

# Decolonising Adamastor: From *The Lusiads* to *Thirteen Cents*

**Lucy Valerie Graham**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3617-1525>

Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

[lucy.graham@fulbrightmail.org](mailto:lucy.graham@fulbrightmail.org)

## Abstract

In 1999 and 2000, two texts appeared that aimed to grapple with post-apartheid South Africa as a new nation, and that doubled back on national myths of origin. One of these, a massive painting entitled *T'kama Adamastor* by Cyril Coetzee, commissioned for the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, focused on the figure of Adamastor that had been created by Luís Vaz de Camões in his epic poem *The Lusiads* (1572), but as reinterpreted by André Brink in his novel *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* (1993). In 2000, another text appeared that re-examined and reimagined creation myths, and also referenced the Adamastor story. This was K. Sello Duiker's award-winning debut novel *Thirteen Cents*. As I argue, *Thirteen Cents* presents a radical break with the ways in which the Adamastor story has been imagined by white writers and artists. Part of the aim of the essay is to revisit and assess Andries Walter Oliphant's critical interventions on the question of a national South African culture, and on the Adamastor story itself.

**Keywords:** Andries Walter Oliphant; *The Lusiads*; *T'kama Adamastor*; *Thirteen Cents*; K. Sello Duiker



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## Introduction

In 1999 and 2000, two texts appeared that aimed to grapple with post-apartheid South Africa as a new nation, and that doubled back on national myths of origin. One of these, a massive painting (oil on canvas; 3.26 x 8.64m) entitled *T’kama Adamastor* (1999) by Cyril Coetzee, commissioned for the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, focused on the figure of Adamastor that had been created by Luís Vaz de Camões in his epic poem *The Lusiads* (1572), but as retold by André Brink in his novel *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* (1993). As the artist explained, he was trying to portray the story of Vasco da Gama’s encounter with Southern Africa and its people, but from another perspective than that narrated by Europe. Hence he turned for a source narrative text to Brink’s novel, which purports to present the encounter from the perspective of indigenous people, and specifically from the viewpoint of T’kama, a “Khoi” leader who is based on the figure of Adamastor, the giant personification of the Cape of Storms and its rocky promenade, in *The Lusiads*. The hanging of the painting was soon followed by the publication of a collectors’ item, *T’kama Adamastor: Inventions of Africa in a South African Painting* (2000), edited by Ivan Vladislavić, a lavishly produced book of essays on the painting, and on Brink’s novel, that included contributions by Cyril Coetzee, Brink, and Andries Oliphant, who was then teaching Theory of Literature at the University of South Africa and chair of the President’s Arts and Culture Trust. A year later, in 2000, another text appeared that re-examined and reimagined creation myths, and also referenced the Adamastor story. This was K. Sello Duiker’s award-winning debut novel *Thirteen Cents*.<sup>1</sup>

In *Thirteen Cents* (2000), the story of Adamastor is evoked alongside other local myths of origin, including indigenous creation myths, in the dream life of Azure, an orphan living on the streets of Cape Town who has striking blue eyes, speaks Sesotho, comes from Johannesburg, and identifies as “black” (Duiker 2000, 151). Before writing the novel, Duiker apparently lived with and traced the lives of a group of street children in Sea Point who were looking for one of their friends. Since the novel was published some two decades ago, most street children have been forcibly “cleansed” from public places in and near the centre of Cape Town. In Duiker’s novel, the divide between Azure and the world of adults is stark, though Azure is on the brink of turning 13 and is thus in his own estimation “almost a man” (1). In *Thirteen Cents* Cape Town is revealed as a predatory and violent environment that offers no protection for its most vulnerable citizens. But it is also, through the dream life of Azure, a site where myths of origin are replayed, reinvented and ultimately decolonised. In this respect, *Thirteen Cents* presents

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<sup>1</sup> I have been researching *The Lusiads* in relation to South African cultural texts for the past 20 years. From 2006 to 2012 I presented a series of lectures on *The Lusiads* and its afterlives in a range of South African texts including *Thirteen Cents*. Meg Samuelson mentions a link between the Adamastor story and *Thirteen Cents*, though this is not fleshed out in any detail (Samuelson 2016, 532).

a radical delinking from the ways in which the Adamastor story has been imagined and reinvented by white writers and artists in South Africa.

As explained by Oliphant in his 2004 essay “Fabrications and the Question of a National South African Literature,” the idea of a national literature—and by extension a national culture—in South Africa is contested. Seen on a pragmatic level, the country does not have a single, unitary culture; it also has uneven literacy, and numerous official languages, yet it lacks equality among these languages. Thus any idea of a “nation” that may seem to exist in the geographical area known as South Africa is arguably “fabricated.” In post-apartheid South Africa, the scars of past atrocities, a history of separate development, and ongoing inequalities still appear as fault lines in the idea of the nation. Yet attempts at nation-building in South Africa have persisted over time, with literature, literary studies, and the arts playing a role. As I shall demonstrate, *The Lusiads* in various incarnations has been deployed in nation-fabrication in South Africa, though mainly by white writers and artists. This is consolidated, in the post-apartheid era, in the painting *T’kama Adamastor*. In *Thirteen Cents* however, *The Lusiads* is explored by a Black writer as one possible myth of origin in an apocalyptic narrative that disrupts the idea of the rainbow nation and deterritorialises the legacy of colonial mapping. Part of the aim of the essay is to revisit and assess Oliphant’s critical interventions on “the question of a national South African literature,” and on the Adamastor story itself. Hence Oliphant’s work will be referenced at key moments in the article.

### *The Lusiads* and Nation-Building in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa

As explained by Oliphant in “Fabrications and the Question of a National South African Literature,” the idea of “South African literature” gained currency “at the turn of the 19th century,” and particularly around the time of Union “which brought English- and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans to a single state after the Anglo-Boer War” (Oliphant 2004, 6). This concept of a national literature was not only exclusionary, “limited to the languages and writings of these two white population groups” (6), but also bifurcated as it was divided between two white cultures “with divergent ethnic affiliations” (6). Nonetheless, at the time of Union efforts were made to forge a national identity that was white and unified. In this context *The Lusiads* came into view as a convenient founding myth. Since the epic poem centred on Portuguese imperialism, it presented a narrative of origins for the colonising races in South Africa that privileged neither Dutch nor English interests, but sought to transfuse the power and self-proclaimed legitimacy of previous sea-faring empires into the body of the new white-ruled nation of South Africa.

After the bitterness of the South African war (1899–1902), in the period leading up to Union in 1910, *The Lusiads* gained currency in South Africa, seemingly with the aim of uniting whites under the banner of a common literary progenitor. The text makes its

appearance in the work of colonial historiographer Dr. G.M. Theal in 1907. In a history of the wreck of the *Saint John*—a Portuguese ship mentioned by Adamastor in his curses of the Portuguese—Theal reproduces the original Portuguese text of canto 5, lines 46–48 of *The Lusiads*, supplementing this with J.J. Aubertin’s translation (Theal 1907, 368–9). As Christopher Saunders notes: “Theal aimed to use his writing to help reconcile Boer and Briton. He explicitly acknowledged that his goal was to promote the emergence of one white South African nation through a common history” (Saunders 1988, 24). Within a historical reconstruction that aimed to assemble a national subject and consolidate white supremacy, the emphasis, in Theal’s evocation of Adamastor, is on a history that white settlers may have in common.

But it was through the efforts of the literary scholar John Purves that the Adamastor section of *The Lusiads* became more widely read amongst whites in the emergent white-ruled nation of early twentieth-century South Africa. Oliphant points out that in 1910 Purves, who was then editor of *The South African Bookman and Quarterly Journal* (a South Africa version of *The London Bookman*), bemoaned the fact that South Africa had not yet developed its own “literary consciousness” (quoted in Oliphant 2004, 20). Purves was determined to forge such a “consciousness” via *The Lusiads*. In a lecture delivered at Transvaal University College in August 1909, Purves erased the history of indigenous orature to claim that Camões’ epic is “the first and greatest of South African poems,” and that it presents “our portion in the Renaissance” (Purves 1909a, 543). The nationalist project behind this statement becomes evident when one considers that the lecture, which draws on Theophilo Braga’s claim that *The Lusiads* encapsulates “the entire demonstration of the life of a nation” (544), was published in the pro-Union periodical *The State*, which ran in South Africa between 1909 and 1912. At a time when the white races of South Africa were preparing to unite, Purves casts Adamastor as a threat to Enlightenment values, a barbarous obstruction who tries to keep “the spirit of poetry from passing into the interior” (542). Yet it is Adamastor as an objectified figure, an artistic accomplishment, who presents, for Purves, the height of European poetic genius:

Down there at the far southern end of the continent this poet ... set up a monument of perpetual endurance in the giant figure of Adamastor ... [T]his great poetical creation left us by Camoens in the sixteenth century is a thing unique in the newer world south of the Line, or west of the Atlantic. (542)

Adamastor thus enables the power of European art to be claimed for the South African nation, but in a way that is set up to mark or monumentalise the cultural superiority of those of European origin over subject peoples. Summarising the narrative of *The Lusiads*, Purves emphasises the fifth canto: “The whole nucleus of the poem is to be found in the fifth canto, which describes the African voyage. It is this which gives novelty and life to Camoens’ epic” (Purves 1909b, 744). Affording further prominence to this aspect of the poem, and to the figure of Adamastor in particular, Purves included in a poetry anthology entitled *The South African Book of English Verse* the Adamastor

stanzas of the first English translation by Sir Richard Fanshawe (1655). The compilation was published in 1915 as a textbook, and went to a number of editions throughout the first half of the twentieth century, playing an important part in constructing a literary tradition that white settlers might have in common, and suggesting an antagonist against whom they could unite. When the protagonist in George Heaton Nichols' "black peril" novel *Bayete!* (1923) dreams that Nelson, the leader of a black resistance movement, "had suddenly grown to the size of Table Mountain, and his men could no more arrest him than the Lilliputians arrest a Brodingnag" (Nicholls 1923, 349), the author seems to have had Adamastor in mind. *The Lusiads* continued to influence white writers and literary scholars throughout the twentieth century. For instance, in the 1980s Malvern van Wyk Smith produced an edited collection of poetry, entitled *Shades of Adamastor* (1988), that was inspired by *The Lusiads* and Adamastor, and which included about 50 poems that engaged either indirectly or directly with the themes of Camões' epic.

As Stephen Gray argues, *The Lusiads* is not "the first and greatest South African poem," but rather "the national epic of the Lusitanian bogeymen, the sons of its eponymous hero, Lusus, and not of any significant number of South Africans" (Gray 1979, 17). Yet it did to some extent become "the white man's creation myth of South Africa" (15) as the Adamastor section in particular seized the imagination of generations of white, mainly male, writers throughout the twentieth century, inspiring them to write back to, or to allude to, Adamastor in their literary endeavours. In 1930 the London house of Faber & Faber published a collection of poems, entitled *Adamastor*, by South African-born poet Roy Campbell, which consolidated Campbell's literary reputation. Drawing on the image of the gigantic Adamastor, who emerges from the dark and stormy sea to curse the Portuguese mariners in canto 5 of Luís Vaz de Camões' epic poem *The Lusiads* (1572), Campbell's poetry collection includes a poem entitled "Rounding the Cape," which depicts the speaker leaving South Africa by ship, looking back on the mountain and recalling the spirit of Adamastor: "The low sun whitens on the flying squalls / Against the cliffs the long grey surge is rolled / Where Adamastor from his marble halls / Threatens the sons of Lusus as of old." The poem expresses guilt about European destruction, both to Adamastor, figured as a slave beaten by his master, and to the land: "Across his back, unheeded, we have broken / Whole forests: heedless of the blood we've spilled." It then tells of impending retribution, as foretold by Adamastor: "In thunder still his prophecies are spoken, / In silence, by the centuries, fulfilled." Addressing Adamastor as "Lord" of the "powers of darkness," the poet then bids the giant farewell, with Adamastor finally being linked to rumblings of discontent among a massive Black underclass that seems about to awaken: "The land lies dark beneath the rising crescent, / And Night, the Negro, murmurs in his sleep" (Campbell 1930, 38). In the previous year, building their "swart gevaar" ("black peril") campaign on white fear of "the black masses" and promising a solution to "the colour problem," J.M.B. Hertzog's National Party had formed the first wholly Nationalist government in South African history. A "reunified" version of this party was to come to power in 1948, beginning the era known as apartheid. While it is not my intention to argue that Campbell was politically affiliated to the National Party, "Rounding the Cape"

expresses guilt about settler violence, and anxieties about a Black oppressed class that is beginning to “murmur” and awaken. As I argue, the Adamastor story came to provide a myth of origin for the white nation as an imagined community (to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term), and increasingly became a site where white anxieties about and interpretations of a Black-majority oppressed population were expressed. In “J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of Africa,” David Attwell argues that there is an allusion to Adamastor in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*, which explores the turbulent era of the late 1980s when the Black “townships” were engulfed by violent protests against the apartheid regime (Attwell 2009, 75). As I demonstrate later in this essay, André Brink was another white author who drew on the Adamastor story, in his case to reflect on colonial contact narratives and indigenous Black masculinity at a transitional moment in South African history.

Published in Lisbon in 1572, *The Lusiads* has 10 cantos and commemorates a journey that had taken place almost a century earlier, namely Vasco da Gama’s “discovery” of a European sea route to India in 1497–8. An Early Modern example of what Edward Said has famously described as Orientalism, the narrative takes the form of a gendered quest, presenting male adventurers in search of the seductive, feminised lands of the East.<sup>2</sup> Adamastor is an impediment in the larger narrative, a liminal figure who appears in canto 5, marking the rounding of a particularly perilous part of the African continent. Mentioned as one of the giants in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, his name derives from the Greek word *adamostos*, meaning “untamed” or “wild.” As Gray notes, the description of Adamastor in *The Lusiads* anthropomorphises the landmass of the stormy Cape into the form of a giant (Gray 1979, 25).

In Camões’ reconstruction of da Gama’s journey, da Gama and his crew are filled with terror at the sight of Adamastor, who materialises from a “fearful” and “overpowering” cloud that is “Blackening out completely the night sky”: “Even as I spoke, an immense shape / Materialised in the night air, / Grotesque and of enormous stature” (Camões [1572] 1997, 105). Adamastor curses the Portuguese for their daring violation of his realm, predicting the deaths of Bartolomeu Dias and Francisco de Almeida at the Cape, and disastrous shipwrecks on the coast of Southern Africa, including that of the *Saint John*. Camões, of course, constructs these prophecies retrospectively, as by the time he was writing Dias and de Almeida were dead, and the relevant shipwreck survivor accounts had already reached Europe. Da Gama confronts the giant, demanding that he make his identity known, and Adamastor tells that he is one of the last of the Titans who rebelled against Jupiter. He claims that he fell in love with the sea nymph Thetis, threatening to take her by force if she did not comply with his wishes. In response, she laughingly drew attention to the disproportionate size of her would-be suitor, and sent an ambiguous reply that she would do what was unavoidable, while keeping her honour intact. During their arranged tryst, Adamastor explains, he found himself

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<sup>2</sup> Noting Columbus’ observation that the world “was shaped like a woman’s breast,” Anne McClintock points out that early Spanish narratives of exploration were gendered and “mapped as a metaphysics of gender violence” (McClintock 1998, 2–3).

simultaneously clasping a rock and transformed into a rock. He then tells how he became exiled to the Cape where his form petrified into the shape of a mountain. In Ovidian fashion, Thetis herself undergoes metamorphosis, first into stone in order to elude Adamastor, and then into the tantalising waves that surround him at the Cape. An inhospitable character, Adamastor may be contrasted with European personifications of India and the New World, where seductive feminine figures often appear in contact narratives. Notably, South African commentators have tended to overlook Adamastor in relation to “the Island of Love,” which represents the Orient in the final cantos of *The Lusiads*.

After reaching India, da Gama and his companions are granted, by the goddess Venus in the final two cantos of *The Lusiads*, the treats of a fantastical island that floats in eastern waters and has classical but also Oriental, feminised and sexualised features: “pomegranates gaped, exposing jewels / richer, redder than any rubies” (Camões [1572] 1997, 188). Among the vegetation the men catch glimpses of feminine figures dressed in “fine wool and variegated silks” (190). Questioning whether these nymphs are “fantasies or flesh,” the mariners hunt them down and have their way with them. The scene, which draws on classical mythology, is a rape fantasy offered in aestheticised vocabulary where the women have been softened up by the arrows of Cupid and are only pretending to run away. The reader is told that the flight of the nymphs made them more desirable, that one fell intentionally to allow herself to be overtaken, and that their surprise and alarm are mere pretence. Tethys appears in this section, and offering her hand to da Gama, who by now seems to be her lover, leads him up a mountain where she points to various parts of the earth as a cartography of Portuguese conquest.

As Carmen Nocentelli-Truett observes in her dissertation on Islands of Love in Early Modern literature, Camões’ island constitutes an imperial dream of sexual violation where the nymphs “have been dehumanized and reduced to the level of hunted animals” (Nocentelli-Truett 2004, 14). As she argues further, although fantastical, the events that take place on the island have a direct historical referent in the conquest marriages organised between Portuguese men and local women in the trade routes of the Indian Ocean where, under Portuguese dominance, racial mixing was celebrated “as a means to consolidate colonial penetration, ensure thorough acculturation and promote religious conversion” (27). Given the importance afforded to the Island of Love in *The Lusiads*, and the fact that Portuguese expansionism laid the groundwork for a colonial outpost at the Cape, where slave women were for centuries kept for the gratification of European men (Ross 1979; Shell 1994), it may seem strange that South African writers and critics have scarcely mentioned it in their writing, and have directed their attention to another fantastical narrative of sexual pursuit in the poem, the story of Adamastor’s attempt to capture Thetis. Part of the reason for white South African interest in Adamastor, of course, is that the giant’s geographical embeddedness in Southern Africa makes him the first European literary personification of the region. Yet the complete elision of the Island of Love in virtually all South African commentary on the poem is noteworthy. While the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre eulogised Camões as a great example of

“Lusotropical civilization,” for “the blond and apparently dolichocephalic Celt seems to have delighted with special ardour in the love of dark-skinned, yellow, and perhaps even of black women, whom he encountered in hot lands and among oriental peoples” (Freyre 1961, 122), South African writers have steered away from the island. Plotting a course instead towards the figure of Adamastor, white writing in South Africa has tended to refashion the melancholy giant into the stereotype of the hypersexualised Black male whose love for a “white” nymph is out of bounds.

Seen in relation to the Island of Love, and situated at the centre of the epic, Adamastor can be read as an uncanny other whose presence suggests the doubling, dividing and interchanging of the colonising self, embodying the inverse of the celebratory commemoration of European exploits that the poem takes as its central subject. The Island of Love offers a reward for Portugal’s national heroes, but Adamastor’s failure and impotence are surely projections of an empire that was swiftly, at the time Camões was writing, losing its power. It is tempting to read Adamastor’s pursuit of Thetis as evidence of ideas about sexuality long associated with Africans in the European imagination, but the final two cantos of the poem show that the monster is no more lustful than the Portuguese themselves. Moreover, the audacity and violence of their attempt to seize and control trade in the Indian Ocean is mirrored in the scene of Adamastor’s attempted rape of Thetis, just as the giant’s size in relation to Thetis has inverse resonance with the disproportionate desire of a small European country for a monopoly over oceanic routes to the East. Adamastor could thus be read as holding up a mirror to the imperial quest itself. Generally, however, one interpretation of Camões’ giant has been driven home in South African readings and rewritings of *The Lusids*, such that Adamastor becomes synonymous with the threat of political upheaval from a demographically “giant” Black population, as in Campbell’s poem mentioned above. Such anxieties then merge with stereotypes of a hypersexualised Black masculinity, and nowhere is this more apparent than in André Brink’s *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* (1993), the text on which Cyril Coetzee’s painting *T’kama Adamastor* is based—though it should be noted that Brink’s novel presents itself as a parody of racial stereotypes, which is observed by Oliphant in his appraisal of the novel.

### The First Life of Adamastor and *T’kama Adamastor*

The William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), where the painting of *T’kama Adamastor* still hangs, was designed by university-appointed architects Frank Emley and Norris Cowen in the early 1930s. But the conceptualisation of the building was strongly inflected by Geoffrey Eastcott Pearse, with his assistant John Fassler producing watercolours for the design of the reading room. Pearse was at that time the first Professor of Architecture at Wits, and though the library was originally going to be redbrick, with a dome, Pearse felt that such a building would be “quite out of character with the other University buildings,” and proposed a neoclassical-style structure with Ionic columns (Pearse 1918). His views prevailed, and the design of Fassler for the structure of the reading room was also adopted. It is interesting that



Fassler's original sketches had, as examples of possible wall hangings, artworks that showcased mining scenes, including scenes of labour. As Cyril Coetzee observes: "A painting that showed mining and industry on the Rand would have made sense for several reasons, most evidently the fact that the University of the Witwatersrand had begun life as a college of mines" (Coetzee 2000, 2). Yet none of the three paintings that came to adorn the walls of the reading room depicts mining, and consequently the labour that created the wealth of Johannesburg has remained out of sight in this space.

Colin Gill's artwork, entitled *Colonists 1826*, was produced in 1926 and purchased for the west wall, arriving in South Africa from England in 1934. As its title suggests, it depicts settlers arriving from Britain in the 1820s landing in Algoa Bay. By 1936 the university had commissioned and hung another massive work, this time on the south wall, by John Henry Amshechwitz. Entitled *Vasco da Gama—Departure to the Cape*, Amshechwitz's painting portrays the King of Portugal handing the banner of Portugal to Vasco da Gama before his voyage, as described in canto 4 of *The Lusiads*. The north wall of the library remained empty until 1999, when *T'kama Adamastor* was mounted (Coetzee 2000, 1). The emphasis on seafaring, across the three paintings, in a reading room many miles from the ocean may seem strange, but the library also houses the original cross planted by Bartolomeu Dias in 1488 to mark the furthest point east that he had sailed. While Fallist students at the University of Cape Town in February 2016 removed and even burned university paintings that they associated with colonialism, remarkably the massive paintings by Gill and Amshechwitz, celebrating colonialism, still hang undisturbed on the walls of the William Cullen Library at Wits.

*T'kama Adamastor* was produced on commission, with generous funding from donors Brian and Dorothy Zylstra. In 1996 a Project Committee was established, with the aim of selecting an artist and coordinating a commission for an artwork. All of the members of this committee, which "focused on what the work could or should include," were white (Crump 2000). According to Alan Crump, though the committee wished to allow for artistic license and did not wish to be prescriptive:

It was agreed that the new work should approximate the work of the other two and that it might have a narrative element if possible, which might complement the figurative content of the earlier canvases. ... Issues such as the "New South Africa", the question of multiculturalism, the challenge of reflecting all South Africa's people more fully and accurately, and of giving expression to the rich tapestry of our history were discussed. (Crump 2000)

Here it can be seen that the commissioned painting was intended not only to enter into dialogue with the two existing paintings, but also to focus on themes of South Africa as a newly democratic, multicultural "rainbow nation." Yet the committee was trying to commission a painting that somehow encapsulated "The New South Africa" with no Black persons involved in the decision-making. The artist selected for the commission, Cyril Coetzee, was also white. It is not my intention to make arguments based simply on race essentialism, but clearly the project seems to have been haunted by Oliphant's

observations about the many pitfalls and fractures that can emerge in attempts to forge a South African national culture.

When he began research for the painting, Coetzee was aware that Amshewitz's work referenced *The Lusiads*, and also that the Adamastor "sequence had a rich history of poetic reinterpretation by generations of South African poets," which included the poems in the collection *Shades of Adamastor*, compiled by Van Wyk Smith (Coetzee 2000, 5). He notes that there "were also a number of fascinating visual responses to the theme" (5). While trying to conceptualise an approach to the painting, which was supposed to have a narrative element, he had "the idea of doing a computer search to see whether there was anything in the recent Adamastor literature that might help me solve this problem" (7). Apparently to his surprise he found André Brink's short novel, *The First Life of Adamastor* (1993). Of this book he stated: "It was exactly the kind of contemporary reworking of the story of Adamastor and Thetis that I had been fumbling to invent!" (Coetzee 2000, 7).

The narrative of Brink's novel could be read as humorous, as a clever parody of colonial stereotypes, but it could also be dismissed as ludicrous and racially demeaning. Purporting to be an attempt to find the "urtext," as seen through the eyes of indigenous people, that lies behind *The Lusiads*, the author recasts Adamastor as T'kama, a Khoi chieftan who witnesses the arrival of the Portuguese mariners at the Cape. Reversing the European gaze, which often portrayed indigenous people as animals, the Khoi see the Portuguese ships and the sailors who disembark as seabirds. T'kama falls in love with a white Portuguese woman, who stands in for Thetis, and she is abducted by the Khoi. His sexual union with her, however, cannot be consummated because of the monstrous size of his penis: "Every new attempt at entering her added alarmingly to the girth and length of my member. Soon I was able to wind it twice around my waist, like a hefty belt, the end tucked in" (Brink [1993] 2007, 82). Eventually a solution is created in the plot: the woman is bathing in a pool of water when a crocodile threatens to attack her. T'kama thrusts his penis into the water enabling her to clutch it and escape to safety, but the crocodile then bites off T'kama's member and it is eventually refashioned from clay, though on a smaller scale, by old Khamab (an indigenous healer), with the European woman's touch infusing life into it. Finally, T'kama and the woman can have sexual relations, though it is not clear whether she is desirous of this or not, as the scene of intercourse is narrated from the perspective of T'kama. She falls pregnant and is recaptured by the Portuguese. T'kama offers the Portuguese livestock in exchange for her return, but they trick him, taking the animals and leaving him with the ship's prow, which looks from a distance like the woman. He is then captured and bound to a rock, where he is left to die, though he claims that he has had many subsequent lives.

The painting follows the narrative of the novel, with the Portuguese represented as birdmen. As Coetzee claims, the painting echoes the "circular" narrative structure of Brink's novel "in which the opening scenes, which deal with the arrival of the Portuguese in South Africa, are mirrored by the closing scenes, where the ships sail off again," and

the “central part of the story takes the form of a journey from Algoa Bay into the heart of interior and back again” (Coetzee 2000, 8). This plotting “supplied [him] with the basis for the mock triptych design” (8). Coetzee also explains that he chose a “mannerist” style for the painting (8).

Notably, Oliphant, who was the only person of colour to contribute to the book *T’kama Adamastor: Inventions of Africa in a South African Painting*, placed Brink’s novel under scrutiny for its evocation of colonial stereotypes. In his chapter entitled “Other Ethiopians: Sideway Glances at Fiction, History and Myth in *The First Life of Adamastor*,” Oliphant asks: “Is the theme of wildness in the colonial view of Africa replicated in Brink’s fictional narrative and in Coetzee’s visual transposition? If so, what are the implications in today’s post-apartheid context?” (2000, 64). He eventually lets Brink off the hook: “As hilarious ‘send up’ rather than hostile parody, Brink’s narrative engages gently with the commanding colonial interpretations of Camões’s Adamastor. It inverts racial stereotyping in order to expose it. The phallic myth is ridiculed and mocked” (68). Oliphant does find problems with the narrative, however, concerning its representation of women. Drawing on the work of Dorothy Driver, who critiqued the Adamastor myth on feminist grounds, Oliphant argues: “As Dorothy Driver states: ‘in all the critical and poetic recastings I have come across so far, Adamastor is central, Thetis is silenced’. *The First Life of Adamastor* is no exception to this hush” (69). Concluding that Brink’s novel is “a story in which women are the nameless and silenced objects of male desire,” he argues: “this ‘send up’ illuminates how a narrative response to a myth invented and reinvented by generations of authors eventually subjects even the most critical writers to its discursive imperatives” (69).

In her critique of Brink’s novel, Sandra Chait claims that Brink’s characterisation of the Black man sails “rather close to the racist wind” as “the gaze in which he is held remains very much that of the white male,” and “[n]either the European woman nor da Gama’s Portuguese sailors are made to look as ridiculous” (Chait 2000, 18). As further argued by Margaret Hanzimanolis, who has written critically on the three paintings in the William Cullen Library and on the interface of the *T’kama Adamastor* painting with Brink’s novel, “while both Brink’s novella and Coetzee’s painting might be termed postmodern ... neither usefully reconstructs the foundational myths of South Africa, especially when it comes to black male sexuality or white female vulnerability” (Hanzimanolis 2002, 257).

### “I see a dark cloud moving”: Adamastor and Apocalypse in *Thirteen Cents*

While Oliphant argues that reinventions of Adamastor seem inevitably “constructed to shroud and silence the extreme racial and gender views on which colonialism is founded” (Oliphant 2000, 49), I turn now to an incarnation of Adamastor, created by a Black author, that arguably decolonises and deterritorialises the Adamastor myth as it appears within *The Lusiads*. This rewriting of the Adamastor story, I argue, can be found

in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, in the dreams and visions of the narrator Azure, a child who has come from Johannesburg to live on the streets of Cape Town after the death of his parents. Although Azure has startlingly blue eyes, and commentators such as Shaun Viljoen read Azure as neither white nor coloured nor Black but "at the same time all of them" (Viljoen 2013), I hold the view that Azure self-identifies as Black and should be read as such. This can be seen when Azure defines himself in relation to the sea:

I like watching people swim. There's a certain order about it. Out at sea there'll be one or two white faces, mostly surfers. They don't fear the sea. As always they go at it like they own the sea. And then still out at sea but closer to the beach you'll find the coloureds, laughing and frolicking in the water. I must say, no matter what anyone says, coloured people know how to have a good time. They just seem to know how to have fun. Wherever there's laughter and mischief on a beach, there's usually a coloured face not far from there. And then at the water's edge you find black people. We always seem to be scared of water. (Duiker 2000, 151)<sup>3</sup>

In his dreams while on Table Mountain, Azure encounters a series of characters drawn from Southern African creation myths. He first hears of a giant monster called T-Rex, star of *Jurassic Park*, through his friend Vincent, while he is still in the city, before his ascent up the mountain. Vincent tells Azure that T-Rex is Gerald, a local coloured gangster who has abducted and tortured Azure because Azure "looks white" on account of his blue eyes, and because Azure, after having smoked marijuana, accidentally confused Gerald with a Black African character named Sealy. For Gerald, who aspires towards whiteness, this is the gravest of insults. Azure's abuse by white paedophiles, but also by the henchmen of Gerald, shows the limits of narratives of South Africa as a harmonious "rainbow nation." Instead, *Thirteen Cents* reveals a fabricated nation still riven by racial prejudice and not willing to take care of its most vulnerable citizens. In retaliation for being mistaken for a Black person, Gerald has Azure captured, starved, beaten, and sexually abused. According to Vincent, who has also been abused by Gerald, Gerald is like T-Rex in that he is "fucking destruction" and even "the police know it" (Duiker 2000, 63). Once Azure goes up the mountain and starts dreaming there, however, T-Rex takes on shifting significance, symbolising the spirit of the Cape and its monstrous mountain, evoking Adamastor, and becoming an avenging father figure for Azure, who in his dreams starts metamorphosing into another T-Rex.

When reading *Thirteen Cents*, it becomes apparent that Duiker was interested in creation myths while composing the text, which weaves myths of origin into Azure's dream life when he is on the mountain. Under Azure's gaze the mountain begins to shapeshift into anthropomorphic form. Evoking the Adamastor story, Azure notices that "the mountain looks like a giant that is about to move and crush everything in its way" and that "the rocks [of the mountain] look like strange creatures ... some of them look like people

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks are due to Danyela Demir for pointing this passage out to me in discussions of Azure's identification as Black in *Thirteen Cents*.

from afar” (109). It is likely, given the content of *Thirteen Cents* and the fact that Duiker read widely, that Duiker came across chapters two and three of Stephen Gray’s *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*: on Adamastor as “the white man’s creation myth of southern Africa” (Chapter 2), and on “the Hottentot Eve” (Chapter 3), which includes extensive consideration of the story of Saartjie Baartman, the “Hottentot Venus,” who was abducted from Southern Africa and displayed as a pornographic exhibit in England and Europe. In Gray’s account, the stories of Adamastor and Baartman may be regarded as narratives of origin as these figures are versions of “Adam and Eve” (Gray 1979).

In a cave on the mountain in *Thirteen Cents*, Azure dreams that he meets a woman who “looks like she has lived a very long time ago” (Duiker 2000, 119). According to his description of her: “She is short and her bum is big but she has the lightest smile [he has] ever seen ... She has a beautiful face and a yellow skin that seems to glow” (119). When he asks her name, she “begins to sob” and replies that her name is “Saartjie” (120). Azure then says that he is looking for T-Rex, with Saartjie replying that T-Rex is “her husband” and that he is “hungry and has gone to find people to eat” (120). They see T-Rex “below in the city ... stomping on cars and tearing apart buildings” (121). Azure’s dreams of a giant monster associated with Cape Town evoke Gray’s chapters on Adamastor in *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, though in *Thirteen Cents* the gigantic monster is not “the white man’s creation myth of southern Africa” but now Azure’s. Moreover, through his dreams of “Saartjie,” the figure of Baartman is retrieved, revitalised, and reimagined from a Black perspective as she is seen sympathetically by Azure: “I can see she is a little sad but I keep talking to make her think about other things” (122). While white writing on the Adamastor myth often presented triangulation wherein the white male poet observes Adamastor as an embodiment of Black masculinity and Thetis as a white nymph, by incorporating the story of Baartman *Thirteen Cents* includes the story of a Black woman alongside other myths of origin.

The remaking of Baartman is actually staged in one of Azure’s dreams when he stays on the mountain for four days, sleeping beside a fire in the cave. He tells that he “always” sees Saartjie in his dreams, and in one of them she has a wound under her breast that is crawling with maggots (126). Playing on the biblical myth of the creation of Eve, Azure takes out one of her ribs and uses it to remove the maggots and clean her wound, before he sews the wound closed (127). This “creation” of a whole—and now unwounded—Saartjie is restorative, but also it is significant that she does not need to be (re)made from the rib of a man. The novel then evokes indigenous mythology as Saartjie and Azure are joined by a character called “Mantis,” a trickster figure in indigenous storytelling. Following this, Saartjie claims that Azure is “the sun’s child” (129), evoking ancient Egyptian mythology where the King was portrayed as the son of the sun-god Ra, and pointing towards Azure’s mythical transformation into a T-Rex, “king of the dinosaurs” (60).

While on the mountain, Azure notices, in a dream state, that—like Adamastor and Thetis—he is undergoing metamorphosis, his skin is becoming like that of T-Rex: “My skin is thin and looks like a lizard’s with all the markings” (119). Saartjie tells him that he is “the last T-Rex” and that the T-Rex destroying cars in the city is his father. After this, in his dream life, Azure conjures an incident where Gerald visits him in the cave. Azure forces Gerald towards T-Rex, with his own transformation into a gigantic monster imminent:

“You have to go. You know that, don’t you? I’m too little to eat you, but I’m growing up fast.”

He shakes his head.

I smack him with my tail and he falls. He cracks his head on a rock but still gets up. T-Rex gets to him and chews off his head. Snakes pour out of his neck. He slashes them with his sharp nails and eats Gerald. I go back inside to finish cooking my meat. ... When it’s red and bleeding I eat it. (123)

In an incident that can be described as magical realism, the fantastical fuses with real life, as after Azure awakens and descends from the mountain he finds that Gerald is indeed dead. According to Gerald’s sidekick, Sealy: “It was a mess, what he did to himself. I still say no man would have cut himself up the way he was ... Apparently the Twenty-Eights had a contract on his head. But something else got him first” (134). The vengeful Adamastor, cursing the Portuguese, has metamorphosed into T-Rex, avenger for Azure, creating “fucking destruction” in the world of adults who have abused Azure.

The final chapters of *Thirteen Cents* can be read in dialogue with the final cantos of *The Lusiads*. In both texts the hero of the story ascends a mountain and looks at the earth below. But whereas in *The Lusiads* da Gama is gratified to see a map of colonial conquest from the pinnacle of a sacred mountain, the final chapters of *Thirteen Cents* offer a view of the apocalyptic deterritorialisation of a city that was founded as a part of a colonial trade route. When he finally climbs the mountain again Azure does not cast his eyes over the cartography of imperialism. Rather, he witnesses or dreams a scene of devastation where the sea has risen and waves crash into the city: “Cars get washed away. The waves continue like this for a long time, each time gathering more strength” (161). Parts of Cape Town, including the bay from which da Gama would have seen Table Mountain looming, were claimed from the sea during the colonial era and under apartheid, but here the sea reclaims its space from the land. Azure then sees “a dark cloud moving,” recalling da Gama’s sighting of Adamastor in *The Lusiads* where da Gama had seen a “blackening” cloud before the appearance of the monstrous Adamastor (Camões [1572] 1997, 105), and the novel ends with the destruction of the city by water and fire: “I look and see the tallest wave the sea has ever made. It rises taller than any building .... Rocks start falling around me ... Everything seems to crumble ... Above me the sun shines like the ruler it is ... A ball of fire comes from it ... In the distance I hear the agonizing screaming of people being burned. The sky rains with fire” (Duiker

2000, 162–63). Though Azure repeats “My mother is dead. My father is dead”—words that finally end his story—it is clear that he has found mythical forbearers in T-Rex/Adamastor and Saartjie. Reimagined by a Black writer in the post-apartheid era, the figure of Adamastor is finally decolonised, unshackled from what Oliphant has called the “discursive imperatives” of its history (Oliphant 2000, 69).

## Conclusion

Rising out of the darkness to confront European explorers for their daring incursion into Southern African seas, Adamastor, a fantastical giant from a sixteenth-century Portuguese epic poem, has had a hold on the white imagination in South Africa since the makings of the nation in the early twentieth century. This culminated in the post-apartheid era with the creation of the painting *T’kama Adamastor*, by Cyril Coetzee. For whites in South Africa, Adamastor has had shifting significance: at times the spectre of this giant fused with white anxieties about white rule in a Black majority country; at other times Adamastor appeared in literary reincarnations to hold up a mirror to European destruction, warning of impending political upheaval; and often he has been read as an incarnation of monstrous Black masculinity. But this is not the end of the Adamastor story. In *Thirteen Cents*, Adamastor is conjured by a Black writer who appropriates a colonial myth only to decolonise it. As Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez argue, while aesthetics has been “an aspect of the colonial matrix of power,” “decolonial aestheSis” challenges and subverts the hegemony of coloniality, and thereby “contributes to making visible decolonial subjectivities” in the arts, including in literature (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013). Wresting the Adamastor story from its European roots and white cultural ownership, *Thirteen Cents* reveals the limits of political decolonisation, of apparent political liberation from apartheid, pointing to the importance of applying decolonial thinking to knowledge and “aestheSis,” to the arts and cultural myths.

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