“Colonial Botany”: Conservationists and Orchid Hunters in Popular Afrikaans Fiction Set in the Congo (D.R.C.) and Central Africa from 1949-1962

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Summary

In this article I focus on the use of botanical tropes in *Die jagters van Bloedeiland* (1958), a popular fiction text from the colonial era set in the Congo (D.R.C.). It forms part of the adventure series *Die Swart Luiperd* (1949-1962), whose titular hero is a white Afrikaner dressed in a black leopard costume. His mission is to guard the tropical jungle against “outsiders” who attempt to access the treasures of Africa. Amongst these are European botanists, whose feverish exploration of “undiscovered” plant species – reminiscent of the “orchid hunting” of the Victorian era – renders them vulnerable to abduction by hostile indigenous tribes. The Black Leopard is portrayed as a particular brand of conservationist figure: the white Afrikaner “insider” hero who has an intimate knowledge and love of Africa, and adheres to a strict moral code. While this series represents Africa as both rich (evoking the “Eldorado” trope), and “dark” in the Conradian sense, its hero is unambiguously noble. In his aversion for Western civilisation and love of the wild the Black Leopard may seem to embody the perfect balance between “whiteness and wildness” (see Leon de Kock 2006), but his idealised characterisation firmly roots him in the prevailing Afrikaner nationalism of the era.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word gefokus op die gebruik van botaniese trope in *Die jagters van Bloedeiland*, ’n populêre fiksieteks uit die koloniale era wat in die Kongo (DRK) afspeel. Dit vorm deel van die avontuurreeks *Die Swart Luiperd* (1949-1962), met as hoofkarakter ’n wit Afrikanerman geklee in ’n swartluiperdkostuum. Sy lewenstaak is om die tropiese woude teen “buitestanders” wat die skatte van Afrika probeer bykom, te beskerm. Onder diegene is Europese botanici, wie se koorsagtige soektogte na “onontdekte” plantspesies – wat herinner aan die “orgideewaansin” van die Victori-aanse era – hulle blootstel aan ontvoering deur vyandige inheemse stamme. Die Swart Luiperd word uitgebeeld as ’n besondere tipe bewaringsfiguur: die wit Afrikaner “binnestander”, die held wat ’n diepgaande kennis van die oerwoud en liefde daarvoor het, en leef volgens ’n streng morele kode. Hierdie reeks stel Afrika voor as ryk (wat die “Eldorado”-troop aktiveer), sowel as “donker” in die Conradiaanse sin, maar die Swart Luiperd word as ondubbelsinnig edel uitgebeeld. Alhoewel hy in sy afkeer van die Westerse (“oor-“)beskawing, en liefde vir die ongetemde dus mag lyk na ‘n vroeë Afrikaanse prototipe van De Kock (2006) se voorgestelde vervlegting van “whiteness

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and wildness", bly hierdie geïdealiseerde karakter gegrond in die heersende Afrikanernasionalisme van sy tyd.

1 Introduction

The exoticisation of Africa comes about *inter alia* through the use of colonial botanical tropes. The use of such tropes in the Afrikaans adventure series *Die Swart Luiperd* (1949-1962), forms an integral part of the exploration of how the Congo/Central Africa was represented in Afrikaans writing of an era that featured Afrikaner nationalism at its zenith, as well as the transition of colonised Africa to independence. The discussion that follows will hopefully integrate the tenets of relevant theoretical discourses (like colonial/ postcolonial studies) with insights gained from the writings of Schiebinger & Swan (2007), John Thieme (2016), and Jim Endersby (2016) in the field of Plant Studies – particularly their theoretical-critical contributions to an understanding of "colonial botany".

2 At Home in Wildest Africa: *Die Swart Luiperd*

The hero of this series, the Black Leopard (whose real name is Leon Fouché), can best be described as an Afrikaner adventurer of the colonial era who spends most of his time in the African jungle, which he loves and protects against all forces of evil – within and without. The indigenous tribes of the vast Central African jungles consider him to be part animal, part human because of the black leopard mask he wears, as well as a potent spirit who – riding his black horse Donker ("Dark") and accompanied by his two tamed leopards Simson ("Samson") and Spikkels ("Spots") – can move undetected and at lightning speed through the jungle.

The adventures of this foursome take place in East Africa, Central Africa and North Africa. The stories that can be considered "Afrikaans writing on the Congo" either feature jungle adventures in the vast Congo itself, or a spot at the confluence of the Ugandan/Congolese borders, or neighbouring ex-Belgian colonies Rwanda and Burundi. References to place in the texts suggest some historical knowledge of the map of colonial Africa on the part of the authors:[1] actual Central African/Congolese cities, rivers, mountains and border posts are named in the texts, as is the colonial power in control at the time, Belgium. As for the *representation* of the Congo in this popular fiction series, the stock-in-trade colonial tropes are abundantly present: exotic flora and fauna; indigenous tribes that sport filed teeth to aid their cannibalistic practices; wild pygmies hunting with poisoned arrows, lost cities, untold treasures, a white queen in the heart of Africa – to mention but a few.

1. Braam le Roux (1949-1958) and Meiring Fouché (1958-1963).

Sluiers oor die woud (*Veils over the Forest,* no. 52, 1959) can be considered typical of this kind of writing. The lost/hidden city in the primeval jungle is the prevalent colonial trope activated in this text, which is an adventure involving the disappearance of white visitors (amongst others missionaries and scientists) who enter the territory of the Kanoessi tribe. The narrative initially (1959: 3-4) sets the scene for the discovery of the legendary city of the Kanoessi by referring to one particular quest of the Black Leopard in the jungles of the Congo: to traverse dense tropical bush that is home to gorillas, chimpanzees and large elephant herds, so as to track down the elusive okapi in its natural habitat. The okapi is referred to as a species only found in the "deepest, deepest jungle" in the heart of the Congo: the Jungle of Shadows, with its gargantuan flora which is practically impenetrable, and has monstrous reptiles and hostile tribes armed with poisonous weapons (1959: 3-4). The Black Leopard is portrayed as fully aware of these perils:

> Dit lyk soos 'n afskrikwekkende verdoemenis van groen gebladerde reus-stamme; diep, donker skaduwees. Die toppe van die bome lyk soos 'n onmeetlike groen oseaan wat wegstrek tot byna in die oneindige, behalwe hier op regs waar die magtige bergreeks in die oerwoud inskiet en weer wegswaai. Maar behalwe in die rigting waar die berg geleë is, lyk dit asof hierdie groen woesteny tot in die oneindige wegtrek. Die Luiperdman weet dat as jy eers in hom verlore is, jy vir goed verlore sal wees ….
>
> (1959: 4)
>
> [It looks like a fearsome hell of green leafy giant tree trunks; deep, dark shadows. The tree tops look like an immeasurable green ocean that almost reaches into infinity, except for the mighty mountain range on the right that pierces the jungle and then swerves away from it. But except for the direction in which the mountain is situated, it seems as if this wilderness extends into the infinite. The Leopard Man knows that, once lost in this jungle, one would be lost forever ....]

The [Noire] mountain is described as a colossus arising from the surrounding jungles, and appears equally abominable ("afskuwelik"), mysterious ("geheimsinnig") and menacing ("dreigend"). There is something creepy ("grillerig") about the mountain that the Black Leopard finds unnerving, and makes him suspect all manner of secrets hidden in its huge gorges, dark green mountainside and pitch black cliffs. While observing this, the Black Leopard's attention is drawn to something he finds to be odd: something in the dense jungle reflecting sunlight. He is intrigued by this, and when he investigates, he finds a pair of (ladies') sunglasses near the wreckage of a small aircraft, but no sign of bodies. He subsequently learns from the Belgian commander of a nearby outpost that a four-seater aeroplane went missing in that region five years ago. Thus begins the Black Leopard's search for Anette du Pré, her fiancé Dr Anton Briers (antiquarian), and two scientists (Pierre Gide and Beniamino Rocci) – a mission that involves the accidental wounding

of the sacred gorilla of the Kanoessi tribe, and the tracking of it through a dark tunnel leading into a huge tropical basin. While on the run from the vengeful tribe, the Black Leopard climbs an enormous tree, from which vantage point he sees the city of the Kanoessi. To his amazement it is the most beautiful city he has ever seen in that part of Africa: instead of the traditional huts made of clay, this city consists of uniformly neat, white rondavels with thatched roofs, designed to form concentric circles around a massive central building with a golden dome (1959: 71). It is significant that, upon seeing these buildings for the first time, the Black Leopard surmises that no indigenous tribe could have built it: while their huts are usually thrown together in "great chaos", this city[2] has all the markings of an excellent, neat design, with a beautiful temple (which is compared to a majestic "white jewel") as its centrepiece. When the Black Leopard discovers that the four missing passengers of the doomed flight are in fact alive and put to work in this city, this puzzle is also solved: although held in captivity, they are revealed to be the architects of this "lost beauty". The assumption of white agency behind any sophisticated enterprise in Africa is a well-known feature of colonial discourse – the "Great Zimbabwe" debate being a case in point[3].

3 Botanical Obsessions

The extensive use of such colonial tropes points to a strong Eurocentric element forming part of the matrix underlying the representation of the Congo/Central Africa in Afrikaans popular writing of the colonial era. Not surprisingly the realm of the exotic Other is constructed to include beautiful yet dangerously intoxicating indigenous flora. In *Die jagters van Bloedeiland* (The hunters of Blood Island – Le Roux 1958) the Black Leopard is asked to save a group of British scientists from Kew who are on an expedition to find rare orchids. Professor Walter Reed, a botanist, his daughter Esmo from the British Museum, and his son Dr Robert Reed (a medical doctor) are the core members of this orchid hunt. Initially Professor Reed is depicted as a passionate researcher, but his actions very soon take a childish, even irrational turn, endangering his whole entourage. Against the advice of the Black Leopard, who senses impending chaos as a result of tribal factionalism, Reed proceeds with his orchid hunt during which some of his associates are killed and others abducted. Despite this, he has to be physically restrained from attempting to revisit the patch of mysteriously intoxicating orchids in the heart of the Congo jungle throughout this adventure.

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2. Interestingly referred to as a "stat" (Afrikaans for "African village") as opposed to "stad" ("city").

3. See Beach (1984) for the postcolonial response to this Eurocentric myth-making.

Reed's irrational conduct is reminiscent of the so-called "botanical obsessions" that have surfaced periodically in Europe since the 17th century. Lemmer (2000: 148-149) refers to the Dutch "bollenrasernie" (tulip frenzy) of 1634-1637 in this regard, and observes that the preoccupation with orchids (a phenomenon dating back to the Victorian era) has had to be regulated by CITES in our time. This is necessary because, according to Hansen (2000: 58 in Lemmer 2000: 149), millions of collectors all over the world are growing orchids, which has led to a situation where this contemporary "orchid fever" has now eclipsed both the 17th century tulip mania, and the 19th century fascination with orchids. It is thus not merely an historical phenomenon that has run its course, but has been resurgent in the 20th century and into the third millennium. This is evidenced by the numerous books and films featuring "orchid fever" that are still produced in our time, and that bear an ironical resemblance to what Schiebinger and Swan (2007: 2-3) call "colonial botany" in their volume of case studies on "the volatile nexus of botanical science, commerce, and state politics" in the Early Modern World (1550-1800):

> Colonial botany – the study, naming, cultivation, and marketing of plants in colonial contexts – was born of and supported European voyages, conquests, global trade, and scientific exploration. The expanding science of plants depended on access to ever farther-flung regions of the globe; at the same time, colonial profits depended largely on natural historical exploration and the precise identification and effective cultivation of profitable plants .... Colonial endeavors moved plants and knowledge of plants promiscuously around the world .... Botany was "big science" in the early modern world; it was also big business, enabled by and critical to Europe's burgeoning trade and colonialism.

For the purposes of this article (which deals with texts published during the colonial era) it is not necessary to dwell on the question raised by Thieme (2016), i.e. whether there are notable differences between the use of botanical tropes in colonial discourse, as opposed to their use in postcolonial discourse[4]. Suffice it to say that plants have for the longest time been inextricably linked to commercial endeavour driven by those in power. Nevertheless the study of plants has never been the exclusive domain of academically trained white botanists from the developed world. According to Schiebinger and Swan (2007: 2-3) Europeans were definitely not the only "producers of knowledge"

4. Thieme (2016) argues that botanical tropes are prominent in postcolonial literary texts as well as in postcolonial theoretical discourse. It is "nothing new – it has notable antecedents in colonial discourse and was central to Darwinian and other Victorian commentary on cultural interaction" (2016: 41). The focus of his discussion is to ascertain to which extent (if any) the use of such tropes is different in postcolonial contexts. He discusses the various manifestations of hybridity in English Caribbean representations of the orchid, mango, and "breadfruit" (Artocarpus altilis).

in this field. Quoting Judith Carney in this regard, they comment as follows on the role of African slaves in the botanical enterprise (Schiebinger & Swan 2007:9):

Africans, in their forced migration on European vessels from their homelands into the Americas, carried not only seeds and plants but the technologies for their cultivation as well. Slave dooryard gardens and provision fields – "botanical gardens of the dispossessed" she calls them – provided the staging ground for this African "diaspora of cultigens".

Carney argues that "these gardens should be, but rarely are, conceptualized as part of the colonial network of botanical gardens", and designates African slaves "active botanists" (Garney, J. in Schiebinger & Swan 2007: 9). This amounts to a far greater contribution than merely providing "material artifacts" from which knowledge could be gathered. Similarly, women seldom authored books on botany in colonial times, but have emerged "as active agents of natural knowledge" in research projects such as those of Schiebinger and Swan (2007: 9, 11).

In *Die Swart Luiperd* series, the agency of natural knowledge of the African jungle is, however, reserved for the Black Leopard. There are references in the series to many tribes with whom the Black Leopard has friendly, mutually respectful and helpful relations. When his son Bennie goes missing in the jungle, and his wife Sonet is abducted, the Black Leopard receives messages by bush telegraph to both alert him, and promise to assist him in his searches. In his ability to move swiftly and quietly in the jungle, utilising the natural habitat of wild animals and indigenous peoples without causing disturbances, and to follow many of the languages spoken in the various parts of Africa, the Black Leopard demonstrates his affinity for the wild, and respect for the natural laws of the jungle. This enables him to act as a skilful negotiator and facilitator of solutions in times of crisis. The knowledge of the indigenous peoples is thus not conveyed authentically, in their reported speech, but mediated by a white go-between in paternalistic fashion. In *Die jagters van Bloedeiland,* the reasons for ascribing this role to the Black Leopard emerge in abundant textual detail. The character Colin Fancutt (1958: 13) gives a glowing account of the abilities and (international) standing of Leon Fouché. In *Tiere van die heilige woud* (Le Roux 1957b), the safari leader Patterson attests to his character as follows: "[H]y praat met die kennis van 'n man wat Afrika en sy inboorlinge ken, 'n man wat, soos enige verstandige Afrikakenner ag slaan op wat hy hoor" ("He speaks like a man who knows Africa and its inhabitants, a man who – as any expert on Africa would wisely do – heeds what he hears" – 1957b: 6). The Black Leopard is thus esteemed by white people of sound character, who value his presence and influence in the jungles of Africa.

In other texts in this series it is strongly implied that the Black Leopard has also earned the respect of numerous indigenous tribes. This is not merely due to his grisly leopard mask, but because of his knowledge of the arts and skills

of their world: the ancient art of mixing poison for arrow tips; the fact that his instincts and senses are attuned to the jungle (the reader learns that his sense of smell is superior to that of an ordinary white man); his ability to decode the messages of the jungle drums; and his desire to discover more of the jungle mysteries, for example beholding the shy okapi (Le Roux 56: 25) and the famed/fabled cemetery of the elephants (Fouché 1962). He furthermore shuns European arms and carries only a bow and arrow, and a knife.

It is in his identification with the ways of the jungle, exhibiting knowledge more akin to the indigenous kind one learns experientially, than the kind of learning acquired through scholarly books produced within European knowledge systems, that the Black Leopard comes closest to being an early Afrikaans example of the coexistence of whiteness and "wildness" in a character. This "well-known wild man of the jungle" brings to mind Leon de Kock's concept of wildness-in-whiteness (2006), which encapsulated an approach to the "whiteness" debate in South Africa that would create space for an authentic whiteness – unorthodox, anti-establishment, and nomadic – within a dynamic co-existence of "whiteness" and "wildness". In his discussion De Kock opened up the possibility of unconventional white protagonists who do not conform to the idealised heroes of colonial times - who were characterised as men of strong moral fibre, racially "pure" in traditional, monogamous marriage and family life; unambiguous in their love of their mother tongue and culture. Examples of De Kock's "wild whites" include Coenraad de Buys and Reverend Van der Kemp (both of whom "went native"). For De Kock, this kind of "wild" whiteness would be free from racial prejudice and Eurocentrism, and thus leave an imprint in which white writing of the colonial era could cease to be, retrospectively, "the locus of shame and despair" (De Kock 2016: 186). *Die Swart Luiperd* series shows some awareness of the ambiguity inherent in the Congo imaginary, and might have been able to accommodate more ambiguity or at least greater subtlety in the portrayal of its titular hero. The series as a whole does not, however, manage to interrogate its historical context. Perhaps any such expectation, formed from the contemporary vantage point of postcolonial discourse, is simply unfair: the function of popular fiction is described by Willemse (2015: 83) as forming essential parameters for the understanding of the literary, social and political discourses of a given epoch. Furthermore, as much as a "popular" text may take issue with salient socio-political issues (see Burger 2012: 357), the "met ogen van toen"[5] view (doing justice to an older text by taking its historical context into consideration) remains important.

The suggestion by the character Fancutt – that the Black Leopard is actually worshipped ("verafgood") by the indigenous peoples because of his almost supernatural strength, his uncanny ability to navigate the jungle, and his

5. See Van Kalmhout (2010). The Dutch phrase literally means "with the eyes of then", i.e. reading the text in its time.

terrifying black leopard costume – bears more than just a hint of the well-known colonial trope of “superstitious awe” on the part of “the natives” when faced with an apparent anomaly (a man who seems to be part animal, possessing supernatural powers).[6] Furthermore, the Black Leopard’s gentlemanly and protective behaviour towards (white) women marks him as the ultimate romantic hero whose disdain for civilisation is only matched by his love of adventure and mystery.

When faced with treasures of immense value like the ivory stash of Max De Leeuw (see Fouché 1962), the gold and precious stones of the Moon people, and other secret treasures in hidden cities the Black Leopard encounters, the Black Leopard is represented as being exemplary. His overriding concern is portrayed as protecting the peoples and riches of Africa, and bringing to book criminals who pose a threat to the secrets of the jungle, and its peoples. He is not tempted by riches, renown or any prize civilisation may offer him. This inclination is evident from how he deals with the British orchid hunters as well as the indigenous tribesmen who lure them into a trap for their own horrific purposes in *Die jagters van Bloedeiland*.

Jim Endersby introduces his book *Orchid. A cultural history of the orchid* (2016), by referring to two popular although very different films featuring orchids: *Moonraker* (1979) and *Adaptation* (2002). According to Endersby these films present an idea of what orchids mean in our time (2016: 3):

> They are deadly but endangered. Alluring, even sexy. Luxurious and expensive. Delicate “hothouse” flowers, not really adapted to the real world, yet they can be lethal. Mostly found in mysterious distant jungles, orchids have often been depicted as feminine and delicate, which may be why larger-than-life male heroes have to be imagined as the only ones who can bring them home safely. People will commit crimes for them, even kill or die for orchids.

Endersby’s study finds orchids in all manner of art and literature, ranging from the high-brow to the popular variety:

> Partly because orchids take such extraordinary shapes, they have cropped up repeatedly in the stories we humans tell ourselves. Whether it’s in films, novels, plays, or poems, orchids feature repeatedly from Shakespeare to science fiction, from hard-boiled thrillers to elaborate modernist novels, and tracking orchids across diverse genres reveal unexpected connections. For example, orchids crop up in the late nineteenth century in tales of imperial derring-do; a hunt for orchids often provided the pretext for adventurous heroes to face death in the pages of the *Boys Own Paper* and the novels of H. Rider Haggard (who wrote Edwardian bestsellers including *She* and *King Solomon’s Mines*). Unexplored jungles had provided writers like Haggard with

6. Note however that even white characters at times refer to him as a spirit (“gees” – 1958: 14).

> infinite scope, a dark canvas on which to depict imaginary tribes of cannibals, scheming and seductive native women, and other appealing mysteries.

Endersby's study, with its emphasis on European cultures and cultures shaped by Europeans ("the world's most active travellers"), makes a sound argument for seeing the orchid (culturally associated with especially two themes – sex and death) as "a good example of the exotic riches that Europeans sought – and would kill for – and which shaped their vision of the new worlds they set out to annex" (2016: 8). In the process Endersby acknowledges the ambiguity in the representation of the orchid in colonial texts that Thieme (2016) has noted with reference to the Caribbean. According to Thieme (2016: 45) the orchid found there is often associated with "a fragile colonial or white Creole identity that is ill-suited to the tropics". In this regard Thieme refers to Jean Rhys' "counter-discursive response to Jane Eyre", *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), in which an "octopus orchid" is featured – a plant that flowers twice per annum, and whose ephemeral nature serves as a metaphor for the heroine Antoinette's white creole identity (2016: 45). Similarly the orchid in Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The orchid house* (1953) becomes a trope of the isolation of the white creole community; the orchid house itself "is a metonym for the diseased and enclosed world of this group, from which its strong female characters must escape" (2016: 45). Thieme argues that orchids in Caribbean texts are linked to natural beauty as well as to the colonial presence, and thus become ambivalent. This is, according to Thieme, also applicable to texts by Derek Walcott (*Omeros* 1990) and Jan Carew (*Black Midas* 1958) (2016: 46). Wilson Harris's *The Sleepers of Roraima* (1970) however lacks this ambiguity and represents orchids in terms of "luminous beauty" (2016: 47); the orchid in this text thus becomes the epitome of an

> … idealized pre-Columbian nature that is a world away from the transplanted hybrid horticulture that Kincaid identifies, and this perhaps accounts for the divergent ways in which the flower is represented in Black Midas, where it seems to be used both as a trope for a "pure", unhybridized nature, and the depredations occasioned by colonialism.
>
> (2016: 47)

Although the orchid is thus linked to white colonialism, it is evident that an association with purity also exists, in that it may represent "unhybridized nature" in a text.

The orchids referred to in *Die jagters van Bloedeiland* are represented in an equivocal fashion. At first acquaintance they strike onlookers as extra-ordinarily beautiful. When, almost by accident, the orchid hunters stumble upon a natural amphitheatre in the jungle, formed by ancient trees and vegetation, they see orchids of such breathtaking, abundant beauty that it is described as a miniature orchid kingdom (1958: 31). Professor Reed and his associates storm into this area like schoolchildren, only to fall curiously silent

after a while. Upon investigation their guide, Colin Fancutt, who remained outside the circle, realises that all animal tracks and footpaths veer sharply away from this spot, and that it is devoid of any birdlife or even butterflies. As he enters the circle, he becomes acutely aware of the tomb-like silence, and an overpowering fragrance: a terribly heavy, intoxicating smell emanating from the orchids, that causes extreme drowsiness. Before he succumbs to it, he sees the orchid hunters lying unconscious amongst the orchids.

It is fascinating to find a discussion in Endersby (2016: 157-183) of various texts from the 19th and 20th century featuring similarly beguiling orchids: exquisite in appearance, yet attendant by a “peculiar sickening odour pervading the heavy, heated air” (2016: 165) that has a narcotic effect on human beings. Endersby refers here to a piece published in the London *Daily Mail* in 1896, but also mentions other texts that seem to have been inspired by the story of the “demon flowers” (see 2016: 165-166). It is noteworthy that *Die jagters van Bloedeiland* does not specify whether the fragrance emanating from the orchids was pleasant or unpleasant. The text also suggests that human beings (whites as well as indigenous people), animals and insects were all similarly affected by this odour. The hostile tribesmen who abduct the hapless orchid hunters from the circle take great care to limit their exposure to the orchids. This does not necessarily preclude an interpretation of the orchid in this text in terms of “purity”, i.e. unveiled as a symbol, a remnant, of an unspoilt precolonial existence. The conspicuous absence of any sexual connotations (so part and parcel of orchidology),[7] may substantiate such an unambiguous reading. Professor Walter Reed’s irrational behaviour – he ventures into the jungle again, solo, despite his narrow escape the first time, and has to be tracked down by the Black Leopard and forcibly returned to camp (1958: 95-96) – is again merely described as childish behaviour, and not linked to “fiction’s lethal orchid women” (Endersby 2016: 169). The Black Leopard admonishes him sternly, but tells Fancutt:

> “It has been a while since I last had to physically restrain an elderly man, but fortunately I caught him while he was still at the edge of the Jungle of Eternal Silence. Professor, you are just like a child. Go to your tent,” he scolds Reed, but behind his mask he smiles at the quaint, diminutive figure who obeys him in such docile fashion, even though his thoughts are still so full of orchids.

Conclusion

In this article *Die Swart Luiperd* was introduced as an important example of popular Afrikaans fiction of the 1950’s and 1960’s, which serves as a reflection of beliefs and sensibilities that enjoyed currency during that

7. See Endersby (2016: 157-183).

particular juncture in Afrikaans history. The portrayal of the titular white Afrikaner hero as the arch-conservationist benefactor of African peoples, flora and fauna makes use of well-known colonial tropes idealising whiteness, and thus forms part of the ideological agenda of white Afrikanerdom prevalent at the time.[8] The Black Leopard's protective stance as regards the jungle is at least partly motivated by his desire to preserve this personal bit of paradise as his retreat from the excesses of "over-civilization". His conservationist leanings can thus be ascribed in equal parts to his love of the wild, and the (typically colonialist) sense of entitlement (encapsulated in Cowper's phrase "I am monarch of all I survey", that has famously been utilised by Pratt 2008/1992). In *Die jagters van Bloedeiland,* another botanical trope from colonial times – that of the exquisite yet deadly orchids ("demon flowers") in the very heart of Africa – plays to the larger companion tropes found in fiction on the Congo (D.R.C.), i.e. Africa as the richly endowed "Eldorado", yet at the same time the Conradian "heart of darkness". While this kind of representation of Africa could have accommodated a similarly ambiguous protagonist exhibiting De Kock's "whiteness-cum-wildness", the Black Leopard's ideological range is rather closely circumscribed by Afrikaner Nationalism, and Eurocentric colonial values.

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8. See Giliomee, H. on the 1950's as part of "formative apartheid" and the 1960's as part of "high apartheid" (<http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php? script=sci_ arttext&pid=S0259-01902015000100010>.)

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