

My Landskap Is Myne Verhard: A Topopoetics of Displacement in Ingrid Jonker's Ontvlugting (1956) and Ek Dryf in die Wind (1966)

Carlijn Cober

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2106-6047>

Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands

carlijncober@gmail.com

Abstract

This article conducts a stylistic analysis of the references to landscape in two of Ingrid Jonker's poems: *Ontvlugting* (1956), and *Ek Dryf in die Wind* (1966). Through the lens of geocriticism, specifically topopoetics, descriptions of the landscape are read as narrative structures that have an affective function within the text. The article aims to demonstrate that these two poems evoke a sense of figural displacement, a feeling of disconnection or lack of belonging, which is established by specific toponyms and images of nature. By oscillating between an intimate attachment with the landscape on the one hand, and a stark affect of estrangement on the other, these poems both perform and embody the concept of displacement.

Keywords: Ingrid Jonker; topopoetics; displacement; geocriticism

Mythologising Ingrid Jonker

After her suicide in 1965 the South African poet Ingrid Jonker (1933–1965) quickly became a mythologised figure. She didn't leave an expansive oeuvre behind, with only two collections of poetry published during her lifetime: *Ontvlugting (Escape)* in 1956 and *Rook en Oker (Smoke and Ochre)* in 1963, as well as one posthumous publication titled *Kantelson (Setting Sun)* in 1966. Her work is still very popular in the Netherlands, as in 2018 the Dutch publishing house Podium produced the 18th reprint of an anthology of her poems. This anthology, *Ik Herhaal Je*, was first published in 2000 and features poems selected and translated by the Dutch poet Gerrit Komrij. The steady popularity of her work could be explained by the fact that she has been transfigured in different forms of media, which have made her reappear in the public eye and rekindled the

interest in her work for a broader audience, providing her with an extensive *nachleben* (“afterlife”). Examples include the aforementioned selection by Komrij, complemented by a biographical overview written by Henk van Woerden, but also the documentary *Korreltjie Niks Is My Dood* (2001) directed by Saskia van Schaik and finally the movie *Black Butterflies*, directed by Paula van der Oest and starring Carice van Houten (2011).

Although these different representations and materialisations of Jonker have added to her popularity in the Netherlands, the reception of her work has also been influenced by these various forms of Dutch intermediation. These mediations feature a somewhat exoticised version of Ingrid Jonker, and all employ the visual trope of Ingrid frolicking on the beach, conjuring her as a *kaalvoet kind* (“barefooted child”) or sensual young woman (Van Woerden 2011, 211). In his work *De Gouddelver: Over het lezen van Poëzie*, Yves T’Sjoen taps into the notion that Jonker fell prey to mythmaking in his chapter “De Mythe van het Hartseerkind” (“The Myth of the Heartsore Child”) (T’Sjoen 2005, 240). The word *hartseerkind* is adequately chosen, as it describes both how she is perceived as a naïve, child-like figure and her proneness to depression and heartbreak. Ideas of her being a child-woman and of her childhood as a paradise lost often appear in the discourse on Ingrid Jonker, for instance when her friend and fellow *Sestiger* (“Sixtier”), Jan Rabie, describes her during an interview (in Deloof 1987, 207; my translation):

Die hoofkenmerk van Ingrid Jonker en haar skryfwerk is dat sy kind was en dat sy kind gebly het. Sy het die hele tyd vir haarself wiegeliedjies geskryf. Haar gedigte is vol verkleinwoordjies. Alles was wiegeliedjies.

(The main characteristic of Ingrid Jonker and her writing is that she was a child and remained a child. All that time, she wrote nursery rhymes for herself. Her poems are full of diminutives. It was all nursery rhymes)

In an interview segment of the documentary *Korreltjie Niks Is My Dood*, the poet Antjie Krog describes her defiance of how Jonker has been infantilised and depoliticised by means of a one-dimensional portrayal and selection of her poetry. She claims that anthologies only featured “*kabouterliefde*, children’s poems, the naïve Ingrid, playful Ingrid—never the enraged mother, the critical, politically engaged thinker. Her place was only as the daughter, the girl, the lover” (*Korreltjie Niks Is My Dood* 2001; my translation). In this fragment, Krog points to the fact that Jonker’s work has been depoliticised and framed on the basis of her sex, as selections of her work emphasise the feminine, child-like, or erotic and romantic elements of her work.

A “Natural”

It would be seductively straightforward to read Jonker’s poems as purely autobiographical and to establish her within the genre of confessional poetry, akin to the work of other female poets who used their (intense) personal experiences as material for their work. As such, it has become commonplace to compare her to American

“confessionalists” such as Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton, especially on the basis of biographical details such as mental illness or suicide (Fourie 2003, 121–27; Francken and Renders 2005, 11; T’Sjoen 2013, 21; Viljoen 2013, 136, 149; Zeeman 2001, para. 2).

The second recurring trope in the discourse on Ingrid Jonker is her connection to nature. She is portrayed as a “natural”: naturally gifted at poetry, a natural beauty, and profoundly in touch with nature. By invoking her death by drowning herself at Drieankerbaai (Three Anchor Bay) or by featuring her running barefoot along the shores of Clifton, she is imagined as someone whose life, death and poems were tied to the region where she lived and died. This trope is repeated by Dutch newspapers, which describe her as a “child of nature” who wrote “barefoot-verses” (Vloet 2000, para. 4) about her “childhood at the Cape” (Jaeger 2011, para. 3) or give her the title “lady South Africa” (Keyser 2001, title)—eulogising her as the embodiment of South Africa. Her life is presented as intimately tied to a geographical location. A memorial statue has even been erected at the beach of Gordonsbaai (Gordon’s Bay), the place where she grew up and which is mentioned in the first line of the poem *Ontvlugting*. By transforming this location into a *lieu de mémoire* (“site of memory”), she is positioned specifically within a geographical, regional site (Nora 1989, 13).

This practice of “naturalisation” also surfaces in academic sources. In her article “Surviving that Place” (2014), Marian de Saxe analyses Jonker’s “use of nature images and loss to expand her world” (De Saxe 2014, 48). Moreover, De Saxe links Jonker’s references to landscapes as a symptom of “homesickness,” paraphrasing André Brink who claimed that her experiences of Europe left her “feeling herself negated by her displacement: neither at home in herself, in South Africa or outside that time, that place” (De Saxe 2014, 46). Although the examination of Jonker’s use of nature images and references to the regional landscape is an interesting and new topic of research, it has once more been subjected to a biographical reading.

Biographical readings have, indeed, been the most prevalent practice in the analysis of her poetry. Joan Hambidge expresses her frustration and fatigue as a result of exclusively encountering biographical readings of Jonker’s work during her discussion of Antjie Krog and André Brink’s translation of Jonker’s poems, *Black Butterflies* (2007). She exclaims, “Where, damn it, is the text?” (Hambidge 2008, 96). Yves T’Sjoen signals a similar phenomenon in the reception of Jonker’s poetry in Belgium and the Netherlands, as he determines that “Jonker’s poetry in the Dutch language area has been read exclusively from a biographical point of view” (T’Sjoen 2013, 19; my translation). There has been a “one-sided fixation on the person” (T’Sjoen 2013, 20), which has gone hand in hand with a reduction of Jonker’s identity to her tragic life and death.

The issue with the biographical approach towards Jonker’s poetry is that it has not only created a one-dimensional image of both her person and her work, the exclusive focus

on personal issues has also resulted in a myopic stance towards the text *as text*—one that has blinded readers from alternative readings or interpretations of her work. Even within prevalent biographical readings, her political engagement is mainly discussed in relation to one isolated poem, *Die Kind* (“The Child”) (Heynders 2009, 40–46). This singularity is odd, as in terms of context Jonker was part of *Die Sestigters* (“The movement of the Sixties”). One of the connective features of this group of writers was their strong awareness of national and local political issues. They also represented a movement that aimed to modernise Afrikaans as a literary language, and experimented with style and form. Unfortunately, many formal or stylistic elements of Jonker’s poems have largely been overlooked within the academic community. Even in terms of genre, scholars driven by the label of the autobiographical or confessional poem have failed to notice her experimentation with different genres or poetic modes, most strikingly the topographical poem.

Topographical Poetry

Topographical poetry, or local poetry, is a genre with a rich and longstanding tradition. John Denham’s poem “Cooper’s Hill” (1624) is generally accepted as one of the first landscape poems, but the genre has links to the classical tradition of the pastoral and the idyll (Burt 2011, 598). Topographical poems often describe a specific geographical place or location, such as a hilltop, a river, a city or region. Burt (2011, 605) describes “a set of formal signs” to identify topographic poetry, such as

the name of the place, often in the title, sometimes with a preposition [...]; present tense [...]; and a structure involving movement or perspective, following the eye or the body as it moves across or through the site.

Ingrid Jonker’s work lends itself well to a reading as topographical poetry, as it often invokes images of South Africa or “Afrika” through affect-laden descriptions of specific regional locations. In this text, I want to investigate the potential of a geo-centred approach to two of Jonker’s poems as key examples of the genre of topographical poetry. I have chosen two poems that can be read along the lines of Burt’s definition. First, the title poem of her first collection published in 1956: *Ontvlugting*, in which Jonker explicitly refers to two topographical locations: Valkenburg and Gordonsbaai. Second, I will investigate a poem from her posthumously published work *Kantelson* (1966) as a classic example of a *prospect poem*. The prospect poem is a subgenre of topographical poetry in which the lyrical I views a specific location from a physical and/or temporal distance, usually from a bird’s eye view, and reflects on the future of that place (Brownlow 1978, 203). In this poem by Jonker, the lyrical I takes on this position by “drifting in the wind,” and reflecting on the future of “her black Africa.”

Topopoetics

In his contribution to *Geocritical Explorations* (2011), Sten Pultz Moslund defines “topopoetics” as a phenomenologically based investigation into “the corporeal

experience of place, or geographies as sensuous geographies” in literature (Moslund 2011, 30). Specifically, a topopoetical reading investigates “how physical dimensions and elementals (such as topography, horizontality, verticality, earth, wind, water, light, vegetation, density”) etcetera, function within the text (Moslund 2011, 34).

By taking the function of textual elements referring to environment and space into account, this article provides an alternative reading in response to Joan Hambidge’s call to reposition the text at the centre of analysis. In order to distance myself from a biographical reading, I will investigate Jonker’s poetry with a focus on the concept of “displacement,” and an eye on the affective function of references to landscape. The main question of this article is the following: How do references to the regional landscape evoke an affect of displacement in Ingrid Jonker’s poetry?

I will demonstrate that a sense of displacement does not derive from the biographical fact that Jonker left South Africa to travel Europe in 1964, as is suggested in the article by De Saxe (2014), but has been a fundamental theme in Ingrid Jonker’s poetry from the very beginning. To illustrate the consistent recurrence of this concept of displacement, I will compare two poems from two different publications that evoke a similar affect of displacement: *Ontvlugting*, from the eponymous collection published in 1956 and *Ek Dryf in die Wind* from the posthumously published *Kantelson* (1966). By defining displacement as an affective function in the text, I will investigate the potential of the concept of “displacement” as part of a reading within the framework of geocriticism. My understanding of “displacement” aims to contribute to Angelika Bammer’s quest “to bring to the surface the material ground of culture and community within which the work of theory takes shape: to put the ‘place’ back into ‘displacement’” (Bammer 1994, xiv).

After briefly introducing Bammer’s concept of “displacement,” I will move on to a stylistic analysis of Jonker’s work, with a focus on affect and place, rather than person. How do poems such as *Ontvlugting* (1956) and *Ek Dryf in die Wind* conjure a sense of figural displacement, a feeling of disconnection or lack of belonging? How do toponyms and images of nature function within the evocation of a regional landscape? This article aims to analyse this distinctive form of displacement by providing a *topopoetic* analysis of the text, thus moving towards a “geo-centered rather than ego-centered approach” as a means to counteract the vast majority of biographical readings Jonker’s oeuvre has endured so far (Westphal 2011, xiv). The combination of a stylistic method within a geo-centred approach fits precisely with my aim to take on a distinctively non-biographical interpretative lens for these texts, thereby illuminating different facets of Jonker’s work such as the affects it encompasses and possibly invokes for the reader.

Displacement

For a reader who is not familiar with the region of Cape Town, the references to Valkenburg and Gordonsbaai might produce a sense of alienation or detachment when

the reader is asked to imagine him/herself in a specific place. In the case of Jonker, her poems can be said to create a peculiar form of estrangement. Because her poems consistently link place to a feeling of a lack of belonging to that place, this disaffection is best described as displacement. In *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (1994), Angelika Bammer indicates her concern with “the relation between the experience of displacement and the construction of cultural identity,” which she describes as a double bind of “marking and recording absence and loss and inscribing presence” (Bammer 1994, xiv). This definition elucidates that displacement is an *experience* that is intertwined with the construction of a (cultural) identity. As the concept of displacement is generally used to describe migrational groups and broad categories of literal dislocation, Bammer’s emphasis is unique and conceptually relevant in its focus on the individual and on displacement as an affect rather than situational status. Bammer centralises the feeling of displacement, which she suggests is part of a “postmodern geography of identity: both here and there *and* neither here *nor* there at one and the same time” (Bammer 1994, xii). Following Bammer, I will define “displacement” as a negative affect of dis-belonging or estrangement of place. This displacement does not necessarily have to imply a literal relocation, but would indicate a structure of feeling, which can be conveyed via text.

As a textual, affective structure, it is analysable as part of a topopoetic reading, which “involves a mode of reading that moves away from the *representation* of place in literature to a direct presencing of place or sensation of place” (Moslund 2011, 31). By placing this notion of presence at the centre of analysis, a topopoetic reading might be performed in two ways. First, a topopoetic reading, following Moslund (2011, 35), takes into account how

words are not just flat, textual signifiers: all of them are names that trigger or presence an inner image of shapes and colors and blended with sounds, smells, and haptic sensations of the heat and moisture of the climate.

Seen in this way, a topopoetic reading is concerned with the affect a text brings about, through an analysis of the function of references and/or imagery of the landscape and environment. A second form of topopoetic reading “may appreciate the ways in which the vocabulary of a text is affected by, or sometimes produced by, the environment of its setting” (Moslund 2011, 35). I will follow the first type of topopoetic analysis concerned with the affect the text brings about in order to keep the focus of analysis on the text itself, extending at most to the interpretative axis of text-reader instead of author-text. Such an interpretation can be viewed as phenomenological, since the text is not perceived as a static object or vehicle for communication, but as an inter-subjective, expressive medium. The following case study of Jonker’s poem *Ontvlugting* will be an investigation into the potential of topopoetics as a method for the textual analysis of the affective function of toponyms and references to regional landscape.

Ontvlugting

In the first rhyming couplet of the title poem of her first collection of poetry, *Ontvlugting* (1956), Jonker invokes a space that is deeply embedded in the Southern region of South Africa, by referring to two toponyms: Valkenburg and Gordonsbaai. By imagining a flight from current circumstances, compared with the mental institution Valkenburg in the city of Cape Town, the lyrical I imagines him/herself back in the coastal village of Gordonsbaai. Because both these toponyms refer to the area where Ingrid Jonker spent most of her childhood, this poem has been read exclusively from a biographical perspective (Van Woerden 2011, 142). From a topo-poetical perspective, however, one could say that these places are of central importance to the lyrical I within the poem. The title *Ontvlugting* expresses a longing to be somewhere else, a longing to escape. This longing is not portrayed as an abstract, general sensation, as the lyrical I establishes a link between a figural displacement, a feeling of disconnection or lack of belonging, and specific toponyms: Valkenburg and Gordonsbaai (Jonker 2000, 10):

*Uit hierdie Valkenburg het ek ontvlug
en dink my nou in Gordonsbaai terug:*

The term *hierdie* proves to be difficult to translate, as it simultaneously emphasises place (*hier*) and imagined place (indicating some sort of Valkenburg, “like” Valkenburg), connected by a likeness or similar affect. In Gerrit Komrij’s translation this comes to the fore as “Hier, aan dit Valkenburg,” maintaining both a sense of an exact, specific place as well as likeness of a place (“dit”). The translation by Antjie Krog and André Brink manages to achieve a similar effect in even fewer words, simply by using the word “this.” At the same time, however, Krog and Brink have drastically changed the word *ontvlug* by substituting “run away,” which refers to a more physical yet somehow less urgent form of escape, while they do translate the title with the more literal “Escape,” which allows for an interpretation that holds up both a real escape and a flight of imagination. As the poem presents a place that is both real and part of the imaginary, it not only refers to specific places, but also conveys a particular affect related to place. In this case, the toponym Valkenburg would both refer to the mental institution in Cape Town in a literal sense, and serve as a metonym for a feeling of confinement, unhappiness or instability. Gordonsbaai, on the other hand, comes to stand for a place of nostalgia, of return, of belonging, underlined by the word *terug* (“return”).

The imagined flight of the lyrical I to Gordonsbaai brings about a stream of associations closely related to identity, emphasised by the tricolon structure of the following three stanzas, all beginning with “I.” Markedly, the first “I” differs significantly from the second and third “I,” as the first “I” engages in an activity in the present tense: *Ek speel, en kerf* (“I play,” “and carve”), while the second and third instances of “I” contain ontological statements on the lyrical I’s identity via metaphors (*Ek is*). In most biographical readings, these images have been interpreted as images from Jonker’s childhood years, symbolising the lost paradise of childhood (Fourie 2003, 221).

Although the word *speel* (“play”) suggests innocence, the I’s interaction with its surroundings suggests otherwise. Especially the act of carving swastikas into a tree could be considered quite a violent attempt to leave a mark with an infamous ideological meaning on the surroundings. The mention of the *rooikransboom* (“red-krantz tree”) is ambiguous, as this tree (*Acacia Cyclops*) is an invasive species that derives from Australia, and was first introduced in 1857 “along the Cape coast to control drift-sand.” It was later spread to other “disturbed areas” (De Beer 1986, 2). These trees had a binding function as they kept coastal sand in place to prevent the beach from weathering. Perhaps it is precisely this function the lyrical I aims to violate; their function of control, or the forceful hindrance of dissolution, or perhaps their non-indigenous presence within the landscape—turned detrimental through the Nazi-symbol.

The I’s innocence is in a process of decline, eventually resulting in loneliness and death:

*Ek speel met paddavisse in 'n stroom
en kerf swastikas in 'n rooikransboom*

*Ek is die hond wat op die strande draf
En dom-allenig teen die aandwind blaf*

*Ek is die seevoël wat verhongerd daal
En dooie nagte opdis as 'n maal*

Coincidental with the decrease of innocence is an increase of scope, as the focalisation changes from being near- to farsighted. The proximity of playing with tiny tadpoles in a creek or brook expands into the perspective of a dog confronted with empty skies and an outstretched beach, which then turns into a literal bird’s-eye view of a seabird, descending from the sky to “dish up” “dead nights.” Moreover, the “I” becomes more animalised, as the identification of the “I” moves from a human animal to a domesticated animal to an animal as untamable and out of reach as a seabird. Although the metaphorical identification with animals such as a dog and seabird might indicate a sense of belonging to the landscape or nature, as opposed to the artificial, cultural confinement of Valkenburg, this tricolon expresses a failed attempt to interact with the environment in a way that is sustainable for the subject. Connections are not made, just as needs are not met. The metaphors that are employed to convey the lyrical I’s identity all depict one animal against an empty landscape, prompting an affect of loneliness or desolation. The dog barking “dumb-alone” at the wind is a disheartening image, as an act that is as destitute as it is useless, and conveys an utter sense of loneliness. The seabird is evidently (on the verge of) dying—starving, descending and already associated with “dead nights.” The word *opdis* also points to the pretense of serving “nothing” as a meal, thus indicating a form of self-delusion, while the lyrical I is unable to cope with the emptiness that is both outside of themselves (*dooie nagte*—“dead nights”) and within (*verhongerd*—“famished”).

The structure of the tricolon, which starts after the colon in the second line of the poem, disintegrates completely as soon as *Die god* (“The god”) makes its entry, even though the figure that is addressed actually appears to be *jou* (“you”):

*Die god wat jou geskep het uit die wind
sodat my smart in jou volmaaktheid vind:*

*My lyk lê uitgespoel in wier en gras
op al die plekke waar ons eenmaal was*

The interpretative difficulty here lies in the matter of the *jou*. Is the addressed “you” even human? Or does it refer to the landscape of Gordonsbaai, influenced by natural elements? The multiplicity of locations is interesting as well, as the poem refers to *al die plekke* (“all those places”), while the lifeless body is already motionlessly “washed out” (*uitgespoel*). This might indicate that the landscape itself is considered to be just as fragmented, various or complex as the identity of the “I.” The “I” actually becomes “us,” which is troublesome in itself. This duplication might refer to a fragmented notion of identity, consistent with the I in Valkenburg versus the imagined I in Gordonsbaai, or mind versus body. It might also point to the addressed “you” who is *geskep uit die wind* (“created from the wind”), as this “you” indicates the interruption of her identification with the animals. The “you” who is created by the god from the wind can be considered both a biblical reference as well as an explicitly profane reference, as it refers to a god as an element of nature, whose idea of perfection is to create an “Other” to function as an end of grief for the lyrical I. The second colon indicates a consequence of that ironic (?) *volmaaktheid* (“fulfilment”), as the lyrical I becomes a corpse, tangled in weeds and grass. Although it would be easy to state that the lyrical I now has become part of nature, even in death the lyrical I does not coincide with its environment, but is “washed out,” displaced, like a morbid *objet trouvée* and simultaneously scattered around places that held personal meaning for the “us.” Through these last lines, the poem creates a strange sense of intimacy, for instance by depicting the past of an “us.” At the same time, it has an effect of estrangement, due to the logical incongruity of the polymorphous locations, and the uncomfortable nearness of death, in which the reader is now somehow made complicit, rendering the reader into someone who might feel oddly out of place or in a state of transgression.

Ek Dryf in die Wind

The lyrical I in this poem manages to do what the seabird in *Ontvlugting* could not: to drift in the wind (Jonker 2007, 124–27). The bird’s eye perspective is generally related to a sense of (visual, moral) control in prospect poetry, as it allows the focalising persona to take an unusual stance from a physical height, accompanied by a view of the future (Foster 1975, 242). Yet, the focalisation in this poem seems to be driven by a lack of control. The word *dryf* (“drift”) already depicts an aimless, uncontrolled movement, in the sense that the “I” has somehow surrendered to the course of the wind, allowing it to

determine the subject's direction. At the same time, *dryf* usually refers to water, which reminds the reader of the last lines of *Ontvlugting*, in which the subject's dead body has supposedly been transported by the current to multiple locations. Moreover, the use of this word confuses the reader, as the blurred description of elements destabilises the readerly attempts to imagine the position of the lyrical I.

Both poems depict an individual that subjects itself to the natural elements. More often than not, this subjugation of the "I" is related to the dominant position of the *jy* ("you"), who has a destructive effect on (the landscape of) the "I." The title of this poem expresses a sense of detachment or lack of roots, as the lyrical I is repeatedly "let loose" or "let go" by the other:

los glo ek my ou vriend het my verlaat
los glo ek jy het die berge in my laat tuimel
los ruik my landskap na bitter son en bloed

The strong anaphora reveals the importance of the word *los*. This is emphasised by the fact that the word matches the content of the first two lines on a semantic level, but is strictly speaking not a part of the verbs *verlaat* ("leave"), *tuimel* ("tumble"), let alone *ruik* ("smell"). Similar to *Ontvlugting*, one part of the tricolon is structurally notably different from the first two. There is a strict parallelism in the first two lines, as they describe the belief of the "I" to be "loose," followed by a description of what the "other" has done to him/her, with the verb placed at the end of the line. The third line breaks this parallelism: it begins with the "I" who describes a bodily sensation, "smell," and goes on to describe how "my landscape" smells, "of bitter sun and blood." "Smell" is not used as a direct verb in this case, and does not indicate an action performed by the lyrical I. Rather, it is a sensational characteristic which is attributed to the landscape itself. At the same time, the "I" who smells and the landscape he/she describes the smell of, more or less coincide, as *ruik* indicates a subjective bodily feeling that is highly metaphorical at the same time.

What is interesting here is the appropriation or embodiment of landscape as *die berge in my* ("the mountains in me") which have been made to tumble, as well as the use of *my landskap* ("my landscape"). These two notions of landscape appear to refer to different things. First, *die berge in my* is a metaphor for the crumbling of an inner world, which has been destabilised by the *jy* ("you") in the poem. The notion of tumbling mountains might be based on the proverb or cliché of "to move mountains," which stands for a goal that is difficult or nearly impossible to accomplish, and indicates great effort to achieve. In this case, the combination of words turns this maxim into a hyperbole, as the *jy* has not only been able to move "the mountains in me," but has destroyed them altogether. Similar to *Ontvlugting*, the landscape is something the lyrical I does not seem to have control over, as the "other" puts the "tumbling" into motion. Second, there is the landscape that is described as *my landskap*, which allows for a more layered meaning. One interpretation would be to understand it as a reference to the

metaphorical landscape of the lyrical I after the destruction of the “mountains,” interpreting it as closely linked to *die berge in my*. Another possibility would be that the landscape refers to the deteriorating body of the poem, as its form is “let loose” in free verse. Seen in this way, the form of the poem mimics the body of the lyrical I. A final possibility is that “my landscape” refers to a literal landscape, as the lyrical I calls upon *My volk* (“My people”) and *My swart Afrika* (“My black Africa”) several stanzas later (Jonker 2000, 124).

The appropriation of the landscape as *my landskap*, which is subsequently connected to smells that are “bitter” and “blood[y]” creates an uncomfortable reading experience, due to the negative affective and sensational connotations of these words. A landscape that smells bitter and of blood brings to mind decay and rot, which is linked directly to the body of the lyrical I by the words *my landskap* and *bloed*, since both indicate human subjectivity. Moreover, the process of decay is transferred onto “my people,” which indicates a parallel between the lyrical I, the landscape and *my volk*:

*my volk het van my afgevrot
wat sal word van die vrot volk
'n hand kan nie bid alleen nie*

Not only is “my landscape” marked by decay, it is virtually equated to “my people.” This connection establishes an intimate link between landscape and identity, as well as the lyrical I and its situationality. However, although they are repeatedly described as “my” people, indicating a sense of belonging, the lyrical I is not necessarily a part of them within this poem, as the lyrical I has already become *my afwesige beeld* (“my absent image”) and is able to wonder what will become of “my people” from a distant position. To return to the title, the position of the lyrical I is a disconcerting matter. Is the drifting in the wind and view from above a position the “I” takes from the beginning, or is it a reflection on the final words of the poem? As the lyrical I describes itself as *eensaam soos 'n uil* (“lonely as an owl”), and the poem ends with *swart kraaie* (black crows), the “I” takes in a viewpoint from above, ominously describing a landscape in decay in-depth. Through this description, the “I” is not a part of the landscape, but is already disconnected in a physical way, although the “I” does display a concern for the future of *my volk*.

The most alienating element in this poem is how the lyrical I connects these negative notions such as decay and rot with itself, seemingly describing how its own body is already deteriorating within the timeframe of this poem, finally leaving nothing but *my afwesige beeld*. The “bitter sun” that is mentioned in the last part of the tricolon is elicited again in the last stanza of the poem, and functions as an “absent image” as well:

*die son sal ons bedek
die son in ons oë vir altyd bedek
met swart kraaie*

The sun disappears in more ways than one, as it disappears within the poem as well as describing a future disappearance. First, the sun becomes a less literal reference to the outside world as it is turned into a corporeal part of the *ons* (“us”) by becoming “the sun in our eyes.” The sun as a source of light finally becomes a black feathery mass that leaves no light in the eyes of the “us.” As crows are traditionally connoted with death, the poem has a gloomy and melancholic ending. This sense of melancholy is made more poignant by the performative nature of this last line, since the sun also literally disappears for the reader. It is through this mechanism that the reader is made a part of the text, part of the *ons*. As the poem makes the sun present and absent within the course of a few lines, the reader encounters a similar sense of loss.

At the same time, the “I” visualises a heartfelt attempt to shape the landscape, to build or create:

*Wat sal van my word
die hoekstene van my hart bring niks tot stand
my landskap is myne verhard
verbete verbitter maar oop*

The attempt to create, however, turns out to be in vain, as the landscape “hardens” and later on “rots away from me,” and the lyrical I falls into ruin. The fact that the “I” has no control over *my landskap* suggests an estrangement or chasm between the “I” and its landscape, or at least establishes that “my” landscape is inaccessible. The word *hoekstene* (“cornerstones”) in relation to the words *landskap* and *verhard* (“hardened”) is striking, as “cornerstones” and “hardened” connect to a tactile roughness and fixedness, while the word “landscape” has a more natural, moving and fluid meaning. The word *verhard* could be a pun on the word *hart* (“heart”), based on the similar sound. This would indicate a similarity between *my hart* and *my landskap*, as both are associated with the words “hard” or “closed” within this poem. In light of this interpretation as a pun that creates a verb around *hart* (“heart”), it might also indicate that the landscape has become part of the “I,” both bodily and emotionally. The image of the “cornerstones of my heart” indicates a desire to establish an emotionally charged fundament that would establish a connection between the “my” and *my landskap*. As “the cornerstones of my heart” aren’t able to bring about anything, there is no foundation, no site of self-constructed identity or identification, no “place.”

The main sense of displacement especially derives from the fact that the landscape described as “mine” has hardened from the “I” against his/her will, thus attributing agency to the landscape while lessening the agency of the lyrical I: *my landskap is myne verhard*. Not only is the landscape described as something that has agency, it moreover portrays a negative affect towards the lyrical I, as it does not open up to the lyrical I, nor allows for it to lay a foundation that would accommodate or shelter the “I.” The word *oop* (“open”), stands out within this stanza, as it is juxtaposed with the word *verhard* through its place at the end of the line and strikingly contradictory meaning. Perhaps

this openness does not pertain to the landscape after all, but expresses a hope of the wounded lyrical I for it to be so. Perhaps it refers to the landscape of the I's heart, as it is literally wounded by the trauma of dis-belonging.

Conclusion

Both in Jonker's *Ontvlugting* and *Ek Dryf in die Wind* the lyrical I who expresses a desire to belong (to the landscape) is left with a profound sense of displacement. This article has aimed to distance itself from a reductionist biographical reading by taking into account the poetic qualities and affective function of aspects such as environment and space, thus providing a *textual* reading of Ingrid Jonker's poems through the lens of topoetics. While many references to nature or landscapes in her poems appear to refer to a deep sense of identification with the landscape, they are simultaneously intertwined with a sense of displacement and an inability to become or feel part of that environment. Second, displacement has proved itself to be a consistent theme within Jonker's oeuvre, ranging from her first collection of poems *Ontvlugting* to her last poems in *Kantelson*.

The notion of a topo poetic "close" reading, as an affective reading based on nearness and presence of space rather than mere representation or imagining of space, gives rise to questions concerning the function of literature and its effect (or rather affect) on the reader. Not only does such a reading allow for the imagining of a certain space, it creates a contact zone that draws the "presented" world closer. The textual aspects in the poems by Jonker that address the reader on the level of affect and emotion, instead of ratio and imagination, certainly allow for such a reading.

Of special importance in this case is the similarity that Jonker's poems establish between the reader and the lyrical I, by including the reader in the intimacies of a "you" and "me," or by including the reader in a "we." In doing so, the poems create a closeness and affectionate relationship between reader and the text, as well as the reader and the place the text invokes. Through mechanisms such as these, the poems establish a sense of belonging for the reader, while particular spaces are conjured through the use of quite common natural images (the sun, a beach, a stream, dogs, seabirds), which make it easy for the reader to relate, regardless of his or her own rootedness in a particular space. At the same time, this notion of nearness goes hand in hand with a form of estrangement or defamiliarisation, as the text invokes a place that is yet unknown by the use of toponyms (Valkenburg, Gordonsbaai, Africa). In the case of Jonker's poetry in particular, it can be said to *perform* displacement, as well as convey it. As the text simultaneously brings the landscape into existence via accessible images and renders it out of reach, strange and *unheimlich*, her poetry makes the reader go through a process of emplacement and displacement. Particularly Jonker's use of natural metaphors allows for this "spatializing of language" (Krupnick 1983, 5), as the reader is made part of a world and subsequently kept at a distance, leaving the reader with the affective impact of displacement.

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Appendix 1

Ontvlugting

Uit hierdie Valkenburg het ek ontvlug
en denk my nou in Gordonsbaai terug:

Ek speel met paddavisse in 'n stroom
en kerf swastikas in 'n rooikransboom

Ek is die hond wat op die strande draf
en dom-allenig teen die aandwind blaf

Ek is die seevoël wat verhongerd daal
en dooie nagte opdis as 'n maal

Die god wat jou geskep het uit die wind
sodat my smart in jou volmaaktheid vind:

My lyk lê uitgespoel in wier en gras
op al die plekke waar ons eenmaal was.

Appendix 2

Escape

From this Valkenburg have I run away
and in my thoughts return to Gordon's Bay:

I play with tadpoles swimming free
carve swastikas in a red-krantz tree

I am the dog that slinks from beach to beach
barks dumb-alone against the evening breeze

I am the gull that swoops in famished flights
to serve up meals of long-dead nights

The god who shaped you from the wind and dew
to find fulfilment of my pain in you:

Washed out my body lies in weed and grass
in all the places where we once did pass.

Appendix 3

Ek Dryf in die Wind

(Vir Anna)

Los het ek my eie selfstandigheid
van grafte van bedrieglike vriende
die vuurherd wat ek vertroos het gluur my aan
my ouers het hul afgebreek van my dood
die wurms roer teen my moeder, my vader
hou sy hand vas wat los teen die lug veer
los glo ek my ou vriend het my verlaat
los glo ek jy het die berge in my laat tuimel
los ruik my landskap na bitter son en bloed

Wat sal van my word
die hoekstene van my hart bring niks tot stand
my landskap is myne verhard
verbete verbitter maar oop

My volk,
volg my eensame vingers
mense, hul jul in hartlikheid
versluier deur die son van die toekoms

My swart Afrika
volg my eensame vingers
volg my afwesige beeld
eensaam soos 'n uil
en die vereensaamde vingers van die wêreld
eensaam soos my suster
My volk het van my afgevrot
Wat sal word van die vrot volk
'n hand kan nie alleen bid nie

die son sal ons bedek
die son in ons oë vir altyd bedek
met swart kraaie