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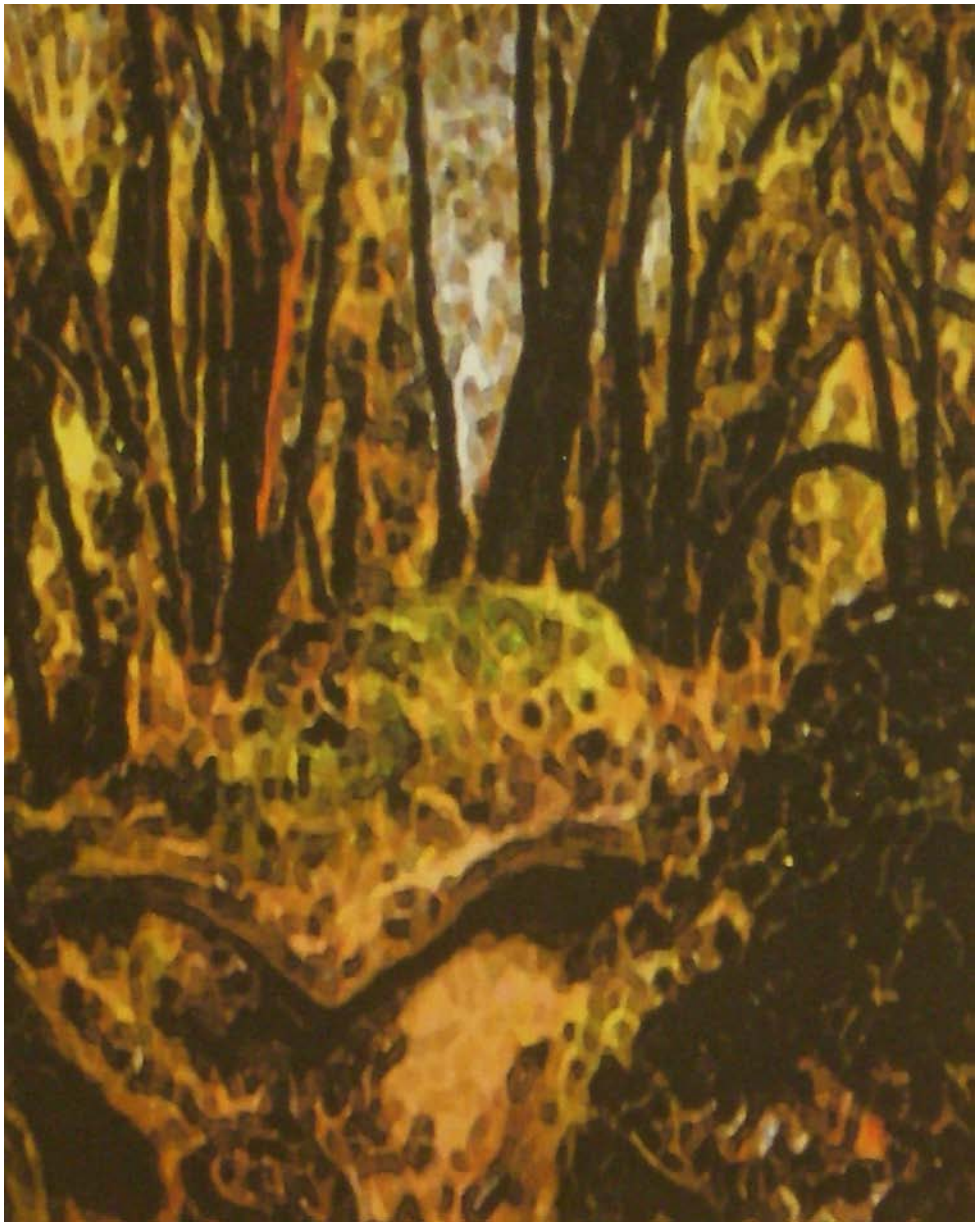

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CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS
The Editor: Alternation, Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal, Priv. Bag X10, Dalbridge, 4041, DURBAN, South Africa; Tel: +27-(0)31-260-7303;
Fax: +27-(0)31-260-7286; e-mail: smitj@ukzn.ac.za;

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Nature and Power: Forests

Guest Editors
Catherine Addison and Urmilla Bob

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Introduction
Nature and Power: Forests

Catherine Addison

This issue of *Alter*nation is the first of a pair guest-edited by Urmilla Bob and me and devoted to the general topic of 'Nature and Power'. Mainly because all of the essays represented in this issue are based on papers delivered at a 'Literature and Ecology' colloquium in Mtunzini in October, 2007, the subtheme of this issue is 'Forests', reflecting the topic of the colloquium. The second issue, which will also include some papers from the 'Forests' colloquium, will take on the broader subtheme of 'Nature and People', since its essays will be drawn from a wider selection of academic disciplines, all broadly definable under the heading 'environmental studies'.

The relationship between 'nature' and 'power' is an important preoccupation of ecocriticism, as of other branches of environmental studies. The questions that this relationship generate are of course many and in most of them, the 'power' that is interrogated is not seen as *possessed by* nature so much as *wielded over* it in a variety of ways. Ecocriticism came into being, in fact, in response to a late-twentieth-century recognition of an 'environmental crisis' taking the form of a powerful threat to the health and even the existence of nature, due mainly to global industrialization. Awareness of this 'environmental crisis', according to Lawrence Buell in his 2005 book on ecocriticism, has led thinkers of all disciplines to ponder the question of 'whether planetary life will remain viable for most of the earth's inhabitants without major changes to the way we live' (2005:vi). Although this question may seem to have greatest relevance to scientists, economists, urban planners and other scholars of the material world, academics in many different fields have responded to it strongly in their recent theory and

practice. Buell's (2005:vi) book is aimed with an almost missionary fervour at:

> all who have the time and will to think strenuously about the implications of the endangered state and uncertain fate of life on earth for literary and cultural studies.

The fact that many practitioners of 'literary and cultural studies' have responded to his and others' prompting and now call themselves 'environmental critics' or 'ecocritics' is a sign of the widespread recognition of the crisis and of its urgency.

Ecocriticism in its early years tended to focus on authors who specifically revered nature and the natural world, such as William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau (Buell 2005:21f). Even in 2001, Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R Wallace in *Beyond Nature Writing* reported that the field was still 'dominated by critical analyses of nature writing and literature of wilderness' (2001:1f). However, the more recent trend, including the tendency of Armbruster and Wallace's book, has been to look at the ways in which the environment is represented in all texts, even those that attempt to background it and those in which it is totally urbanized or degraded. Cheryll Glotfelty's definition, though formulated as early as 1996, is still apt since it characterizes ecocriticism very broadly, without mention of nature, as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (1996:xviii). The present issue of *Alter*nation is much more limited in its scope than Glotfelty's definition allows, being specifically aimed not only at nature but at that subsection of nature designated as 'forests'.

Despite the fact that our continent may be the one most immediately endangered by environmental change, ecocriticism does not appear to have acquired many adherents in South Africa. South African ecocritics so far possess no formal academic association; nor can they yet publish in a dedicated local journal. However, the fact that, since 2004, an annual 'Literature and Ecology' colloquium has taken place is a sign of their continued existence and, in some cases, loyal commitment to the cause. The first colloquium was the brainchild of Dan Wylie of the Rhodes University English Department. Attracted to the field by his own academic interests, he

had recently noticed the high-profile status of ecocriticism in North America and Europe and the almost complete absence of practitioners in South Africa—with the notable exception of Julia Martin at the University of the Western Cape. This first colloquium, in 2004, was hosted in Grahamstown, as were the second and third. Most of the 2005 proceedings were published in a special issue of *Current Writing* (18,1 [2006]) entitled *Animal Geographies, Animal Presences*; many of the 2006 papers have recently appeared as a book entitled *Toxic Belonging? Ecology and Identity in Southern Africa* (2008), edited by Dan Wylie and published by the Cambridge Scholars press. The 2007 colloquium, some of whose papers are printed here, took place at the University of Zululand, where the 2008 one will be held as well; the University of the Western Cape has offered to host a colloquium in 2009. Although a small group of devoted people reappear at these colloquia year by year, others who would probably not cite ecocriticism as their principle field attend sporadically, attracted by specific themes. Despite successes in publishing and a continuing interest, both South African and international, in the very creative, stimulating and collegial atmosphere of the colloquia, the critical mass for a more official status and a free-standing journal has not yet been achieved.

So much for the power of ecocriticism in South African academic circles. To turn to the power of nature as represented by the essays in this issue: a reader will find its degree varying quite radically according to the texts and practices under discussion.

The first essay, Lindy Stiebel's '"The Thirst for the Wilderness was upon Me": Africa-as-Wilderness in Rider Haggard's African Romances', deals with colonial texts and, shows how, as one might expect, in Rider Haggard's fiction African nature is commodified for the consumption of the reader and potential adventurer/colonist back home in Britain. However, the power relations between Haggard (and his male English protagonists) and wild African nature are not as simple as this stereotype would suggest. Haggard perceives a kind of sublimity in a wilderness he conceives ambivalently, both as an unspoiled paradise and a fearful heart of darkness. Although he acknowledges the potential for hunting and other exploitative activities, he also seems to have a deep appreciation for unexploited African nature, with all its dangers and beauties. Stiebel notes Haggard's (for a man) unusual penchant for gardening and his delight in orderly British-style

gardens walled off from the African wilderness, and yet paradoxically taking much of their value from the presence of this wilder nature surrounding them.

The next essay, 'Francois Levaillant and the Mapping of Southern Africa', by Ian Glenn, emphasizes the ability of maps to assert power over wilderness. The map that is of central interest in this essay was compiled by and for the eighteenth-century French explorer and ornithologist, Francois Levaillant, who visited southern Africa in the 1780s. A gift to King Louis XVI that was calculated to pique this monarch's interests in both hunting and extending France's sphere of influence in Africa, the map includes inserts depicting not only indigenous animals and people, but also episodes from Levaillant's travels in the area, accounts of which were bestsellers at the time. Glenn argues that the map possesses imaginative powers over and above its colonizing potential, for it is a multi-media artefact, including narrative, representation of space and a kind of bio-geography of the whole subcontinent.

Gillian Gane's 'The Forest and the Road: Transformations of Space in Novels by Achebe and Okri' shows that imperial and colonial powers were not the only ones to see African wilderness—forests, in particular—as exploitable resources. In Chinua Achebe's fiction, pre-colonial Igbo men are admired for cutting down and transforming into fertile farms the virgin forest, while non-transformed wild nature is defined as 'evil forest' and shunned as wild women are shunned. Gane provides a brief gender analysis of these attitudes and also demonstrates that Ben Okri's fiction shows a greater awareness than Achebe's of the human damage done to nature. In Okri's novel, *The Famished Road*, the relationship between the road and the forest that it cuts through and displaces is a complex one.

Gane's essay is followed by Syned Mthatiwa's, which also deals with contemporary African writers who display marked concern about the environment and about the destructive power that human development can wield over it. Entitled 'The Depiction of Forests/Trees and Malawi's Rural Landscape in the Poetry of Lupenga Mphande and Zondiwe Mbano', Mthatiwa's essay discusses the negative aesthetic and sociological effects of deforestation and tobacco cultivation on the land and people of (particularly northern) Malawi, and it praises the two eponymous poets for their awareness and exposure of these effects. Mthatiwa points out that many

Malawians have traditionally suffered from a kind of 'forest phobia' which causes them to clear forests to remove their perceived dangers. However, Zondiwe Mbano and, even more, Lupenga Mphande value trees and forests not only for their harbouring of meat animals and honeybees and for their provision of shade in a hot country, but also for their intrinsic beauty. Mthatiwa argues that this aesthetic appreciation of nature for its own sake—which he himself shares—is not a Western import but simply a less conspicuous thread than the homocentric and instrumentalist attitudes that often dominate African world views.

The fifth essay is Dan Wylie's '"Long and Wandering Forest": Sidney Clouts, Geophilosophy and Trees'. Here, Wylie shows how Clouts's complex poetry reflects a relationship with natural entities such as trees that does not follow the conventional, unequal power relationship of subject and object. Instead of this simple dichotomy Clouts substitutes a complex polarity of perceiver and perceived, in which the immanence of being reverberates into a moment of transcendence. Since South African ecocriticism is, in Wylie's phrase, 'seriously under-theorised', his essay represents an effort to fill the gap. He brings to bear on his reading of Clouts the theory of geophilosophers such as Gilles Deleuze—but also attempts to find a rapprochement between geophilosophy and the phenomenology that appears in many ways more appropriate to Wylie's own experience of the poet.

Like Wylie, Pat Louw is concerned with the power exerted by human perception on nature—which includes, for Louw, people living close to nature. Her essay, 'Identity, Place and "The Gaze" in *The Woodlanders* by Thomas Hardy and *dream forest*' by Daleen Matthee', analyses and compares two novels in which some characters seem to be truly at home in the forest or woodland while others, who do not really belong there, observe the forest and its denizens with an outsider's gaze, objectifying and commodifying both. What Louw calls 'the gaze' is the action of a subjugating eye, creating dualisms (such as 'subject/object', 'self/nature') and asserting outsider superiority. In *dream forest*, tourists subject human and animal inhabitants of the Knysna forest to this same alienating scrutiny, as if they were both spectacles provided for the gazers' consumption. In the two novels, the outsiders are of course generally wealthier and more influential than the forest- or woodland dwellers. Nevertheless, as Louw

points out, some of these forest inhabitants possess an enviable awareness of their surroundings that does not assert unequal power relations between the perceiver and the perceived.

My essay, 'Terror, Error or Refuge: Forests in Western Literature', moves outside Africa into the literary history of two continents which, in the early stages of their human development, were both heavily forested. Perhaps on this account, forests have always been powerful symbols in the literature of Europe and North America. Though these forests are often depicted as the opposite of civilization, the dark terror which humans had to destroy by exerting their own liberating and enlightening power—cutting and clearing to build castles and cities—this is not their only portrayal, even in early texts. Forests may be places of testing and trial, or they may figure as refuges, or even as ideal human settlements. In the works of authors from Dante to Frost, forests are seen as wielding power over the human characters who resort to them—power which is, at least ultimately, recognizable as benevolent.

Patsy Maritz, in 'The Enchanted Forest as a Place of Knowing', investigates the forest in one particular genre of Western literature: the fairy tale. Focussing on a Russian tale as well as two from Hans Andersen, Maritz shows how the forest, with its resident witch, functions as a place of trial for the stories' female protagonists. To brave the deep forest and survive an encounter with the witch is to pass successfully into womanhood, according to Maritz, who sees the forest as a specifically female motif.

There are no witches mentioned in Sr. N. Gloria Irenata Biyela's essay, 'Securing Women and Children at King Shaka's Well-Resourced and Formidable Refuge, Nkandla Forest', though some ghosts—or at least a 'talking mist'—do appear. This essay focuses on a specific, non-fictional forest in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Posing for herself the question of why Shaka chose this forest as a refuge for women and children during his war with Zwide of the Ndwandwe clan, Biyela finds her answer partly in the traditional meanings and uses of forests in Zulu folklore and history and partly in the resources offered by the Nkandla Forest itself: clean water, abundant fruit and animals, medicinal plants and the power of confusing enemies in its thick mists and concealing and protecting refugees in its steep and secret vastnesses. She goes on to discuss Nkandla Forest today as a national treasure, worthy of careful conservation, and potential provider

of livelihoods for crafters, herbalists and ecotourism practitioners.

Like Biyela's article, Anne Hutchings's 'Ritual Cleansing, Incense and the Tree of Life—Observations on Some Indigenous Plant Usage in Traditional Zulu and Xhosa Purification and Burial Rites' offers detailed information about the traditional uses of a number of individual plants. She too advocates a respectful, even reverent, attitude towards nature—a nature that is not essentially separate from humankind, or from the dead and departed. In indigenous Zulu and Xhosa ceremonies of purification, Hutchings finds the reflection of such a holistic world-view.

The next article, 'Environmentally Aware Art, Poetry, Music, and Spirituality: *Lifelines*', is an attempt to demonstrate that a similarly reverent attitude to nature may be cultivated in and through certain art forms and ways of being. The paper takes the form of an interview in which David Levey interrogates Chris Mann about the production of *Lifelines*, a text that is holistic in the sense that it includes poems by Mann, illustrations by Julia Skeen and scientific commentaries by Adrian Craig. Recently published as a book, this work has multimedia dimensions, since it has also been represented by an installation at the 2007 Grahamstown Festival, a show including slides and live music, and a CD. The general theme of the work is animals, with individual poems focussing on specific animals. Levey's questions prompt Mann to outline a holistic perspective that makes possible a return, as it were, to humankind's 'chromosome cousins'—the other animals with whom we share the planet—but a return informed and humbled by physics, history, social conscience and a broad understanding of the environmental harm that we humans have done to ourselves, those other species and the planet itself.

Throughout these eleven essays, forests, woods and wilderness are shown as having a great attraction for human beings, despite or even because of perceived dangers. Though forests may protect people and provide them with resources necessary to their spiritual and physical well-being, human attraction has not so far proved powerful enough to protect forests from people and the depredations of development and industrialization. Fully recognizing our attraction to and need for forests, which operate as the lungs of our biosphere, is the first step in the fight to preserve and regenerate them. The next step may involve adopting the holistic vision advocated by several of the papers in this issue. In this vision, forests and humans are not

essentially distinct but operate as centres of energy within a larger living entity whose health depends on the soundness and harmony of all its parts.

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Department of English
University of Zululand

‘The Thirst for the Wilderness Was on Me’: Africa-as-Wilderness in Rider Haggard’s African Romances

Lindy Stiebel

Introduction

One of Rider Haggard’s first biographers, Morton Cohen, wrote that ‘[f]or many Englishmen, Africa became the Africa of *King Solomon’s Mines*’ (1960:94). What Haggard continued to do after this, his first successful African romance, was to work the same canvas, repeating certain features until he had created an instantly recognisable ‘Africa’ for his readers. Writing of Africa intermittently for the whole of his writing career of just over 40 years, Haggard sustained a remarkably constant construction of Africa, perhaps because of, rather than despite, a changing political climate at home. At odds with Britain’s handling of territories in South Africa and the changing policy, post-Shepstone, particularly towards the Zulu people, Haggard drew a largely nostalgic landscape even from his earliest African romance. In his African romances, particularly those written pre-1892 before his only son died, he took a real geophysical space with current and past historical events to which he frequently referred, and moved the whole into a series of ‘imaginative geographies of desire’ (Jacobs 1994:34).

The aim of this paper is to investigate one aspect of Haggard’s constructed topography of Africa: the ‘Africa-as-wilderness’ trope in which Nature is seen as a powerful yet potentially overwhelming force which needs restraining. Once restrained, however, its attraction is diminished. When ‘Africa-as-wilderness’ is added to the other typical tropes Haggard constructed—Africa as vast Eden, as sexualized bodyscape, as dream

underworld and as home to ancient white civilizations (see Stiebel 2001)—a composite topography emerges of a fictional landscape onto which the desires and fears of an age, through one of its most representative writers, are projected. Though this paper is not able to explore the desires and fears referred to at any length, suffice it to say that the imperialist novel provides an illuminating insight into the concerns of the late Victorian era. As Parry notes:

> What criticism can recover, through dismantling the plural discourses and reconstructing the displacements and erasures, is the effaced historical contest and unrehearsed enunciations of the anxieties in the conquering imagination, both necessarily repressed by the exigencies of the ideological representation (1993:224).

Rider Haggard can be seen as the first 'boys' adventure story' writer of Empire to cast 'Africa-as-wilderness' centre stage. In doing so, he spawned a legacy of writers to follow this trend—thus Stephen Gray sees Haggard, quite correctly, as part of a lineage stretching from Captain Marryat and RM Ballantyne, through John Buchan and Stuart Cloete, to Wilbur Smith, but states that it would be a 'tedious business' to discuss them separately as they all 'conform so rigidly to established patterns' (1979:111).

Africa as Wilderness

If one classic element of Haggard's African topography is Africa as vast sunlit Eden, then another is the theme of Africa as wilderness. The wilderness he draws, however, has both positive and negative elements: in the positive sense, wilderness represents nature as opposed to civilisation; in the negative version wilderness becomes the alienated heart of darkness. To take the positive view of wilderness first, Africa as unspoilt nature offers the jaded, civilised Englishman a chance to recharge his spirits, rediscover himself. Haggard, critical of the new commercial middle classes in pursuit of wealth in England, makes his alter ego Quatermain both constitutionally and ideologically a restless wanderer. At the start of *Allan Quatermain*, the hero who is saddened by his boy's recent death (which similar bereavement was soon to happen to his creator in reality) gives expression to his wanderlust:

> The thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate this place no more; I would go and die as I had lived, among the wild game and the savages. Yes, as I walked, I began to long to see the moonlight gleaming silvery white over the wide veldt and mysterious sea of bush, and watch the lines of game travelling down the ridges to the water ... no man who has for forty years lived the life I have, can with impunity go coop himself in this prim English country, with its trim hedgerows and cultivated fields, its stiff formal manners, and its well-dressed crowds. He begins to long—ah, how he longs!—for the keen breath of the desert air; he dreams of the sight of Zulu impis breaking on their foes like surf upon the rocks, and his heart rises up in rebellion against the strict limits of the civilised life (1995:9f).

This is a desire-laden passage written by one who had recently left the less restricted life of a settler in a 'new' land and was now uneasily adapting himself to a far more circumscribed environment in all ways—politically, physically and mentally. The physical and spiritual limitations of his English life are strikingly captured by his daughter. She writes of his circumstances around the time of the publication of *Allan's Wife* (1889) two years later:

> Rider made up his mind that the adventurous part of his life was behind him. That in future his path lay at home, on the small Norfolk estate bordered by the River Waveney and the wide green valley which ran down between the two counties from the town of Bungay to Beccles. In the square Georgian house where his wife had been born, set amidst its shady lawns and beech trees and walled garden. On the little farm consisting of some two hundred and forty acres of heavy land, with its antiquated buildings, neglected pastures and dilapidated fences. Not a very wide or romantic prospect, or very promising material to fill the life of a man of his temperament and ambitions unless he had a political career as well, and that had failed him (Haggard 1951:173).

Small wonder—given the number of circumscribing adjectives, 'walled', 'bordered', 'small' and 'square' in this passage—that Haggard repeatedly sent his heroes out to Africa to the wilderness to escape such limitations.

The great positive virtue then of the wilderness is the potential it offers for adventure. In its most recreational form, adventure for the hero involves hunting wild animals in which the wilderness abounds:

> Haggard's novels set in Africa tend to treat the continent as a vast nobleman's park teeming with game, big and little, waiting to be shot. While the slaughter of wildlife in *She* is mild compared with that in *King Solomon's Mines* and *Allan Quatermain*, the eye of Haggard's imagination is ever alert for wild game (Etherington in Haggard 1991:224)[1].

It must be noted, however, that in later life Haggard turned his back on hunting, saying that 'the destruction of the lower animals for the sake of sport, has become abominable to me' (1926:2.105), and indeed published an anti-blood sports novella *The Mahatma and the Hare* in 1911; but this is

[1] Etherington's reference here to Haggard's African wilderness resembling in its positive aspect 'a vast nobleman's park' is interesting for the way in which it foregrounds Haggard's frequent reference to 'parkland' in Africa. Etherington suggests that 'such vistas were an impetus to colonization and imperialism, inasmuch as they suggested the possibility of country estates open to acquisition by adventurous spirits' (in Haggard 1991:225). Appleton in *The Symbolism of Landscape* suggests another intriguing reason for the appeal of parkland to the viewer/reader:

> If there is a type of environment which we as a species can recognise as our natural habitat, it has to be the savannah... This is now generally agreed by the anthropologists to be the kind of environment in which the first recognizable hominids made their home; ... the power of attractions ... which drew them towards this favorable kind of landscape, has not been eliminated from our genetic make-up but has survived—in Jungian terminology—as an archetype, whose influence is still to be seen in many ways, not least in the wide-spread attraction which people feel towards 'parkland', an idealised contrived arrangement of well-spaced trees within a tidily groomed grassland. (1990:15)

certainly not apparent in the early romances in which hunting is clearly relished.

The wilderness, however, has a negative aspect, and that is the varying difficulty and hazards of the terrain that the hero must overcome before achieving the purpose of his quest. Haggard's inventiveness knew no bounds in the construction of obstacles to be conquered, as they always are, in his African romances. The movement of the hero is always from the known and the British—whether 'Home' or a British settlement on the coast—to the unknown African interior. On one level, the journey is an arduous physical one in which several African helpers may lose their lives, and on another level it is a psychological test of nerves for the Englishman. It is 'a trek from the known into the unconscious unknown self' where the characters move 'progressively through a symbolic landscape from physical tests to moral tests' (Etherington 1978:76f). The journey usually leads backwards in time as in this primordial scene from *She*:

> To the right and left were wide stretches of lonely death-breeding swamp, unbroken and unrelieved so far as the eye could reach, except here and there by ponds of black and peaty water that, mirror-like, flashed up the red rays of the setting sun.... And then ourselves—three modern Englishmen in a modern English boat—seeming to jar upon and look out of tone with that measureless desolation (Haggard 1991:47).

The travellers struggle through deserts, swamps, mountains, plains teeming with dangerous animals and inhospitable tribes, and the movement is 'northward, ever northward' (1908:277).

In *Allan's Wife*, this challenging terrain is allegorically called the 'Bad Lands',

> a great expanse of desolate land, stretching further than the eye could reach, and bordered far away by a line of purple hills.... To look back on it is like a nightmare (Haggard 1951:77f).

This extract hints at not only the physical, but also the psychological strain that Quatermain undergoes in the early romances, and certainly that Leo and

Holly undergo in *She*. 'Africa-as-wilderness' in this sense signifies the challenge darkest Africa afforded to the Victorians:

> As the Victorian mind tried to ground itself in its role as the colonizer of the "new" lands, it was threatened with the abysses, cliffs, swamps and sands, not only of the southern lands it was colonizing, but of its own psyche (Carter in Darian-Smith *et al.* 1996:3).

Remarkably, the hero always overcomes these hardships, generally to return to Britain—though *Allan Quatermain* breaks the pattern that Haggard was later to stick to, as Sir Henry Curtis remains in Zu-Vendis to rule with Queen Nyleptha, and Quatermain dies in Zu-Vendis at the book's end. The returning adventurer is often filled with nostalgia for the wilderness he has left, despite its dangers. Brother John (*The Holy Flower*) back in England 'spends a lot of his time wandering about the New Forest ... trying to imagine that he is back in Africa' (1915:319), while John Niel, back in Britain with the placid Bessie, yearns instead for Jess, who is the tragic outsider, the loner, symbolised in the following extract by the freedom of the remembered (African) night skies:

> He is not a man much addicted to sentiment or speculation, but sometimes when his day's work is done, and he strays to his garden gate and looks out at the dim and peaceful English landscape beyond, and thence to the wide star-strewn heavens above, he wonders if the hour will ever come when once more he will see those dark and passionate eyes, and hear that sweet remembered voice (1900:308).

To keep the wilderness, especially in its negative aspect, at bay, Haggard's African topography frequently features *the enclosure*. The small cultivated patch of ground in the midst of the wilderness is a feature of Haggard's African romances, as it is indeed of other colonial writers' works, in which the garden, bearing powerful connotations of paradise and order, is shown in sharp contrast to the turbulence beyond. Boehmer describes this feature in colonial writing as the creation in the fruitful but wild colonial lands of 'a

whole collection of green spots ... replicas of the Kentish garden county' (1995:53). The symbolic value of the garden, the cultivated land, as a victory of civilisation/order over wilderness/chaos is thus evident: 'Nature is neutralised in the garden to become an object of detached contemplation. The garden is not, has never been, a product of nature but a *symbolic structure of meaning*. In the post-lapsarian world, the garden is the return of nature through art' (Pugh 1988:103, my emphasis).

Garden making is an attempt to impose a structure upon an existing topography, to change a small corner of it to suit oneself. Haggard, by all accounts, was an enthusiastic gardener both at home and in Africa—his daughter comments on this in her description of her father at 'The Palatial', also known as 'Jess' Cottage', the small house that he and Cochrane shared during the British occupation of Pretoria: 'Rider, being Rider, at once made a garden, planted roses, and a vineyard in front, and a screen of blue gums around it. He also wrote to his mother asking her to send him nuts and acorns from his favourite beech and oak trees in the park at Bradenham, so that he might grow 'English trees'' (Haggard 1951:75). On the question of creating gardens in the colonies as domestic spaces, it is interesting that Haggard was known for his intense interest in gardening, often seen as a woman's domain. For example, Ranger, in an article entitled 'Landscape Gendering in Zimbabwe' remarks in relation to colonial Rhodesia: 'As in Australia, the women created oases of civilised domesticity, green lawns and flower-gardens; they moderated essential male violence' (1994:7). Certainly Haggard's gardening efforts in South Africa were then an exception to the norm as described here by Ranger. Further research into Haggard's love of gardening might well yield interesting insights into this often gendered activity—could the garden, for example, represent a kind of sublimated desire for the [absent] colonial female? Or a link home to the [absent] mother?

The largely autobiographical *The Witch's Head* has the main character, Ernest Kershaw, described in similar vein: 'Even if he only stopped a month in a place he would start a little garden: it was a habit of his' (1890:336). Ironically, despite Haggard's frequently voiced dis-satisfaction with England and its 'trim hedgerows and cultivated fields' (1995:9), it is mostly an English kind of garden that he creates in the Africa which he valued for its freedom from constraints. Ideologically, perhaps one

could say that this is another manifestation of the contradiction between Haggard the public imperialist and the private doubter—while he yearned for Africa to remain untouched and unspoiled, he contrived to create an artfully natural English spot for himself within it. Of course while England was in control of the Transvaal, things were for Haggard as they should have been, politically speaking. Thus the garden of 'The Palatial' is a cornucopia of plenty:

> The ground themselves were planted with vines, just now loaded with bunches of ripening grapes, and surrounded with a beautiful hedge of monthly roses that formed a blaze of bloom. Near the house, too, were a bed of double roses, some of them exceedingly beautiful, and all flowering with profusion unknown in this country. Altogether it was a delightful little spot (1900:169f).

Returning to this same garden in 1914 as part of the Royal Commission investigating the state of the Dominions, with the Transvaal long returned to the Boers, the Anglo-Boer wars and Zulu Wars now past, all of which Haggard felt dated back to poor political decisions in Britain, Haggard's words on his garden seem symbolic of promise wasted:

> The garden is a terrible sight, a mere tangle, the whole two acres of it. Of the vines we planted only one or two survive climbing up trees. The roses are all gone.... Standing among those noxious growths I seemed to forget all the intervening years and grow young again. I saw the walls rising. I saw the sapling gums, the infant vines and the new planted roses and gardenias.... I went away with a sad heart. Oh! Where are they who used to pass in and out through that humble gate? (2000:130).

A more sudden dilapidation overtakes another type of enclosure in *Jess*: Croft's farmhouse at Mooifontein, the fictional version of Haggard's first marital home, Hilldrop. Mooifontein is a picture of plenty and order, again 'a delightful spot', a haven of productivity:

> All along its front ran a wide veranda, up the trellis-work of which

> green vines and blooming creepers trailed pleasantly, and beyond was the broad carriage-drive of red soil, bordered with bushy orange-trees laden with odorous flowers and green and golden fruit. On the farther side of the orange-trees were the gardens, fenced in with low walls of rough stone, and the orchard full of standard fruit trees, and beyond these again the oxen and ostrich kraals, the latter full of long-necked birds. To the right of the house grew thriving plantations of blue-gum and black wattle, and to the left was a broad stretch of cultivated lands, lying so that they could be irrigated for winter crops by means of water led from the great spring that gushed from the mountain-side high above the house, and gave its name of Mooifontein to the house (1900:22f).

Everything has its place, with Silas Croft, the owner-farmer, as benevolent dictator over the whole[2]. The picture is pre-lapsarian and recalls Haggard's own pride in his achievements at Hilldrop in brickmaking and haymaking, and his early domestic happiness with his new bride and first-born child, the precious Jock:

> The presence of the white man [Silas Croft] domesticates the wild country into a safe pastoral one; here a man may live and work like an original Adam, creating and refashioning an Eden—trapped in a time warp—to his own image (Low 1996:38).

Yet neither the idyll at Mooifontein nor at Hilldrop could last. Croft's farm is burnt down by the Boers as part of the Boer uprising against the British in the Transvaal following retrocession, and the Haggards felt forced to leave

[2] Boer-owned farms in Haggard's African romances are similarly hierarchical, if more severely disciplined—see, for example, Maraisfontein in *Marie* and Botmar's Transkei farm in *Swallow*. The farmers own the land by virtue of the fact that they work it and have 'created' cultivated land out of raw nature: 'The farm pyramidal structure, presided over by the Boer owner, translates nature into an order based on wealth and power; in Eden, and in the hundreds of farms of South African fiction, the garden of myth finds its practical, historical actualization' (Oboe 1994:143).

Hilldrop for fear of an imminent Anglo-Boer outbreak. Both Silas Croft and Haggard leave South Africa in the belief that, at that point politically, 'this is no country for Englishmen' (1900:367) and return reluctantly to England.

In *Allan Quatermain* and *Allan's Wife*, however, the enclosures brought to the foreground are less obviously rooted in Haggard's own history and more closely allied to the ideals of romance,

> commonly symbolized by some kind of paradise or park like the biblical Eden, a world in which a humanity greatly reduced in numbers has become reconciled to nature (Frye 1976:172).

Yet, despite their origins in Haggard's fancy, their ideological implications remain rooted in the late nineteenth-century British preoccupation with Africa. Both enclosures mentioned—the Mackenzie mission station in *Allan Quatermain* at which Quatermain rests on his way to Zu-Vendis, and the Carson compound in *Allan's Wife* where Quatermain meets his wife, Stella—have their origins in the desire for colonial settlement in Africa, the idea of colonial land 'as property, and with it inevitably the appropriation and enclosure of land' (Young 1995:172)[3].

[3] Haggard, it must be noted, was in favour of returning to the system of smallholding farming in England in an effort to provide the small farmer with a stake in the land. The long succession of Enclosure Acts of Parliament had transformed the sociological and topographical map of England by legislating for the enclosure of common land into larger and larger estates, squeezing out the smallholder. What Haggard campaigned for in his agricultural writings was 'to revive a regime of smallholdings ... returning the larger farms created by a century of Enclosure Acts to an earlier condition. It meant the active encouragement of local difference, even in a sense of return to the picturesquely primitive' (Carter in Darian-Smith 1996:29). This radical move from one who, after all, was a member of the landed gentry, can be traced back to Haggard's firm belief in the restorative value for people of working the land:

> To large classes of this country the land means a place that is green and full of cows in the summer, and brown and full of mud in

The Mackenzie mission station in *Allan Quatermain* is reached after a ten-day trek inland from Lamu, an island off Kenya, and a perilous canoe trip up the Tana River in which Quatermain, Sir Henry Curtis, Good and Umslopogaas are attacked by murderous Masai tribesmen. The first view of the Mackenzie family marks them as separate from the wilderness that Quatermain and company have just struggled through:

> A gentleman, a lady, and a little girl ... walking in a civilised fashion through a civilised garden, to meet us in this place (1995:40).

They then proceed to the mission enclosure, which is in microcosm a British paradise in Africa, a British protectorate hierarchically organised and feudally arranged. On the lower slopes of the hill (for the topography mirrors the power relations) are the 'Kaffir gardens' full of mealies, pumpkins, potatoes and also containing 'neat mushroom shaped huts' whose occupants come 'pouring out' to greet the visitors. The road up the hill is lined with orange trees 'positively laden with golden fruit'. Higher up the hill the party is shown a 'splendid quince fence', which marks the border with Mackenzie's private enclosure within which is his 'private garden', church and house (1995:41). This garden is symbolically far more English than the African gardens lower down. Quatermain, no doubt speaking for Haggard, exclaims:

> winter; to another class it means a place where there are weekend parties and pheasant shoots; and to a third and more select class, a place where they can go hunting for votes. But the land is a great deal more than all these things. It is the nursery of peoples.... Therefore the land is the most vital of all the problems with which we have to deal. (Haggard 1916:47)

Haggard had support for his position on smallholdings from Joseph Chamberlain whose 'three acres and a cow' policy was in similar vein—after reading a copy of *Rural England* that Haggard had sent to him, Chamberlain replied: 'I judge from what you say that we are very much at one [on agricultural matters]. I am, and always have been, in favour of Small Holdings' (quoted in Cohen 1960:175).

> I have always loved a good garden, and I could have thrown up my hands for joy when I saw Mr Mackenzie's. First there were rows upon rows of standard European fruit-trees, all grafted; for on the top of this hill the climate was so temperate that very nearly all the English vegetables, trees and flowers flourished luxuriantly ... strawberries and tomatoes (such tomatoes!) and melons and cucumbers, and, indeed, every sort of vegetable and fruit (1995:41).

Protecting this enclosure is Mr Mackenzie's 'magnum opus', a huge ditch and wall that took him and 'twenty natives' two years to dig and to construct. The effort was worth it, for Mackenzie says 'I never felt safe till it was done; and now I can defy all the savages in Africa' (1995:42). The image of the manor complete with moat and drawbridge is sustained by the method of entry into the inner sanctum—the party crosses 'over a plank and through a very narrow opening in the wall', which seems a very much tamed and domestic version of the crossing over the chasm into the place of the Fire of Life in *She*. This small opening leads immediately to Mrs. Mackenzie's 'domain—namely, the flower garden' filled significantly with 'roses, gardenias, or camellias (all reared from seeds or cuttings sent from England)'. Flossie, the Mackenzie daughter, has a little 'patch' devoted to indigenous plants, 'some of which were surpassingly beautiful'. Quatermain's interest in one in particular, the Goya lily whose beauty is fabled, sends Flossie off on an expedition to procure him one that ends in her being kidnapped by the Masai. The Mackenzie house is 'massively built' but unremarkable. The whole enclosure is dominated by a vast phallic fir tree, 'a beautiful tapering brown pillar without a single branch' for seventy feet whereafter the top boughs offer shade to the house. Mackenzie uses this tree as his 'watch tower' as it affords a bird's-eye view of terrain within 'fifteen miles or so' (1995:42f). This enclosure is evidence of the wilderness tamed and mastered within its borders, yet ever vigilant for the possibility of attack from without. It marks a triumph of English planning implemented by black African labour and aided by the natural fertility of the soil together with temperate climate. It is at one level Haggard's and Empire's dream of making the wilderness into a Garden of Eden now lost at 'home'; yet at another level it is a dream that cuts across the latent desire for a free, uncivilised wilderness to escape the confinements of that same 'home'.

There is an ambivalence and contradictory movement in Haggard's version of the African pastoral. On the one hand, Africa is represented within the Judaeo-Christian myth of the garden as the place where the original perfection of man can be recovered; on the other, Africa is also presented as an anti-garden where man's presence in the landscape merely heralds impending corruption (Low 1996:39f).

The enclosure at Baboon Head in *Allan's Wife* is hierarchical in a manner similar to the Mackenzie compound, with Mr Carson at the head, accompanied by Stella, Quatermain's future wife. Though it has no moat surrounding it, Quatermain has to struggle through the appropriately named 'Bad Lands' to reach the Carson settlement, which is 'embraced ... in the arms of the mountain' that backs it. Again, the settlement is arranged in tiers with the 'Kaffir kraals, built in orderly groups' on the lowest level and the Carson dwellings higher up surrounded by the ubiquitous groves of orange trees. The dwellings, shaped like beehive huts, are built of 'blocks of hewn marble' by an ancient people. At this point the Editor figure breaks in with a learned footnote about ruins of such kraals being found in the 'Marico district of the Transvaal', built necessarily by 'a white race who understood building in stone and at right angles' for 'it required more than Kaffir skill to erect the stone huts'. Haggard's African landscapes are littered with ruins of ancient white civilisations; suffice it to say here that these white marble structures, because built by an ancient white race, validate Carson's own dominance in this enclosure. Again there is a 'beautifully planted' garden with 'many European vegetables and flowers' growing in it. All in all, it is 'the best farm I have ever seen in Africa' created again by British initiative and planning, African labour and 'marvellous soil and climate'. Carson says, 'I found this spot a wilderness' after 'renouncing civilization'; in Africa he has created something rather more idealistic than Mackenzie, whose enclosure is described in more prosaic terms than Carson's quasi-spiritual realm. Carson is known as the chief of the 'Children of Thomas', a labouring force of about a thousand Africans, and the farm is run on a cooperative basis, with Carson reserving 'only a tithe of the produce' (1951:91-101).

This is Haggard's vision of the muscular Christianity that he was to encourage in his positive report on the Salvation Army settlements in the United States in *The Poor and the Land* (1905), and which he would repeat in *The After War Settlement and Employment of Ex-Servicemen* (1916). The

African wilderness could be made to yield up its bounty by dint of planning and labour, could be held back from these hard-working small fiefdoms even at the risk of relinquishing some of its exhilarating yet threatening promise of freedom.

Other characteristic features of Haggard's African topography, as mentioned at the beginning of the paper, include Africa as vast Eden, Africa as dream underworld, Africa as sexualized bodyscape, and Africa as home to ancient white civilizations. In the face of those who see Haggard as a typical imperialist adventure writer, Haggard produces a paradoxically complex African topography onto which he projects some of his own reservations about Britain's imperial future in Africa, introducing thereby an adversarial element, a contentious note, filled with ambiguities. These ambivalences are perhaps most particularly seen in his sexualized bodyscapes (see, among others, Stiebel 2000). However, overall, it is a fictional topography that would resonate deeply in his own age, as this passage from *The Natal Witness* (28 March, 1914) illustrates:

> Who shall say how many strong and sturdy pioneers have been attracted from the pleasant Homeland to help in winning the African wilds to civilisation as a result of romantic interest aroused in them when as boys they read and revelled in these romances? Haggard did more to advertise South Africa to the world when it was less known than any man of his time (Coan 1997:48).

What attracted Haggard—and what he managed to convey to his readers at the time—was the powerful attraction of nature, its potential danger, and yet the Englishman's ability to engage with it and emerge refreshed, if occasionally chastened.

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Department of English
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Francois Levaillant and the Mapping of Southern Africa

Ian Glenn

Introduction

This paper uses some early maps of South Africa to raise a number of historical and theoretical issues—about power over nature, about representations of travel, of the role of hunting and safari in the European consciousness, and about the use of multi-media in representations of travel and nature. In doing this, the paper addresses issues raised by historians of animals in maps (George, 1969, Stone and Aberdeen University African Studies Group, 1988) and by post-colonial critics of cartographic traditions, particularly those focusing on the links between cartography and power (Bell *et al.* 1995; Stone and Aberdeen University African Studies Group 1988; Stone and Aberdeen University African Studies Group 1994; Stone 1995; Carruthers 2003; Penn 1993; Gregory 1994). As Jane Carruthers suggests, we have important reasons to examine the origins of our environmental cartographic tradition:

> Partly because of the political repositioning of South Africa within Africa, but also because of a distinct interest in matters spatial in the social sciences, African space and place are becoming significant in South African environmental history. The new concern with cartographical history and demarcation of space is an emerging theme in African environmental history and is likely to grow together with an increasing attention to the visual dimension in general (Carruthers 2006:809; notes removed).

This article will argue that an examination of the maps of French explorer François Levaillant and their influence complicates and enriches our understanding of colonial mapping and its relation to power, particularly royal power. It contends that a, if not the, primary link of map is to narrative and that the role of the map is more open, more intellectual, more pleasurable, than many critics allow.

Exhibit A

The line on the map traces the exploratory voyage of French ornithologist and man of letters François Levaillant (born Vaillant, often written Le Vaillant) in the Cape in the early 1780s (Rookmaaker *et al.* 2004; Le Vaillant *et al.* 2007; Le Vaillant 1790). The map formed a significant part of his representation of his travels. (This map and the map of the second voyage to the Orange River can be found in the first volume of the Parliamentary volumes on Le Vaillant [Quinton *et al.* 1973:66-67; 112-113].)

The map stands alone as a conventional map of Southern Africa, with mountain ranges and rivers and towns and villages. But it starts doing more: it refers to local farms, and to the narrative of Levaillant's *Voyages*.

The dots on the line refer to temporary camps described in his travels. For example, a dot marks the spot of the '*Camp des Puces'*, the Camp of Fleas, where the expedition spent only enough time to get infested. Elsewhere the annotation refers to a '*Pays plein de Lions et de Tigres'*—an area full of lions and leopards. Elsewhere, the map refers to particular hunting expeditions described in his travels. When Levaillant came to write his Second Voyage, he was paid almost as much for the map as for the text, showing the extent to which the map had come to be seen as a major element of the narrative.

When Levaillant's Travels were first published, they were a best-selling sensation across Europe, translated into nine languages and drawing admirers for a variety of reasons. Yet at the outset, one of the most important reviews, by Joseph de Guignes, the well known sinologist, in the influential *Journal des Scavans* (later *Journal des Savants)* sounded some critical notes in a generally favourable review (de Guignes 1790). The review was the very first item in the 1790 volume and so would have been difficult for any of the learned readers of the day to miss. After complaining that Le Vaillant's title led one to believe that he had penetrated into Central Africa rather than the fairly well-explored Dutch settlements of the Western and Eastern Cape, de Guignes attacked the text for what he saw as a major omission:

> *Le voyage que nous annonçons n'est point accompagné, qui étoit absolument nécessaire pour entendre l'Auteur & le suivre dans ces contrées inconnues, carte que nous aurions préféré à ces planches qu'il a fait graver* (de Guignes 1790:4).
>
> The expedition that we are reviewing is not accompanied by any map, which was absolutely necessary to understand the author and follow him in these unknown countries, and which we would have preferred to the engravings he had made....

This review provides a suggestive narrative and logical link to the next map. It seems quite likely that the criticism in the *Journal des Savants* may have led to a request that M. le Vaillant should indeed provide a map that would not only set his travels into the context of previous exploration, but also offer a coherent inter-text with his narrative and visual account (de Guignes

had also complained that the lack of chapters made the text less coherently organised that it should have been [1790:4].)

Perhaps then, in order to remedy the lack that De Guignes has pointed out, one admirer of the written account was fortunate enough to receive a present of a map inspired by the Travels. (What this also suggests is that Exhibit B preceded Exhibit A and that the commissioned map provided some of the impetus for the maps in the later volume, something needing further scholarly attention.)

Exhibit B

This copy scarcely begins to do justice to the original, measuring in at about 9 ft by 6 ft (2.67 m x 1.83 m). Details about the artists and the construction are available on the Gallica web-site (http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/Notice.

php?O=07759098). The geographical part of the map was designed by Perrier, the five inset drawings and the animals by Van-Leen and the birds by Reinold. The fauna and flora were in '*62 papillons collés sur la carte spécimens de la faune et de la flore*'—62 specimens of fauna and flora stuck on loose-leaf. If one looks closely, one can see that the paper on which they were drawn does not always match the background exactly. The five ornamental insets were of camps in various African groups, one showing the intrepid hunter bedecked in a hat and his pet baboon Kees resting contemplatively next to a tree. (The map has been republished as an end-map in the 2004 Brenthurst edition [Rookmaaker *et al.* 2004].)

If this map looks fit for a king that is because it was made for one—for Louis XVI of France, in 1790. As many of you will no doubt have observed, the large '*cartouche*' at the top has the King's coat of arms. The map was '*dressée pour le Roi sur les observations de M. Le Vaillant par M. de Laborde, ancien premier valet de chambre du Roi, gouverneur du Louvre, l'un des Fermiers généraux de Sa Majesté*'—constructed for the King, on the observations of Mr Le Vaillant, by M. de Laborde, former first valet of the King's chamber, governor of the Louvre, one of the Farmers-general of his majesty—and the king's former banker. A contemporary account tells us that Louis XVI, a keen hunter, had enjoyed Le Vaillant's highly popular *Voyages dans l'interieur*, and de Laborde no doubt thought that this lavish present might cheer up the embattled sovereign.

The sheer size of the map gives it a kind of embodied physicality that suggests it was intended for prominent display. Did Louis XVI drop some tactful hints to the Marquis de Laborde that he'd like a map that combined reminders of text and showed the extent of Levaillant's travels and placed animals in their proper geographical location? Did Louis XVI gaze longingly at the map while the French Revolution swirled around outside?

Seeing the Map

The map is in the *Service Hydrographique* of the *Bibliotheque Nationale*, in a specialised area for hanging extremely large and rare maps. On a visit, I—probably the first or one of the first South Africans ever to see the map—was allowed in, past 37 other precious and unique maps, to see a map which I had studied at a distance, as virtual or textual object.

In its physicality, the map is striking. Published maps give the appearance of certainty and perfection and precision. Here, the impression is of creativity, innovation, uncertainty, invention. Cracks on the surface, a small ink blot at one spot or one of the papillons coming slightly unstuck—all these pay tribute to the manufactured reality and improvisation here. Then there are the details that no reproduction is ever going to match completely. One can see the meticulous care with which the animal patches have been blended with their background on the map. There are tiny annotations referring to Levaillant's narrative. In the Saldanha Bay area, there is a minute note fixing Malgas Island as the spot on which the Danish sea captain was buried. The reference to the *Camp de Puces* is there and there are also numerous other references to the narrative.

For the purists of accuracy there is a great deal to complain about. Levaillant portrays himself as having gone much further east and north than in reality. The animals and birds and plants are by no means to scale and the elephant is Indian or Asian, not African. If we wanted to accuse Levaillant—or somebody involved with the map—of being obsequious to royalty, we could point to the flower that has been named the 'Sceptre of Louis XVI'. (We might, on the contrary, point to the place named for the 'Republic of Birds' if we wanted to see the map as keeping ideological-biological possibilities open.)

But to be a purist is to miss and ignore the obvious achievements of the map. It reproduces, in amazing detail, a bio-geography of the country, giving very accurate portrayals of most of the iconic mammals and many of the iconic birds of the country—often placed in areas where Levaillant encountered them. For anybody interested in commenting on Levaillant's voyage or bird or animal discoveries in any detail, the map is an indispensable reference and needs much more detailed work as inter-textual reference than this article can provide.

To understand just how good and how important it was, we need to place it in its tradition, and also understand something of the likely motivation of the mapmakers and the king himself.

Media-Historical Importance

How original was this map done for Louis XVI and on what existing traditions did it draw? The decorative features on earlier maps of Africa may

have included animals—typically lions, elephants and camels—but there was nothing of this sophistication (George 1969:146). When human figures are added, they often belong to political commentary or allegory—figures being sold into slavery or engaged in cannibalism. A map by the De Leths from 1730 includes in the cartouche an illustration of a rowing boat with rowers and a standing figure shooting at a seal, but this realistic portrayal is unusual (Norwich 1993:62f).

There were, of course, earlier maps of Africa designed by leading French cartographers for royal consumption. In 1722, Guillaume De L'Isle produced a map for Louis XIV and in 1740 Jean Baptiste Nolin junior one for Louis XV (Garson 1998:65f). While these elegant maps included decorative cartouches, they lacked the many details that characterise Levaillant's map.

Similarly, though Dutch maps of the Cape done during the 1780s, a fairly intense period of mapmaking, have been neglected because most of them were removed to archival storage in Holland in 1791 (Koeman 1952:73, 77), none of them had this kind of specific detail. The maps of Duminy, a sea captain's accurate coastline, or of Friderici (Commemoration Committee 1952:55-58, Plates VII and VIII) may have been more accurate in some respects than Levaillant's, but they lacked the richness of belonging to a larger conceptual and narrative universe.

Levaillant's map only makes full sense when seen as a multi-media construction acting as addendum to Levaillant's *Voyages*. For example, Levaillant was one of the last people ever to see a Bloubok or Blue Antelope and one of his hunters killed one of the last ever recorded specimens near Swellendam. On the map, we can see the Bloubok placed in the correct place. We have the map, in other words, as an illustrated and more or less personally verified expansion on Levaillant's *Voyages*, which themselves are hugely important as multi-media representations of travel and African nature. This is not to say that the map covers Levaillant's travels perfectly accurately, or that he travelled to the full extent of the map, but the map does recall major encounters with animals and birds, while the insets refer to the lengthy descriptions of indigenous groups he met. We thus have one of the first maps ever to indicate wildlife distribution linked to a specific voyage.

We can also see that in crucial ways Levaillant's map overcame some of the weaknesses of earlier attempts to map animal distribution as

noted by George (1969:42). She points out that the size of drawings on earlier maps relative to the scale of the map simply meant that the drawings overwhelmed any attempt to portray distribution. Here, the large size of the map and the elegant miniaturisation of the wonderfully accurate inserted '*papillons*' meant that the map could serve as two purposes: as a miniature animal compendium, but also as an attempt, accurate at least for some of the areas Levaillant traversed, to portray distribution.

For Levaillant, travel is verified by his appeal to other sources of authenticity: the illustrations in the plates, which he repeatedly insists were done under his supervision and based on his drawings '*sur place*'. If readers did not believe a creature such as a giraffe existed, even if drawn, they could visit the King's zoo to see the specimen he had brought back from Africa. If they did not believe his account of birds, they could come and see the specimens.

In key ways, the gift to the King accepts this multi-media construction of the reality of the hunting-voyage and builds on it. Where Levaillant and his publishers placed the drawings in the original text as close to the relevant passage as possible—and often the text cross-references the illustration—the map takes this logic a step further by transposing the space of the journey across pages into the placement of events on a map. The hunting safari or voyage narrative is only complete when mixed with map, picture and text—the conventions that govern the *National Geographic* form to this day. In this form, the verisimilitude of the voyage is guaranteed and given form by the map and the drawing—or photograph.

What is also worth insisting on is that the map is a multi-media multi-handed construction, itself forming part of the reference text. The artists, working on those transportable butterflies, veritable hyper-texts to be placed, perhaps shifted, then stuck, suggest that multi-media is not a twenty-first century invention or idea. One of Marshall McLuhan's most fruitful aperçus is that new media take their content from old ones (McLuhan 1964:8) and this map incorporates lots of older conventions and material into a new and influential model.

Histories of maps do not address this influential development. Earlier maps of the Cape might show fixed elements like rivers, mountain ranges, and even farms, but the idea of the map as recording where animals were found—and shot—was new here. This novelty depends on the

combination of several new technologies that change the way in which nature and travel could be recorded and represented. (Bialas's turgidly theoretical claim that Levaillant was simply interested in marking his presence in the colonies by inscribing his name by writing it on the Heerenlogement rocks could not be more fatuous [Bialas 1997:45].) Levaillant was personally heavily involved in the development of a new form of arsenic-based material for use in taxidermy to preserve animals (Rookmaaker *et al.* 2006:146-58), but he also benefited from better rifles, increased sophistication in map-making and the skills of the artists. These technologies combine to turn the hunting expedition from a killing for meat and skins into a scientific—and commercial—voyage of recording, discovering and preserving. The map becomes one way of cross-referencing to shot and preserved specimens or to bird books. Many of the vividly accurate portrayals of birds here pre-date their appearance in Levaillant's later illustrated volumes on the birds of Africa.

The King comes to own the voyage or this unique version of it, as he ended up owning the giraffe. He put the giraffe on display and may very well have done the same with the map. He is the first major consumer of this hunting-voyage-as-text-as illustrated reality. A hundred years later, rulers of the European or American world would come to Africa to replicate the voyage and bring trophies home to be admired, decimating wildlife en passant. Now, thankfully, we have Discovery Channel and National Geographic and Animal Planet.

But there are some problems in this version, particularly as the map was, as far as we know, never displayed. What was Louis XVI's likely motivation in wanting the map, if we assume that his wishes were part of the process of construction? To answer this, we can look at revisionist historical work which tries to re-assess Louis XVI as a monarch with a particular education that was likely to have shaped his interest in maps and travel (Girault de Coursac 1995).

In short, Louis XVI was very much an educational child of his times, in many ways reared on Enlightenment and even Rousseauistic principles that involved a mix of manual and intellectual labour and, in particular, an interest in a range of languages and intellectual disciplines, including geography. A recent article points, in particular, to his love of the sea and interest in voyages (Zysberg 2002:60-65). On the scaffold, he is reported to

have inquired if there were any news of the La Perouse expedition.

What we then have to add is that while the King might have been keen to rival the British in wanting to see French exploration and French influence expand, he was also intellectually and perhaps even emotionally involved. Details like the Danish captain's tomb, if they were inspired by a hint that the King had found this passage particularly interesting, would suggest that it was the power and curiosity of the narrative, rather than a wish for an instrument of power, that was the driving force in the King's use of the map.

What this map suggests is that the motive for using maps, even by the most powerful, might always have been mixed and multiple and that the pleasure of imaginary travel, curiosity, wishful thinking and a wish to learn more probably weighed more heavily than any strategic interest.

If we were to see Levaillant's text as an instrument of malign power, then we would probably have to say that insofar as he provided the model for the hunting narrative, which was to be the dominant form of literary product from South Africa during the nineteenth century, then his narrative was a powerful influence, but the map, which remained unknown because of bad historical timing, can scarcely stand indicted of that (Glenn 2005:64-70).

Influence

Levaillant's fate in Southern African culture, in which he is undoubtedly the single most important influence, is to have been imitated and systematically censored. Two maps, produced a few years later than Levaillant's, make the nature and extent of this double action comically clear.

Pisani's map (Norwich, 1993:78-79), probably one of the most fraudulent documents in a military archive anywhere, shows all sorts of details taken from Levaillant and it only makes sense when seen as based shamelessly on his repute and on his travels. In the upper right, the writing next to the shipwreck of the Grosvenor (at least 500 km out of place) reads: 'Former travellers arrived to this apels in service of the Grosvenor's people'. The former traveller who claimed to have tried to go the help of the survivors was Levaillant and his Voyages were often bound with accounts of the survivors of the Grosvenor (Glenn 1996:1-18).

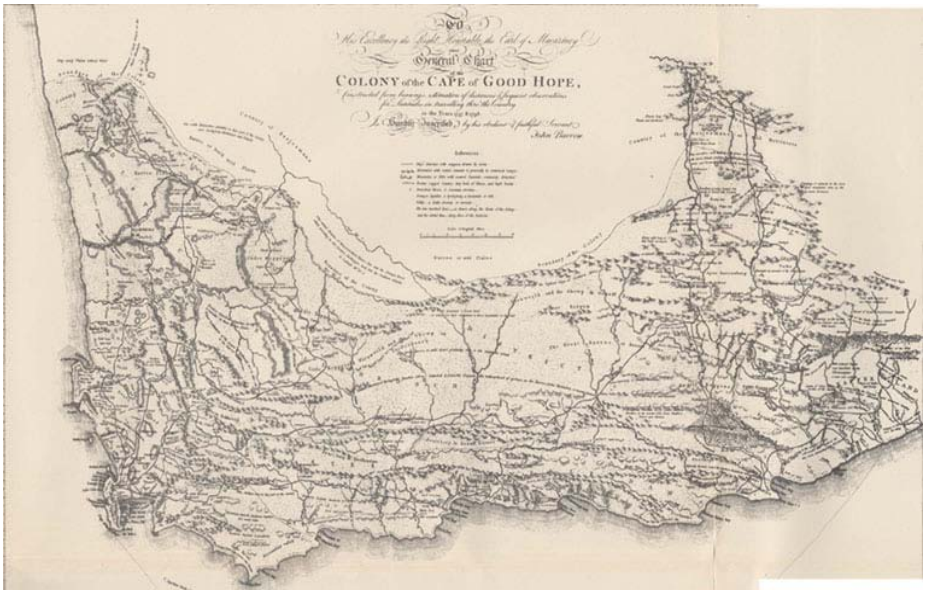
Exhibit C

What we see too in Pisani's map is how influential the style of the King's map has been in a few years, though the map has none of the complex attempt to place animals and birds accurately into the landscape. What is surprising is that Pisani's map is in a book of historical maps of Southern Africa that makes no mention of Levaillant—an omission that continues in the Stanford collection (Jacobson, 2004) based largely on the Norwich collection.

John Barrow is usually represented as the sober accurate land-surveyor compared to the flighty French voyager (Pratt 1992:90; Penn 1993:20-43). Yet when we look at Barrow's 1801 map, we see that it is full of unacknowledged traces of Levaillant.

Regions are marked by the game found on them in some cases, while elsewhere they are marked as good for corn or pasture. Already, it seems, we have moved to seeing the wild animals as a natural resource to be exploited. In two cases at least, Levaillant is marked by absence. Where his Bloubok stood, Barrow notes simply: 'Blue antelope once in this part of the country'.

Exhibit D



And, where Levaillant flirted with Narina, Barrow notes only: 'Well watered plains once inhabited by the Ghonaquas, a race now extinct' (Barrow 1806: map in frontispiece). That trace where the plains are still marked by the presence of someone who is extinct, suggests the power of Levaillant's accounts and imaginative geography over his contemporaries and much of the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Levaillant's map marks a key moment where the map changes our relation to a text. A map pushes us between various realities, out of any notion of the autonomous and autotelic literary text. The experience of reading changes as a result of a cross-referenced map and many of the eighteenth-century battles about the difference between fictional and non-fictional texts turn on maps, particularly a map that insists on a reality that trumps the fictional.

There is also a theoretical question at stake here. As many post-modern critics have observed, maps have undoubtedly been used as agents of

imperial power, ways of dividing and ruling, of imposing various kinds of fictitious order. What this map suggests is that the map always had other powers, even for kings: powers of imaginative transport, narrative supplement, discovery, and private spectacle.

I also want to suggest that the elements of a hugely influential multi-media genre that persists as a media staple today—the travel account or the *National Geographic* article—are in place here. And they came in part because Levaillant's account drew the eyes of the King and much of France irresistibly to look from Paris, not West, or East, not even in curiosity to where La Pérouse might be, but South.

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Centre for Film and Media Studies
University of Cape Town

The Forest and the Road in Novels by Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri

Gillian Gane

Novels by two great Nigerian writers, Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri, present strikingly different attitudes toward trees and forests and toward nature and the environment more generally. I examine the attitudes that emerge from their novels *Things Fall Apart* and *The Famished Road*, finding that Achebe and Okri are writers of different generations, addressing different concerns. Then, given the alarming statistics on the current state of forests in Nigeria, I try tentatively to find ways of conceptualizing change in that country, discovering some promise in Okri's image of the road.

Chinua Achebe demonstrates powerfully the irreparable damage to the fabric of Igbo society that colonization brought, but shows no particular concern for the environment. In his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, it is taken for granted that the natural world exists to be exploited by human beings, though parts of the natural world are at the same time a source of danger and fear; nature is polarized into good, usable nature and evil, dangerous nature. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, by contrast, exposes not only the persistent effects of colonization and the conflict between the rich and the poor, but the devastating effects of development on forests and the natural world. Perhaps most crucially, the world that Okri presents is not one with human beings at the centre.

The difference between the two authors is in large part generational; Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was written in the 1950s and set some half a century earlier, at the time when the colonizers first arrived in Nigeria. Ben Okri himself was not born until 1959, the year after *Things Fall Apart* was first published in England. His novel *The Famished Road* was written in the

1990s and is set just before Nigeria's independence in 1960. The difference also has to do with the vantage points from which the two novelists write. Achebe locates himself squarely within the worldview of rural Igbo society a century ago, whereas Okri does not tether himself to any fixed ethnic or cultural identity. His narrator and protagonist Azaro is a small boy, a spirit-child who moves between the world of spirits and the human world, and no clues identify the particular language or culture of his family (he calls his parents 'Mum' and 'Dad'). It is also significant that Azaro and his family have no connection with agriculture.

Achebe has made clear his outrage at Conrad's identification of Africans with their natural environment in *Heart of Darkness*, and his own presentation of the Igbos' relationship with nature is clearly shaped by his commitment to countering Conrad's dark vision. In his much-reprinted article 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', Achebe presents a scathing critique of Conrad as a 'bloody racist' (1977:788)[1], charging that he 'projects the image of Africa as "the other world", the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality' (1977:783). In 'The Novelist as Teacher' Achebe announces his own commitment to offering an alternative vision:

> I for one …. would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them (1975:45).

For Conrad, the dark heart of Africa reveals the savagery underlying the veneer of civilization: both the natural world Marlow finds in Africa and the human beings who inhabit it are wild, untamed, primordial, a source of horror. In response, Achebe insists that Africans—specifically, the Igbo of Umuofia—see themselves as quite separate from the natural world; his re-

[1] 'Bloody' was the term Achebe used in his first version of this article as published by the *Massachusetts Review*. In subsequent versions he changed this to 'thoroughgoing'.

contextualizing of the key terms ‘darkness’ and ‘heart’ is an explicit response to Conrad. Just like Conrad’s Marlow, the Igbo fear and are repelled by untamed nature. They condemn the inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Mbaino by calling them ‘sons of wild animals’ (1959:11). When sources of fear for the Igbo are enumerated, high on the list is ‘the fear of the forest’, followed immediately by the ‘forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw’ (1959:13). The darkness of moonless nights is another source of terror to the people:

> Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them…. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark (1959:9).

Of nature itself—landscape, scenery—there is virtually no description in Achebe’s novel. Readers have one brief glimpse of huge old trees as a group of men leave familiar ground and enter ‘the heart of the forest’, where

> The short trees and sparse undergrowth which surrounded the men’s village began to give way to giant trees and climbers which perhaps had stood from the beginning of things, untouched by the axe and the bush-fire (1959:59).

Conrad could not at this point have resisted a ponderous allusion to ‘the night of first ages’ or primordial evil; Achebe, by contrast, notes mildly and casually that these trees are ancient and untouched by human activity without attaching any moral or metaphysical significance to the fact.

Achebe’s Igbo are farmers. Yams, the ‘king of crops’, are objects of reverence to them, and many rituals celebrate the planting and harvesting of yams and other events in the agricultural year. What the Igbo value is not nature raw and unimproved, but nature exploited and domesticated, conquered and cultivated for the benefit of human beings. While Evil Forest and ‘nature red in tooth and claw’ are objects of fear and revulsion, there is virtue in the subjection of nature to human needs. The expectation is specifically that hard-working farmers will clear ‘virgin’ forest and convert it into fields for their crops. When Unoka, Okonkwo’s lazy and improvident musician father, consults the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and the

Caves about his poor harvests, she screams at him:

> You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe. When your neighbors go out with their ax *to cut down virgin forest*s, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labor to clear' (1959:17; emphasis added).

The authoritative voice of the Oracle, who relays to the people the mandates of their deities, judges Unoka as wanting for his failure to participate in deforestation, in the metaphoric defloration of untouched, virginal nature. The Oracle holds no brief for the protection or preservation of nature, but is aligned with the masculinist and colonizing enterprise in terms of which the virginal is seen as crying out to be violated and exploited. As virginal maidens exist to be deflowered and impregnated, virgin forest needs to be cleared and turned into farmland producing crops for the benefit of human beings.

Evil Forest is by contrast the tainted realm into which abominations are cast away. 'Every clan and village had its 'evil forest', we are told;

> In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine men when they died. An 'evil forest' was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness (1959:148).

Evil Forest is a zone of abjection, a place where contaminants can be siphoned off from civilized society. It is a dump for toxic waste, both for sources of disease and for the dangerous products of human experimentation. If good men marry virgins and clear virgin forests to plant their crops, Evil Forest serves as a kind of safety valve for draining off noxious elements that threaten society.

So convinced are the Igbo of the dark powers of Evil Forest that when the Christians ask for a piece of land they readily offer them land

there: 'they made them that offer which nobody in his right senses would accept' (1959:148), convinced that Evil Forest will destroy them. The people of Mbanta are amazed when the Christians survive and flourish; they start to think that the white man must have a fetish powerful enough to counter the toxic forces of this dangerous place.

The division of forests into, on one hand, those that are virginal and available for exploitation and, on the other, those that are evil is reminiscent of the tendency to divide women into virgins and whores. The masculinist worldview sees virgins as pure and as appropriate objects of male desire—though of course the goal of the desiring male is precisely to destroy that virginity. Similarly, virgin forests and untouched nature are seen as inviting men to conquer, subdue, and exploit them, and this conquest and exploitation is approved and encouraged. Set against the virginal, whether a female body or a forest, is the impure and experienced, which is at least potentially contaminating and dangerous—though at the same time these unsanctioned outlets are considered essential to the preservation of respectable society. Not only is this a dangerously polarized way of thinking, but it is one that sees women and land alike only from the perspective of their exploiters.

I am in no position to judge the extent to which this polarized worldview presented in the novel accurately reflects Igbo beliefs or the extent to which it is a result of Achebe's commitment to writing back against Conrad and the Western tradition. There are, however, a couple of indications that Igbo society may be less trapped in polarized binaries than Achebe would have us believe. Evil Forest is repeatedly presented as noxious, dangerous, a place apart; and yet there is the paradox that the oldest and most important of Umuofia's *egwugwu*, the revered ancestral spirits of the clan, is called Evil Forest. This must surely indicate that at some level the people of Umuofia accept that Evil Forest is intimately connected to them. This is also implied by the fact that, according to Paul Brians's study guide for *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia, the name of the community, means 'people of the forest'.

Of course, the Igbo attitude toward nature I have outlined is by no means exceptionally exploitative. Through time and space human beings have characteristically seen nature as a resource at their disposal, and the damage done to the environment by small clans of pre-industrial

agriculturalists is negligible when set against the massive depredations of contemporary agribusiness and industry. Nor is it reasonable to expect Achebe as a writer recapturing the worldview of his Igbo ancestors to show the kind of concern for the environment that is characteristic of our own age.

Forty-four years later, Ben Okri in *The Famished Road* sees the natural world in a very different light from Achebe. Writing in a different global context and with a new understanding of the fragility of the environment, Okri shows a sympathetic awareness of how human agency is damaging nature, and his magical realist approach allows him to blur the boundaries between humans and the rest of the natural world. The vulnerability of nature and of trees in particular, in the face of human expansion and development is a recurrent theme. Early in the novel, the narrator's father tells his young son that the forest that surrounds their home is doomed:

> Sooner than you think there won't be one tree standing. There will be no forest left at all. And there will be wretched houses all over the place. This is where the poor people will live …. This is where you too will live (1993:34).

Again and again we see vivid images of the destruction of forests, and of wounded and bleeding trees. Trees that have been felled are anthropomorphized as fallen warriors. In one case, 'Red liquid dripped from its stump as if the tree had been a murdered giant whose blood wouldn't stop flowing' (1993:16). In another, 'The tree was mighty, its trunk gnarled and rough like the faces of ancient warriors. It looked like a great soul dead at the road's end' (115). Trees groan as they are chopped down:

> I got to the edge of the forest and heard trees groaning as they crashed down on their neighbours. I listened to trees being felled deep in the forest and heard the steady rhythms of axes on hard, living wood (1993:137).

'[E]very day the forest thinned a little, Azaro tells us; 'The trees I got to know so well were cut down and only their stumps, dripping sap, remained' (1993:143).

Okri's image of trees as *warriors* and *giants* is radically opposed to the image of *virgin* forest in Achebe's novel (and in many other texts and discourses): for Okri, trees are gendered male, individualized, and endowed with potent agency; their defeat is the tragic fate of great heroes. The priestess who speaks of virgin forests, by contrast, genders forests as female, sees them as undifferentiated masses, and implicitly approves of their subjection. In both cases, readers are clearly intended to position themselves as male—in Achebe's novel, to see themselves as destroyers of female forests and cultivators of yams in their place; in Okri's, to feel a masculine empathy with the conquered trees. The warlike virility of Okri's trees does not in fact empower them in the contest with human beings: it seems designed merely to make their plight more poignant to male-identified readers.

At one point in *The Famished Road*, Azaro has a surreal vision of the 'new world … being erected amidst the old':

> Skyscrapers stood high and inscrutable besides huts and zinc abodes. Bridges were being built; flyovers, half-finished, were like passageways into the air, or like future visions of a time when cars would be able to fly (1993:113).

This vision of an incomplete modernity is telling in at least two ways. It dramatizes the enormous gulf between, on the one hand, the high-tech, gravity-conquering skyscrapers and flyovers created by and for the wealthy and, on the other, the frail informal dwellings of the poor that stand in their shade. It is further significant that the flyovers are incomplete: these passageways into the future end in mid-air, leading to even more surreal visions of flying cars, and making us wonder whether this futurist fantasia, and the modernist project of which it is part, will ever be completed.

It is not only mega-projects representing massive investments that encroach on the forest, but also the homes and pathways and places of worship of ordinary people:

> All around, in the future present, a mirage of houses was being built, paths and roads crossed and surrounded the forest in tightening circles, unpainted churches and the whitewashed walls of mosques

> sprang up where the forest was thickest (1993:242).

Bit by bit, development and the expansion of human settlements destroy the forest:

> Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. In the distance I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been. Places where children used to play and hide were now full of sand piles and rutted with house foundations. There were signboards on trees. The world was changing and I went on wandering as if everything would always be the same.
>
> It took longer to get far into the forest. It seemed that the trees, feeling that they were losing the argument with human beings, had simply walked deeper into the forest (1993:104).

There is an adversarial relationship between trees and human beings—and the trees are 'losing the argument'. Workers with heavy machinery destroy growing things, and those trees that remain are converted into signposts bearing signs that doubtless assert human ownership and control of the area.

At least twice Azaro sees the forest as fleeing from human beings: in the passage quoted above from page 104 trees walk deeper into the forest, and later the pace of their flight quickens: 'The trees were *running* away from human habitation' (1993:243; e.a.). There are many other passages about wounded and defeated trees and forests, and there is finally a point at which Azaro concludes, 'The forest there had been conquered' (1993:277).

However, in this novel nature is not always seen as suffering and innocent. There is at least one evil tree that grows at the spot where Azaro has buried a fetish and that changes into a sinister animal. Evil spirits often have the characteristics or body parts of animals, and there is an intriguing reference to 'the unholy fecundity of objects' (1993:161).

Within Okri's novel a couple of visionary characters (seen by most as lunatics) offer their insights into the problems threatening forests and trees. The herbalist, who performs the ritual washing of the new car purchased by the ambitious Madame Koto starts with the expected predictions of prosperity, then gets drunk and, to everyone's consternation, announces that the car will be a coffin before continuing with other prophecies of doom. 'All these trees will die', he predicts, 'because nobody loves them any more'. The more generalized rant to which he moves on, most of which is presented in capital letters, starts: 'Too many roads! Things are CHANGING TOO FAST' (1993:382). The insights of Azaro's father, another visionary and idealist who makes pronouncements in capital letters, are similar. He lashes out at the ghetto-dwellers, among other things for 'not taking care of their environment'. He urges them to 'THINK DIFFERENTLY … AND YOU WILL CHANGE THE WORLD' (1993:419), but is met only with derision: 'He has gone completely mad!' (1993:420). It is he who articulates the concept at the heart of the novel, the notion that, like Azaro, Nigeria is an *abiku*, a child who is not ready to be born and who repeatedly dies and is reborn:

> Dad found that all nations are children; it shocked him that ours too was an abiku nation, a spirit-child nation, one that keeps being reborn and after each birth come blood and betrayals, and the child of our will refuses to stay till we have made propitious sacrifice and displayed our serious intent to bear the weight of a unique destiny (1993:494).

The herbalist evidently believes there was once a time when people did love trees ('nobody loves them *any more*'). And in *Things Fall Apart*, too, there are in the names of the community ('people of the forest') and of their most revered ancestral spirit ('Evil Forest') traces of a time when people were closely identified with the forest. These bonds, however, are relegated to the past. In the mid-twentieth-century present of Okri's novel, both the herbalist and Dad seem impotent in the face of the changes in their world: the herbalist's conviction that change is happening too fast is echoed in Dad's notion that the new nation is not ready to be born because adequate preparations have not been made. Both men urge a change of heart: trees

need to be loved, the environment must be taken care of, people must think differently.

However Nigerians have conceptualized nature or writers have imagined the relationship between Nigerians and the natural world, the recent history of Nigeria is a sad story of deforestation, destruction, and the apparently inexorable conquest of nature. The Igbo farmers were urged by their Oracle to clear virgin forest; colonization meant a new demand for palm oil and the intervention of the colonizers in issues of land ownership. But the effects of peasant farming and early trading ventures were trivial compared to the depredations of global capitalism that followed as the twentieth century progressed. Okri gives us a glimpse of these depredations; more recent factual information presents an even more alarming picture. According to a World Land Trust website,

> Nigeria, once in the heart of the tropical rainforest belt, has lost about 95% of its total forest cover and now has to import 75% of the timber it needs for its own purposes (World Land Trust).

The death of forests on such a scale must arouse horror and grief. The challenge that confronts us is—without losing sight of the record of destruction and without allowing our outrage to diminish—to find ways of thinking about our changing world that are not grounded in nostalgia for the lost past. We need to accept that change is inevitable. The nature of space is not fixed and constant, and we can neither turn back the clock to retrieve the past nor freeze time to preserve spaces unchanged.

Not all change in Nigeria fits the pattern of the juggernaut of development ruthlessly eradicating everything of value. The Malian critic Manthia Diawara (2000:135-136) offers an interesting perspective on Achebe's Evil Forest: this zone of terror and abjection, he claims, became in fact the locus of modernity in Nigeria, the site where the future evolved. It was the Christians, the formerly taboo and untouchable *osu*, the twins who had been rescued from the bush where they had been left to die—those seen as worthless by respectable Igbo society—who were most active in developing Nigeria and making it a modern country. We may well have reservations about the project of modernity (a project Diawara does not question), but this turning of the tables where former outcasts lead the way

into the future has a certain appeal.

The Famished Road is full of liminal zones and transformations. Azaro and his family live always on the edge of things, within walking distance both of forests and of the city centre. In this novel, spaces are not fixed or constant, and different worlds flow into one another: the spirit world interpenetrates the real world, dreams intersect with waking life, the city flows into the forest, both paths and rivers become roads. Space is mobile, multiple, and multivalent. Of particular interest is Okri's treatment of roads, the centrality of which is highlighted by the title *The Famished Road*.

In Achebe's *Arrow of God* (another novel about the Igbo early in the twentieth century), there is a road under construction by the colonial administration; it has no particular significance in itself, but its construction is an occasion for brutal exploitation of the labour of the local community. In Okri's novel, by contrast, roads function as multivalent images resonant with meaning. To an extent the road stands opposed to the forest. Roads are of course quintessentially human constructions; they are directional and purposeful, easily seen as symbols for movement and progress. The students to whom I have taught this novel often want to see roads as evil, but that is surely an oversimplification. Roads radiate many different kinds of meaning. They are hungry—famished—and demand sacrifices. Their construction often involves destruction of trees and the natural environment. There are, as the herbalist protests, too many of them. But at the same time roads are linked to natural phenomena—the novel opens with a reference to a road that was once a river: 'In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world' (1967:3). The construction of roads can be a noble human endeavour. When the seven-headed spirit takes Azaro on a visionary tour, they see people who have devoted two thousand years to building a beautiful jewelled road; in all that time they have constructed only two feet. When they complete this road, they will die, because, so the spirit explains, 'they will have nothing to do, nothing to dream for, and no need for a future' (Okri 1993:329).

One intriguing motif Achebe and Okri have in common is a prophetic notion of the nature of toxic waste: in both novels, the by-products of bad magic are an enduring source of dangerous pollution, just as in our own age nuclear waste, pesticides, and other by-products of the 'magic' of technology, along with disease-causing organisms stored ostensibly for the

purposes of research, will remain virulent hazards to human beings and the environment for generations to come. As we have seen, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* one of the factors that makes Evil Forest evil is 'the potent fetishes of great medicine men' (1959:148), 'evil essences loosed upon the world by the potent "medicines" which the tribe had made in the distant past against its enemies but had now forgotten to control' (1959:104). What is significant is that these poisons are here consigned to the world of nature—the 'bad' nature represented by Evil Forest. In Okri's *Famished Road*, the products of magic similarly constitute a persistent hazard, but they are found not in the forest but on the road. When Azaro falls ill, his father says:

> He probably went and walked on all the bad things they wash on the roads. All those witches and wizards, native doctors, sorcerers, who wash off bad things from their customers and pour them on the road, who wash diseases and bad destinies on the streets. He probably walked on them and they entered him (1993:119).

In Achebe's fiction, the toxic residues of magic pollute the forest and make it an evil place, whereas in Okri's work it is the road that becomes polluted—neither part of nature nor a realm that is set apart as evil, but the thoroughfare on which all must travel; the sorcerers' poisons are just one element of many that contribute to the complex nature of roads.

At the end of the novel, when Azaro reiterates his decision to remain in the world rather than return to the realm of the spirits, he frames his decision in terms of roads. He is, he says, 'a spirit-child rebelling against the spirits, wanting to live the earth's life and contradictions'. What he wants is 'to have to *find or create new roads* from this one which is so hungry, this road of our refusal to be' (1993:487; e.a.).

Earlier, when Madame Koto warns Azaro that if he misbehaves, 'The forest will swallow you', the dialogue that follows illustrates Azaro's childlike way of thinking—and his strong imaginative empathy:

> 'Then I will become a tree', I said.
> 'Then they will cut you down because of a road'.
> 'Then I will turn into the road'.
> 'Cars will ride on you, cows will shit on you, people will perform

> sacrifices on your face'.
> 'And I will cry at night. And then people will remember the forest' (1993:219).

Azaro imagines himself; first, becoming a tree—part of the forest that Madame Koto presents as hostile, identity-consuming territory. When Madame Koto threatens that the tree will be cut down 'because of a road', Azaro imagines himself turning into that road. Even if the crying road does no more than remind passers-by of the forest that once was, Azaro's imaginative identification both with the trees of the forest and with the man-made road is moving and impressive, as is his persistence in seeing a connection between the two. We can all learn from Azaro's empathy for the world he lives in and his ability to identify with both trees and roads.

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Department of English, University of Zululand
(Research Fellow)

The Depiction of Forests/ Trees and Malawi's Rural Landscape in the Poetry of Lupenga Mphande and Zondiwe Mbano

Syned Mthatiwa

This paper explores and analyses the ways in which forests/trees and Malawi's rural landscape are depicted in the poetry of Lupenga Mphande and Zondiwe Mbano, from an ecocritical perspective[1]. It focuses on Mphande's collection *Crackle at Midnight* (1998) and Mbano's poems, especially those that appear in *The Unsung Song: An Anthology of Malawian Writing in English* (2001). Both Mphande and Mbano come from Malawi's northern district of Mzimba. Unlike the central and southern regions of Malawi, northern Malawi has a lower population density and still retains a lot of trees, forests and bushes. The districts of northern Malawi boast the highest forest cover percentage in the country. Besides, northern Malawi is the location of the country's largest forest reserve and Africa's largest man-made forest, the South Viphya Forest Reserve. With the exception of that

[1] There are several definitions of ecocriticism (Buell 2005; Heise 1999; Rueckert 1978 in Glotfelty 1996:xx), and as a burgeoning field of literary criticism, it is still being defined. However, Glotfelty's definition broadly captures what ecocriticism is all about. Glotfelty simply defines (and broadly too) ecocriticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (1996:xviii). The name of this branch of literary study is still being negotiated. Ecocriticism is also known by names such as green cultural studies, ecopoetics, and environmental literary criticism.

part of the region which is occupied by Lake Malawi, northern Malawi, which development-focussed people describe as the forgotten region, is characterised by great highlands. The most magnificent of these are the Nyika Plateau and the undulating Viphya highlands. The rolling landscapes and lush forest areas of northern Malawi in general, and Mzimba district in particular, offer unspoilt wilderness of great scenic beauty.

Mphande's and Mbano's origin from a place of so much scenic beauty has had an influence on their poetry not observable in the works of other Malawian poets. Most Malawian poets, including Mphande and Mbano, are social critics. Their poetry exposes the follies of dictatorship and tyranny. The themes of 'detention and torture, tyranny … and despotism, exile and alienation, and disillusionment' (Chirambo 1998:17) with Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's authoritarian and dictatorial leadership (1964-1994), find expression in their poetry.

The focus by critics on the political or anti-Banda/MCP (Malawi Congress Party) messages in Malawian poetry, while commendable, has led to the sidelining of other interesting issues such as the depiction of forests or trees and Malawi's rural landscape in the poetry. The works of Mphande and Mbano show a concern with 'rural dwellers and how they relate to their environment' (Chipasula in Mphande 1998: vii). These two poets have a

> keen eye and a sharp ear, and [their] poems teem with sensuous images of cicadas … hills, ridges, valleys, trees, grasslands, streams, and brooks (Chipasula in Mphande 1998: vii).

Mphande and Mbano both show ecological awareness and, at least in the case of Mphande, displeasure at the destruction of trees and the pollution of the land.

Trees, grasslands, hills, valleys, and rivers are ubiquitous in Mbano's poetry; out of the seventeen poems that appear in *The Unsung Song* only two make no mention of trees. Mbano uses trees for various ends. He uses them to show his sensitivity to Malawi's seasons and how seasons affect nature, that is, humans, plants and animals. In the poems under study Mbano comments on the three Malawian seasons: the hot dry season

(September–mid November), the hot rainy season (mid November - April), and the cool dry season (May - August). In the poem 'Beware, Millipede' (2003:131), the only poem by Mbano analysed here that does not appear in *The Unsung Song*, Mbano uses the behaviour of *msangu* tree as a marker of seasons. In the poem, the fact that the *msangu* is growing new leaves shows that the hot rainy season will soon be over and the cool dry season would follow. We notice this in the first stanza where the persona declares:

> Now that the *msangu* tree
> Is bringing forth leaves
> adieu rain, adieu visitor

Mbano's evocative description of the land during the hot dry season (which follows the cool dry season) in this poem reveals the keenness of his (poetic) eye. In fact evocative visual images permeate most of his poems. It is at this time of the year when

> From above, the sun stares harsh
> Over lands scorched brown
> And wildfires lick the land to ash

Here he offers us a picture of a land sweltering under the relentless African sun, an ideal weather for bushfires. But more importantly Mbano reveals his prejudice against the *msangu* tree. Much as it is useful to birds that 'twitter [while] building / Nests' which dangle like 'succulent fruit' up in the *msangu*, the tree, like the baobab, is useless to those running away from the scorching sun because, as he puts it, 'under the *msangu* are thorns / And the baobab gives no shade'. Here the value of the *msangu* tree is judged by its usefulness to human beings, especially those seeking relief from the blazing sun. Mbano's homocentric attitude here is the attitude of many Malawians, if not most human beings. The thornier the tree, the more useless it is for human beings, even as a provider of shade. The worth of a tree is therefore judged by its use to humanity. The non-instrumentalist transpersonal ecological view which acknowledges the connectedness of all entities on the planet—as '"leaves" on an unfolding "tree of life"'—and encourages 'a

psychological identification with all phenomena' (Eckersley1992:62) is remote to him.

We also see the importance of trees as providers of shade in a land reeling from the blows of an angry sun in 'Nyumbani's Tale', (2001:244-245) where a hunter (trapper) runs to the comfort of the shade offered by a *katope* tree after setting his trap for a monitor lizard. The importance of trees in a land punished by the hot African sun cannot be underestimated. And, as I mentioned above, Mbano judges their value instrumentally.

Mbano demonstrates his sensitivity to the plight of life under this harsh sun. In 'A Prayer' the persona pleads with the sun to allow rain to fall and feed the parched land:

> Blazing sun
> Staring from above
> Wink at times;
>
> Let your eyelids
> Rain down
> Tears of pity.
>
> Green in fields
> Green in the wild
> Stoop under you (2001:250).

The heat of the sun is proving too much, and plants, both in the field and in the wild, are suffering ('Stoop under you').

The hot rainy season and the cool dry season and their effect or impact on grass, trees, and animals are hinted at in 'Lake Kazuni' and 'The Lingazi'—a lake and a river respectively. In the former, which reads like a panegyric to the small lake, Mbano details the destruction caused by a rainstorm whose water fills up the lake. The violent storm tears down 'youthful boughs' (2001:239), smashes the brood of a dove whose cry is described as a dirge and capsizes a fisherman. Here the effect of the storm negatively affects human beings, plants and other animals. Humanity's elevated position on the 'Great Chain of Being' is of no consequence as

people become fellow sufferers of the consequences of capricious nature. The acts of capricious nature are also mentioned in 'The Lingazi'. This poem celebrates the lovely and peaceful river whose water 'purls tunes / Salutary', and 'leaps sportively like / A hare' over stones before spreading out '[e]ffervescently' (2001:240). In the poem the impact of the cool dry season on nature is highlighted. The season comes with cool and sometimes strong moist south-easterly winds called Chiperoni. The Chiperoni winds normally occur in the period from May through August and typically cause overcast conditions with drizzle on windward slopes along the Northern lakeshore and in many areas in the south of Malawi. In this poem these July winds charge like a menacing madman, forcing 'craven grass and leaves' to 'rasp and rattle in terror'. In spite of this the sun is lambent, inviting the speaker to rest on a rock by the river.

On reading Mbano's poems one gets the feeling that he uses forests, hills, and trees as aspects of technique[2] or style, either in simile (as in 'Song of Nyavitima' [2001:226] where love is compared to a tree which sprouts but soon withers and dies) or in the creation of moods such as peacefulness, violence or sorrow. In 'Silence Returned', for example, Mbano enables the reader to see the landscape as he travels from Salima Secondary School, where he once taught, to Madisi by car (which he calls 'Machine of men') to deliver the body of a Form One student who was killed by a village boy while escorting a primary school girl-friend of his (Mbano 2001:256). In the poem the reader is invited to see the green hills, the bumpy road and sandy tracks the travellers follow, the yellow sun that 'crouche[s] / Around whiteness', farms, forests, and the foot of the 'forlorn hill' which is home for the dead student. The description of the hills as green, yet dry, and the sun as yellow and 'crouch[ing] / Around whiteness', helps to capture the sombre mood under which the journey was made (2001:255).

Furthermore, Mbano's reference to forests in his poetry reveals the terror and fear that forests evoke in Malawians. In the traditional imagination of many Malawians '[t]he forest manifests power, natural and supernatural power, with its unlimited scope for mystery' and it inspires a feeling of 'awe tempered with fear' (Obiechina 1975:47). In 'Honeybird', which describes a

[2] Technique is understood in this paper as 'the sum of working methods or special skills' of a writer (Holman & Harmon 1986:499).

quest for honey (the sweet things of life which do not come without pain / suffering or struggle), Mbano talks of the preparations one makes before embarking on a journey into the forested hills. In the poem the forest is said to be cold and wet—underlining the physical suffering that one who ventures into it has to undergo. The persona carries an axe, a spear, and a club in preparation for whatever danger he is likely to encounter there. In a country where lions and leopards roamed the forests and villages even in broad day light not long ago, one does not want to take chances. Here we see forests associated with danger and physical suffering, places where no-one would want to linger. This 'forest phobia' (Nygren 2000:13) relates to the attempt to clear inhabited areas of trees and bushes so as to remove the danger associated with them. Only recently has the reforestation drive attracted the attention of many Malawians in the rural areas.

In 'Sunset over Mparayi' Mbano reveals his nostalgia for his home—Lukonkobe. Here he wistfully describes the elongating shadows as sunset approaches, and the behaviour of the villagers in readiness for the approaching night: cattle are brought home, girls come to the village from fetching water, and men walk home from a hunt in the forests. In the poem Mbano romanticizes village life, a rare aspect in his poetry, as he is aware of the struggle the villagers go through to survive as demonstrated in 'A Widow' (2001:250-251). Visual images of elongating shadows as evening approaches, of cattle shuffling from grazing grounds with boys riding them, of 'hungry fires' licking pots on verandas; and aural images of whistling and chanting boys, and of girls yodelling wistful songs, paint a picture of a sweet home that Mbano who now lives far from it (in an urban area in Zomba), has all but lost (2001:263). The forest in this poem also figures as a place where humans acquire necessities such as honey and meat, as we see men walking home from a hunt to be welcomed by their happy wives and children excited by the prospect of eating meat. The implicit message here is that wanton destruction of forests would lead to the disappearance of such a happy rural life since game will no longer be available. Forests in Malawi, as in other parts of the world, provide rural people with fuel wood, poles, timber, bush meat and other foods, agricultural tools, and medicinal plants. But the destruction of forests in this poverty-stricken landlocked country is well underway as we shall see in Lupenga Mphande's poetry. Activities such as

clearing forests for agriculture, wood fuel gathering, brick making, commercial logging, and curing tobacco, among others, increase the extent of deforestation every year (Ministry of Natural Resources 1996:4).

Mbano's sensitive portrayal of nature and the landscape reveals his ecological awareness although he does not explicitly advocate the conservation of the forests and scenic beauty of Lukonkobe. Mphande shares similarities with Mbano in his depiction of Malawi's rural landscape: trees, hills, valleys and rivers. Like Mbano, Mphande has a keen eye for, and a sharp ear to, the environment. Adrian Roscoe says this of Mphande:

> No one paints physical Malawi better than Mphande; no one is quite so sensitive to the scattered graces of its hills and waters (1977:138).

I agree. Mphande's poems, especially the ones in the first half of *A Crackle at Midnight* abound with flowers, trees, grass, birds and hills. In 'On the Vipya' we encounter the persona sitting 'in a sea of pink grass high up the Vipya plateau' surrounded by 'wild flowers [that] sparkle like stars against / [a] lake breeze that blows the grass to endless waves'. The place is '[a]ll quiet save sounds of hill birds in the distance' and the persona 'watche[s] two blue cranes pirouette a love dance' (1998:5).

Similar descriptions of his home are found in 'Thoza View', 'What I Like Best', 'Where I Was Born', 'Visiting Friends', 'Returning to Thoza', and 'Shrine Revisited'. In these poems woods and hills feature a lot and hills are the most forested areas in rural Malawi. This is consistent with Malawi's northern landscape which is characterised by highlands, rolling hills and valleys. The opposite, however, holds true for urban areas such as Blantyre which have very high population density where the hills surrounding the city are farmed heavily in spite of their prohibitively steep slopes, resulting in massive soil erosion (Stoddard 2005).

In 'Thoza View' (1998:24) Mphande offers a romanticised view of Thoza. Here the persona shows us the view of Thoza which he likes. This is

> the view of Thoza [that] from ridges below [is]
> laced with springs,
> Patchwork fields lush and green,
> staggered with mlombwa trees

And boulders pocked with grey
that trail hills to the lake.

He also likes
walking spacious woods
on edges peopled with sunbirds,
Rambling criss-cross waves of fields
that dot the landscape.

In the poem the persona reveals the relationship between the people of Thoza and their forest environment when he tells us that 'In season bee hunters swarm the hills, / [and] yodel to honey-guides'. As we saw in Mbano's poetry, here too the forests and hills are a source of honey for the villagers. Mphande continues to paint a beautiful and romantic view of Thoza with its

Rain-washed hills [rising] shrouded in green canopies
and wafts of lilac fragrance
Permeat[ing] village dwellings along greenbanks [sic]
with reeds flowering in white

—before wistfully concluding that 'Only in Thoza, and only here can you bask / in so much sunshine'. No doubt, this observation is triggered by his experience in the United States with its cold winters.

A similar romantic view of Thoza can be seen in 'Where I Was Born'. In this poem, where Mphande also laments his exile and alienation, he does not lose sight of the beautiful Thoza landscape. He writes:

Follow cow tracks skirting lush fields dotting the country side
And ascend a staggered range of hills. You'll see towering
Families of cumulus spread like birds over brooks to crest
Into brilliant white against the blue.
If you come to Thoza peak and see green hills
That merge with clouds, listen to songs of leaves
In the wind, look for wispy edges of hail crystals

> In raindrops and think of me, dear friend, in the place
> I was born (1998:39).

The 'lush fields dotting the country side' and 'staggered range of hills' only reside in his memory now. However, as Mark L. Lilleleht observes, Mphande's

> memory of a place, a memory that stretches well beyond the poet's own mind and into the memory of the land (1999),

is a captivating feature of his poetry. But, upon his return to Thoza captured in 'Returning to Thoza', possibly after 1994, Mphande notices that the landscape is not much different from what he left behind in 1984. 'After years of absence / browsing in concrete jungles abroad' (1998:59) (that is, his stay in urban centres of America) he drops off a bus 'at Thoza junction' one 'glorious morning' and stands

> silenced by a presence in the air
> emanating, [he] was sure, from solitary
> outcrops of rocks scattered over ridges [while]
> [i]n the valley below the deciduous [plants]
> were abloom, and [he] bathed in wafts
> of blossoms of season, struck by promise
> of happiness and joy (1998:59).

While Mbano is wistful about Lukonkobe, Mphande is wistful about Thoza, his home. Mphande's description of Thoza reveals his nostalgia for his country and home village from which he is exiled. His descriptions of the landscape certainly give the impression of a very beautiful place and create an atmosphere of tranquillity and peace. But this 'nostalgic romanticism' (Lewis nd) also belies the harsh social and economic realities under which the people live. In 'What I like Best' and 'Cutting the Millet Stalks' Mphande romanticises hard, back-breaking work. In 'What I Like Best' (1998:37), the persona tells us that s/he likes

best ... the view of a village
From atop an opposing ridge
To watch a farmer work his field,
Till the land for better yield
Youths carting produce across a gully
Yodel to the sun in the valley,
Women sing in chorus around the byre,
Tell stories around a fire.

While, in 'Cutting the Millet Stalks' (1998:20), we get a picture of the persona and his family

Invading the field from all sides
With knives and whetstones slung
By shoulders, and in a swoop … squat [,]
Hopping like frogs in season, warbling
In chorus, reaping the field bare.

In reality these activities are not as pleasant and interesting as they are made to appear here. They involve a lot of perseverance and hard work.

A significant aspect of Mphande's poetry, an aspect ignored by his critics, for instance Mark L. Lilleleht and Simon Lewis, is the author's conservationist attitude. While in Mbano's poetry this can only be inferred from his sensitivity to the landscape, Mphande is explicit in such poems as 'Bushfires', 'Along the Rift Valley', 'Snapping of an Old Tree', 'A Crackle at Midnight' (the title poem), and 'The Fig Tree'.

In 'Bushfires' 1998:27), where he describes a bushfire on Malosa hill in southern Malawi, one of Malawi's forest reserves, Mphande laments the destruction that bushfires cause to trees. He dismisses the myth that,

bushfires are good for forest: they clear
the undergrowth for new sprouts,
provide pasture for grazing, and assist
the hunter with game.

For him, 'old trees wail in summer blazes / to the chagrin of the sun and thunder', or simply, bushfires destroy trees. The destruction of trees / vegetation, and even property, caused by bushfire is also shown in 'A Crackle at Midnight' (1998:33), where a bushfire rages through a village at night. In 'Along the Rift Valley', Mphande details the destructive nature of tobacco farming, both to the soil and the environment, polluting the air and destroying life. In her essay titled 'Development Discourses and Peasant-Forest Relations: Natural Resource Utilization as Social Process', Anja Nygren emphasises that:

> environmental changes are inextricably linked to social and political processes and that social relations of production are central to an understanding of deforestation (2000:13-14).

This is very true of Malawi, especially with regard to tobacco farming. Tobacco forms the backbone of Malawi's foreign exchange earnings. Up to 80% of Malawi's foreign exchange earnings come from tobacco export which the locals fondly call Malawi's green gold. Tobin and Knausenberger claim:

> No other country devotes as much of its agricultural land to tobacco as does Malawi, and no other country is as dependent on tobacco for its export revenues as is Malawi (1998:407).

The successive governments in Malawi have always strongly supported the tobacco industry through subsidies and tax breaks, a thing that has led to the crop's domination of Malawi's export market (Poitras 1999). Before 1990 tobacco was grown on estates by means of the tenant system. The tenants who stayed on the estates grew tobacco using resources borrowed from the estate owners, to whom they later sold their tobacco. The estate owners in turn sold their tobacco at the auction floors situated in the three regional cities: Mzuzu in the north, Lilongwe in the centre and Blantyre in the south. Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorial regime favoured large estates rather than smallholder farms because, as Tobin and Knausenberger observe,

> [l]eases for estates and licenses for burley production provided

> instruments for political and economic patronage to be distributed to those in the private sector as well as to politicians and senior civil servants. Recipients provided both support for and loyalty to [the] autocratic government. To complement the patronage, government policies encouraged and subsidised the cost of growing burley tobacco on estates (1998:407).

Following the World Bank and USAID-driven structural adjustment programmes, the Malawi government liberalised the tobacco industry in 1990. Today smallholder farmers are able to grow tobacco wherever they please and sell it directly to the auction floors. The government of Malawi and its willing creditors (World Bank and USAID) have encouraged the production of tobacco as an export crop not only as a means of earning foreign currency, but also as 'a way of promoting development in the rural areas' (Poitras 1999) where 85–90% of the population lives, through the returns the farmers earn from their sales. Whether the tobacco industry has indeed helped in promoting rural development in Malawi is a highly debatable question, however.

Tobacco might be important to Malawi's economy, but studies have linked its production to deforestation in a country where this is a problem. Large tracts of forest are cleared by estate owners and thousands of smallholder farmers to pave the way for tobacco farms. A lot of trees are also cut down to be used for the construction of sheds for curing burley tobacco or to be burnt as fuelwood for the flue-cured variety of tobacco. This exposes the soil to rain and wind and makes it susceptible to erosion. Besides, tobacco depletes soil nutrients such as nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus more than other crops such as maize and cassava (Tobin and Knausenberger 1998:414). The situation in Malawi as far as the tobacco industry is concerned exemplifies Nygren's claim that:

> deforestation involves much more than the physical act of felling trees. It is a process of change in the people's land tenure and land-use systems, in their social stratification and power relations, and in their environmental perceptions and cultural constructions—a process of change that has to be examined from a diachronic perspective (Nygren 2000:13).

In the poem 'Along the Rift Valley' (1998:22), Lupenga Mphande shows his awareness of the deleterious effects of the tobacco industry to the environment. Not long before, the persona observed

> villagers rise with dawn
> [to] plough behind teams of oxen, singing, …
> making maize fields lush and broody after the rains.

But

> Now tobacco farmers
> mount tractors at noon, rip
> the soil sour, and thrive.

Worse still,

> Puffs of smoke blight through
> valley air and drown for ever
> love songs of thrushes.

In this poem Mphande exposes the negative effects of tobacco farming to the environment. This exposure also comes through in 'The Fig Tree'. In 'The Fig Tree' (1998:44), the persona gets news that an ancient fig tree that stood close to his compound back in his village will have to be cut and the wood sold to tobacco farmers. His displeasure at this piece of news is clear in his halting voice when he tells us:

> But now, I hear, times being as they are,
> The council [of elders] has voted to cut the tree down
> And barter the wood away to tobacco farmers.

Fig trees play an important role in African villages. Because they are evergreen, they offer refuge from the blazing sun during the hot months. Village elders often hold council under a fig's shade. But in this poem the new economic system necessitates that this important tree be cut down. Here Mphande shows his awareness of tobacco's contribution to deforestation in

Malawi. In a similar vain 'A Dance in the Kraal' takes a swipe at modern agricultural methods for spoiling the soil with residues from pesticides. The negative effects of pesticides such as DDT, dieldrin, aldrin, and heptachlor are fairly well-known to the world today, which is why they have been banned around the world, including in Malawi (Tobin and Knausenberger 1998:422). The tobacco industry in Malawi used these chemicals before their negative side-effects were known. In 'A Dance in the Kraal' (1998:46), Mphande blames these '[h]ealing herbicides that soured the healthy earth' for the perennially poor harvests that lead to malnutrition and heavy child mortality.

The Malawi government's support of the tobacco industry led to loss of fertile arable land for many rural Malawians in the 1970s and 80s. Government sometimes leased land belonging to villagers to estate owners, and the government's decision was final. In the 'The Noose' (1998:96), government snatches fertile arable land from villagers and gives it to an estate farmer. In the poem a government agent reads a decree to the village elders which tells them that

> the village
> land … had been sold to an estate
> farmer and [the villagers] were to move at once
> to the hills.

Unable to admit such a huge loss, the village chief, headman Chidongo, hangs himself.

The poem 'Snapping of an Old Tree' (1998:30-31) can be read at two levels. The first level is to see it as an obituary for an old *muwula* tree that stood for years in a village but later weakened and crashed to the ground. The fact that the foot of the tree had served as a playground for children and a hiding place from the sun for elders to discuss weighty village matters, is enough for the villagers to feel sad over its loss. On a different level it can be read as an allegory for the passing of a village elder. In both cases one cannot ignore the fact that Mphande finds trees important literally or for metaphoric use in poetry.

Although Mphande's attitude to trees is instrumental or anthropocentric in some cases, one can still see that he has respect for the

intrinsic value of trees and nature. His poems show that he is interested in the conservation of the trees and natural environment of his beloved Thoza.

Mphande's and Mbano's attitude towards forests, trees and nature in general departs from what is considered the traditional view of nature in Africa. Emmanuel Obiechina sums up this view very well with reference to West Africa and I quote him at length here. Obiechina writes:

> The traditional world view [in West Africa] has an important bearing on attitudes to nature and this in turn is reflected in the novels. It implies a mystical yet utilitarian outlook on nature instead of an externalized appreciation of it in forms like fine landscapes, beautiful flowers, cascading waters or the colours of the rainbow. In this tradition the beauty of the particular tree comes to be inseparable from its 'vital' property, demonstrable in pharmaceutical or magical efficacy or the shade it provides from the heat of the sun. The uniqueness of a particular stream or wooded landscape resides in some supernatural manifestation, either as the abode of a communal deity or a local spirit identifiable with the destiny of the community (1975:42).

This view, which is sometimes taken as the traditional African world view, should be considered with caution. For me the assumption commits a fallacy of hasty generalisation. To begin with, the idea of a 'West African' or simply 'an African' needs careful interrogation. There is no generic African. Africa is made up of different people with different sensibilities. There is no single African sensibility with regard to nature or the environment from North to South, East to West. Even the idea of a traditional world view is a heavily contentious one. There is no one tradition for all African peoples. As a youth growing up in rural Malawi my childhood friends and I used to sing songs of praise for some of the neighbouring hills; praising them for their majesty and beauty. We enjoyed the scenic beauty of flowers that came with the first rains too. But none of us had read an English novel or lived in an urban setting to acquire an externalised aesthetic view of nature.

Obiechina further observes that in West Africa today,

> [n]ature is being recreated in the urban settlements as it is in the

> industrialized parts of the world; and individuals, especially the educated middle class, are beginning to develop modern aesthetic attitudes towards nature and modern concepts of it. The Western aesthetic outlook tends to affect to an increasing degree Africans who live in the urban environment or who have been brought up on Western literature (1975:50).

One might be tempted to attribute Mbano's and Mphande's nostalgic and romantic rendering of their rural landscape to their western sensibility, since both are products of western education and live in urban areas. (Obiechina himself does this to some characters in West African novels in his *Culture, Tradition and Society in West African Novel* [1975]). This however would carry the indefensible assumption that their sensibility is mediated by western education, without which they could not have appreciated the unique beauty of Thoza or Lukonkobe. Besides, the fact that these are the only Malawian poets of note to so clearly exhibit an ecological awareness downplays the influence of western education or even exile. Other Malawian poets, some of whom have been exiled, such as Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula, Felix Mnthali and Steve Chimombo, are not as consistent in their dealings with the landscape, trees and forests as the two poets discussed above.

Granted that humanity is part of nature and our building of cities and scarring of the landscape should be seen as nature taking its course, as Edward Picot argues in *Outcasts from Eden: Ideas of Landscape in British Poetry since 1945* (1997), the fact that we are aware that our destructive tendencies to the environment may backfire and hurt us is enough to motivate us to treat the environment with care and respect. In this age and era of environmental crisis sensibility like Mbano's and Mphande's may have more commendable conservationist potential than the so-called traditional African world view which sees nature as providing for humanity forever. Moreover, the ecological awareness of Mphande and Mbano is very important now, at a time when village life in Malawi is encroaching on forest reserves, threatening endemic species as well as 'some of Africa's finest scenery' (Newton 2001). The demand for firewood, more land for agriculture, wood for curing tobacco, and wood products for construction, which leads to loss of thousands of hectares of indigenous trees each year

will surely lead to catastrophic erosion, extinction of endemic species and 'will also have [a negative] aesthetic impact on the country's landscape' (Newton 2001).

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Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER)

‘Long and Wandering Forest’: Sidney Clouts, Geophilosophy and Trees

Dan Wylie

In 1924, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in an untitled poem:

> Space, outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:
> If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,
> Invest it with inner space, this space
> That has its being in you. Surround it with compulsions,
> It knows no bounds, and only really becomes a tree
> If it takes its place in the heart of your renunciation (Bachelard 1964:200)[1].

Rilke here establishes in poetic form the central metaphysical problem that is the concern of this essay: how we come to know, and come to know our place in relation to, the apparently real and independent objects of the natural world. It’s a perennial and perhaps ultimately insoluble issue, of course, and I will do no more here than gesture towards the phenomenological tenor of Rilke’s verse; relate this to similar poems about

[1] This is Maria Jolas’ translation from Bachelard’s French; it reads better, I think, than Stephen Mitchell’s direct rendering of Rilke’s German: ‘Space reaches *from* us and construes the world:/ to know a tree, in its true element,/ throw inner space around it, from that pure/ abundance in you. Surround it with restraint./ It has no limits. Not till it is held/ in your renouncing is it truly there’ (Mitchell 263). But that ‘Surround it with restraint’ (*Umgieb ihn mit Verhaltung*) is satisfyingly ambivalent.

trees and forests in South African poet Sidney Clouts's oeuvre; and use this as a starting-point for some thoughts about the philosophical basis for ecologically-orientated criticism in South Africa. Clouts—as difficult and elusive as Rilke himself—remains unforgivably neglected; and 'ecocriticism' in South Africa remains seriously under-theorised. By way of helping address both these shortcomings, I here examine selected poems by Clouts through a phenomenological lens, drawing especially on the work of Gilles Deleuze, but also touching on that of Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard and Freya Mathews. These thinkers are by no means always in agreement, and I am far from competent to unpack their complex inter-relations; but I sense sufficient congruence between them to make possible a broadly phenomenological approach to explicating the role of poetry within ecologically-orientated critical practice.

Rilke's versification and wielding of metaphor enact the essentials of such a philosophical base for our ecological relations: space is neither inside nor outside of us or our perceptions, but an inter-relationship forged in and by our very perception of it; and the discrimination of discrete objects within this fluid spatiality is an act of 'renunciation'. This renunciation, I take it, is firstly of the 'boundlessness' of space; that is, a vacuous mysticism is avoided by a recognition that not all there is can ever be perceived at once, the response to which is necessarily a deliberate carving out of a portion of it by the willed imagination. Secondly, the notion of a bounded and discrete self which is envisaged as doing the perceiving is renounced as temporary, if not illusory. If this is to appear to take a severely anti-empiricist or anti-positivist line, it is not to deny that natural objects might pre-exist our perception of them, or that there is no importance or reality to the notion of a coherent and personal self. (As Deleuze noted,

> you have to keep small supplies of significance [sic.] and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it…; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality (1987:160).

It is to say only that such entities *as we perceive them*—and we have no choice *but* to have them presented to us via our perceptual equipment—are

neither originary nor fixed, but are functions of, constituted by, processual inter-relatings, in short by experience. One such vital process involves that elusive tool called the imagination. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, another phenomenologist whose thought might very fruitfully be applied to an analysis of Clouts, wrote in a manner irresistibly reminiscent of Clouts's poem 'Of Thomas Traherne and the Pebble Outside' (1984:65):

> We are not this pebble, but when we look at it, it awakens resonances in our perceptive apparatus; our perception appears to come from it. That is to say our perception of the pebble is a kind of promotion to (conscious) existence for itself; it is our recovery of this mute thing, which from the time it enters our life, begins to unfold its implicit being, which is revealed to itself through us (Quoted in Pearson 1999:29).

Poetry, or what Deleuze calls 'minor literature', seems pre-eminently suited to addressing this immanence of relationship. Bachelard quotes J H van den Berg: 'Poets and painters are born phenomenologists'. … We are continually living a solution of problems that reflection cannot hope to solve' (1964: xxxv).

If, in 'living a solution', causality—how the poetic image actually transpires in words—becomes a highly problematic issue, Bachelard for one attempts to make of that a virtue. In his argument, the immediacy of the poetic image itself is all; in the very receptiveness to the image exists the poetic imagination. In attempting to explain this, the scientist and empiricist 'must break with all his habits of philosophical research'; 'The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche' (1964: xv). What is interesting in this last quotation is its use of another metaphor of spatiality—a kind of meta-spatiality, which implies much about the nature of language itself, working inevitably within space and time:

> The atomism of conceptual language demands reasons for fixation, forces of centralization. But the verse always has a movement, the image flows into the line of the verse, carrying the imagination along with it, as though the imagination created a nerve fibre (1964: xxviii).

This is so redolent of Clouts's own characteristic images of 'particles' and nerves, of his near-aphoristic deployment of the metaphorically-loaded image, and of his use of multiply intersecting spatiality's, that it sometimes seems as if Clouts had read Bachelard. (This is not impossible, but I have no evidence that it is the case; more likely both Bachelard and Clouts are independently deriving similar conclusions from the works of Spinoza and his successors.) In Bachelard's view, no general 'principle' will serve to track the emergence of the poetic image. Rather than in causality, then, we look for the meaning of an image in 'reverberation'. Bachelard follows Minkowski:

> it is as though the sound of a hunting horn, reverberating everywhere through its echo, made the tiniest leaf, the tiniest wisp of moss shudder in a common movement and transformed the whole forest, filling it to its limits, into a vibrating sonorous world (1964: xvi-xvii n).

There could hardly be a truer description of Clouts's poetic vision. It is in this very activity of reverberation that certain transcendence is achieved—which appears almost synonymous with Deleuze's articulation of 'immanence'.

We will return to this paradoxical idea of 'immanent transcendence', which I believe does dominate Clouts's work and his view of the human-nature relationship, but I want at this point to register one demurral from Bachelard's position. Bachelard's insistence on the primacy of the poetic image threatens to decouple it altogether from its socio-historical context: 'the cultural past doesn't count' (1964: xv). He adds, 'The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, and yet his image immediately takes root in me' (1964: xvii). One can see what this means, yet it is not, in my view, either possible or necessary to erase altogether the cultural connotations of words and concepts; indeed, their meaning often depends on such connotations, built up over decades or centuries of culturally accepted repetition and contestation. This is the case even where, as often happens in poetry, such connotations are being challenged or reworked; and it remains the case even where the poet himself seems to want to detach from localised socio-political engagement (as indeed Clouts has been accused of doing,

most memorably perhaps by Stephen Watson in his essay 'Sydney Clouts and the Limits of Romanticism', 1990). It is in this area, perhaps, where an application of Deleuze's more historicist mode of thought might in future be found useful. Deleuze and Guattari noted that any piece of non-reductionist literature (and, no doubt, criticism) 'ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles' (1987:7). I will not, however, treat such inclusive historicization at any length here, beyond touching on the following intriguing example.

Oddly, Sidney Clouts, in all his poetry, mentions an indigenous South African species of tree only once—a rare poem written about the Wild Coast ('Bright the River's Ocean Shore', 1984:102). Almost all of Clouts's 'natural' poems are written out of his Cape Town environs, and there the trees he depicts are invariably what we now term exotics or aliens: pines, eucalypts, and avocados. In some ways this is understandable: the forests around Constantia, about which he wrote specifically in the two versions of 'Through Cold Constantia Forest', or Silvermine, or the city's suburban gardens, *are* exotics. For the ecological historian, this is of some interest, simply as evidence of the extent to which plantations have come to dominate that part of the world. (As I write, controversy bubbles over clearances of sections of the Tokai plantations.)

It seems inconceivable that Clouts did not regularly encounter indigenous plants—in Kirstenbosch, or among the figs and proteas on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, or in at least a few of those same gardens. Why does he never write of *them*? Why is it that he is most moved by the 'cutting of the pines', to echo the title of one poem, most excited by the fruits of plums and apricots, most intrigued by the shapes and shadows formed by eucalyptus leaves? Though valid, it's a little too easy, I think, to pass this off as a blindness on Clouts's part, as being a direct reflection of his own 'intruder' status, of his being as much a colonial implant as a pine tree who by that fact simply does not address the dimension of what Alfred Crosby (1986) famously called 'ecological imperialism' in his book of that title. Some sense of comfortable familiarity with the exotic plantation does involve such narrowness, but there is more to it. As David Trigger and Jane Mulcock (2008:178-198) have recently pointed out, the very status of 'alien' in the sense of biological invasion versus belonging is more contested than

many realise, more ambivalent than the quasi-nationalistic, exclusionary, even anti-evolutionary rhetoric's of some biological purists will allow. This affects the concomitant senses of belonging of human denizens, too. However, the social-biological history of Clouts's sense of belonging is not the thrust of this essay—and was not, I think, central to Clouts's own concerns.

Clouts, for all that his poems are saturated with the natural—the geological underpinning of rock, the ever-present sea, bird sounds, trees and leaves everywhere, occasional animals—is not an *ecological* poet in the sense that he is particularly concerned with the observable dynamics of ecosystems as such: there is a little of that science in his vocabulary, but those dynamics are not his subject. But I want to suggest that he is 'ecological' in a more radical, philosophical sense. He may be attracted to writing about European exotics because they provide a familiar fund of images which can, as it were, resonate in a larger verbal echo-chamber than obscurer, less 'literary' indigenous plants; but his self-created task is clearly not to allow his readers to see them in so dulled and comfortable a way. On the contrary, Clouts seems to wish radically to destabilise the ways in which familiar objects are seen, and to make the experience of re-visioning them a radical destabilising of the very notion of the 'self' which observes them. This is to eschew a rather limited conceptualisation of 'belonging-in-place'—some kind of bioregionalism, one might call it—predicated on the empirical 'realities' of a localised and objectively apprehended ecosystem, in favour of a more philosophically challenging notion of immanence within an ecosystemic imaginary. The 'reality' of this imaginary is brought into unique being by the very act of observing and writing itself. His poetry seems, in short, to propose a kind of phenomenology of belonging which is intrinsically fluid, neither objective nor subjective, neither wholly imagined (or mental), nor wholly material; it is rather, as it were, co-creative with/in the world. Recognizing the oscillatory flux between apperceptions of multiplicity and unity, he wrote:

> I am not contemplative by
> nature but *in* nature:
>
> by nature, among;
> in nature, one (1984:130).

I am attracted (though with some trepidation) to reflecting this idea through the 'geophilosophy' of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (I will refer mostly to Deleuze), partly because their vocabulary often involves terms with both a geographical and an organic, even botanical air: *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization, arborescence, rhizomes*. As for Bachelard, for Deleuze the operation of poetics within physical and ecological space is of paramount importance to human consciousness. To an unusual degree, Deleuze and Guattari combine the insights of the biological sciences, non-Kantian philosophy (especially that of Spinoza, Bergson and Monod) with a poetic quality of delivery, in ways I intuit may prove especially valuable to the ecologically-orientated literary critic. Their vast output would be impossible to summarise even by an expert, which I emphatically am not[2]. It will I hope be sufficient for now to note the essential thrust of their thought against the linearity of conventional Darwinian causality and Kantian metaphysics alike. Against Kant and the more recent theory of autopoiesis, 'which posits in a priori terms the unity, stability, and identity of the organism', they assert that the organism—human, animal, even, I would suggest, poem[3]—'can never be made separate from its relations with the world since "The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior". The object, or Nature, is never simply 'out there': Deleuze and Guattari attempt 'to unfold and enfold the plane of nature as a plane of immanence that distributes affects and which cannot be conceived as operating in terms of an arbitrary distinction between nature and artifice' (Pearson 1999:148).

[2] It has to be admitted that I am plucking out 'relevant' snippets from a vast entanglement of often infuriatingly abstruse, sometimes positively bizarre, discussion, especially from the central work, *A Thousand Plateaus*—but I am comforted by their apparent injunction to read it in precisely this way, as an 'unattributable … multiplicity' (1987:4).

[3] Though Deleuze and Guattari draw extensively on literary sources and examples, their their inclusion of poetry is, surprisingly, extremely slight; their chapter on 'The refrain' in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987:310-349) perhaps comes closest. More work is needed to extend their insights into this area.

How is this immanence then to be expressed in the (to all appearances) artificial medium of language, in poetry? The process is racked between the desire to 'deterritorialize', or rebel against the constraints of conventional 'stratification', and the temptation to conform which mere communicability in fact requires. On the one hand, Bergson pointed out:

> Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it (quoted in Pearson 1999:49).

On the other hand, Deleuze beautifully said:

> One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud 'lines of drift' with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, sonorities (quoted in Pearson 1999:171).

(Note, again, the botanical metaphors here.) It is, I suggest, that sense of 'constant effort', alongside its apparent air of improvisation, its quality of metaphoric grafting of one unexpected thing with another, that makes Clouts's poetry so intriguingly elusive as well as grounded and muscular. It is experienced as 'difficult' precisely because it enacts a dissolution of accepted categories of self and object, replacing those with what Deleuze outlines as

> [f]lows of intensity, their fluids, their fibres, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, micro perceptions … [b]ecomings, becomings-animal, becomings-molecular (1987:162).

The poem becomes another 'assemblage', at once a *de*territorialisation of what has come before, and a *re*territorialisation on its own momentary terms.

It needs to be stressed that Deleuze and Guattari are not advocating some sort of anarchic overthrow of all ordering systems or strata, which can have benefits as well as dangers: 'if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions' you may be 'dragged towards catastrophe'. Instead,

> Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities here and there, have a small plot of new land at all times (1987:161).

I take Clouts's poems to be exactly such 'flow conjunctions'.

One further, strong philosophical connection that can be made is the fascinated approval both Clouts and Deleuze accorded the Renaissance philosopher Baruch Spinoza. In 'Wat die Hart van Vol Is', for instance, Clouts wrote that 'The heat has a selfless// heart like Spinoza's/ Godlike calm' (1984:119); there is much to contemplate in those lines, and to some implications I will return. Spinoza is also a crucial influence in the philosophical work of Freya Mathews, particularly in her book *The Ecological Self*. And as Robert Hurley notes in his preface to Deleuze's own study of Spinoza, deep ecologists such as Arne Naess have also drawn on Spinoza's sense that the 'environment is not just a reservoir of information whose circuits await mapping, but also a field of forces whose actions await experiencing' (Deleuze 1988:ii). It is also of interest that, despite propounding a philosophy of 'pure immanence' in a manner I consider closely analogous to Clouts's and because of his own history of emergence from Marxist thought, Deleuze incorporates dimensions of political historicism which I think eventually do need to be included in a full and coherent ecological criticism. One aspect of this is the longest-term view imaginable, the last 10 000 years, over which period Deleuze and Guattari connect the emergence of human consciousness, and its sundry self-protecting stratifications, with the advance of global deforestation (see '10 000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals', Chapter 3 of *A Thousand Plateaus* [1987:39-74]).

While congruence with Clouts appears to me extremely powerful, Deleuze's analyses may yet be found limited or inappropriate in some respects. In the first place, as Bonta and Protevi note, for all their botanical terminology Deleuze and Guattari 'spend little time' on the actual space of the forest, and 'failed to theorize the forest as anything other than a human space and precursor to civilization'. Their conception of forest seems to have been based on the European plantation, this despite the fact that the highly complex 'holey space' of tropical rain forest, with its 'high ratio of flow to order' and its 'far-from-equilibrium crisis state' might, as Bonta and Protevi suggest, happily embody Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'rhizome' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:88)[4]. Deleuze defines the rhizome as 'a decentred multiplicity or network'. The term is derived from ecology, 'denoting the zone of contact of plant roots, micro organisms and other soil elements' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:136). The rhizome is listed as possessing a number of qualities which I find powerfully enacted by Clouts's poetry, even those about plantation exotics. Amongst rhizomic qualities are

> connection (all points are immediately connectable); heterogeneity (rhizomes mingle signs and bodies); multiplicity (the rhizome is 'flat' or immanent); … and decalcomania (the rhizome is not a model like the tree, but an 'immanent process') (Bonta & Protevi 2004:136-7; cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987:7-12).

Each of these aspects deserves finer explanation than I have space for here, but the tenor will be clearer from these examples of rhizomes: 'the unconscious … the river, the fire-ant, kudzu[5], mycorrhizal fungi, gossip,

[4] It is perhaps worth noting recent strong arguments for distinguishing natural *forests* from human-created, regularised, harvestable *plantations*, though it's doubtful that this distinction, with its associated ethical judgements, can always hold.

[5] This apparently approving mention of a runaway North American alien plant will particularly gall the biological, anti-imperial purists; but it's also a hint of an anti-plantation strand in Deleuze's thought, one perhaps not fully worked out by him, but adumbrated in the opening pages of Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

sexuality, the rain forest'. On another level, the rhizome is simply 'the milieu of things, of beings' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:137). The congruence of many of these with Clouts's concerns is clear: in Deleuze's 'mantra of the rhizome [which] is "and … and … and" without beginning or end' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:137), one is irresistibly reminded of Clouts's line, 'More, More, the River of Night' ('Intimate Lightning', 1984:69).

But unlike Clouts, Deleuze generally uses the image of the tree and of 'arborescence' as a model for hierarchization and stratification, precisely the antithesis of the rhizome. In a certain sense, then, I will suggest that Clouts goes beyond Deleuze by performing exactly such a decentring, an evocation of multiplicity and immanence, amongst exactly those plantation trees that Deleuze accepted as norm-governed or 'stratified'. Many of Clouts's poems evoke images of leaves, trees, fruits and roots, and a number of important ones depict a rather disembodied, or disembodying, speaker—a 'body without organs' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:149ff)—apparently literally burying 'himself' amongst the dynamic motions of a tree (see especially 'The Avocado and the Sparrow', 'North Wind', and 'To the Subtlety of the Plane of Mind' [1984:21, 70, 136]).

In his use of arboreal imagery[6], then, Clouts's fundamental aim is arguably to disrupt, primarily through startling metaphor, the tendencies within thought, life and expression towards the habitual and numbed. His tradition is not of the wire-strand fence (a perfect image for what Deleuze calls 'territorialization' and 'striation' together), but of the raindrops clinging to the fence; not of the shrub (the one instance where 'arborescence' in the Deleuzean meaning might fit) but 'dew on [the] shrub'. Dew, raindrops, grains, atoms, leaves, wind: these are the mobile, transient, multifaceted icons for Clouts's consciousness of being and belonging. These are Clouts's rhizomes. In their characteristic lack of narrative, their cross-hatching of metaphors, their deliberate mingling of 'signs and bodies', Clouts's poems seem designed to generate new multiplicities, to defy the

[6] Not only in arboreal imagery—one would like to see similar studies of rock, or wind, or birds—in Clouts's poems; or, even better, of how all of them intersect and work into and through one another via quasi-mystical confluences of colour and movement. But this is after all an essay about forests.

linear, and to meld and dissolve formerly accepted perspectives. They are what Deleuze called 'assemblages', that is, 'arrangements of bodies that provoke and regulate a matter-energy flow' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:54). As already noted, these arrangements necessarily 'regulate', because they are embedded in language, but they are also what Deleuze rather oddly calls 'machinic'[7]: they are expressions of that part of the 'Chaosmos', the perpetual flux of ordering and disordering forces, which Deleuze terms 'deterritorialization'; they are 'invitations or feelers that search out opportunities for the positive creation of fields of bodily action where the previous fit' of pre-existing assemblages and collective forms of enunciation 'breaks down … in ways that establish the conditions of new territories' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:54-5). They are each an example of what Deleuze, following Duns Scotus, calls 'haecceity': a freshly apprehended and compiled 'environmental assemblage', a 'set of conditions [which] treats spatio-temporal relations not as predicates of a thing … but as dimensions of multiplicities, components of the assemblage' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:94).

All this has profound implications for (and is based on profoundly interesting) preconceptions of the nature of consciousness and of the metaphysics of being, at least some of which are Spinozan in origin. I will try to bring some of these out through readings of the poems themselves, but let me close these introductory comments with a quotation from Spinoza himself:

> the mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. Hence it comes about that the order or linking of things is one, whether Nature be conceived under this or that attribute (2002:250).

Clouts was, I believe, trying to encapsulate in his poems this sense of oneness[8] which transcends the limited and limiting division between mind

[7] Not to be confused with 'mechanistic': 'machines', in Deleuze and Guattari 1987, are roughly those assemblages which form 'at the cutting edge of deterritorialization' (Bonta & Protevi 1004:107).

[8] This also Coleridgean, as is the title of Clouts's central collection, *One Life.*

and body, not to leave either behind, but in effect to reach transcendence *within* the processes of art, of living and reading, precisely as Spinoza had adumbrated. This is emphatically not a transcendence outside or beyond experience of the material and imaginal world, but is, moment by moment, actively constituted by it. As Claire Colebrook explains Deleuze's take on this:

> [T]ranscendence, or an outside to thinking, is *produced* through this drama …. This is a plane of immanence, a pure flow of life and perception without any distinct perceivers …. There is perception, and it is from this perception that the perceiver is formed. This perceiver can then go on to form an image of itself as an 'I' in relation to some outside or transcendent world. Any truth or transcendence, any foundation or ground for experience, is always an event of experience …. Before 'the' subject of mind, then, there are what Deleuze refers to as 'larval subjects': a multiplicity of perceptions and contemplations not yet organized into a self. We can think of all of life as series of 'foldings', with each cell or organism being produced by creating an interior and exterior from the flow or milieu of life (Colebrook 2002:74-5).

This is close to Freya Mathews's conception of what she calls the 'ecological self', a conception of self not as a purely autonomous, self-regulating entity ontologically independent of external stimuli, but as an individual 'whose autonomy and integrity are a function of its interconnectedness with its environment' (Mathews 1994:108). Nowhere, perhaps, is this more avidly expressed by Clouts than in 'Something Precious' (1984:39), where the arrival at its final statement—'You will be only yourself'—is predicated on an infolding of interflowing consciousness of all the multiplicities of the milieu, not all of which can be at once available to any defined 'perceiver'.

But back to forests. An obvious way in is to track the dynamics of Clouts's thinking through the two versions of his poem 'Through Cold Constantia Forest'. The first version begins with the central consciousness at once enveloped in and opened up to an ecological dynamism:

This massive creaking opens
chills and tugs the whole
of wakefulness
for miles around.

Day's pulsings cannot choose,
they take their answers,

Through draughty foliage
hunting the stones,
the wings of beetles, the shadowy hole
that long and wandering forests
have given my hat.

These pressures that spurt
their questioning cold on the cranium,
run right through me (1984:36-7).

Curiously, within this dialogue, this imbrications, the speaker then figures himself half-humorously as alien, 'landing on this planet', but in a manner which was 'foretold', just as the other energies within the planetary, cosmic and forested ecosystem were 'foreseen'. Against this sense of a cosmic destiny, the intricacies of the natural are closely observed, but not 'stratified' by scientific jargon or speciation ('draughty foliage', 'wings of beetles'). They are closer to the archetypal, are of an evolutionary piece with the grander motions of 'meteors', 'wind', 'stars'—and with the human presence which, in momentary but euphoric separateness, paradoxically registers its fundamental unity:

Up, up and the flight was foreseen.
I know this oxygen lightness
I know this upward opening through meteors
this fiftieth-century darkness
interwoven…

The ‘pulsings’ and ‘pressures’ of the environment implicate the speaker in its energies: they ‘run right through me’, become ‘interwoven’, engage in processes of conversation; in a systole/diastole of ‘questioning’ and ‘answer’, they breathe ‘out and in/ and pause to take the human’. The poetic effort is implicate in this awareness, this new kind of knowing, an ‘upward opening through meteors’, so that ‘All poets are one poet / all words one subject’. (Would it be too fanciful to hear an echo of ‘metaphors’ in the word ‘meteors’?) The poem in its leaps across interpretative space, its internal cross-referencing, and the tenor of its metaphors, enacts the necessary oscillation of consciousness between awareness of the separate self, the ‘I’ that ‘exit[s]’ this space, and the sense beyond sense of interwoven wholeness.

In the second version of the poem (1984:113), this quasi-mystical evocation of immanence has become both more problematic and more grounded. The stars and meteors, and the slightly forced notion of alienation, are gone. The structure of the poem is more orderly, a stanzaic version of the one-line aphoristic style of Clouts’s best poems. Because they are not particularly forestry, I do not deal with these poems here, but I think the ‘one thought one line’ poems such as ‘The Situation’ (1984:71), ‘Residuum’ (1984:78) and ‘Dew on a Shrub’ (1984:88), exemplify more than any others the reverberatory conjunction of Deleuzean striations and deterritorializations working magnificently together. At its simplest, it is just the interminable sway of order and disorder, as depicted intimately in this poem’s opening:

> Through sudden thickets
> the dust and the flame is
> pond water broken
> into rings minutely
>
> by dragonflies.
> I know this place
> as intimately
> as my life, and twigs are stirring.
>
> Songs for a golden

age are sung all
day at the coast and far
inland by shadows.

An old, old
obduracy
opens:
this pressure runs right through me.

All absolute notions
descend and gather
compressed
stone after stone

and the wind rises
jarring as
in the enigma
of the deadest hours.

This version ends with the stanza that opened the first version:

This massive creaking
opens chills and tugs
the whole of wakefulness
for miles around.

It's awakening, vivifying if not entirely comforting, still within the limits of human cognisance. The poet's statement,

I know this place
as intimately
as my life,

sounds less mystical than just familiar and complete. There are stronger hints of the rigours of the natural world: 'pond water broken'; the wind is 'jarring'; a pine branch

> pulls apart
> the spider web's
> last moment.

While a certain utopianism is not absent— 'Songs for a golden/ age are sung all/ day'— there is a sense that what unifies our limited humanity with our ecosystems is more of an 'enigma', an 'old old obduracy'. Nature 'opens', so that its 'pressure runs right through me', but the wild ease of the first version is ameliorated. (There is something here of the poet's complaint elsewhere: 'The eye will not go in' ['Within', 1984:80].) Nevertheless, the belonging is more rooted, more contained, more of a haecceity:

> all absolute notions
> descend and gather
> compressed
> stone after stone.

Here, as so often, 'mind' and 'body' and 'world' are literally compressed into a new unity, a 'plane of consistency' as Deleuze calls it, an instantiation of transcendence.

The two versions of the poem reveal, as it were, two slightly different phases of the difficult process of 'deterritorialization' and its ever-present counter-force, reterritorialization, or the resistance of the given to the creation of new perceptual experience. The differences in 'takes' on the forest scene show how Clouts is grappling with age-old existential issues: how we can know the world; how it is that the self seems at once embedded in and separable from the world; what the role is of subject-perspective in our representation of the world to ourselves. Above all, how is one to understand the conflicted atomisation of the unity of all existence, a unity we know must pertain at some level but which resists, is atomised by, the equipment of interpretation? (Deleuze draws strongly on Bergson's insight that:

> to perceive consists in condensing enormous periods of an infinitely diluted existence into a few more differentiated moments of an intense life, and in this summing up a very long history. To perceive means to immobilize, quoted in Pearson 1999:34).

It is the very job of poetry, I would say, to provide such suggestive condensations, an intense life. In numerous poems and lines (maybe all of them: I will use only examples of trees here), Clouts presents highly compacted aspects or phases of inevitably variable responses to these questions. In 'Mile of Grace', for instance, he presents a moment of apparent unity with those trees that 'walk with' him in an easy companionship which is, in its very process, transcendent. In 'The Cutting of the Pines' (1984:60), he adopts a converse angle, as it were, and reveals a regretful, regrettable instance of destructive divisiveness between humans and trees. In several images of mirrors—like the shiny surfaces of avocado leaves—he images both the obdurate impenetrability of the botanical 'other', and the possibility of being mirrored in a new unity, or what a Spinozist might call a 'parallelism' (though Spinoza never used the word, Deleuze does). The idea of the mirror includes both unifying and dividing aspects, the 'real' and the 'virtual'[9] working together, neither excluding nor eliding one another, consciousness reflected back and forth between the unitary and the dual.

'Eucalyptus' (1984:30-31) is a poem which more finely enacts Clouts's thinking on these issues (if 'thinking' is even the right word). I will start with the section in which mirrors feature (since many of Clouts's poems are deliberately non-linear, it hardly matters where we begin). Section 3 opens:

> Of the mind in the breadth of its coastal atmosphere,
> of eucalyptus beaten against the sky,
> of the sea linking its wiry maze of cicada,
> and stone suns washed with light within the sea,
>
> the copious mirrors burn and gladden me.

The grammar is tricky, itself non-linear, characteristically paradoxical. Technically, I suggest, the mirrors 'have', or hold, the mind, the eucalyptus, the sea; but there is no locus from which the mirror is being wielded, no

[9] 'Virtual' in Deleuze's vocabulary means not the non-real, so much as that regime of possibilities which emerges as a new 'plane of consistency' is created, is the realm of multiplicities.

hand holding it, no obvious point of view. It is not even that the mind is holding up a mirror to the scene, though that might be said to be part of it, but only *said*, which is to say constructed or abstracted after the event. The event of perception is multiple, 'copious', 'link[ed]' within the 'wiry maze' of this coastal 'assemblage'. It is difficult to say what is contained within what: it enacts what Bergson called 'reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation' (quoted in Pearson 1999:33). Mind is contained within atmosphere, but only in a certain conception of possibility; in another sense all the images are contained within the mind of the speaker (or reader)—except that such a mind and such a speaker cannot be located outside the experience, which is the 'I saw' of the opening line of the poem. These possibilities are, to use Merleau-Ponty's word, reversible. There are 'stone suns' within the sea: is it reflections of the sun mirrored on the sea's surface, or stones shaped and bright as suns under the water's surface? Both, probably, but what is being held within what cannot be settled. Similarly, the 'wiry maze' of the cicadas' sound, the central image of Section 2:

> The purity of summer
> issuing through the leaves
> spread eucalyptus
> hot and pungent, meshed
> with the wavering essence
> of grass, dustbrown.
> And the singeing clangour flew,
> everywhere ringing
> and summoning,
> dwelling revealed
> in the missile cicada
> that tangled the sky into strings
> of relentless strings of sounds.
>
> In your wiry maze,
> cicada, the summer
> began.
>
> Cicada,

cicada,
this grass eucalyptan
haze, this reverberant shimmer
began,
and the desultory moods,
whose mission is light.

This is a version of Deleuze's 'holey space', in which subversion of the striated normative forces can occur, in which a sound akin to light at least momentarily permeates everything, subsumes and synaesthetically affects all other aspects of the assemblage. Thus, as in Deleuze's philosophy, even 'non-organic life … escapes the strata and is implicated in transversal modes of communication … that cut across the evolution of distinct phyletic lineages' (Pearson 1999:154). Light speaks[10].

Hence throughout the poem is a sense of an underlying unitary energy, figured as light, though it ends up being not only that ('light', too, is 'only' an image). Connected with light is a lexicon of 'conventional' transcendence: 'purity', 'blue', 'paradisiacal', 'mission', 'essence'. Nowhere, however, is this hint of the mystical permitted to rest in sentimental detachment: in every line, these words are shackled to others whose tenor is bodily, temporal, and dynamic. The last line is just one case in point: 'time's papery essence shaken into the light'. In short, in this chaosmos of multiplicity everything is linked to everything else: 'innumerable', 'invisible', 'plural', 'inhabiting', 'countering', 'mottled' [remember Hopkins?], 'meshed', 'tangled', 'reverberant', 'desultory', 'mashed', 'fuse[d]'. Moreover, much of the process seems difficult, even destructive. If fire, another prominent image, might be said to work as a Deleuzean rhizome, it also results in ash:

Here where the mashed beams fuse the trodden grass
birds walk into the air and move about
heedlessly into the sparser regions, where
the scheme of summer swelters moist and blue.

[10] Cf. the poem 'The Light was a Word' (1984:43).

> The nerve of space rides gently through my hair.
>
> Lowering out of the sun they fly back black
> in the cindwers of a ragged moment burned
> in the mind and showering its ash
> broad on the stippled ocean, ragged birds…

There are other tough processes in train, 'tasking the knobbled ground', not only within some putatively objective natural eco-realm of cyclical creation-and-destruction, but 'in the mind' making sense of it all. Another lexical set includes 'pestered', 'meddle', 'pungent', 'singeing', 'missile', 'relentless', 'beaten', 'ragged'—none particularly positive, some decidedly aggressive. This is far from some delusory, disembodied transcendentalism, but a transcendence-within, a transformation and extension of the initial 'I' from one space into another, and back.

The 'geophilosophy' of space is again a key element here. The poem begins with (in limited physicality) the speaker looking out onto the blue Atlantic through the pointed leaves of a eucalyptus tree (and the elongated shapes of the leaves are admirably and unmistakably invoked). But in fact it is not so much the shapes of the leaves themselves that are being spoken of, so much as the spaces between and beyond: the vision of the 'float of horizon' is structured by, pointed at by, counter pointed by the more solid and proximate leaves of the tree—but is not ultimately confined by or to them. Nor can consciousness of the 'beyond' be separated from the leaves: I am reminded of one of my favourite Clouts lines: 'At the vanishing point of grass the air is pricked' ('Pathways', 1984:140). The here and the beyond, and our definitions of either, are interdependent and transitory, rustling and changing.

Further, initial conceptions of space mutate into other conceptions. The shapes of the eucalyptus leaves are finally mirrored in, and transformed into the shapes of birds' wings, flying away and then back in successive 'vectors of escape' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:106), and those further into flakes of black ash. Our discernment or imposition of 'lines of flight' (another particularly apposite Deleuzean phrase in this context) has to be recognised as only one of multiple ways of seeing or mapping the progression of things, however: this is neatly captured in this poem by the contrast (almost

symbiosis) of the image of summer on the one hand 'enter[ing] the world' and then, in contrast, 'issuing through the leaves'. So it is, too, in Spinozist fashion, that one cannot discern where mentality or mind begins and body or world ends, though one can, if one so wishes, figure it one way or the other. But every line of this poem enacts Clouts's conviction that Spinoza was right to reject a simplistic causal connection between actions of the mind and actions of the body: there is only experience, and to relate the experience in language is to create a new experience again. Clouts's task on this 'knobbled ground' was to enact the haecceity of experience itself—and this is a deterritorialized 'image of "pure affect": there is a sensation that is not referred to any specific body or place' (Colebrook 2002:58). Even as it arises from a locality and an ecosystem, it is not *the* ecosystem; it is not even a representation of *an* ecosystem, but something much more far-reaching; a transcendence into a re-formed ecosystem, a geophilosophy of dynamism or becoming. Clouts's line puts it best: 'The nerve of space rides gently through my hair' (1984:31).

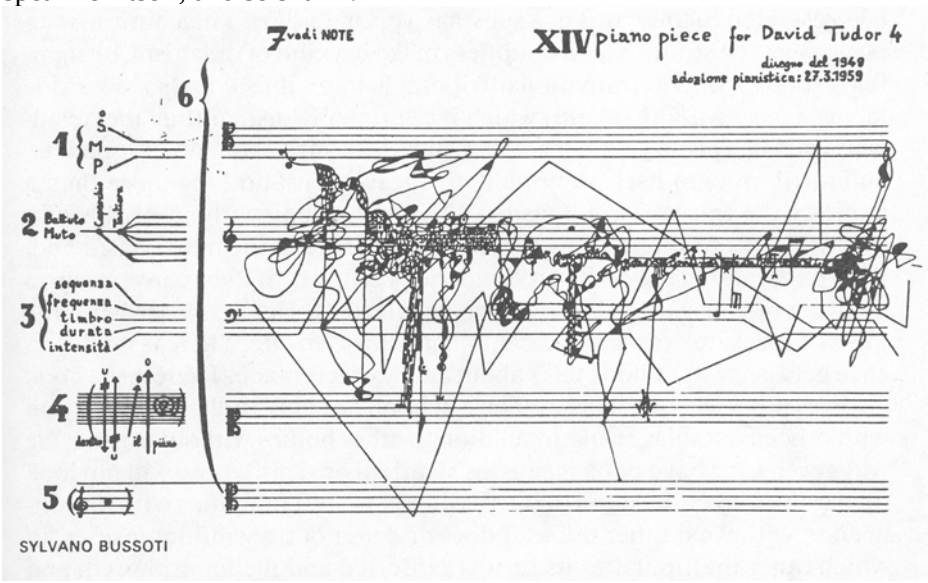
The experiential manner of Clouts's poetry places him firmly, I believe, within a phenomenological tradition, even within what has more recently been characterised as 'eco-phenomenology' (Brown & Toadvine 2003). Deleuze and Guattari are not always easily assimilated to the phenomenological tenor as exemplified by Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but I am not alone in scenting connections (see Casey 2003). Deleuze seems to me to offer methods of criticism based on a

> description of experience [as] an attempt to return to the 'things-themselves' rather than simply taking for granted higher-level, culturally sedimented idealizations and abstractions that often pass for a historical metaphysical discoveries (Brown & Toadvine 2003:4).

Because such experience is geophysically and historically rooted and contingent, we have here a methodology upon which (despite the 'foreign' location and nationality of these philosophers) a locally-developed ecocritical practice might be founded. But, as Deleuze and Guattari's own comments on how to read their book *A Thousand Plateaus* intimates, the only non-reductive response to a poem is another poem. So it is appropriate

to end with one final example.

On one of his many walks through forests, Clouts must have found an old iron gate thrown or fallen down across a stream. The poem ‘Under the Gate’ (1984:90) encapsulates so much of what I have been drawing from Deleuze that it deserves more complete analysis than I can provide here. In its conjunction of the rigid, gridded shape of the gate, framing and counter pointing the flow of the stream through it, with water’s uncontainable variation, the poem’s imagery exactly enacts in words a diagram with which Deleuze and Guattari open *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987:3). They permit it to speak for itself, and so shall I.



Let me close by quoting the first (and best) part of ‘Under the Gate’, pointing out only how the turbulence and ‘terror’ of an apparently unwelcome presence ultimately ‘cleanses well, I think’. The Deleuzean ‘striation’ of the gate’s impeding bars becomes integral to a conflictual but transcendent, finally beneficent awareness of the overall flow of life:

Watery ratgate iron
fallen across stream stones

shuts a part of each pinned cloud,
whose runged and pebbled whale
piles monstrous bubbles moiled with leaves
against the bony bars.
Erect oak-water also at this spot is marred.
My enemies dock here,
they crowd and barricade; I hear
the hustle in my soul of fears that rot
the hinges of my reason.
Flow,
clear spumes of heaven; flow,
sperm-saturated beauty.

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Department of English
Rhodes University

Identity, Place and 'The Gaze' in *The Woodlanders* by Thomas Hardy and *dream forest* by Dalene Matthee

Pat Louw

> The unalienated lover of nature inhabits; the alienated lover of nature gazes (Kerridge 2001:134).

Introduction

Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Woodlanders* is set in Wessex, England, towards the end of the nineteenth century and Dalene Matthee's novel, *dream forest* is set in the Knysna forest of South Africa some fifty years later. Both novels describe people who are closely associated with forests and who make their living from working with trees. Hardy, in his 'Preface' to the Wessex edition of *The Woodlanders*, published in1912, wrote:

> I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory, and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life (1986:443).

Matthee could probably be said to have had a similar aim. She has written numerous novels which describe the lives of the woodcutters of the Knysna forest. *dream forest* was originally published in Afrikaans in 2003 (with the title *Toorbos*), while Hardy's was first published in 1887. Placing these two novels in a comparative framework makes one immediately aware of the differences between them, but also of some surprising similarities. Their use of language is very different, but it is interesting to compare the way each

depicts the relationship between identity and place. The comparison illuminates the distinctive features of each novel and illustrates the narrative strategies used by each novelist.

Socio-Historical Context

It is important to note that in England there used to be a distinction between woodland and forest. According to Richard Pogue Harrison, woodland in medieval times was an area which could be farmed by the people whereas a forest was an area which had been set apart for the use of the King:

> A 'forest', then, was originally a juridical term referring to land that had been placed off limits by a royal decree. Once a region had been 'afforested', or declared a forest, it could not be cultivated, exploited, or encroached upon. It lay outside the public domain, reserved for the king's pleasure and recreation (Harrison 1992:69).

The King's recreation was of course the Royal Hunt, which also served certain political functions. Later, large sections of the King's forest were sold and a class of 'landed gentry' emerged, especially after the Enclosure Acts of 1750-1860. In Hardy's time, most of the Woodlands he refers to would have been privately owned:

> Hardy's Woodlands—stretching South and East from Melbury Osmund (the original Great Hintock) would have mainly belonged to the Ilchester family of Melbury park (Great Hintock House) (Fincham 2008:3).

Under certain circumstances the common people were allowed to use or lease part of the woodlands to farm (Morgan 2008:4).This meant that woodlands were partly cultivated: they were pastoral rather than wild, indigenous trees being interspersed with apple orchards.

In comparison, the Knysna forest can be said to be mainly a wilderness area where 'an indigenous elephant population roams freely' (Cloete 2002:4). The felling of trees began in about 1788 in order to supply timber to the Cape and later for railway sleepers and wagon wheels:

> With the beginning of the Great Trek in 1835 the demand for wagon wood and structural timber reached unprecedented heights (Von Breitenbach 1972:38).

The woodcutters did not lease the land but lived by selling wood to the timber merchants:

> They were tough, independent, skilled men who, in spite of the pitiful living they derived from their labours, steadfastly refused the subservience, as they saw it of being in employment for a wage (Wilson 1971:37).

Although there were small patches of cultivation within the forest where the woodcutters grew sweet-potatoes as their subsistence crop, the trees were indigenous. Some replanting of indigenous trees was attempted in areas where much of the forest had been destroyed, but in general it was a wild, rather than a cultivated space. Thus we see that the woodland area in England was a pastoral space which was privately owned and was leased to the woodland people, while the African forest was a wilderness area, controlled to some degree by the State authorities.

Mapping Forest and Woodland

The difference between Hardy's woodland and Matthee's forest is further suggested by the maps which are furnished at the beginning of each book. The map given in Matthee's novel shows only one town, Knysna, and a large blank area representing the forest. There are some names of places within the forest, but they are not towns or even villages. They serve as landmarks or gathering places within the wilderness area and are known mainly to the forest people, not the outside world. These people are clearly separated from the people in the town:

> They had a fierce pride in their skills and independence, and because of their isolation as a community several words were coined and still survive in forestry today (Wilson 1971:38).

In the novel, there is a distance between the forest people and the town. They are linked by a train but socially kept apart by prejudice and poverty. Very few of the townspeople venture into the forest, though tourists visit the area occasionally in order to see the forest people and the elephants.

The forested area in the map given in *The Woodlanders* is barely discernible from the surrounding towns and villages. It seems to occur in a densely populated area, as the map is crowded with names of places. Whereas people in the novel by Matthee live deep within the forest, the people in Hardy's novel live in Little Hintock, the village bordering on the woodlands. However, the inhabitants of this village are isolated from the larger towns in the vicinity and are regarded as being different. Rosemary Morgan points out that 'endogamy was practiced for so long in these villages, due to some vendetta between the two communities, that prolonged inbreeding led to homozygosity of the population' (2008:3). This was also true of the Knysna forest people: 'Forest people marry forest people. Only once in a while did it happen otherwise' (Matthee 2006:36). We therefore find that Hardy's and Matthee's communities have a good deal in common, in spite of the differences. Both are isolated from major towns and considered 'different' by the townspeople.

Identity, Place and 'The Gaze'

The concept of community is generally linked to the notion of belonging. This is not always linked to a locality as there are examples of occupational communities which do not have place as a commonality. However in the case of Hardy's novel, the naming of the community simultaneously evokes the natural environment and defines the people as a community which is set apart from other communities that do not share or belong to the same environment.

Similarly in Matthee's novel, there are many references to the 'forest people' who are set apart from the people from the towns. Their identity is constructed in relation to the forest: they live in the forest and work and suffer there. However, the construction of this 'forest' identity is not fixed. The border between that particular place and the 'outside' world is a porous one. Border crossings by the inhabitants of woodland and forest test the resilience of that identity. The forest or woodland space is also penetrated by

intruders who do not belong to that locality. This has repercussions for forest people as individuals and as members of a community.

My interest in these two novels is that I wish to compare the way in which the narratives construct identity in relation to place. My central focus is the role of the gaze; of looking and being looked at, in the construction of identity. The crucial idea is that the power derived from looking at the other is related to the extent to which the viewer belongs to the forest or woodland. In both texts the idea of belonging to place is highlighted by the way in which characters are allowed to see and be seen within the text. They are divided into two groups: insiders to the forest, and outsiders. The distinction between the insiders and the outsiders is revealed by means of 'the gaze'. Within these two extremes is a continuum of people who move in and out of the forest and belong at different times. Their identity in some cases is closely formed by the forest, which gives them a sense of belonging. However, this doesn't always give them power. At times their very closeness to the forest and to nature makes them vulnerable to outsiders. I argue that the narrative voice constructs power relations in the text by using the natural environment as a reference point and also by using 'the gaze' to enact these power relations. To go further, the gaze between different subjectivities within the text operates to alert the reader to divisions and barriers between different groups. These can be human or non-human groups.

Ecofeminist and Ecocritical Theory

I will be combining a number of discourses in this analysis. In both feminist and ecocritical discourse, attention has been given to the power of vision and the way in which knowledge is gained by the 'disembodied' eye (Haraway 1991:189). To observe without being observed is to have power over the object of one's observation (Louw 2006:149). I will be using some aspects of spectatorship theory to demonstrate the complexity of the power relations of looking. In some cases the viewing relationship is gendered and voyeuristic where the man is the viewer and the woman is the object of his viewing pleasure without her being aware of it. For Donna Haraway, the notion of objectivity brings with it negative associations of racism and sexism, using 'the conquering gaze from nowhere' (1991:188). She describes this gaze thus:

> The gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claims the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation (1991:188).

I am using this feminist perspective to describe power relations within the texts but also the power relations between text and reader. I will also be using some aspects of social-constructionist ecofeminist theory. This theory integrates the domination of nature with social conflicts, including but not limited to racial discrimination, gender oppression, and class hierarchies' (Ewing 2003:131). While the domination of nature is one aspect which is strongly evident in the two novels mentioned above, this is not the only way in which nature is represented in these narratives. The domination of nature implies that the power struggle between man and nature is being won by man. It focuses on the exploitation of nature. However, in both novels we also see a corresponding power in nature to overcome and destroy man.

By using an ecocritical perspective, I hope to go beyond the mode of literary criticism that reads setting only as metaphor. Bennett states:

> If ecocriticism has taught us anything, it has taught us to view 'settings' not just as metaphors but as physical spaces that inform, shape, and are shaped by cultural productions (2001:197).

In a narrative there is an ongoing dialectical relationship between identity and place as the narrative voice allows certain subjectivities to be constructed and changed as the narrative unfolds. James Tyner, a cultural geographer, sees landscape functioning as a medium through which subjectivity can be constituted. He writes: 'It is a matter of *who* we *are* through a concern of *where* we *are*' (2005:261). Tyner is connecting the construction of identity with a territorial reference point. This is particularly relevant in the case of belonging to a group.

'The Gaze' in the Opening of *dream forest*

In *dream forest* there is a strong emphasis on being seen and being watched. In the opening sentence Matthee establishes an intimate relationship between

her main character, Karoliena, and her environment: 'As she walked through the forest she suddenly realized that there was an elephant watching her from the thicket' (2004:1). In one sentence Matthee evokes the wildness of the forest: a space with its thickets and deep undergrowth which is extensive enough to provide a habitat for elephants—a far cry from Hardy's Woodland. The girl is alert to the visual and auditory signals of the forest: she is able to distinguish the shape and colour of the elephant from the foliage of the bush and can recognize the call of the lourie which is meant to be a warning to the elephant of the approach of a human but which works conversely to warn the human of the presence of the elephant.

The watching of the human by the animal is a curious reversal of the more usual spectatorship sport of game-watching. Karoliena is the object of the animal's surveillance but she is familiar with this environment and knows what to watch for and when to wait. There is a reciprocity of seeing and being seen with regard to the elephant because she and the elephant are both aware of each other. They are equal opponents in the sense that they are each eyeing the other and taking care not to cross each other's paths. This could be an example of the type of encounter between a human and nature that Donna Harraway seems to promote:

> Historically specific human relations with 'nature' must somehow—linguistically, ethically, scientifically, politically, technologically, and epistemologically—be imagined as genuinely social and actively relational; and yet the partners remain utterly inhomogeneous (2001:3).

Karoliena is completely, actively involved in sharing this environment with the animal and there is an awareness of each other on both sides. They are completely 'inhomogeneous', but yet relational. She does not have the advantage or the protection of a motor vehicle from which to survey the animals and is therefore denied the safety of the game-park tourist. In the case of looking at animals in a zoo or in a wild life film, there is an unequal power relationship as the human is the unseen voyeur, watching from a safe distance. John Berger points out that the capacity of the human eye is extended considerably by modern technology in photography which enables humans to see things about animals that they would not normally be able to see:

> Animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away they are (1980:14).

His argument that the closer we come to the animal by intrusive camera techniques, the further away the animal is from us seems paradoxical, but it must be put into the context of the power relations inherent in the act of viewing. Karoliena has none of these advantages but also none of the alienation it brings. She gives and receives the practice of watching, thereby proclaiming her membership of this biotic community and demonstrating her inhabitation and sense of belonging in the forest. This can also be related to the notion of 'anotherness' which is a term used by Patrick Murphy to describe a way for a human to relate to the non-human world which is different from the 'othering' of the alienated watcher of nature. 'Ecology and ecocriticism indicate that it is time to move towards a relational model of 'anotherness' and the conceptualization of difference in terms of 'I' and 'another', 'one' and 'I-as-another' (1998:40).

'The Gaze' in the Opening of *The Woodlanders*

Hardy's novel opens with a man walking through the woodland but, unlike Karoliena, he is not familiar with the environment. He is an outsider who is bent on finding a particular woodland girl, Marty South. Hardy makes it clear that this man is a stranger by raising the question of belonging at the outset:

> It could be seen by a glance at his rather finical style of dress that he did not belong to the country proper; and from his air, after a while, that though there might be a sombre beauty in the scenery, music in the breeze, and a wan procession of coaching ghosts in the sentiment of this old turnpike-road, he was mainly puzzled about the way (Hardy 1986:42).

He has neither the knowledge of the geography nor the history of the place. He does not 'inhabit' the forest in the sense that Gary Snyder uses the word

'inhabitation'. Snyder's idea of 'inhabitory peoples' (1977:59) are people such as American Indians who have a sense of the sacred places in the land from a long association with its people and a deep and intimate connection with the local ecosystem.

Hardy uses the narrative technique of positioning the man as a spectator, looking in at the young woman as she works by the light of her evening lamp. This gives him a predatory aspect as he looks in through the open windows of people's houses without them knowing he is watching. He is a threatening presence because of the power of his secret watching and intruding on the girl's privacy. Donna Haraway writes, 'Vision is *always* a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices' (2001:192). In this case there is no equality in seeing as there was in the case of Karoliena and the elephant. Marty South is presented as an innocent victim—unsuspecting and open as she has her attention intently fixed on her work. Her association with nature at this point makes her vulnerable to the 'outsider'. The man is a barber and he wants to cut her hair in order to make a wig for a rich local woman. Marty's hair is described in terms of the richness of nature:

> She had but little pretension to beauty, save in one prominent particular—her hair.
>
> Its abundance made it almost unmanageable; its colour was, roughly speaking, and as seen here by firelight, brown; but careful notice, or an observation by day, would have revealed that its true shade was a rare and beautiful approximation to chestnut.
>
> On this one bright gift of Time to the particular victim of his now before us the newcomer's eyes were fixed (Hardy 1986:48).

This encounter encapsulates the way in which nature and the people belonging to the forest are threatened by outsiders or newcomers who, because they have money, can force people like Marty to give up their natural treasures. It could perhaps be read in postcolonial terms as a metaphor for the colonial encounter and the commodification of natural resources. The beauty of the colour derives from the transition from the dull and neutral 'brown' to the rich lustre of 'chestnut', signifying both the texture and brightness of her hair and her close association with trees. Her

hair symbolizes the force and vitality of nature as it has a life of its own, being described as 'unmanageable'. His project is to tame nature, manage it, bring it under his control but in the process turn it into something artificial and lifeless in order to enable someone with money to pretend that it belongs to her. Questions of belonging here become twisted and broken as what belongs to Marty is taken and given to someone else by people who do not belong. The fine balance of nature is broken because of the inequality of power relations, enacted by the gaze of the invisible onlooker.

'Outsiders' and 'Insiders' in *dream forest*

In *dream forest* there are also outsiders to the forest who come as tourists to 'see' not only the forest and the elephants, but also the forest people. They ask questions about whether the forest people are wild, and they seem to put them on an equal level with the animals. They are what Richard Kerridge calls 'alienated observers' (2001:134) of nature. They want to satisfy their curiosity about these hidden people and animals and the implication is that they themselves are superior, 'civilized' beings in comparison who are above scrutiny. When they come to the forest it is always in passing—they make it clear that they have a good life elsewhere. This can be seen when Karoliena sits near some strangers on a train journey to the forest:

> When Karoliena sat down on the bench furthest away from them, the strangers stared at her curiously and one of the women whispered something to the village woman behind her hand.
>
> 'One of the forest children', the village woman said loudly, nose in the air. Then she added: 'Poor whites. An enormous problem'.
>
> 'How sad', the strangers muttered sympathetically (Matthee 2006:7).

The writer employs a narrative technique of shifting positionality here, as the reader is shown how the 'outsiders' see Karoliena, and then we are told that she feels crushed by the term 'poor white' (2006:8). It is a label which is imposed on the forest community and which places them in an inferior position in relation to the townspeople. By changing the perspectives on

Karoliena we are made aware of the way in which her 'forest identity' is threatened by the outside world.

Not only the tourists, but also visitors from the Carnegie Commission into poverty, come to the forest in search of the people who live there. The Carnegie people seem to be blind to the possibility that the label, 'poor whites' could be offensive and degrading to the forest people who are immediately placed in a situation of being 'othered' by them. They are also blind to the real problems confronting the people of the forest. Many of these people's problems are caused by the colonial Government and the buyers of the wood. The forest people explain that they are put under strain by the Government, who try to control the cutting of the wood by making the woodcutters register, involving a payment that is difficult for them to afford. They also restrict the trees that they allow the woodcutters to cut while at the same time demanding wood:

> We're not even allowed to take a splinter from some of the sections because the forest has suddenly become a reserve that the government wants to conserve for people coming from outside to see what a forest looks like (1986:26).

The tyranny of being looked at is felt sharply by the forest people whose livelihoods are threatened by the action. The Carnegie Commissioners however refuse to 'see' and understand these problems, even when they are told about them by the forest people. The identity of a whole group of people is constructed through the way outsiders 'see' them.

Resistance to 'Outsiders' in *dream forest*

However, within the forest group there are voices of resistance. Karoliena Kapp, for instance, is aware of the tourists' belittling attitude but she exploits them by appearing to be 'wild' and pretending that she cannot understand English and then earning money or food by acting as a guide and taking them into the forest. She thus superficially accepts the way the tourists 'see' her and the identity that they impose upon her, but she turns it to her advantage and manages to retain her sense of self-worth in spite of this perception of the forest people as 'backward'—a perception that

imposes a group identity on them. Once these 'outsiders' are in the forest they are in Karoliena's territory and she is empowered by her 'situated knowledge' (Haraway 1991:183) of the environment. At one point the Earl and Countess of Clarendon visit the forest and their journey through the forest is blocked by an elephant, lying down in the road ahead of them. Karoliena helps the Countess to get out of the car and overcome her fear:

> She stopped at the door on the Countess's side, put out her hand and carefully opened the door while looking into the Countess's eyes. They were like a doll's eyes and they were terrified …. She stood there, holding the woman's eyes with her own, telling them not to be afraid (Matthee 2006:217).

Here the power of the tourist's gaze is overturned and it is the forest girl whose gaze holds power over the tourist whose eyes become as artificial and lifeless as a doll's. Because of her familiarity with the forest, Karoliena is able to control the situation, while the royal couple is powerless in spite of their wealth.

Border Crossings in *dream forest*

The conflict between the town people and the forest people is reflected in the inner conflict which Karoliena experiences with regard to her identity. The writer conveys her perspective:

> There was a bridge between the world of the forest and the outside world which was sometimes difficult to cross. It was like knowing you had to wake up but were reluctant to open your eyes (2006:2).

This relates to the title of the novel and suggests that the forest and the outside world represent different levels of reality for Karoliena.

There is enormous pressure on Karoliena to leave the forest when she has an opportunity after Johannes Stander from the town asks her to marry him. However, she fails to reconcile her forest identity with her town identity. One of the townswomen says that,

> she always knew it was not going to be easy to get the forest out of the girl that Johannes Stander had landed her with (Matthee 2006:89).

Karoliena marries Johannes, but returns soon afterwards to the forest. We read:

> It was like being released from a trap that was strangling her; escaping from it enabled her to breathe easily again (Matthee 2006:90).

Later, when Johannes goes to the forest to try to persuade her to come back, she says, 'In the forest I'm real. With you, I'm a lie' (Matthee 2006:203).

It is the power of Karoliena's attachment to the forest that results in her being unable to sustain her 'outsider' identity. She is given access to the secrets of the wildest and most mysterious parts of the forest. Again this experience is mediated through sight: she *sees* the mystical tree sprites emanating from a tree during a thunder storm. She is also bound to the forest community in terms of sight: she *sees* the plight of the forest people and is asked by the social worker nurse to 'keep an eye' on them. She belongs to the forest and its people and they in turn open their secrets to her. She is what Kerridge calls the 'unalienated lover of nature' (2001:134). It is only when it becomes clear that the forest people will have to leave the forest that she can take the decision to go back to the town.

Border Crossings in *The Woodlanders*

In Hardy's novel, Grace Melbury is a borderline or transition figure. Her father tries to get her to marry 'well' and to that end he sends her away to be educated. When she returns to her home, she seems to be like an outsider as the narrator tells us, 'she had fallen from the good old Hintock ways' (1986:84). Before entering her parents' house where they are waiting for her in the evening, she spends some time outside, watching them through the open window. 'Let us look at the dear place for a moment before we call them', she says (1986:85). In this way Hardy indicates that her identity is suspended between the insiders to the forest and the outsiders who are transient visitors to the place.

Grace marries the young doctor, Fitzpiers, who is a newcomer to Hintock. He first catches sight of her while she is passing and, later, he is able to identify her by seeing her in a lighted window one night as he passes her father's house. On both occasions she is unaware of his gaze and appears vulnerable and exposed. When they eventually do meet they have a complex exchange of seeing and being seen. She goes to his rooms to run an errand for her father's old servant and she finds him asleep. For a few moments she has the opportunity to observe him without his being aware of her. The power relations are however not reversed because Hardy, in a diabolical twist, shows her seeing Fitzpiers' reflection in a mirror, and in that mirror his eyes are open. It is as if he is watching her even when he appears to be asleep. The result is that she seems more vulnerable than ever to him, and indeed this is borne out in the narrative, as he marries her and then cruelly deserts her for someone richer and better connected. In other words, the way in which Grace sees and is seen by Fitzpiers is a significant foreshadowing of the plot.

The permeability of the border between insiders and outsiders is shown on another occasion when Fitzpiers, the newcomer, goes into the forest with his book and watches the workers in the woods. The narrative constructs him as an outsider because he has the leisure to read 'except when he looked up to observe the scene and the actors' (1986:185). He is outside the action but nevertheless joins the men when they have their tea. Melbury arrives with his daughter in his gig, and again Fitzpiers has the opportunity to observe her while she is unaware of him: 'He looked out towards the gig wherein Grace sat, her face still turned sunward in the opposite direction' (1986:185). Unlike Marty South, who is in the centre of the work, described as being 'encaged amid the mass of twigs and buds like a great bird' (1986:184), Grace is literally and figuratively at a higher level as she sits in the carriage. When the horse becomes restless she is alarmed and is quickly helped down by Fitzpiers. Because she was unaware of his gaze before that moment, his actions destabilize her and distress her, 'producing in her an unaccountable tendency to tearfulness' (1986:187). This shows us that figures of transition such as Fitzpiers have the power to destabilize and disrupt the forest community.

Shifting Perspectives

Insiders to the forest are not only made vulnerable to outsiders but are also liable to miss social opportunities because of their focus on the forest. Winterbourne, for instance, the forest man who hopes to marry Grace, fails to see her on the occasion mentioned above because his attention is so taken up by the surrounding woodlands. In fact he is observed by Grace and her father as they pass him in their carriage:

> Under the blue the orchards were in a blaze of pink bloom, some of the richly flowered trees running almost up to where they drove along. At a gate, which opened down an incline, a man leant on his arms regarding this fair promise, so intently that he did not observe their passing (1986:188).

Hardy draws our sympathy for Winterbourne as it is his attachment to his work and to the place that occupies him, unlike the doctor who doesn't really believe in his occupation. Both Winterbourne and Marty South are defined in relation to the work they do in the woodland. Hardy enables us to 'see' them as being part of the surroundings. As they work together planting trees, we read:

> Winterbourne's fingers were endowed with a gentle conjuror's touch in spreading the roots of each little tree, resulting in a sort of caress under which the delicate fibres all laid themselves out in their proper directions for growth (1986:106).

Marty, too, seems to have an extra-sensory perception with regard to the trees, as she says that she can hear them 'sighing' when they are put upright. This can be compared with Karoliena who helps Oldman Botha to grow little stinkwood trees to increase the supply in the forest. It is an activity which often fails, but they manage to coax the little seedlings to grow by talking to them (Matthee 2006:103).

These passages position us as readers in such a way as to have a favourable 'view' of the woodlanders and the forest people. However, this view is always changing. Kerridge maintains:

> The special value of Hardy to ecocritics is precisely in the way he does not separate place and person. He will not allow anything, place or person, to stabilize in meaning; its meaning is always the product of a shifting set of relations and always seen in the act of generation by those relations (2001:141).

An example of this can be found at the end of Hardy's novel, where we meet the barber again, and his words reiterate the way in which the forest people are seen by outsiders. He refers back to the incident which opened the novel:

> 'Ah—how's Little Hintock folk by now!' he cried before replying. 'Never have I been over there since one winter night some three year ago—and then I lost myself finding it. How can ye live in such a one-eyed place? Great Hintock is bad enough—but Little Hintock—the bats and owls would drive me melancholy-mad! It took two days to raise my spirits to their true pitch again after that night I went there. Mr Melbury, sir, as a man that's put by money, why not retire and live here, and see something of the world?' (1986:432).

Hardy catches the tone of every urban dweller who feels out of place and superior to people living in a rural area. Without realizing it, the barber reveals his own inadequacies as he says, significantly, 'I lost myself finding it'. Although he is referring to losing the way, there is on another level the sense of losing his urban identity for a while by being placed in a rural, forest environment. As he is a visitor for a short time, he cannot find a rural identity, and flounders in confusion and disorientation for some time before returning to his old self. Interestingly, he uses an image of sight in describing the backwardness of the woodland village: 'a one-eyed place'. Also mentioned are bats, associated with blindness. Only his town, Sherton Abbas, is considered to be 'the world', which in itself is ironic as it is not a place of any great size either.

As the reader's sympathies have been enlisted by the narrative in favour of the forest people, this perspective only focuses critical attention on the barber and other people like him. However, it also illustrates Hardy's narrative technique of constantly changing perspective on the forest and its people. Kerridge refers to this technique as placing the reader in 'multiple

and shifting positions' (2001:133).

Kerridge's analysis of Hardy's narrative technique can also be applied to Matthee's. Although the dominant perspective in this novel is given by a focus on Karoliena, many different positions are taken up in relation to both insiders and outsiders to the forest. Some of the forest people are shown to be narrow-minded and mercenary, for example, Karoliena's mother. Poverty and isolation sometimes leads to psychological breakdown, as in the case of the woman who becomes obsessed with a non-existent child. Outsiders are also sometimes shown in a positive light, for example, Mr Fourcade the botanist, who inspires Karoliena and enables her to make a living in the forest by facilitating an arrangement whereby she sells ghost moths to a collector in town. In this way, Matthee avoids a simplistic moral association of goodness with the forest people and badness with the outside world. Karoliena's struggle to negotiate her identity is seen in relation to both positive and negative aspects of both worlds.

Conclusion

Donna Haraway states:

> Positioning is … the key practice grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision, as so much Western scientific and philosophic discourse is organized. Positioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices (2001:133).

The imagery of vision in these two novels provides a way of accessing the forest communities and gives a key to the dynamic process of identity formation in relation to place. With this knowledge, however, comes responsibility, as Harraway suggests. The shifts in narrative focus alert one to the power relations between insiders and outsiders within the text, but also cause us as readers to assess our own position. Kerridge maintains that

> in Hardy's narrative it is the frequent shifting, in spatial and social terms, of the reader's perspective that brings to life such a sense of responsibility …. Each shift of the narrator's position asks us to reassess our own (2001:133, 134).

I would suggest that in both novels there is a shifting of the reader's perspective on the forest people. Kerridge writes:

> as Hardy became more successful, he grew increasingly determined to confront his readers with their complicity in the sufferings of his characters (2001:127).

In both novels, we find forest people being positioned as objects of silent, unseen observers and they respond to this gaze in different ways. In Matthee's novel the question of the suffering of the forest community is particularly pertinent, as their problems are described from many different perspectives and the reader cannot easily escape some sense of complicity.

The cultural geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, makes a humorous point as regards tourists: 'for there to be tourists there must also be colourful natives willing to be seen but not see' (2001:324). Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves as readers whether we are complicit in the sufferings of the forest people as well: do we, like the tourists want to 'look at' their secret lives by reading these novels? Do we share the tourists' gaze?

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Department of English
University of Zululand

Terror, Error or Refuge: Forests in Western Literature

Catherine Addison

I

The forest in Western literature and culture has often been perceived as existing in Manichean opposition to civilization, enlightenment or even morality. A history—both psychological and social—of this tradition is offered in Robert Pogue Harrison's compelling book, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (1992). Forests, according to Jungian psychology, generally symbolize the unconscious (Bishop 1995: 309; Progoff 1992:44); they are often full of frightening uncertainties and real dangers, reminding humans of the distant past of their species, when absence of rational understanding of the natural world left them at the mercy of cruel and mysterious forces. Since both Europe and North America were originally thickly wooded (Holmes 2000:83), forests were the cluttered and darkened spaces that had to be cleared in order to let in enlightenment and build the courtly city. Harrison cites as his earliest literary example the ancient epic of *Gilgamesh*, whose protagonist's first heroic act is to defeat the forest demon Huwawa, an action that represents the cutting down of a sacred cedar forest (Harrison 1992:14-18). According to Harrison, this destructive act has been endlessly repeated in Western history in order to protect civilization, for the forest is the Nietzschean home of Dionysos, the god of frenzy and dismemberment; it is the 'abyss of precivic darkness from which civilization is merely a deviation, and a precarious one at that' (1992:38). If future humans are to set about reversing the damage done by deforestation of the planet, this view of the forest will perhaps need to be revised.

An explorer or colonizer can project this view beyond the West's own margins, onto the space of the distant Other. Thus, in *Heart of Darkness*,

Joseph Conrad represents Africa in terms of a forest that is malevolent, seemingly impenetrable but requiring to be 'subdued':

> The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there…. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil (Conrad 1971:58-59).

According to Elleke Boehmer, the 'obsessive quality of Conrad's language' representing the forest reflects the author's anxiety at the inability of Western confidence to compass this Other or, in fact, to subdue it. Like many Europeans writing about places distant in space and type from the familiarities of home, Conrad resorts to the language of the sublime—not Longinus's sublime of 'excellence and distinction' but Edmund Burke's sublime of 'delight' in 'danger and pain' (Boehmer 2005:92; Longinus 1965:100; Burke 1844:52). The quoted passage is saturated with the sense of a terrifying unknown that is totally alien and yet familiar to the observer's own brutal and repressed racial memory. Though the African forest seems like an 'unknown planet', it is actually 'prehistoric': in 'taking possession' of it, its colonizers would re-enact an ancient and familiar moment of subjugation.

Chinua Achebe, reacting furiously to Conrad's Manichean portrayal of Africa as '"the other world" and the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization' (Achebe 1977:785), showed in *Things Fall Apart* one of the thriving, orderly human societies that existed beyond the trees blocking Conrad's view. Achebe's fictional community in this novel is called 'Umuofia', which significantly means 'People of the Forest'. Contradicting the nightmarish forest symbolism of *Heart of Darkness*, as Evan Mwangi (2004) explains, 'In the forests of Umuofia, there is a system of education, a rich philosophy, and sophisticated art, not to mention a complex religion and medical practice'. Of course the 'African village life and its richness' (Mwangi 2004) sustained in and by the forest in *Things Fall Apart* is itself

defined against a small area of 'evil forest' that focuses the villagers' own supernatural fears and repulsions (Achebe 1996:105). But this area does not really resemble the fearful forests of Western tradition; it is too limited to be called sublime. As Gillian Gane explains in her essay in this issue, since every village has its own evil forest, the taboo area is in a sense a domesticated, manageable evil. The virgin forest by which the villages are surrounded is the great provider for those who are energetic enough to use it properly. Achebe's is indeed a different forest from Conrad's.

Fortunately for future hopes for the environment, Conrad's is not the only type of forest depicted in Western culture or literature, either. Manichean binarism may be a very compelling model for perception and concept definition—probably having acquired extra prestige from modern computing, which is based on binary exclusionism—but it is not the only possibility in either case. I have written elsewhere about colonial texts that use the terms 'civilized', 'savage', 'white' and 'black' in ways that challenge the determinism of postcolonial theorists such as Franz Fanon and Abdul R JanMahomed, who claim that these terms exist in Manichean oppositions always favouring the colonizing power (Addison 2002:74-76; 1995:691-692; Fanon1986:132-138; JanMahomed 1985:82). Similar arguments may demonstrate that a forest need not be the evil antithesis of the court or the city. The Forest of Arden in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, for example, is shown as an ideal place of human habitation. And, if that text be seen as simply reversing the values while retaining the antithesis, a forest may be just a place where ordinary people work and make their living. Pat Louw demonstrates, in this issue, that some characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, like characters in *Things Fall Apart*, are naturalized inhabitants of a forest that supports and holds no terrors for them.

Instead of offering a unitary or binary scheme, this paper will divide its field into three. Although the number is not arbitrarily chosen, it is acknowledged as to some extent provisional. A gem may be cut in a variety of ways, and each style of cut will illuminate the stone differently. Another interpreter might choose four rather than three, for example, since a pastoral ideal could be understood as quite different in kind from an outlaw's refuge. In this discussion, however, the development of the ideal settlement from the sheltering refuge is traced as a seamless progression. European and North

American literature will be seen, then, as representing forests in three different ways.

Perhaps the most compelling is the primal view already introduced, named by Harrison 'The Shadow of Civilization', in which the forest is indeed contrasted to the city, court or other built environments, including eventually that place called 'home' by the colonist or explorer. *Sir Gawain and the Grene Gome* and folktales such as 'Little Red Riding Hood' take this view. *Heart of Darkness* is, as mentioned, also in this tradition, though Harrison sees Conrad as a belated contributor, revealing 'an abyss at the heart of the savior civilization' (1992:140).

Secondly, the forest may be, as at the beginning of Dante's *Inferno* and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, a place of wandering or error, in which the straight path is lost. Here the forest is as full of danger and magic as in the first view, but it does not exist in direct opposition to a city or court; it is a place of trial in which the trees and their shadows help to confuse the protagonists' moral vision. The right path through or around the labyrinth does exist but it may not be evident—or immediately evident—to the wanderer or quester.

Finally, a forest may be a place of safety to which the outlaw or exile can flee and in which she or he can find solace, or even delight. Forests are represented in this way in the Robin Hood stories, in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, in Byron's, Felicia Hemans's, Henry David Thoreau's, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's representations of the North American 'forest primeval' and, to some extent, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

The discussion will conclude with some comments on how these three aspects of forests are interrelated and how they are, in fact, often all three present in forest literature, even in early texts.

II

Harrison's 'shadow' aspect is probably the most famous. The forest both hides and embodies the 'primitive terror' (Eliot 1944:39) that threatens civilized life, its consciousness and enlightenment. Christianity, whose 'light of the world' metaphor gives strength to its traditional opposition to the older, tree-worshipping religions, from the beginning set itself against the 'heathen groves' of these other beliefs (Schama 1995:227). A forest is dark

even in daylight and its trees, which may trammel and confuse the clearest pathway, always offer concealment to what we fear, in reality or in our imagination. A forest is a place where we are watched by the wild beast, the fugitive and the shapeless monster; it is the breeding ground of terrors and the mirror of the unconscious. William Blake writes of the 'forests of the night' as though the night itself possesses them. They function in his lyric as the dreamlike backdrop to the 'deadly terrors' of a 'Tyger' whose bright 'burning' is the result of almost unspeakable violence on the part of a creator of dubious morality:

> Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
> In the forests of the night,
> What immortal hand or eye
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
>
> ……
>
> And what shoulder, & what art,
> Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
> And when thy heart began to beat,
> What dread hand? & what dread feet?
>
> What the hammer? what the chain?
> In what furnace was thy brain?
> What the anvil? what dread grasp
> Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
>
> When the stars threw down their spears,
> And watered heaven with their tears,
> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb make thee? (Blake 1972:214).

Probably the most famous folktale using the forest's terrors as the main fulcrum of its plot is 'Little Red Riding Hood'. This story remains a kind of archetype for the Western or Westernized child, even more than those other forest tales—'Snow White', 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Sleeping

Beauty'. For Little Red Riding Hood's forest contains not only the possibility of getting lost or meeting dangerous strangers, it also includes and fosters that fearful predator from the European past, the wolf. Red Riding Hood is perhaps not sufficiently intimidated by the forest and its denizens. Instead of hurrying mutely past the wood's dark perils, she stops to talk to a wolf, thereby bringing disaster to herself and her family. However, the story as we encounter it today usually follows the shape of the Grimm brothers' version (called by them 'Little Red-Cap'), and therefore may be read in the context of their whole collection of tales, in which forests are not always hostile places. In fact, according to Harrison, forests in these tales are places more of restoration than of loss, and they 'represent the ancient unity of nature' towards which the Brothers Grimm, like so many of their Romantic contemporaries, yearned with a poignant nostalgia (Harrison 1992:170). Though the wolf manages to trick Red Riding Hood and devour her and her grandmother, another character who truly understands the forest and its ways—the Huntsman—emerges from among the trees to save them and wreak justice on the wolf, teaching the child a lesson in prudence and obedience at the same time.

Going back further than the Grimm brothers to the fourteenth century, we find in the anonymous narrative poem *Sir Gawain and the Grene Gome* a graphic evocation of the terrors and discomforts of the medieval forest. Gawain, leaving the civility of Arthur's court in fulfilment of his promise to find the Green Knight on New Year's Day, quests northward from Camelot to the 'wilderness of Wirale' (1970:701) where old, tree-revering religions are still practised (Phelps 1993:324) and where many enemies dwell:

> Sumwhile with wormes he werres, and with wolves als,
> Sumwhile with wodwos, that woned in the knarres,
> Both with bulles and beres, and bores otherwhile,
> And etaines, that him anelede of the high felle (1970:720-723).

But, for a seasoned warrior, not even the 'wodwos' are as difficult to bear as the elements and the outdoors in bitter winter:

> For werre wrathed him not so much, that winter was wors,
> When the cold clere water fro the cloudes shadde,

> And fres ere hit falle might to the fale erthe;
> Nere slain with the sleet he sleped in his irnes
> Mo nightes then innowe in naked rokkes,
> There as claterende fro the crest the cold borne rennes,
> And henges high over his hed in hard iisse-ikkles (1970:726-732).

This vivid realization of the hardships of sleeping outside in metal armour in winter is the background to the description of that 'castel the comlokest that ever knight aght' which appears to end Gawain's quest for the moment. Unlike the confusions of the wilderness, in which all is muddled together:

> hore okes ful huge a hundred togeder;
> The hasel and the haghthorne were harled al samen
> With rugh raged moss railed anywhere (1970:742-745)

the castle discriminates itself from its background in such clear outline and detail 'That pared out of papure purely hit semed' (1970:802). Everything inside, from the courtesy of the lord and lady to the 'cheier before the chimney [where] charcoal brenned' is the antithesis of the forest so triumphantly excluded in the warmth, brightness, richness of colour in garment and furniture and in the ceremoniousness of the lord's apparently Christian household, fasting luxuriously this Christmas Eve on

> fele kin fishes:
> Some baken in brede, sum brad on the gledes,
> Sum sothen, sum in sewe savoured with spices (1970:890-892).

So far *Sir Gawain and the Greme Gome* demonstrates in brilliant imagery the traditional antagonism between civilization and the savage forest, the fact that, in Harrison's words, 'the law of civilization define[s] itself from the outset over and against the forests' (1992:2). However, even so early a poem complicates this dichotomy and blurs its borders with ironies, not least of which is the fact that Gawain's most difficult trial occurs not among the trees but indoors, enclosed within the warm and apparently hospitable walls of his host's house. The greatest danger for Gawain as for many other protagonists is to be found not in the perilous journey or the

magical encounter in the forest glade but in the complex intrigues of civilized society. The Lady's temptation of Gawain while he lies in his bed in the tower each morning is not even of a directly sexual nature; she offers him witty conversation and gifts—the most fatal of which is not the kiss but the green girdle which she persuades him to believe is a talisman against physical harm. One of the unexpected morals of this tale is that the castle is more dangerous than the forest.

III

The second aspect of the forest, dependent on Christian morality, is as a place of wandering, or error. '*Errare*' means 'to wander', a concept invested with moral danger within the Bunyanesque allegory of a life journey for which there is only one cor*rect* path ('*rectus*' meaning both 'right' and 'straight'—the opposite of 'erroneous', 'mistaken' or 'astray'). Wandering is almost compulsory, amongst trees. In the famous opening lines of Dante's *Inferno*, the '*selva oscura*' or 'dark wood' is itself the antithesis of '*la diritta via*', the 'di*rect* way' that the poet has irretrievably lost:

> *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*
> *Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*
> *Che la diritta via era smarrita.*
> *Ahi quanto a dir qual era e cosa dura*
> *Esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte*
> *Che nel pensier rinova la paura!* (1970:1.1-6).
>
> (Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard it is to tell what that wood was, wild, ragged, harsh; the very thought of it renews the fear!) (Trans Singleton 1970:1.1-6).

Of course, this initial wandering is the first turn that, two cantos later, brings Dante to the gate of hell, where every hope must be abandoned by those entering, all of whom have supposedly strayed from '*la diritta via*' into a dark and savage wood (see Harrison 1992: 81-87).

Like *La Commedia*, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is an allegorical text, but its type of allegory is generally quite different and more multivalent than Dante's. However, early in the first canto of the first book, two of his characters follow Dante's example and stray into error in a forest. Their process of wandering is much more carefully unfolded than Dante's, whose loss of the 'straight way' is revealed as a sudden *fait accompli* in the first tercet of his poem. Redcrosse and Una's detour starts quite innocently when they seek shelter from a rainstorm under the branches and then, gradually, as they take increasing pleasure from the beauty and variety of trees, they find that their 'delight' has 'beguile[d]' their sense of direction:

> Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,
> Vntill the blustring storme is ouerblowne:
> When weening to returne, whence they did stray,
> They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,
> But wander too and fro in wayes vnknowne,
> Furthest from end then, when they neerest weene,
> That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:
> So many pathes, so many turnings seene,
> That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been (1970:1.1.10).

The forest has led them to a digression from their great quest—to rid Una's parents' kingdom of a 'Dragon horrible and stearne' (1970:1.1.3)—and the fact that innocent delight in nature is the lure does not make their fault any less serious. 'This is the wandering wood, this Errours den' (1970:1.1.13), the more experienced Una tells her young knight as they reach the obscure centre of the 'thickest woods' (1970:1.1.11), and indeed a hideous monster is concealed here, which only the 'litle glooming light' (1970:1.1.14) of Redcrosse's virtue reflected in his armour illuminates at all. His battle with Errour is his first trial, in which he is—thanks to Una's intervention—ultimately successful, but it is a rather ignominious victory, since Error is no handsome dragon but a stinking beast that evokes nothing but disgust in knight and reader alike:

> Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw

A floud of poison horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke
His grasping hold (1970:1.1.20).

The simple moral contained in this allegory suggests that no pleasures are innocent and that all wandering is into sin, but Spenser's meanings are invariably more complex than this. Redcrosse is in any case a 'knight-*err*ant', and his wandering leads him successfully through his first knightly trial, just as, in the end, Dante's errantry brings him via hell and purgatory to a vision of the nine light-infused spheres of heaven.

IV

The third striking aspect of the forest in Western literature is much more positive than the first two. Alexander Porteous, following John Evelyn's seventeenth-century forestry treatise, *Sylva*, suggests that Paradise itself may have been a kind of forest grove (Porteous [1928] 2002:47); and Simon Schama, analyzing the Lithuanian forest in northern European literature, wonders whether it represents Arcadia to disinherited Polish authors (1995:49). However, the good side of the forest is not usually quite as unmixed a blessing as this. More often than it appears as an Edenic ideal, it features as a shelter to which the outlaw or the world-weary sufferer can resort in times of trouble.

The archetypal outlaw is of course Robin Hood who, even in the earliest ballads is always a forest dweller, finding in the woodlands a happier alternative to life in the city, village or other permanent human settlement. For Robin and his merry men, a kind of anachronistic Romantic appreciation of nature is a consequence of their rejection of the unjust society that has disinherited and condemned them. The following quotation comprises the first two stanzas of 'Robyn Hode and the Munke', the earliest Robin Hood ballad found in manuscript. Dating—as a written artefact—from the mid-fifteenth century, it is probably much older than this, since ballads belong to the ephemeral oral tradition:

In somer, when þe shawes be sheyne

> And leves be large and long,
> Hit is full mery in feyre foreste
> To here þe foulys song;
>
> To see þe dere draw to þe dale
> And leve þe hilles hee,
> And shadow hem in leves grene
> Vunder þe grene-wode tre (Kinsley 1989:405-406).

In this opening contextualization of the exciting tale to follow, the forest that hides and protects outlaws naturally comes to be appreciated, at least in 'somer', for its beauty, its protective shade and pleasant birdsong, and also for the noble sport of hunting, amply and illegally provided there. (As Schama explains at length, in England after the Norman invasion, nearly all the forests were the king's personal property, their timber and wild animals forbidden to everyone except the monarch [1995:139-174].) What may have begun as an uncomfortable refuge in a time of necessity has already become a haven of beauty and freedom.

But it is Shakespeare's *As You Like It* that really develops the aesthetic of the forest pastoral, the 'golden world' (1973:1.1.112) to which the main characters retreat in the face of the usurping Duke Frederick. In the Forest of Arden they live a simpler, more virtuous life than they had at the court; Schama claims that, in contrast to Dante, who loses himself in his dark wood, these characters are able to '[find themselves]'. He goes on to assert that:

> Greenwood . . . is the upside-down world of the Renaissance court: a place where the conventions of gender and rank are *temporarily* reversed in the interest of discovering truth, love, freedom, and, above all, justice (1995:141).

However, even in *As You Like It*, the forest is not quite Utopia; it is always only a *temporary* respite from civilization's strife and complexity. Duke Senior and his followers, with the striking exception of the melancholic Jacques, return to their court as soon as Duke Frederick abdicates. Moreover, the Forest of Arden is not depicted as an unreal Arcadia without weather or

seasons. Amiens and Jacques's song, 'Under the greenwood tree' shows a forest purged of its wolves and wodwos but not of other, personified adversaries: 'Here shall [we] see / No enemy / Save winter and rough weather' (1973:2.5.1-8). Even here the elements bring their periodic discomfort, though *As You Like It*, unlike many of Shakespeare's more sombre plays, portrays no cruel tempests. And nature's discomforts, embodied in the 'winter wind' are 'not so unkind / As man's ingratitude', the play's other famous song asserts (1973:2.7.175-177). Even in its harsh mood, the forest offers a kinder embrace than malicious humankind.

In both American and European literature, the great North American wilderness mostly figures as a sympathetic refuge. As in Conrad's much less optimistic view of the African forest, the American forest seemed to take its colonizers back in time to their own primordial origins, but envisaged in terms of beauty, strength and innocence rather than, as in *Heart of Darkness*, bestiality and abomination. Romantic writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau regarded forests or woods much as William Wordsworth saw mountains, as places of power and renewal. In 1845, Thoreau actually retreated from 'civilized life' into the woods near Concord, Massachusetts, where he lived alone in a rough cabin for over two years (Thoreau 1983:54). His account of this experience is included in *Walden*, his most famous work, which is a critique of modern life. Though Thoreau's narrator, like Duke Senior, returns to civilization at the end of the book, he concludes that the wilderness which he has learned to inhabit is necessary to humanity as a corrective to narrow perspectives and as refreshment for the jaded eye. The sublimity and mystery that he apprehends in the forest represent an essential balance to the aspirations and stresses of communal life:

> Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness …. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable …. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigour, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and decaying trees, the thunder cloud and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to

> witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander (1983:365-366).

Thoreau has remained a kind of textbook for conservationists precisely because he manages to articulate nostalgia for the sublime terrors of the old view of the forest whilst retaining a pragmatic sense of nature's usefulness to the well-adjusted human psyche. Not exactly as in Umuofia, a recognition of the forest's mana encourages a respectful coexistence of humans and the natural world. The forest, like other manifestations of nature, is restorative because it retains its mystery, in which an element of the old fear persists.

This mysterious element is what motivates Robert Frost's most famous lyric, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', too. The speaker in this poem sees the forest as 'lovely, dark and deep', a detour holding the fearful attractiveness of a dream—but a dream that would distract him from his commitment to the everyday world:

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep (1973:130).

The speaker resists with difficulty his desire to remain in the forest's beckoning 'lovel[iness]' that is also ominously 'dark and deep' in this oddly ambivalent little poem.

Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* and other works presents the New England forest even more ambivalently. In Pearl's stories of the 'Black Man', who 'haunts [the] forest' (1970:202), primitive and heathen elements appear to predominate, but the forest is also a reconciler of lovers, protecting the secrecy of their strange meeting and offering its gloom and chiaroscuro as a commentary on the inevitability of human confusion and sorrow:

> The road, after the two wayfarers had crossed from the peninsula to the mainland, was no other than a footpath. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest. This hemmed it in so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, and disclosed such

> imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that, to Hester's mind, it imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering. The day was chill and sombre. Overhead was a gray expanse of cloud, slightly stirred, however, by a breeze; so that a gleam of flickering sunshine might now and then be seen at its solitary play along the path (1970:201).

Hester's allegory of a 'moral wilderness', akin to Dante's '*selva oscura*', is not shared by the narrator, who sees in the forest's numinous depths a more sympathetic presence. Again and again the 'mystery', 'melancholy', 'shadow' and 'gloom of this dark forest' are emphasized, and yet the elusive sunlight pours down in a 'flood' on Hester as she temporarily casts the scarlet letter from her and lets her beautiful hair down before Arthur Dimmesdale, her erstwhile lover. Commenting on this scene, in which he claims that Hester 'achieves her apotheosis', Keith Sagar in his recent book, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*, sees the forest as possessing a spirit of freedom and wildness that, while harmonizing with Hester's spontaneous sexuality, is totally opposed to the Puritan values of her seventeenth-century New England community (2005:210-212). But the wilderness is not always presented in *The Scarlet Letter* in this way. After Hester retrieves her letter 'A' and confines her hair again, the forest becomes once more associated with darkness rather than light and with its accustomed sorrow, as does the tenor of the characters' lives (1970:227-229).

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous opening exclamation in 'Evangeline', 'This is the forest primeval', repeated as a refrain in other parts of the narrative, speaks of an environment whose overwhelming sombreness echoes the sorrowful forest of *The Scarlet Letter*. His forest's apparent sympathy with human tragedy, too, is evident in the opening description of trees and topography:

> This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
> Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
> Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,
> Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.
> Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighbouring ocean
> Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest.

> This is the forest primeval; but where are the hearts that beneath it
> Leaped like the roe, when he hears in the woodland the voice of the huntsman?
> Where is the thatch-roofed village, the home of Acadian farmers,—
> Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands (1970:53).

To Longfellow the Canadian forest holds no primitive or supernatural terrors for these bucolic Acadians whose 'beautiful village of Grand-Pré' (1970:53) seems an extension of the natural world. Though their forest setting does not in the end protect them from the injustices of the Old World (the English destroy their village), it is implicated in the freedom and justice of their little world while it lasts:

> Alike they were free from
> Fear, that reigns with the tyrant, and envy, the vice of republics.
> Neither locks had they to their doors, nor bars to their windows (1970:54).

Even the stranger forests that Evangeline encounters in the American South during her long search for her lover Gabriel repeat the prophetic sorrow:

> Lovely the moonlight was as it glanced and gleamed on the water,
> Gleamed on the columns of cypress and cedar sustaining the arches,
> Down through whose broken vaults it fell as through chinks in a ruin.
> Dreamlike, and indistinct, and strange were all things around them;
> And o'er their spirits there came a feeling of wonder and sadness—,
> Strange forebodings of ill, unseen and that cannot be compassed (1970:71).

But the North American forest is not always portrayed as gloomily as this. Daniel Boone has for a long time epitomized the frontiersman for whom the forest is a benevolent and invigorating habitat. (Natty Bummpo of James Fenimore Cooper's 'Leatherstocking' tales is another such figure.) Byron devotes seven unusually non-ironic stanzas of his *Don Juan* to praise of

Boone and his home amongst the ‘wilds of deepest maze’ (1928:8.61). Here are four of them:

> Crime came not near him—she is not the child
> Of solitude; Health shrank not from him—for
> Her home is in the rarely trodden wild,
> Where if men seek her not, and death be more
> Their choice than life, forgive them, as beguiled
> By habit to what their own hearts abhor—
> In cities caged. The present case in point I
> Cite is, that Boon lived hunting up to ninety;
>
> And, what's still stranger, left behind a name
> For which men vainly decimate the throng,
> Not only famous, but of that *good* fame,
> Without which Glory's but a tavern song—
> Simple, serene, the antipodes of shame,
> Which Hate nor Envy e’er could tinge with wrong;
> An active hermit, even in age the child
> Of Nature, or the Man of Ross run wild.
>
> 'T is true he shrank from men even of his nation,
> When they built up unto his darling trees,—
> He moved some hundred miles off, for a station
> Where there were fewer houses and more ease;
> The inconvenience of civilisation
> Is, that you neither can be pleased nor please;
> But where he met the individual man,
> He showed himself as kind as mortal can.
>
> He was not all alone: around him grew
> A sylvan tribe of children of the chase,
> Whose young, unawaken’d world was ever new,
> Nor sword nor sorrow yet had left a trace
> On her unwrinkled brow, nor could you view
> A frown on Nature's or on human face;

> The free-born forest found and kept them free,
> And fresh as is a torrent or a tree (1928:8.62-65).

In Byron's version of the Boone family, the forest really does seem to be an Eden, as Porteous suggests it may be ([1928] 2002:47). Certainly the 'unawaken'd' newness and innocence of the children suggests an unfallen state not possible closer to 'civilization''s crowds and corruptions.

Felicia Hemans develops a variant of this Romantic-Edenic woodland in 'The Forest Sanctuary', published in 1825, only a year after the composition of *Don Juan* was brought to an end by Byron's death. The speaker in Hemans's once-popular but now little-read poem is a Spanish Protestant who has fled his own country for the North American wilderness. The new environment does succeed in calming and consoling his heart to some extent, immersing him in 'this hush of woods, reposing' (nd:1.2) and reminding him even of God's 'presence in the quiet and dim, / And whispery woods' (nd:1.7), but he has been too deeply harmed by torture, confinement and the memory of martyred friends for real peace to be possible for him:

> Bring me the sounding of the torrent-water,
> With yet a nearer swell—fresh breeze,
> And river, darkening ne'er with hues of slaughter
> Thy wave's pure silvery green,—and shining lake,
> Spread far before my cabin, with thy zone
> Of ancient woods, ye chainless things and lone!
> Send voices through the forest aisles, and make
> Glad music round me, that my soul may dare,
> Cheered by such tones, to look back on a dungeon's air! (nd:2.1)

Throughout the poem, he is almost obsessively compelled to 'look back' to his 'own soft skies', his 'native Spain' his 'lineage' and 'father's land' and his personally mourned 'dead' who 'rest not here' (nd:1.2). He must tell—and retell—his story, 'pour[ing]' it into 'the desert's ear' (nd:1.10), in the absence of a human receiver. Though he claims at the end to learn from the starlit forest 'the might / Of solitude' (nd:2.76), he continually populates this solitude with the troubling presences of his past: the wife who died at sea on the journey out and the friends martyred for their faith back in Spain.

But, like Boone, he is not the only human figure against this backdrop of trees. He has brought his young son with him to the New World and parts of the poem are addressed to the child:

> Now sport, for thou art free, the bright birds chasing
> Whose wings waft star-like gleams from tree to tree;
> Or with the fawn, thy swift wood-playmate racing,
> Sport on, my joyous child! For thou art free!
> Yes, on that day I took thee to my heart,
> And inly vowed, for thee a better part
> To choose; that so thy sunny bursts of glee
> Should wake no more dim thoughts of far-seen woe,
> But, gladdening fearless eyes, flow on—as now they flow.
>
> Thou hast a rich world round thee:—Mighty shades
> Weaving their gorgeous tracery o'er thy head,
> With the light melting through their high arcades,
> As through a pillared cloister's: but the dead
> Sleep not beneath; nor doth the sunbeam pass
> To marble shrines through rainbow-tinted glass;
> Yet thou, by fount and forest-murmur led
> To worship, thou art blest!—to thee is shown
> Earth in her holy pomp, decked for her God alone (nd:1.92-93).

The child has become a true denizen of these woods, starting anew without history, innocent of sorrow and cruelty. Whereas memory of the martyred 'dead' who do not 'sleep' on this shore is a sacred burden for the father, whose mind turns continually back to Spain, 'wak[ing] … dim thoughts of far-seen woe', the child is 'free' of all memory except of the 'sport[ive]' and 'gladdening' natural world. Nevertheless, he is brought to a virtuous 'worship' of the speaker's God by a kind of natural religion as surely as the chastened captive ready to die at the stake for his faith. The forest not only protects its true child from the agonies of human oppression and error, but it crowns him with the 'gorgeous tracery' of its beauty and touches him to worship with the numinous prompting of its sublimity.

V

To claim that these three aspects of the Western literary forest are totally distinct is of course misleading. Though Hemans's forest is purged of both evil and error, it nevertheless depends on the ancient terror of wilderness for the numinous power with which it is invested. It represents as well a digression from the straight lines of crime and punishment, or intolerant tyranny and martyrdom, that pertain back in the Old World. In fact, most versions of the forest as refuge revise the 'primitive terror' (Eliot 1944:39) aspect of the wilderness, while many of them also see the forest as an earthly paradise into which characters wander by mistake or design while fleeing from the cruel and inexorable laws of the fallen world. Wandering may be ironized; it depends from whose point of view the traveller is observed as to whether his or her woodland digression is morally wrong. According to the great sheep-and-goat calculation of the older Calvinist or Catholic doctrines, an excursion from the one straight path must carry the traveller into sin and judgement, but in a more complex moral universe there are many paths to redemption and even magical passages back to unfallen innocence.

And not only the outlaw and refugee stories are inclusive of all three forest symbols. Little Red Riding Hood's forest is, as already mentioned, not wholly terrifying, for it provides a livelihood and sources of wisdom for the huntsman. And, clearly, her stopping to talk to a wolf is a moral error which leads her into the labyrinth. Gawain suffers from the terrors of the forest, but learns in the end that the wilderness may be a refuge from the temptations and perplexities of society. Though he seems to wander in the forest, it is in the castle that he actually goes astray. In both Dante and Spenser the erroneous paths that lead into the obscure wood bring them to terrifying encounters, though in Spenser the wood is at first perceived as a refuge from the weather. And, in the end, these paths do actually return the protagonists to the right road, after severe tests of their courage and perspicacity.

What the body of these texts shows is that the forest is a symbol of great power in Western literature and thought but that, like all symbols, its meanings are multivalent and can be reconstructed. The forest-civilization antithesis is seductive, but it is not the only way of seeing and perhaps, at a time when the world's forests are endangered, it is an archaic and unproductive construction—at least in its Manichean form. Many texts, from 'Robyn Hode and the Munke' to 'Evangeline', show the possibility of

human beings and forests coexisting symbiotically, and this type of relationship may form the basis of a better narrative for the present time.

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Department of English
University of Zululand

The Enchanted Forest as a Place of Knowing

Patsy Maritz

> *… the feathers from the wings of angels are taken and strewn along the forest paths. Only the women who need enter the forest see them rocking softly on a leafy bed.*

Introduction

In his essay 'Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing', Bruno Bettelheim states of women who have confronted their deepest fears:

> Having found their own strength and gained the ability to exercise it, they no longer need to live in fear, or to depend on others for their well-being. Life will be good for them forever after.
>
> It [is] their experience in the dark and pathless forest; it [is] their successful encounter with terror which did all this for them. Finding oneself in a dark, impenetrable forest is an ancient literary image for [a woman] in need of gaining self knowledge (Bettelheim 1981:14).

When a woman has a powerful internal struggle and descends into the unconscious mind or the deep feminine (a well-hidden locale under many layers of thought and feeling), the struggle on a metaphorical level manifests itself in a difficult journey through the world between worlds, one of the 'ancient literary images' to which Bettelheim refers. After her induction, the woman dies to her former way of knowing and acquires a different way of

knowing, relinquishing her naïve and childish understanding of the world for a more mature awareness and comprehension. It is often necessary for women go through a form of initiation in order to become thus independent, strong and perceptive. Clarissa Pincola Estés in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* writes about 'contacting of the power of the Wild Woman'. Her parallel between strong, passionate women and wolves is animating and evocative (1992:3-6, 25-38). In this paper I draw on her constructs in certain instances, as they are vivid, vibrant and instructive.

Estés' Jungian construct of the deep female psyche (Estés 1992:3-4, 33, 88-90, 123) holds the intuition, which is a profound current of knowing that integrates into the divine. It is formed from the great female collective unconscious, consisting of a combination of many varied influences from all women, familial or communal. Because female readers have a knowledge of the archetypes of the deep feminine and their being part of the female collective unconscious, they are able to relate (albeit in an undefined way) to what the fictive heroine of the fairy tale experiences. By way of analogy with their own encounters of entering the 'dark impenetrable forest', they are able to recognize the process, understand its significance, and know how to deal with it when its cycle rises in their own psyche.

I have chosen to discuss the enchanted forest as it occurs in three fairytales, together with the forest's magical beings in each case. The enchanted forest resembles the real forest in that both harbour strong forces that affect people's lives in dramatic ways. The forests in the tales provide a milieu for the protagonists to become empowered, though not all of the characters come successfully through the spiritual trial that these forests offer them. The stories are about humans and their supernatural counterparts in an oral tradition.

Unlike in real, or realistic, forests, in the fairytale forest nature is animated or personified. In 'The Snow Queen' flowers possess the power of speech and in 'The Little Mermaid' some creatures are half animal and half plant (both these stories are from *Andersen's Fairy Tales*). The construct of the indivisible whole in the fairy tale implies that the fantastical entities cannot be separated from their environment because they are at one with the milieu. There is a form of omniscience and cohesion whereby the fairytale creatures are all-knowing and all-seeing. Their thoughts and feelings are accessible to all and are read and felt by all other fantastical entities. They

are a mutable ensemble of beings that blend into their surroundings, and change form at will. In the real world, most humans separate themselves from nature and perceive a distinction between themselves and nature. They see themselves as half dependent on the environment in an exploitative relationship in which they draw on plants and animals for their sustenance. People are generally more centred on taking care of their own personal interests than of the environment. Humans do not usually see themselves as a part of a great recycling process in which they are made of the same elements as the earth, taking in its nutrients and on cessation offering the elements and nutrients back in a huge cyclic process. They have a dualistic view of themselves in relation to their surroundings. Misinterpreting the power relations between themselves and nature, they act in bad faith and destroy the natural habitat to which they belong and on which they depend.

Regrettably, humans are also in division among themselves. Men and woman are at variance with one another because men try to dominate women. They both misuse nature and mismanage the wild life and wild lands that ensure their existence on this planet. They encroach on nature's own territory and even drive back the ocean in order to occupy its place. In the same way that the sea lands have been dwelt in by people, so men and ruthless women have by their selfish will forcibly uncovered and illegally occupied parts of women's secret souls. By their insensitivity and self-centredness they introduce negative convictions that crush and throttle. However, like the deltas and flood plains, the deep waters of the psyche will surge up to reclaim the lost territory. The deep feminine will reassert itself.

This paper will study three folktales rooted in the oral tradition, all of which locate their female characters for at least part of the narrative in an enchanted forest populated by fantastical entities associated with female trial, suffering and power. The stories are 'Vasilisa the Wise' as retold in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992) and 'The Little Mermaid' and 'The Snow Queen' from the Collins edition of *Andersen's Fairy Tales*' (nd). All these tales involve a protagonist who enters a forest, has an experience there and exits either in triumph or defeat. Vladímir Propp sees the plot structure of the 'wondertale' or fairy tale as possessing certain 'constant … factors' (Propp 1984: 82). According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, Propp's version of the fairy tale plot follows these lines:

> [t]he hero (victim or seeker) meets a 'benefactor,' willing or unwilling, obliging or reserved, helpful or hostile at first. The benefactor tests the hero (in many varied ways, which can go as far as engaging the hero in combat). The hero reacts negatively or positively, on his [or her] own or by means of supernatural intervention (there are many intermediate forms). The acquisition of supernatural help (object, animal, and person) is an essential feature of the function of the hero (Lévi-Strauss 1984:171).

In 'Vasilisa the Wise', the witch Baba Yaga is a hostile yet fair benefactress who tests the heroine (seeker), Vasilisa, by obliging her to perform very difficult tasks. There is a condition that if Vasilisa fails she will be devoured by the witch. If she succeeds, Baba Yaga will provide her with the fire she needs. Vasilisa cooperates with the witch and reacts positively. With the assistance of her supernatural helper, a doll, she accomplishes the tasks Baba Yaga sets. The benefactor in the 'The Little Mermaid' is the willing but self-seeking sea witch. The heroine (victim) is the mermaid and her help takes the form of a phial of magic potion (object) that the witch prepares. After swallowing it the mermaid undergoes the necessary change from fish to human. In 'The Snow Queen', the crippled hag of death and oblivion is Gerda's benefactress. Gerda (a seeker) escapes the hag's spell of ennui with the help of the flowers. The hyacinth's story and the appearance of the rose bushes rouse Gerda from her amnesia so that she may flee the witch and resume her search for Kay. The witch inadvertently assists Gerda to surmount a shortcoming of procrastination and self-indulgence in her character.

The fictional women in the three fairy tales are young girls who as characters undergo life-changing experiences in the enchanted forests. I will argue that the girls, by going into the forest, have an encounter whereby they may be initiated into the deeper and wilder knowledge of who they are apart from who they are taught to be. In human society complex overlays, injunctions or prohibitions imposed by culture, tradition or custom can cause a woman to become alienated and estranged. When a woman is alienated, she is out of touch with her deep intuition or her inner knowing. For her this means muddling through life without a focus or passion. She 'lack[s] inner seeing, inner hearing, inner sensing, inner knowing' (Estés 1992:80). She

could be the woman who lives by the values of goodness and sweetness, protective qualities she saw in her mother's love for her. She continues to put a premium on them by being obliging and agreeable even when she faces abuse. Her purity and freshness exert a pull on any predator within her range.

Perhaps a woman's experiences have caused her to be afraid, ambivalent, faltering and without inspiration. Trauma, confusion and perhaps fear of non-compliance are just a few of the many negative states that a woman who is alienated from the deep feminine can experience. This woman can however be transformed through entering the mythological forest of the mysterious psyche and availing herself of the figure of the witch, (a fantastical construct) for initiation into the deep feminine. According to Estés, who paraphrases Jung's 'The Transcendent Function':

> some persons, in their pursuit of the Self will overaestheticise the God of Self experience, some will undervalue it, some will overvalue it, and some who are not ready for it will be injured by it. But still others will find their way to what Jung called 'the moral obligation' to live out and to express what they have learned in the descent or ascent to the wild self (Estés 1992:32-33; see Jung 1960:84, 91).

When a woman has an enormous internal struggle, it is in parallel with an outward journey into the fantastic and follows the pattern of the death/rebirth cycle during which a new woman is born (Estés 1992:81). This cycle entails the death of an epoch in a woman's life and the birth of another epoch, a cycle which recurs many times in the life of a woman. The innocence of youth is maintained and reinforced by a kindly and protective mother whose loving voice is internalized by the child. During a rite of passage the 'too good' nature has to die and be replaced by a wilder and wilier nature. The woman must understand the many layers of reality and dispel her illusions of 'I am good so society must love me'. Bettelheim explains this phenomenon as the woman emerging from the forest experience and being happy afterwards (Bettelheim 1981:14). This content-ment is temporary, however, because inevitably the cycle will repeat itself again. With each descent the woman may become either stronger or weaker.

Some fairy tales depict the start of such a journey as follows: 'once there was and once there was not…' By reading these first few words, we as readers are alerted to the fact that a mystical account of the 'other world' is about to occur. The 'other world' events play out in a 'world between worlds' where nothing is as it seems and there is an understanding that the protagonist will soon become cognizant of something that she was not aware of before. The nature of folklore is such that it borrows from reality but does not correspond to reality. According to Propp,

> In folk prose the unusual acquires dimensions impossible in life. In folklore the narrative is not based on normal characters or normal actions in a normal situation; just the opposite: folktales choose things strikingly unusual (1984:19).

In most fairy tales where forests feature, something both strange and familiar awaits an individual in the forest and it is the individual's fate to meet it. According to Estés, '*La Que Sabé* [the One who knows] breathe[d] upon us, changing us' (1992:33). In the strange events and transformations of the tale, the female reader or listener recognizes the cycle of death and rebirth that is familiar to her own psychic life.

'Vasilisa The Wise'

'Vasilisa the Wise' is a folktale of Eastern European origin. In Russian folklore there is a blurring between the animate and the inanimate, the real and the unreal, nature and man, the dead and the living. I have chosen the tale because it is rich in symbolism and diverse in its different themes and constructs. It incorporates motifs that are found in other fairy tales, for example 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Cinderella' and 'Rumplestilskin'. It is therefore ideal to use as a template when analyzing the other tales to be discussed in this essay. In the 'Hansel and Gretel' tale there are exiled children, a cannibalistic witch, a formidable forest and an unusual abode. The 'Cinderella' tale features the hateful stepmother and daughters, the importance of clothes, an abused child and a caring benefactor. In 'Rumplestilskin' a maiden has helpers who assist her when she is required to spin hay into gold. The three tales are all similar, in the way in which they

conform to the characteristics that Propp has identified.

In 'Vasilisa the Wise', the formidable and frightening forest or the 'psyche wilderland' (Estés 1992:83) is the locus of initiation into the deep feminine for Vasilisa. The 'psyche wilderland', or deep unconscious, provides a locale where she will learn life's most important lessons and become greatly strengthened. I will provide a brief outline of the tale 'Vasilisa the Wise' as told in Estès, who provides a Jungian interpretation of the story. I will later use her template of interpretation to explain 'The Little Mermaid' and the 'Snow Queen', too.

'Vasilisa the Wise' is a story about a young girl who loses her mother. The mother bequeaths the girl a doll to comfort and guide her, and charges her not to neglect the doll and always feed her. The girl's father remarries after a short while. The stepmother and stepsisters tyrannise Vasilisa and try to get rid of her. Emotionally ill-equipped to defend herself against the step women, Vasilisa becomes their servant and falls victim to their persecution and abuse. The naïve and over-protected young girl, in the absence of her father, loses her territory, her certainty and her dignity. The step women are jealous hags 'who throw [her] about like a rag' (Estés 1992:92). Because she is docile and submissive, their ill-treatment intensifies. Eventually they order her into the forest to fetch fire from Baba Yaga the evil witch. Like 'things that live in the dark, the step women [clap] and [squeal]' (Estés 1992:76) as they conspire to make sure that Vasilisa dies. She is obliged to go into the forest in search of the frightening old woman who eats children. By the construct of the rule of naivety and gullibility she qualifies for initiation by Baba Yaga.

Vasilisa leaves her 'real' world and enters the other world of the enchanted wood. On entering the forest, she plunges into a darkness that is both literal and metaphorical. The forest becomes darker and darker. Bettleheim writes:

> [t]his evil, this darkness that surrounds [her] in the forest, is but a projection of the darkness that resides in [her]self, and so is the dragon against which [she] does battle. The dragon is a figment of [her] imagination into which [she] projected all that [she] can not accept in [her]self (Bettleheim 1981:15).

Night falls. Vasilisa comes closer and closer to a frightening ordeal in which the forest is the underworld of the psyche where the red, the white and the black horsemen ride. They lead her into the old witch's hut. Their uncanny presence is a precursor of the kind of experience that Vasilisa will have in the Yaga's abode. Baba Yaga, the keeper of the sky and earth beings refers to the horsemen as 'my sun, my day, and my night' (Estés 1992:92). As Vasilisa approaches the initiation hut she is closer to herself, to essential ideas, feelings and the realm of the unconscious. According to Helen Pilinovsky:

> [Baba Yaga's] home is a mobile hut perched upon chicken legs, which folklorist Vladímir Propp hypothesized might be related to the zoomorphic *izbushkii*, or initiation huts, where neophytes were symbolically 'consumed' by the monster, only to emerge later as adults (1980).

In the following analysis, I will interpret the images and metaphor in the tale. The fire that Vasilisa seeks is retained in the skulls of children that the old witch has devoured. The crucibles of fire are balanced on pedestals made from dead people's bones, many of which surround the house. The bones testify to people who have displeased the hag and have been devoured by her as a result. They are the casualties who fail the initiation process. The mythological forest as the locale of the deep psyche houses Baba Yaga and her 'cohorts', who are the 'dragons' against whom Vasilisa 'does battle'. The witch sets her tasks to complete. One of thee is to separate the poppy seeds from the dirt. By doing this, Vasilisa learns to discern between positive and negative elements. She focuses on the positive. Through her diligence and commitment, she is a constructive link in the separation process. The process of separation is a metaphor for choosing to pursue desires from the soul instead of the seductive elements that arouse but do not satisfy. An example of such elements would be wrong friends and destructive lovers instead of steady, dependable people.

The magic 'hands in the air' are the first of Baba Yaga's 'cohorts'. They are a synechdochic metaphor for the help they give the witch in accomplishing her tasks. The magic hands squeeze oil from Baba Yaga's poppy seeds, a precious end product, symbolic of healing and anointing. It is

hard work to squeeze the last drop of oil from the minute seeds; the hands' productivity is an example of how affirming and therapeutic useful pursuits can be.

Vasilisa's 'doll', Vidacita, also assists her in accomplishing her tasks. The doll, a talisman and 'helper', resembles the elves and fairies that sometimes come to the rescue of mortals when huge tasks have to be accomplished. Vidacita is on the one hand the diminutive of Vasilisa, a small and bright copy of herself, who, like her, is dressed in red, white and black. On the other hand, this doll is also a talisman from Vasilisa's mother, a matrilineal bequest of power or deep intuition handed down the familial female line (Estés 1992:80). She is the instinctual life force that is fierce, enduring, astute and driven towards continued existence. Together with the Yaga the doll is the mother of all women. Their guidance and intuitive gifts come from the personal level as well as from the divine.

Another of Baba Yaga's 'cohorts' is the chicken feet that spin the house. The chicken feet are tough, strong, flexible and agile; they are tenacious and cling to a perch where they roost even while the bird sleeps. This image is suggestive of the support or mainstay in the psyche where Vasilisa learns to be vigilant, stalwart and perceptive. The claws on the chicken feet are sharp and durable, capable of scratching open hard ground and uncovering what lies beneath the surface. They evoke the insight and detection mechanisms that Vasilisa needs to employ to gain clarity in any given situation. As a whole, the house is symbolic of a part of the young Vasilisa's psyche that needs to be developed. When she arrives in the forest or at the threshold of the deep psyche, she is vapid, too ordinary and nondescript. She needs to drop her inhibitions, gain charisma, and (like the house on the chicken feet) reel and swivel with her hands to the heavens in celebration of a vibrant life.

The 'cohorts' collectively represent human action, passion, carrying out intentions, developing strategies, clearing and preserving the inner sanctum. Their lesson to Vasilisa is to keep order and not allow the forest of the psyche to become cluttered and chaotic. She is charged with the task of taking care of Baba Yaga's house. By good housekeeping she learns responsibility, constancy and trustworthiness. By working in Baba Yaga's yard she learns to grow, prune and nurture plants. She provides enough water for the plants, not too much and not too little. She deals with beetles,

weeds, and pests. This form of husbandry is an analogy for nurturing a good partner, raising children and being on the lookout for harmful influences. She learns to allow what needs to expire to die, and by dying to live again.

During her stay with the Yaga or Hag Goddess, she is initiated into character-building activities and she learns about her inner cycles and biorhythms. She needs to remain within her natural rhythm and learns that she should not fan the sensual fire too high or allow it to die down to low. She develops her intuitive powers and relinquishes ideas and practices that cause her to have problems with the archetype of the stepmother and sisters. The step women represent the detractors or the wicked refrain within the deep psyche that chants discouraging messages and negative assertions. They are the vicious reiterations that whisper dark messages of hate, deception and misconstruction. They are the natural predators that shout 'fail'. Fortunately they are also part of the dark self that will drive an individual towards becoming stronger and more prudent. They will drive the woman to overcome weak elements that urge her to be too compliant and agreeable, and to accept defeat without a fight.

The construct of the Baba Yaga or the old Wild Mother brings about a new directive to the ego, so that the miraculous can occur, integrity can be built, impulses moderated, and energy focused in the right way. She is a teacher, a model that is true to herself, the power of the life-force. She represents the irrational and the inexplicable element that we fear in ourselves. She is the devourer, the one who is able to eradicate us. If we outwit her or overcome her we will be immensely enriched.

Baba Yaga requires Vasilisa to perform various tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. By cleaning the dirty laundry, Vasilisa deals with confidential matters and secrets in her own life, which brings her a form of catharsis. The clothes are the external coverings that the witch selects in order to reveal a certain identity to the outside world. As Vasilisa washes the witch's clothes, part of the old hag's power is transmitted to her. She lays down her own clothes and adopts the witch's persona. The witch's personal effects are significant as they stand for power, affluence and authority. Each occasion calls for a different garment, depending on what impression she needs to convey. Vasilisa needs to be empowered, and the 'washed clothes' construct is associated with power, mastery, and social mobility. Part of Vasilisa's initiation is so that she can

adopt the personae that the outfits characterise. Through her purification process she develops spiritual dynamism and strength.

Under the correction of Baba Yaga, Vasilisa is fully initiated, acquiring the witch's sensibilities, gaining her stamp of approval and earning the right to own the fire. She advances as master of her experience. Her detractors are silenced by being burned to cinders, destroyed by the skull that holds the fire, which is the passion and power that the girl has derived from her descent. Above all the fire it is a token of a secure livelihood. If the witch is separated from her assets, the heroine profits and her future is secured forever. 'Life will be good for [her] forever after', according to Bettelheim (1981:14).

The tale of 'Vasilisa the Wise' is a comprehensive template that well illustrates the descent of a heroine into the deep psyche where she will confront her dragons and do battle with them. The dragons are a rich field of personification of abstractions and of metaphor that represents the psychological and social exemplars that will teach, strengthen, empower and edify the heroine. Referring to the symbolism of folktales such as this one, Bettelheim says:

> the symbolic codes woven into fairy tales are relatively easy to decipher, for they are based either on generally familiar allusions or on verbal substitutions. As Freud noted, folklore in general takes advantage of symbols that possess universal validity (Bettelheim 1981:31).

'The Little Mermaid'

The second tale that I wish to investigate is 'The Little Mermaid', from *Andersen's Fairy Tales*. The motifs in this story are very similar to those of 'Vasilisa the Wise', forest and witch themes occurring in both tales. The mermaid is a princess of the sea who falls in love with a human prince, but in order to win his love she needs to become a human being. The world of the merpeople is subordinated to the human world. The fictive world of the human, consisting of the prince and his kingdom, simulates the real dimension, into which the supernatural is adroitly integrated. The mermaid believes that humans have superior benefits and privileges. So strong is her

desire for the prince and the promise of immortality enjoyed by human beings that she visits the enchantress of the sea, who has the power to transform her into a human being. In order to meet this sea witch she is required to traverse a hostile and frightening terrain—a sea forest with snakelike polypi that catch and strangle their victims:

> She had to traverse an expanse of bare grey sand till she reached the whirlpool, whose waters were eddying and whizzing like millwheels, tearing everything they could seize along with them into the abyss below…. Then she had to pass through a boiling, slimy bog which the enchantress called her turf-moor: her house stood in a wood beyond this, and a strange abode it was.... All the trees and bushes around were polypi, looking like hundred-headed serpents shooting up out of the ground; their branches were long slimy arms with fingers of worms, every member, from root to the uttermost tip, ceaselessly moving and extending on all sides…. Among other things might be seen even a little mermaid whom they had seized and strangled (Andersen nd:124-125).

In all these tales, the forest represents the dark side of the human psyche. No forest, however, upon land or sea could be as menacing as the deep and violent wilderland of the psyche of one who wishes to change her cultural affiliation and traverse the boundaries of her own society to move into another. The mermaid represents someone who has this aspiration on a human level. Her psyche is therefore particularly voracious; it would rather fasten her down and annihilate her than let her pursue such an unfavourable line of action. As a metaphor, her journey to the house of the hag reflects the violence of the machinations of the deep unconscious upon one who would forsake her clan, her ethnic group or her religion to form a union with another of a different culture, class, religious belief or an unconventional sexuality. Jung would describe such a woman as someone who is not ready for the descent and will be injured by it.

There are several parallels between the mermaid's undersea forest and the forest of Baba Yaga. The sea witch and Baba Yaga are one and the same Old Wild Mother, with her cohorts. In this milieu a great acclimatisation takes place. On a certain level, both Vasilisa and the

mermaid have the same initiatory experience, but only to a point, because they emerge from the forest of the deep psyche very differently. The polypi forest is far more threatening than the forest that Vasilisa transverses. The description is frightening, and the transactions between the mermaid and the witch in the sea forest are violent and painful. Vasilisa's experience is rigorous but fulfilling and successful. She proceeds valiantly, tentatively, intelligently and smoothly through her initiatory experience. The mermaid, who has a strange duality about her (she is both fish and human), undergoes a very violent and brutal initiatory experience. She underestimates the hazard involved in her cross-over. Unlike Vasilisa she is inflexible and ignores her inner hearing, inner seeing and inner knowing.

Throughout the exercise of acclimatization, the little mermaid knows that the cross-over from 'fish' to human is perilous and may not be worth all the energy and sacrifice needed. She is also inexperienced at projecting what might happen in the future, unable to calculate human ways and guilty of ignoring clues in her environment (the dead mermaid caught in the tentacles of the polypi). During their interview, the wily and experienced witch, who has expected her, says 'I know well what you would ask of me', and then 'laugh[s] so violently that her pet toads and snails f[a]ll from her lap' (nd:126). The hag warns the little mermaid that she will endure terrible pain day and night and that she will never be able to be among her family again. Moreover, unless the prince marries her, she will not gain the immortality she so desperately wants and she will also die if he marries another—she will instantly dissolve into foam.

The mermaid is stubborn and compulsive. The terrible phial of potion she is willing to consume is a potent and volatile mix. Even the polypi cringe as she takes it past them. In spite of all the warnings she still pursues her unwise course of action. Her sisters serve as 'helpers' and also experience the same upper world that the mermaid sees and desires. They turn away from the novelty after a while but the mermaid does not. Towards the end of the tale they visit the witch and exchange their hair for a penknife that they hope the mermaid will use to kill the prince. They are so concerned about the sadness which the youngest mermaid has caused in their family that they risk going through the frightening whirlpool and polypi forest to see the witch. The mermaid stands on the deck of the prince's ship unmoved

as they hand her the knife. She is indifferent to their sacrifice and devotion and does not kill the prince, choosing to die herself instead.

The mermaid is not like Vasilisa who listens to 'Vidacita' and feeds her. The mermaid does not heed her intuition and the less she listens the fainter the inner voice becomes. The dark psyche works to provide what she wants, as her will is so strong.

Because the mermaid unwisely bargains her tongue away to the witch as a means of exchange, her beautiful singing voice (her brilliant creativity) is lost to her. She foolishly forfeits it as compensation to the witch for her help. She is the kind of woman who will gambol away her reserves without being able to predict that this exploit will handicap her in her future endeavours. She is reckless and takes unprecedented risks. Instead of drawing power from the witch, she gives her own power over to her.

After drinking the potion and committing herself to the 'upper world', she develops an apparently faultless persona. She is deformed but looks good, always graceful, smiling and beautiful. Her legs are however so painful that every step she takes is agony for her. She fools the entire court that she is doing very well in the 'culture-made skin' that does not fit (Estés 1992:276). The culture-made skin (legs) is an attribute she acquires that enables her to fit in with her new society. Sacrificing so greatly for a diminished life, she still consoles herself that the new culture's ideology of a perfect and long life will sustain her; but her expectations remain unfulfilled. Her transfer from mermaid to human is nothing but exile to an earthly wilderness.

The mermaid stays; she cannot go home to recuperate and wishes for no other way of existence. She has forfeited all her power and becomes a 'fog', then a 'vapour' and then a 'wisp of her former wildish self' (Estés 1992:102). Furthermore, she has no self-expression left; she can no longer sing or communicate or go to her inner world that has an order familiar to her. There is no way to revive herself as she is always caught up in her pretence. Sadly, she is resourceful enough to be led into the life she seeks, but her situation is too untenable to sustain.

The mermaid's former way of life is in fact a representation of a state of being that is cohesive and soulful. It is nourishing and set in her natural habitat but she does not appreciate her nurturing and serene environment. She relinquishes all she is and has in the merkingdom because

she is idealistic, self-centered, naïve, dissatisfied, restless and ambitious. Her discontent is with her people, her environment and her state of having a tail and living in the water. She surrenders her natural bodily form for a futile devotion to a man who does not return her love.

The mermaid chooses to leave her home on her own accord, while Vasilisa is an exiled heroine. If we were to apply the mermaid's experience to women in real life, a woman (by a cross-over) would forfeit an essential personal quality necessary for her continued existence in the place of her choosing. Perhaps she would need to suppress it forever and be mute about it. Ironically and metaphorically, her tongue would be cut out in the same way that the mermaid allowed the witch to cut her tongue out.

This real-life woman might be a person from an ethnically or culturally different or a deprived or lower-class background who is attracted by the trappings of an affluent and powerful culture and falls in love with a man from this group. She pursues him relentlessly. She leaves her home, her loving and devoted family, culture, religion and friends to embark upon a course of action that will prepare her for a future with the man. She relinquishes her way of life, of dress, and of speech. She renounces her affiliations because she believes that his religion, worldview or societal structure is more sustaining than her own. She learns a new language, adopts new mannerisms, customs, values, dress codes and gestures. She tries to hide the truth about her background, living a life of pretence and angst, striving to be someone she is not. An irreconcilable lack of correspondence between her reality and that of the new culture alienates her from the new group. The man eventually rejects her in favour of a woman of his own standing. She cannot return home because the change in her is significant enough to estrange her from her own people.

Another possible example is a woman who embarks upon a relationship with a man many years her junior. She deserts her family and own age group to mix with younger people. She tries to familiarise herself with their discourse, and engages in activities that younger people enjoy. As time goes by, she is obliged to conceal the effects of aging. Her life becomes one of apprehension and dislocation. Although she has superior attributes, everyone recognises her as inadequate and she is gradually phased out, being made to look ridiculous and anachronistic. This woman might open herself up to such impossible circumstances and inhabit so bizarre a mental world

that the only people who can share her particular psychic space are those in mental institutions or prisons.

Unlike Vasalisa, who separates the poppy seeds from the dirt, these women fail to select the elements that nourish rather than seduce. They choose harsh, abusive partners instead of the men who will nurture them. They do not reach the 'moral obligation'—the goal of Jung's 'transcendent function'—under which they live out what they have learnt in their descent to the wild self and thereby 'discover the courage to be [themselves]' (Jung 1960:91; Estés 32-33). They are the women who crawl away in tatters.

The end of 'The Little Mermaid' is tragic and convoluted. Suffice it to say that something awaits her in the forest landscape of the psyche and it is her fate to meet it, without possessing the right form to withstand it. Women who are similar to the mermaid meet up with the forest witch, defy her caution and fall into her power; in her iron jaws she chews them up and spews them out. They are the bones in the fence around the house that spins on chicken feet or the skeleton of the little mermaid caught in the clutches of the polypi. They do not relinquish their 'good girl' nature and do not learn to understand the many layers of reality. They continue to believe: 'I am good, so society must love me and accept me'. Like the mermaid they spend an eternity doing good deeds but never thrust their hands towards heaven to reel and swivel in celebration of a vibrant life.

'The Snow Queen'

Vasilisa and the mermaid undergo initiation in forests and so does the next heroine whose progress we follow. She is Gerda, the female protagonist of 'The Snow Queen'. Her initiation takes place in the form of a long and challenging journey. Within the journey she also has a forest experience. Gerda is fated to endure hardship during a wellnigh impossible undertaking. When a sliver of glass falls into the eye of little Kay, Gerda's playmate, he undergoes a personality change and is stolen by the snow queen. Gerda's arduous journey is a quest to find him.

She has many varied experiences. Numerous creatures of make-believe assist her in finding her way to the palace of the snow queen and, like Vasilisa and the mermaid, she meets up with a forest witch. This witch takes the form of an old woman with whom she stays during one stage of her

journey. The old woman is a crippled hag, the ruler of the realm of oblivion and death, according to Wolfgang Lederer in *The Kiss of the Snow Queen* (1968:41). Her affliction entitles her to this designation. She is not the complex Baba Yaga, who is a combination of various archetypal witches of both the forest and the underworld. Nor is she is like the snow queen who is a truly powerful enchantress. She is just an old witch with a whim. During Gerda's stay with her, the old woman seduces Gerda into the psychic space of distraction and idleness because she wants company. Gerda forgets her purpose and loses sight of her intention to find Kay, but fortunately she has an experience that causes her amnesia to break. This occurs through her communication with the plants in the old hag's garden, the most important of which are roses and hyacinths. These talking flowers volunteer information based on their own perspectives or worldview. They are quite solipsistic in their approach and their remarks are mostly not altogether applicable to her situation. The hyacinths say of their own opinion, 'We do sing our own song, the only one we know!' (nd:225). However, they tell Gerda a significant forest story. I investigate this story because it is a tale with the same theme as the other tales discussed in this essay.

The hyacinths' embedded narrative strongly features the forest in the construct of the divided world of realism and myth. The flowers are enchanted, with other-worldly qualities: they are the all-seeing, all-knowing watchers who can also use their scent in mysterious ways. After Gerda has been subtly reminded of Kay's existence by a rose, the hyacinths tell a story about three maidens who enter a forest:

> 'There were three fair sisters, transparent and delicate they were. The kirtle of the one was red, that of the second blue, of the third pure white. Hand in hand they danced in the moonlight beside the quiet lake; they were not fairies, but daughters of men. Sweet was the fragrance when the maidens vanished into the wood; the fragrance grew stronger. Three biers, on which lay the fair sisters, glided out from the depths of the wood, and floated upon the lake: the glow-worms flew shining around like little floating lamps. Sleep the dancing maidens, or are they dead? The odour from the flowers tells us they are corpses; the evening bells peal out their dirge!'

> ‘You make me quite sad,’ said little Gerda. ‘Your fragrance is so strong I cannot help thinking of the dead maidens. Alas! and is little Kay dead? The roses have been under the earth, and they say no!’
>
> ‘Ding dong, ding dong!’ rang the hyacinth bells. ‘We toll not for little Kay—we know him not! We sing our own song, the only one we know!’ (Andersen nd:225).

The sisters in this story are either poisoned or hypnotized by the fragrance that they encounter in the forest. They experience death, or on a different level, defeat in their initiation into the numinous experience of the deep psyche. They are like the children Baba Yaga devours because they do not satisfactorily accomplish the tasks that she sets. They meet the same fate as the dead mermaid.

As Gerda listens to the hyacinths’ parable she sees herself suffering the same fate as the princesses. She realises that, like them, she too has gone into a forest and become overpowered by a fragrance. Her forest is the abode of the hag and her wonderful, sweet-smelling garden. She identifies with the princesses, seeing the oblivion that the hag’s spell causes her as a kind of ‘death’ that has brought her to a state of forgetfulness. Living in the house of the witch has caused her to relinquish her quest and become self-indulgent and self-involved. She realizes that the hag’s promise of bounty and everlasting asylum has paralysed her will and diverted her from her goal. She immediately leaves the cottage with its scented flowers and delicious cherries and resumes her search for Kay. Thus she escapes oblivion and inertia and emerges strengthened in her resolve.

More lessons from other people along the way await her after she flees the hag. She learns wiliness and strength from the robber maiden; she is toughened by the cannibalistic robber woman; she is taught to be cautious and careful by the Lapland woman; she discovers from her encounter with the Finland woman her great inner strength, integrity and resolve. Although Gerda does not have a personal encounter with the snow queen, her initiation is elicited by her.

Indirectly the snow queen is responsible for Gerda’s quest into the unknown or the wilderland of the deep psyche. In Gerda’s experience (the most voracious part of which is the broken down castle in the wood

inhabited by the cannibalistic robber woman and her villainous associates), her 'helpers' are the swallows, the pigeons, the talking flowers, the ravens, the prince and princess and the reindeer. They play a part similar to that of Vasilisa's helper, Vadacita. The construct of the shattered mirror and the distorted view of the world it brings to Kay also touch Gerda's life. Her charge is to reverse the negativity it causes; she succeeds in her mission.

In both 'Vasilisa the Wise' and 'The Snow Queen', clothes and coverings are thematic. Through the princess's provision of fine clothes and fur boots, Gerda develops the feel for sophistication and elegance. In a forced exchange, the robber maiden takes the clothes and muff and gives Gerda the robber woman's big, rough gloves. As Baba Yaga's possessions connote authority, durability and mastery, so do the gloves belonging to the robber woman. Above all, the gloves are the token of a secure passage. If the witch or her 'cohorts' part with any assets, the beneficiary profits, her future secured forever. Gerda has outwitted her 'devourer', the cannibalistic robber woman, and is thereafter imbued with this woman's vitality, wiliness and resilience.

Whereas Vasilisa's detractors are her stepsisters and stepmother, Gerda's are the snow queen's guards who shout 'expire'. They are the negative assertions that Gerda fights off by chanting a prayer of affirmation. When, after the long expedition, she finds her way to the snow queen's palace, she weeps with joy at seeing Kay again. Her tears melt the icicle of his heart and the snow queen's spell over him is broken. She emerges from her initiatory experience a different person. She is strong, can navigate in the dark and go a long way to rescue someone she loves. The story ends when both Gerda and Kay are mature adults, celebrating their victory over the snow queen. In the company of Kay and in fulfilment of their moral obligation, she returns to their home town to pay homage to the role model of their formative years. There they find that the only change that has taken place is within themselves: 'The clock [says] "Tick, tick!" and the hands [move] as before' (Andersen nd:254).

Gerda, a fictive character undergoing a descent into the psyche's wilderland, has a counterpart in the real world. This young woman commits herself to a young man from an early age. He is her childhood sweetheart but rejects her when he goes through a very difficult adolescence. She remains faithful and patient. Part of her descent into the wild feminine revolves

around her determination to rescue him. He suffers a deep form of identity crisis and perhaps becomes a gangster or a drug addict, involving himself in a destructive relationship. He attaches his sleigh to that of the snow queen, a *femme fatale*. However, he is rescued by his first love, returns home as a prodigal and continues his life, carrying out his moral obligations. Like Gerda, the woman, he goes through his own initiation into the deep psyche.

Both Gerda and Vasilisa reach the point of Jung's 'moral obligation' where they live out what they have learnt in their descent or ascent to the wild self. Of Gerda and Kay the narrator says:

> There they sat, those two happy ones, grown-up and yet children—children in heart, while all around them glowed bright summer—warm, glorious summer (Andersen nd:255).

But the mermaid has an experience parallel to a form of imploding into herself or 'crawling away in tatters'. She does not live to fulfil her moral obligation because she never ascends. A woman whose experience is analogous to that of the mermaid will pay a penance for heeding her undisciplined heart. Depending on her own world view it might happen that she commits herself to the moral obligation of performing good deeds for the rest of her life.

Conclusion

What do readers gain from the tales we have studied? The stories all speak of and to women. A comparison should enable us to determine what Propp calls the 'constant … factors' and those that are unique to a specific tale (Propp 1984:82). By understanding the characterization we may be able to find the fairy tale that best suits our own particular life crisis. Using a technique of critical analysis we can try to comprehend the imagery, metaphor and symbolism active in the descent of each protagonist. Heeding theoreticians such as Propp and Bettleheim, we can gain an understanding into the basic way the fantastical constructs operate. Perhaps some of us can identify with one of the heroines, saying: 'I too have met with Baba Yaga under similar circumstances'. We learn from the tales that, in order to survive our encounter with the witch, we must not forget to feed Vidacita, listen to her instruction and combine forces with her when she assists us in

separating the poppy seeds from the dirt. We should be in good faith, face our dragon and know that finding ourselves in a dark, impenetrable forest is an ancient literary image for humankind in need of self knowledge. By coming successfully out from among the trees—and from the witch's clutches, bearing her possessions—we forsake our naïve and juvenile understanding of the world for a more mature, but perhaps less conventional, way of knowing. According to the folktales we may live happily ever after only when we have left the ordinary expectations of society and withstood the trial of the Wild Woman, at which point we can begin, in Jung's phrase, to 'find the courage to be [ourselves]' (1960:91).

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University of Zululand

Securing Women and Children at King Shaka's Well-Resourced and Formidable Refuge, Nkandla Forest

Sr. N. Gloria Irenata Biyela (FSF)

Introduction

The primary purpose of this article is to return to King Shaka's most popular and formidable refuge, namely, Nkandla Forest, whose spectacularly mountainous ground and its depths witnessed, according to Gillings (1989), the famous battles between Shaka and Zwide of the Ndwandwe tribe. The article concentrates on Nkandla Forest as a well-resourced guardian of victims and refuge for women and children during the Shakan and Zulu-Anglo wars. During the former, King Shaka had to act responsibly and show courage in the face of great adversity by protecting and caring for the most vulnerable in his land. For him, the security of women and children was a priority in all conflicts and his planning involved attention to their specific needs prior to his campaigns.

This article further examines the environmental, socio-economic and pharmaceutical value of Nkandla Forest, which may explain why Shaka chose it as his stronghold while he exercised his intelligence and cunning in overcoming Zwide, a negative and dangerous opponent. Despite Nkandla Forest's perils and chances of terror during war, its mysterious rocks, flora, fauna and water supplies were beneficial to the 'refugees' as well as to the wounded warriors from the nearby battlefield.

Forest Power and the Protection of Victims

Throughout human history, people have been fascinated by the beauty and

diversity of forest life, and have found in forests an inspiration, a stimulus of the imagination and a source of spiritual reflection. A forest acts as a place of transformation where heroic acts tend to take place. Forests abound in Zulu folklore and are often used to offer practical advice, warnings, predictions or analytical observations, both spiritual and physical. For example, the folktale, '*Izimuzimu Nentombazana*' (The Cannibal and the Girl) in Noverino Canonici's collection of Zulu tales (1993:78) contains a clear warning to children that their parents are right when they give them directives on how to behave in strange places and with strange people, or when they insist on the children's not venturing alone into deserted places or a forest. It teaches that parents must be obeyed over and above peer group pressures because those places might be infested with hostile animals, or witches and their familiars. In the forests of these tales, there are often ogres, human beings who have degenerated into animals, intent on the utter destruction of human life, driven by greed and witchcraft. Such forest 'people' are seen to be half animal and half human.

There are also folktales such as '*UBuhlaluse Benkosi*' (Canonici 1993:95) (UBuhlaluse, the King's Favourite Daughter), which feature the unjustly victimized heroine, UBuhlaluse, who struggles for survival against the utterly destructive acts of her enemies. She cries for help and the man cutting wood in the forest saves her; finally, she regains her beauty as well as her royal status which her enemies envy so much. The king punishes all the culprits in the conspiracy against his daughter.

In his study on trickery and tricksters in forests, Canonici (1995:130) states:

> The forest becomes a symbol of the wide living shield that protects human life, because forest trees span the three cosmic circles: the sky, the earth and the underworld. When a person is chased by evil forces the forest opens up to protect him or her.

Even in the underworld, the service of forest trees is still recognized in the poem of Benedict Wallet Vilakazi (1993:73), '*Ma Ngificwa Ukufa*' (When Death Comes):

Ngimbeleni ngaphansi kotshani

Duze nezihlahla zomnyezane,
Lapho amagatsh'eyongembesa
Ngamaqabung'agcwel'ubuhlaza.

(Bury me underneath the grass
Near the willow trees
Where the branches will cover me
With leaves full of green.)

Both Canonici and Vilakazi give us a powerful illustration of forest trees with elongated branches and the massive strength to stretch themselves out to embrace, cover and protect a victim or the one abandoned. The Catholic *Daily Prayer from the Divine Office* presents the following Morning Prayer verse to highlight the power of forest trees (1974:293-294):

Hail, true cross, of beauty rarest,
King of all the forest trees;
Leaf and flower and fruit thou bearest
Medicine for a world's disease;
Fairest wood,
….
Yet more fair, who hung on these.
Bend thy branches down to meet him.

Here, the branches of the sacred Cross on which Jesus Christ was hung humbly bend down to meet Him in order to lift him up and exalt him to the great heights of the forest. The speaker concludes by calling the Cross the King of all the forest trees because through this Tree joy has come into the world.

It is assumed that Shaka also thought that the tall rejuvenating Nkandla Forest trees would bend low to welcome women and children into their abode. Elements of power and protection seem to be characteristic of human apprehension of forest trees. These elements remind one of the two prominent leaders in South Africa, namely, Gatsha Buthelezi and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, both of whose names are associated with trees. 'Gatsha', meaning a branch is the name of Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi,

who with the Zulu royal blood stretched himself high above others to become the first president of the Inkatha Freedom Party in 1975, to protect with integrity the indigenous values of the African soil. 'Rolihlahla' is Mandela's family name, which literally means to drag a bush or a cut branch. If you drag a branch in isiXhosa, they say, you initiate trouble. The other meaning of this name has an association with bravery because you cannot drag a branch if you are not capable of finishing your course. Consequently, the name means that you stand up for what you believe in. This is exactly what Mandela did. He took up arms and went to the forest as an Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK) warrior to confront the evil forces of apartheid through guerrilla warfare. In his autobiography through Cachalia's pen (1998:75), Mandela bravely tells his story:

> From the beginning, I admitted to being one of the people who had helped to form MK. I told the court that whatever I had done, I had done to serve my people and, in a humble way, to contribute to the freedom struggle.

Like forest trees stretching out their branches for a stranded victim, Mandela audaciously dragged the citizens of South Africa across the apartheid bridge and protected their human rights through a democratic government in 1994.

Although forests are a rich natural resource, providing tranquility, protection and other gifts to humans, they still remain symbolically ambiguous because everything, real or unreal, is conjured up in forests. A person should, however, be able to decipher some aspects of the forests that constitute the common good endorsed by *ubuntu* (humaneness), which shapes and reflects the human social system.

In the Eastern Cape context, some Xhosa-speaking people tend to treat forests with caution, regarding them with a degree of ambiguity. On one hand, during the Frontier Wars with the British, the forests in the Amatolas and the Waterberg played a valuable role as places of refuge, and also as sites in which battles could be effectively waged and won. Moreover, forests are perceived as containing much of value, and a specially trained practitioner, such as an *igqirha* (a healer and diviner) or an *ixhwele* (herbalist) may venture into forests to gather plants and bark. On the other hand, they are also viewed as dark, mysterious, potentially hazardous places,

and sometimes even the abode of witches. (Gwadana Forest in the former Transkei is one such example.)

Nkandla Forest is no exception to the general ambiguity concerning forests, because stories of ghosts marching on the previous battlefields are commonly told by the people who live nearby. It is not clear whether what is reported by the renowned historian, Jeff Guy (2005:16), concerning the marching on the battlefield is associated with the 1906 Bhambatha Zondi uprisings or not: 'For Bhambatha had to die, and die publicly … and [fall] back on the Nkandla Forest to continue his resistance.' One is left to speculate that the marching ghosts on the precious Nkandla Forest battlefield are probably resilient warriors from all nationalities who took part in the wars that have raged over this battlefield during the ages. They might have committed themselves like Bhambatha to die for the truth in order to fight endlessly against unjust rulers of all ages. Their continuous marching seems to show their dedication to their military mission of fighting for their land and the protection of society.

Nkandla Forest is also popular in the stories of *ufuqane*, a supernatural being that is believed to accompany and carry individuals around as if a person is walking in the 'air-lift'. This *ufuqane* is said to be very active on misty days. Nevertheless, in the next sections, we will turn to the more positive side of Nkandla Forest, focusing on its location, its link with the war between Shaka and Zwide of the Ndwandwe clan and on the question of why Shaka chose it as his stronghold and as the refuge for his vulnerable subjects, such as women and children.

Nkandla Forest and Shaka's Reasons for Choosing It

Nkandla Forest is a remote area of breathtaking mountainous beauty, located within the uThungulu District in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The whole Nkandla area is of course named after Nkandla Forest. It is said that the name, Nkandla,

> is derived from the verb *khandla* meaning 'to tire, exhaust or prostrate' and was given by King Shaka to the various connected forests that clothe the mountains, spurs and valleys of the area …. Separate names are given to some of the forests e.g. Dukuza (wander

> about), Elendhlovu (the elephant one), Elibomvana (the little red one) and Kwa Vuza (the dripping one). The slopes of the mountains are remarkable for their steepness and heights [varying] between 2000 - 3500 feet (http://www.kznwildlife. com/site/ ecotourism/destinations/forests/Ncandla/History.html).

Tradition holds that Shaka went to the area to resolve a dispute, but when he got there, he was exhausted due to the remarkable steepness and height of the mountains. As described by Duncan McKenzie and Pat Benchly in their birding guide to the forest (2007):

> The Nkandla Forest comprises 1600ha of climax mistbelt forest and is one of the most outstanding examples in South Africa. The forest covers the crown and southwestern slopes of the ridge, which lie above the Umhlathuze and Thukela rivers at a height of between 1100 and 1300 m above sea level. Streams rising in the forest form deep gorges leading into the Nsuze River (500m), which runs southeast along the base of the ridge.

Before one starts a discussion about why Shaka chose Nkandla Forest as his stronghold during his war with Zwide, it is necessary to talk briefly about one of the causes of this bloody war. Tradition holds that the major catalyst of this war was the murder of King Dingiswayo of the Mthethwa clan, who was Shaka's foster father. To Shaka, Dingiswayo was a mentor and protector after he had been rejected by his own father, Senzangakhona. The murder of Dingiswayo by Zwide of the Ndwandwe clan put Shaka at centre stage, charged with taking revenge on a very powerful antagonist. The fight against this hated murderer of his protector became an obsession for Shaka that could only end with the complete crushing of Zwide, the harsh enemy. Shaka was still somewhat young and inexperienced to face the ruthless and unscrupulous Zwide. The informants maintain that Zwide looked at Shaka with great contempt—so much so that he had killed Phungashe Buthelezi for having been defeated by Shaka. To Zwide, such a defeat meant a loss of political status for Phungashe. Shaka was greatly alarmed at Zwide's actions.

It is assumed that Zwide's action towards Phungashe scared Shaka and

made him start seeking a superior strategy to overpower the arrogant Zwide. Seemingly, Shaka began to think about his previous victories which took place in the forest while he was still under Dingiswayo's mentorship. The *imbongi* (praiser) has a record of one of Shaka's historical victories in the forest:

> *UsiShaka kashayeki kanjengamanzi,*
> *Umahlomehlathin'onjengohlanya,*
> *Uhlany'olusemehlwen'amadoda.*
>
> (Shaka is unbeatable, is not like water,
> He who armed in the forest like the mad man,
> The mad man who is in full view of men.) (Cope 1968:89).

The informants say that the name of the mad man who is referred to in the above stanza and whom Shaka killed in the forest was uLembe or Somadela, the son of Malusi of the Nxumalo or Ndwandwe clan. The informants also mention that this man was in the true sense not mad, but a Goliath whom only people like Shaka could conquer. Shaka's memories of the strategies he used when he attacked uLembe probably led him to use similar tactics in confronting this new 'Goliath', Zwide. Possibly, the idea of using Nkandla Forest as a safe haven during war also came to Shaka from recollections of his tremendous victory over the so-called mad man of the forest. His reminiscences of this previous forest encounter seem to have empowered and encouraged him to start preparations for war with the arrogant Zwide.

In the next section, we will investigate some of the reasons why Shaka committed himself to protecting women and children. We will also examine the means he devised to show the nation that he was a responsible statesman and accountable for the safety and security of his most vulnerable, such as women and children.

Shaka, and the Significance of Protecting Women and Children

According to Shaka's strategic plan for war, Zwide had to be crushed within the former's territory. Zwide had to be lured skilfully to the Nkandla Forest

and Shaka had to evacuate women and children to a place where Zwide would not be able to find them to massacre. Like a male lion Shaka had to use all possible defensive mechanisms to protect his subjects. As Parker puts it in *Natural World* (1995:112),

> The role of the male lions is to defend their pride's territory. They do this by pacing around it, by roaring, by marking trees and paths with their urine.

The lion represents the one who comes to the fore to take control in every critical situation that puts his or her dependents in jeopardy. It further represents an individual who does not display his or her power and authority only for his or her own glory and honour but for the welfare of those under his or her rule. It represents the one who goes out of himself or herself for the good of others.

Shaka designed tactful evacuation plans as a military necessity to save the population from the advancing army of Zwide and the atrocities that could be committed against his civilians under Zwide's occupation. Critics may perceive Shaka as an irresponsible statesman for hiding his subjects, especially, women and children in the forest. Others might argue that he had no choice because leaving them in their homes would have exposed them to Zwide's cruelty as the latter's intention was to burn all the homesteads, food storages and livestock on his way to the Nkandla battlefield.

If one takes note of the situation of Dukuduku State Forest, which lies at the entrance to the greater St Lucia Wetlands Parks, one begins to learn that Shaka was not the first or the only one to find sanctuary in a forest. Probably, Shaka learnt about the safety of forests from the people who used to live in the Dukuduku Forest, as the following quotation from Nicola Jones's 'Save the Forest' (1999)—published on a website sponsored by The Helen Suzman Foundation—suggests:

> Dukuduku — meaning the sound of heartbeat or the place of hiding — is so called because it was a sanctuary for both men and cattle during the Zulu succession struggle following Cetshwayo's death in 1884. Historical research suggests that the region has been inhabited

> since before the days of Shaka and provided food and building materials and shelter for cattle.

It is interesting to note that the use of the forest as refuge did not end in Shaka's or Cetshwayo's times: in the Dukuduku State Forest,

> Since 1994 the number of forest dwellers has been swollen by fugitives from justice, refugees from violence in the midlands, Mozambican immigrants and a growing army of unemployed and homeless folk looking for a new home (Jones 1999).

This statement seems to confirm that the forest is still perceived as a safe haven for the vulnerable.

Prior to evacuations to the Nkandla Forest, Shaka addressed the nation and re-affirmed the distinctive role that women play in society. He proclaimed women's importance in rebuilding war-torn societies and social resources. Women leaders often facilitate reconciliation through mediation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and also constitute a primary force of immediate socio-economic stability in their families. For Shaka, such valuable contributions had to be retained and protected. He emphasized that if women and children were not looked after during the conflict, and were to fall under direct threat of attack, inequalities would escalate and social networks would break down, making these women and children more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation during and after the conflict. Children in particular would suffer, because it was likely that they would be subjected to conflict displacement and consequently end up living in extreme poverty without the support of their parents, families or communities. Therefore, the protection and safety of women and children became Shaka's primary duty as a statesman.

For Shaka, Nkandla Forest seemed the safest place for hiding women and children as it was near where the battlefield would be and he knew that the warriors were determined to die for their women and children. According to the Zulu patriarchal system, men have a bounden duty to protect their land, together with women and children, at all costs. For women and children, the presence of their audacious warriors seemed the best protection of all.

And a sense of protection was greatly needed at this time. Many people were unable to cope with the anxiety associated with a supposed attack and invasion by the ferocious Zwide. Some fled and others died of shock and fear. This fear, based on the pre-war reports that many people and domestic animals would be utterly destroyed, was important in Shaka's planning for emergency evacuations from probable targets to reduce demoralization and control panic, especially amongst women and children.

Close to the departure of refugees to Nkandla Forest, Shaka sent the *izinyanga zempi* (special war herbalists) to the forest to make a final thorough check-up on the natural resources such as the kind of water, animals, vegetation and plants in the environment for the safety and security of his subjects who were going to take refuge in this forest. Traditionally, *izinyanga* (herbalists) are well-respected for their superior knowledge of flora and fauna. Biyela (2003:47) states:

> Amongst the Zulu community, *izinyanga* are regarded as primary health-care workers as well as protectors of society even from natural disasters.

An experienced *inyanga* (herbalist) is supposed to know the phase of the moon during which the majority of animals are involved in breeding so that they can communicate to the people that they should not interfere with or kill the animals during this season.

An *inyanga* is also supposed to know what phase of the moon or season of the year it is in order to tell the people what kinds of both plants and animals are available for medicinal use. To examine the environment prior to war was essential because some plants fluctuate during a certain phase of the moon and some plants have to be avoided during a particular season. Tradition has it that during the expedition to KwaSoshangana in 1828, for example, many of Shaka's warriors died from *umdlebe*. This is a species of poisonous tree of the *Synadenium cupulare* family. Many warriors died because they came to that place when this fatal plant was blooming. It is said that its scent causes death. Apparently, on that occasion, *izinyanga* of war had not been sent to examine the local environment prior to the expedition. The tragic deaths caused by this fatal tree, *umdlebe* are recorded in the following praises of Dingane:

> *Uqambi-lankom, ukuba zilahlekile,*
> *Ziyakuf' umdlebe kwaSoshangana.*
>
> (Detached drove of cattle, because the herd has strayed,
> and will be poisoned by the *Synadenium cupulare* tree in Soshangana's land.) (Rycroft 1988:70).

After a good inspection of Nkandla Forest to the satisfaction of the chief commanding general, evacuations began with women and children, followed by the steady flow of a great exodus. The civilians were moved to safe areas inside the forest under a good protection of special warriors. According to DeWitt (1943:2), almost the same procedure was followed during the mass evacuations under military supervision during the Second World War.

During his war with Zwide, Shaka used a military strategy to lure Zwide to his stronghold, Nkandla Forest. It is important to note the same tactic of luring an enemy into this forest was used during the Bhambatha Rebellion in 1906:

> *Yingakho inkosi uBhambatha yakhetha amaqhinga okulwa ihlehla, ibayengela ophathe, isebenzisa ukuvikeleka eyayikuthola ekucinaneni kwamahlathi aseNkandla.*
>
> (This is why King Bhambatha chose the strategy of fighting backwards, leading them to the risk area, using the security which he used to find in the denseness of the Nkandla Forests.) (Guy 2006:3).

The person largely responsible for the use of Nkandla Forest as a refuge in this war was Sigananda Shezi, a popular activist of the 1906 uprisings who, like his father's cousin Shaka, saw Nkandla Forest as the appropriate refuge for women. Gillings (1989) reports that those observing the movements of the Bhambatha uprising were amazed to see how women poured out of the Nkandla bush and made their way to Gun Hill, only to return to the bush after the action. This is what Shaka's *imbongi* (praiser) says about the condition of this refuge:

Obesixhokoxhoko singamatshe aseNkandla

(He who is as strongly compact as the rocks of Nkandla.) (Cope 1968: 95).

The above discussion clearly illustrates that the Nkandla Forest was deemed to be a suitable place of refuge for women and children during periods of conflict. The place itself influenced Shaka's strategies of responding to threats and protecting vulnerable groups such as women and children. One may want to know to the spot where Shaka's stronghold was in the forest to map out the area where the evacuations ended. The following statement from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's website, which tells of yet another Zulu leader who kept his people safe in the forest, gives us a clue as to the exact location of this stronghold:

> Above and at the rear of the Mome waterfall (which has a drop of fifty feet) is a natural stronghold, the one used by Cetshwayo in 1883. The Mome canyon gorge, takes its name from a stream that flows through it. It is about one and a half miles long, with great mountain walls on either side. At the head of the valley is the waterfall. Near the fall the ground rises on either side to an altitude of over 3000 feet, but at the mouth of the valley drops away with remarkable suddenness (http://www.kznwildlife.com/site/ecotourism /destinations/forests/Ncandla/History.html).

Probably, this is the same stronghold used by Shaka during war with Zwide. It is likely that King Cetshwayo, Sigananda and Bhambatha followed Shaka in using this natural fortress. In the following section, the discussion is on the mist belt, especially the portion around the Mome gorge. It is necessary to find out the role played by the mist belt in the fight as against Zwide.

The Mist Belt

There are a number of stories told about the thick and heavy mist of Nkandla Forest. People living near the forest often speak about *izinkungu ezikhulumayo*, 'talking mist'. Probably, the hill, Nomangci (One Fully

Covered) near the Nkandla Forest got its name from this mist, because, most of the time in summer, this hill is hidden by low cloud cover.

The mist that settles on the forest area is often so thick that its movement carries powerful sound waves. This 'talking mist' is terrifying because you first think that someone is walking behind you, but then you suddenly hear voices in dialogue in front of you. Moreover, the thickness of the mist also makes vision very difficult. Shaka may have calculated on Zwide's warriors' unfamiliarity with such a strange mist and guessed that it was going to be too difficult for them to make progress towards their opponents, especially at night.

With reference to this mist belt, Gillings (1989) mentions that, during the Bhambatha uprisings, Colonel Mckenzie issued orders for the men to prepare for a night march but the mist delayed their further movement as its density is found to be greatest around the Mome Gorge.

It appears that the choice of a mist belt area was one Shaka's most effective ploys in preventing his enemy from attacking his vulnerable subjects in the forest. Perhaps he was influenced by Zulu folklore in this choice, for, as Canonici (1995:132) observes, in folktales, a mist is 'a confusing natural element that creates seclusion and protection, like the magic circle'. In most of these traditional stories it functions beneficially, protecting the escaping victim and confusing the attacker.

Because of the mist, it was almost impossible for Zwide's warriors to confront Shaka's warriors who were on guard near the hiding place of women and children, and who were determined to die rather than letting the enemy into the forest to massacre their women and children.

The mist becomes more mysterious if one takes Maphumulo (1989:65) into consideration.

> '*UNomkhubulwane yinkosazana eyisithunywa sikaMvelinqangi…Akabonwa uhamba nezinkungu zezulu*.'
>
> (Nomkhubulwane is the princess who is the messenger of God…. Human eyes do not see her, she moves by the heavenly mist).

In Zulu tradition, Nomkhubulwane is regarded as *iNkosazane* (a heavenly Lady or the Princess of fertility and nature). Many questions arise

concerning what Maphumulo says about her relationship with the mist. During my field research, I came to a forest at KwaBulawayo near KwaMaqhwakazi. I was told that this forest as well as the field inside it were dedicated to Nomkhubulwane. Young women used to tend both the field and the forest. The story of the mist along the river, Amatheku, in this forest was told by the locals. The Khumalos of Ngome Forest at Nongoma say that Nomkhubulwane used to appear in this forest when there was mist.

If Nomkhubulwane goes by the mist, could it be possible that the voices and the movements in the 'talking mist' in Nkandla Forest have some association with Nomkhubulwane and her associates? Possibly, she moves by the mist to protect travellers and refugees who might be victims of the dangers of the forest, especially when it is misty.

The Nkandla Forest mist, especially around the Mome Gorge, can be likened to that of the Great Victoria Falls in the Zambezi River admired by Vilakazi (1993:54) in his poem; '*Impophoma YeVictoria*' (The Victoria Falls):

> *UNkulunkul' ogcobe isimongo*
> *Sekhanda lakho ngomudwa wothingo*
> *Lwenkosikazi, nenkung' engapheli*
> *Egubuzele izinyawo zakho.*
>
> (God has anointed your forehead
> With the rainbow line
> Of the Queen, and the mist that never gets finished
> Which is covering your feet.)

Vilakazi here mentions the mist, the rainbow and the heavenly Lady as related entities, as if saying that where the Lady is, the rainbow and mist are also to be found. Traditionally, when the rainbow appears after rain, it is a sign of Nomkhubulwane's presence, for she has the responsibility of bringing calm after a storm in order to protect people from the after-effects of violent weather. Vilakazi further mentions that the mist of the Victoria Falls covers the 'feet' of this waterfall. The feet, in this context seem to symbolise the unfathomable depth of the waterfall, whose lower part is always covered by the thick mist. The mist has to shelter and protect the

'feet', probably, the delicate parts of this natural grandeur. One can conclude that the mist of both Nkandla Forest and the Victoria Falls have a similar responsibility, which is to hide and protect the vulnerable.

Water, Food and Medicinal Plants

According to De Witt, writing of the evacuation of Japanese people from San Francisco during World War II (1943), the provision of hospitals and medical care to evacuees from the date of evacuation is essential. However, one may argue that without water and food, life is impossible for a refugee, and it is often difficult to obtain these basic life commodities during such testing times as war. Fortunately, Nkandla Forest is the source of numerous crystal-clear streams, the principal ones being the Mome, Nkunzane and Halambu. Almost all the streams from this forest join the Nsuze River along the south eastern side of the forest. Due to the abundance of running water, Nkandla Forest, abounds in wild fruit trees, vegetables, birds and animals that may be used for human consumption. About wild fruit, Gcumisa (1993:192) maintains that '*ezinye izithelo zasendle ziwukudla nakithina sintu*' (Other wild fruits are also food for us human beings). Examples of the wild fruit that children could enjoy in the forest are *izindoni* (black edible berry / forest myrtle) and *umgwenya* (kaffir plum/ *Harpephyllum caffum*) (Doke 1972:167, 287).

Informants maintain that species such as birds and monkeys in the Nkandla Forest canopy played a crucial role in helping children to obtain wild fruit during their stay in this forest. The informants say that when monkeys eat certain wild fruit, they have a habit of knocking them down from the trees. Children would enjoy picking up these fallen fruit for their own consumption and sustenance. There would also have been wild vegetables like *imbati*, an edible stinging gourd which, according to Doke (1972:491), is called urtica and fleirya; and *intshungu*, which Hutchings (1996:304) calls gifappel. These were greatly enjoyed during the war and are still admired by present-day Zulu people for their flavour and health components.

Besides the fresh running water and wild fruit and vegetables which the forest provides, it also hosts an impressive assortment of medicinal plants, many of which contain potential cures for fatal diseases such as

cancer and cardiac conditions. *Umganu* (marula tree) and *unwele* (Sutherlandia) are among these. Plants with anti-muscular inflammation and anti-bleeding properties and the power of healing snake bites are also found in the forest. It is said that plants with broad and thick leaves and soft tree-barks such as *umunga* were used for binding the wounds of injured warriors from the nearby battlefield.

Herbal plants form the core of life for almost every African family. In fact, African herbal medicine is one of the most sophisticated herbal medicine systems in the world. Combinations of a variety of ingredients are used in formulas correlated to each individual's pattern of physical and emotional disharmony. The multi-ingredient formulas may be decocted and drunk, inhaled or licked.

During my field research, my informant, who is an *inyanga* (herbalist) at Umlazi Township, showed me a traditional medicine which had a mixture of 46 ingredients. The formulas in that medicine were crafted together to work simultaneously, each ingredient designed to accomplish a part of the overall process of restoring balance in the body. Here, however, we will focus on a few selected herbs, especially those which are regarded as Nkandla Forest products.

Perhaps the most important of these plants is *Sutherlandia frutescens* subspecies, *microphylla*, commonly known by the Zulus as *unwele* or *insizwa*, and by English-speakers as club moss (Hutchings 1996:5). Nkandla Forest is a home to this plant, which has been traditionally used to cure a number of illnesses such as skin irritations, bladder inflammation and blood diseases and also to soothe more psychological ailments:

> the Zulu warriors returning from battle used the plant to relax themselves. Grieving widows used it as an anti-depressant to help them through their loss (http://www.sutherlandia. com/ sutherlandia _frame.htm).

It is thought that *unwele* was the first plant to be looked for by the herbalists during preparations for Shaka's campaign against Zwide, because it was the most relevant medicine for both warriors going into battle and women who were to lose their loved ones due to war.

Currently, it is being used for people suffering from HIV or AIDS:

> A medicinal plant used in Africa for centuries to boost immunity—and currently being taken by people with HIV- is to be tested by scientists in a clinical trial …. The Medical Research Council (MRC) is setting up a phase 1/11 trial on Sutherlandia (referred to locally as *unwele*), and its ethics committee has already approved the terms of the trial (Cullinan 2001).

Unwele has been tested scientifically and is already on the dispensary shelves as a safe product, as Hutchings (2002:2) maintains:

> Tablets made from dried leaves are taken by all patients attending the clinic and account for the observed improvements in weight, energy levels and general well being. Toxicity tests on the leaves from the chemotype grown for PhytoNova were recently conducted by the MRC on vervet monkeys and indicated safety in all the variables tested. There are many anecdotes available on its efficacy, including anecdotal evidence of raised CD4 counts and lowered viral loads available cited by Dr Gericke in various presentations. Many patients report rapid improvements in appetite and strength.

It is remarkable to hear that anecdotal evidence, suggesting that *unwele* might improve the quality of life of thousands of people suffering from HIV/AIDS, is already mounting.

However, caution should be observed as far as biodiversity and sustainability are concerned, because of the risk that the growing herbal market and its commercial benefits could pose a threat to biodiversity through overharvesting. Use of natural resources, if not controlled, may lead to the extinction of endangered species and the destruction of natural habitats, not least in the Nkandla Forest, a rich source of *unwele* and other natural cures.

The other herbal plant that I want to bring in into this discussion is *amasethole* (*Vitellariopsis marginata*), which is used to treat patients with blood clotting disorders and other blood-related diseases. The herbalists use mainly the roots of this plant, which are of great help in controlling bleeding and blood clots due to gape wounds sustained during war. It appears that

there are chemical components contained in the roots of this plant that are responsible for antiplatelet agglutination activity in the body. *Amasethole* is popular amongst indigenous herbalists because of these properties. Unfortunately, the medicinal character (antiplatelet agglutination) of its roots of this plant has not yet been scientifically investigated and is not widely known in the medical sector.

Another medicinal plant which is also not yet as popular as *unwele* is *inguduza* (*Scilla natalensis*, slangkop). This is my late grandfather's favourite herbal plant from Nkandla Forest. My grandfather used to call it *umuthi omhlophe* (white medicine). Probably, it got its nickname from the white foam it produces when crushed or whipped in water. My grandfather would always recommend it to other herbalists as a good medicine for sprains, fractures and purgative uses. My grandfather would also use *umhlabelo* (embrocation) for sprains, fractures and snakebites.

Since there were children hidden in the Nkandla Forest during war, it is necessary to talk about the most common herbal medicine for children called *umphuphutho* (*Graderia scabra*), which could not have been neglected during this period of evacuation. Amongst African homes, it is often observed that when the child looks sickly, or an infant's fontanel is sinking-in, the mother or grandmother of the child first checks its eyes. The checking is usually followed by the following comment: *unesilonda*, which literally means to have a 'sore'. This kind of sore does not mean a skin inflammation. It refers to a certain kind of irregularity in the body system of the child. *Isilonda* in a child is usually regarded as an indication of a low immune system. To boost the child's immune system, adults usually use *umphuphutho*, which is a brownish- powdered medicine as an anal suppository.

Traditional women seem to be specialists in this field of childrens's healthcare and they say that the eye can reflect any disharmony or imbalances that might occur amongst the organs of the body. They further maintain that they are also able to interpret the condition of the eyes by noting pigmentation changes. These eye pigmentation changes often correspond to the stages and types of disorders in the body.

Then there are herbal medicines administered specifically for women. I asked several women who used to be traditional midwives in rural areas about medicines that are used for labour-related pains and disorders.

They mentioned that a particular variety of plants has been used for centuries as potent medicines by South Africa's indigenous peoples. They used these medicinal plants mainly as energy boosters, powerful anti-depressant and regulators of all sorts of body disorders. Among these is *ugobho/ugobo* (*Gunnera perpensa*), which is commonly known as a river pumpkin and has been mentioned as the most popular medicinal plant for women-related conditions. This plant is found in Nkandla Forest and could have been used during Shaka's war. It is used to treat infertility in women and to aid in the expulsion of the afterbirth. Zulus also administer this herb to facilitate delivery of the child or to initiate labour when it is retarded. Another medicine is prepared from the warmed leaves of a herb called *Udlutshana* (*Aster bakeranus*); it is used to facilitate menstrual discharge.

Unfortunately, most of these traditional herbs are not yet known in the western world of medicine, nor have they been scientifically researched for exposure and the identification of their molecular substance.

United Person Power as Security: Shaka's Relatives and Friends

Besides medicinal plants, food, water and the physical features of Nkandla Forest, person power was also essential to Shaka's success during his campaign. The discussion will now turn to Shaka's close relatives and friends, for example, Zokufa Shezi and Zihlandlo Mkhize, who strongly supported him.

The *amaChube* or the Shezi clan is numerous in Nkandla and there is a legend that says that they originated in the Nkandla Forest. During Shaka's time, Nkandla Forest was under Zokufa, the father of Sigananda, the popular activist of the 1906 Bhambatha uprisings. Zokufa and Shaka were cousins and grew up together at eLangeni area near Melmoth. Zokufa's clan was already on the side of Shaka when the latter fought with Zwide.

Moreover, the Shezi clan or *amaChube* were specialists in metal work. It is said that the *iklwa* (Shaka's short shafted stabbing spear) was developed by them in the Nkandla Forest. This means that Shaka chose to fight near the production 'warehouse' of his weaponry so that he would have a constant supply close at hand.

Then there was Zihlandlo, who was Shaka's best friend. With reference to Zihlandlo, Kunene (1979:299) states:

> Shaka visits Zihlandlo who from now on is to serve as a close friend to whom he can speak his most delicate thoughts. Zihlandlo is brave, gentle, humane and above all, intelligent.

The *imbongi* is quite aware of the intimate relationship between Shaka and Zihlandlo. He compares such a brotherly relationship to a single leaf of sweet reed:

> *Owadl'izimfe zimbili.*
> *Enye kuwuZihland' enye kunguGcwabe,*
> *Kwaphum'ikhasi selilinye.*
>
> (He who devoured two stalks of sweet reed,
> One was Zihlandlo and other Gcwabe,
> And there came out now one leaf.) (Cope 1968:111).

Informants mention that the sweetness of the reed in the above stanza symbolises the unique relationship that existed between Shaka and Zihlandlo. Some informants continue to emphasize that there were many other kings who submitted to Shaka voluntarily but they were not as close as Zihlandlo to his heart. Zihlandlo was so close that Shaka even called him *umnawami* (my younger brother).

Before facing Zwide, Shaka needed very strong person-based power and support. It was at such times that Zokufa, Zihlandlo and other friends would be called in for assistance, as is illustrated in the saying: 'a friend in need is a friend in deed'. This explains that the chiefs surrounding the Nkandla Forest battlefield favoured Shaka rather than Zwide. As a result, Shaka conquered his arrogant enemy. The *imbongi* acknowledges Shaka's victory as he proclaims:

> *USikhunyan'uyintomb'ukuganile,*
> *Ukufinyanis'uhlez'enkundlen' esibayen'eNkandla,*
> *Engaz'ukuthi amabuth'akh' anomgombolozelo,*

Usishaya-ndlondlo bakushayile.

(Sikhunyana is a girl and he is married to you,
He found you sitting in council in the cattle-fold at Nkandla,
Not knowing that your warriors had a cross examination,
Beater of the horned viper, they have beaten you.) (Cope 1968:101).

The *imbongi* emphasises that Zwide's son, Sikhunyana, was conquered. Probably, Sikhunyana was the chief commander in Zwide's army. The *imbongi* also highlights the fact that Shaka's warriors encircled Zwide's impi at Nkandla Forest, Shaka's stronghold, which is referred to as a cattle-kraal. Elsewhere, the *imbongi* describes how Shaka finally destroyed Zwide himself:

UZwide wampheq'amahlonjan' omabili.
(As for Zwide, he twisted his two little shoulders together.) (Cope 1968: 95).

The above discussion indicates that in addition to the strong spiritual and natural forces that influenced Shaka's affection for the Nkandla Forest as a refuge, the place was also associated with strong social and political attachments. Within and near the forest were people whom Shaka could trust and depend on. The descendants of Zihlandlo agree that *amaChube* / Shezi and Mkhize clans were neighbours at Nkandla. This adds to the fact that there was a united power base for Shaka, which in the end gave him security against Zwide. Shaka is idealized as a warrior king. Relentlessly going after his mortal enemy Zwide, he caused his friends and allies to come closer to himself, and former enemies to become his allies.

The focus of this article is not on war *per se*, but rather on the resources available in Nkandla Forest as well as on Shaka's care and responsibility as a leader as far as women and children, security and safety were concerned. Cachalia (1998:108), in Nelson Mandela's autobiography, puts it this way: 'Like a gardener, a leader must take responsibility for what he grows.' For Shaka, his garden in this situation was his nation, which he had to protect. He had to act as a responsible statesman despite the testing

times of war, to avoid the slaughter of his people by Zwide. With reference to a responsible person, Msimang (1986:160), states:

> To the traditional Zulu, to act in a responsible way is the highest virtue and to neglect one's duty is vice. Consequently, the irresponsible are invariably punished. However, those who act in a responsible manner are rewarded.

Respect for Nkandla Forest as a Tourist Destination

Because of its medicinal and food resources, its breathtaking beauty and mystery and its rich cultural heritage, Nkandla Forest is a tourist destination *par excellence*. But it is also a delicate and complex ecosystem. According to Michael Pidwirny (1999-2008), ecosystems are:

> Dynamic entities composed of the biological community and the abiotic environment. An ecosystem's abiotic and biotic composition and structure is determined by the state of a number of interrelated environmental factors. Changes in any of these factors, for example, nutrient availability, temperature, light intensity, and species population density will result in dynamic changes to the nature of these systems.

Negative effects of change or lack of the interconnected balance in the ecological community are better explained in the *Catholic Link*'s 'Greening the Liturgical Green Season' (2008):

> Without a cloud, there would be no rain, without rain, the trees cannot grow … and without trees, we cannot make paper …. If there is no light, the forest cannot grow.

Ecological changes have not yet drastically affected Nkandla Forest. Although road construction may have negative effects on its natural habitat at a later stage, the forest is at the moment enjoying its balanced bionetwork, as its natural vegetation is still able to nourish and shelter our soil and sustain wildlife like most rainy forests. Carbon dioxide in the air, created by

burning and respiration, is absorbed and removed from the air and stored in the leaves, branches, roots and stems of forest trees, to be emitted as oxygen. This collection of carbon dioxide helps to reduce the amount of pollution in the air, and this in turn assists in reducing the greenhouse effect. Nkandla Forest has exceptionally high species diversity, including shy forest mammals such as Bushbuck, Nsimango Monkey, Bushpig and Blue Duiker. The forest is also adorned with magnificent birds, which tourists can enjoy with wonder, as the following account indicates:

> The Nkandla Forest area is home to some 147 species. Species more typical of cooler forest include Kynsa Turaco, Orange Ground Thrush, White-starred Robin, Bush Blackcap, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Grey Cuckoo-Shrike and Forest Canary. These birds are present throughout the forest, although the thrush is best seen along 'Thrush Alley'… Birds more typical of warmer forests include Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (often seen along the road), Purple-crested Turaco, Red-capped Robin-Chat and Grey Sunbird. Other forest specials that can be seen include Olive Bush Bush Shrike, Collared and Olive... Waxbill, Emerald and Black Cuckoos, African Crowned Eagle, Black, Black Sparrowhawk, Bluff… Chorister Robin-Chat, Trumpeter Hornbill and Dark-backed Weaver (McKernzie & Brenchly 2007).

According to the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 'Vital Information' website (2008), 250 bird species have been recorded in the Nkandla Forest. Tourists have much to enjoy in the Nkandla Forest as attractive sites of cultural and historical significance still exist, but they are all overshadowed by King Cetshwayo's grave site.

Nkandla Forest is highly respected amongst the Zulus. Informants say that the wagon that carried King Cetshwayo's body from Eshowe to Nkandla Forest, which lay at the entrance of this forest for years before being taken to uLundi Museum, was also respected by the Zulus because they believed that it represented their king. The continuing importance of Cetshwayo, even today, is illustrated by the fact that when the elderly Zulus swear, they usually say: '*Ngimfung' eseNkandla*' (I swear by the one at Nkandla). The presence of King Cetshwayo's grave in Nkandla Forest highlights the status

of this indigenous forest as a revered heritage site. Maphalala (2005:5) states:

> *Idlinza leNgonyama liyahlonishwa kukhulekwe umuntu esekude uma esondela kulo futhi kungashiswa tshani obumile phezu kwalo*.
>
> (The grave of the king is highly respected. A person must say praises still very far from it. The grass growing onto it is not supposed to be cut.)

Generally, in Zulu culture, a grave is regarded as a sacred place.

In reference to the grass on the grave of King Cetshwayo, Vilakazi (1993:60) in his poem, '*Khalani Mazulu*' (Cry Zulus) observes:

> *Omunye wamakhos'alele*
> *Emboz'wutshani baseNkandla.*
>
> (One of the kings resting
> Covered by the grass of Nkandla.)

Vilakazi is deeply impressed by the uniqueness of Nkandla Forest's grass that is tenderly covering the body of the late King Cetshwayo under a beautiful grove of trees on a ridge near the confluence of the Nkuzane and Nsuze rivers. Vilakazi's observation further reminds the reader that besides Nkandla Forest being a famous stronghold during both Shakan and Anglo-Zulu wars, it is the eternal resting place of King Cetshwayo, the victor of the most memorable battle of Isandlwana between the Zulus and the English where the English lost to the Zulus in January, 1879. English tourists, in particular, are often driven by the intention of seeing for themselves the grave of the exceptional Zulu king who challenged and defeated the apparently invincible army of their land. It has been realized that tourists who visit Isandlwana often extend their visits to Nkandla Forest as way of linking the history of the two heritage sites because, without King Cetshwayo, the history of Isandlwana is incomplete; he was the champion of the day. Following is the response of some tourists when the guardian of King Cetshwayo's grave asked them why they had come to the Nkandla

Forest: 'We want to visit the grave of the King' (Gillings 1972).

Vilakazi (1993:60) in an earlier stanza of '*Khalani Mazulu*' skilfully links the events of Isandlwana Mountain to the champion of that day, King Cetshwayo, together with the latter's resting place, Nkandla Forest, as he proclaims:

Nentaba yeSandlwan'igeba
Ivuleka…

(Isandlwana Mountain bows
And opens…)

Young Women for Entrepreneurship through Home-Made Craftwork

Nkandla Forest provides livelihood for local people in a range of different ways, among others in its supply of clays, reeds, sedges, and other plants that may be used for arts and crafts. Indigenous reeds and sedges have been used by Nkandla women to weave household goods for many years. Nkandla women specialize in making traditional items such as *amacansi* (sleeping mats) and *amavovo* or *amakhama* (beer strainers). They are also well-skilled in clay- pot making. However, in this discussion, the focus is on *ugonothi*, a reed-like plant, which is a product found in the Nkandla Forest. According to Doke (1972:257), *ugonothi* (*Flagerellaria guinensis*) is a species of osier, a cane-like forest climber with tendrils on the top of the leaves. *Ugonothi* is mainly found at Mvalasango Hill near the two rivers, namely, Nhlanhlakazi and Iziphishi, in the Nkandla Forest.

My late mother and my aunts used to harvest *ugonothi* from Nkandla Forest in winter, using the traditional hand-cutting method. Before weaving a basket, *ugonothi* has to be split vertically into two halves. *Ugonothi* baskets are woven using a traditional technique that pays homage to indigenous knowledge.

What I want to bring to light in this discussion is the noteworthy consortium that my own mother and my aunts formed with other women at Dlabe village for this home-based craft, which provided a regular and much-needed source of income to the Dlabe women to enable them to support their

families. My primary school fees came from this small family business of home-made carrier baskets of *ugonothi*. This is why it does not come as a surprise to me to learn that the dwellers of Dukuduku Forest are also financially benefiting from their forest, as reported by Jones (1999):

> A pressing concern is that if they move, they will no longer have access to the many resources the forest offers and will thus lose their current income. 'I have children to feed,' one woman said. 'I have built a life in this forest. What must my children eat if I agree to move?'

The dwellers of Dukuduku Forest demonstrate that indigenous forests such as Dukuduku and Nkandla provide fundamental resources for the sustenance and well-being of local women who become breadwinners for their families. However, it is important to underline at this stage the challenge the dwellers of Dukuduku Forest face as far as conservation is concerned. Jones (1999) further reports that the inhabitants of this forest practice slash-and-burn agriculture, snare animals and birds and strip forest trees.

These Dukuduku Forest dwellers, like the Dlabe community and other forest users, are obliged to give back to the forests through conservation methods which promote a sustainable usage of the forest's products in order to retain the ecological balance of the generous forests. In 'Greening the Liturgical Green Season', the *Catholic Link* (2008) comments on the ethics of using natural resources:

> Chopping down a tree to use its wood is not wrong. It is how we use things that makes the difference. Indiscriminate felling of trees without a long-term plan of replanting is immoral.

Coming back to Dlabe women and the benefits they obtained from the *ugonothi* products of the Nkandla Forest, it can be said that these women not only became economically uplifted, but they also developed skills in working together as a small business group, which in the corporate world is presently known as a 'co-operative'. Dlabe women also expressed in their products their pride in their own local forest, namely Nkandla, which is about 10 km from Dlabe village.

At present, one perceives *ugonothi* products as suitable for further development. *Ugonothi* could be manufactured for the big corporate markets as laundry baskets, fruit baskets, gifts or functional items, curtain-blinds and garden windbreaks that reflect indigenous skills as well as the local people's traditional knowledge. These items would be wonderful assets to give local people income, which in return would be an incentive not to let the skill of weaving *ugonothi* die out and not to let the other natural resources of Nkandla Forest in general be destroyed. Such an initiative could be taken as a joint venture with KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, as the Nkandla Forest is managed by this organization.

It is, however, disappointing to find that this indigenous skill is being allowed to die out because, due to their modern lifestyle, the youth of Dlabe are not prepared to learn indigenous skills from the senior members of their community. As a result, the young women of Dlabe will never know about *ugonothi* products, because these reed types are utilized only by elderly people at present, and only on a limited scale. At the same time, poverty is striking the Dlabe community hard, so that most of the young women leave school early due to financial limitations and many end up involved in drugs and reckless lifestyles.

Ugonothi products together with other Nkandla products could provide the young women of Dlabe with regular income to support themselves and their families. Promoting the production of *ugonothi* and other products from Nkandla forest should form part of an ongoing integrated initiative to assist the people of the area, especially the Dlabe community, in manufacturing useful and culturally significant items from forest products and conserving the local rainforest in a socially and economically sustainable manner, as envisaged by the Inina Craft Agency (2008), which is striving to promote the principles of sustainable environmental management.

Summary and Conclusion

This article focuses on Nkandla Forest as a provider of a wealth of life-sustaining resources such as natural vegetation for craftwork, wild fruit trees, wild vegetables, medicinal plants, marvelous birds and animals. It represents the landscape of the forest and its surroundings, including

streamlets meandering throughout the magnificent gorges of Mome, which is crowned with a cloudy mist belt, as a gift for any lover of nature.

The article also deals with the recognition and sustainability of Indigenous Knowledge, the focus being on the use of *imithi* (indigenous herbal medicines) as well as the raw materials for certain crafts. Of course, the forest's resources are not all known and tapped; perhaps there are plants growing there that have the potential to cure HIV and AIDS.

Due to the fact that a large portion of the population in a number of developing countries still relies mainly on traditional medicines to satisfy their primary health-care needs, there is an urgent need for research paradigms amongst local communities to ascertain the molecular characteristics and to identify the benefits of traditional herbal medicines. In the western medical sector, these traditional medicines need to be recognized, together with the African holistic approach, which takes into account the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of an individual in the process of healing a person. But, while greater attention should be paid to Indigenous Knowledge Systems, awareness campaigns also need to be undertaken, because the wide range of medicinal plants is in jeopardy due to the unregulated and fast-growing commercial herbal market. If local people, especially those near Nkandla Forest, could utilize their indigenous medicinal plants economically, indigenous medicinal plants from this forest might coexist with universalised scientific medicines.

The main focus of the article, however, deals with the cultural and political history of the Nkandla Forest, showing how profoundly the forest is steeped in the past for the Zulu people. The article looks at the reasons why King Shaka chose this forest as a refuge for women and children during his war with Zwide. At the same time, it highlights the power which forests in general display in protecting unjustly ostracized and victimized individuals, even in folktales. It emphasizes the fact that King Cetshwayo, the champion of the battle of Isandlwana, rests eternally in the Nkandla Forest. And it points out that this forest is said to be the original home of the ancestors of Zokufa Shezi, the father of Sigananda, the hero of the Bhambatha uprisings.

To conclude, Nkandla Forest is a high conservation value forest that can be defined as an eco-cultural heritage of outstanding and critical importance due to its unique ecosystem and strong cultural and historical values. It consequently has great tourism potential, though this needs to be

controlled in order to conserve its value. Nkandla Forest is one of those national treasures which can help people to understand and appreciate the power and grandeur of nature and humankind's relationship to it. As the following extract on 'Nkandla' from the *Zululand Experience Newsletter* (2003) claims,

> Apart from being an area of great, often pristine, natural beauty, the Nkandla Forest represents a rare relic type of high wet rain forest, of which very few examples survive. They are relics of times in the distant past when the climate was wetter and even colder …. The many rare plants, and the rarity of the habitat type as a whole, are in themselves sufficient reasons for conserving this rare forest type.

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IsiZulu Language Research and Development Centre
University of Zululand

Ritual Cleansing, Incense and the Tree of Life – Observations on Some Indigenous Plant Usage in Traditional Zulu and Xhosa Purification and Burial Rites

Anne Hutchings

Introduction

Purification procedures involving plants during rites of passage have been a widespread phenomenon in many cultures through the ages. Relics of such practises from biblical times are still to be found in present day transition-marking ceremonies such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals, which may be marked by the use of white flowers or the burning of incense. Although their underlying significance may often be forgotten in Western society, in rural Africa there is a great awareness of the mystical forces of pollution and danger that need to be overcome to ensure safe passage during such times of transition. The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep observed in 1908 that in rites of passage three consecutive phases could be perceived (Van Gennep 1960). These phases are separation, transition and incorporation and while not all of them are apparent to the same extent in every rite, the perception is still a useful guide to our understanding of the processes involved. The pattern may be clearly seen in African circumcision and healer graduation ceremonies where the candidates are required to live in the bush, away from their families, for a length of time before the ceremony, then to undergo various rites before incorporation into a recognised age or professional group. The celebration of incorporation or re-integration into the home often takes the form of a communal feast. Further

examples may be seen in various Catholic and Anglican ordination ceremonies, which require a retreat, with cleansing by confession and absolution before the ceremony itself, which is followed by a shared community and family celebration. Such rites underline the relationship between the individual and the community which is well expressed in the Zulu proverb '*Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu'* (I am a person because of other people). In this study I observe how some traditional Zulu and Xhosa purification and burial rites involving plants relate to other practices. I use biblical and Ayurvedic examples to demonstrate that there are related levels of practice from other cultures and times, and indicate that the rites have a profound holistic significance in serving a common human need for belonging and continuity.

Definition of Terms

Given the nature of this study, it is appropriate to start with some definition of the terms pure, purification and pollute from *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993). Meanings given for the adjective pure (p. 2418) include the terms 'not mixed with anything else', 'not adulterated', 'not debased', 'not corrupt', 'morally undefiled' and 'innocent'. Purification (p. 2419) is defined variously as an action or process of making 'ceremoniously or ritually clean', 'physically pure or clean by removing blemishes and impurities' or 'morally or spiritually pure by the elimination of faults, error, or other undesirable elements'.

The meaning of the verb pollute (p. 2760) includes 'to make morally corrupt', 'to violate purity or sanctity', 'to desecrate or to defile', 'to make physically impure, foul, filthy, dirty or tainted and 'more recently, to contaminate, especially with reference to the environment'.

In this study purification has been viewed as a process by which the state of purity is retained by the removal of polluting factors. This may be a physical process, implying the removal of dirt or sources of infection, or by a symbolic moral and spiritual process, implying the elimination of faults or sin and a healing or restoration of wholeness to the victim or repentant perpetrator.

In Zulu culture, pollution is viewed as a mystical force that weakens resistance to disease and creates conditions of bad luck and misfortune which are perceived as part of the physical and social environment (see

Ngubane 1977; Hutchings, 1989). Environmental factors include evil spirits and sorcerers or witches and would include items of witchcraft known as *umeqo*, which, various informants have told me, are likely to have been left in the pathways of innocent people who have become polluted when they have failed to 'step-over' them. Subsequent purification rites may be by sprinkling, washing or the taking of an emetic (pers. comm. Simon Khumalo). The presence of the ancestors may also cause sickness and bad dreams when offended by a failure to carry out certain required rites. This is, however, done for positive purposes. Buhrmann (1984: 27-29) refers to two categories of ancestors, namely the 'living dead' – clan members who are called shades in anthropological literature, and non-clan related ancestors. Shades are regarded as 'kindly mentors, guides and protectors, especially when customs are kept and regularly performed'. Non-clan related ancestors are 'more distant, powerful and numinous'. Berglund (1989:123), points out the great difference between sickness caused by the shades and that brought about by witchcraft and sorcery. The latter, he says, is intended to kill or annihilate if at all possible. The former serves to alert not only the person involved, but also the whole family, to the needs of the shades. Appeasing rites, which may be simple or prolonged, are aimed at restoring broken contact and thus improving health and a general feeling of well–being (Buhrmann 1984:28).

Indigenous Plant Taxa and Customs in Study

Plants selected for this study include four indigenous plant taxa, observed or known to me to have been used in Zulu or Xhosa traditional purification or burial rites, or as incense or regarded as a Tree of Life. These are *Lippia javanica*, *Ziziphus mucronata* and various *Helichrysum* and *Ficus* species. The first three taxa are used in burial rituals, *Ziziphus mucronata* as an African 'Tree of Life'. *Ficus* species, commonly known as fig trees, have been included because Zulu customary usage and reverence for large fig trees relate very closely to two Ayurvedic Trees of Life featured in Patnaik (1993).

Purpose of Study

Basically the questions asked about the selected Zulu and Xhosa purification rituals involving plants are how they relate to customs elsewhere, what they

mean to the societies involved and, briefly, how the relevant plants may work as anti-pollutants on a physical level.

Methodology

This study is based on the relevant aspects of my research as a botanist and ethnobotanist over the past two decades at the Universities of Transkei and Zululand. Research activity involved primarily, observing, talking and reading.

Observing and Talking

I was able to observe plants and usage directly in the former Transkei between 1983 and 1986 where I was employed as a research assistant and, later, herbarium curator in the Botany Department at the University of Transkei. My research involved intensive field work, collecting and identifying plants for the setting up of the herbarium, and gave me the opportunity to observe plant characteristics and also to record Xhosa names and usage from informants met in the field or from colleagues working at the university. The plants included various *Helichrysum* (*imphepho*) species (see Hutchings & Johnson, 1987). I was also able to record or observe plant usage and some purification customs from meetings with various Xhosa speaking traditional healers and informed lay persons, all of whom were interviewed by me on more than one occasion in their own homes or work places or at a hospital in Lusikisiki in Transkei (see Savage & Hutchings, 1987; Hutchings 1989).

I joined the University of Zululand in 1987 and was able to observe and record Zulu usage of plants, both from a literature survey conducted for the compilation of an inventory of Zulu medicinal plants (Hutchings *et al.* 1996), and directly, from various informants and plant collecting expeditions. I started an indigenous medicinal plant demonstration garden in the Botany Department, partly to confirm identity and usage from local healers of the plants I was recording. The garden is still in operation and visiting healers and botany students often volunteer further information on usage and names, and also sometimes on purification rituals, when they see the plants in the garden.

Between 1995 and 2002 I paid repeated visits to seven healers' home gardens and exchanged plants and information, and sometimes, on request, assisted in the treatment of patients. The gardens included a large one in Mpembeni, close to Hlabisa in the North, about 100 Km from the University, five local gardens, three of which were in the adjacent township of Esikhawini, and two of which were in a more rural area within a 20Km radius of the University. I also visited the garden of the late Simon Mhlaba, in Sumdumbili 90Kms South of the University. Simon Mhlaba was a traditional healer and then secretary of the provincial *Inyangas* Association, who visited all of the above-mentioned gardens with me after he invited me to participate in the preparation of local traditional healers for qualifying examinations being conducted by the newly formed Traditional Healers Association. We made a total of 22 visits to the seven healer group gardens in 2000 as part of the Environment Liaison Centre International sponsored by the Medicinal Plants and Local Communities (MPLC) project, which sought to empower local communities in selected areas of northern KwaZulu-Natal by promoting the utilisation of indigenous medical plants and knowledge for the enhancement of health and conservation. I visited Simon Khumalo in his home in Sundumbili frequently, where he showed me how he used the incense known as *imphepho* (a *Helichrysum* species). I helped him to set up one of the MPLC garden projects in Sundumbili, where we were able to conserve and discuss the significance and usage of a large fig tree. Meetings with healers in their own established gardens took place in the shade of various large trees. Owner of one of the local healer's gardens, the late John Mthethwa, accompanied me on a collecting visit to Ngoya Forest, where I was able to observe his careful preparation before collecting bark of one of the trees. A year later, wounds from the bark removal had completely healed.

In November 2000, I was invited to collaborate in the management of informed and consenting patients in an Ngwelezana Hospital HIV/AIDS support group programme on the basis of two creams I had made in response to calls for help in treating skin complaints from healers at the homes of the late Veronica Ndlovu and John Mthethwa. *Lippia javanica* is an important ingredient in these creams. The on-going clinical work has been extended to a community outreach programme, in which home-visiting has enabled me to observe current plant usage. It has also enabled me to pay bereavement visits

to the families of some deceased patients and to attend part of the long vigils held by family members and neighbours, prior to burials. These are held to ensure that the departed person is not left alone until the burial is safely concluded and the spirit of the departed set free to join the body of the ancestors. I have also witnessed hand-washing at various funerals I have attended since 1986

I conducted research in a rural area known as Ntandabantu in northern KwaZulu-Natal between 2000 and 2003. I wished to share my experience of cream-making and selected indigenous therapeutically beneficial plant species with a rural community who might be able to use this resource to address some of their own health problems. First I needed to know how much people know about the plants I wished considered might be a resource and thus initiated the survey on medicinal plant knowledge. Results are presented in the discussion on *Lippia javanica,* as are the results of a case study on the effects of water problems, AIDS and home-based care in the area, published after I was joined in some of the research by Prof. Gina Buijs (see Hutchings & Buijs 2004 and 2005).

The MPLC and Ntandabantu community visits involved many long car journeys, usually of over an hour's duration, which provided many opportunities for talking with Simon Mhlaba., Dr Lissah Mtalane and also with the botany department driver, Simon Khumalo, who was able to confirm common knowledge of much of the usage mentioned in this paper. Dr Mtalane accmpanied me and also acted as interpreter at Ntandabantu and in the clinics, community outreach visits and healers' meetings between 1999 and 2005. A nurse, former hospital matron, one time deputy provincial MEC for health, and friend to the traditional healing fraternity, she is a fount of knowledge on Zulu cultural customs. She was with me at two funerals and was always able and willing to explain anything I asked.

Reading

The extensive literature search I conducted during the compilation of an inventory of Zulu Medicinal Plants involved Zulu usage of over 1000 species, including all the taxa discussed in this paper. Details included known usage by various ethnic groups, recorded Zulu, botanical and English and Afrikaans names as well as known physiological effects, chemical

compounds and biological properties found in these and closely related plant groups. I have continued to read widely around my subject matter and have also relied on a long standing habit of personal bible reading and study. Unless otherwise stated, bible quotations are from The New International Version (1978). For comparisons with Ayurveda practice I relied strongly on the beautifully illustrated book by Naveen Patnaik (1993).

For the purposes of this study, I have relied on a literature study to:

- Demonstrate how the Zulu and Xhosa purification rites I have observed, relate to other recorded African, biblical and Ayurvedic practice.
- Better understand and explore the meaning and role of such rites and ritual with reference to spiritual and community well-being
- Observe indications of possible efficacy pertaining to physical anti-pollutant or anti-microbial properties of the taxa recorded

Before detailing specific usage of the selected plant taxa used in Zulu and Xhosa rituals, I have exemplified a basic human need for purification cleansing expressed in Psalm 51, noted similar Zulu and Xhosa modes of ritual cleansing activity and given a brief overview of symbolic significance of the colour white in biblical, Ayurvedic and African concepts of purity.

The Human Need for Purification Cleansing

Psalm 51, may be taken as an example of a basic human need for purification or forgiveness in order to survive and continue with ones life calling. It refers to David's need to be cleansed from the state of sin after adultery with Bathsheba, so that he would be saved, not only from death, but also to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem after the exile. The four main verbs used in verse 7 in different versions of the Bible reveal different modes of action.

The *New International Version* (1978) reads

> Cleanse me with hyssop until I am clean:
> Wash me until I am whiter than snow

An even stronger image is produced in *New Revised Version* (1968) of the old authorised *King James* version and reads:

> Purge me with hyssop ….

In the *Jerusalem Bible* (1966), the line becomes

> Purify me with hyssop ….

An older *Catholic Bible* (1914) reads

> Sprinkle me with Hyssop ….

Washing, purging and sprinkling all feature strongly as modes of action in recorded Zulu and Xhosa purification rituals (see Hutchings 1989). It is also interesting to note that the *Hyssopus* reportedly known to Dioscorides was named a Holy Herb because it was used for cleaning sacred places (Grieve 1976:456) while Paffard (1995: 171) traces the derivation of the Old English name *ysope* via Greek from the Hebrew *ezob* and refers to its usage for cleaning lepers.

The Colour White as a Symbol of Purity

Biblical Significance

The concept of white as the colour of purity, is reflected in the call 'to be washed whiter than snow' in Psalm 51, quoted above, is repeated in Isaiah 1:18, with the promise:

> Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Revelation 7:9 depicts a multitude of people, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands, which is explained in verse 14:

> These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

White lilies are frequently featured in portrayals of the biblical annunciation and were commonly used in Italian renaissance art to symbolise the purity of the Virgin Mary (see Fig. 1). Brewer (1993:755)

recalls a tradition that the lily sprang from the tears of Eve as she left Paradise and notes that in Christian art the lily is an emblem of chastity, innocence and purity, with images of St Joseph with a lily in his hand indicating that his wife Mary was always a virgin. White lilies commonly called St. Joseph or Madonna lilies (*Lilium candida*) originate from the Balkans, Lebanon and Israel and have a long history of cultivation from 1500BCE and are reported to be featured in 5000 year old Cretan Frescoes (Mabberley 1987:333). They are often grown in South African gardens.

The Significance of White from Ayurvedic Practice

An association of the divine with white is reflected in verses of longing from a twelfth century hymn from Mahadeviyakka to the Goddess Siva quoted by Patnaik (1993:153):

> You are the forest.
> You are all the great trees.
>
> O Lord White as Jasmine,
> Filling and filled by all.
> Why don't you show me your face?

While burial is not part of Ayurvedic tradition, cremation services are and people attending these services often wear white robes to symbolize purity and goodness (pers. comm. Mayuri Dahya).

The Significance of White in Zulu and Xhosa Rituals

Examples from Zulu and Xhosa rites include the white beads which are worn during training and at healer graduations and are well illustrated in various photographs in Broster and Bourne (1982), Buhrmann (1984) and Berglund (1989). The white clay used by Xhosa trainee diviners known as *Amagqira* before their graduation is reported to serve as a warning to others that they should not be approached during this time of required isolation (Broster & Bourn 1982). This, I think is likely to be true of the white clay used by teenage boys undergoing circumcision rites. Berglund (1989) says that for

the Zulu white is associated with good (p. 364) and the divinity (p. 371), while medicines classified as 'White medicines', although they may not necessarily be white, serve as purifying protectors (pp. 47, 355). Plants with large white flowers or roots are grown in many Zulu gardens as a protection against lightning. The late Mavis Mbuyise, a traditional healer from Esikhawini, had cultivated an exotic species because of its white flowers for the same purpose. One student informant told me he found it difficult to understand why white people erected lightning conductors on their roofs when they cultivated so many protective plants that would do the same thing.

BURIAL PURIFICATION RITES

A Biblical Example

Purification rites associated with burial are described at length in the chapter 19 of the Book of Numbers. In Judaic tradition any one who even touched a corpse was considered unclean and contaminating to the whole community for a period of seven days (Num. 19, 11). The proscribed purification ritual involved the sprinkling of the tent in which the deceased died, all the vessels, everyone present, with Hyssop dipped in lustral water. Anyone who touched the corpse, was also also required to bathe in the water for a number of days before he could be regarded as purified (Num. 19, 17-20). Lustral water comprised spring water poured on the ashes of a sacrificial heifer that had been burned for the deceased.

Zulu Burial Rituals

In Zulu culture, death is considered a highly intensified form of pollution that emanates from the corpse itself, and perceived dangers, precautions and burial rites are comprehensively detailed by Krige (1950: 159-175). Relatives of the dead are thought to be not only in a position of danger themselves and in need of fortification, but also to a source of pollution to the society. Thus they may not take part in the normal life of the society until they have been purified after the mourning period, which is always longest for the nearest relatives. After a traditional burial an ox or a goat, known as *imbuzi yokugez' izlanda* (goat for washing of the hands) is slaughtered to 'cleanse the hands' of those who had helped with the burial and to rid them

of pollution. The chyme of an animal is used intact and is only used for hand washing when the slaughtering has been done for cleansing, not sacrificial purposes. The cleansing properties of chyme are also referred to fairly extensively by Ngubane (1977) and Berglund (1989), who points out its importance in ritual handwashing (p. 129):

> It must be this thing (the chyme) of the animal because it alone washes so that the hands become like the shades …. This thing is better than soap because it gives the colour of the shades, the colour inside the hand.

Quoting a diviner from eThelezi, he continues,

> It gives this colour …. Then they (the shades) see that the man agrees to their brooding. So he becomes powerful.

A Zulu Burial Wash - Lippia javanica (umsuzwane)

The following information on the use of a plant known as *Umsuzwane (Lippia javanica)* pertaining to burial rites was obtained for me in the plant usage survey I initiated in Ntandabantu. Apart from a brief mentioned by Krige (1950), citing a work by Lugg (1907), and referring to the practice of placing a branch of the strong smelling plant *Dippia asperifolia* (sic.) in the mouth of a corpse at burial, no reference was found in the literature surveyed to the usage of *Lippia javanica* in funeral rites. It is, however, fairly common knowledge in the areas of KwaZulu-Natal where I have worked that the leaves of *Umsuzwane* are used to wash hands after a funeral (pers. comm. S. Khumalo).

Ntandabantu is the name of a rural area of approximately 80 square kilometres comprising c. 400 homesteads, strung out along the ridges of hills and situated approximately 40 kilometres west of the nearest town, Mtubatuba (see Hutchings & Buijs 2004 and 2005). The area is extremely dry and poverty stricken. We were able to conduct four surveys with the help of Khangi Zwane, a worker in the University of Zululand agriculture department who has her home in Ntandabantu and was able to conduct the surveys over weekends. She went to three different areas and interviewed those she met with on a random basis, using printed questionaires.

Preliminary results of our 2002 survey of 100 of the estimated 400 household in the area indicated that the average household consisted of eight members and that 60% of these households had less than R500 available for food per month. This was often less than R200.

The questionnaires on five medicinal plants included *Lippia javanica* and was prefaced by an assurance that personal information would be kept confidential and that the results would be shared with participants in workshops aimed at improving health knowledge and cultivation of useful medicinal plants. Fourteen community workshops were held to discuss health problems usually attended by about 40 participants, mainly elderly women. A medicinal and food plant garden was initiated but had to be abandoned a year later due to the acerbated drought conditions. We also paid eight home visits to families with severely ill or recently deceased members.

All of the 78 participants interviewed recognised and used leaves of *Lippia javanica,* which is one of the plants that does grow abundantly in the area. Although all knew the name *umsuzwane,* it is not always used by the community members coming from Mtubatuba out of respect (*hlonipa*) for the brother of Falaza (King of Mtubatuba), who was named Msuzwane. Instead they use the name *umkhwishane,* a name used 'because it works against bad spirits'.

All reported using leaves for coughs, colds and flu or headaches, 65 reported usage before and after funerals, 54 said it was used to protect against pests in food stores and 37 used it against ticks in animals and/or to prevent Newcastle disease in poultry. Several participants referred to the plant as 'our Vicks', two mentioned use as 'mosquito coils' and one said that it could be applied instead of Jeyes fluid to 'get rid of ticks'.

The following observations, referring to funeral or other purification rites are quoted from the questionnaires.

- A mixture of leaves and roots is used to clean tools and hands before and after funerals
- The plant is used when coming from the mortuary to remove bad spirits.
- We use stems and leaves as brooms to sweep grave sites and, after weeding the grave site, to remove both the soil and the weeds.
- The corpse is washed with an infusion after death to prevent odours forming. This is necessary in cases where the death did not take place in

a hospital. (One informant said his church does not allow washing of the corpse with *umsuzwane*, but that it should be used only to wash hands and tools.)

- If the corpse has an odour, women place pieces of *umsuzwane* in the nostrils of the corpse and sweep the room where the person was sleeping.
- The plant is used by the poorest of the poor who have failed to slaughter a cow or goat - instead of (the chyme of) a goat, ground leaves or leaves and roots are placed in a big basin of water in which everybody washes their hands.

Other usage relation to practical protective, anti-pollutant or anti-pest usage included:

- In the olden days there were no fridges or cool boxes and we had heads of cattle and so meat was not scarce. If the meat started to smell it was boiled with *umsuzwane* to take away, the smell.
- Leaves are sprinkled in toilets to prevent odours.
- In rural areas where there is no electricity, wood is collected from the forest, where many snakes are found. A stem with leaves should be placed on the head and even one small stem will prevent snakes from coming to you.
- Collect some *umsuzwane* to speak to the Ancestors.
- Leaves are mixed with *imphepho* (as a protective charm).
- Leaves are used in oxwagons to harvest the maize.

This last item puzzled me until my informant asked someone to photograph the ‘oxwagon’. The photograph showed how the *Lippia* branches are woven to create walls around the sides of a traditional ox-drawn plough when it is needed to harvest maize.

Indications of Efficacy of Lippia javanica as an Anti-pollutant and Insect Repellent

The insect-repellent properties of *Lippia javanica* are fairly well known against various insects, including beetles and mosquitoes (Van Wyk *et al.*

1997; Omolo *et al.* 2005). Known antimicrobial effects of *Lippia javanica* are reported in Viljoen *et al.* (2005). It is also interesting to note that use of the plant to disinfect anthrax infested meat in the eastern Cape was recorded in the late 19th century (Smith 1895). In 2007 the CSIR reported the forthcoming patented production of mosquito-repellent candles made from *Lippia javanica* (CSIR – technology transfer – http://www.csir.co.za/ technology_transfer/successsstrories revised 17/9/ 2007).

Air Purification and Incense

Biblical and Eastern Examples

Frankincense, long regarded as a symbol of divinity, was one of the gifts brought by the Wise men to the infant Christ (Mat. 3:11 and glossary note, *Jerusalem Bible*). In India incenses from aromatic gums and flowers are burned before family altars during morning and evening devotions (Patnaik 1993: 150). At the same time, Ayurvedic rules of hygiene require fumigation of chambers with incense as a disinfectant and against insects. Air purification involving Holy Basil among the Hindu is reported by Patnaik (1993:24f) to be widespread. He quotes an Italian traveller's 17th century record:

> Every one before his house has a little altar, in the middle of which they erect pedestal-like little Towers, and in these the shrub (Holy Basil) is grown.

Patnaik also observes on the same page that, in India, any courtyard centred around Holy Basil is considered, to be a place of peace, piety and virtue and notes that:

> Modern Science has established that this modest aromatic shrub perceptibly purifies the air within a wide radius of its vicinity, proving most effective just before sunrise, the time when it is ritually circled by the devout.'

An African Incense – imphepho (Helychrysum spp.)

Imphepho is often referred to as 'Our incense' in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Bundles of the plants are commonly sold for the purpose in street *Muthi* (medicine) stalls in many parts of South Africa. They are commonly called 'everlastings' in English because of their long-lasting flowers. The term *imphepho* is used by Zulu, Xhosa and also by Ndebele speakers from Zimbabwe (Gelfand *et al.* 1985) for various related strong smelling *Helichrysum* species. Eight species are known to be burned to invoke the goodwill of the Zulu ancestors (Hutchings 1996), two of which may also be used for diviners to induce trances. Two species from the eastern Cape are reported to be burned to clear the air for the ancestors, to safeguard the home against evil spirits during the night and to be used in cleansing rites to purify the body before sleeping (Broster & Bourn 1982; Hutchings 1986).

Buhrmann (1984: 40-46) observed the need expressed by Xhosa healers to induce and clarify dreams when a patient is presumed to have come from a polluted and unclean environment and has to be prepared to enter a clean one. She cites Greek and Roman practice in which temple sleep was preceded by ritual purification to free the mind of the contamination of the body and thus release it for unimpeded dream experience. Berglund (1989: 113f) observes that smoking *imphepho* is common among Zulu diviners, and that some chew the stems and leaves of the plant while others place plants under their pillows 'so that dreams may be clear'. He records that one diviner compared *imphepho* to a shade (ancestor), saying 'it does not die, even as a shade does not die' and was convinced that the ancestors 'were just near the plant, in the earth'. In addition to its everlasting properties, the clarity of colour of the flower was found significant to the diviners, who reported that one reason for smoking and inhaling *imphepho* was 'to give us a clear mind'. It was also said that the plant should never be ripped out of the soil, and that before being broken off, it should be addressed with the words 'excuse me, thing of my people, it is the work of my ancestors I am doing'.

Simon Mhlaba told me in 2004 that a traditional healer would never buy *imphepho*, but always harvested it during the day, explaining to the plant exactly why it was being taken. He showed me how he burned *imphepho* in a holy area of his workplace. This activity seemed to me to be very similar to the ritual burning of Holy Basil in Hindu homesteads described in Patnaik

(1993), and even the clay vessel he used showed an oriental influence. A student from the University of Zululand interviewed by Professor Gina Buijs (pers. comm.) said the smoke from the burning of *imphepho* was 'meant to rise to the ancestors, who convey it to God'. Krige (1950) describes simply how, on their way home from a burial, women sometimes pick flowers of the 'yellow everlasting' to thread into necklaces and tie them round the necks of children to enable the spirit of the deceased to bless them.

I witnessed the burning of *imphepho* before the first performance of a mixed Zulu and white dance performance at the Grahamstown festival in the early 1980s, and again, at the start of a Primary health care workshop held for *Sangoma*'s in Valley Trust in 2004. This ritual calling to the Ancestors appears now to be an important element at the inception of many transcultural events and state ceremonial functions.

In Ntandabantu five women were asked about their use of *imphepho* and all reported that the herb was placed in the bottom part of a clay pot and burnt in order to be able 'to speak to the ancestors'.

A recent community-outreach visit to a 93 year old blind woman, who had been distraught at the recent death of her son on my previous visit, which took place after he had been buried, found her much calmer and revealed that she had just burned *imphepho* in a purification ceremony for him. She said that she could now die in peace as her grandson would be looked after and thus indicated her own acceptance of a timely death as well as that of her son.

Indications of Efficacy

Proven antimicrobial activity has been shown in various aromatic *Helichrysum* species and antifungal and insect or parasite repellent effects are also known (see Hutchings 1996; Van Wyk *et al.* 1997 and 2000; Yani *et al.* 2005). These properties are also indicated by wide usage of species for suppurating sores and respiratory infections.

The Tree of Life

Biblical and Ayurvedic Examples

Biblical references to a tree of life occur in the first and last chapters of the Holy Bible. In the Book of Genesis 2, 8-10,

> After the Lord God had formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, the man became a living being.
>
> Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the East, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of tree grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Verses 15-16 tell of how Adam was commissioned to take care of the garden and told that he could eat of any tree excepting for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as this would cause him to die. After the provision of a helper, Eve, the prohibition was broken at the suggestion of a crafty serpent, and Adam, Eve and the serpent were banished from the garden, and the tree of life protected (Gen 3,23-24). Verse 24 concludes:

> He placed … cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

One of the reasons for which Eve ate the forbidden fruit was because she thought it would bring her wisdom. Proverbs 3, 18 refers to wisdom and reads:

> She is a tree of life to those who embrace her, those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

The Book of Revelation was written after the coming of Christ and prophesies the second coming of Christ and the resurrection and salvation of those who have done right. Revelation 22:1-2 records,

> And he showed me a river of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street, thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of nations.

Verse 14 reads,

> Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

Patnaik (1993) lists two fig trees (*Ficus bengalensis* and *Ficus religiosa)* in his list of sacred plants. Of *Ficus religiosa* (Patnaik 1993:37) he writes:

> India honors the sacred fig as the Tree of Life. The earliest evidence of this reverence was discovered by archaeologists excavating the five-thousand-year-old remains of the Indus Valley civilisation, when they found seals already depicting the sacred fig circled by worshippers …. As befits the tree of life, its medical properties were found to contribute to the health of the vital functions – circulation, vision, the lungs, and the kidneys.
>
> So deeply is this tree associated with both the origin and the symbiosis of life that it is thought to induce illumination, and countless Indian legends tell of sages meditating in its shade. The greatest of them came to be known as Enlightened One or Bhuddha, and his tree, the Bodhi, or Tree of Enlightenment. Bhuddists often depict the Buddha in the shape of this tree, which has become the Bhuddist symbol of consciousness.

Of *Ficus Benghalensis*, more commonly known as Banyan, Patnaik (1993:19) writes:

> Three thousand years before Pliny described it to the Roman Empire this mighty shade tree struck awe in the Aryan nomads sweeping across India. Their priests likened the banyan's outpouring of vitality to a flow of light or to liquid immortality overflowing on to the earth from the goblets of the gods themselves.

Claims for immortality are thought by Patnaik (1993:19f) to relate to the observed extreme longevity of the banyan tree, which he calls life-giving and life-preserving. He cites the various blood-clotting, antiseptic, astringent and diabetes alleviating properties known to Ayurvedic doctors and describes how the trees are still used as places of assembly in rural India by merchants, village elders, and priests celebrating religious occasions.

Farmers are reported to herd animals into the shade of the trees to protect them from the searing sun, while school children may be taught under the trees during the day and adults may hold discussion meetings under the same trees in the evenings. Illustrations of the two sacred fig trees featured in Patnaik's work depict religious sages, birds, animals and flowers sheltered below the trees (see Fig. 1).

African Usage of Fig Trees

An interesting parallel usage of the fig tree as a shelter was brought home to me when I was setting up a new community garden with Simon Mhlaba in Sundumbili. Much of the existing vegetation was cleared, most of it alien invaders, but he insisted that a large indigenous fig tree should be left so that meetings could be held in its shade. Palmer and Pitman (1972:440) refer to an recorded incident in which Dr. John Hutchison of Kew dined under a Transvaal *Ficus* that shaded 'quite half an acre of ground'. The species are sometimes difficult to tell apart. Watt & Breyer-Brandwijk (1962:775) record:

> In East Africa many of these trees (*Ficus sur*) are used from generation to generation as sacred shrines or places of sacrifice to the ancestral spirits. Sacrifices usually of rams and male goats are made to appease the ancestral spirits to invoke rain, to ensure a good crop, to relieve famine to eat the first fruits and generally to safeguard the tribal and local welfare. Sacrifice to the tree means also sacrifices to *Earth* and *Forest*, the two great divinities of productivity (F86).

(The work cited as F86 refers to a paper by Friede 1953 from *Trees in S. Afr*, 5, 4, which I have been unable to locate.)

An African Tree of Life

The tree to known Zulu, Xhosa and Ndebele speakers as *umphafa* (*Ziziphus Mucronata*) is much revered in many parts of Africa and is perhaps best described in the eloquent frontispiece of McCallum (2000):

> The *Ziziphus mucronata* is a thorn tree which can be found through-

> out the entire continent of Africa, extending its boundaries into the Middle Eastern countries of Israel, Lebanon and possibly Turkey. On its branches, it has two rows of thorns, one pointing upwards and out, while the other row hooks back in an opposite direction. It is believed by the traditional Nguni people of southern Africa that these thorns remind us of something about ourselves … they say the ones that point upward and forward tell us that we should always look ahead to the future, while the ones that look backwards say that we must never forget where we come from. For these people, it is not only the tree of the ancestors, it is the tree of life.

I knew of the ritual use of branches of *Ziziphus mucronata* to attract ancestral spirits to new dwelling sites, or to be placed on the graves of chiefs and kraal heads after burial and fed to cattle to imbibe the spirit of the departed owner from various sources in my earlier work on Zulu medicinal plants (Hutchings 1996). It was only after I learnt that *umsuzwane* could be used as a substitute for a goat's chyme, that I learnt that u*mphafa* branches or twigs could be used as a substitute for a person who had died, and were widely used locally 'carry home the spirit' of some-one who had died in hospital, or away from home. This had been recorded by Player (1997:81-84). Dr. Lissah Mtalane confirmed this practice from her experience in nursing dying patients in a Zulu hospital and lent me her doctoral thesis (Mtalane 1989) in which she carefully describes several instances similar to those related by Magqubu, in Player (1997). Both tell how an elderly relative will take a branch from home to lay on the bed where the death has recently taken place. The twig will then be treated as if it is the dead person on the journey home, even to the extent of buying a separate train ticket and food for the person and explaining how and where they are going. This is to ensure that the spirit of the dead person is accompanied until the burial is safely completed. Magqubu further describes how the twig would be put in the eaves of the huts, a beast would be killed and the dead person would then join al the *amadlozi* (ancestors) in the *muzi* (homestead), and is quoted by Player (1977:86):

> You must know that this is not only a tree of the people, but all the wild animals, and cattle and goats too, eat from this tree. It is food

> for the spirit and the body. You must *hlonipa* (respect) the *mpafa* (sic.).

When I related this custom to a journalist, the late Chris Jenkins, he told me how he had observed a similar custom, after the tragic deaths by drowning of eight teenagers from Mpumalanga on a school outing to Richards Bay in May 2005. Relatives brought down by bus to identify the bodies, visited the spot where the children had perished and held a prayer service on the beach and a number of elderly women relatives had brought branches with them, which they dipped into the sea before taking them back home on the bus. The gesture and its significance of the gesture puzzled Chris Jenkins until, he told me, it was explained to him by a local woman.

Observations on Some Properties Relevant to Ziziphus mucronata as a Tree of Life

Obviously it is difficult to assess scientifically the efficacy of a tree of life, but the observation in Palmer and Pitman (1972: 1392) that in some (unspecified) places the tree is believed to indicate underground water would give weight to the concept of a tree of life. The tree is often found growing next to water, as is a beautiful specimen growing naturally in the grounds of the University of Zululand. The fruit is apparently not very pleasant to taste, but is regarded as a source of food in times of famine and also reported to be a good thirst quencher (Fox & Young 1982). Medicinally roots, leaves or bark are used for various forms of pain in Africa, while extracts and alkaloids from related species are reported to have shown significant analgesic, anti-inflammatory or sedative properties. This is also reported in related species used in Chinese phytomedicine (see Hutchings *et al.* 1996 & Van Wyk *et al* 1997). Such usages and properties would reinforce the image of the tree as a comforter, as would the frequently observed sheltering and sustenance of insects, birds and animals.

FINDINGS

The passages quoted below were selected to illustrate how the literature survey helped me to understand the purposed of rites I was recording.

Notes on the Social Significance of Culture, Rites and Symbols from the Source Literature

Vera Buhrmann, a clinical psychologist, was intrigued by and wished to understand the meaning of the rituals she observed in the eastern Cape and wrote:

> When I was first introduced to a group of Xhosa *amagqira* (indigenous healers) and started watching and sharing their rituals and ceremonies and learning about their cosmology, I was plunged into a world which was partly familiar to me from my own analysis and training as an analyst, and subsequent practice as one, but which was unfamiliar to me in its vitality, its power to grip all participants and its ability to transform attitudes, insights and feelings …. I felt the need to experience and understand the meaning of the methods of the healers, their rituals, ceremonies and symbols, so as to satisfy myself about the reasons for effectives of their healing procedures and the effect these had on me (Buhrmann 1984: 13).

She found her studies of Jungian philosophy highly relevant to understanding and analysing her experiences and quotes Jung (1953: par 174):

> Rites and rituals are attempts to abolish the separation between the conscious mind and the unconscious, the real source of life, to bring about a reunion of the individual with the native soil of his inherited instinctive make-up (Buhrman 1984:66).

In his book on Zulu thought patterns, Berglund (1989: 18) wrote:

> The relationships between men expressed in rituals and symbols make living in that society a meaningful experience.

In a similar vein, in a paper examining the role indigenous culture in a paper on herbal resources in Nigeria some three decades after Berglund, Iroegbu (2006: 42) wrote:

> The richness of culture exists in our minds and the material resources with which it can blend. In short, culture is manifested in the way we live and thus establishes mores over time. Indigenous knowledge is a basis for understanding how to live in local environments in a way that makes sense for the people whose lives are sustained in them. The role of local or indigenous knowledge is to guide sustainable ways of life established with social systems containing linkages to cosmology, moral concepts and pedigrees. Indigenous knowledge is also known as local knowledge and traditional knowledge: local knowledge accounts for a society's origins and the embodied natural and socially constructed world it inhabits, and upon which it functions. It is a sensible dialogue and a shared adaptive response to environmental challenges that affect people, their families and kin-related neighbours. This suggests that a nation in quest for progress and development must not cheat itself by deliberately neglecting any sector of its culture: economic, political, religious or health.

Referring to the needs for and potential benefits of further understanding between cultural groups in South Africa, Buhrmann (1984: 16-17) wrote:

> We need to work on the images we encounter in other cultural groups of our shared country: this will increase our understanding to the mutual benefit of all concerned. If this knowledge is shared it could also assist the members of other cultural groups to a greater understanding of the images and forces that motivate them from their unconscous.

On the holistic philosophy of Ayurveda, or 'Knowledge of Life', Patnaik (1993:1-2) wrote:

> Its logic prescribed a whole way of life, based on knowledge and awareness that man (sic.) is interdependent with all forms of life. Spirit is described as the intelligence of life, matter as its energy. Both are manifestations of the principle of Braham, the one-ness of

> life …. But as the highest form of life, man (sic.) also becomes its guardian, recognizing his[her] very survival depends on seeing that the fragile balance of nature, and living organisms is not disturbed.

More specifically on humanity's ecological responsibility, Patnaik wrote:

> In Ayurvedic terms, this means that man must prevent wanton destruction. What he takes he must replace, to preserve the equilibrium of nature. If he cuts down a tree for his own uses, he must plant another. He must ensure the purity of water. He must not poison the air. He must not poison the water. Ayurveda, some four thousand years ago, was already propagating the arguments which inform the ecological debate of our own time.
>
> The logic of Ayurvedic philosophy, with its insistence on maintaining nature's equilibrium, continues by observing that if man's spiritual health is dependent on his ability to live in harmony with the external universe, his mental health must depend on his ability to live with himself.

Of sacred plants, science and the forest, (Patnaik 1993:16) wrote:

> As early as 3000B.C. the prehistoric worship of actual plants was already turning into a reverence for nature as a source of medicine …. What primitive peoples worshipped as a plant's magical powers was now analyzed by the Ayurvedic physicians for its physical powers.
>
> The scientific approach may have dispelled superstition, but it certainly did not diminish a plant's sacredness in the eyes of the Ayurvedic physician to whom knowledge was sacred, as it was to all Indian thinkers. Indeed, the great Indian philosophers conducted their dialogues in the forest using plants again and again to illustrate concepts of spirituality and continuity to their students, because the forest represented the endless regeneration of life, or what we would today call an ecosysytem, complete in itself.

Discussion

The above quotations reflect the values of rituals and symbols as powerful and transforming and highly meaningful to the holistic societies from which they emerge, and stress the responsibility humanity has for maintaining the environment and its own integrity. These concepts have helped me to understand the function of the practices described in this study, which, for me, demonstrate the needs for both a sense of belonging and a sense of continuity which I believe are essential to both spiritual and community well being and survival. A belief in the possibility of being cleansed from pollution in purification rites involving plants and an acceptance of death as not being final are expressed in the related African, biblical and Ayurvedic examples cited. Respect and guardianship for the environment are shown in care and cultivation of trees within the healers' gardens, and the conservation practices relating to the example of bark preservation and in the collection and recognition of the sacred properties of *imphepho.*

Possible efficacy in the aromatic plants used as antipollutants are apparent, especially in the resourceful use of *Lippia javanica* by the people of Ntandabantu. The volatile oils commonly found in *Helichrysum* species used as incense have some indicated antimicrobial, antibacterial and insect repellent properties and would tend to purify the air in the same way as other insect repellent candles. They could also help to disperse calming and sedative properties indicated by use of the plants for sleep and trance induction.

The substitution of *Lippia. javanica* for the chyme of a goat in ceremonial hand-washing at a funeral would provide a significant economic release from the pressure on poverty stricken communities to meet ritual obligations, while still allowing for the solace that fulfilling the ritual might bring. With great compassion, Mtalane (1989) calls on hospital nurses and doctors to try to understand and to facilitate, where they can, traditional washings and family burial rituals such as those involving the *umphafa* tree. This is one of the ways we can adapt to the calls for understanding of rite expressed by Buhrmann and Oroegba above. Do these rituals not fulfil a universal need of communities to respect and honour their departed loved ones, and, in doing so, remind us that we are part of a living community that includes the living dead/ ancestors in a similar way to the community of saints cited in the Christian Apostles' creed, as intercessors? I believe the

rites described in my text have very much to do with a holistic perception and a concept of the sacred, and that this is relevant to traditional concepts of the forest and the need for its conservation.

Conclusion

Although some of the customs related in this paper may seem strange to a foreign eye, such rites of passage fulfil a valuable function in holding a community together. The universality of many of the underlying concepts found in diverse studies of ritual confirm the view expressed by Etkin (1993), that anthropology, as one of the core disciplines of Ethnopharmacology, offers a holistic perspective that broadens our insight. This, I believe, enables us to understand what it is as human beings we have in common, which is far more important than our differences. During the course of my study, many of the people involved have died. The last funeral I attended was that of the journalist Chris Jenkins who died suddenly very recently. As I watched the smoke rising high before the altar as the priests solemnly circled the altar with incense censers, I thought of the student who talked of the smoke from *imphepho* being taken by the ancestors straight to God, and felt comforted.

Acknowledgements

In keeping with truth expressed in *Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu*, I know that, as a person, I should not have been able to undertake this study without the help of other people. I should like, first, to acknowledge my late husband Geoffrey for his enthusiastic and shared love of the Psalms, and also to thank the following people for their generous sharing of knowledge:

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Research Fellow, Department of Botany, University of Zululand.
ahutchin@pan.unizul.ac.za
University of Zululand.

Environmentally Aware Art, Poetry, Music and Spirituality: *Lifelines*

David Levey
Chris Mann

Introduction

Lifelines (Mann *et al.* 2006) is the originating text of a holistic work of environmental art. Poems by Chris Mann based on encounters with forty animals, ranging from the aardvark and bees to the peregrine falcon and zebra, are embedded in images by Julia Skeen on each right-hand page of the book. The poems are informed by recent discoveries in science, while the images evoke the animals in their habitat with frequent references to fossil and cosmic time. On the left-hand page is a ghost image of the animals and scientific notes about each by Adrian Craig, a zoologist. A bibliography lists some books and articles concerning astronomy, biology, cosmology, palaeontology, physics and zoology as well as research into the behaviour of individual animals, while a list of further reading is available on request.

Other cultural artefacts accompany the book: an installation launched at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2007, a DVD of the music and images from the installation, a CD of the songs and a multimedia show. There have been over eighty performances of the last mentioned to date, at universities, schools, churches, literary and science festivals and conferences.

The performances can be interpreted as a form of oral literature, an influence evident in Mann's work from early in his career. Texts from the book are embedded in a sequence of digital images. These are projected onto a large screen behind the poet who introduces the poems, reads them aloud and performs original songs. The songs draw on the musical and literary

traditions of the ballad, *mbqanga* (a Zulu musical genre), folk-rock, jazz and plain-chant.

The performance of *Lifelines* at the Eco-Literature colloquium held at the Twinstreams Education Centre, Mtunzini, KwaZulu-Natal, on 6 October 2007, led to an invitation from the organisers to participants to submit an article to this journal. The performance on which this interview is based took place in the Senate Hall of the University of South Africa, Pretoria, City of Tshwane, on 4 March 2008.

We (interviewer and poet) share similar views regarding the value of a holistic approach to human existence which allows room not only for the material, in the environment especially, but also the spiritual. However, both of us felt it would be worthwhile to discuss and interrogate these assumptions. Hence the following interview, which condenses and focuses various points of discussion and sources from our combined reading. Furthermore, we felt such an approach to be valuable as regards the commitment in *Lifelines* to combined oral, artistic and musical forms. We regard this as simply the first step in a continuing conversation on all levels, and invite others to enter the discussion.

DL: Chris, I enjoyed the passion and skill of your performance and Julia's art but mightn't it be possible to dismiss *Lifelines* and other similar work of yours such as *The Horn of Plenty* (Mann and Skeen 1997) as sentimental responses to natural phenomena?

CM: Literary theories fifty years ago, constructed primarily by university scholars resident in functioning cities, may well have dismissed poems about animals, fruit, cereals and vegetables as sentimental. After all, the lights shone without interruption in the streets and lecture halls, the smokestacks of the factories, discretely sited on the urban fringe, were pouring their waste into the magnanimous emptiness of the atmosphere, abundant clean water gushed out of the taps and the racks of the food emporia were filled with cheeses from Ireland, beef from Argentina, salmon from Canada, rice from India and fruit and wine from South Africa.

Homo sapiens, or at least an affluent caste of the species, who'd lived for hundreds of thousands of years in fear of predatory animals, drought and famine, appeared to have gained control of the bio-niche in which its

offspring lived. Modernity had arrived. The Enlightenment which had produced education, commerce and industry, democracy, science, medicine and the nation-state had subjugated nature to serve the evolutionary trajectory of human beings. The progeny of Adam and Eve, as prophesied by Genesis, had indeed attained 'dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.' (Genesis 1:26). The literary scholar with a social conscience merely had to continue to implement the dream of progress, of human improvement, begun so promisingly in the nineteenth century.

There were of course a few unpleasant deviations from the dream: spasms of intra-species slaughter which in the twentieth century killed tens of millions of soldiers and civilians; a population which in a scant two thousand years had increased from a hundred or so million to billions of hungry people; an accelerating migration from the land to urban conglomerates which produced more shacks and crime than houses and shopping malls; and poverty, enormous poverty, in which more members of the species now lived than ever before.

Other social injustices presented themselves for solution, in the form of inequities, for example between men and women, between people of different classes, colours and ethnic origins. The list lengthened inexorably as monetarist economics and a culture of personal freedom and human rights spread rapidly through industrial democratic states and elsewhere. Was this a reaction to the duties and responsibilities imposed by the peasant culture of the forebear? Or was this the triumph of consumerism disguised in the exhilarating pursuit of individual aspirations to be free of nature, God and other people's irritating requirements?

Whatever the causes, market-driven economics, emboldened by the seeming collapse of the moral superiority of communist and socialist theories, promised at the start of the twenty-first century, if not a fridge and a book-shelf, at least a Coke and a TV set in every home. God and nature were redundant, pushed aside in the heady enthusiasm to explore new pastimes and to consume more and more. Anthropocentric hubris was running in full spate. Some enthusiasts like those who once clung to the idea that the earth was the centre of the universe, created the notion of modernity. With hardly a reference to the imprint in each of their cells and molecules of ancient cosmological events and still-occurring biological processes, they placed

human time at the centre of the cosmos.

Nonetheless, under the surface, of course, a new current was beginning to flow. Environmental activists and researchers in the natural sciences during the second half of the twentieth century accumulated more and more evidence that showed how human beings, increasing in number and mechanized power over the environment, were depleting natural resources, poisoning the water, soil and air and extinguishing other species at a rate comparable to the Permian extinction.

The sporadic attempts by 137 countries to implement the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and 2007 on climate change and the widespread, if grudging, acceptance of Al Gore's film 'An Inconvenient Truth' symbolized the paradigm shift underway across the world. The dominant species had begun to realise how domineering it had become and how much damage it was causing its habitat day after day after day.

Against this background, the genre of eco-literature which had been foreshadowed by the Romantics, for instance, began to emerge in a new form, to which it would seem that *Lifelines* is a modest contribution. Ironically enough, a charge of sentimentality, of charming naivety, could well be advanced against those literary critics, intellectually radical in some respects and critical of such literature, who nevertheless continue to take for granted the sustainability of the biological framework of life in which they write. It is as if such theories assume that the basic physiological needs for food, water, shelter, health and security outlined in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow 1943:394-395) have been and will always be met and that the self-actualisation of individual human beings is and will remain the central concern of contemporary literature.

Will literary theories based, for example, on different varieties of secular humanism, modernism, post-modernism and post-colonial frameworks of understanding be able to adjust to the new challenges posed by the environmental movement? The scale of the rethink is probably much more comprehensive than we can currently imagine. Some adjustments have already been made, for example the attempt to incorporate environmental concerns and the sacred into a new edition of a prominent introduction to post-colonial studies (Ashcroft *et al.* 2006:6 – 8; 491- 493; 517-518; see also Scott 1996:303-314).

DL: Turning to South African interpretations of the environment, in what way, if at all, could you say that your work differs from that of the 'Veld and Vlei' poets of the past?

CM: *Heartlands* (Mann 2002) is a series of poems-of-place. Unlike most of the poems of the so-called 'Veld and Vlei' writers with which I'm acquainted, *Heartlands* depicts a series of landscapes, both in South Africa and other countries, in which people are shown to be present and a part of history and culture.

'Midlands Lexicon' and 'Komga Thornbush', for example, evoke a multi-languaged natural environment in which even a single species of grass or an ordinary thornbush have a variety of names and significances. 'Hlambeza Pool', a fairly typical sacred site in the Eastern Cape countryside, images the tobacco, beads and grains of mealies used in contemporary rites that venerate the *abaphansi* (ancestral spirits). 'The Magic of Motse' sets out the struggle of a local catechist against the corruption and administrative collapse of a small town. A similar post-liberation dysfunction is seen in 'Seymour'. 'Karoo Pyre' describes the attempt by policemen to incinerate the bodies of the Pebco Three. 'Hogsback Oracle' evokes the shade of Monica Wilson, the social anthropologist whose insights into the change from small-scale to large-scale societies in Africa and elsewhere provided a model of social change that has influenced much of my work. 'A Field in Italy' links the second world war with families living in South Africa and Italy while 'Saying Goodbye to the Romans' imagines the impact of decolonization on Britain after three hundred years of occupation by the forces of a large-scale imperial power. Then there are a number of what might be called family poems of place, deliberately set in such quotidian built environments as a supermarket, a child's bedroom, a swing in a garden in the suburbs and the passageway leading to the front door of a home.

'Shacklands' (from *Kites*, Mann 1990:28-40) is an earlier example of a peopled landscape. 'Shacklands' is an extended multi-voiced poem that evokes a number of individuals and some of their activities in and near a sprawling slum on the outskirts of a city where water, plants and animals are shown to be as underdeveloped, to use a euphemism, as the immigrants from the land.

In *South Africans* (Mann 1996), I tried to transmute the tradition of *izibongo* (praise-poems) into a multi-cultural work suitable for the page. Dozens of individual people from widely different backgrounds, as well as people in groups, were evoked. In this series of portrait-poems the diversity of people in South Africa is celebrated and the landscape, and in particular the wide open spaces of veld and vlei relished by an urban dweller visiting the hinterlands and the mountains, were of course of secondary or no importance.

Lifelines, in contrast, are located in the tradition of poetry about animals found in numerous, if not all, cultures. Animal metaphors are layered into daily speech and remind us of our ancient kinship with other living creatures (Wilson 1975:271-301). Within the tradition of literature in English, as elsewhere in other cultures, animals signify different meanings in different texts and eras. Think only of the serpent in Genesis, the antelope in the Song of Songs, the lamb in the Gospels and the horses of the apocalypse in Revelations. Then we have the peacock and other fantastical creatures in the medieval bestiaries and the owl and ass in Shakespeare. Think also of the lamb, tiger and worm of Blake, the nightingale of Keats, the skylark of Shelley, Tennyson's eagle, Kipling's *Just So* stories, Orwell's elephant, Seamus Heaney's badgers and otter, Roy Campbell's zebras, Douglas Livingstone's wild-cat, lion and goat and the crow, the eagle and fox of Ted Hughes.

The portrayal of animals by Hughes in particular (Hughes 1957; Hughes 1960) marks a significant change by poets in the West in their attitude towards animals. Hughes expresses a neo-Darwinian interpretation of nature, though less dourly in his later poems. The rough, tough competitive struggle to survive is emphasised. The narrator is an observer, the animal a creature out there, an object to be looked at (the hawk) or consumed (the pig). This neo-Darwinian emphasis is a healthy antidote to the romantic, urban view of nature so vividly and poignantly expressed by Keats and in my view brings the reader closer to the empirical reality of nature than Wordsworth. My reading of Hughes left me wondering, however, whether he was oversimplifying nature from another perspective.

I continued to admire the fierce strength of 'The Hawk in the Rain' and 'Lupercal' but felt that my own experiences of nature, in particular working to develop sustainable low-cost agricultural projects for an NGO in

the Valley of a Thousand Hills outside Durban during the eighties and nineties, were different. I was at the time part of a small multi-denominational reading and discussion group called Christians Anonymous. Our reading of recent discoveries in a number of different sciences was beginning to position a neo-Darwinian view of nature in a wider ecological context. The texts we read, together with the findings of the environmental movement, invited a fresh interpretation of animals and their environment.

In complete contrast to Hughes and Douglas Livingstone, that much undervalued South African poet, I saw the bio-sphere as sacred and felt a restless urge to write a book that would show how we could live with the reality of natural selection as well as re-consecrate our attitude to nature.

DL: Isn't this Wordsworth's essentially pantheistic response to nature, but just in another guise?

CM: I was in fact initially influenced in this direction by the theologians whom the group was reading at the time. Drawing on the work of Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179) and Meister Eckhardt (1260-1328), Matthew Fox introduced the idea of creation spirituality (Fox 1983:42-54, 88-92). Attempting to distance Christian thought from the sobering disquietude provided by St Augustine's doctrine of original sin, Fox wrote enthusiastically of 'original blessing'. Central to his work was a joyful affirmation of cosmic creation and a natural philosophy he dubbed 'panentheism'.

Notable in this array of ideas was Hildegard of Bingen's concept of the 'greening' of creation (*viriditas*) (Hildegard of Bingen 1985:113), a poetic insight of extraordinary prescience for a nun with little formal education who wrote without the research results of palaeo-biology at hand and who was unlikely to have known that the earth was once as barren of life as the moon is today.

The forays into theology by Fox, however, seemed to me to be in need of temperate refinement and more observable empirical foundations. My attention then shifted to work by physicists, astronomers and cosmologists such as Paul Davies, Martin Rees and Thomas Berry, as well as books introducing disciplines such as biology and zoology on which my previous studies in English Literature, philosophy and African oral literature had not

touched at all.

While struggling through these I was shocked to discover that I was in fact living and working with a dated Newtonian paradigm of understanding, one that I had simply inherited from the physics and chemistry of school. This had been shaken but not dismantled by the reading I had done into the history and philosophy of science which was part of an undergraduate degree in philosophy. The complex implications of the work of Einstein, Bohr, Hubble and Heisenberg had yet to disturb the comfortable rectitude of a conventional urban, post-industrial epistemology. There was, as can be imagined, more crucial socio-political work to be done during the eighties and nineties in South Africa and my intellectual pursuits were erratic. There were pipelines to install and schools to be built and young children at home to be parented and loved.

In keeping with the practical holistic philosophy of development that was being implemented by The Valley Trust, the non-governmental development organisation where I worked, the idea of the specialised pursuit of a rarefied, comprehensive theory of understanding to the exclusion of other aspects of life was and remains to me unthinkable. The interplay of carefully researched and constructed models of understanding, incomplete in themselves and incompletely absorbed, taken together with the lived experience of work and family life, with all their stresses and strains, their tears and embraces and exhaustions and joys, seemed to me the locus and subject of poetry. The pursuit of theoretical knowledge by itself, remote from work and daily life, would be an act of reduction, of disincarnation, to coin a term, in which the poetry would wither away to lifeless if noble abstractions.

The Newtonian paradigm, for those of us whose understanding of science was limited, suggested a universe that behaved like clockwork. God was the ghost in a machine. The macro-cosmos was large and stable and governed by decipherable laws. It had neither a beginning nor an end and was emptiness, a vacuum not a plenum, populated by stars, the sun and the planets and a few other such bodies. The micro-cosmos likewise was populated by spheres of one kind or another, the hard-edged atoms and molecules of Rutherford. Their movements, like billiard balls on a snooker table, could be measured and predicted with precision. People who worked in the humanities spoke with respect at the time of such 'hard science' as a

type of superior, more dependable knowledge.

Logical positivism, scientific materialism and, it may be, the confidence in social ideologies that flourished in the first part of the twentieth century grew out of this misunderstanding of science, with tragic consequences for the environment and for the imagined classes of people who did not fit the intellectual paradigms of the intellectuals and leaders.

One by one, the discoveries of the twentieth century seeped slowly and intermittently into my consciousness. Still consumed by work in peri-urban and rural development in the non-profit sector, I simply did not possess the scholarly background or the intellectual ability to question the results of physicists, palaeontologists, biologists and astronomers. Nor was there the time to explore the manifold implications of the discoveries or attempt a reasoned yet poetic coalescence. What could any one individual, especially a person brought up on literature, make of the explosion of scientific knowledge that was occurring every day? One example must suffice, the increase in size of the publication *Chemical Abstracts*:

> What began as two little volumes in 1907 (free to members and carrying a subsidized price of $6.00 for non-members) had by 2000 swollen into a behemoth that swallowed library budgets and shelves at an alarming pace. Its colossal 1997-2001 Collective Index occupies 35 linear feet and lists for $43,000 (Flaxbart 2007:1).

And that was just an index. I was living by faith in far more areas of thought and discovery than I cared or dared to acknowledge. Here are a few examples of the discoveries in science that shook my paradigms. Rather than prune and carefully order the list, I have deliberately left the discoveries in a single paragraph, tumbled together and tangled up and at different levels of insight to reproduce the muddled and at times exasperating process by which most of us in fact learn across disciplines, in contrast to the orderly absorption of knowledge in a book or a well-designed course organised by an institution of higher learning.

> The universe had not always existed. There had been a start. Billions of galaxies were once contained in a pinhead. Energy had, over time, transubstantiated into light, into matter, life on earth, then

consciousness. Time was inseparable from energy, was linked to the speed of light. There was in fact an arrow to time, to complexity from the hydrogen atom, to iron, carbon and uranium to Shakespeare's mind. Energy, not matter, was the primary constituent of the universe. Space was not empty but full of numerous forces and events always intangible to human perception. Science did not provide immutable facts but incomplete models of understanding. These models changed with time. The scientist could not be excised from the experiment. While events at the macro-level were precisely predictable, measurements at the quantum level faded into estimates and probabilities. Mathematics had limited scope. Some complex physical systems would remain inexplicable given the dimensions of consciousness. And language. The macro-universe was far bigger than expected and expanding every moment with enormous speed. The micro-cosmos was opening out under experiment into more and more complex realities. There no longer was an end to the small. A molecule of carbon, the element without which life cannot exist, needs three million years of heat and pressure in the nuclear reactor of a star to be created. It takes a universe this old and this large to create the possibility of that most complex of phenomena, life, to occur. Cosmology can tell us what happened but neither science nor philosophy has yet explained why the universe is here. The chance of repeating the founding conditions of the universe is one in ten to the power of 123, which exceeds the number of all the photons in the universe (Penrose 1989:339-345). Why genes replicate and life struggles so fiercely to survive cannot be explained within biology. Or science, given its self-limiting method of experimentation and verification. Which was its strength. The relationships of forces between the sub-nuclear particles in a rock, a plant, bacterium or animal on earth were established at the start of the universe and are to be found in all other matter in the universe fourteen billion years or so later, including those sub-nuclear forces within each neuron within each brain. Human sensory organs as well as the brain curved, filtered, censored, broke up and reconstituted in different combinations the incoming stream of data. Consciousness, in other words, only provided illusions of the real. Refined technologies of

> perception such as the radio telescope and the electron microscope revealed megabytes of data inscrutable to direct human perception. The physicality of humans and the limits of their technologies preset the range of phenomena we could ever hope to know.

It was ludicrous to imagine that I could or would want to synthesize all these incomplete and, it must be said, rapidly altering models of understanding into a grand design. That was the business of philosophy and theology. My vocation was poetry, written in a period characterised by a rapid and stimulating flow of new ideas from different disciplines, socio-political instability and the mutability of much of science.

What poetic form, what narrative structure, mode of address, diction and prosody could best absorb and express this flux of astonishing new findings, particularly in regard to the manifested need to engage once again with nature? Did the subject matter not require epic treatment? A grand metaphorical narrative as in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*? A precisely ordered poetic journey as in Dante's *La Commedia*? The verse paragraphs of pentameters that conjured up the pantheism of Wordsworth out of the rocks of an island?

After considerable thought, experimentation and rejection, I postulated a form in keeping with my creative abilities and the highly differentiated and changing character of the science I was trying to absorb. The larger forces at work in the universe would be depicted not in a grand design but in a series of individual dramatic monologues in which the narrator addressed an animal he had encountered. By choosing encounters from my own lived experience and working them into different lyrics I could more readily incarnate aspects of the standard model of cosmogenesis into poetry. The metrics would be based primarily on stressed peaks, providing the regular irregularity and irregular regularity observable in a living organism. By addressing the animal directly as an animal I could avoid the pathetic fallacy on one hand and the distancing stance of a Hughes on the other.

This latter mode of address would, I would hope, encourage the reader to feel that animals were not so much objects to be observed, ignored or consumed as chromosome cousins, fellow creatures in an interlinked web of necessary bio-diversity. To substantiate this relationship with an image, the artist has shown the animals in the book looking out and at the reader.

By addressing a variety of animals encountered at different times and evoking different responses I could bring out a range of different responses felt by others of our species. This range of feelings included the following: frustration and anger ('Cutworm'), regret ('Kudu' and 'Eastern Cape Rocky'), apprehension and fear ('Orthosucus'), repugnance at the unknown ('Spider'), repulsion then acceptance ('Maggots'), admiration ('Eland'), a sense of mystery ('Bees'), a deepened sense of biological time ('Dicynodont' and 'Lizard'), distress, ethical uncertainty and awe ('Silverfish'), horror then grudging acceptance ('Peregrine Falcon'), disaffection with fellow humans ('Porcupine' and 'Tortoise'), dismay at interspecies violence ('Moth' and 'Zebra') and moments of tranquil unity with nature ('Dove', 'Blesbuck' and 'Cicada').

DL: I take your points, but I wonder if your work would appeal to anyone who would prefer not to read religious themes into (or out of) nature?

CM: I would sincerely hope so. Religious themes are decipherable in some of the poems but there is, I think, much more to them than that.

'Antlion', for example, is based on the numerous times I sat as a boy on a dune and stirred the sandy den of the creature with a twig, as well as on the comprehensive field work of a researcher who worked on Kalahari antlions (Van Zyl 1994) and Wheeler's *Demons of the Dust* (Wheeler n.d.). The poem also incorporates references to the energy transfers observable in the macro-cosmos in the creation and life-cycle of a star (Davies 1983:26-32) and in the micro-cosmos in the exchanges of energy in biological systems (Pimm 1982:99-106).

All this sounds too technical, too scientific for poetry but that was the challenge I faced, to transmute the findings of scientific research into texts of poetic significance in a form where the reader suspended suspicion and discontent. I mean no one in their right mind addresses an animal in verse, let alone one present only to the imagination. The art of the poetry lay in making such dramatic monologues believable, in speaking for example to an imagined chameleon on a branch using alliteration, assonance and four or more stress-beats to a line in the hope that a reader would read the poem with what Robert Frost (Poirer & Richardson 1995:777) described in 'The

Figure a Poem Makes' as a delight that turns into wisdom.

DL: Nevertheless, should one bring God (however defined) into a poetic/artistic response to nature at all?

CM: I would not be prescriptive or censorious here. The current preference for, if not hegemony of, secular literature found in the western academy should not exclude writing by people of faith. Shabbir Banoobhai, for example, a South African poet of great distinction who writes within the Muslim tradition, or a poetic hymn-writer such as Isaiah Shembe, the founder of an enormous African independent church in KwaZulu-Natal, perceive and celebrate a God whom they perceive at work in the lives of people and the whole panoply of the natural world.

I write as an artist who happens to be an aspirant Christian, whose life is steadied by daily prayer and given a wider perspective in space and time by regular meditation and worship and the music, liturgy and evolving traditions of the Anglican community. In *Lifelines*, as elsewhere, I prefer to avoid using the word 'God' wherever I can. To me the mere verbal deed of drawing such a word into the syntax of a sentence, particularly one written in prose or spoken in a secular social context, diminishes the energy and complexity of the metaphor and turns what to me is a vocative, a salutation, an infinity, a glimpsed presence, an unfolding, an opening out of consciousness into a noun as humdrum as the word 'potato'.

In *Lifelines*, for example, I tried instead to be true to the range of emotions that the encounters with animals aroused in me. A number of these left me and, I would hope, the reader eschewing any didactic and narrow interpretation of a Creator, for example the unpalatable discovery, conveyed in a number of poems, that ongoing sacrifice is built into the biosphere. How can there be a loving 'God' in a world of ferocious insects ('Mosquitoes') and destructive herbivores ('Rhinoceros)? Poetry for me is an art that shares with a reader not texts declaiming and defining a closed ideological commitment but emotions such as pain and a sense of helplessness ('Electric Ray'), humour and irony ('Warthog') and confusion ('Finches') as well as translucent moments of tranquillity and felt belonging ('Heron').

DL: However powerfully these emotions are felt, is it really feasible to trace links between nature, in South Africa for example, and the cosmos?

CM: The links have been discovered by astronomers, cosmologists, palaeontologists, biologists and palaeo-microbiologists. One of the most comprehensive summations of their findings to date is the book *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Barrow 1986).

Let me give a few examples of what has become prominent in my imagination as I pondered over the years the significance of books like that. The leaves of the milkwood trees on the dune at Port Alfred where I sat as a boy and fiddled with antlions, like leaves all round the earth, catch photons of light speeding in from the sun at a little less than 299,792,458 metres per second and transmute these miniscule packets into sugars and gases and energy consumable on earth. Without such capturing of energy the earth would be as thinly skinned with plants today as it was before the assumed first appearance of such an astonishingly complex molecule in an angiosperm.

The nuclei of the grains of sand on the beach below the dune are held together by the same set of astonishingly precise forces that cohere the hydrogen and helium and other atoms in the furthest observable and measurable star and dust-cloud in the universe. These forces, their relationships of energy, momentum and radial speed were established at the start of the cosmos over fourteen billion years ago. Were those sub-nuclear relationships to differ, by even a tiny amount, the whole universe would collapse.

Local gravity related to the movement of the moon pulls the sea back and forth and, pulsing out in waves through the sea, chamfers the edge of each grain of the sand on the beach. The complex molecules in every nerve and cell of me were fused out of hydrogen in a long-vanished star whose dust was compacted by gravity into the planets which circle the sun. My lungs thirst after oxygen which is present in each breath of air I breathe only because of the photosynthesis of the leaves. Dark matter or energy, recently discovered and still poorly understood, links huge conglomerations of matter such as the galaxies. The existence of the whole expanding cosmos is sustained by enormous forces or powers that also remain unknown.

DL: I personally am struck by the scale and vividness of your imagination, but do you think your work will or should cause a response? If so, in what way? Or doesn't it matter whether you evoke any reaction?

CM: Definitely. The response I would welcome most from a reader of the book is the one that slowly emerged in me as I did the research and entered into the meditations that slowly turned into the poems, namely, a frightening realisation of the vulnerability of life in an industrialized, monetarized biosphere and an exhilarating understanding of the intimacy of the lifelines on the planet with the cosmos in which they emerged.

The response I also welcome, after a performance, is linked to a lifelong passion to find ways to restore poetry to the public domain in a culture dominated by the mass media. When young people come up on stage at the end of a performance and say how much they enjoyed the poems and the art, then Julia the artist and I feel hugely affirmed.

Whether or not *Lifelines* will have any impact at all on behaviour is another matter. On the one hand there is the gloomy view of the later Auden, that poetry 'makes nothing happen' (Auden 1968:41). On the other is the statement made by Seamus Heaney during his visit to Grahamstown in 2003: his Irish experience suggested that poetry can help to change 'attitudes'. In South Africa it is often forgotten how much poetry or verse was written by people during the eighties and nineties. The value of this huge outpouring has passed and the violence of many of the sectarian slogans and battle cries posing as poetry still needs to be openly acknowledged and criticised. At the time such oral political literature served at the very least to articulate the socio-political attitudes of large numbers of people in an international language.

Also articulating an unfolding cluster of feelings, by suggesting that we view other animals as 'chromosome cousins', the book and the performance confront a current prejudice among humans which I call 'animalism', our tendency to feel instantly superior to any animal we meet. Despite the vigour of the animal rights lobby it is difficult to imagine how long it will take for this prejudice to be ameliorated among a largely carnivorous species.

DL: Agreed, yet I still need to ask whether such poetry and images do have any place in a South Africa that is still struggling with massive socio-economic inequalities and other difficulties, which are increasing rather than being resolved?

CM: Poetry, the reading and writing of poetry, like prayer, provides me with less imbalanced perspectives on daily life and moments of tranquillity in which values and beliefs that guide future action coalesce. This is not an elite pastime. Is it unnatural for people who live in poverty, in a violent, overcrowded urban slum to pray and sing and dance and listen to the live oral literature of a sermon for hours on a Sunday when there is so much material work that could be done at home? Of course there are numerous incidents of charlatan chicanery in such spirituality, as there are not only in some of the inner city churches with their thousands of adherents but also in the established mainline churches as well.

Both activities, however, in other words the poetic and the religious, engage the inner life, in solitary meditation or in the community of a faith group, and both are as crucial to the restoration of an abundant life among poor people as decent homes, water, sanitation, roads, clinics and schools.

That said, the awareness you express of this ghastly, dehumanizing blight cannot be dissolved in Pharisaic disdain or shunned in an intellectual protectionism that always privileges art over action, or worse, favours socially committed texts, masquerading as poetry, in order to foist these on pupils and students and thereby expiate personal guilt at ethical inaction. Individual artists make their peace with this material injustice, as well as crime and corruption and the inefficiency of government services in different ways. In my case I am fortunate enough to be able to spend more time on writing and performing than I could do in my youth but I continue to express my commitment to social justice through the development activities of a literary festival of which I am the convenor, through Spiritfest, a recently established independent festival that takes place during the National Arts Festival, of which I am the secretary, and through several developmental trusts and similar activities.

These are of course minor enterprises when set against the billions of rands spent and often squandered on development by a government increasingly characterised by ineptitude. To give but one example: a

qualified report from the auditors would be enough to get the director of a company or a department of government fired in other parts of the world. Year after year since liberation, however, to no avail the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in Parliament lists department after department and parastatal after parastatal whose accounts are not acceptable.

Another role for the poet with a social conscience is thus emerging, with greater and greater urgency, the perennial role of public witness, not only with regard to the environmental crisis. Why, it may be asked, are writers who were so prominent in their criticism of the injustices of apartheid so silent about Mugabe's Zimbabwe and the widespread and growing incidents of maladministration and corruption of the post-apartheid government in South Africa?

To my mind the oral, musical and visible medium within which I practise my craft calls many of the human being's senses and capacities (affective, intellectual, even spiritual) into play, and I'd hope that the experience of this holistic art will be shared by others, not as an escape from daily reality, but as an enriching explication. Who knows, it may in some cases lead to a change in behaviour. I often wonder, for example, what effect the poem 'Finches', which conveys my disquiet at the slaughter of such birds in a gum plantation when I was a boy on a farm, has on audiences of schoolboys. In the Eastern Cape where we live there have been observable changes, not inspired by poetry of course, towards better conservation practices, sometimes induced by rational economic factors. Who would have thought, for example, that unsustainable cattle and maize farming which has had such a destructive effect on bio-diversity in the area would have been largely replaced by game-farming in a decade?

In this so-called post-apartheid era we need a number of perspectives to help us regain the sanity of sustainable relationships between each other and the biosphere that succours us and the cosmos which is our home. Other writers and artists will and must of course focus on what to them are priorities different to ours. But such differences, as in the sciences, as in the competitive urge to survive in nature, are a healthy and welcome part of life.

DL: Having set out some of the intellectual and biographical background to *Lifelines* would you, in conclusion, choose a poem from the book that embodies what you have been saying?

CM: I'd like to offer 'Rhinoceros' (Mann 2006:63) which brings together a few insights from science, technology and ecology and articulates my belief in the importance of art, an attitude in this case derived from a response to the gold-skinned sculpture of an African rhino excavated from Mapungubwe.

RHINOCEROS

A gully of thorn-bush, smitten by the heat.
Ant-heap pinnacles, like Gaudi's cathedral.
And sightings, in cycads, of pale grey hide.
Ear-scallops. The dusty boulder of a rump.

You were a saga upwind of me. Had been,
for millions of years. A Pliocene mammal
getting on with it. That maw of a mouth
lipping, ripping, grinding scrub to a mash.

I sat in a jeep, my camera aimed like a rifle,
and zoomed in. On a snuffling, slobbering,
pig-eyed cranium. A calloused flange of lip.
Click. I bagged in pixels a kill of your being.

What art, I thought, could begin to semaphore
the instincts delicately latticed in your genes,
the shoals of blood-sacs bred in your marrow
and your whole horned hunger to live, live, live?

A month or so later, back home at my desk,
tracking your spoor through the internet bush,
I marvelled at what the artists had made of you
centuries back in Mapungubwe's hill-top smithy.

You were a small, austere replica of your self,
a talisman crafted by the sculptors of the village,

a totem whittled from wood and skinned in gold
to strengthen and beautify the life of the clan.

I gazed and gazed, at the stump-strong legs,
the hippo-squat bulk, a head dropped to charge,
loving your lustre, your bony snort of a tail.
And then you charged, right out of the screen
into the word-carved talisman of this poem.

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A further reading list is available from Chris Mann.

David Levey
Department of English Studies
Unisa

Chris Mann
Institute for the Study of English in Africa
Rhodes University

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