

# Dystopian Ecologies: Thinking about South African Ecocriticism through a Comparative Reading of Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* and Alettie van den Heever's *Stof* [*Dust*]

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## Summary

This article explores the notion of a South African ecocriticism by firstly placing it against the background of the ongoing debates about the relationship between postcolonialism and ecocriticism and secondly by situating it within the context of African ecocriticism. It points out the most important characteristics of South African ecocriticism, focusing on the impact of South Africa's colonial history on environmental matters, the subsequent entanglement of environmental with social matters as well as the country's linguistic and cultural diversity. The "dynamism and contingency" (Wylie 2006: 266) typical of South African ecocriticism is further considered by a comparative reading of two recent South African novels that present dystopian views of a future environment, Henrietta Rose-Innes's English novel *Green Lion* (2015), which deals with animal extinction, and Alettie van den Heever's Afrikaans novel *Stof* [*Dust*] (2018), which focuses on plant extinction.

## Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die nosie van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse ekokritiek deur dit eerstens te plaas teen die agtergrond van debatte oor die verhouding tussen die postkolonialisme en ekokritiek en tweedens deur dit te situeer binne die konteks van 'n Afrika-ekokritiek. Daar word gewys op die belangrikste eienskappe van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse ekokritiek deur te fokus op die impak wat Suid-Afrika se koloniale geskiedenis gehad het op die omgewing, die verstremgeldheid van omgewingsake met sosiale kwessies en die land se talige en kulturele diversiteit. Die "dinamiek en toevalligheid" (Wylie 2006: 266) tipies van die Suid-Afrikaanse ekokritiek word verder ondersoek deur 'n vergelykende lesing van twee onlangse Suid-Afrikaanse romans wat distopiese perspektiewe op 'n toekomstige wêreld gee, Henrietta Rose-Innes se Engelse roman *Green Lion* (2015), wat onder andere handel oor die uitsterf van sekere dierspesies, en Alettie van den Heever se Afrikaanse roman *Stof* (2018), wat fokus op die uitsterf van plant-spesies.

## Introduction: A South African Ecocriticism

Taking stock of what a South African ecocriticism constitutes by con-fronting the challenges of reading the record left behind by a group of South Africa's first peoples, the /Xam Bushmen, Dan Wylie (2006: 266) insists that a key component should be "its dynamism and contingency": "If a 'South African ecocriticism' is to be developed, it will look more like a nest of unique and living snakes than a crystalline or geodesic structure", he writes. My own aim in this article is to give a short overview of the consensus achieved so far about what a South African ecocriticism looks like and to further explore it by reading two South African novels which speculate about the dystopian ecologies that the country's future might hold, namely Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* and Alettie van den Heever's *Stof [Dust]*. I cite Wylie because I feel that change and contingency are important characteristics in the case of a rapidly evolving field such as ecocriticism, especially with regards to these literary texts which place their ecological concerns and uncertainties about a sustainable future in the genre of speculative fiction.

The notion of a South African ecocriticism is firstly framed by debates about the relationship between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Post-colonial critics argued for the 'greening' of postcolonialism at roughly the same time that ecocritics stated that their field should become open to the entanglement of political and social issues with environmental concerns (see Huggan 2004 and Nixon 2005). In their introduction to the edited volume *Environment at the Margins. Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers (2011: 3-5) point out that the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonialism share "a sense of political commitment, interdisciplinarity, and the interrogation of capitalist development and process".<sup>1</sup> Central to postcolonial ecocriticism, they go on to argue, is a responsiveness to "historical relationships of power, to colonial history and its effects, and to cultural differences", together with an emphasis on the "inextricable intertwining" of cultural, political and natural environments.

South African ecocriticism is also defined in relation to discussions about what an African ecocriticism constitutes. Anthony Vital (2008: 88) argued that the main features of a postcolonial ecocriticism that asks African questions and finds African answers, should be the "need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment", the need to understand "the complexity of African pasts" and to take into account "the history of Africa's insertion into a globalizing modernity". According to him, it should also deal with the epistemological and ontological questions

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1. See also the following volumes focusing on a postcolonial ecocriticism: Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009), Roos and Hunt's *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Literature* (2010) and DeLoughrey and Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies. Literatures of the Environment* (2011).

posed by Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity, because of "the complex interplay of social history with the natural world, and how language both shapes and reveals such interactions" (Vital 2008: 90). Caminero-Santangelo and Myers (2011: 8) are in agreement that any African ecocriticism should take seriously the "specificity of cultural, discursive and material contexts in Africa; the ways that modernity has shaped Africa; and the kinds of local responses that have been engendered". Adding to the existing research, Chengyi Coral Wu (2016: 157) identifies four broad directions that characterise African literature's engagement with the environment, namely the articulation of kincentric relationships with the land and environment, a critical attitude towards the West's colonisation of Africa and its impact on African environments and ecologies, the portrayal of the impact of war and other forms of violence on the environment, and the focus on neocolonialism, especially the continued global exploitation of Africa's natural resources and the imposition of Western mainstream environmentalism on postcolonial Africa.

In describing the specifics of a South African ecocriticism, most writers agree that the South African environment has been impacted by the country's history of colonialism and apartheid to such a degree that there is a significant overlap between environmental and social problems. One of the outstanding features of South African ecocriticism is thus its engagement with "the inextricability of animals, land and people", as Stanley and Phillips (2017: 6) remark. One of the most important themes in South African ecocriticism is the link between conservation and colonialism. The fact that people were often dispossessed of their land and their livelihoods in order to establish nature and game reserves has led to the argument that a South African ecocriticism should engage with issues of environmental justice and should be "unrepentantly anthropocentric", as Anthony Vital (2005: 299) puts it. In a fraught context such as the South African, it is said, the interests of animals and nature should always be weighed against those of the peoples who have been disadvantaged by colonial history and apartheid. Socio-political issues such as inequality, poverty and land redistribution are thus inextricably intertwined with environmental matters such as the extinction of animal and plant species, climate change, the impact of unsustainable farming practices and the proliferation of waste.

Another aspect that demands the attention of a South African ecocriticism is the country's linguistic, cultural and literary diversity. Thus far most of the ecocritical attention in South African literary studies have been focused on the literature written in English, considerably less on the literature written in Afrikaans and very little on the literatures in the other South African languages. Viewed against the background of South African ecocriticism's focus on the entanglement of environmental matters with the socio-political, this is somewhat ironical because English is the erstwhile language of colonialism and Afrikaans the language associated with a history of

oppression. Even though the other official languages in South Africa have literatures that deal with the environment in a variety of ways, little attention has been devoted to what they can bring to a South African ecocriticism. As far back as 2006, Ursula Heise (2006: 513) wrote that “monolingualism is currently one of ecocriticism’s most serious intellectual limitations”, also that the ambition of environmentalism to think globally will be seriously hampered if it is done in terms of a single language, “even and especially when that language is a hegemonic one”. It is clear that much more work, perhaps in the collaborative and comparative mode, should be done on South African literature that deals with the environment in order to build an inclusive South African ecocriticism. A South African ecocriticism should also be open to the full range of literary forms that have been employed in engaging with the environment, including those forms associated with South Africa’s oral traditions.

The two novels that I aim to compare in this article in order to explore the specificities of a South African ecocriticism are *Green Lion* by Henrietta Rose-Innes and *Stof [Dust]* by Alettie van den Heever, the first written in English, the second in Afrikaans. Even though my article falls short of truly tapping into South Africa’s linguistic and literary diversity, it is an attempt at a comparative approach. Both novels are set in the Western Cape region of South Africa, with the city of Cape Town as its most important urban hub. Both novels exploit the elements specific to a South African ecocriticism: the entanglement of the social with the environmental, the specifics of the locality, its colonial history, its cultural and linguistic diversity and the potential use of indigenous knowledges, in highlighting the extinction of species, the problems of climate change, the enduring inequality between different classes and races and the increasing vulnerability of people, animals and plants.

The comparative approach can also be deemed appropriate because both novels can be categorised as forms of speculative fiction, in the sense that they are set in the future and paint scenarios derived from current conditions. For the purposes of this article I will refer to Steenkamp’s view that the term speculative fiction “suggests an element of ‘fancy’ distinct from the realist mode, whilst at the same time not foreclosing a substantial relation to the ‘real’” (Steenkamp 2011: 7). Steenkamp takes her cue from Wolfe’s definition of speculative fiction as “a particular subtype of science fiction in which ‘established facts’ are extrapolated to produce a new situation,” as well as to Merrill’s view that the term speculative fiction covers stories “whose objective is to explore, to discover, to learn, by means of projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, of ‘reality’” (cited by Steenkamp 2011: 6).

## **Animal Extinction in Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* (2015)**

*Green Lion* is Henrietta Rose-Innes's fourth novel, published in 2015. The action is set in Cape Town in the (near) future. Table Mountain and its adjacent peaks, Lion's Head and Devil's Peak, have been fenced off and stocked with indigenous animals. Only the very rich are able to gain access to its tourist lodges, guided walking tours and hunting expeditions. Shack settlements have crept up against the fence where it loops Lion's Head, but they are eventually demolished to build housing for City Council employees. Even though this is a speculative vision of Cape Town, it is recognisable and relatable: in an author's note concluding the novel's US imprint, the author refers to it as "a city at one slight remove from the real".

Although the novel is intricately layered and addresses a variety of environmental issues, I would like to focus my discussion firstly on the way in which the novel relates the extinction of certain animal species (in this case the Cape Lion or *Panthera leo melanochaita*) to South Africa's colonial history and secondly on the way in which it depicts the psychological consequences such extinctions may have for humans. Considered one of the "charismatic megafauna" and the crowning glory of South Africa's so-called Big Five (lion, elephant, Cape buffalo, rhinoceros and leopard), it is the lion, whether taxidermied, symbolic or real, that drives the plot in this novel.

The novel is narrated from the perspective of the character Con (short for Constantine) Marais who returns to Cape Town after having spent a number of years in London. Here he finds out that his childhood friend, Mark Carolissen, has been so badly injured by a lion at the zoo where he works that he is in a coma in hospital. The research institute at the zoo is dedicated to breeding extinct animals back into the world, in this case the extinct black-maned Cape Lion by using as a breeding pair a male they found in a Russian zoo and a female saved from canned hunting in a Namibian safari park. The male lion, Dmitri, which mauled Mark is put down after the incident, leaving only the female Sekhmet. After retrieving Mark's belongings from the zoo, at the behest of Mark's elderly mother, Con volunteers to take his place at the zoo. This forces him to confront the painful memories of their combined past in which he was both party and witness to the trauma of Mark's family losing their daughter Lizzie, when she was captured by a wild animal while they were hiking in the Table Mountain reserve.

Mark's relationship with lions stands central in the novel, with real lions becoming confused in his mind with their symbolic counterparts. The Carolissen family is in possession of a collection of taxidermied animals, amongst which there is a lion. The stuffed lion is a strong reminder of South Africa's colonial history in which some species of wild animals were hunted to extinction. The link between colonial history and extinction is also referenced by the mottos preceding each of the novel's eight sections. The

motto preceding the first section is taken from the journal of Jan van Riebeeck, the governor who was the first to settle the Cape at the behest of the Dutch-East India Company in 1652, and describes the ferocity of the lions encountered at the Cape. This is clearly linked to the novel's description of attempts to breed back the extinct Cape Lion at the zoo's research institute.<sup>2</sup> The motto preceding the second section is attributed to //Kabbo, one of the members of the group of !Xam Bushmen who acted as informants to the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd, who recorded their now extinct language as well as their stories, songs and sayings at the Cape in the latter half of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> The mere mention of //Kabbo's name brings to mind the fact that some of the indigenous peoples in South Africa, such as the Bushmen, were hunted by colonial farmers as if they were animals.<sup>4</sup> In the passage used as motto, //Kabbo speaks of the stars of the Southern Cross who "were formerly men, and at the same time lions", hinting at the way in which the first peoples of South Africa related to animals.

Also significant is the fact that the novel's fictional zoo-cum-research centre is set in the same spot on the slopes of Table Mountain where Cecil John Rhodes built a zoo in which he wanted to house animals from all over the British Empire on land that he owned.<sup>5</sup> Not far from the now derelict zoo one also finds the Rhodes Memorial, incorporating amongst others eight lion statues, where Con goes on several occasions in the novel (20-21).<sup>6</sup> The novel's description of this memorial is explicitly linked to Rhodes's attempts to transform the surroundings into a landscape that would remind him of England (see Twidle 2014). A perhaps unintended irony of bringing Rhodes into the novel lies in the fact that *Green Lion* was published at the same time (May 2015) that the University of Cape Town, built on land bequeathed by Rhodes, was forced to remove his statue that occupied a central place on its campus as a result of the #RhodesMustFall movement's demands as part of a decolonisation process.

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2. This aspect of the novel can be related to Cape Town zoo director John Spence's real life attempt to breed lions that would at least look like the extinct Cape Lion. See "'Extinct' lions surface in Siberia" (2002), also "Lion cubs thought to be Cape lions" (2000).
  3. See *The Digital Bleek and Lloyd*, <<http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/>>.
  4. Jamal (2015) makes a similar point in his review of *Green Lion* when he writes that the lives of animal, portrayed in the novel as hunted, taxidermied and incarcerated, also refers to the "dispossession of the majority of South Africans under colonialism and apartheid.
  5. See Sarah Ommanney (2012: 5).
  6. Page references in this third part of the article are to: Rose-Innes, Henrietta. 2015. *Green Lion*. Cape Town: Umuzi.

When Con takes Mark's place at the zoo, he finds out that his friend's attachment to the lion at the zoo was consistent with his belief that contact with nature and wild animals can restore life and heal psychological trauma. One of the symbolic lion presences in the novel is that of the "green lion", an ancient symbol associated with the alchemists' Philosopher's Stone, usually depicted with the sun in its mouth (49). When Con finds the family's stuffed lion, painted green and with a tennis ball in its mouth, in Mark's room at the family house, it becomes clear that Mark is completely taken with the healing and transformative powers of the alchemical green lion. It also transpires that Mark tried to translate his belief in the regenerative powers of the Green Lion into the activities of the Green Lion Group, a society which he founded. Their leaflet reads that when the Green Lion eats the sun "*Illness is healed / Withered plants are revived / The dead brought back to life. / So do we seek to devour the energies / of the wild*" (161-162). The group meets regularly at suburban homes where they watch nature documentaries on wild animals and create opportunities to get close to wild animals. When one of Mark's friends and acolytes, Mossie, approaches Con after Mark was attacked by the lion, she takes him to one of these meetings where visitors are allowed to touch a python (166-167). When Con goes through the rucksack Mark left at work, he finds another symbolic lion, this time on a postcard depicting Antonello da Messina's painting of St. Jerome and the lion, given to him by his mother. She tells Con of the "terribly sweet story" attached to St Jerome, who pulled a thorn from a lion's paw after which the lion was devoted to the saint (38).

Con has "lion dreams" of his own; it starts after the incident in which Mark's sister Lizzie was captured by a wild animal while the family, accompanied by Con, spent a weekend in the Table Mountain Reserve. During this weekend Con wanders off on his own. While bathing in a mountain pool after masturbating, a shadow falls on him and his clothes are drooled on (202-203). When it transpires later in the day that Lizzie has disappeared, he realises that the "questing shadow hadn't been looking for him [...]. It had come for the youngest of them, the weakest, as wild things often do" (207). This makes him feel as if he was the one who hurt Mark's family, "who had called something savage into their lives" (208). Con's experience with the unidentified, wild animal thus turns into a lion dream, infused with savagery, danger and eroticism.

This is equally true of his experience of the lioness Sekhmet at the zoo. When he first approaches the lion's cage, Sekhmet charges at him, throwing herself at the bars of the cage, before retreating. As keeper he struggles to gain her trust and almost never sees her. When he does see her fully for the first time, he is with Mossie, Mark's friend, who invited him to the Green Lion Group. Mossie persuades him to take her into the enclosure outside the lion cage at night and seduces him in order to steal the keys of the lion cage from him while he is asleep so that she can free Sekhmet. The freed lioness kills a

girl in one of Cape Town's suburbs (242), but is never found even though sightings are regularly reported and fantastic stories about her do the rounds.

One's reading of the lion presence in the novel is also presided over by the motto which introduces the novel, namely the final stanza of Margaret Atwood's poem "Sekhmet, the Lion-headed Goddess of War, Violent Storms, Pestilence, and Recovery from Illness, Contemplates the Desert in the Metropolitan Museum". In it the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet addresses the foolishness of the fantasy that deities with lion heads will be kind to their worshippers: "But if it's selfless / love you're looking for, / you've got the wrong goddess". The lines quoted in the motto speaks to the "wishful thinking" that a lion, "the final one, a kind lion," will come to "lick you clear of fever, / and pick your soul up gently by the nape of the neck / and caress you into darkness and paradise". This suggests that Mark and his Green Lion group's hope that contact with wild animals will heal psycho-logical trauma and restore life to an exploited earth is a vain one.

The novel ends with the zoo transformed into the "Green Lion Centre, devoted to the interdisciplinary conjunction of Arts and Natural Sciences, under the joint auspices of the Departments of Environment, Recreation and Culture" (257). All the animals have been replaced by the taxidermied animals in the collection of Mark's family and a theatre group gives regular performances to entertain children. Con works at the new centre and still hopes that the lioness Sekhmet will return. It seems as if he too has now become infatuated with the fantasy of the lion as a gentle companion, as portrayed in Antonello da Messina's painting of St Jerome: "He may grow old at this desk, may grow a long beard like the saint. But one day, there will be a lioness in the corridor, her footfalls soft but growing louder. [...] soon she will be here" (262). Con realises that in another hundred years many more creatures will exist "only in museums of lost and impossible things" (262), but has clearly taken on Mark's impossible dream that a gentle lion will come to save and heal him.

Although there are many intricacies to be uncovered by a more extensive reading of the novel, I will limit my comments to the novel's depiction of the characters' relation to animals. The novel clearly relates the extinction of certain animals in South Africa to the country's colonial history in which both animals and the indigenous peoples were hunted in colonial displays of patriarchal power. It is more ambivalent about the psychological consequences these extinctions may have for humans. Firstly, it posits a relation between the trauma of personal loss that the characters experience during the course of the narrative to the psychological distress that the loss of animal species, the degradation of the environment and continued inequality will bring, thus ending on a profoundly melancholy note. Thus it is not surprising that Twidle (2015) refers to the novel as "a work of mourning" for both the human losses and the vanishing life forms it describes. Secondly, it suggests that the characters in the novel project their desires and needs onto wild



animals in such a way that it can only result in tragedy. The novel paints an intimate and complex portrait of the way in which humans have related to animal throughout history by presenting a palimpsest of lion references. Precisely how the relationship to animals should play out remains ambiguous, but it seems clear that neither subjugation nor sentimental attachment can be an adequate response to the animals with whom we share the planet.

### **Plant Extinction in *Stof* by Alettie van den Heever**

The speculative element is much more pronounced in Alettie van den Heever's 2018 novel *Stof* which focuses its attention on the possible extinction of seeds and plants rather than animals. Like Rose-Innes's novel it is set in Cape Town and its surroundings; the time is 2081, twenty years after some unspecified event (called the Hardship, "Hardskip" in Afrikaans), together with a long drought, overuse of natural resources and unsustainable farming practices, resulted in massive desertification. The air is filled with a poisonous dust; the glare of the sun is almost unbearable; there are food and water shortages; previously unknown diseases of the skin, gut and lungs are rampant. The main source of energy is biogas extracted from human faeces, so that people have to endure long queues to exchange their faeces for water and a food mixture called Staple. Viable seeds that will endure in water-scarce conditions are the most highly prized commodities in this ravaged world. Seed stocks are strictly controlled by a technologically advanced and walled-off enclave, called Meconium, surrounded by various less affluent settlements in which people struggle to survive. The unauthorised possession of seeds is unlawful and heavily punished.

Society is still, as in the present, structured around the division between the rich and the poor. Meconium is the most affluent of the communities described in the novel: it is situated in central Cape Town and walled off with indestructible nanopex walls from the poorer communities outside (an oblique reference to the walled-off communities in South African urban areas). Its inhabitants, called Meconites, have access to advanced technology such as an aerial transport system and sophisticated weather gear to deal with the dust. Meconium also runs the biogas industry which provides energy and organises the exchange of faeces for food and water rations (the name Meconium is derived from the word for a new-born infant's faeces). Even though privileged, the inhabitants of Meconium are under constant surveillance whilst its agents are perpetually on the lookout for a legendary seedbank dating from the 2030's even though some think its existence is a mere myth (70).<sup>7</sup>

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7. Page references in this part of the article are to: Van den Heever, Alettie. 2018. *Stof*. Cape Town: Queillerie.

Meconium is surrounded by various settlements under its guardianship. One of these is Hardekraal, “one big district of tree huggers”, according to one of the characters in the novel (77). The nearby Close Enough is a large shack settlement, with its own tech, sex and power districts (77). People from the outside communities are called “phayas” (the Xhosa word for “over there”) and they are only allowed into Meconium on the annual Open Day to visit exhibitions in the diversity centre called No One’s Ark where humans and animals from all over the world are on display. Meconium also runs a reality survival show called *Specimen of the Year* eagerly watched by Meconites and non-Meconites alike. The entrance into the peninsula on which Meconium is situated is ruled over by marauding gangs: to the east a motorcycle gang called the “Voorfokkers” [Frontfuckers] patrols incoming roads; to the north-west the R27 gang roams the road out of Cape Town on skateboards. Beyond their domain lies the Koeberg nuclear reactor ruled over by the Koeberg Guardians, locked into an uneasy agreement with Meconium’s rulers. Even further afield, on the outskirts of the urban area, unscrupulous groups engaged in organ harvesting (lungs are especially valuable) patrol the area looking for any passersby they can pounce on.

The plot of the novel is centred on its principle character, a young girl called Amper (short for Ampersand) Molooi. She is a sixteen-year-old orphan who was raised by her grandmother and lives in the settlement Kylemor, in one of the outlying districts under Meconium’s rule. She has long dreadlocks, wears an ancient pair of diving goggles against the dust and a grey dungaree, with her dog tied to her belt. She is heir to a valuable collection of heritage seeds that her grandmother Bettina Molooi left her when she died, together with a collection of seed stories, written up in a book. Amper falls in love with a handsome patient in the clinic for lung patients in Kylemor, the Native American Wakinyan, who was actually sent by Meconium to investigate the rumour that she is in possession of a valuable seed collection. When he leaves, he takes with him most of the seeds hidden in her grandmother’s house as well as Bettina’s book of seed stories. Refusing to believe that he was a Meconium agent, Amper decides to go and look for him in the rough settlements around Meconium. She is accompanied on her quest by Mrs Jemima Jafta, who manages the clinic for lung patients in Kylemor but used to be a climatologist, dust expert and climate activist. They are taken to the city by the hawker Sias, who was a plastic surgeon before he started a business manufacturing biogas, first from human fat and then faeces.

After they get to the Hardekraal settlement outside Meconium, Amper goes to a Meconium Open Day. Here she sees Wakinyan on display as part of the Human Genome Project (Meconium’s attempt at sustaining diversity), together with the Viking Queen Ana, who is expecting his child. She also learns that he is favoured to win the *Specimen of the Year* contest, a reality show in which contestants must survive in the wild for forty days. Wakinyan comes to see Amper in Hardekraal and invites her to be his special guest at

*Specimen of the Year's* final event, but it is a ruse. On arrival in Meconium she is taken prisoner by Meconite security guards so that she can be interrogated about her seed collection. She manages to escape with the help of a young Meconite, called Foos, who has become disillusioned by the draconian laws of Meconium. Together they flee up the Cape West Coast towards a settlement they have heard of and hope will give them shelter. Their flight takes them past a confrontation with the dangerous R27 gang, the Koeberg nuclear plant and a near-fatal confrontation with an organ harvester who preys on people trying to move up the coast. They are finally found by scouts of the settlement they were hoping to reach, just before they succumb to hunger and thirst. This settlement is named Ikabod (a Hebrew word which means "it is over" or "no glory"). Here they are welcomed by a woman who turns out to be Amper's great-grandmother, Engela Vanaard, who gives her a detailed account of her ancestry (358-359). It emerges that Engela is the mother of Mrs Jemima Jafta who managed the lung clinic in Kylemor and accompanied Amper on her trip to Meconium. To her utter surprise, Amper finds out that Mrs Jemima Jafta is the mother of the father, Barend Vanaard, she never knew because he was murdered before she was born. Her mother was Sonjie Molooi, daughter of Bettina and Vincent Molooi.

It transpires that the Ikabod settlers were waiting for Amper to return with the seeds she inherited from Bettina. They were the ones who sent Bettina away with the seed collection in the first place, because they feared an attack from Meconium during the years of war between different factions in the region. Amper finds out that Bettina safeguarded the seed collection by braiding the valuable seeds into her dreadlocks (throughout the novel Amper refers to her dreadlocks as the "threads" connecting her to her grandmother). The dreadlocks are cut off and taken to the Ikabod laboratory to recover the valuable seeds. As important as the seeds woven into Amper's dreadlocks are the seed stories, which tell the story of each seed's origin in a way reminiscent of the folklore of South Africa's first peoples. Although the book that recorded these stories was stolen by Wakinyan, Amper retrieves these stories from her memory and writes them down throughout her journey to Hardekraal and the flight from Meconium.

In conclusion, I want to point out three ways in which this novel addresses important environmental issues. In the *first* place it is clearly conceived as a means of dramatising the consequences of different environmental ideologies by placing its main character amidst different, even contradictory, views. The Meconium enclave wants to solve the problem of human and environmental survival through the use of science and technology. They preach a philosophy of diversity which has become a strictly policed dogma and is artificially maintained. Their survivalist capitalist practices have led to an unequal society which they maintain through strict measures of control and surveillance. They also carefully cultivate the mythology of their diverse

origins in student movements lead by a person of mixed race and no specified gender, called Wilde Ngoku (175-177).

The ideology on which the Ikabod settlement is based is almost the exact opposite of Meconium's high-tech and scientific approach. Most of the Ikabod settlers are members of AIAG (an inversion of GAIA), who believe that humans have a responsibility to the environment, not necessarily to correct or improve it, but to stay (366). They follow a posthuman philosophy which rates humans on a par with all other elements on earth, seeing everything on earth as interrelated and part of a whole. Their settlement is based on recycling, barter, low impact housing, communal activity and the sustainable cultivation of the land – even though it becomes clear that it is not wholly free of the desire for profit. Amper overhears a conversation about plans some of them have to sell the seeds she brought at the highest possible price (370).

Other environmental philosophies are also hinted at. The people who live in Hardekraal are members of the GAIA movement, who believe that the Hardship was the result of the earth or GAIA avenging herself. Mention is also made of the notion of a dark ecology, articulated by a nuclear scientist who is one of the Koeberg Guardians and refers to it as “an ecology on the other side of mother nature or Gaia” (264), an ecology that will be built on a different relationship with the non-human and everything that surrounds humankind, by also embracing the abject and the non-natural. It is important to note that the novel ends with Amper uncertain about which ideology she will choose to follow, but free to make her own choice.

In the *second* place the novel also suggests that indigenous knowledges and the creative imagination have great value in helping to articulate a sustainable relationship with the environment. Amper is educated by her grandmother Bettina who instils in her the knowledge of seeds and plants by means of the stories she tells. These stories, in turn, are reminiscent of the stories told by South Africa's indigenous or first peoples in which the imagination is free to roam across the boundaries separating the human and the non-human. This speaks to De Loughrey's argument that environmental criticism dealing with the Anthropocene lacks engagement with indigenous perspectives and that indigenous authors “have long troubled the borders of both the human as subject and fiction as form” (De Loughrey 2019: 32). Bettina believed that humans exhausted and depleted the earth with their stories of mastery, conservation and science; that is why she believed that the earth should be changed by telling stories that emphasise the power of the imagination, creativity and growth. Bettina's faith in the ability of her stories to change existing attitudes, is counterbalanced by Amper's other grandmother, Mrs Jafta, who is extremely cynical about the belief that stories have the power to change people.

*Thirdly* the novel also makes a point about race, language and culture within the context of the environmental crisis. Even though the novel makes no

reference to racial identity, the characters' names suggest that they represent a cross section of the different races in South Africa. The surnames used, suggest that Amper is of mixed racial descent, her forebears being of both coloured and black descent (to use the racial nomenclature currently in use in South Africa). The novel's use of Afrikaans seems to militate against its fraught history as the language which white Afrikaners appropriated for their nationalist project, all the while ignoring the fact that more than half of its mother tongue speakers were coloured and that they were intimately involved in the evolution of the language. This novel uses Afrikaans not only to articulate the dystopian future it envisages (creating new words and expressions to capture the new world), but also to acknowledge the variety of its speakers and to describe how its urban and rural variants will likely diverge in a future world. The Afrikaans used in the novel approximates a spoken rather than a formal variety because it is the language spoken in the poorer settlements of the new order (English is the language spoken in Meconium), with the language changing as the action moves from the urban to the rural area. It also suggests a kind of protocol or best practice for multilingual societies: it is namely custom in the Hardekraal-settlement to use the language of the oldest person taking part in the conversation, whether it be Xhosa, Afrikaans or English (the languages currently spoken the region in which the novel is set).

## **In Conclusion**

By way of conclusion one can say that the comparison between these two novels show certain features commonly associated with a South African ecocriticism, namely the impact of the country's history of colonialism and apartheid, the entanglement of the environmental with the social, while it also hints at the country's racial, linguistic and cultural diversity (more so in Van den Heever's case than in that of Rose-Innes). As two very different examples of speculative fiction, the novels also demonstrate the way in which different subgenres of fiction can be employed to address environmental concerns. In the case of Rose-Innes's novel the speculative element allows for an intimate vision of a not-too-distant future, in which humans will have to deal with the impact of animal extinction, mourning the loss and resulting loneliness it will entail in a variety of ways. In the case of Van den Heever's novel it provides a framework for fictionalising different intellectual and pragmatic responses to the problems posed by climate change and environmental crisis.

Rose-Innes's novel places the emphasis on the devastating impact of the country's colonial history on its human and animal inhabitants, the intertwined histories of conservation and extinction, and the impact that this history has on human beings' relationship with animals as well as its psychological consequences. Van den Heever's novel shifts the focus to the

impact of climate change, the effect that the extinction and scarcity of plants and seeds will have, the value of indigenous knowledges, the persistence of social inequality and possible outcomes for the multiracial and multilingual society in South Africa. Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* is an urban novel in which the action plays itself out in a white English-speaking middle-class environment; the action in Van den Heever's novel is mostly set in peri-urban shack settlements and rural areas, where characters from diverse racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are reduced to poverty by being excluded from the racially indeterminate Meconium enclave. Rose-Innes's novel probes the intricately layered psychological nuances in Con and Mark's friendship, the impact of the trauma triggered by the loss of Mark's sister, the environmental loss it mirrors as well as the melancholy caused by the work of mourning; Van den Heever's novel employs the generic devices of the adventure story, the thriller and the indigenous tale in the process of imagining a future ecology.

The reading of these two speculative novels, dealing with environmental issues in the South African context, confirms to a large extent the general trends in South African ecocriticism pointed out by ecocritics. At the same time they can be read as taking part in – as De Loughrey (2019: 10) argued – the much needed “provincializing” of discussions about the environmental crisis in the Anthropocene, in the same way that postcolonial studies have “troubled, contested and provincialized” the universalising narratives of the west. Both novels exploit the specificities of the South African locale, its history and its current situation in order to contribute to global debates on the environmental crisis. As speculative novels they look both backward to the specifics of the history that has shaped current South African events and forward to speculate on how it will influence the country and planet's future.

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