marchal (107–8) dégage les trois conséquences possibles émanant du processus de l'acculturation. On a tout d'abord *l'adoption* lorsque l'un des groupes accepte la culture de l'autre à travers un processus de l'assimilation. On a ensuite la *combinaison* qui est la naissance d'une culture nouvelle issue de la rencontre de deux cultures différentes et enfin la *réaction* qui fait référence aux conséquences imprévues de l'adoption des traits culturels étrangers. L'identité culturelle prend donc en compte non seulement des considérations psychologiques modulant la perception que le sujet se fait de lui-même d'une part, puis celle qu'il se fait de sa relation avec le monde d'autre part, mais aussi les contraintes sociales qui pèsent sur lui ou sur le groupe dans lequel il vit. Elle "n'est [donc] pas donnée une fois pour toutes" (Maalouf 31).

Dans le corpus d'étude,

> *after having experienced* [*European*] *ways of living and forms of partnership alien to her culture, her religion, her tradition, the protagonist finds herself lost.*

> Après avoir expérimenté le mode de vie [européen] et les formes de relations étrangers à sa culture, sa religion, sa tradition, la protagoniste se sent perdue. (Martins 798) .

La narratrice vit donc au plan identitaire une situation instable car, après avoir adopté la culture de l'ailleurs,

> *her choices and what she believed would be the path to emancipation and happiness had not led to personal fulfillment and inner peace.*

> ses choix et ce qu'elle croyait être le chemin de l'émancipation et du bonheur ne l'ont pas conduite à un épanouissement personnel ni même à la paix intérieure. (Martins 798)

Une suite narrative nous permet d'illustrer l'effet de contraste qui préfigure la discrimination dans l'œuvre étudiée:

> Les cérémonies furent ponctuées d'échanges de civilités pendant lesquelles la famille de Dorotha, par la voix de son père, avait très sérieusement énuméré les défauts et les qualités de leur fille devant sa belle-famille française aux bras chargés de vins de France, royalement ignorés au profit des bouteilles de Vodka de toutes sortes qui se prenaient au goulot au fur et à mesure que la soirée avançait. Les Français écarquillaient les yeux, abasourdis devant ces gens d'un autre tempérament. Au petit matin, la mariée en longue robe fut retrouvée au bas de l'escalier ivre-morte, une bouteille de vodka à la main. (*Riwan* 111–2)

Ces "vins de France, royalement ignorés au profit de la vodka", cette "mariée ivre-morte" au bas de l'escalier, ces "gens d'un autre tempérament" sont autant d'indices d'agir, d'être et de faire qui ont pour effet de marquer, voire de renforcer la discrimination. Ils représentent ainsi les signes "que les individus emploient pour classer les autres individus (et eux-mêmes) dans des ensembles dont ils considèrent qu'ils reflètent des ressemblances et des différences pertinentes dans la vie quotidienne" (Fiske). Ces marqueurs de discrimination favorisent des situations de conflits dont la conséquence est l'exclusion qui inspire d'ailleurs chez la narratrice un sentiment d'extrême solitude tout en ravivant chez elle la "peur de se perdre en tant [qu'elle même]" (Geets 8). Même si la narratrice se réjouit de profiter du voyage dans cette Pologne aux "merveilleux paysages" (*Riwan* 112), l'impossibilité de partager cette expérience avec les siens et le sentiment d'être exclue rendent son bonheur "si triste, [notamment à cause de] la rupture [entre son] atmosphère et ces parades d'ailleurs, parades de vie à mi-chemin entre la farce et la tragédie" (113). S'étant profondément détachée de sa propre culture d'Africaine, retourner en terre natale lui apparaît être une aventure "douloureuse" (161). Pourtant, c'est là seulement qu'il lui sera possible d'être délivrée de cette "forme d'identité aliénée et sans vie" (Mbembe, "A propos des écritures africaines de soi" 18) forgée en Occident, pour enfin guérir de l'exil qui désormais lui semble être une errance sans fin.

Au moment où l'alternative du retour se présente à la narratrice, elle est déjà profondément marquée par la déchirure, par l'oubli d'elle-même à cause de "l'assimilation d'autres références culturelles que les siennes propres" (Treiber 45). Elle n'est plus véritablement ce qu'elle était avant et elle n'est pas non plus parvenue à devenir ce qu'elle souhaitait être. Puisqu'il ne suffit pas juste de retourner en terre natale pour connaître la guérison du soi malade de la différence et du déni de soi-même, la narratrice doit se réapproprier les structures profondes de sa "culture dispersée [c'est-à-dire celle à l'intérieur de laquelle elle] se reconnaît spontanément dans le monde com-

me dans sa propre maison" (Dumont 73). C'est de cette manière qu'elle retrouvera les traces de sa tradition ainsi que les codes lui permettant de se reconstituer culturellement. Dans cette entreprise, l'articulation des langues ainsi que des gestes de la vie courante au village nous apprennent beaucoup sur le processus de sa transformation et apparaissent non seulement comme des "instrument[s] d'intégration collective et d'affirmation individuelle, comme marqueur[s], comme indice d'appartenance" (Abdallah-Pretceille 306), mais surtout comme les garants de la cohésion dans un groupe dans la mesure où chaque membre du groupe est responsable d'un passé commun à préserver.

Le "dire" et l'"agir" entre jeu de miroir et contrastes chez la narratrice bugulienne

Le miroir en tant qu'objet de production d'images ou de reflets a une fonction de révélation. Chez Ken Bugul, avant de représenter à la narratrice sa propre image, le miroir est d'abord identifié métaphoriquement comme le personnage de Riwan. Ce dernier est décrit comme:

> un fou, un fou fou, un fou dangereux. Et un fou aussi fort est encore plus dangereux […] Il portait un pantalon bouffant à moitié déchiré. Son torse, puissant, était nu. Sa peau luisante de sueur était couverte de poussière. Il tirait sur ses chaînes avec rage et soufflait tel un taureau blessé dans l'arène. Il rugissait comme un fauve mais jetait par moments des regards anxieux autour de lui. Il était attirant. Il m'attirait. (*Riwan* 13)

L'attirance dont la narratrice se sent saisie à la vue de ce "torse puissant [et] nu, [de cette] peau luisante de sueur", est moins un appel à la séduction que l'expression de la vérité sur sa propre condition. En effet, "'Je suis Toi-Même'. C'est ce que le miroir répond impitoyablement à celui qui l'interroge" (Michaud 205). Riwan apparaît en quelque sorte comme sa doublure. L'évocation de l'attirance prend ici la forme d'un procédé discursif de reflet à visée d'auto-identification. Ainsi posé, le mot *attirait* trahit chez la narratrice une sorte d'égotisme qui frise l'autodérision, subjuguée qu'elle est par la vision de la folie de Riwan qui correspond en réalité à sa "douloureuse plaie intérieure" (*Riwan* 167), à sa propre "névrose" (166).

La métaphore filée s'invite à la construction du jeu de miroir à travers le thème de la beauté brouillée et ternie tant par le "pantalon bouffant à moitié déchiré" que par la "poussière" qui recouvre la peau luisante. Ce précédé en appelle à une autre image: celle du mirage. Il s'agit en effet d'une beauté illusoire, ayant une apparence trompeuse. Derrière elle se cache une réalité plus sombre, une condition instable, celle d'un "fou". L'adjectif fou est pris ici au sens de "hors de soi", pas à entendre comme l'état d'un sujet impatient mais "étranger à lui-même" (Mbembe, "A propos" 18). Le fait pour la narratrice d'avoir voulu "être autre chose, une personne quasi irréelle, absente de ses origines" (*Riwan* 111), et son identification à Riwan, donnent des chaînes qui retiennent ce dernier captif, la figuration de sa propre "double vie" (160), de son "numéro de la femme émancipée" (111) puis enfin de sa "clandestinité intellectuelle" (111.).

L'esthétisation du miroir qui décline peu à peu en mirage, notamment avec les métaphores de la beauté et des chaînes eux aussi nimbés d'accents d'oxymore, procède d'un travail de déconstruction de la négation de soi. L'image du fou semble être l'aboutissement d'un processus d'acculturation à l'issue malheureuse. Sa construction textuelle faite d'images brouillées: corps de rêve mal vêtu, couvert de poussière mais surtout cachant l'âme souffrante—la folie—prend l'apparence de la représentation des revers du déracinement culturel. Ce procédé discursif tourne donc en dérision les clichés sur l'ailleurs. Les thèmes du miroir et du mirage invitent également celui du rêve, car il s'agit avant tout de la critique des rêves entretenus sur les notions de l'ailleurs, de l'émancipation et de la modernité.

Une expérience transcendantale, presque mystique inaugure le processus de la guérison et de la transformation de la narratrice. En effet, autant Riwan son référent, une fois défait de ses chaînes devant le Serigne devient "tout d'un coup calme comme sorti d'un long calvaire" (22), autant la narratrice, s'étant retrouvée pour la première fois dans la cour des femmes du Serigne, a "envie de rester avec elles. [Elle prend conscience de ce qu'elle] pouvait parler autrement, être autrement, tout naturellement [elle sent] une réhabilitation intérieure" (32). Elle peut commencer le travail au sortir duquel elle sera délivrée de la folie de l'errance. À travers les modalisations du savoir-dire et du savoir-être qui sont les deux ensembles paradigmatiques structurant l'imaginaire bugulien, on peut dès lors apprécier son immersion dans sa socioculture.

À partir du *dire* de la narratrice se dégagent certains traits culturellement marqués qu'on appelle des "figures épistémiques" (Pierssens 11) ou les "agents de transfert" (Pierssens 9). Ces traits s'expriment à travers des modalisations qui sont à la fois des appareils normatifs et des foyers évaluatifs. Ceux-ci se manifestent dans le texte par

"l'intrusion […] d'un savoir, d'une compétence normative du narrateur (ou d'un personnage évaluateur) distribuant, à cette intersection, des positivités ou des négativités, des réussites ou des ratages, des conformités ou des déviances" (Hamon 22). Ces marqueurs de compétences aident dans le cas de la présente étude à l'évaluation des savoirs en lien avec les tabous qui sont des « invariants permettant de saisir les structures psychologiques et mentales des sujets appartenant à une communauté […] à l'égard de certains aspects des choses" (Fopa Kuete 292).

Dès l'entame de l'œuvre, des détours langagiers, de murmures et des allusions feintes suggèrent qu'une chose terrifiante est survenue. Pourtant "il était impossible de savoir d'où avait surgit la parole.—On dit que …—On a dit que … Et encore, seuls les plus téméraires osaient se risquer à parler ainsi […] Ceux qui savaient détournaient la tête et poursuivaient leur chemin" (*Riwan* 9). Les personnages buguliens sont pour ainsi dire aptes à interpréter et à construire une feinte de discours sur un sujet tabou, ici, la profanation du corps d'une des femmes du Serigne: "on dit donc qu'il s'était passé, peut-être, quelque chose entre elle et quelqu'un" (10).

Il faut peut-être rappeler que dans nombre de sociétés africaines, le corps de la reine étant sacré, sa profanation entraîne le châtiment ultime. C'est pour cette raison que, prise de panique, la reine coupable "s'était enfuie. Arrivée à son village, la nuit, les parents effrayés, décidèrent d'attendre le matin pour aviser" (10). Autant la panique enserre les personnages, d'où "la peur, la terrible peur de parler d'une chose qui devait être terrible" (9), autant la sanction demeure terrifiante: "cette nuit même, leur maison fut réduite en cendres. Il n'y eut jamais de nuit" (10). On comprend pourquoi "les mouchoirs des têtes devinrent des voiles. […] les chemins furent soudain désertés. Les salutations se firent plus brèves, les devantures des maisons se vidèrent. La fontaine devint silencieuse. Les mots devinrent de brefs soupirs" (11). De toute évidence, seuls sont aptes à comprendre, à savoir dire et à savoir agir selon les usages des sujets culturellement compétents et conscients en fonction de la situation des enjeux culturels et même mystiques qui entourent les tabous. Dans le même temps leur *agir*: savoir-être—silences, feintes de discours, murmures, voiles, soupirs—constitue un langage hautement significatif, qui est davantage suggéré que verbalisé.

Par ailleurs, le rituel de la déférence mis en scène par la narratrice atteste aussi de l'acquisition et de l'acceptation d'un savoir-être qui fait partie de ces savoirs non linguistiques quoi qu'ils soient "intégré[s] à chaque niveau du […] système linguistique" (Andersen 85), et qui demeurent visibles à travers les actions. Ce rituel exprime non seulement une sorte de hiérarchie du genre déterminant la place et le rôle de la femme dans la communauté, mais davantage l'une des formes de la scénarisation de sa présence en face de son chef traditionnel, spirituel et plus tard son époux:

> Je saluais respectueusement le Serigne en mettant les genoux à terre et en prenant appui sur mes deux mains. Il répondit à mes salutations par un "bissimila" et me demanda de m'approcher. Je m'exécutai en rampant vers lui, comme un bébé, et m'assis sur la moitié de mes fesses, les jambes posées l'une sur l'autre. (*Riwan* 15).

Véritable art de vivre, la mise en scène du personnage féminin rend compte d'une poésie traditionnelle de la relation entre sujet et maître. Une autre perception du rituel de la salutation est celle qui anime la vie ordinaire des femmes. Ce sont ces "mains tendues […] les mains de femmes […] des mains tendues [toujours] accompagnées de sourires" (26–7). Face à ce spectacle, la narratrice qui s'est retrouvée introduite malgré elle dans la cour des femmes du Serigne demeure perplexe, se demandant si "elle devait serrer la main à chacune d'elles" (26–7). Cette autre mise en scène de la banalité des retrouvailles heureuses même avec une inconnue ravive en elle les contrastes entre le vivre ensemble africain d'une part et les mœurs occidentales d'autre part. Il y a ici l'évocation d'une façon d'être, d'une philosophie de la vie en communauté et dans le rapport à l'autre. Cette forme d'expression décrite sous le paradigme du *montré* plutôt que du *dit* et la valeur performative sur le sujet sont extraordinaires. La reconnexion de la narratrice avec sa culture d'origine rend possible non seulement le renouvellement de sa compréhension au sujet de l'idée de la soumission de la femme, mais surtout fait naître chez elle un discours nouveau sur le thème crucial de l'érotisme; sujet au seuil duquel se parachèvent les retrouvailles heureuses non seulement avec les siens mais surtout avec elle-même.

La question de l'érotisme ou la figuration du bonheur retrouvé

Le procès de l'érotisme dans le roman bugulien est d'abord un réquisitoire contre l'érotisme occidental, marqué par un "vif antiromantisme, un antisentimentalisme" (Juranville 24). Cet érotisme est décrit comme essentiellement cérébral, dépressif et, est illustré par des "pages arrachées du Kama Sutra aux revues pornographiques, en passant par des films érotiques visionnés en cachette" (*Riwan* 165). Ce rapport dérangeant à la sexualité se perçoit

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chez la narratrice lorsqu'elle laisse entendre que parfois, seule, "on se masturbait [...] en fantasmant sur le souvenir de membres d'hommes de toutes les tailles" (166). Il s'agit ici d'un érotisme libéré des conventions et dépourvu de sa "dimension métaphorique" (Baudrillard 34) car "en rupture avec les ritualisations sociales traditionnelles qui [ont justement] pour fonction de canaliser les débordements pulsionnels" (Juranville 20). C'est enfin un érotisme qui par sa trop grande libéralisation annihile les possibilités du plaisir, efface le mystère et les silences qui sont pour la libido de véritables sources de construction de la jouissance.

Ce procès de l'érotisme est également celui de la définition de la femme dans la posture qui doit être la sienne au sein de sa communauté. Le jeu de miroir qui a permis d'établir la correspondance entre Riwan et la narratrice suggère aussi le conflit au sujet de la nature de la femme, notamment en ce qui concerne les caractéristiques innées liées à son genre selon certaines conventions africaines. Le questionnement suivi de l'affirmation: "Et si Riwan était une femme? Mais Riwan n'était pas une femme" (*Riwan* 31) pourrait exprimer l'ambigüité qu'a eu la narratrice à se situer elle-même du point de vue de son genre et même de son orientation sexuelle à un moment donné de sa vie. Cette ambigüité est accentuée par la question "une femme pouvait-elle être Riwan?" (31). Cette dernière question prend une valeur argumentative. Si elle rappelle l'esprit transgressif d'une narratrice qui dans son passé a eu une sexualité clivante et s'est laissée aller au "lesbianisme [avant son] départ en Europe" (Ndiaye et Sagna 65), elle montre d'une part l'origine de la névrose dans laquelle elle a sombré, et suggère d'autre part un contre discours, un rejet de ce passé clivant qu'elle associe au temps de l'errance par-delà les cultures de l'ailleurs.

Quelques séquences de mélanges de codes linguistiques aident à montrer comment la narratrice, pour retrouver quelques traits essentiels de sa féminité d'Africaine, recadre la question érotique à travers le discours. De rares et subtiles incursions de mots en wolof dans le français qu'on appelle code-mixing, "mélange de langues par l'emploi d'éléments phonétiques, syntaxiques ou lexicaux" (Calvet 29) permettent en effet de dire comment se vit et se raconte le jeu érotique au village Dianké. Les suites narratives ci-après illustrent ce mélange de codes tout en suggérant ses sens latents: "Sokhna Mame Faye [...] Petite jeune fille, elle avait préparé le café au diar [pour le Serigne], le délicieux, le merveilleux café au diar du baol" (*Riwan* 101). Il en est de même pour SokhnaXat quelques années plus tôt qui "arriva avec une cafetière dont le bec verseur fumant répandit dans la pièce un arôme fort, aux senteurs de "diar" (23). Le diar, littéralement "clou de girofle", plus qu'un simple ingrédient parfumeur est un puissant aphrodisiaque qui augmente non seulement la testostérone mais aussi améliore les performances sexuelles tout en prévenant l'éjaculation précoce. Servir le café au diar n'est plus un simple geste de routine mais tout un discours entre époux en ce qui concerne les attentions qu'ils se prêtent mutuellement pour leur épanouissement sexuel.

Cette disposition à vivre et à exprimer la sexualité est inaugurée bien avant le mariage par le rituel du *xaxar*. Le but dudit rituel est d' "exorciser dès le départ les démons de la haine et de la jalousie" (116). Par ailleurs, de l'éducation traditionnelle de la jeune fille au jeu de la séduction dans le mariage, on peut retenir certaines injonctions symboliques telles: "fais un nœud de 'Gongo' [encens écrasé mélangé et fermenté avec des parfums musc recherchés], attache au haut du bras et saute au cou de ton mari pour l'accueillir, il ne te résistera pas" (121). Cette technique discursive affirme la prééminence des subtilités expressives du wolof sur le français et indique en quelque sorte l'inversion de l'influence culturelle par la langue sur le sujet. En effet "c'est la langue dominante qui fait irruption dans la langue dominée, et non l'inverse" (Rimbaud). Cet emploi linguistique permet donc, toujours dans une perspective de miroir, d'opposer deux visions culturelles sur le sujet érotique. D'une part se dégage l'une des visions africaines de la relation de la femme à l'homme fondée sur le principe de l'"abandon total de soi au Ndigueul" (*Riwan* 31) c'est-à-dire, de la soumission aux normes de la tradition ainsi qu'aux us et coutumes en la matière. D'autre part, on a une vision moderne de la femme dite émancipée où l'amour est "discuté, expliqué, analysé, planifié" (165) et où les "théories de liberté, d'émancipation, désintègr[ent] les relations parce qu'elles détruis[ent] la tendresse [et explique de ce fait] l'impossibilité d'apprécier une démarche, des gestes beaux, la finesse d'une main, une brise de parfum virevoltant" (146). En critiquant cette logique de la femme moderne ainsi que sa sexualité, la narratrice explique les causes du bonheur manqué, du moins du bonheur tel qu'elle l'a fantasmé, et qu'elle n'a pas pu trouver en Occident, les références culturelles de l'ailleurs étant trop éloignées des codes de sa culture dispersée. L'écriture bugulienne apparaît donc à la fois comme "une écriture sur soi et [un] témoignage sur la condition de la femme" (Ndiaye et Sagna 64) puis comme "le ferment d'une crise de savoirs qu'elle mobilise" (Pierssens 13). Le discours de la narratrice formulé sous le modèle de miroir ainsi que l'articulation des savoirs culturels traditionnels de son village à travers les modalisations du savoir-dire et du savoir-être deviennent les signes mesurables de sa propre ré-immersion dans sa culture dispersée.

Conclusion

Riwan ou le chemin de sable se révèle comme un procès contre l'influence quelquefois déroutante de la culture moderne sur le sujet africain. Il convient cependant de préciser que la narratrice rentre dans un certain Sénégal. Le mode de vie qu'elle choisit d'adopter est donc celui des femmes de son village Dianké. C'est donc de la poétisation d'une façon de vivre parmi tant d'autres qu'il s'agit. C'est aussi dans cette dynamique que se dessine la transformation de la narratrice dans son projet de reconstruction identitaire. Le village Dianké devient donc le lieu où la "désacralisation de la transcendance [...] culturelle [moderne afin de se] remodeler à [sa] guise en fonction de [ses] aspirations" (Guiyoba 293) est possible. Ken Bugul esthétise les possibilités d'une réinvention de soi visible à partir de la réappropriation d'un savoir-dire et d'un savoir-être par la narratrice pour qui retourner en terre natale aide à déplacer l'horizon de construction de son devenir. À travers un jeu de miroir et de contrastes, on voit le repositionnement idéologique de la narratrice pour qui finalement, le retour en terre natale est la conséquence d'un échec personnel dans l'entreprise de l'exil. C'est d'ailleurs en cela que ce retour est douloureux. Les articulations d'idées et de connaissances nouvelles ayant un profond ancrage dans l'un des aspects de la culture et des traditions du village Dianké au Sénégal sont le signe d'un ré-immersion dans sa socioculture et permettent de reconsidérer le principe de la modernité qui détermine la vie du sujet diasporique. La narratrice en retournant en terre natale et en acceptant les mythes et les vérités qui fondent sa culture dispersée et qui sont résumés au seul principe du Ndigueul, c'est-à-dire de la soumission, guérit finalement des plaies de son passé. De la sorte, elle peut sortir de la dépression et redevenir une femme au sens où sa féminité sera vivante. Sa guérison de la névrose et sa métamorphose en femme selon ses vœux rendent possibles chez elle l'avènement d'un discours heureux: "je me sentais bien depuis que j'étais revenue dans ce village, [...] c'était la première fois qu'un homme m'avait fait l'amour avec tant de tendresse [...] La sensation de mon corps et de mon plaisir du moment me semblait première" (*Riwan* 165).

Notes

1. "Sociétés récemment sorties de l'expérience que fut la colonisation, celle-ci devant être considérée comme une relation de violence par excellence" (Mbembe, *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* 139–40).

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Tchibamba, Stanley and Conrad: postcolonial intertextuality in Central African fiction

Yvonne Reddick

Tchibamba, Stanley, and Conrad: postcolonial intertextuality in Central African fiction

Paul Lomami Tchibamba (1914–85) is often described as the Congo's first novelist. Previous research in French and English has depicted Tchibamba's work as a straightforward example of 'writing back' to the colonial canon. However, this article advances scholarship on Tchibamba's work by demonstrating that his later writing responds not only to Henry Morton Stanley's account of the imperial subjugation of the Congo, but to Joseph Conrad's questioning of colonialist narratives of 'progress'. Drawing on recent theoretical work that examines intertextuality in postcolonial fiction, this article demonstrates that while Tchibamba is highly critical of Stanley, he enters into dialogue with Conrad's exposure of colonial brutality. Bringing together comparative research insights from Congolese and European literatures, this article also employs literary translation. This is the first time that excerpts from two of Tchibamba's most important responses to colonial authors have been translated into English. Also for the first time, Tchibamba's novella ***Ngemena*** is shown to be a crucial postcolonial Congolese response to ***Heart of Darkness.*** Through close textual analysis of Tchibamba's use of irony and imagery, this article's key findings are that, while Tchibamba nuances Conrad's disparaging portrait of a chief, he develops the ironic mode of Conrad's ***An Outpost of Progress***, and updates the journey upriver into the interior in ***Heart of Darkness***. This article illustrates the complex and nuanced way in which Tchibamba interacts with his European intertexts, deploying close analyses of his responses to Conradian imagery. **Keywords**: African fiction, Congo, Joseph Conrad, intertextuality, Paul Lomami Tchibamba.

Introduction

Paul Lomami Tchibamba (1914–85) is often described as the Congo's first novelist (Kadima-Nzuji 8). Previous research in French and English has depicted Tchibamba's work as a straightforward example of 'writing back' to the colonial canon. However, this article shows that Tchibamba enters into a complex dialogue with two major colonial authors: Henry Morton Stanley and Joseph Conrad. It is surprising that scholarship about Tchibamba's work has been so scarce: the few English-language works on his novels include Pierre Halen, Kasongo Kapanga ("Legitimizing the invented Congolese space: The gaze from within in early Congolese fiction"; *The Writing of the Nation: Expressing Identity through Congolese Literary Texts and Films*), and Susanne Gehrmann. This article advances research on Tchibamba's work by devoting space to lesser-known—but highly important—novellas that respond to Stanley and Conrad: *N'Gobila des Mswata et Mistantèle* (N'Gobila of the Mswata and Mistantèle, 1972) and *Ngemena* (1981). Bringing together comparative research insights from Congolese literature and the European authors Tchibamba read, this article also employs literary translation. Sections from these two important novellas are translated into English for the first time here, as none of Tchibamba's books have been translated into English in their entirety.[1] This article reveals for the first time that *Ngemena* is a highly significant postcolonial response to *Heart of Darkness*, offering a crucial Congolese perspective on the river-journey into the interior. Many earlier scholars who examine Tchibamba's references to European culture follow a simplistic model of counter-discourse, without acknowledging the complexity of his relationship to European authors. Gehrmann has written of "the textual confrontation with Joseph Conrad" in Tchibamba's novella *N'Gobila* (15), ignoring Conrad's exposure of the difficulties of the colonialist project and scarcely examining Tchibamba's engagement with Henry Morton Stanley's writings. Silvia Riva has conceded that Tchibamba's fantastical landscapes owe a debt to nineteenth-century aesthetic devices such as the diorama, but then incongruously argues that the fantasy realms of this era constitute "*la cible principale des attaques de Tchibamba*" (the main target of Tchibamba's attacks) (Riva 74).

Riva and Gehrmann's oppositional model of Tchibamba's writing is problematic: it glosses over the com-

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plexities of his intertextual responses to earlier authors, brands colonial-era literature as a uniform entity, and ignores the forms of (foreign and internal) oppression that replaced colonialism. In fact, in a preface to *Ngemena*, Tchibamba wrote that his novella was not only a trenchant critique of colonialism, but offered a cautionary moral for Western "*néo-colonialisme*" (*Ngemena* 8) that persisted after independence and benefited the Congolese ruling classes. If Tchibamba is highly critical of Stanley, he enters into an intricate ideological and literary dialogue with Conrad's exposure of the Congo Free State's brutality. Moreover, scholars such as Kadima-Nzuji have long known that Tchibamba particularly appreciated certain European authors, especially Jules Verne (226). Conrad is important for Congolese writers: according to Kapanga, "*Heart of Darkness* holds a special place in Congolese history and literature" (*Writing of the Nation* 137). He has shown how "Congolese writers such as Mudimbe and Ngandu Mkashama [...] have confronted the claim of darkness in their writings", although their responses to Conrad are oblique. Understandably, Kapanga is troubled by Conrad's depiction of the Congo as "wilderness where rudimental souls are trapped" (147). Nevertheless, he examines how Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* "highlights the contradictions between the colonial ideology's stated ideals and the reality on the ground where acts of betrayal and treacherous behaviour evidenced gross incompetence" (148). Kapanga's account does not deliver any close analyses of how Congolese authors have responded to Conrad's imagery in *Heart of Darkness* or his ironic tone in *An Outpost of Progress*—nor is Stanley's narrative mentioned. There is a brief glance at similarities between the way trade and power are depicted in *Heart of Darkness* and *Ngando* (143), but these similarities are not discussed in detail. Congolese authors are still characterised as "writing back" and "counter[ing] the discourse that erased their presence" (150): neither Tchibamba nor Conrad conforms to such a simplistic model. This article analyses postcolonial intertextuality in two of Tchibamba's novellas, *N'Gobila des Mswata et Mistantèle* and *Ngemena*.

The two works examined in this article are historical fiction: *N'Gobila* is set in the early days of European subjugation of the Congo for King Leopold II, while *Ngemena* is set during the colonial Belgian Congo era. Both were published during Mobutu's drive for *authenticité*, which aimed at ridding the Congo of colonial influence and creating a new cultural consciousness for the country. In keeping with Mobutu's attempts to undo imperial cultural influence, Tchibamba does offer a cultural corrective to Henry Morton Stanley's account of his establishment of a station at Kimpoko in *N'Gobila*. Yet Riva and Gehrmann oversimplify Tchibamba's work when they characterise it as univocal "textual confrontation" or blunt "*attaque*" on European literature.

Tchibamba's career as a novelist began with the publication of his award-winning novella *Ngando* in 1948, which sets a traditional tale of the spirit-world in the time of early European colonialism. He had preceded it with an article on the status of the "*évolués*" (the educated Congolese middle class), in the magazine *La Voix du Congolais*, in 1945—and received a brutal flogging from the colonial administration (Tchibamba and Lomomba 40). He followed these works with the magical realist short story "La Récompense de la cruauté" (The Reward for Cruelty) and the historical novella *N'Gobila*, both written in 1971 and published by Valentin Mudimbe's imprint Le Mont Noir the following year. 1974 saw the publication of his realist novella *Faire médicament* (Making Medicine), set in the Oubangui region, and his magical realist novella *Légende de Londema* (The Legend of Londema). *Ngemena*, an historical tale of a river-journey that exposes racial and class-related fault lines, appeared in 1981. His last novel, *Ah! Mbongo* (Oh! Money) was begun after 1948, went through many drafts, and was finished in 1978. The novel was posthumously published, with Alain Mabanckou's editorial help, in 2007. Several other works appeared posthumously in *La Saga des Bakoyo Ngombé et autres inédits* (The Saga of the Bakoyo Ngombé and Other Unpublished Works) in 2014. Silvia Riva identifies *Ngando*, "La Récompense de la cruauté", elements of *N'Gobila*, and *Légende de Londema* as Tchibamba's "*cycle du merveilleux*" (fantastical cycle) (Riva 75), employing elements of magical realism, whereas novels such as *Ah! Mbongo* are more "*picaresque*[*s*]" (80).

Tchibamba's writing certainly criticises colonial brutality, but Riva and Gehrmann's work proposes an excessively oppositional model of colonial and postcolonial literature. Over a decade before they published their work about Tchibamba, Elleke Boehmer complicated the 'warring dichotomy' of postcolonial texts versus their canonical European predecessors:

> [T]he postcolonial tends automatically to be thought of as multi-vocal, 'mongrelized,' and disruptive, even though this is not always the case. Similarly [...] the colonial need not always signify texts rigidly associated with the colonial power. Colonial, or even colonialist writing was never as invasively confident or as pompously dismissive of indigenous cultures as its oppositional pairing with postcolonial writing might suggest. (Boehmer 4)

Further important work on the significance of canonical European authors for African literature has been con-

ducted by Byron Caminero-Santangelo, who notes that "In an effort to place the 'classics' in a colonial tradition, those ascribing to the 'writing back' model reduce their significance to a collusion with colonial discourse" (15). Conrad's work is an obvious choice of intertext for authors writing from, and about, Central Africa. While Achebe engaged antagonistically with Conrad in his famous essay "An Image of Africa", later postcolonial authors have responded to and updated Conrad in a more dialogic way. Major postcolonial authors such as V. S. Naipaul and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o align their work with Conrad's (Naipaul; Duerden and Pieterse). Caminero-Santangelo has researched intertextual references to Conrad in African authors from Chinua Achebe to Ama Ata Aidoo, while Rebecca Fasselt shows how Ngũgĩ follows Conrad by destabilising race, gender, and class boundaries. Caminero-Santangelo writes that "a good deal of African literature is focused on some form of colonialism and the need for decolonization", yet he stresses that "colonialism is not a monolithic entity; its form and ideology change" (17). In addition, it is important to acknowledge that after African countries gained independence from European colonialism, new forms of oppression did sometimes replace colonialism. Ania Loomba has cautioned that "'Colonialism' is not just something that happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates with the collusion of forces inside, but a version of it can be duplicated from within" (32). Tchibamba is highly aware of both collusion and internal oppression.

Mobutu's 'recourse to authenticity'

In 1965, the Congolese chief of the armed forces, Joseph Désiré Mobutu, seized power in the Congo. He would rule the country for thirty-two years, changing its name to Zaïre from 1971 to 1997. Mobutu's coup had financial and military backing from Belgium and America (Badru 153)—one example of a policy that shows that Congolese independence was not a clean break with western powers, and the origin of Tchibamba's statement that the government benefited from "*néo-colonialisme*". From 1966 onwards, Mobutu began to develop ideas that ultimately led to a policy called the *recours à l'authenticité*. This doctrine was first laid down in 1967, in the Manifesto of N'Sele, which would become official national policy (Lagae and De Raedt 179). Yet it is important to emphasise that Mobutu decided to employ the term *recours* (appeal to, recourse to) as opposed to the originally proposed *retour* (return) (Adelman 138). The slogan "*Tribu oui, tribalisme non*" (yes to tribes, no to tribalism) aimed to avoid the politicisation of Congolese ethnic groups that had formerly caused the nation to fragment, while acknowledging that tribal affiliation could not be done away with completely (Wright 86). Affiliation to one's ethnic group was not conducive to national unity in a country as vast as the Congo, which has over 360 different social and ethnic groups (Fraiture 8). The very concept of different ethnic groups was partly fabricated by colonial ethnographers to facilitate domination (van Reybrouck 111–2); such policies had disastrous results in neighbouring Rwanda. Mobutu's state commissioner for information aimed to replace tribal affiliation with allegiance to a national "tribe" (351). Cultural reforms to implement this ideology included "changing the words of traditional songs and chants so as to praise the President and the national party" (Adelman 135). In a 1974 speech addressed to the United Nations, Mobutu explained the authenticity policy as consisting of:

> *Une prise de conscience du peuple zaïrois de recourir à ses sources propres, de rechercher les valeurs de ses ancêtres, afin d'en apprécier celles qui contribuent à son développement harmonieux et naturel. C'est le refus du people zaïrois d'épouser aveuglement les idéologies importées.*
>
> The people of Zaïre's realisation (of the need) to refer to its own roots, to search for the values of its ancestors in order to appreciate those that contribute to its harmonious and natural development. It is the Zaïrian people's refusal to embrace imported ideologies blindly. (qtd in Lagae and De Raedt 118)

In terms of its popular reception, Kapanga has said that "At first, the policy was seen very positively although it had its doubters" (Kapanga and Reddick). In addition to reforms such as a new national dress, the removal of colonial monuments, and the Africanisation of names (Adelman 135), "Culture was seen as a key instrument to 'decolonize' the nation" (Lagae and De Raedt 179). Of course, this came with contradictions: the new national dress, the *abacost*, was modelled on Maoist garb; musician Camille Feruzi played the accordion (van Reybrouck 355) rather than the traditional *lokole*. Exhibitions, artistic commissions, and studies on Congolese art became important means for fomenting interest in a national culture. However, "the strong hold of the president on all forms of artistic expression was peculiar, leaving little manoeuvring space for other cultural agents or artists wanting to work outside of the official guidelines" (Lagae and De Raedt 179). Some of the dictator's attempts to don a chief's mantle were met with skepticism: Kapanga notes that "Mobutu did wrap himself in the role of the

traditional chief (by his behavior and rationale), but people could not give it to him because he did not have a royal blood line" (Kapanga and Reddick). Outright resistance to the regime was brutally crushed: after six months in power, Mobutu publicly hanged four leaders of a supposed plot against him.[2] Public executions had not happened in the Congo since colonial times (van Reybrouck 336, 339), although the earlier loss of thousands of lives due to rebellions and massacres meant that the public reaction to the hanging was somewhat muted.

Consequently, there was little room to manoeuvre outside official guidelines. Between 1965 and 1975, Tchibamba worked at several minor official posts under Mobutu's rule. According to his daughter, Eliane Tchibamba who wrote the preface to the novel *Ah, Mbongo*:

> *Il est désillusionné par la création de partis uniques dans les anciennes colonies, qui font preuve des mêmes tendances répressives et des mêmes intolérances que l'administration coloniale de naguère. Les nouvelles hiérarchies ne supportant aucune critique, on le met "au placard" à l'ONRD (Office national de recherches pour le développement).*
>
> He [was] disillusioned by the creation of single parties in former colonies, which came to demonstrate the same repressive tendencies and intolerance as the former colonial administration. [Since] the new hierarchies did not tolerate any criticism, he was relegated to the National Office for Development Research. (*Ah! Mbongo* 11)

In the novellas examined here, Tchibamba describes the precolonial exploration and colonial oppression of the Congo not only to denounce European brutality, but to criticise "neo-colonialism". The times and places where the books were published are significant: *N'Gobila* was published in Kinshasa in 1972, when the novella's portrait of an august chief would have pleased Mobutists if they did not look too closely at Tchibamba's criticisms of Africans who colluded with imperialists. In 1981, after Tchibamba had retired from his disappointing work at the National Office for Development Research, *Ngemena* was published in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Tchibamba's damning criticisms of "neo-colonialism", which will be further analysed shortly, did not actually appear in his own country, distancing him from potential repercussions.

N'Gobila: a riposte to Stanley, a dialogue with Conrad

The novella *N'Gobila* begins at the time of early imperialist exploration, when Henry Morton Stanley and his followers come into contact with the Mswata people and their chief, N'Gobila. This novella would partially fit the model of postcolonial counter-discourse proposed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin: it becomes an instance when "[r]eceived history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims" (34). However, the primary reason for Tchibamba's use of a counter-narrative is not to "write back" to the Western canon in general. Specifically, Tchibamba targets Stanley's eulogistic account of his mission "for the cause of civilisation" (104) in *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State* (1885) and the brutal Belgian regime that he helped to establish. Stanley's 1876–1877 exploration of the Congo River, related in his 1878 book *Through the Dark Continent*, had been instrumental not only for the mapping, but for the military subjugation, of the Congo for King Leopold II. During the time of the Congo Free State, Conrad would respond to Stanley's account of "destructive progress". While Stanley had praised the administrator Lieutenant Janssen for achieving "great progress in the construction of a commodious house" (409), Conrad subjects the idea of colonialist "progress" to intense scrutiny. His short story *An Outpost of Progress* (1898) creates a damning portrait of the inept and violent Free State administrators Carlier and Kayerts, and its exposure of Belgian imperialist cruelty is arguably even more trenchant than his later criticisms of oppressive behaviour in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Yet Conrad's most scathing criticism is reserved for the Sierra Leonean character Makola, who sells both the Station's African employees and some of Gobila's men to slave-traders in exchange for ivory (*Outpost* 16). Scholars such as Jakob Lothe have remarked on Conrad's "ironic play on 'progress'" (49) and detailed his deployment of irony.

Irony is also prominent in Tchibamba's *N'Gobila*, but he deploys it not only to correct Conrad, but to build on his critique of Belgian practices. This is far more complex than a case of 'writing back'; while Tchibamba exposes the inadequacies of Conrad's account, correcting the spelling of "Gobila's" name to "N'Gobila" and offering a Congolese perspective on the Mswata people, he also aligns his own novella with Conrad's criticisms of the Free State. Tchibamba's use of irony is evident from the outset of his description of the establishment of the station, which highlights the double standards at the early stages of the subjugation of the Congo:

> *D'habiles contacts qu'il parvint à nouer avec N'Gobila inondé de cadeaux de pacotilles, Bula Matari réussit à obtenir l'autorisation, non pas de "prendre possession du pays", mais simplement de "construire un petit village" sur une butte à proximité du fleuve pour y séjourner en qualité de simple hôte.*

> From the skilful links that he managed to forge with N'Gobila, whom he had showered with gifts of junk, Bula Matari succeeded in obtaining permission, not to "take possession of the country", but simply to "build a little village" on a hillock near the river and stay there as a simple guest. (*N'Gobila* 47)

Tchibamba uses "*Bula Matari*", Stanley's soubriquet among the Bakongo. The nickname means "the stonebreaker, because he could break up rocks with dynamite". Yet later the term "would also be used to refer to the colonial regime" (van Reybrouck 46). The moniker "breaker of rocks" also captures Stanley and the Belgians' intransigence. Nicknames such as "You-You-You", a mocking rendition of the Administrator's black followers' Pidgin English, and "*Mistantèle Ndundu Djié*" for the Administrator's habit of cursing "*Nom de Dieu!*" (43), satirise both white settlers and black accomplices in the imperialist project. Tchibamba lays the satire on thickly: repeating "*simplement*" and "*simple*" in the passage quoted above stresses that this occupation is anything but simple. His use of quotation marks (*guillemets* in the original) to mock the duplicity of Bula Matari's assertions further reinforces the text's ironic sting. Quotation marks are used ironically again to report the Administrator's speech: he is described as going "*se 'promener'*" (for a walk) to Maluki, when his actual purpose is to forge "*de nouvelles alliances*" (50): establishing new alliances in the interests of his imperialist mission. Here, irony is used to expose the duplicity of this barely-concealed venture to subjugate new parts of the Congo. A Mswata warrior disguised as N'Gobila is interrogated by the Administrator, and here Tchibamba employs irony by quoting direct speech:

> *Ne sais-tu pas encore que ce pays appartient au Bula Matari?* […] *Tu as besoin d'une bonne correction pour t'apprendre la Civilisation.*

> Don't you know yet that this country belongs to Bula Matari? […] You need a good hiding to teach you some Civilisation. (*N'Gobila* 76)

"Civilisation" is as critical a concept for Tchibamba's narrative, as "progress" had been for Conrad; here, Tchibamba's ironic capitalising of "Civilisation" exposes the duplicity of the European imperialist mission and builds on Conrad's earlier criticisms.

Tchibamba further interrogates the concept of civilisation, and particularly African civilisations before colonisation, in his descriptions of N'Gobila. His characterisation of N'Gobila is without irony; instead, it offers a corrective to Stanley and Conrad's accounts. Stanley shows "Gobila" as "an exceedingly stout man, of about forty-five, very unking-like in dress" (405), a servile collaborator happy to admit Stanley "as his neighbour and friend" (406). The so-called "*Papa Gobila*", occasionally drunken (407–8), is characterised as an avuncular buffoon, capable of ridiculing white men but supposedly keen to adopt them: "The stout old man regarded [Lieutenant Janssen] with paternal pride. Gobila, with rare humour, had christened his white son '*Susu Mpembe*', or the 'White Chicken'" (409). "Gobila" is little more dignified in Conrad's version of events. He is "a gray-headed savage, thin and black, with a white cloth round his loins and a mangy panther skin hanging over his back" (*Outpost* 7–8). Yet Conrad's characterisation of "Gobila" is not invariably unsympathetic: he is described as prudently "cautious" around white men after the slaving raid (17). Conrad encourages his reader to sympathise more with "Gobila" than with Makola, Carlier, or Kayerts, but the chief is still stereotyped according to racist European ideas of the time. Tchibamba's account restores kingly dignity to N'Gobila, and foregrounds his prowess as an explorer and military leader. The Mswata chief is:

> *Majestueusement assis sous un monumental dais de rameaux de palmiers et entouré de son aréopage d'imposants dignitaires.*

> Majestically seated beneath an imposing canopy of palm branches and surrounded by his council of impressive dignitaries. (*N'Gobila* 52)

The crowd is "hanging on [every word from] his august lips" ("*accrochée à ses lèvres augustes*") (52). Majestic, imposing, impressive, august: Tchibamba's adjectives labour the point here, but he restores the regal reputation of Stanley's drunkard and Conrad's "savage". It was via river-exploration and armed subjugation that Stanley helped to bring Congolese territory under the Belgian king's control, and Tchibamba's account demonstrates that N'Gobila's people are quite capable of such feats themselves. The Mswata "*étaient perpétuellement sur le fleuve dans leurs pirogues-huttes, écumant les contrées riveraines*" (were always on the river in their canoe-huts, skimming through the waterside regions) (46). Here is a history of precolonial exploration that offers a riposte to European claims of "discovery", such as Stanley's account of "discovering" Lake Leopold II (Stanley 225). The Mswata have suffered

defeats at the hands of other tribes, but Tchibamba points out that it is N'Gobila's actions that lead them to victory and conquest:

> [*a*]*près avoir réduit par les armes la résistance des premiers occupants et conquis une grande partie des terres au-delà du grand plateau de l'arrière-pays, les Mswata attribuèrent à leur héros le titre du roi.*
>
> After having quelled the resistance of the first inhabitants by force of arms and conquered a great swathe of the lands beyond the high plateau of the hinterland, the Mswata bestowed the title of king upon their hero. (*N'Gobila* 46)

This history of precolonial conquests and military exploits is set against the recent incursions of Europeans on the following page: "*des explorateurs européens commencèrent à remonter le Pool*" (European explorers began to journey up the Pool) (47). Tchibamba's account champions indigenous traditions and puts the concept of western "civilisation" under pressure: the Mswata have ambitions to expand their territory, a sophisticated system of rule by king and council, and a detailed knowledge of navigation and topography. "Progress" clearly does not come with European invasions. Yet Tchibamba's descriptions of the Mswata's military ambitions also resonates with the post-independence era of internal colonialism. Tchibamba presents N'Gobila as a responsible ruler whose ambitions for territorial expansion are justified and who resists European incursions after initial co-operation. The author sets up an implicit contrast with the complex alliances with foreign powers that rival Congolese politicians established during the Congo's First Republic (1960–65).[3] For Tchibamba, the early 1970s represented a welcome time for Congolese self-rule and an opportunity to write about an ideal historical ruler— but important ambiguities about contemporary politics arise elsewhere in the novella.

Twenty years later, N'Gobila is able to foresee an end to the repressive era of colonial taxes and licenses (88). He prophesies a day when:

> [*N*]*os descendants redeviendront maîtres de ce pays* […] *Huit décennies plus tard, la lointaine vision du vieillard allait devenir la réalité.*
>
> Our descendants will become masters of this country again […] Eight decades later, the old man's distant vision would become reality. (*N'Gobila* 89)

This is a celebration of Congolese independence, but Tchibamba's narrative does resonate with contemporary aspects of Mobutu's regime. N'Gobila's people mount an anti-colonial resistance by transforming into "leopard men". As Gehrmann notes, "'Leopard men' as agents of secret societies, who often carried out murders, were known in different parts of the Congo during the 19th and 20th centuries. Considered a potential menace to colonialism, their 'magical power' fascinated colonial artists and writers […] Tchibamba makes strategic use of their threatening reputation" (24–5).[4] Nevertheless, Gehrmann does not mention that the image would have had contemporary resonances: the mention of "leopard men" would have reminded readers in 1972 of Mobutu's leopard skin chieftain's hat (van Reybrouck 341), worn in spite of his lack of royal blood, and his Order of the Leopard (355), set up to honour foreign dignitaries and Congolese officials. The leopard had replaced the lion as a national symbol of power in Mobutu's public ceremonies. The irony here is that Tchibamba's "leopard-men" have considerably more anti-colonial bite than the foreign members of Mobutu's Order of the Leopard, who included Queen Elizabeth II. There is also an important ambiguity in the words that Tchibamba attributes to N'Gobila. The chief's statement that the country will one day become "*légitime héritage de leurs aïeux*" (the legitimate inheritance of their ancestors) (*N'Gobila* 89) contains an important double meaning. Although Tchibamba celebrates Congolese independence, and Mobutu's presence was viewed positively in the early 1970s, with hindsight, the kleptocracy that he instituted raises the important question of who exactly benefits from independence. Later in his career, Tchibamba will comment on the ruling classes' subsequent collusion with foreign powers. He ends his narrative with a final, ironic flourish, exposing his narrator as profoundly unreliable:

> *Ce récit vient de l'arsenal de menteries apothéotiques qui ont longtemps auréolé la terrible épopée de Mfumu N'Gobila* […]. *Ici, s'arrête la part du narrateur, éternel menteur.*
>
> This tale comes from the collection of deifying lies that have long endowed the terrible epic of Mfumu N'Gobila […]. Here ends the part of the narrator, that perpetual liar. (*N'Gobila* 90)

The "lying" narrator is tasked with retelling "the legends of the region" (90). Throughout, Tchibamba's narrative has focused closely on the exploits of a people within its region. This goes subtly against the grain of Mobutu's

recours à l'authenticité: it was national pride, not affiliation to social and ethnic groups, that Mobutu and his cronies initially wished to promulgate.[5] Tchibamba's coda to his novella encourages his reader to question the veracity of all aspects of his account, and this creates several important dimensions: it reinforces the reader's interpretation of the tale as an imaginative cultural narrative for the Mswata, not as an historical account; but it also encourages the reader to turn a critical gaze on how poorly Mobutu compared with N'Gobila. Thus, while Tchibamba can be seen to repudiate Stanley and correct Conrad, he uses Conrad's ironic criticisms of "progress" to target not only imperialism, but to hint at his dissatisfaction with the regime that replaced it.

Ngemena: a dialogue with Conrad

If Tchibamba had engaged with Conrad in *N'Gobila*, his response to Conrad in *Ngemena* is more lengthy and complex. Gehrmann's view is that the "textual confrontation" with Conrad sees Tchibamba using Conradian ideas "not as continuation of his central metaphors and symbols, but as contestation" (15). Yet Gehrmann concedes that there are even parallels between *Heart of Darkness* and other works by Tchibamba: the European journey into the Congolese forest is echoed in the novella *La Récompense de la cruauté* (19). Her model of counter-discourse does not account for why Tchibamba responds so frequently to Conradian tropes. Gehrmann has used *Ngemena* as an example of Tchibamba's realistic fiction, in which "an African point of view is focused on in order to elaborate a quasi-documentary portrait of colonial society with its inherent structural violence" (13). It is indisputable that Tchibamba offers a Congolese point of view: an author's note that closes the novel describes the plot and events as "*véridiques et vécus réellement*" (true and truly experienced) (*Ngemena* 109), and it is inspired by personal experience. There are also important "*picaresque*" elements: the lengthy and frustrating encounters with colonial bureaucrats often read as more Kafkaesque than Conradian. Yet Tchibamba uses occasional references to Conrad to target not only European colonials, but neo-colonial power relations after independence—and sycophantic black collaborators in such schemes. *Ngemena* is in many respects Tchibamba's most detailed and intricate dialogue with a European author, and it displays multiple layers of intertextual response, critique, and ambivalence.

Tchibamba's preface to this novella is highly important for its criticisms of both colonialism and the forms of oppression that replaced it. This is Tchibamba's motive for setting his novella in colonial times:

> *Malgré les "indépendances" qui, après la spécieuse décolonisation de façade, ont installé la plupart des pays de notre continent sur le pavois de la souveraineté en vertu de laquelle des vieilles colonies sont devenues de jeunes États (après 300, 200, 100, voire 80 ans de domination étrangère), l'obstacle fondamental contre lequel bute encore aujourd'hui notre élan dans tous les domaines de la vie nationale a pour origine le phénomène que nous croyions enterré: le colonialisme. La persistance de ce phénomène dépersonnalisant (déjà mué en un irritant néo-colonialisme où baignent avec euphorie tous nos gouvernements nationaux et nos bourgeois de fraîche date) ne peut que nous inciter à exhumer de temps en temps, sous forme de revues rétrospectives, des anecdotes véridiques, même fragmentaires, se rapportant à certaines anciennes situations marquées par des circonstances particulièrement intolérables, voire tragiques, que nous avons connues.*
>
> In spite of the "independences" which after the specious appearance of decolonisation, raised most of the countries of our continent on the pedestals of sovereignty under which old colonies became young states (after 300, 200, 100, even 80 years of foreign domination), the fundamental obstacle against which our momentum in all areas of national life still stumbles today, has as its origin the phenomenon that we believed was buried: colonialism. The persistence of this depersonalising phenomenon (already transformed into an irritating neo-colonialism in which all our national governments and our new bourgeoisie have been wallowing ecstatically) can only incite us to exhume from time to time, in the form of retrospective reviews, true anecdotes, even fragmentary, relating to certain former situations marked by particularly intolerable, or even tragic, circumstances that we experienced. (*Ngemena* 8)

He stresses that such stories should be remembered, since:

> [*L*]*e passé est toujours vivant* (*et joue même un rôle actif dans les trames politiques où n'arrêtent plus de s'enferrer nos dirigeants nationaux incapables de décoller de l'ornière du passé colonial*).
>
> Current affairs are very often a repetition of past tragedies and the past lives on (and even plays an active role in the political plots in which our national leaders continually entangle themselves, incapable of getting out of the rut of the colonial past). (8–9).

Recalling Boehmer's non-essentialising model of colonial and postcolonial discourse, Tchibamba stresses that not all colonials behaved as "*négrophobes*", nor did they all rule with a rod of iron ("*la férule*") (23)—but conceding that

they were not all "*négrophobes*" is not exactly a resounding endorsement of them. He stresses that not all colonials were brutal, conceding that certain individuals could be "*sympathiques et vraiment fraternels*" (pleasant and truly fraternal) (23). However, some of his most damning criticisms are reserved for brutal colonial administrators.

The novel illustrates the variety of interactions between Congolese people and Europeans—and an important dimension of this is Tchibamba's exposure of the pervasiveness of colonial brutality, from the physical violence perpetrated by the Belgian captain of the ferry *Eendracht* (48) and the complicity of his Congolese lackey "Mbénga", right up to abuses of power by high-ranking colonial officials such as former highwayman von Lörrach (56) and Nazi sympathiser von Hermann Schlechting (108).[6] However, he adds further ammunition to his criticisms by entering into dialogue with Conrad's exposure of atrocities in the Belgian Congo Free State in *Heart of Darkness*. Tchibamba updates Conrad by creating a journey into the interior along the Congo River, a trek inland through a forest where cannibalism is allegedly practised, and characters that recall Conrad's exhausted railway workers and diseased Free State profiteers. Tchibamba is more concerned with exposing the abuses and inconsistencies of the colonial project than with creating an African rewriting of *Heart of Darkness*, and other African authors and artists make their responses to Conrad more overt.[7] Yet Tchibamba points to continuity between the atrocities Conrad witnessed during his 1890 journey upriver, and continued discrimination in 1948.

Since the novel has never been translated into English in its entirety, a brief plot summary is helpful here. The well-educated Congolese clerk Pualo Mopodime must travel from his home in Kinshasa to see his aunt in his natal town in Libéngé, in the province of Oubangui. A voyage up the River Congo, and a subsequent overland journey, see Pualo coming into contact with a whole spectrum of European administrators of different nationalities, African opponents of the regime and collaborators, and Africans from many parts of the Congo and other colonies. Tchibamba reinvents not only the Conradian river-voyage, but Conrad's characters.

Indeed, in the preface to *Ngemena*, Tchibamba lends weight to his critique of colonial (and neo-colonial) policies by employing a Conradian image. He draws on Kurtz's painting of a woman carrying the torch of civilisation, her blindfold evoking the brutality that a benevolent image of colonialism suppresses (*Heart of Darkness* 29). Here is Tchibamba's response to this Conradian image:

> *Nous humilier à tout instant, nous brutaliser en toute occasion, là était pour eux la règle de conduite indispensable à l'assiette et à la sécurité de la sacro-sainte personnalité du colonial porteur du flambeau de la civilisation.*
>
> Humiliating us every minute, abusing us at every opportunity, there was the code of conduct indispensible to the establishment and security of the sacrosanct person of the colonial, bearer of the torch of civilisation. (*Ngemena* 7)

Here, Tchibamba's characteristic irony takes the place of Conrad's use of the blindfold to draw out colonial double standards. Tchibamba uses the river-journey to dramatise tensions between different social classes, and between Congolese people who collaborate with or resist their oppressors. The riverboat *Eendracht*, on which Pualo travels, becomes a microcosm of colonial society and brings these tensions to a head. Tchibamba examines the issue of how to treat *évolués*—the educated Congolese middle class—and relations between Congolese people and their European masters. The 1940s had witnessed the rise of the *évolués* (a problematic colonial label meaning 'developed' or 'evolved'). Their status entitled them to a 'social merit card' and certain limited privileges that colonials normally enjoyed (Ringrose 24–5). Tchibamba mocks this system, which ended up distancing the *évolués* from both Europeans (Ringrose 25) and from other Congolese people. Pualo's ticket entitles him to a "third-class bridge cabin for *évolués*" (*Ngemena* 35). For wanting a third-class cabin, the ferry conductor nicknamed Mbénga ridicules Pualo for being one of "*les 'Blancs-Noirs' de Kinshasa imbus de prétentions idiotes*" (the Kinshasa 'white-blacks' full of idiotic ambitions) (38). Mopodime's education, class, and supposed adoption of European mannerisms add an intricate layer of tension to the already fraught relationship between urbane Kinshasa clerk and hinterland ferryman. However, with the irony that characterised *Ngando*, Tchibamba describes Mbénga as having "the authority of a white man". Tchibamba exposes Mbénga himself as one of the "*Blancs-Noirs*" when he separates a black Congolese man from his mixed-race wife, sending her up to the second class cabins "*avec les Blancs ses pères*" ("with her relatives the Whites") (38).

Conrad, too, had put into play the fractured relationship between black people who collaborated with the Free State and their white employers aboard the *Roi des Belges*. Amid concerns that indigenous Congolese people will attack the steamer, a black headman from a British colony announces that he will "catch 'im" and "Eat 'im" (*Heart of Darkness* 49). Conrad makes it clear that the differences between African ethnic groups are marked, and

sometimes lead to open hostility. Yet the "partnership", "bond", and "distant kinship" (62) that develop between Marlow and his inept helmsman, illustrate the intricate sympathies that are created between Europeans and some African characters, and the collusion of certain Africans with European colonialists. Conrad does not present European colonialism as a monolithic entity, nor Africans as a homogeneous group united against their oppressors.

When he updates Conrad's iconic river-voyage for a 1948 ferryboat journey up the River Congo, Tchibamba creates a renewed sense of the complicities and tensions among Congolese people under the Belgian colonial regime. Yet he goes beyond Conrad's narrative by showing how the issue of class plays a part in Mbénga's assertion of his power over Mopodime. Tchibamba takes aim at divisive colonial practices, such as reinforcing class segregation by providing *évolués* with negligible 'privileges'. Yet by the time Tchibamba published this novella, he had worked in several minor posts under the Mobutu administration, was receiving less literary recognition in his home town of Kinshasa than abroad, and was "*déçu par le comportement humain*" ("disappointed by human behaviour") (*Ah! Mbongo* 12). Given his dissatisfaction at this time, his critique of the way Mbénga colludes with Europeans is also applicable to the "*néo-colonialisme*" (*Ngemena* 8) that he attacks in the preface.

Tchibamba continues his dialogue with Conrad during the course of the river-journey, and his descriptions both echo, and revise, *Heart of Darkness*'s evocations of the journey upstream:

> *De part et d'autre, la paix du règne végétal, la tranquillité et le silence imprègnent les deux rives d'un climat nostalgique, lequel flotte sur l'étendue liquide qui file sans arrêt, envoûtant et mystérieux. Tandis que sur la terre ferme, rares se montrent les habitations des hommes.*
>
> On either side, the peace of the plant kingdom, tranquillity, and silence imbu[ed] both banks with a nostalgic atmosphere, which floated on the liquid expanse that ran by without stopping, spellbinding and mysterious. However, human dwellings on firm ground were rarely seen. (*Ngemena* 49–50)

Tchibamba is responding to Conrad's description of forest and river as primordial realms immersed in silence:

> Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. […] There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. (*Heart of Darkness* 41)

Tchibamba's "plant kingdom" responds to Conrad's "world of plants"; his "nostalgic atmosphere" echoes Conrad's moments when the past comes back to Marlow. Yet the critical difference between these passages is that while Conrad's river is a restless place of primordial menace, Tchibamba's vocabulary of "peace" and "tranquillity" offers the opposite interpretation. Tchibamba's Congolese perspective complicates a European picture of the Congo River and its forests as sites of threatening alterity.

Tchibamba's echoes of, and revisions of, Conrad's voyage into the interior continue even when Pualo disembarks from the ferry. The reputation of forest peoples whose territory Pualo passes through, sets up a significant dialogue with Conrad and with European stereotypes about Africa. In his famous attack on Conrad, Achebe singled out two examples of the threat of cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* (qtd in *Heart of Darkness* xlvii–xlviii). It is notable that Marlow does not actually witness any cannibal practices, and that the European drive for capitalist consumption is also described in terms that evoke cannibalism: Kurtz opens his mouth "as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (74). Tchibamba revises this by stating that there are indeed people in the Upper Congo who had been cannibals, although this behaviour had been largely abandoned and the martial force of their tribe had been crushed. Historically, the Ngabaka Minangéndé warriors did not return home from a raid:

> [Q]*ue munis d'un paquet de feuilles contenant de la chair humaine destinée aux banquets* […] *cette pratique n'*était pas encore totalement *abandonée, bien que ne s'accomplissant plus avec des démonstrations bruyantes.*
>
> Unless they were supplied with a bundle of leaves containing human flesh destined for [their] banquets […] this practice had not yet been completely abandoned, even though it was no longer accompanied by noisy displays. (*Ngemena* 76)

However, no longer warlike or bloodthirsty, the Minangéndé who had become "civilised" (Tchibamba's cautionary quotation marks) now suffered intolerable punishments; such ignominy would have been countered with a bloodbath ("*bain de sang*") in former years, but they are now only able to offer resistance in the form of "*des protesta-*

tions timides vite 'oubliées' sans réparations" (shy protestations, quickly 'forgotten', without compensation) (76). The Congolese people whom Marlow encounters offer armed resistance to the steamer and its white and black crew; Tchibamba's revision of Conrad's account neither condemns nor praises the former cannibals, but rather evokes the pathos of a people whose capacity to resist has been utterly destroyed. Congolese people certainly organised strikes and mutinies to demand better treatment in the Belgian Congo in the 1940s (Yervasi 16–7). Amid such a climate, Tchibamba reveals the Minangéndé's powerlessness as pitiable.

If Conrad's Kurtz embodies the Congo Free State's consumptive appetite for ivory, Tchibamba's narrative focuses on two natural consumer products cultivated in the colonial Belgian Congo: rubber and cotton. In the novella, the company Cotonco has established plantations of these cash crops, and a factory for their preliminary processing (*Ngemena* 78). The colonial Compagnie Cotonnière Congolaise (Cotonco) actually existed; this adds to the novella's verisimilitude and focuses Tchimbamba's critique of colonial labour practices on an historical target. The village of Gemena is surrounded by plantations (78) where political "*relégués*" (exiles) are put to work (80). Yervasi notes that "After several uprisings throughout the 1930s, the Belgian authorities constructed exile or *relégation* camps to contain insurgents" (16). The aging political exile whom Mopodime meets has been banished specifically for being part of the "*Ngunza*" religion (*Ngemena* 82), a radical anti-colonial movement (Mélice 34). The name of the place, "Gemena", is a colonial mispronunciation of the Ngbaka word *Ngemena*, which means "*rejeté, chassé, banni, déporté*" (rejected, hunted, exiled, deported) and was used of an individual who had become a "political outcast" (*Ngemena* 84). For Tchibamba, the word brings with it painful memories of slavery (84). The *ngemena* political dissidents:

> [*F*]*urent recrutés illico, sous forme de travaux forcés, pour commencer la plantation de coton et d'arbres à caoutchouc.*
>
> Were recruited straightaway, in the form of forced labour, to begin the planting of cotton and rubber trees. (90)

And in order to evoke the horror of this new form of slavery in the plantations, Tchibamba draws on Conrad's descriptions of labourers forced to build a railway during the time of the Congo Free State. Here is Conrad's description of the railway workers:

> Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck and all were connected together with a chain […] They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them. (*Heart of Darkness* 18)

Here is the passage in which Tchibamba recalls Conrad's description:

> [*D*]*es colonnes d'individus enchaînés, hâves, décharnés, déguenillés, poussés comme du bétail, brutalisés jusqu'au sang par les soldats sur la conduite et l'exhortation cruelle de leurs impitoyables chefs blancs armés de revolver* [*sic*]*; ceux de ces malheureux qui, n'en pouvant plus, tombaient exténués, étaient abattus et leurs dépouilles abandonnées sur place, offertes aux bêtes carnivores. Et dire que c'était au nom et pour le compte de la civilisation chrétienne que se pratiquaient de telles atrocités* […]
>
> Columns of chained individuals, haggard, scrawny, ragged, goaded like beasts, beaten until they bled by the soldiers under the direction and cruel encouragement of their pitiless white chiefs armed with a revolver [sic]; those unfortunates who, unable to stand it anymore, fell down exhausted, would be killed, and their bodies were abandoned there, given to the carnivorous animals. And to think that it was in the name of and on behalf of Christian civilisation that such atrocities were perpetrated […] (*Ngemena* 85)

Tchibamba goes further than Conrad does in his criticisms of the colonial project by explicitly pointing out the hypocrisy of this treatment of forced labourers: "*Ô Boula Matari toi qui hier te prétendais anti-esclavagiste* […]" (Oh, Boula Matari, you who claimed yesterday that you were against slavery […]) (87). The Berlin Act of 1885 had aimed to end slavery in Western and Central Africa, and bound signatories to punish those who continued the trade; this makes the injustice of forced labour systems all the more ironic. Tchibamba's description of the isolated old man Kashidi Mwan'Inzal sets up further intertextual echoes of Conrad:

> *Marchant au hasard* […] *ils eurent néanmoins la chance de découvrir un malheureux vieillard de ngemena tout perclus. Accroupi au pied d'un palmier desséché, à côté d'un semblant de hutte basse à peine couverte de chaume, cet homme était ceint d'une incroyable charpie de rabane tout effilochée; détruit par une précoce décrépitude fertilisée par d'interminables privations débilitantes et des maladies consécutives jamais soignées, ce déshérité n'avait que la poliomyélite comme compagne.*

> Wandering aimlessly […] they nevertheless were lucky enough to discover an unfortunate old paralysed *ngemena* man. Crouching at the base of a shrivelled palm, by what passed for a low hut barely covered with thatch, this man was wrapped in incredible shreds of frayed raffia; destroyed by an early decrepitude worsened by endless, debilitating deprivations and consecutive, untreated illnesses, this deprived individual had polio as his only companion. (81)

This isolated old man in a forest hut acts as a contrast to Conrad's Kurtz, and Tchibamba echoes some of Conrad's famous descriptions to highlight the ideological differences between the two characters. Both are wracked by disease and close to death, and the encounters with them function as the culminating point of the heroes' journeys into the interior. The two characters even share some physical traits. Mwan'Inzal's head "*brillait au sommet de la calvitie, et couverte d'une tempe à l'autre d'une bande de cheveux très blancs*" (shone with baldness at the crown, and covered from one temple to the other with a strip of very white hair) (83). This tonsure-like appearance suggests religious devotion, whereas Kurtz's is "impressively bald", resembling "ivory" (*Heart of Darkness* 59), the commodity he covets. Tchibamba sets the two characters up as contrasting epitomes of colonial megalomania and victimhood. Yet Mwan'Inzal's appearance more closely echoes Conrad's descriptions of exhausted "criminals" (forced labourers) condemned to work on the railway:

> They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation. […] While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. (*Heart of Darkness* 20)

Conrad's description moves from a group of labourers to a specific individual, to whom Marlow gives a ship's biscuit (20). This is paralleled in Tchibamba's description of the state of *relégation*, the specific fate of Mwan'Inzal, and Pualo's gesture of filling the old man's jerry can with water when he sees him crawling towards a spring to drink (*Ngemena* 96). Yet Tchibamba goes beyond Conrad by giving Mwan'Inzal the agency to tell his own story: an important privileging of the Congolese perspective. A primary purpose of setting up these parallels with Conrad is to highlight the way "rebels" and "criminals" were treated during the time of the Free State, and during colonial rule. Kurtz impales the heads of "rebels" (*Heart of Darkness* 73) on poles outside his hut, and Marlow comments ironically that "Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me" (73). Although Tchibamba does not document practices that are as horrific as this, condemning Mwan'Inzal and other *ngemena* exiles to "*une mort lente*" (a slow death) (*Ngemena* 86) sets up troubling echoes of Conrad's documentation of the Free State's intransigence.

No character in *Ngemena* is as cruel as Kurtz, but the chief administrator von Hermann Schlechting, a German who has become a Belgian citizen, shares some traits with him. Kurtz has a German name (*Heart of Darkness* 74), although he is also part English and part French (61). More significant than the shared origin of their names is the disturbing parallel that Tchibamba creates between von Hermann Schlechting's sympathy with the Nazi genocide and Kurtz's wish to exterminate Congolese people. Tchibamba describes him thus:

> [*V*]*on Hermann Schlechting* […] *savourait avec délice les récits des atrocités épouvantables inaugurées par ses frères tortionnaires nazis aux camps des mis à mort à sa terre natale à Orianenburg, à Dachau, à Buchenwald* […] *Au nom de la civilisation chrétienne il fallait que nos colonisateurs introduisissent de telles pratiques dans cette providentielle 'Dixième Province belge' d'outre-mer qui vola sans hésiter au secours de la 'mère-patrie' terrassée, meurtrie, gémissante sous les bottes hitlériennes.*
>
> [V]on Hermann Schlechting […] relished with delight tales of the fearful atrocities introduced by his Nazi torturer brothers at the camps of people put to death in his homeland at Orianenburg, at Dachau, at Buchenwald […] In the name of Christian civilisation it was necessary for our colonisers to introduce such practices into the providential 'Tenth Belgian Province' overseas, which rushed unhesitatingly to the aid of the fallen, bruised 'mother country', groaning under Hitlerian jackboots. (*Ngemena* 108)[8]

Tchibamba's caustic likening of Belgian colonial policy to the Nazi genocide lambasts colonial policy. Von Hermann Schlechting's admiration of Nazi extermination camps creates a distant echo of the words of Kurtz's pamphlet, which reads, "Exterminate all the brutes!" (*Heart of Darkness* 62). The death toll during the Congo Free State was "of Holocaust proportions" (Hochschild loc. 94), but did not amount to genocide, as the deaths of Congolese people came about due to appalling labour practices rather than the deliberate targeting of an ethnic group (Hochschild loc. 3877). Yet Tchibamba's evocation of Kurtz-like attitudes that persisted among colonials exposes the continuity between King Leopold's personal commercial fiefdom and the colonial regime. There are

also disturbing parallels with events that occurred after Congolese independence, such as the ethnic cleansing of the Baluba in 1960 (van Reybrouck 303).

Conclusion

Tchibamba's dialogue with the two main European precursor books analysed here, *An Outpost of Progress* and *Heart of Darkness*, is richly multivalent, comprising elements of affiliation, cultural correction, and parody. While Tchibamba demolishes Stanley's myth of the benevolence of his civilising mission, and corrects Conrad's portrait of an undignified "Gobila", he does so by using a bitingly ironic tone that builds on Conrad's narrative method. Ideologically, his denunciation of colonialism develops and updates Conrad's exposure of the Free State's ironies and brutality. While *Ngobila* indisputably celebrates Congolese self-government, Tchibamba subtly champions tribal allegiances and a leader more regal than Mobutu. Foreshadowing his later critique of neo-colonialism, he subjects African collaborators in the imperialist project to stingingly ironic criticism. Distinctive irony is the hallmark of Tchibamba's descriptions of colonial "progress" from *Ngando* right up to his evocations of mass slaughter in the name of "Christian civilisation" in *Ngemena* (108). *Heart of Darkness* is the most important European intertext in *Ngemena*, informing the description of the voyage into the interior and contributing to Tchibamba's focus on so-called "criminals" and "political exiles". Published in an era when colonialism had been replaced by other forms of oppression, many of Tchibamba's narratives set in precolonial and colonial times are applicable to the problems of "*néo-colonialisme*" (*Ngemena* 8). Tchibamba responds to European precursors to chronicle precolonial and colonial oppression, but also to raise provocative questions about new forms of imperialist behaviour.

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Notes

1. Some sections of Tchibamba's first novella *Ngando* have been translated by Kapanga and are included in his 2009 article and 2017 monograph. All translations of titles and excerpts from Tchibamba's work in this article are mine.
2. Kapanga notes that the hanging did not relate to the authenticity debate, and that people were less shocked by it than one might expect: Mobutu's act of public execution was seen as a deterrent to potential dissenters (Kapanga and Reddick).
3. The period of the Congo's 'First Republic' from 1960 to 1965 was turbulent, bloody, and complex and saw rival leaders forming alliances with the West and the Soviet Union. Van Reybrouck notes that "Kasavubu and Mobutu were being courted by the CIA, Tshombe at moments was the plaything of his Belgian advisers, and Lumumba was under enormous pressure from the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations. The power struggle among the four politicians was greatly amplified and complicated by the ideological tug of war taking place within the international community" (282).
4. For an anti-colonial movement of 'leopard people' that killed both locals and Europeans, see van Reybrouck (154).
5. Initially, the "*authenticité*" policy was intended to be unitary: hence the slogan "yes to tribes, no to tribalism". Kapanga notes that his policy of moving civil servants all over the country is recognised to this day as one of the unifying factors that has helped in the creation of a national identity (Kapanga and Reddick). For further information about how Mobutu later manipulated ethnic rivalries to shore up his failing regime, see Wright (90).
6. This name means "tigerfish" in Lingala (*Ngemena* 37), and suggests the predatory behaviour of the fish in Malébo Lake that Tchibamba had described at the beginning of *Légende*.
7. For more overt African responses to Conrad that specifically highlights its dialogue with him, see Zakes Mda's novel *Heart of Redness* or Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo's photo-essay *The Phantoms of Congo River*.
8. The French for a 'death camp' is *camp de la mort*. Tchibamba's wording, *le camp des mis à mort*, "camps of those put to death", focuses the reader's attention on the victims rather than the dehumanising fact of their death.

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Reversing perverted development: magical realism in *Moses, Citizen & Me*
This paper focuses on reimagining the developmental process of the child soldier who has developed abnormally into adulthood and bringing him back into normal childhood. In particular, it considers how the attention of Delia Jarrett-Macauley's novel, *Moses, Citizen & Me* (2005) is directed at restoring the childhood of the child soldier. The novel achieves this aim through employing creative narrative techniques to take the monstrous adult that the child has become, through a reverse-development, back to childhood from which the child may be re-educated and re-formed. The novel thus represents how the child soldier whose experience has turned him into some kind of 'monster' may be restored to humanity. The paper argues that magical realism in *Moses, Citizen & Me* encompasses a therapeutic tendency that represents a form of healing for child soldiers. **Keywords:** child soldiers, reverse development, magical realism, *Moses, Citizen & Me*.

Introduction

Delia Jarrett-Macauley, a Briton born to Sierra Leonean parents, was drawn to write about child soldiers through her work experience in war-torn Central and Eastern Europe, and through a documentary about the civil war in Sierra Leone. *Moses, Citizen & Me* begins when Julia, a British citizen with Sierra Leonean parents, arrives in Sierra Leone after the end of the civil war that lasted for about ten years. Julia had been called by Anita, the neighbour of her maternal uncle Moses, to come to Sierra Leone to comfort her bereaved uncle. Moses' beloved wife, Adele, was killed during the war. Julia finds Citizen, the eight-year-old orphaned son of her cousin, rejected and dejected. Citizen is a former child soldier who refuses to speak. She discovers, as Moses had, that Citizen, under instruction from "the big soldier man" (2), had killed his own grandmother, Adele. Anita encourages Julia to help both her uncle Moses and her cousin's son, Citizen.

In spite of the fact that most people feel that child soldiers cannot be redeemed, Julia feels obliged to restore Citizen to normal childhood. Julia's commitment to restoring Citizen to normalcy leads her to visit Doria camp, a rehabilitation camp for former child soldiers where Citizen was found by Elizabeth, Anita's daughter, who brought him home. At Doria camp, Julia meets Sally, a girl soldier who tells her how she and Citizen had escaped from the war front to the rehabilitation centre. At the rehabilitation centre, Julia finds several other former child soldiers, some mutilated and some drug addicts, undergoing rehabilitation under an Irish priest.

Inspired by this visit, Julia imagines bringing the child soldiers back to normal development and normal relations with their families. She resolves to return to the camp and is not in the least surprised when she returns instead through a magical experience that superimposes the female socialisation activity of hair braiding onto the restorative return. One day, as Anita, the neighbour, plaits her hair, Julia observes strange scenes she has not observed before. She is taken into the dream world of Gola forest where she meets the child soldiers of the "number-one-burn-house unit" under their leader, the twenty-year old Lieutenant Ibrahim. Here, the children's experiences of war are revealed to Julia in personalised detail. She learns that they are given drugs to enable them to undertake their gruesome acts, that they are frequently beaten and that the weaker ones are killed by Lieutenant Ibrahim.

The Gola forest sequences allow Julia to be informed about the personal histories of individual child soldiers through which she is able to piece together Citizen's story. They also present a zone of experience outside of realist time and space where the work of healing and reintegration may be done. It is a space where there is a reversal of development back to childhood, allowing the children to be re-educated in a more positive way. Central to this development is the shaman, Bemba G, who combines elements of non-modern wisdom of the elders and modern

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forms of therapy. This combination is what shifts the novel to the mode of magical realism.

Moses, Citizen & Me has received a fair amount of critical attention that mainly focuses on the novel as one example of a child-soldier narrative that, for the most part, misses the specificities of the question of restoration and redemption highlighted through the Gola forest sequences summarised above. Some of the scholars who have examined the novel argue that Jarrett-Macauley creates Citizen as an innocent victim of war like much other child soldier fiction and human rights discourses. According to Stefanie De Rouck, Jarrett-Macauley presents the child soldiers as being under the control of adults' decisions, thus undermining Citizen's agency and humanity. Sarah Maya Rosen and David M. Rosen also argue that the novel, like much contemporary literature and film, represents child soldiers as abused victims of war. These critics' concerns have been on how the novel creates the child soldier as innocent and without making him responsible for his war-time atrocities.

For some commentators, the novel represents a way of restoring the former child soldier to his state of innocence and vulnerability. Caroline Argyropulo-Palmer analyses the novel as a narrative about the child soldier's journey back to childhood. Ken Junior Lipenga argues that the novel is an exploration of the narrator's attempts to heal the emotional wounds of both Moses and his grandson, Citizen. To him, the novel's aim is precisely to salvage Citizen's humanity, to lead him back across the "bridge to normal childhood" and it does succeed "in redeeming the figure of the child soldier from the stereotype of 'monstrosity'" (13). I find Joana Spooner's reading of the novel only as national allegory especially problematic. For Spooner, the novel is about the disrupted nation and the child, Citizen, is represented solely as a metaphor of the nation. This allegorical reading fails to consider the powerful ways in which the child soldier, Citizen, is foregrounded as a rounded character and the novel's imperative in seeing the child soldier reconciled to society.

Coming to the question of narrative mode, there are a few articles that highlight the novel's partial magical realist form, as well as its representation of abnormal development. However, none of these analyses explains the full significance of magical realism in terms of its potential in narrative form to reverse the abnormal development of the child soldier. For instance, Allison Mackey describes these child-soldier narratives as "tragic coming-of-age narratives" (100) that encourage the reader to consider what happens to child soldiers after the dehumanising experiences of war. She sees Citizen's refusal to speak, despite Julia's insistence that he does so, as highlighting the need to recognise alternative ways of working through trauma by creatively shaping one's experiences. Mackey's reading constructs war as a "wrong" rite of passage that leaves child soldiers traumatised and calls for alternative ways of healing and restoring them to childhood. However, she does not consider restoration in relation to narrative mode. Like Mackey, Anne Whitehead's study focuses on the novel's representation of restoring former child soldiers to childhood. However, she sees the novel as representing the rehabilitation of child soldiers through indigenous culture. Even though Whitehead argues that the novel is magical realist, she regards magical realism in the novel as representing an "ambitious attempt by Jarrett-Macauley to envision a mode of recovery for the former child soldiers of Sierra Leone that draws inventively on local custom and tradition" (251–2), alongside other therapeutic modes. Scholarship that does focus on magical realism in *Moses, Citizen & Me* thus fails to identify the ways in which magical realism allows more than just an "African" authenticity. It also embodies the specific narrative capacity to reverse time and allow a re-development and re-education of the "monstrous" child. A factor that has not been considered at all is magical realism's significance in presenting a more ethical technique for conveying traumatic experience that could be sensationalised and turned into voyeuristic spectacle.

Like other child-soldier narratives such as Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obliged*, Chris Abani's *Song for Night* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, *Moses, Citizen & Me* foregrounds the plight of children enmeshed in wars. These novels represent the atrocities children in war suffer as well as the ones they commit. However, a major point of departure from these child-soldier narratives is that *Moses, Citizen & Me* re-imagines the healing for the child soldier. The novel's major concern is bringing back to normal childhood the child who has matured abnormally. Thus, the novel starts when the war has ended and Citizen, a former child soldier, is rejected because of the crimes he committed during the war, chiefly the murder of his grandmother. Julia, a cousin to Citizen, is concerned with helping him and other former child soldiers to overcome their past trauma and restoring them back to normal childhood. Julia thus becomes an empathetic listener who identifies with the witness, Citizen. This resonates with Stef Craps' argument that "appropriate response to accounts of trauma must involve empathic identification with the witness" (157). This implies that, while the other child-soldier narratives can be said to be anti-*Bildungsromane*, *Moses, Citizen & Me* is a converse *Bildungsroman*. Another major point of departure is that, while most of the child-soldier narratives have child protagonists/narrators, *Moses, Citizen & Me* is narrated in the

third person and it is arguably more of Julia's story than Citizen's.

Magical realism: debates and departures

Magical realism is a mode of representation that combines realism and fantasy in such a way that neither of the modes is privileged over the other. In an artistic context, the concept of magical realism developed in the early twentieth century in Europe and was catapulted onto the literary scene through the Latin-American 'boom' writers of the mid-to late twentieth century. The debates around magical realism are many. In the context of this article, the idea of the autochthony of magical realism in African modes of representation is considered, as well as the related idea that all writing from the 'third world' must be magical realist. More specifically, however, this article focuses on how Jarrett-Macauley in *Moses, Citizen & Me* sidesteps all of these debates and initiates a departure where magical realism is a therapeutic storytelling mode that allows a reversal of development and re-education, and allows a more ethical form of representation.

As a mode, magical realism challenges the Western tradition of realism, positing instead an alternative universe in which fantastical elements are placed side by side with the real in the process of establishing equivalence between them. The term was coined in 1925 by the German art historian and philosopher, Franz Roh, initially to apply to German post-Expressionist painters of the 1920s. The term later became accepted in the art circles of Italy and South America. Since the 1960s, magical realism has become more generally accepted in Europe and the Americas and has been applied to literature, first by Angel Flores to describe the fiction of Latin American writers like Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortazar, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Gabriel García Márquez. In recent times, the mode has become no longer a Latin American monopoly and now is very much present in other postcolonial contexts.

Key scholars of the mode include Wendy B. Faris, Maggie Ann Bowers, Amaryll Chanady, Ato Quayson, and Brenda Cooper who have made various attempts to define and analyse how the mode works. According to Faris, magical realism is a combination of realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow originally out of the reality portrayed (163). For Bowers, since in magical realism the magical is presented as a part of ordinary reality, "the distinction between what is magical and what is real is eroded" (63). According to Cooper, magical realism "strives, with greater or lesser success, to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death" (1). Cooper further posits that in magical realism, "the magical is defined as the fictional device of the supernatural, taken from any source that the writer chooses, syncretized with a developed realistic, historical perspective" (16). According to Harry Garuba, "it is the animist world view that presents writers like Ben Okri, García Márquez and Rushdie with the technique and strategy to construct a narrative universe in which transgression and transpositions of boundaries and identities predominate" (271). Garuba further argues that African writers who incorporate spirits, ancestors, and talking animals adopt the strategy to "ascribe a material aspect or existence to what are perhaps only really ideas or states of mind in a manner in which animism imputes spiritual dimensions into material objects" (272). Amaryll Chanady also argues that magical realism is an "amalgamation of a rational and an irrational world view" (21). According to Christopher Warnes, a basic definition of magical realism "sees it as a mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural; that is to say, a mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural, are coherently represented in a state of equivalence. On the level of the text neither has a greater claim to truth or referentiality" (3).

In Africa, writers who have employed this mode include Ben Okri, Syl Cheney-Coker, B. Kojo Elechi Amadi, Wole Soyinka, Yvonne Vera, Pepetela and Zakes Mda who are said to have been influenced by the Latin American writers. However, this claim has been contested by African magical realist writers. The Nigerian, Molara Wood, author of *Indigo*, a collection of short stories, asserts in an interview:

> Africa is the original "lo real maravilloso". Look at newspaper pages and tell me whether some things reported even in this day and age are not magically real. You have news items that ask you to believe that a thief turned into a goat; goats get arrested as do masquerades; or that some woman gave birth to a horse. I find it interesting that many people recount these with straight faces and listeners often take them as so. (Wood and Ibrahim)

Zakes Mda, the South African novelist, similarly denies that his work is influenced by Latin America since, according to him, he writes in this manner because in his culture "the magical is not disconcerting … The unreal happens as part of reality" (qtd in Barker 9, original ellipsis).

These arguments show that even though the mode first became widely known through fiction from Latin America, African magical realism cannot be said to be the product of a Latin American influence but, rather, as a vision and mode of telling born out of Africa's own belief in the reality of the supernatural. This claim is especially justified if one considers the nature of African folktales. In most folktales, supernatural occurrences are recounted in a matter-of-fact manner and listeners take them as real. Garuba has further argued that, in Africa, there is "an animistic mode of thought which is embedded within the process of material, economic activities and then reproduces itself within the sphere of culture and social life" (269). This shows that magical realism is not a borrowed concept in Africa.

Several African stories in which supernatural occurrences are recounted matter-of-factly support the claim that African magical realism is not a Latin American influence but borne out of African belief systems. This resonates with Bowers' argument that in West Africa, magical realism often incorporates local influences to produce a cross cultural literature that emulates the situation of many West Africans today (53). Quayson has also argued that, "African writing takes inspiration from the resources of orality in order to establish a distinctive account of the African world […] In traditional African oral contexts, the dominant narrative genres that circulate have an element of the magical and the supernatural in them" (159). Magical realism can then be said to be the result of a unique amalgamation of the beliefs and superstitions of different cultural groups. This shows that, while some international writers used the mode to challenge Western realism, Africans use it as an influence of their culture. Also, while some international writers use the mode as metaphorical, for Africans, it is part of their belief system. Kwame Anthony Appiah, for example, suggests: "For Okri, in a curious way, the world of spirits is not metaphorical or imaginary; rather, it is more real than the world of the everyday" (147).

The magical realism used in *Moses, Citizen & Me* could thus be said to have been influenced by West African cultures rather than those of Latin America. This is because it is arguably the African belief in the existence of spirits in material things that influences the writing of most Africans, especially West Africans (Garuba 273). Garuba also argues that magical realism is "too narrow a concept to describe the multiplicity of representational practices that animism authorizes" (272) and thus proposes "animist realism" as the appropriate term. He seems to suggest that the magical elements that exist in most African writing as a result of their animist culture is a broader concept which encompasses magical realism. This is because there seems to be materialisation of spirits in such writings. This means that animist realist writings do not just have magical and supernatural elements like magical realist writings do. However, in *Moses Citizen & Me*, there is nothing like the belief in material objects possessing spirits; rather, the novel alternates between the natural and the supernatural world and supernatural events are recounted in a matter-of-fact manner. I therefore argue that *Moses, Citizen & Me* is a magical realist novel.

The other side of the coin is that many publishers in the western world have preferred writers in the third world to write in the magical realist mode, especially to present Africa as a place of irrationality. However, the magical realism in *Moses, Citizen & Me* does not endorse the conception of Africa as a place of irrationality, the supernatural, and witchcraft. Rather, the bizarre occurrences that one sees in the civil war are born more out of the pitfalls of the progress and development of the colonially forged nation than a consequence of African primitiveness. Neither is the novel particularly concerned with a literary challenge to the formal realism Ian Watt sees emerging out of eighteenth-century Europe. Instead, magical realism is a form of therapy that enables a reversal of time and the abnormal development of the child soldier that is a product of the violence that has ensued as a consequence of the arbitrary, colonially convenient borders of postcolonial nations. Magic realism also allows a less fraught representation of the child soldier's experience that could so easily be sensationalised, as discussed below.

Moses, Citizen & Me has many magical realist features that will be outlined and discussed hereafter. The novel contains real historical events as well as fantastical elements. It alternates between the real world of Julia, the narrator; her uncle Moses; her cousin Citizen; and their neighbour, Anita, and the supernatural world of Gola forest with Bemba G and the child soldiers. The first time the narrative moves to the supernatural world of Gola forest is when Anita makes Julia's hair into big African cornrows that act as pathways into the magical, liminal realm of Gola forest: "Her big plaits were a trap, a device for opening up spaces in my head that hadn't been tampered with since I was a girl. She was using her hairdressing ritual to push African 'bush' rituals into those spaces" (51). Here, hair braiding, which is a typical social activity of African women, introduces African modes of narration into the novel. At first Gola forest appears as if it is in Julia's dream world but her subsequent visits to the place make it part of the reality presented in the novel. From that point the novel alternates between the supernatural world and the physical world without any of the worlds being privileged over the other. This resonates with Ato

Quayson's postulation that configurations of elements in magical realist texts differ from writer to writer and from text to text. In some, it is a character or characters who possess magical powers, as in Kojo Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes*. In some cases, it is events which are unusual or magical fused with everyday realities as in Pepetela's *The Return of the Water Spirit*, while in others, the narrative alternates between the magical and the real worlds as in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (175). Like *The Famished Road*, *Moses, Citizen & Me* alternates between the real world and the supernatural world. There are magical effects merged with everyday reality but these are recounted without any surprise. In the novel, wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, "accepted—presumably as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection; they thus achieve a kind of defamiliarisation that appears to be natural or artless" (Faris 177). Gola forest and its activities are presented in the novel as part of the reality as there is a thin line between the natural world and the supernatural world in the novel. Julia is able to enter the forest subsequently to see the child soldiers. On her second visit to Gola forest, for instance, she cannot remember anything between leaving Uncle Moses' house and arriving at Gola forest. Magical realism as therapy is explored below.

Reverse development and re-education: magical realism as therapy

Restoring former child soldiers to normalcy is at the core of *Moses, Citizen & Me*. Julia's desire to help Citizen to heal from the psychological wounds of his war-time experience and restore him to a state of innocence and vulnerability leads her to visit Doria camp to find out more about Citizen's past. This leads to her imaginative journeys into the world of child soldiers, where she sees the abuse they suffer and the harm they cause, thus gaining insight into how they can be helped.

Moses, Citizen & Me comprises formal realism as well as fantastical elements. It alternates between the real world and the supernatural world as has been stated above. Citizen and Julia live in both the real world and the supernatural world of Gola forest, and it is in the supernatural world of Gola forest that the re-education and reversal of perverted development for child soldiers takes place. This contrary education defies the rules of critical realism because it lacks the logical cause and effect that realism aims to represent. However, this is made possible through magical realism's potential which allows it to represent the rationally and logically impossible. It is a mode of representation that makes the magically imagined become real. As a narrative mode, magical realism has proved to be effective in handling bizarre experiences such as the ones represented in *Moses, Citizen & Me* because of its special potential. These qualities include its timeless fluidity, its merger of the non-modern and the modern, and its transgression of boundaries in representing human experiences, which makes it overcome ethical problems of representation.

Since development has mostly been represented as a movement from childhood through youth to adulthood as portrayed in the realist *Bildungsroman*, development from 'adulthood' to childhood would have been very difficult to represent but it is made possible through magical realism. In the *Bildungsroman*, a young adult leaves his native home, enters a world of the unknown, learns his lesson the hard way, and returns home having developed through his experience. This is realist since the experience can be explained through logical cause and effect. However, reversing the development of an individual who has developed abnormally is not logical and is impossible in realism. Magical realism allows this because its combination of the real and fantastic makes it overcome any limitations in representing human experiences. It is the magical realist Gola forest which makes it possible for children who have formerly engaged in adult violence to allow themselves to be told stories, obey instructions from adult civilians, and play games like children.

As a mode in which time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity, magical realism allows the past to be linked with the present and the future and the supernatural world to link with the real world. Thus, through magical realism, Julia is able to enter the past with the child soldiers to understand their past experience and how they can be helped. The magic realist world of Gola forest makes it possible for Julia to see the conditions under which child soldiers operate. Gola forest is thus a site where one can freely imagine what the child soldier has gone through in order to imagine recuperative methods which are not limited to ordinary realities but transcend what is seen. Julia meets Citizen when the war has ended so, for her to help bring him back to normalcy, there is the need to understand his past experience. She tries to achieve this knowledge by taking an imaginative journey into his past which is made possible through magical realism which is not limited by time and space. Magical realism thus helps Jarrett-Macauley to overcome representational problems of the novel only being realist.

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Also, magical realism brings together the non-modern and modern in the way it syncretises the natural and the supernatural in a matter-of-fact manner. It allows the combination of modern and non-modern ideas in reversing the abnormal development of the former child soldier. Even though Gola forest is a rainforest of spirits, Bemba G combines traditional and modern methods in healing the child soldiers. He tells the children of the need for them to be educated: "He went up to the towering silk-cotton tree and pulled from the centre of it a board on which were scribbled numbers, equations and signs. His fingers approached the board and extracted the square root sign" (89). The teaching of mathematics which is a science is blended with the supernatural since the board on which the exercises are written appears through magic. "Like all forests, the Gola has an intoxicating magical order: scrupulously structured and tinged with babble, unreliable clocks and tracks" (93) yet that is where *Julius Caesar*, a play, is staged and mathematics is taught. More radically, these magical realist episodes in Gola forest operate to break down the border between "science" and "magic", showing how the one is interfused with the other.

The reversal of psychic malformation in the novel follows the pattern of Victor Turner's 1964 model of the three main stages of traditional initiation: separation, the liminal stage, and the reintegration stage, or the home-away-home pattern of the realist *Bildungsroman*. However, unlike traditional initiation and the *Bildungsroman* where there is development from youth to adulthood, in *Moses, Citizen & Me*, there is a representation of a journey back to childhood. This journey back to childhood takes the form of re-education and redevelopment which is made possible through magical realism. The basic framework is one of traditional initiation where children of age are taken out of their homes into a liminal space where they are educated by elders in the lore of their people after which they are transformed from children to men. Like the rite of passage into adulthood, the inverted 'rite of passage' for actual child soldiers involves three stages. The separation stage is where child soldiers are taken from the war front, from their leaders and their units. The liminal stage is where they are taken to rehabilitation camps which aims to change their war-related violent behaviour and bring them back to a pre-war state of innocence, vulnerability, and need for guidance, while the reintegration stage is where they are sent to surviving members of their families or foster families. The rest of this section focuses on the nature of the 'reverse initiation' experienced by the child soldiers in Gola forest represented in *Moses, Citizen & Me*.

Mathematics seems to be central to the re-education of child soldiers in *Moses, Citizen & Me*. The lesson in mathematics which the former child soldiers receive under Bemba G in Gola forest signifies a re-education into the life of order and prevention of chaos. Mathematics has been defined as a way of applying ideas in a methodical way that encourages one to become systematic. In the same way, Bemba G's lessons in mathematics keep the children busy and calm, and reawaken their interest in a delightfully modest world of sums. By introducing mathematics to the former child soldiers at this stage of their re-education back into childhood, qualities such as critical thinking, creativity, abstract or special thinking, as well as problem-solving abilities are instilled in them at a time they need them most, because these are the qualities that will help them reorganise their lives. But the science of mathematics is infused by magic in Gola forest. Bemba G also tells the children that mathematics is "the place where magic is infinitesimal and mayhem self-induced" (92), but in Gola forest, mathematics is blended with magic to signify the need for the combination of logical reasoning and the belief in the hope embodied in magic in restoring child soldiers to their pre-war state of innocence, a task that ordinarily would seem to defy what is possible.

The storytelling lessons at the Gola forest are meant to help the children work through their trauma, teach them good morals, divert their attention from the tough realities of life, give their lives meaning, and to shape their future. Storytelling has been established in trauma studies as one of the most important strategies of working through trauma. However, most trauma victims are not able to tell their own stories. Craps argues that most trauma victims are not able to communicate their experience for fear that others cannot understand them "but result in distortion and trivialization" (162). This is seen in the way the children are not able to tell their stories when Bemba G asks them to do so. He teaches them the difference between a true story and a made up story and also the storytelling technique of "[b]eginning, middle and end!" (150). Bemba G's insistence on teaching the children to be able to tell their stories signifies the significance of storytelling in working through their trauma and the need for their stories to be told for future generations to learn lessons from them, while the traditional stories Bemba G tells them are meant to teach them moral lessons and also to entertain them. Bemba G highlights the significance and structure of the beginning, middle, and end of narratives to enable the child soldiers to distinguish the end of the war-time story from the beginning of the new story that begins in Gola forest. When Bemba G decides to tell them stories, the eagerness with which they listen to these stories shows their willingness to be children rather

than engage in adult activities of war and violence: "He told of trees that talked in the night, men who became spiders; he told forest stories that amused the eager listeners" (134). Bemba G's stories teach them moral lessons and help divert their attention from their past lives and the hard truths of their lives as former child soldiers. It also signifies the need to give meaning to their lives and to shape their future.

The re-education of former child soldiers in the liminal zone of Gola forest also involves lessons in dramatic performance. Bemba G helps the children to rehearse and perform *Juliohs Siza*, the Krio version of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in Gola forest. Every child soldier is involved in one way or another: acting, singing, drumming, and dancing. This helps the children to understand the ideals that they are being taught. The staging of *Juliohs Siza* is meant to make the children understand concepts like republican democracy, civic responsibility, and freedom which Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* alludes to, as well as the specific motivation behind Thomas Decker's Krio version, *Juliohs Siza*, when it was written at the time of Sierra Leone's independence. Revisiting Thomas Decker after Sierra Leone's civil war and introducing his ideas is very significant because of what he stood for. Thomas Decker was a Sierra Leonean who held matters of national interest and unity close at heart and contributed significantly to the movement that won independence for Sierra Leone in 1961. Decker's translation of *Julius Caesar* was "an attempt to deliver an important political message to the new nation on the subject of governance through the example and representation of a once noble servant of the Roman people turned hubristic emperor" (Caulker 209). The performance of *Juliohs Siza* by former child soldiers is significant since they need to be educated in the message the play conveyed when it was written at the time of Sierra Leone's independence. Besides, storytelling and dramatic performance, both of which are aspects of literature, help the child soldiers to overcome their past experiences. This is in line with Craps' postulation that "literature apparently manages to bridge the divide between the outside and the inside and to penetrate the souls of people who have lived through various historical catastrophes" (162–3).

Bemba G's lessons in dramatic performance also signify the need for the children to imbibe qualities such as self-control, discipline, understanding of interpersonal relationships, and confidence which drama teaches. As the children rehearse in their groups, they learn team work and respect for each other's opinions and how to negotiate power. When Citizen is not prepared to talk, Hinga, a fellow child soldier, says: "We must not press Citizen to say 'yes' if he wants time to think. I apologize. Let us give him time to think" (179). When they realise that Citizen is "afraid of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, tempting blame and condemnation" (181), they agree that if he has music to offer, that will be more than enough. This shows how the children have internalised democracy through their encounter with *Juliohs Siza*. On the final day of rehearsal, Hinga and Peter stand behind Citizen to encourage him to break the silence even if it meant only a song: "Peter parted Citizen on the back: 'Can talk now, eh, Citizen, no worries'" (186). This group solidarity among child soldiers presented through magic realism gives a more secure purchase on the possible recuperation of child soldiers than conventional realist techniques would allow. At the final performance of *Juliohs Siza* in the Gola forest, "[t]he audience was a mixed bunch, a medley of ages, nationalities and types: British and American soldiers in uniform, village people from across the river, some of the Freetown elites with their own kerosene lamps in hand, and more child soldiers walking barefoot" (201). The diversity of the audience signifies the need to involve all parties in the healing of child soldiers and the importance of spreading the news of their ability to be reintegrated. The Krio version of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, "with intercessions of drumming, dancing and mime" (203) signifies the localisation of foreign ideas. Western forms of healing and reintegrating child soldiers must be administered in accordance with the way of life and beliefs of the people involved. Citizen, playing Brutus' servant, is able to sing, "his flute voice filling our ears" (206). After the show, everybody seems to be surprised at the ability of the child soldiers. A German director who attends the performance asks, "Do you mean child soldiers are capable of this?" (209). This signifies that everything is possible since there is no limit to what happens in the world of magic. At the end, Citizen receives his healing as he dreams about his grandmother who has completely forgiven him and is praying for him. Magical realism signifies that everything is possible, including the forgiveness, total healing, and reintegration of former child soldiers.

Games and sports are also part of the re-education programme at the Gola forest. Bemba G introduces the children to some games which they eagerly play, offering relief from their past trauma. There are also activities in swimming which the children enjoy together as a group. "'Dive him, dive him,' they shouted whenever another boy jumped in and those already in the water swooped upon the newcomer attempting to knock him off-balance" (161). This group sporting activity brings togetherness and engages the children, taking their minds from the battlefield and acting as a symbolic washing away of their guilt. For Citizen, the swimming activity brings out his

strength: "He was a strong swimmer" (161). It also acts as a turning point for him. Inside the water, he experiences "metamorphosis, he became a ruddy brown butterfly boy, his arms circling the air in rapid motion" (161), thus becoming as fragile as a boy and as graceful as a flying creature.

Unlike the classical *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist, after leaving the home, experiences hardships which help him mature into adulthood, the reversal of perverted development through magic realism in *Moses, Citizen & Me* allows the former child soldiers to be taken through education in mathematics, narrative and performance, as well as games and sports, activities typical of children, thus helping them to overcome their 'adult' past and restoring their innocence and reliance on adults. Thus, while the experience of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist outside his home makes him develop into adulthood, the education and games at Gola forest symbolise a journey back to childhood.

The magical Gola forest also allows the former child soldiers to leave the independent adult lives they lived in the army for a childhood life of dependency. At Gola forest, the children no longer fend for themselves but depend on Bemba G for their food, shelter, and protection. Under Bemba G, they eat to their fill after which they throw their dishes up in the air and catch them "in appreciation for good food freely given" (129). This act of throwing dishes also symbolises childish behaviour at the liminal stage of the reversal of perverted education. This total dependency on adults among former child soldiers is not easily achieved in realism as suggested by Kyulanova's study in which the boys undergoing rehabilitation cannot depend on the adults at the rehabilitation centre "because they have become sensitive to the logical gaps and insincerity in their elders' behavior" (31).

Magical realism thus makes it possible to reimagine reversal of psychic malformation which is not possible with the classical *Bildungsroman*. This is because the classical *Bildungsroman*'s mode of development is only ever forward and the narrator can only ever comment with sadness or disappointment at opportunities lost but can do nothing about the past. Magical realism gives narrative form to the possibility of going back and changing. Thus, the narrative therapy in *Moses, Citizen & Me* portrays former child soldiers as potentially functional, people who with a little support, can successfully transform their existences into meaningful civilian lives. This is backed by the real life experience of former child soldiers as discussed below.

Since the end of the war in Sierra Leone, there have been several attempts to heal former child soldiers of their trauma and reintegrate them into society. There were various short-term education and training programmes which operated in the immediate post-war period. These reintegration programmes were organised and implemented by international organisations and the national government to ensure effective re-integration of former child soldiers. Several attempts have also been made to enable former child soldiers to overcome post-traumatic stress disorder. These include Narrative Exposure Therapy, an individual treatment which is based on the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy, exposure therapy, and testimony therapy (McMullen, *et al.* 1232). Others are group-based therapies like the group trauma-focused cognitive behaviour therapy which is aimed at ensuring that former child soldiers are brought together in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. These group therapies have been said to be more effective than individual therapies because working as a group reduced the risk of stigma and promoted understanding and normalisation of symptoms (McMullen, *et al.* 1238). In *Moses, Citizen & Me*, we see the integration of actual therapies used in rehabilitation camps, as well as therapies that derive from Jarrett-Macauley's faith in the power of imaginative stories to heal. As with the group therapies used in actual rehabilitation, Julia in *Moses, Citizen & Me* includes other child soldiers in Citizen's healing and re-education.

The reversal of perverted development in the novel involves three stages: separation from the real world where they suffer rejection, rehabilitation in the supernatural world of Gola forest under Bemba G, and reintegration into the real world. The separation stage is where Citizen is taken from the real world of his grandfather, Moses, where he has become 'unspeakable', unnameable, and under nobody's care, to the supernatural world of Gola forest under Bemba G. The liminal stage of this converse development involves the activities in Gola forest where Citizen, together with other child soldiers, undergoes rehabilitation. Bemba G combines indigenous and modern methods to rehabilitate child soldiers. In the liminal zone of Gola forest, Citizen, together with the other child soldiers, receives education in mathematics, narrative techniques, and stage performance that are all interspersed with magic.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that *Moses, Citizen & Me*, like other child-soldier narratives, foregrounds the plight of children enmeshed in wars, bringing their experiences to the literary public sphere. However, while most of

such novels represent the lives of their child protagonists/narrators as they go through war, *Moses, Citizen & Me* represents a form of a reversal of perverted development. This reverse development and re-education takes place in the magical Gola forest through a shaman, Bemba G, making the novel alternate between the real world and the supernatural world. This is what tips the narrative into the mode of magical realism, a mode of representation that combines realism and fantasy in such a way that neither of the modes is privileged over the other. I have also argued that magical realism is important in the novel because it allows playing around with time and space by allowing the past to be linked with the present and the future, as well as the non-modern, modern, and the supernatural worlds to link with the real world. Furthermore, magical realism in the novel allows the representation of reversal of perverted development.

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L'Annonce faite à Marie: de l'héritage africain à une lecture postcoloniale

Mireille Ahondoukpè

L' Annonce faite à Marie: from African legacy to a postcolonial reading

In this article, a postcolonial reading is undertaken of ***L'annonce faite à Marie*** (The annunciation of Mary), a 1912 play by Paul Claudel. Several celebrated authors from Africa and the Caribbean, belonging to the black postcolonial world, willingly acknowledge their debt to Paul Claudel, including Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Édouard Glissant and Saint-John Perse. Nevertheless, postcolonial theories generally exclude the study of Western and medieval works from the purview of postcolonial studies. It may thus appear paradoxical to propose a postcolonial reading of Claudel's play, written by a French playwright who does not belong to the colonized world. The play is furthermore set in the Middle Ages. However, many critics, mostly Anglo-Saxons, have successfully matched medieval texts and postcolonial studies. In fact, postcolonial theoretical tools are capable of casting new light on the study of ***L'Annonce faite à Marie***, regarding, for example, relations of gender or power, marginalization and migration. Given Claudel's avowed impact on the literature of the black world, in view of the play's focus on situations of domination, the postcolonial approach may be legitimately applied to the study of ***L'Annonce faite à Marie***, despite the 'medieval' particularities of this play.

Keywords: *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, Paul Claudel's African legacy, postcolonial reading, medieval world.

Introduction

L'Annonce faite à Marie de Paul Claudel a souvent fait l'objet d'études classiques axées sur la biographie, le style, les thèmes abordés, etc. Or les théories postcoloniales donnent lieu à de nouvelles pistes d'analyse susceptibles de révéler des facettes souvent ignorées dans les lectures classiques. L'approche postcoloniale est envisagée ici pour relire *L'Annonce* dans une perspective différente, pouvant permettre un enrichissement des études antérieures de cette œuvre.

C'est à partir de *L'Annonce*, publiée en 1912, que Paul Claudel est devenu un dramaturge confirmé. L'auteur situe l'action du drame en 1240 (*L'Annonce* 11), au Moyen-Âge, une époque éloignée de toute entreprise colonial: "Claudel nous dit expressément qu'il s'agit d'un 'Moyen Age de convention" (Aaraas 160). *L'Annonce* est une pièce dont la forte poéticité religieuse transforme l'histoire paysanne, le drame familial de Violaine, en un drame mystique.

Composé de quatre actes, *L'Annonce*, au symbolisme sacré très explicite, est l'aboutissement de *La jeune fille Violaine*, écrite en 1892. Dans le prologue de *L'Annonce*, Violaine pardonne à Pierre de Craon, un bâtisseur de cathédrales, et lui donne, par compassion, un baiser d'adieu. Elle s'en trouve contaminée, car Pierre de Craon est lépreux. Sa lèpre se présente comme la punition d'un péché: il avait désiré Violaine et avait vainement tenté autrefois de la violer, alors qu'il la savait destinée à un autre. Violaine est la fille aînée d'Élisabeth et d'Anne Vercors, un riche paysan champenois, maître du domaine de Combernon. Elle est d'une grande douceur, en contraste avec la dureté de cœur de sa sœur cadette, Mara.

À l'acte I, Anne Vercors, un homme très pieux, décide de donner Violaine en mariage à Jacques Hury, avant de partir en pèlerinage à Jérusalem. Mais l'Acte II révèle que Mara aussi est éprise de Jacques Hury. Mara rapporte la scène d'adieu entre sa sœur et le maître maçon. Les soupçons de Jacques Hury se confirment lorsqu'il voit Violaine atteinte. Elle est accablée de reproches puis conduite à la léproserie du Géyn, où elle vit isolée et méprisée des autochtones. L'acte III nous situe huit ans après cet événement, à la veille d'une fête de Noël. Folle de douleur, Mara apporte à Violaine, recluse et aveugle, le corps d'Aubaine, la fille qu'elle a eue de Jacques Hury, afin que sa sœur ressuscite l'enfant. Violaine est contrainte à la performance d'un miracle. Aubaine, revenue à la vie, présente désormais les yeux bleus de Violaine. Ce miracle ravive la haine de Mara qui précipite sa sœur dans une fosse, à l'acte IV. Revenant de pèlerinage, Anne Vercors trouve Violaine mourante et la porte dans ses bras jusqu'à la maison. Elle y expire dans une ambiance d'apaisement général. Entre-temps, Pierre de Craon revient, guéri de sa lèpre. La pièce s'achève sur une note sacramentelle, dans un univers réconcilié, où retentit l'Angélus.

Cette pièce appartient, d'une part, à la littérature française, c'est-à-dire à la littérature d'un pays non colonisé,

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au sens ordinaire du terme. D'autre part, tout dans cette pièce renvoie à un univers plongé dans le symbolisme religieux catholique médiéval. La lèpre, qui n'y est pas une simple pathologie, devient dans le cas précis une atteinte dans la chair de celui qui avait conçu un péché charnel. La grande propriété de Combernon n'est pas simplement une exploitation terrienne prospère. En effet, Combernon est tributaire du monastère de femmes attenant, Monsanvierge. Un système de servage relie les deux domaines, Combernon étant chargé de nourrir Monsanvierge des fruits de ses labeurs. L'espace-temps de la pièce est féodal; on y évoque la guerre de Cent Ans et le Grand Schisme. En dépit de la symbiose locale, l'univers dramatique plus global représente un monde divisé: dans l'Église, il y a trois Papes au lieu d'un seul et, à la place du roi, siègent deux enfants. La protagoniste, devenue lépreuse, est marginalisée, mais son drame prend une allure religieuse plutôt que sociale: Violaine, à l'image du Christ, s'offre en sacrifice pour le rétablissement de l'unité perdue dans son milieu de vie, et son sacrifice assume aussitôt des résonances universelles, se fondant dans le mystère de Noël. Par ailleurs, dans le monde, le Grand Schisme se termine et le conflit de la monarchie française se résorbe: Jeanne d'Arc mène le roi de France à Reims pour son sacre. Ces événements se situent historiquement vers 1430. Il reste à savoir quelle valeur donner au social, à l'historique et au politique dans une œuvre qui semble se tirer résolument vers un 'lieu' situé exprès, au loin, dans son 'Moyen Age de convention'.

L'Annonce résulte d'un processus de création exigeante, comportant de nombreuses réécritures attentives aux besoins de la scène. C'est une œuvre riche qui semble exiger sans cesse de nouvelles méthodes d'analyse. En 1912, Aurélien Lugné-Poe, un partisan de la mise en scène moderne, dont l'ambition était de restituer toute la poésie et tout le mystère de la scène, demanda à Claudel une réécriture de *La jeune fille Violaine*. Cette nouvelle version, qui n'est pas la première, change de titre pour devenir *L'Annonce faite à Marie*. La représentation au Théâtre de l'Œuvre de la pièce réécrite fut triomphalement accueillie le 22 décembre 1912. Claudel atteste: "Quand je la vois d'un point de vue de constructeur, je trouve que c'est l'une de mes pièces les plus charpentées, qui sont le plus faites pour frapper le public" (Fournier 275).

L'Annonce connaîtra des réécritures ultérieures, visant à la rendre plus malléable à la réalité de la scène. L'action dramatique en reste poétique, mais l'œuvre s'allège du symbolisme foisonnant et débridé. Les personnages, mieux incarnés, se détachent de l'emprise de la parole; ils prennent chair, consistance et identité personnelle. En 1938, par exemple, Claudel décide de remanier encore, avant sa représentation à la Comédie-Française, le quatrième acte de *L'Annonce* qui, selon lui, "ralentissait la pièce et en somme la faisait finir dans une espèce de brouillard lumineux, mais qui était étranger à l'atmosphère dramatique qu'il devait avoir" (Fournier 274), laissant le public insatisfait. La scène et la performance impactent ainsi le processus de création; le dramaturge apporte des ajustements tenant compte des défauts remarqués lors des spectacles. *L'Annonce* bénéficiera de nombreuses représentations, aussi bien en France qu'en Allemagne, en Pologne, en Suisse, en Italie et un peu partout dans le monde: "Claudel a désormais pris place dans les classiques de notre théâtre. Depuis sa mort en 1955, il n'a jamais cessé d'être joué en France et à l'étranger", rappelle Georges Versini (46). Il s'agit, par conséquent, d'une œuvre composée, en plusieurs temps, au XXe siècle, et l'auteur s'est montré soucieux des réalités de l'univers théâtral scénique et de l'esthétique des metteurs en scène qui ont eu à monter *L'Annonce*. Est-il possible, pour autant, d'apprécier ce drame sous l'éclairage de la théorie postcoloniale? L'approche postcoloniale est-elle uniquement réservée aux textes des pays colonisés? Les textes métropolitains peuvent-ils intéresser le postcolonial? Comment interpréter le lien entre la pensée claudélienne et le discours postcolonial de certains écrivains noirs?

Nous pensons que la théorie postcoloniale est susceptible de jeter des éclairages intéressants sur l'ensemble du théâtre claudélien, en général, et sur *L'Annonce*, en particulier, sans lui faire subir des effets de placage, et ce, en dépit de la situation de l'action dramatique loin de la réalité coloniale. En raison des contraintes d'espace, cet article s'appesantira surtout sur l'argumentaire théorique avant de suggérer des chemins d'application, qui seront développés ultérieurement.

Nombre d'auteurs ont abordé la question de la critique postcoloniale des textes médiévaux. On peut compter parmi les contributions les plus percutantes: *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* de Sylvia Tomasch et Sealy Gilles; *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* de John M. Ganim; *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* de Sharon Kinoshita; *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* d'Ananya Jahanara Kabir et Deanne Williams; *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* de Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, et l'article: "Quand 'Postcolonial' et 'Global' riment avec 'Médiéval': sur quelques approches théoriques anglo-saxonnes" de Marion Uhlig.

Cohen voit dans la modernité une continuation du Moyen-Âge, qui la précède et la prépare. Partant, le

Moyen-Âge pourrait être étudié, valablement, avec les outils du postcolonial. Le Moyen-Âge marquerait, sans rupture notoire, le développement culturel du monde moderne. Son symbolisme est largement religieux: la maladie en général, et la lèpre en particulier, témoigne d'un manquement spirituel et exprime la sanction d'un péché. Le théâtre médiéval serait surtout un théâtre religieux, avatar de la spiritualité catholique contemporaine. L'intérêt de cette étude réside dans la justification de l'étude postcoloniale des textes médiévaux. La connaissance du passé médiéval permettrait de comprendre le fait colonial, ses origines historique, politique et littéraire. L'ouvrage présente alors le recours au postcolonial par les médiévistes comme une démarche parfaitement légitime et naturelle. Un tel raisonnement est justifié, dans l'ouvrage, par le legs, l'évident lien de continuité entre le Moyen-Âge et la période coloniale. Simon Gaunt, à travers son étude intitulée: "Can the Middle Ages Be Postcolonial?", s'est basé sur un certain nombre d'ouvrages critiques pour vanter les succès du "Postcolonial Medievalism".[1] L'ouvrage, qui examine la question du risque de placage, pourrait aider à juger de la pertinence d'une approche postcoloniale de *L'Annonce*. Toutefois, à mon avis, il laisse en suspens certaines questions dont celle-ci: les réalités médiévales peuvent-elles être au même diapason que les préoccupations des théories postcoloniales? Cohen ne précise pas non plus s'il existe des écueils à l'étude postcoloniale du Moyen-Âge et, si oui, comment les éviter.

C'est une question à laquelle s'attèle Uhlig. Ses inquiétudes portent sur la validité scientifique d'une approche postcoloniale des textes médiévaux, sur l'éventualité d'un placage de la théorie postcoloniale au détriment des instruments critiques traditionnels. Dans une argumentation bien élaborée, l'auteur nous aide à cerner les contours du postcolonial appliqué aux études médiévales: les fondements, les controverses, les risques et les précautions à prendre. Pour Uhlig, la théorie postcoloniale est intéressante pour les études médiévales. Elle serait susceptible d'éclairer le transculturel au sein des textes: les diversités culturelles et religieuses ainsi que les caractéristiques linguistiques interculturelles du Moyen-Âge, qui sont trop souvent ignorées. De même, l'approche postcoloniale pourrait aider à rompre avec les contraintes normatives de la critique traditionnelle. Mais la périodisation constitue, à son avis, un obstacle à l'ouverture du médiéval au postcolonial. Le concept de l'interculturel constituerait donc une excellente porte d'entrée car le Moyen-Âge "se caractérise par sa situation multipolaire, ses frontières poreuses et ses sociétés plurielles qui évoquent sous certains aspects la communauté largement décentrée et interconnectée du XXIe siècle". Par ailleurs, sa "vitalité transculturelle, translinguistique et transreligieuse" serait éclairée par un recours aux concepts postcoloniaux. Cependant, Uhlig invite à de la mesure et à une combinaison des outils du postcolonial à des méthodes critiques traditionnelles.

Quelles possibilités peut-on envisager, eu égard à l'étude de *L'Annonce*, en partant des lectures classiques mises à jour à l'aune du postcolonial vu de manière plus large? Étant donné ses caractéristiques, évoquées plus haut, *L'Annonce* est un degré zéro d'application de la théorie postcoloniale au théâtre claudélien. Doit-on écarter pour autant une telle expérience?

Notre essai se fera en trois temps: une analyse de l'influence claudélienne sur certains discours postcoloniaux d'écrivains noirs, un survol des aspects de la théorie postcoloniale, non restreints au champ médiéval, et un examen des potentialités, des spécificités et/ou limites d'une application à *L'Annonce*.

Des écrivains noirs postcoloniaux inspirés de Paul Claudel

Plusieurs écrivains noirs, Africains ou Antillais de la période postcoloniale, se réclament de Paul Claudel et reconnaissent son influence sur leurs œuvres. Il s'agit par exemple d'Aimé Césaire, de Léopold Sédar Senghor, d'Édouard Glissant, de Saint-John Perse. Parmi eux, Aimé Césaire et Édouard Glissant sont même des précurseurs de la théorie postcoloniale. S'ils s'inspirent du diplomate français, celui-ci présente certainement un intérêt postcolonial. Le lien de ces penseurs noirs avec la pensée claudélienne porte essentiellement sur la théorie de la relation dans un monde globalisé. Le discours sur le monde chez ces auteurs présente de nombreuses résonances claudéliennes. Mais le rapprochement entre Claudel et ces auteurs laisse souvent entrevoir des écarts qui réinventent la pensée claudélienne. Ainsi, la notion de relation chère à Glissant trouve son écho dans la connaissance claudélienne qui suppose un échange qui respecte l'Autre, un décentrement et un rapprochement des peuples: "naître au monde, c'est concevoir (vivre) enfin le monde comme relation: comme nécessité composée, réaction consentie" (Glissant, *L'Intention poétique* 20). Mais chez Glissant, l'universalité que prône Claudel est remise en question dans *L'Intention poétique* et *Le Discours antillais* axés sur le "Tout-monde" qui bannit l'universel totalisant et l'idée de l'européocentrisme chez Claudel. Glissant rejette la globalisation qui ne respectent pas la singularité de l'Autre et qui conduit au désastre de la colonisation et de l'esclavage. L'approche d'Aimé Césaire

suit la même logique.

L'affiliation de Césaire avec Claudel passe par la remise en cause et la parodie. Sa pièce théâtrale *Et les chiens se taisaient* serait inspirée de Claudel: "*Et les chiens se taisaient* est la réécriture de la pièce *Le livre de Christophe Colomb* de Claudel, écrite en 1927 sur la demande du metteur en scène allemand Max Reinhardt", explique Ernstpeter Ruhe (232). Dans cette parodie anticoloniale du *Livre de Christophe Colomb*, Césaire réfute la valorisation de Christophe Colomb et réhabilite l'homme noir victime du colonialisme. À travers le *Discours sur le colonialisme*, c'est la mission civilisatrice de l'Europe défendue par des Européens comme Claudel qui est comparée à une entreprise dominatrice. Avec Césaire, Senghor a œuvré pour la réhabilitation du Noir tout en ayant aussi des liens intellectuels avec Claudel.

Sous l'influence claudélienne, Senghor essaie d'intégrer le Noir à l'universalité. C'est ce qui explique la correspondance qu'il établit entre l'univers africain dans ses croyances et l'univers chrétien de l'Occident. À partir de l'universalité claudélienne, Senghor recherche l'avènement d'une "[c]ivilisation de l'Universel, qui sera l'œuvre commune de toutes les races, de toutes les civilisations différentes—ou ne sera pas " (9). La même idée de monde globalisé se retrouve chez Perse.

Claude-Pierre Pérez, qui a eu à réfléchir sur la parenté entre Perse et Claudel indique que la "théorie de la poésie-connaissance […] la voix même du grand Tout" rappelle les notions de co-naissance et de totalité dans un monde globalisé chez Claudel; "Leger (comme Claudel) se plaît à invoquer le monde entier des Choses", précise Pérez (4). Mais malgré le rapport entre la pensée claudélienne et les théories de certains auteurs noirs de la période postcoloniale, l'étude postcoloniale de *L'Annonce* ne serait-elle pas un placage?

Étude postcoloniale de *L'Annonce*: un placage?

Face à la lecture postcoloniale de *L'Annonce*, l'impression d'un placage peut provenir de deux particularités de l'œuvre: la première est que son auteur est de la métropole française, et la seconde est liée au Moyen-Âge de convention de la pièce. En ce qui concerne l'étude postcoloniale d'une œuvre de la métropole, il faut dire qu'elle est plutôt rare. Pourtant, le fait colonial ne concerne pas uniquement les pays colonisés, il a impacté également les métropoles. De ce fait, l'étude postcoloniale peut être valablement étendue aux œuvres métropolitaines, surtout que Claudel a eu, en réalité, un statut de colon. Mais l'objection, c'est également que *L'Annonce* ne présente aucun intérêt direct par rapport au fait colonial. La fable de *L'Annonce* est allégorique, théologique, mariale, sans lien apparent au fait colonial. Il est alors possible que le sens commun relève un anachronisme ou pense au placage face à une lecture postcoloniale de *L'Annonce*. Faire du placage, c'est sombrer dans l'exagération, dans l'application artificielle; imposer à *L'Annonce* des théories faites dans un autre âge et pour un autre âge. Pourtant, atteste Uhlig, "depuis une dizaine d'années, le discours théorique inspiré par les Postcolonial Studies suscite auprès de la critique médiéviste anglo-saxonne un engouement reflété par l'efflorescence de la production critique. On ne compte plus les ouvrages qui, du début des années 2000 à nos jours, envisagent les intersections possibles entre les études médiévales et la théorie postcoloniale". Dans la mesure où la théorie postcoloniale constitue une clé de lecture originale, Uhlig soutient son utilisation et précise que cette théorie "offre la possibilité de rompre avec certaines contraintes normatives de la tradition critique. […] On ne saurait en somme rêver d'un terrain mieux disposé à l'égard de la réflexion postcoloniale que ce Moyen Âge d'avant l'émergence des nations".

On remarque, ici, une analogie entre le Moyen-Âge et l'empire coloniale. Au Moyen-Âge, en effet, la société féodale en crise conduit à l'émergence des nations, et par ricochet, à celle de l'empire coloniale. De même, c'est de la crise de l'empire coloniale que découle les États postcoloniaux. C'est dire que les États postcoloniaux s'inscrivent dans une continuité qui les met en liaison avec le Moyen-Âge. Cette continuité de même que l'analogie observée entre Moyen-Âge et empire colonial semblent encourager une approche postcoloniale du médiéval.

Le terme même de "postcolonial" ne va pas sans ambiguïtés. Alors que d'aucuns limitent les études postcoloniales aux réalités de la colonisation, Marie-Claude Smouts élargit sa définition à toutes les situations relevant de la domination:

> Le postcolonial est une approche, une manière de poser les problèmes, une démarche critique qui s'intéresse aux conditions de la production culturelle des savoirs sur Soi et sur l'Autre, à la capacité d'initiative et d'action des opprimés (agency) dans un contexte de domination hégémonique. À partir de cette base commune, les études postcoloniales se sont développées dans d'innombrables directions pour s'appliquer aujourd'hui à toutes les formes de domination (sur les femmes, les homosexuels, les minorités ethniques, etc.). (33)

Ainsi, la théorie postcoloniale et le corpus qui l'intéresse ne sont pas du tout limités à une approche chronologique ou simplement historique du monde, ni aux relations entre l'Occident colonisateur et le non-Occident colonisé. Le postcolonial peut servir à l'analyse de relations de domination sans frontières géographiques ou historiques. Par conséquent, *L'Annonce* peut être soumise à une lecture postcoloniale, bien qu'elle se déroule en plein Moyen-Âge. D'ailleurs, bien que la fable du drame campe un Moyen-Âge de convention, Claudel, lui, a vécu et écrit son texte en plein empire colonial.

Des recherches, évoquées ci-dessus, ont souligné les formidables potentiels liés au rapprochement entre le postcolonial et le médiéval. Mais quelle approche les théoriciens mainstream du postcolonial ont-ils du Moyen-Âge? Traversé par divers courants de pensée, en constante évolution, le domaine des études postcoloniales demeure vaste et complexe. Il est souvent sujet à des affrontements d'idées et de méthodes.[2] Malgré des divergences méthodologiques et idéologiques, des auteurs comme Edward Saïd, Hohmi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Robert Young et Paul Gilroy développent tous l'approche postcoloniale. On peut dire qu'il existe plusieurs théories postcoloniales. En général, ces théoriciens admettent que la critique postcoloniale s'intéresse aux traces multiformes, matérielles et immatérielles du système colonial laissées dans les espaces et dans les cultures; on pourrait l'étendre à "toute culture affectée par le processus impérial depuis le moment de la colonisation jusqu'à nos jours" (Ashcroft, Griffiths et Tiffin 14). Selon Bhabha, l'un des grands théoriciens du postcolonial, "la critique postcoloniale porte témoignage des forces inégales de représentation culturelle impliquées dans la lutte pour l'autorité politique et sociale au sein de l'ordre mondial moderne" (267).

Les études postcoloniales se préoccupent généralement des périodes coloniales et postcoloniales, avec une prise en compte indispensable de l'histoire. Or, le Moyen-Âge, antérieur au voyage de Christophe Colomb et à la découverte du Nouveau Monde, en est bien éloigné. De ce fait, l'intérêt de la théorie postcoloniale mainstream pour le Moyen-Âge est inexistant, ou peu s'en faut. Saïd ne fait aucun cas de cette période dans son livre sur *L'Orientalisme*. Qu'on se rappelle encore, toutefois, que le médiéval dans *L'Annonce* est poétique plutôt qu'historique et que l'œuvre elle-même appartient au XXe siècle, en plein dans le monde postcolonial.

Pour une critique postcoloniale de *L'Annonce*

Les concepts postcoloniaux peuvent aider à découvrir de nouveaux versants de *L'Annonce* que les méthodes critiques traditionnelles laissent sur la touche. La lecture postcoloniale offre ainsi, valablement, une actualisation de l'analyse de cette pièce empreinte de symbolisme, sans être, pour autant, soustraite à l'histoire sociale et politique. Cette dernière partie propose un survol rapide des éclairages possibles offerts par une lecture postcoloniale de *L'Annonce*.

Le concept de genre, par exemple, peut mener à des regards inédits sur les personnages féminins dans l'univers 'médiéval' de *L'Annonce*, et plus généralement sur les constructions générées des relations sociales en termes de domination, bien sûr, mais aussi en termes de mobilité: Qui est libre de voyager? Qui est assigné à domicile? Quels sens revêtent la sortie de la maison pour les personnages en fonction de leur statut, mais aussi de leur sexe? Si Anne Vercors est libre de ses mouvements, tout comme Pierre de Craon, la Mère et Mara ne le sont pas, pas plus que Jacques Hury, le serviteur promu à la position de gendre et héritier, par défaut. Les moniales de Monsanvierge sont enfermées et dépendantes, mais protégées, alors que Violaine, lépreuse, est jetée dehors, parmi les vagabonds et les rebuts de la société.

La notion du 'centre' est, lui aussi, fécond. En guise d'exemples: la foi catholique est au centre de la vie de chaque personnage; Jérusalem fait figure d'un centre de pèlerinage global, un noyau spirituel désiré, recherché par la mobilité volontaire, à partir duquel l'angoisse existentielle peut se guérir et l'unité du monde se refaire; la foi catholique forme un autre centre symbolique, spirituel et politique, autour duquel tout s'organise: l'histoire de Combernon, de Monsanvierge, les heures et les saisons, rythmées de prières et de services divins.

Nous avons également le concept de l'allégorie dont cette pièce symboliste est truffée, et qui se signale déjà dès le titre de l'œuvre. On peut y étudier de manière valable les allégories de l'annonciation, de la mobilité, de la domination impériale, de la réunion de la terre, etc. Plus généralement, le rapport entre le postcolonial et le global rencontre de fortes résonances dans l'œuvre de Claudel qui s'inscrit symboliquement et spirituellement dans l'universel, autour de termes tels que 'communion' et 'co-naissance' (Claudel, "Traité de la co-naissance au monde et de soi-même").

L'Annonce renvoie à l'univers socio-politique de la féodalité, et appelle des notions telles que la domination,

le statut de subalterne et la caste. Les concepts de marginalisation, de différence, de binarisme, d'universalisme, d'exil et d'interculturel recèlent, à son égard, un intérêt certain. Il en va de même de la prise en considération des identités, de l'altérité, de la différence et de leur construction dans l'univers de *L'Annonce* où l'on retrouve, en lieu et place d'un Moyen-Âge homogène, un monde disloqué, en crise politique, sociale et religieuse.

Par ailleurs, on peut lire en filigrane dans *L'Annonce* des traces de domination allant au-delà de la vie sociale locale: il y a la domination anglaise d'une part, et d'autre part, celle de la colonisation romaine, subie auparavant par la France, et qui transparaît dans la religion, la langue, la civilisation évoquée.[3] Le mot 'colonisé' s'applique certes, ici, à un territoire métropolitain. Il s'agit d'une colonisation d'un autre genre, d'une autre époque, mais les questions de territorialisation, de déterritorialisation, de résistance, de libération font, toutefois, partie du discours de cette pièce. Ainsi, avec la guerre de Cent Ans, les Anglais se sont rendu maîtres du territoire français. En 1422, c'est la déterritorialisation: le roi de France, Charles VII, est comme détrôné au profit des Anglais: "Il n'y a plus de Roi sur la France […] À la place du Roi nous avons deux enfants. / L'un, l'Anglais, dans son île / Et l'autre, si petit qu'on ne le voit plus, entre les roseaux de la Loire" (*L'Annonce* 51–2).

L'indépendance ou la libération n'est intervenue qu'en 1429, quand Jeanne d'Arc conduit le roi de France à Reims pour l'y faire sacrer: "C'est le Roi qui va-t-à Rheims […] C'est une petite pastourelle qui le conduit, par le milieu de la France / À Rheims pour qu'il s'y fasse sacrer" (176). Le sacre et le retour du Roi sont évoqués dans la scène II de l'acte III: "Nous allons abattre ces vieux murs, maintenant que le Roi est revenu" (156). Suite à l'action de la femme exceptionnelle, envoyée de Dieu et soustraite à la condition ordinaire de celles de son sexe et de son statut social, le centre se rétablit, tout finit bien pour la France. Pour Jeanne D'Arc, ce sera, hélas, une autre histoire.

L'aspect théologique de *L'Annonce* peut se lire sous le prisme de l'héritage colonial romain, christianisé, de Claudel. Son recours au verset, ses allusions à la liturgie et à la Bible, ses thématiques faisant allusion à la foi, au sacrifice, à la lèpre, au péché, à la Résurrection, etc. constituent en effet, des signes d'une culture catholique, tandis que ses références à la Bible relèvent aussi d'une intertextualité qu'il serait fort intéressant d'analyser sous l'angle de l'interculturel.

De nombreuses expressions latines, d'ordre liturgique, émaillent *L'Annonce*: "Regina Coeli, laetare, laetare" (18); "Pax tibi" (18); " Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis" (217), etc. Elles peuvent également être considérées comme des vestiges d'une France anciennement colonisée. Le vernaculaire des ouvriers et des campagnardes est présent aussi dans l'œuvre, notamment dans la scène première de l'acte III: "Quoi qu'i font les ceusses ed là-bas?" (140); "I fait bin froid pour promener les tiots enfants à c't'heure" (149); "Qué malheur d'nourrir c'te varmine" (150). La forme et le contenu de leurs propos valent la peine d'être pris en compte: parlant dans un langage de dominés, s'exprimant loin du centre de pouvoir, ces pauvres ont pourtant le loisir de toiser ceux qui le sont davantage en les traitant de 'vermine', en montant en épingle leur statut inférieur d'Autre déclassé.

En somme, les outils conceptuels du postcolonial peuvent s'appliquer à des œuvres relevant de ou évoquant d'autres colonisations que celle occidentale post-colombienne. Étant donné qu'il s'agit, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, d'une histoire coloniale, on aura les phénomènes habituels de domination, de territorialisation, de crise identitaire, etc. La critique postcoloniale présente ainsi d'énormes potentialités pour l'élargissement du champ d'étude de *L'Annonce*.

Les outils du postcolonial appartenant à un contexte sociologique différent de celui du Moyen-Âge, des divergences de jugement peuvent parfois intervenir. Ce que la théorie postcoloniale juge aujourd'hui comme des relations à connotation négative peut avoir été perçu positivement au Moyen-Âge. La domination, par exemple, ne se vit pas de la même manière. Au Moyen-Âge, c'est le système féodal inégalitaire qui donne lieu à des situations de domination/protection. Au regard de la critique postcoloniale, la relation entre Combernon et Monsanvierge est féodale, avec des relents d'oppression, de domination. Mais ces regards contemporains sont-ils valables pour caractériser une société du passé qui normalise la domination? Pour les habitants de Combernon, Monsanvierge permet de rendre sa part à Dieu afin de recevoir en échange la bénédiction divine. Il s'agit ici d'une économie du salut, ce qui n'exclut pas l'existence, dans l'œuvre, d'autres formes de domination, ressenties comme telle, de manière négative. Pierre de Craon, qui a voulu violer Violaine, exerce, par exemple, dans le contexte, une domination négative, interdite. Les représentations médiévales peuvent donc se montrer partiellement rétives à des analyses postcoloniales des relations de domination. Par ailleurs, le Moyen-Âge présente des altérités spécifiques, visibles à travers les faits quotidiens ou de grands événements comme la guerre de Cent Ans. C'est dire que l'étude postcoloniale de *L'Annonce* reste possible et valable, mais il s'avère nécessaire de l'entreprendre

avec lucidité et circonspection.

Conclusion

En définitive, les théories postcoloniales ne sont pas sans intérêt pour l'étude de *L'Annonce*. L'étude postcoloniale de ce texte d'auteur métropolitain serait aussi valable que celle des auteurs noirs des anciennes colonies. Et ce, en dépit des doutes que l'on pourrait concevoir à l'idée d'une telle démarche, étant donné la teneur spirituelle de l'œuvre et son espace-temps quasi mythique, médiévale, éloignée de la modernité et du postmoderne dont s'occupent généralement les études postcoloniales. *L'Annonce* paraît faiblement historicisée, sans référence directe à des traces d'une colonisation, même "douce". Pourtant, comme nous l'avons vu, la théorie postcoloniale propose des outils d'analyse qui ne sont pas limités à une époque, à un peuple ou à un lieu. Les relations de domination et de genre, les constructions identitaires, les géographies et les cartographies sociales et politiques sont de tous les temps. Vu ainsi, l'étude postcoloniale de *L'Annonce* recèle d'immenses et d'éclairantes possibilités pour des lectures renouvelées. Cependant, une prise en compte des spécificités du contexte dramatique et de la sensibilité esthétique reste toujours de rigueur. Mais ceci ne nous empêche nullement d'élargir les perspectives de lecture de *L'Annonce*, en recourant aux théories postcoloniales.

Notes

1. On peut citer entre autres: *Empire of Magic* de G. Heng; *Postcolonial Fictions* de Sylvia Huot; *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern* de Patricia Clare Ingham et Michelle R. Warren; et *The Kingdom of Sicily: A Literary History* de Karla Mallette.
2. Certains théoriciens nord-américains pensent par exemple que la théorie postcoloniale doit être remplacée par les global studies qu'ils essaient de théoriser.
3. Les Romains ont dominé le monde pendant plusieurs siècles, et le Moyen-Âge est marqué par la christianisation de l'Europe centrale et orientale.

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Essay

The iconic Hector Pieterson photo and the power of adaptations

Ewald Mengel

The iconic Hector Pieterson photo and the power of adaptations

In South Africa, the iconic Hector Pieterson photo is the starting point for many artists to deal with their own personal trauma and the communal trauma of their nation. The iconicity of this photo has sparked many different adaptations in various fields of art. Considering that we are talking about a traumatized country, Freud's concept of "repetition compulsion" seems to be one explanation for this phenomenon. However, art is only seldom a mere product of traumatization. Quayson's concept of "symbolization compulsions" comes closer to explaining the phenomenon of repetition in the arts, because it leaves the artists more freedom of expression and does not suggest that art is the result of illness, while still implying 'compulsion' and 'obsession' in the act of creation. I want to suggest that 'repetition' in the arts in the South African context is not so much a sign of confinement and restriction, but that the many adaptations of the unique historical incident should rather be understood as attempts of 'working through' collective trauma, making sense of history, and contributing to the country's healing. **Keywords:** Hector Pieterson, repetition compulsion, symbolization compulsions, adaptation, trauma, art.

During the symposium 'What Does It Mean Living Together in the Aftermath of Historical Trauma', organized by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontain, South Africa from 24 to 26 March 2014, a workshop was held for students in the gallery of the university library, which I was invited to attend. Its subject was Gerrit Hattingh's fine art photograph *Before and After Hector*. When the students were encouraged to voice their opinions about it, most of them seemed to like it. Some of them expressed their uneasiness about it, while others felt that there was 'something missing' in this photograph. I, too, felt the same, although at the time I was unable to put it into exact words. Having dealt with adaptations before (Mengel), I knew for sure that adaptations by definition have to change things, to leave things out, or to add things, because otherwise they would be copies and not adaptations at all (on adaptation theory see Hutcheon). It was only later that I remembered the terminology of C. S. Peirce, the founder of semiology, and it became clear to me that Peirce's distinction between three types of signs—'icon', 'index', and 'symbol'—is helpful to analyze the phenomenon in question, and describe the 'missing link' in a more scholarly way.

According to Peirce (see Bergman and Paavola), the term 'icon' is a sign that bears some likeness or semblance to reality. An icon is a simplified visual representation of something else, for example, a program on your computer for which the icon serves as an easily recognizable button. A photograph would also be a good example for we assume that there is a reality behind it to which it bears a likeness. But the terms 'icon' and 'iconicity' also have a second meaning because originally they refer to the image of a saint.

The concepts 'index', 'indexicality', and 'indexical meaning' imply an actual reference, a concrete and real relation bound to a historical context: The Obama family introduce 'First Dog' Bo, a Portuguese water dog, to the press on 14 April 2009 on the lawn outside the White House in Washington (my example). The event here is historical and unique, and its veracity may be underpinned by referring to eyewitnesses, photographs, or video films.

In contrast to indexical meaning, referential meaning according to Peirce is less context-bound, more general, and lacks historical specificity and uniqueness: 'A dog runs on the lawn'. In this case, the meaning-generating reference is just to the animal species that is specified (dog), the way it moves (runs), and the locality (lawn).

The third type of sign that matters in this context is symbols. On a linguistic level, a symbol stands for some object or idea it represents. The English word 'dog' (Latin: *canis*, French: *chien*, German *Hund*), for example, designates a well-known domesticated animal with four legs that can bark. Linguistically, there is no 'actual', 'corporeal' relation or similarity between signifier and signified, but this relation is arbitrary. As literary symbols,

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dogs may signify almost anything, depending on the context in which they are used. In the contemporary South African novel, for example, dogs occur quite frequently and have even become objects of scholarly analysis (Wylie and Barendse).

Sam Nzima's iconic Hector Pieterson photo from 1976, which was printed in the newspaper *The World*, literally went around the world and is known to all of us today. Circulated mainly by newspapers and television at first, the internet became an important multiplier from the 1990s onward. What we find on the internet nowadays is not just *the* 'one and only' iconic photo but a series of shots which show the group of the three young students from different perspectives and distances.

In the original photo we see a disorientated crowd of black people in the background, some of them looking in the direction of the group. A woman is seen on the left, also looking towards them. The limp body of Hector Pieterson, clad with short trousers and one gym shoe, is being carried by an older male student (Mbuyisa Makhubu), who is half crying, while a female student in school uniform (Hector's sister Antoinette Sithole) is walking by his side, wailing, the palm of her right hand thrown upwards in a gesture of lament (or is it to shield off bad luck?).

In a second photo the group has advanced, the crowd is no longer to be seen, and the woman in the background is now on the right side of the photo, no longer looking towards the children but in the direction of where the crowd was before and where there still seems to be trouble. Hector's head is thrown back even further, the mouth of the student carrying him again is wide open, half crying, and Hector's sister is still walking by his side, crying and holding the palm of her right hand upwards like in the first picture.

There are more photos to be found on the internet—it is an ideal platform for distributing them. The photographer Sam Nzima shot a series of six with a simple Pentax camera (Molosankwe; Pohlandt-McCormick) and smuggled the film through the police control in one of his socks. From there, it went to the offices of the newspaper *The World*, which dared to publish the photo on its front page.

The following cartoon by Zapiro, a rough version of which, chiselled into stone, is gracing the monument before the Hector Pieterson Museum in Orlando West, Soweto, and which obviously catches all those elements which make up the photo's material iconicity—the group of three; Hector's limp body; the half crying, open mouth of the older student; the crying sister with the palm of her right hand thrown upwards—represents a more modern version of the Hector Pieterson motif.

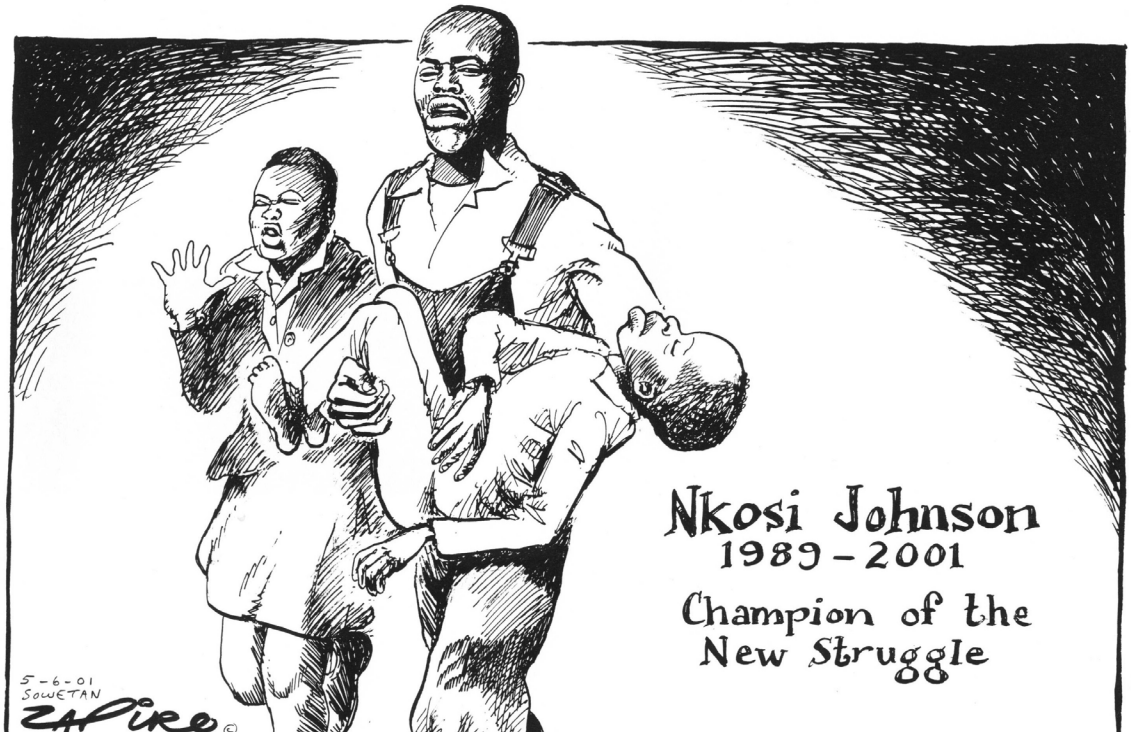

Figure 1: Zapiro *Obituary cartoon: Nkosi Johnson (1989–2001)*. Originally published in *Sowetan*. Re-published with permission.

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It is interesting to note that there is—intentionally—no historical exactness in the Zapiro cartoon. While the shape of the older student's mouth and the position of the sister's hand are meticulously observed, the dying child here has bare feet and wears a pair of long trousers. Zapiro's drawing turns out to be an adaptation that does not aim at historical accuracy. The victim here is called Nkosi Johnson, who was born HIV positive in 1989 and became a celebrity in South Africa in the last decade of the 20th century, fighting against the discrimination of children and adults known to have HIV/AIDS. Nelson Mandela referred to him as "an icon of the struggle for life" (*BBC News*). He died of AIDS in 2001.

Gerrit Hattingh's fine art photograph *Before and After Hector*, too, is obviously meant to allude to the iconic Hector Pieterson photo, whose constitutive elements are preserved: the group of three, the limp body of the child carried by a strong young man, the woman at his side, the palm of her right hand raised upwards. However, there are also a number of changes: the setting is no longer the township of Soweto but a beautiful natural scene on a sunlit day; there is no crowd of protesters in the background and the people in the photograph wear turn-of-the century clothes. Hattingh's adaptation is to remind us of the many black people (15,000–20,000) who lost their lives in British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902.

Figure 2: Gerrit Hattingh *Before and after Hector*. Published with permission.

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The reason for the boy's trouble seems to be related to this. There is no indication that he is shot, but what we know is that many people in the concentration camps suffered from malnutrition and died from various infectious diseases, some of them outside the camps after they were released (*South African History Online*). The man and the woman are obviously trying to get help for the young boy who seems to be in serious trouble. But are they still students? It would hardly make sense in this different historical context. They could be the brother and sister, or even the parents of this child.

One more example will suffice to illustrate how the iconicity of the Hector Pieterson photo can be adapted for different purposes.

Figure 3: Picture by Nganga Dlanga of the Black River FC advertising agency. Republished with permission.

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In this picture, two broadly smiling college students are imitating the iconic Hector Pieterson situation. The body of Hector is replaced by a mortar board, a gown and a scroll. It seems that the students celebrate their graduation. The allusion to Hector Pieterson in this context, on the one hand, is to remind us for what the Soweto students in 1976 fought and died for, namely equality and freedom of education. On the other hand, one cannot avoid noticing the more sinister undertones of this picture (Davids and Mbele; Ferreira): Is that what they proudly carry already a corpse? Will their graduation really set them free, or will they be swallowed up by the army of unemployed academics, since South Africa's economy has once again hit a recession?

Hector Pieterson was shot by the apartheid police on 16 June 1976 in Orlando West, Soweto. The original, iconic Hector Pieterson photo by Sam Nzima 'freezes' the moment after this incident as a unique historical moment in time. It captures the attempt to save Hector's life, and shows the emotions of Antoinette and Mbuyisa that go along with it. This is its indexical meaning. The referential meaning of the picture is that the South African police did not hesitate to shoot at and kill school children. Hector was not the first and the only one—a few hundred people were killed on that day and the days after. Thus, the picture could become a symbol of the cruelty of the apartheid regime, and the suffering of the black population under their white oppressor.

Iconicity presupposes repetition, circulation, and multiplication. Adaptations are 'translations' (in the widest sense of the word) from a source context into a target context. They make use of the referential and symbolical meaning of an icon, while its indexical meaning has to be suppressed because it is an obstacle for the adaptation process. If one feels some loss looking at Gerrit Hattingh's 'retrospective' adaptation, this loss is created by the lack of indexicality which, however, is a necessary precondition for an adaptation to come about at all. The same applies to the students celebrating their graduation.

Since 1976, many adaptations of the iconic Hector Pieterson photo have been produced in different forms across the fine arts (Saayman-Hattingh) for different purposes. In the South African context, one is tempted to explain this phenomenon by referring to Sigmund Freud's idea of repetition compulsion. After all, we are dealing with a collective (communal, societal) trauma that seems to be haunting the South African nation (Tutu; Volkan).

Freud has turned repeatedly to the concept of repetition compulsion in his writings. He did this for the first time in an article of 1914, "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten" (Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through). He took it up again in "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" (Beyond the Pleasure Principle), where he emphasizes that the "patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it [. . .] He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it" (288). This means that Freud's idea of repetition compulsion leaves no room for artistic creativity or freedom. The traumatic past is "unclaimed experience" (Caruth), unspeakable and unrepresentable, and according to Caruth, it will keep haunting the present.

With Ato Quayson's theory of "symbolization compulsions", we enter the realm of representation. Symbolic representation allows individual artistic creativity, but Quayson still clings to the idea that there is a compulsion of sorts that is triggered by communal trauma: "Symbolization compulsion is the drive towards an insistent metaphorical register even when this register does not help to develop the action, define character or spectacle, or create atmosphere. It seems to be symbolization for its own sake, but in fact is a sign of a latent problem" (82).

In the South African context, this latent problem is contemporary communal and societal trauma, and it seems that South African artists keep returning to the same situations, motifs, and character constellations that other artists have been dealing with before. This repetitiveness of South African arts may be seen in a negative light. Elleke Boehmer, for example, draws a rather bleak picture in her article "Permanent Risk: When Crisis Defines a Nation's Writing". But the fact that the arts keep returning to this communal trauma can also be interpreted positively. The many adaptations of the iconic Hector Pieterson photo, for example, may be understood as repeated attempts to come to terms with this trauma, to work through it, and to be able to live with it, even if it might not be overcome finally. Repetitions are necessary in this context. As such, they are an indication of strength in spite of the existing trauma, and the willingness to face the past, to work through it, and come to terms with past atrocities. Their common starting point is the iconicity of this photo, which shows Apartheid society and its problems through a magnifying lens. By repetitive variation, the adaptations create a web of meaning that relates the past to the present and brings seemingly unrelated events and persons into a surprising and meaningful relationship.

The parallels between the four totally different historical situations and events become clear: through the iconic power of the original Hector Pieterson photo, the suffering of black people under apartheid rule is prospec-

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tively related to the scourge of AIDS, the problem of education, and the inactivity of the ANC government in the present, and retrospectively to the many deaths of black people in concentration camps set up by British troops a hundred years earlier. The iconicity of the original Hector Pieterson photo empowers these 'flights of thought' and lends the later adaptations their meaning. It creates a net of semantic relationships that combines hitherto unrelated elements in a surprising way. At the center is black suffering, both in the time of colonialism and under the present political conditions. The intermedial adaptations of the iconic Hector Pieterson photo thus construct a new transmedial narrative that tries to make sense of South African history.

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Interview

Henrietta Rose-Innes in conversation with Gail Fincham

GF: You've recently returned from the UK, where you went for your PhD viva examination. This turned on your submission of your latest (fifth) novel. Can you say something about this novel: what it's called, how it relates to your previous four novels?

HRI: Thank you! Yes, I've recently completed a manuscript entitled *Stone Plant*, which should be published in 2020.

I see the new novel as the third part of a very loose trilogy of environmentally themed novels, along with *Nineveh* and *Green Lion*. Each of these books examines the human relationship with the non-human world in different ways: *Nineveh* deals with our urban coexistence with the multitudes of organisms around us, and how we need to negotiate unpredictable changes in these complex systems. The focus is on the small and non-mammalian, represented here by a swarm of mysterious, pestilential beetles. I think it's a book about the irrepressibility of life, and how it thrives in unexpected ways, whether we welcome it or not.

Green Lion, on the other hand, is a bleaker book, looking at the other side of these interactions with the non-human. Its major animal figure is the last surviving individual of an extinct lion species, and it deals with loss and mortality. It looks at how we are bleeding the earth of our co-species, fetishising them and turning the spaces we share with them into sterile wastelands—the loss and the loneliness of that predicament.

In *Stone Plant*, I wanted to return to a more hopeful vision: set in a slightly future or alternative Cape Town (as are the other two books), the focus is on the plant world. A central being in the story is an ancient plant that finds ways to survive a drought-scarred world, and revive and propagate, by manipulating the human characters around it. It's a more ambitious novel than I've attempted before: it expands the cast of characters not only to the vegetable kingdom, but even to inanimate objects and the long dead. I want the book to speak about the resilience of life, and how survival strategies may be playing out on such a slow time-scale—the long cycles of vegetable life, even of geological time—that perhaps we cannot perceive them.

GF: Did you grow up in an ecologically sensitive household? Do you have animals? (cat named Sekhmet, dog named Soldier?)

HRI: My parents loved plants and the outdoors. My mother especially was a lifelong gardener, and also a painter of very beautiful, detailed botanical watercolours. (Some of her works are in the botanical art collection at Kew—we are very proud of that.) We often walked on Table Mountain, or went on family holidays to national parks. So yes, there was always a strong affinity for wilderness. I've recently moved to the South Peninsula, where I live surrounded by wildlife; but I actually think being in Norwich, far removed from this kind of landscape, also made me dwell on it more. The distance might have affected my writing more strongly than my current immersive environment will. Cape Town is very present in *Stone Plant*—but it is a somewhat 'other' Cape Town, dreamlike, having perhaps drifted over from a nearby parallel universe—which I think is partly a result of the book having been composed in another hemisphere.

I do have cats, but none named Sekhmet, although they are all of course incarnations of the Egyptian lion-headed goddess of bloodshed and war. (My interest in ancient cultures, evident in the epigraphs in *Green Lion*, is also part of my mother's legacy; she studied archaeology as a young woman, and for good or ill I spent my childhood leafing through dusty old texts with titles like *The Glory That Was Rome.*)

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GF: The book covers of your four novels are striking, yet all so different. How did their design come about? Are you happy with all of them?

HRI: They are spaced out over many years and several publishers. My very first cover, *Shark's Egg* for Kwela Books, was kindly designed by a friend of mine, which at the time I didn't realise wasn't the way these things are always done. My last two novels, *Nineveh* and *Green Lion*, have each had a number of different editions now, in different countries with different markets, and I always find the variations fascinating. I really love the ominous, Ballardian cover of the American *Nineveh* (Unnamed Press), although it doesn't evoke the local landscape; and I appreciate the elegant style of my covers for my French-language editions (Editions Zoe). I'm not too protective of the covers—I'm very happy for a clever designer to take it out of my hands and come back with something astonishing that I never could have imagined for myself. My latest book of short stories, *Animalia Paradoxa*, which has just recently been published in Norwich by Boiler House Press, has a striking abstract cover—I never would have associated my work with that kind of minimalist elegance, but it works beautifully. As mentioned, I am hoping that *Nineveh*, *Green Lion*, and *Stone Plant* will be viewed as an informal trilogy, and I'm pleased that both my UK publisher and my local publisher have now coordinated the covers so that the first two books, and I'm hoping the third, all have matching covers by the same brilliant local designer (for design company publicide).

GF: Any idea of where your next novel might take you?

HRI: I haven't got an inkling of the next one yet. But once *Stone Plant* is off my hands, I am keen to start writing more short stories. I would like to get together a new collection of completely new stories. I have a feeling they will be a little weirder and more removed from day-to-day reality than what I've written to date; maybe speculative fiction, or adjacent to it. This seems to be the direction my stories are going in.

GF: How does your recent experience of doctoral study in the UK compare with your earlier international residencies? I'm thinking of the relationship between having space for uninterrupted writing and the stimulus of working with other writers?

HRI: I've been very fortunate in the number of residencies I've been able to attend around the world. The greatest gift is to have time to write away from workaday cares and duties. The PhD was a very different experience, however, because it offered quite the opposite to that kind of removal. At the University of East Anglia (UEA), I felt thrust into the heart of a fervently active literary world. I was able to have fruitful discussions on my novel-in-progress with my very supportive supervisor, the writer Jean McNeil, and I engaged with many other inspiring authors, at the university and beyond. There's a tradition of creative thought and writing on ecology and the urban landscape in the UK, which I was glad to tap into. I also made publishing connections. I believe my presence in the UK was crucial to my getting published there, as was the excellent reputation of the UEA creative writing programme. Those connections are maintained long after the degree, and indeed led directly to the production of *Animalia Paradoxa*—Boiler House Press is based at UEA.

GF: The move from the first two novels (which have no epigraphs) to the last two (where Nineveh *has several epigraphs prefacing the novel and* Green Lion *has epigraphs prefacing each of its eight sections): do these epigraphs position the reader differently from before?*

HRI: In *Nineveh* the epigraph was meant to establish a deep historical context for the novel by evoking some of the very oldest cities, Nineveh and Ur. I was hoping to suggest that the rise and fall of the grand housing estate in the novel is a minor eddy in the ancient, endlessly repeating cycle of human construction and destruction. The epigraph lends a universal dimension to a story that otherwise can feel quite narrowly focused on the idiosyncrasies of the local.

In *Green Lion*, the epigraphs also gesture towards times past. Many of them refer to ancient, mystical animal figures from other eras, gods, and ghosts. In part, this was meant to contrast the vulnerable bodies of real animals threatened by human acts, with the idealised, untouchable, powerful totems that humans choose to preserve and revere in their place.

In both books, the epigraphs act as a quiet counterpart to the more immediate narrative, pulling the reader out of the story briefly for a moment of oblique contemplation.

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GF: Your first novel, Shark's Egg, *plays out in relation to the Cape's seas, and is strikingly visual. Because in a number of epiphanies, like that of the Aquarium, we see Anna seeing (where 'seeing' is emotional and cognitive as well as physical), we are confident that, faced with the challenge of the last chapter, "Sink or Swim", Anna will swim. You have described this novel as your most autobiographical.*

HRI: As is the case with many debut novels, *Shark's Egg* is probably the book that has the most autobiographical elements of all my novels. While Anna's story is not exactly mine, the settings in which she finds herself are ones that I was very familiar with in my teens and twenties. I did spend a lot of time on the mountain, and I have always been drawn to certain institutional spaces like aquariums, galleries, museums—spaces that allow one to engage with an expansive world while remaining a solitary observer. This chimes with my sense of myself as a novelist. These places are also very nostalgic for me and once again summon up my mother—she was the artist at Cape Town's natural history museum when she was younger.

GF: Williams makes the point that after Shark's Egg *the sensorium you employ is as much acoustic as visual. Can you comment on this change of direction in your subsequent novels?*

HRI: I do think I am more a sensual than a cerebral writer; my primary impulse is often a visual image. But I think that each of my novels is attuned to a different sensory mode—especially since I've been writing about animals. In *Nineveh*, for example, there is a lot of emphasis on sound—the scuttling of insects, frogs peeping in the swamp. In *Green Lion*, on the other hand, there's much more attention paid to smell, befitting a book focused on a large mammalian predator. In *Stone Plant*, taste comes into play. Focussing on these secondary senses, apart from being enjoyably sensual, is a way to distance myself a little from the human prejudice towards the visual; an attempt to access the non-human experience (of course an impossible task).

GF: Williams (436) also remarks on your background in archaeology and paleoanthropology, seeing these as informing your second novel, The Rock Alphabet. *To me, this is your most mysterious and enigmatic text, since one is left with many questions that cannot be answered. Does your archaeological/anthropological background point you towards the historical and cultural mysteries of Bushman paintings in the Cederberg?*

HRI: I studied archaeology as an undergrad and some of my happiest memories of being a student involved the annual field trips to map rock paintings in the Cederberg. Sometimes the paint colours are very subtle and faded, but once you get your eye in you can't stop spotting them on the rocks, and it's like a whole dimension of hidden meaning in the landscape is revealed. In some parts of those mountains, the paintings are so plentiful they overlay the landscape like a secret text in a vanished language. Very compelling for a writer.

GF: Your phrase "like a secret text in a vanished language" recalls Stephen Watson's observation that the Bushmen and women of the Cederberg were "people so far removed from us that in their conception of life there was no such thing as the inorganic or otherwise dead matter" (302). Perhaps this profound ontological difference between the San worldview, signalled in their paintings, and our own, accounts for the mystery that hangs over your text in The Rock Alphabet.

HRI: I do think that the book is about history's essential unknowability: the inscrutability of the past and of the dead, and the need to retain a necessary humility about what we can never know. I am not so bold as to make any definitive statements about the worldview of the rock artists.

GF: Your third novel, Nineveh, *has received widely differing critical responses. My question to you is simply whether in this novel you see urban expansion and ecological survival as compatible?*

HRI: I think part of what I wanted to convey in *Nineveh* is that cities and 'nature' are inextricably mixed up and tangled in each other: there is no separating them into pure and distinct systems, and it's not necessarily a question of one surviving at the expense of others. Urban ecologies will persist, although they may not take the forms that we might imagine or desire, and the balance between their elements—rats and weeds, bricks and mortar—is constantly in flux.

GF: Loren Kruger's reading of Nineveh *echoes what you have just said in that she foregrounds this urban/natural entanglement, seeing the novel as about "the interpenetration of the developed and the wild, 'culture' and 'nature', the urban street and the apparently bare earth" (17). Shane Graham however reads* Nineveh *more pessimistically: as "about invasion and infiltration, entropy and dis-*

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integration" (76). But in your interview with Riach you remark: "Nineveh *is a hopeful book. It's about acknowledging and even celebrating all varieties of habitation of our shared urban space, human and non-human, even if it comes to forms that are unpredictable, uncontrolled, and unwelcome" (9). Is the key to* Nineveh's *'hopefulness', then, the human and non-human capacity for adaptation?*

HRI: Entropy and entanglement are ever-present conditions of the universe, and I don't view them as negative forces. I think one way to countenance the future (and survive to see it) in these times of eco-catastrophe is to find ways to engage with our environment as it is and as it could be, rather than with a conception of pristine nature as it maybe never was.

GF: Fiona Moolla remarks that "African ecocriticism cannot be established upon conceptions of nature that present themselves as universal. African ecocriticisms furthermore reveal that relationships with land are always social and political" (20). Can you say something about how Nineveh's *relationship with land is both social and political?*

HRI: There is no way to write about land ownership in South Africa, in Cape Town, without our history of violent dispossession being the clear subtext; and any book dealing with contested land is by definition political. Throughout *Nineveh*, there are references to the layers of occupation and use and re-use of the land on which the book plays out. The premise of the book (and in fact of *Green Lion*) is a rejection of the enforced regulation of urban space and enforced segregation of its inhabitants—the sorry history of South Africa from colonial conquest through apartheid and into the present.

GF: Moving now to your fourth novel, Green Lion, *you remark, in the "Concrete Fragments" interview with Graham Riach, that* Green Lion *is a bleaker book than* Nineveh: *"With its theme of animal extinctions, it shows the enforced emptying out of a landscape by the forces of environmental destruction; this is a sterile, unromantic emptiness, that leaves the characters more isolated than before" (9). But could I go back to what Riach says in his article on the politics of space? There he links your narrative strategies to "a literary negotiation of the unresolved issue of post-apartheid spatial distribution". He states that your use of "imperfect spatial cadences" leads to "ambiguity and open-endedness" as "formal solutions buckle under the weight of societal complexit[ies] they try to resolve" (2). Might these "imperfect spatial cadences" permit the reader of* Green Lion *to harbour some hope that, despite environmental devastation, beyond the fence erected on Table Mountain to imprison the people of Cape Town, some animals may still survive?*

HRI: *Green Lion* itself does not allow for much of that kind of ambiguity. What it leaves us with is the sense that much of our natural world will linger on only as phantoms or fetishes in the human psyche. The "formal solutions" that are critiqued in the book, such as the conservationist impulse to fence off the land, do fail. But I would like to think this book will be read in conjunction with *Nineveh* and *Stone Plant*, both of which offer a counterpoint: a vision of messier, unregulatable systems that allow for the resurgence of resilient living systems.

GF: You've said that the writing of Green Lion *helped you mourn the death of your mother. Do you want to say more about this?*

HRI: While on one level the book is about the loss of species, on another it deals with our human fear of death, and the impossibility of bringing what we love back from oblivion. It was only after I had finished writing it that I understood that—of course—it was about my own bereavement, written as it was in the aftermath of my mother's death. Whether it helped, I can't say.

GF: You comment that in your latest, still unpublished book, Stone Plant, *you are "turning back towards compression and stylisation" because "deep down, the transformative hallucinatory quality of language is what [you] value most" (Riach, "Concrete Fragments" 3). Can you elaborate?*

HRI: I value a destabilising sense of estrangement in writing; among other things, it is one way to approach writing about the non-human. It's one reason why science fiction has always had value for me. The short stories I've been writing recently, and the new novel, edge towards the speculative, without delving into outright fantasy. I've often said that the space I'm interested in exploring, in classic fantasy terms, is not exactly Narnia, and perhaps not even The Wood Between the Worlds, but perhaps the *wardrobe*: that space of possibility, where we have the first inkling that a break in perceived reality is imminent. Those are the moments that offer the most magical tension and potential for revelation and escape—for me as a reader, and also as a writer.

GF: Rob Nixon foregrounds the opposition between the politics of ownership of place and the experience of displacement in postcolonial writing. Huggan and Tiffin similarly draw attention to "the tension between ownership and belonging in a variety of colonial and postcolonial contexts: contexts marked, for the most part, by a direct or indirect engagement with often devastating experiences of dispossession and loss" (85). Can you comment on the relevance of this opposition or tension to your fiction?

HRI: Of course, dispossession is the backdrop to every South African story, particularly one that deals with contested land. My protagonists (e.g. Katya in *Nineveh*; Con in *Green Lion*) often feel positively dislocated from the spaces that they move through—they are certainly not the inheritors of this landscape. I try to resist reductionist ideas of 'belonging', though; that land is more naturally inhabited by some than by others. Every character's relationship with the land is contingent, ephemeral, and subject to change. In *Stone Plant*, for example, the plant has occupied the central location in the story for centuries, but this primeval inhabitant is ultimately revealed to be transient, and able to respond to shifts in the universe by upping roots and propagating to more favourable climes.

GF: Finally, could I attempt to summarise some of what we've been discussing? From the first line of your first novel ("It's a strange day to come walking by the sea"), your preoccupation with the environment is central. This environmentalism is augmented by visual, auditory and sensory devices which dramatize your protagonists' development. But your ecological emphasis is never limited either to the environment or to the psychological growth of your characters. It is always linked to the political context of your writing, as your remarks on land ownership in South Africa in this interview attest. (Perhaps this demonstrates the multi-layered ideological implications of an ecological vision). The increasing narratological complexity in the trajectory of your novels is accompanied by increasing political complexity: the thematics of both Nineveh *and* Green Lion *are multiply refracted through their use of epigraphs. What are the problems and challenges that this narrative process demands in orchestrating your readers' responses?*

HRI: I'm pleased that increasing complexity is evident in the books. I do try to keep grappling with new problems, technically and thematically, and each time it feels like my range broadens. *Stone Plant* involves choreographing the timelines of multiple beings, not all human (or even animate), and some of them very old: an attempt to decentre the human view, perhaps, to expand the politics. It's challenging, in part because a large canvas is not the easiest mode for me—my default focus is on the compelling detail or moment, which more easily translates into the short story form. I've wrestled with this manuscript longer than any other, and I'm hoping that, ultimately, the plant and I both win.

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Huldeblyk

Harry Kalmer (1956–2019)

Willie Burger

Foto: Corina van der Spoel

Vroeg vanjaar, toe hy reeds baie siek was, het Harry Kalmer by UNISA se Breyten Breytenbachseminaar gepraat. Die titel van sy voordrag was: "How to write in Afrikaans en still respect yourself in the morning". (Dit is terloops 'n kenmerkende Harry Klamer klopreël. Die gesoute kopieskrywer met jare se ervaring in die reklamebedryf het presies geweet hoe om lesers se aandag met 'n titel te trek. Dink maar aan titels uit sy oeuvre soos: *Die waarheid en ander stories*; *En die lekkerste deel van dood wees*; *The secret of my excess*; *Die man met die dertien kinders*.) 'n Effense aanpassing van daardie titel is paslik vir 'n huldeblyk aan die veelsydige en produktiewe Kalmer: 'How to study Afrikaans literature and still respect yourself in the morning'.

So bietjie meer as twee jaar gelede het Kalmer met die derdejaarstudente aan die Universiteit van Pretoria kom praat. Sy pryswennerroman, *'n Duisend stories oor Johannesburg*, was vir die derdejaarsklas voorgeskryf en gulhartig soos hy was, het hy die uitnoding om met die studente te praat dadelik aanvaar. Hy het egter 'n voorwaarde gehad: hy was bereid om vrae oor sy roman te beantwoord en met my in gesprek te tree daaroor voor die studente, maar hy het eers 10 minute versoek om met die studente te praat oor die moontlikheid van 'n loopbaan in kopieskryf. Hy het passievol gepraat oor die reklamewese en die studente aangemoedig om 'n loopbaan in juis Afrikaanse advertensies te volg. Dit was vir die studente verstommend om te hoor dat iemand hulle aanmoedig om 'n loopbaan in Afrikaans te probeer hê—veral in die omstandighede waarin hulle dikwels onder die indruk gebring word dat daar nie juis loopbaangeleenthede in Afrikaans bestaan nie.

Toe ons op pad na die klas oor die kampus stap, wou Harry by my weet of ons Breyten Breytenbach se poësie vir ons studente voorskryf. Dit was vir my 'n vreemde vraag. Dit is immers ondenkbaar dat enige kursus in Afrikaanse letterkunde nie die werk van Breytenbach kan insluit nie! Harry het net so onderlangse laggie gegee en opgemerk dat daar in die drie jaar wat hy Afrikaans op dieselfde kampus bestudeer het, geen Breytenbach-gedigte met hulle behandel is nie. Dit was die soort poësie en Breytenbach die soort Afrikaner wat destyds nie as die ware Afrikaners en die 'regte' Afrikaanse letterkunde beskou is nie, of soos Harry dit self later in 'n lesing gestel het: "toe Pretoria die land van braaivleis rugby sonneskyn en Prys die Heer [was], 'n plek waar dit in die 1970's was asof Woodstock nooit gebeur het nie, Neil Armstrong nie op die maan was nie en H. F. Verwoerd nog gelewe het". Dit was die tyd toe Breyten Breytenbach tronk toe gestuur is—maar sy werk nie aan U P aan die studente voorgehou is nie.

Die manier waarop Afrikaans toé beskou en krampagtig beskerm is, het ongelukkig gelei tot 'n situasie waarin talle Afrikaanssprekendes skaam geword het om Afrikaans te wees, laat staan nog om in Afrikaans te skryf, of te werk. Maar Kalmer het deurentyd in Afrikaans bly skryf, en het die studente aangemoedig om in Afrikaans reklame te skryf, omdat hy 'n manier gevind het om ondanks al die vooroordele, al die stiksienigheid en uitsluiting in die naam van Afrikaans, in die taal te werk en sy selfrespek te behou.

Harry het in die 1970's en 1980's besef dat daar Afrikaanse skrywers is, soos Breytenbach, wat 'n ruimte in Afrikaans geskep het vir diegene wat nêrens tuis gevoel het nie—wat 'n onrus oor hul isolasie en assosiasie met rassisme, konserwatisme, nasionalisme en christenskap ervaar het. Hierdie skrywers het hom laat voel dat hy sy selfrespek kan behou al skryf hy in hierdie taal, maar nog belangriker, het hy een van die skrywers geword wat die ruimte vir 'n ander beskouing van Afrikaans en 'n Afrikaanse denkwêreld help oopskryf het. Harry was een van die skrywers wat dit vir 'n jonger geslag opwindend gemaak het om Afrikaanse literatuur as 'n tuiste te kon ervaar. Toe ek Kalmer se *Die waarheid en ander stories* tydens my diensplig jare gelees het, kon ek weet daar is 'n plek

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in Afrikaans om krities te wees, om buite die laer te staan, om trots te wees op wat vermag kan word in die taal en deur denke in die taal. En dit is iets wat Harry se boeke voortdurend by uitstek gedoen het.

Al het Hennie van Coller dit nie goedgedink om 'n profiel oor Kalmer in die driedelige *Perspektief en profiel* se kanonisering in te sluit nie, is Kalmer een van die groepie skrywers in Afrikaans wat 'n leefwêreld in Afrikaans buite die Afrikaanse wêreld moontlik maak. (Dit is miskien juis hierom dat hy uiteindelik die erkenning vir *'n Duisend stories oor Johannesburg* se Engelse weergawe gekry het in die vorm van die Sunday Times se Barry Ronge-prys vir fiksie, terwyl die Afrikaanse weergawe nie Afrikaanse pryse verower het nie?) Kalmer het ook 'n Afrikaanse ruimte geskep waarvoor 'n mens nie selfbewus wegskram nie, juis deur nie betrokke te raak by bakleiery oor en om Afrikaans nie—wanneer Spek Harmse motiveer waarom hy Afrikaanse advertensies skryf, is dit geen van die holruggeryde argumente nie, is daar geen angsvalligheid nie, bloot 'n gevoelige oor op die grond en vir die klank van raak woorde.

Die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur van die paar dekades vóór 1994 is gekenmerk deur anti-apartheidsentimente: 'betrokke literatuur'. Kalmer het in hierdie stadium gedebuteer, in 'n tyd van noodtoestande, en toe dit—soos nou—moeilik was om te onderskei wat regtig in die land aan die gang is en wat propaganda is. Toe verskyn *Die waarheid en ander stories* (by Taurus, juis omdat Kalmer nie by Nasionale Pers wou uitgee nie weens die manier waarop beriggegee is oor die Dakar-beraad). Die verhale sluit aan by die grensverhale van die tyd—die geweld, diensplig, struggle, maar veral ook blootlegging van die leuens wat die geweld regverdig. Die interessante is egter hoedat Kalmer, anders as die meeste ander skrywers van 'grensliteratuur' (byvoorbeeld Strachan, Van Heerden, Kellerman, Kruger) met sy ironiese sin vir humor, ook selfrefleksief met die 'genre' van die grensverhaal omgegaan het—soos die veelseggende titel van die een verhaal aandui: "Die nag steek op op soos 'n seer tand; 'n grensverhaal in die jongste styl". Hierdie titel (en verskeie aanhalings en verwysings in die verhaal self) is 'n aanduiding van hoedat Kalmer, reeds in 1989—midde in die opbloei van grensliteratuur ook sy bydrae gelewer het tot grensliteratuur—maar anders as by die ander grensliteratuurskrywers was daar by hom nie bloot die rapportering van die 'waarheid' van die situasie nie, maar ook 'n selfbewuste wete van waarmee hy besig is en 'n ironiese blik daarop.

Hierdie selfbewuste in voeling wees met die literêre stromings van die tyd, sowel as met die sosiopolitieke situasie waarin hy skryf, kenmerk Kalmer se oeuvre. Die selfbewuste deelname aan die literêre stromings stel hom egter ook in staat om buite daardie strominge en tendense en temas te staan. Juis hierdie buitestaan stel hom in staat om op subtiele wyse oor die tendense en stromings te reflekteer. Dit doen hy tot in sy laaste roman. In *'n Land sonder voëls* sluit hy aan by die tendens om distopiese verhale te skryf—maar dan doen hy dit vol selfspot en ironie—veral met die verwysing na die distopiese literatuur van Orwell en Huxley.

Hierbo is reeds gewys op Kalmer se humorsin, altyd onderbeklemtoon, sodat die haastige leser sommige van die snaaksste opmerkings mislees. In die een grensverhaal dink 'n karakter, na aanleding van 'n landmyn, "die dood begin by die voete"—'n verwysing na 'n gedig van Breyten Breytenbach uit *Die ysterkoei moet sweet*. Heelwat later, in *'n Duisend stories oor Johannesburg*, kry dieselfde aanhaling 'n ligter gevoel as die meisie met 'n liefde vir Breytenbach se digkuns dieselfde woorde onder haar voet laat tatoeër, maar sy skryf lelik en die tatoeërkunstenaar kan nie Afrikaans verstaan nie en toe lees dit: "doos begin by die voete".

Geweld is sentraal in byna al die literatuur sedert 1994—Leon de Kock verwys na die "wondkultuur" in 'n "patologiese openbare Suid-Afrikaanse ruimte" waarin misdaadfiksie 'n sentrale plek inneem. Kalmer is in voeling hiermee. Hy sluit ook aan by die misdaadgenre wat sedert die 1990's in ons land 'n bloeitydperk beleef. Misdaadfiksie as die uitdrukking van misnoeë met postapartheid Suid-Afrika, die teleurstelling met die gewaande reënboognasie. Misdaadfiksie bied by uitstek die geleentheid om alles wat verkeerd loop in die land van geweld en korrupsie bloot te lê, bied geleentheid om na die wonde te staar. Speurder Barries Barnard moet probeer sin maak van die chaos—tevergeefs in *X-Ray*, en later in *Kniediep*.

Kalmer is by uitstek die skrywer van die stad—in teenstelling met die plaasromantradisie skep hy 'n wêreld waarin nie eens meer nagedink word oor plaasstof nie. Kalmer bied die soort prosa waarmee gewone, stedelike, middelklas-Afrikaanssprekendes kan identifiseer. Die eksplisiete 'stadsroman', *'n Duisend stories oor Johannesburg*, ondersoek selfbewus die tema van die stad. Johannesburg kom hier op 'n ander manier aan die bod: as megastad is dit die plek wat al die vlugtelinge opvang—nie soos Le Corbusier 'n stad sentraal wou beplan nie, maar in duisende versplinterde gebeurtenisse—sonder 'n enkele samebindende faktor—terwyl alles nogtans deur 'n netwerk verbind is. Kalmer het 'n ander blik op die stad oopgemaak, maar ook 'n ander blik op die romankuns in 'n tyd van 'netwerkdenke'.

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Ondanks sy aansluiting by temas en tendense van die stad, grens, postmodernisme, geweld en wonde, is sy werk in die eerste plek menslik. Hy weet ons is "kniediep" in die moeiliheid, dat ons so eensaam is dat ons "briewe aan 'n rooi dak" skryf, dat behoort en tuisvoel altyd bietjie buite bereik is. Die onbereikbare afstand tussen mense is 'n onvermydelike kondisie van ons bestaan. En selfs as dit lyk asof daar versoening is, momente van nabyheid, word dit dikwels in die kiem gesmoor—soos weer in *'n Land sonder voëls*. Gevolglik is die momente wanneer een mens wel 'n ander op deernisvolle wyse ervaar, so oorrompelend in sy werk. In hierdie momente munt Kalmer uit—dit is waarom *En die lekkerste deel van doodwees* so treffend is. Maar soms kon hy dit met een sin regkry. Hy had die vermoë om die leser aweregs met 'n enkel sin te tref, soos die beskrywing van die Boer wat van die krysgevangenekamp terugkeer en met sy vrou, wat die verskrikking van 'n konsentrasiekamp oorleef het, herenig word: "Wanneer Abraham uiteindelik van Ceylon af kom, het hulle so baie vir mekaar te sê dat hulle nooit daaroor praat nie".

Kalmer was nie slegs 'n goeie storieverteller nie, hy het ook die vermoë gehad om onvergeetlike karakters (met gepaste name) te skep. Meneer de Beer, X-Ray Visagie, Barries Barnard, Vlieger, Spek Human, Bosman Hiemstra, Magdalena Otto. Die enkele kenmerk wat al die uiteenlopende karakters deel, is dat hulle nooit inpas nie en nooit stereotipes raak nie. Sy fiksiekarakters is soos die historiese karakters waaroor hy skryf (Bram Fisher; hy was besig met Marius Schoon) nie stereotipes nie. Hulle is dikwels oënskynlik gewoon, vaal, soos iemand aan ons almal bekend is.

Hy maak dit moontlik vir iemand soos ek, wat letterkunde moet doseer, om te wys dat Afrikaans 'n bepaalde, unieke manier van kyk na menswees en die wêreld moontlik maak. (En sodoende maak hy dit moontlik om Afrikaanse letterkunde te bestudeer met behoud van jou selfrespek.)

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