

An Ecocritical Reading of Pieter Fourie's *Die Koggelaar*

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Summary

Pieter Fourie's *Die Koggelaar* (1988) is an important play in his oeuvre and one which has been commented on and discussed by various theorists. Most of these discussions focused on Boet Cronje as the protagonist of the play and foregrounded the themes of racism, chauvinism and Afrikaner nationalism in the late eighties as depicted in this play. In my ecocritical reading of this play I move away from a human-centred approach and try to show rather how the characters in this play stand in a special relationship to the Karoo landscape, animals, earth and God; i.e. the interactions and interdependence of the various "worlds" are highlighted.

Opsomming

Pieter Fourie se *Die Koggelaar* (1988), is 'n belangrike drama in sy oeuvre en een wat talle teoretici reeds geresenseer en bespreek het. Meeste van hierdie besprekings het gefokus op Boet Cronje as die protagonis in hierdie drama en het hoofsaaklik die temas van rassisme, chauvinisme en Afrikanernasionalisme, soos uitgebeeld in hierdie drama, ondersoek. In my ekokritiese lesing van die drama beweeg ek weg van 'n oorwegend mens-gesentreerde benadering en probeer eerder aantoon dat die karakters in hierdie drama in 'n spesiale verhouding staan tot die Karoo-landskap, die diere, aarde en God; m.a.w. die interaksies en interafhanklikheid van die onderskeie "wêrelde" word uitgelig.

Introduction

Although the reception of Pieter Fourie's *Die Koggelaar* (first performed in 1987, published in 1988) during the late eighties was generally good, some controversy¹ accompanied its first performances. Most people – some in

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1. Vermeulen mentions in his discussion of the reception of the play, under the heading "Rejection", that
[t]he Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State cancelled a production of this play in 1987. After much infighting this institution allowed the play to be performed in 1989. In reaction to this performance representatives of the NG-church of Hospital Park, Bloemfontein, requested their members not to attend plays like *Die koggelaar*, their objection being the scene where Anna appears naked on stage and the "misuse of the name of God" in the play. But as Professor S.A. Strauss (1989: 10), theologian at the University of the

longer discussions (such as Schutte 1989; and Pienaar 2000) and some in shorter reviews (such as Hough 1989) – highlighted Boet Cronje’s position as the main character in the play and focused on his portrayal as a chauvinist and racist Afrikaner nationalist.

Coetser (1991) and Vermeulen (1992, 1996) conducted longer studies of this play and also focused in their analyses on Boet Cronje as the protagonist of this play – but now respectively from a Jungian and a Lacanian perspective. Coetser (1991: 45) used in his analysis psycho-analytical theory as formulated by Jung to focus on the theme of drought in this play. According to him “drought initiates events which lead to the development of a fully-fledged psychosis in Boet. As a consequence of the inter-connection of the personal and the collective unconscious the physical drought surrounding Boet ... becomes a dramatic metaphor for the figurative drought in the community of which he is part”. Vermeulen stressed the link between Afrikaner politics and culture, and stated that the rending apart of these two aspects “brought the Afrikaner’s whole *weltanschauung* in crisis”, with the result that “the socio-psychological effects of this crisis were *inter alia* disorientation, uncertainty, anxiety and fear of the future” (1996: 57). He then chose Lacan for his analysis of Boet Cronje, because for him “no other psychoanalytic theoretician ... explores the relation between the psychical and the cultural” (1996: 59) so well.

In this article I want to move away from the position taken by the previous commentators to focus solely on Boet Cronje’s role as the protagonist in this play, by giving a new reading of Pieter Fourie’s play from an ecocritical perspective.

Ecocritical studies in drama and theatre theory have been gaining popularity since their inception in the middle nineties in America.² In a supplement (“Ecocriticism and Drama”) to the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* in which four articles are given on this topic, the value of this approach in drama theoretical studies is described as follows:

Orange Free State, pointed out both aspects objected to were sensitively treated. One therefore suspects an ideological motive behind the surface argument: the confrontation of some Afrikaners by their mirror image was probably the real problem they had with this play. (Vermeulen 1996: 58)

2. Although still a relatively young field, various conferences and seminars have been held on this topic (e.g. “Mapping Ecocriticism across Performance” at the 2005 American Society for Theatre Research conference in Toronto, Canada). More books are also being published on this topic, notably the work of Theresa J. May. A bibliography of her research in this field can be found at <<http://www.humboldt.edu/~tjm33/publications.html>>. (Accessed on 10 January 2007).

Perhaps one of the more significant notions for theatre and performance studies to arise from the use of this critical frame is that it posits a radical rethinking about the representation of humans and their environment. Instead of the human-centred perspective that has traditionally dominated Western theatre and drama scholarship and performance, ecocriticism shifts the point of view to one that locates humans within a mutually-reliant system, whereby human and animal bodies, land, plants, and trees influence each other.

(Richard 2006: 123)

Ecocritical studies in drama and theatre usually consist of two approaches, namely (1) either the praxis of ecodrama itself, or (2), eco-critical readings of specific plays. Although we do have examples of ecodrama in South Africa with the work being done by The Jungle Theatre Company,³ I could not find any examples of ecocritical readings of South African plays.

In my ecocritical reading of Pieter Fourie's *Die Koggelaar* I will focus on three aspects, namely (1) Landscape/"word"scape: the Karoo; (2) Man/Animals/Earth/God; and (3) Crossing real and figurative borders;

1 Landscape/"word"scape: The Karoo

1.1 The Karoo Landscape

It is clear from the various direct references given in the play that Pieter Fourie situated *Die Koggelaar* in the Karoo ("*Koggelkaroo*" (Fourie 1988: 1);⁴ "*Karoo*" (p. 2); "*die hele Koggelkaroo*" (p. 14); "*Die Koggelkaroo*" (p. 17); "*n Karoovlakte, die Karoo*" (p. 35); "*die Karooveld*" (p. 9). The Karoo, however extends over a vast area and occupies most of the interior of the Cape Province (see map in *Karoo: South African Wild Flower Guide* 6, 1994, pp. 20-21). Fourie does mention in one instance the town Beaufort West in the play when Boet describes driving to this town for a dance (pp. 25, 26). Beaufort West is in the middle of the Karoo – its heartland so to speak.

3. The Jungle Theatre Company began performing theatre in South Africa in 1995 under the name of Jungle Performance. It uses music, mime, puppetry, juggling and storytelling in its performances and often visits schools with performances that convey ecologically sound messages, e.g. "Hoerikwaggo: Mountain of the Sea", which focuses on the importance of Table Mountain as an example of biodiversity and cultural variety. For other examples visit <<http://www.jungletheatre.co.za/aboutus.html>> (accessed on 10 January 2007).

4. Subsequent references to *Die Koggelaar* will be indicated by page numbers only).

In discussing the plants of the Karoo in the above guide, the compiler (David Shearing) makes a distinction between eight regions in the Karoo (with further subsections to indicate the occurrence of various veld types). He describes the area around Beaufort West (the so-called “False Upper Karoo”) as follows:

“Flora is much the same as that of the Central Upper Karoo, except that it has more grasses. The area from Murraysburg to Middelburg to De Aar to Colesberg and back encompasses the most spectacular of all changes of vegetation in South Africa. This is an area of grass veld that has been eroded into Karoo. There are still pockets here and there that are almost entirely grass veld, and these indicate what can be achieved through good, scientific farming methods. False Karoo types are inclined to be sparser than the genuine Karoo types. *Pentzia incana* (**anchorkaroo**) is the dominant karoo bush, and *Chrysocoma ciliata* (**bitterbos**) the main pioneer.

(Shearing 1994: 28-29)

The Karoo is well known for the droughts that occur there on a regular basis and the often difficult circumstances in which the sheep farmers have to survive. According to Esler, Milton & Dean

[t]he Karoo land user has chosen to make a home and earn a living in a harsh and unpredictable environment. The Karoo is a spectacularly wild and open landscape of rugged mountains, stony plains, salt pans and sand dunes. Rain may fall in winter, summer, without warning, or not at all. The indigenous plants and animals of the Karoo have been selected over hundreds of thousands of years to escape or endure heat, droughts and floods.

(Esler, Milton & Dean 2006: 1)

In *Die Koggelaar* Fourie foregrounds the Karoo as the space in which Boet Cronje (and the rest of the characters) are placed – not only by repeating the word Karoo (nine times) in the play, but also by linking/combining this word with the plants found in this area, namely the “anker karoo”/ (anchorkaroo) of and the “silwerkaroo” (see discussion of these plants below). The word “Karoo” does not only indicate a particular space/ landscape or is linked to certain plants in this region. It is also implied by the use of the name of Anker for Boet Cronje’s coloured half-brother, since his name is linked to the name of the most dominant karoo bush – the “anker karoo”/ (anchorkaroo).

1.2 The Karoo: A “Political” Landscape

The Karoo is commonly associated with large sheep farms and with droughts – both elements that play pivotal roles in *Die Koggelaar*. It is the presence of a catastrophic drought which eventually destroys Boet Cronje’s

sanity and drives him to kill his parents, wife and in the end, also himself. A drought which is, of course, not only a physical drought attacking the people, animals and plants of this landscape, but one that can clearly be interpreted as symbolising the wider political crisis experienced by the Afrikaner in the late eighties (as represented by the figure of Boet Cronje). Coetser discusses the theme of drought and its various connotations and associations in the play in some detail (1991: 48-53), while Vermeulen also links the theme of drought with the Afrikaner's political crisis of the period:

The protagonist is Boet Cronjé, a typical Afrikaner *boer* (farmer). The antagonists are the drought, God and the racial other. The intermediaries are Boet's father Ben, his mother Beta [sic], his wife Anna, their son little Ben, the "coloured" farm-hand Anker and Boet's breeding ram. The crisis dramatised by this play starts with the drought. It is a crisis of survival – of the farm, its people, animals and veld. This disaster soon becomes a family, a religious and a politico-cultural crisis.

(Vermeulen 1996: 57)

Fuchs and Chaudhuri in *Land/Scape/Theater* also link national identity with the land itself and states that

[t]he tension between landscape as locality and landscape as notion is, in fact, one of many instances of what Stephen Daniels terms "the duplicity of landscape", referring to the tension between thing and idea – matter and meaning, place and ideology – that seems to be the defining characteristic of landscape. Landscape denotes the interaction of people and place: a social group and its spaces, particularly the spaces to which the group belongs and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning.

(Fuchs & Chaudhuri 2002: 24-25)

The bigger "landscape" of *Die Koggelaar* is the political landscape in which the policies of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd and Mr John Vorster are still active. Danny, one of Boet's drinking buddies in the bar scene says explicitly: "En met doktor Hendrik en oom John aan ons sy kan ons nie verkeerd gaan nie"[And with doctor Hendrik and uncle John on our side nothing can go wrong] (p. 30). This conversation takes place just before Anker is brutally humiliated because he is a coloured person in a white man's bar.

It is clear from various incidents in the play that Boet Cronje is a racist – not only apparent in some of his remarks ("Hou die swartetjies van die werf af. Ek sien hulle begin hans word"/[Keep the blacks out of the yard. I see they are becoming cocky] (p. 5), but especially in his behaviour towards Anker in the bar scene. It is, in fact, the realisation in the end that Anker is his half-brother which pushes Boet over the edge and propels him into action (the killing of everybody). The voice of his deceased son, Klein-Ben, urges him to avenge this stain on their pedigree ("stamboek" (p. 59). The

family name, the whole tribe/clan in fact has been blemished by Ben's action, and Boet must erase this blemish by destroying the whole family. It is, of course, ironic that by killing his family and himself, Boet thus opens the path for Anker to be the next owner of the farm, since Ben has indicated earlier that Anker will inherit the farm when he dies: "Nooitgedacht sal joune wees" [Nooitgedacht will be yours] (p. 57).

In describing the Karoo landscape we (as readers) are twice told that we "know" the Karoo – how it can rain there: "Dit reën nou soos dit net in die Karoo kan reën" [It is raining now as it can only rain in the Karoo] (p. 2), and how quiet it can be there – "'n Karoovlakte, 'n oop hemel, stilte soos die Karoo dit alleen bied"[The Karoo plains, an open sky, silence as only found in the Karoo] (p. 35). It is probably not only the physical landscape of the Karoo that will be familiar to most South Africans in *Die Koggelaar*, but also the depiction of the political landscape of Afrikaner Nationalist domination during the end of the 1980s.

1.3 Karoo: "Word"scape

The word "Karoo" is linked with various other words – of which "Koggelkaroo" is probably the one with the most associative meanings in the play. Knaplat says in his introduction of Boet Cronje to the audience that he lives at "Nooitgedacht, telefoon 1713, Koggelkaroo" (p. 1). This particular description of the location of the farm is repeated on pages 14 and 17. The "koggel"/mockery motive is thus introduced also in the setting of this play in the Karoo.

The word "koggel", meaning to mock/imitate/mimic/tease, is used in various permutations in this play (as verb: "koggel"/to mock; as noun in "koggelaar"/mock⁵ or "Koggelkaroo"; and found in other words such as

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5. Vermeulen (1996: 57) translates the word "koggelaar" as "mockery" in his article and states that "(w)ithin the context of the play the word *koggelaar* means inter alia a person or personified figure who mocks, taunts, challenges, derides, provokes, etc." Coetser (1991: 45) translates "koggelaar" as "teaser" – a word that perhaps does not convey all the "negative" connotations of the word "koggelaar" as strongly as the word "mockery". Three meanings of the word "koggelaar" are given in Odendal & Gouws, namely (1) "Iemand wat 'n ander koggel", (2) "Stoterige, byterige trekdier", (3) "Voëltjie met wit voorkop en ken en 'n wit streep bo die oog, wat ander voëls se sang naboots en lief is om naby skaapkrake te bly waar hy baie insekte vang: *Oenanthe pileata*; skaapwagter" (2005: 594). The first meaning of the word is thus simply someone mocking someone else, while the second meaning refers to a stubborn (butting and snappish) draught-animal, while the third meaning refers to a little bird that mimics the song of other birds and usually lives in a sheep kraal, the so-called "skaapwagter" (directly translated as "shepherd"). The third meaning thus also brings to the fore both the motive of mockery, as well as the role played by sheep in this play.

“koggelmandervoet”). Boet Cronje, God and nature are linked by the use of the word “koggel” or “koggelaar”. Boet accuses God of mocking/taunting him by not giving relief to the drought-stricken earth (p. 60), while Anker names Boet earlier as the “koggelaar” (p. 55). Boet taunts God through his actions (e.g. collecting money to buy glasses for Him so that He can see the effects of the drought (p. 57); and in the end painting the dried-up bottom of the farm dam white for God to see how empty it is (p. 60). When Boet believes that the clouds are also mocking him because they don't bring rain (p. 41), he starts to fire into them. When it eventually does start to rain (after his suicide), Anker states that the clouds are not mocking them now (p. 2, 61). By linking the word “Karoo” with the word “koggel”, Fourie expands the connotative range of the word “Karoo” to also include those meanings generated by the word “koggel”.

The repetition of the word “Karoo” in the names of the plants (“anker karoo” and “silwerkaroo”) underlines the close – almost symbiotic – relationship between place and plants in the Karoo. The “anker karoo”/ (anchorkaroo): *pentzia incana*, is named as such because of its well-developed root system and the manner in which it branches out to make new plants: “[a]nchors, as in the well-known ankerkaroo bossie, are formed when roots develop where branches touch the soil” (Esler et al. 2006: 48). It is according to David Shearing “the dominant karoo bush” (1994: 29), and “a very common shrub ... A staple feed of animals on most farms” (1994: 170). The “silwer karoo”/silver Karoo: *plinthus karooicus* is a shrub that is “very drought resistant” (1994: 60) and according to Esler et al., often has a “longer lifespan than people” (2006: 32).

The reference to “koggelmandervoet” by Knaplat in his first speech does not only introduce the “koggel”/mockery motive in the play, but also links the plant and animal world in one word. The “koggelmandervoet” is namely a

low-growing shrub with a huge root system, seldom more than 20 cm high, although in spared veld it can reach more than three times that size. The crown is a mass of closely-packed branches covered with small, dark green leaves arranged in the shape of small hands like those of the agama lizard (koggelmander) Probably the most palatable plant in the Karoo.

(Shearing 1994: 60)

The name of the **plant** “koggelmandervoet” has enclosed in itself a reference to an **animal**/reptile – the “koggelmander”/agama lizard.

Although the “koggelmandervoet” is a plant, Knaplat activates the secondary reference to animal/reptile of this word in the first utterance in the play: “Dan het die koggelmandervoet hom tóg vertrap”/ [Then he has after all been trampled on by the koggelmandervoet] (p. 1). An agama lizard can probably trample on a small insect in the veld, but it is clear from this image that the “koggelmandervoet” is a force large enough to have

destroyed a strong man, Boet Cronje. It is almost as if some sort of prehistoric animal has arisen from the soil to trample Boet to death – as if nature itself has turned against him. Knaplat reinforces this idea when stating in his second utterance that “[h]ier in ons kontrei is dit wet, ’n waarheid soos kaiingklip en muistepelbos: vertrap jy hom, vertrap hy jou”/ [Here in our region it is law, a truth like the kaiingklip and muistepelbos: if you trample on him, he will trample on you] (p. 1). Boet Cronje exploited (trampled on) nature and nature then turned against him and eventually “destroyed” him.

The word “Karoo” thus carries a range of meanings and implied meanings in this play: on a first level it indicates a physical location that is well known for its droughts. By linking it to the word “koggel” it also evokes Boet’s relationship with God and nature (the plants and animals on the farm), while the various associative links between place (Karoo) and the plants/animals found in that space (“anker karoo”, “silwerkaroo”, “koggelmandervoet”) also illustrate the close relationship that exist between the various elements (earth/plants/animals) .

2 Man/Animals/Earth/God

2.1 Man/Animals

Die Koggelaar opens just after Boet Cronje has shot and killed himself in the dried-up bottom of the farm dam. Knaplat (portrayed by a black actor wearing a cream-coloured suit) is the first to appear on stage, wearing a white mask made of wire depicting a ram’s head. Knaplat is thus a sheep – the stud ram used by Boet Cronje for breeding purposes on Nooitgedacht. When Anker, the coloured farmworker, arrives (probably to see what has happened to Boet Cronje) a conversation ensues between these three characters.

Boet is astounded that Knaplat can speak (“Knaplat! Jy praat? Jy het ’n stem?”/ [Knaplat! You can speak? You have a voice?]) (p. 2). Boet then feels compelled to explain to Knaplat and Anker why he has acted in the manner that he has. Knaplat is at first not really interested in Boet’s explanations, but immediately reproaches him that he has never really cared for the animals on the farm – never really “listened” to them: “Jy het my nooit werklik geken nie. Ons was een met hierdie grond, maar vir jou was ek iets om getap te word; die skaap met wie jy kon maak soos en wat jy wou. My hele bestaan was net vir jou.”/ [You did not really know me. We were one with this soil, but for you I was something to be tapped; the sheep with which you could do whatever you wanted to. My whole existence was in your hands] (p. 3).

When Boet blames the drought, stating that they were both affected by it, Knaplat disagrees with him: “Jy op jou manier en ek op myne, ja! Maar sáám was ons nog nooit nie!”/ [You in your way and I in my way, yes! But we were never together!] (p. 4). Shortly after this conversation Knaplat again conveys to Anker Boet’s astonishment that he (the sheep) has a voice: “Hy was verstom toe hy ontdek ek het ’n stem. Kan jy dit glo?”/ [He was astounded when he discovered I had a voice. Can you believe it?] (p. 5). Anker’s reply to this is simply: “Ja, hy’t graag net na homself geluister.”/ [Yes, he often listened to himself only] (p. 5).

Boet then proceeds to relate various incidents in his life to Knaplat and Anker, for example bringing his new wife, Anna, to the farm; the birth of their son, Klein-Ben; the death of Klein-Ben in a borehole accident; the racist incident in the bar; and the psychological effect the worsening drought had on him. Knaplat comments on these incidents and is often critical of Boet’s habit to absolve himself of any blame in some of these incidents. When Boet discusses Anna’s supposed infertility, he describes Anna’s request to have his sperm tested as a procedure that will humiliate him: “Boet: Sy en die dokters. Hulle wou verder gaan, my aan groter vernedering onderwerp. Knaplat: Soos jou saad tap en dan versterk?”/ [Boet: She and the doctors. They wanted to go further, subject me to even greater humiliation. Knaplat: By tapping your seed and fortifying it?] (p. 40). It is inconceivable to Boet that his “seed” could be defective and later in the play it is also unacceptable to him that his bloodline could be “soiled” by the existence of a coloured half-brother.

He is the master of his sheep, and need not “listen” to his animals, but will exploit them for his own purposes. When Knaplat accuses him near the end of the play that his actions are the cause of the animals suffering on this farm: “Jy het jou grond moeg gewei; jy weier steeds om die water wat daar is oop te boor”/ [You overgrazed your pasture; you still refuse to drill open the water that is in the ground] (p. 44), Boet angrily replies that it is his sheep and his soil: “Dis my vee en my grond” (p. 44). When the drought intensifies and Anker advises him to reduce his sheep by half and to sink the borehole, Boet reacts by assaulting Anker.

2.2 Man/Earth

The three men (Ben, Boet and Anker) – all three farmers on Nooitgedacht – are seen by Betta to be the most affected by the drought. When describing the three men Betta states that they have become one with the soil: “[E]k dink hulle’t deur die jare al een geword met die grond” (p. 13). Although **Boet** is deeply connected to the soil and is intensely affected by the death of his sheep, he is also to a large degree their enemy. He overgrazes the veld and stubbornly refuses to reopen the borehole after Klein Ben’s accidental death there, although everybody on the farm urges him to do so. He is in

fact out of balance with his environment, and needs to either change his ways or be eliminated for nature to recover.

Ben knows the Karoo and tries to convey this knowledge to his grandson. He tells Klein-Ben at the start of the borehole scene that the Koggelkaroo has its own way of doing things and has its own habits: “Die Koggelkaroo het sy eie gang en gewoonte” (p. 17) and proceeds to tell him about the “koolganna” to convey to him a lesson in humility:

Soos die koolganna hier. (*Tel 'n bossie op*) Jy kan as't ware sê dis die dood met lewe in hom. Eintlik is hy nie 'n bossie nie, maar boom. Sien jy hier, dié garings? Dis sy bas. Bas soos 'n boom se bas ... want hy is 'n boom. Maar die droë hemel, die dor aarde het gemaak dat hy sy man as boom nie kon staan nie, Hy's vervloek tot bossie ... maar hy't boom gebly. Klein ... en sal jy my glo? ... nederig. Dis uit nederigheid dat sy koppie so hang. En as 'n skaap hom kom vreet staan hy ook kop omlaag ... maar die skaap uit dankbaarheid. (p. 17)

[Like the koolganna here. (*Picks up a little bush*) You can almost say it is death with life inside it. It is, in fact, not a small bush, but a tree. Look here, do you see these threads? They are its bark. Bark like a tree's bark ... because it is a tree. But the dry sky, the arid earth caused its failure to hold its own. It is doomed to be a bush ... but it has retained its essence as a tree. Small ... and will you believe me? ... humble, it is out of humility that its small head hangs. And when a sheep comes to feed on it, it also stands with its head bowed ... but the sheep out of gratitude.] (p. 17)

The special relationship between animals and plants in the Karoo is illustrated in the “koolganna” example. Ben describes the bush in visual terms as being an image of humility, while the sheep (mimicking the plant's stance) is described as a model of gratitude. Ben's view of nature thus stands in stark contrast to the arrogant way in which Boet treats nature. Although Ben opposes Boet's actions and tries to change Boet's mind, he is unsuccessful in his attempts and is the first person to be killed by Boet.

Anker also knows what is best for the farm and like the “anker karoo”/ (anchorkaroo) bush is naturally part of this landscape. While tracking a “rooikatspoor”⁶ through the “silwer karoo” he finds Anna (abandoned by Boet, naked in the veld in searing hot temperatures) and rescues her. Hetta tells us that he is able to fend for himself under the harsh conditions of the drought by hunting for “ystervark”/porcupine and “kolhaas”/mountain-hare (p. 12). He knows what is best for the farm and the animals on the farm, and

6. The “rooikat”, *Felis caracal*, is a caracal or South African lynx – a wild predator that will kill as many sheep as it can find. Anker's action of tracking the caracal implies that he is looking after the sheep on this farm by trying to protect them from predators.

tells Boet to stop exploiting them: “Meneer moet net met minder tevrede wees. Verminder die skaap met die helfte, boor die aar oop, laat Knaplat rus ... Meneer wil net ontvang, maar wil niks gee nie”/[You must be satisfied with less, Sir. Decrease the sheep by half, open the borehole, rest Knaplat ... You only want to take, but don't want to give anything back, Sir] (p. 54). Anker's advice to be more careful with the resources on the farm and to care more for their environment, is rejected by Boet. Because Boet in his arrogance is destroying nature, he has to die. When Boet is finally dead, Anker and Knaplat celebrate the end of his domination over them by putting the wire mask on Boet's head and carrying him out while mocking him the whole time. The rain that falls during this episode can symbolically be seen as a blessing from nature – a new, fertile period lies ahead for the farm, Knaplat and Anker.

2.3 Man/God

The great differences between Boet and Anker's attitudes and actions are again demonstrated when one focuses on their respective viewpoints of God in this play.

Boet states rather arrogantly at the beginning of the dramatic events when he is showing his new bride, Anna, the farm, that God must be a farmer's “partner” (“vennoot” (pp. 4-5)) or else one will not be successful. Boet is at first happy with his partner: “Kyk hoe sorg Hy. Kyk daar – so skuins teen die skurwe rantjies – die rooigras”⁷/ [Look how He is caring for us. Look there – against the sloping ridges – the red-grass] (p. 5), but becomes increasingly more disillusioned with this “partnership” when the drought continues: “Die lang en verskriklike droogte het gekom. God het ons geslaan, beproef en verlaat. Maar toe ander rondom my dwaal het ek vasgetrap. Sterk in my geloof bly staan”/ [The long and devastating drought came. God chastised us, tested us and abandoned us. But when others went astray I stood firm.] (p. 9).

When the drought continues Boet's faith in God begins to waiver and in a conversation with his father he mentions for the first time that he thinks God is mocking them: “Boet: Koggel Hy ons”/ [Boet: Is He mocking us?] (p.

7. The abundance of “rooigras” (red-grass)/*Themeda triandra* on a farm is important for a farmer. According to Esler et al.

[g]rasses are generally acknowledged to be the stock farmer's most valuable asset, because they are productive, tend to be palatable and protect the soil Tussock grasses, including ... rooigras ... form tufts that die back in dry or frosty weather, but resprout after rain. Throughout the Kalahari and most of the Karoo ... the grasses remain palatable even when dry. Being multistemmed from their bases, grasses protect the soil from wind and water erosion.

(Esler et al. 2006: 29)

13). When Ben replies that God is only testing them, Boet apologises for his remark. After their son's death, Boet and Anna try unsuccessfully for her to become pregnant again. Boet takes her into the veld where he leaves her naked under the blazing sun, because he believes that the sun will regulate her temperature and heighten her fertility (p. 37). During his conversation with Anna he again states: "Die Here is wreed met ons ... Hy koggel ons"/ [God is cruel to us ... He mocks us] (p. 36). This time he does not apologise for his remark.

As the relationship between Boet and God deteriorates, Boet's actions are described by the other characters as being like those of someone "mocking" God. His mother, Betta, remarks that Boet is shooting into the clouds "asof hy God bly koggel"/ [as if he is still mocking God] (p. 41). In his prayer later in the church he openly attacks God and reproaches God for not sending him any rain, for taking away his son and for being the reason why Anna is acting strangely: "Anna! Kom jy my koggel?"/ [Anna! Have you come to mock me?] (pp. 42-43). He now believes that everyone has abandoned him: "My grond, my God, my vrou – almal het my verlaat"/ [My soil, my God, my wife – everyone has abandoned me] (p. 44).

As a defiant gesture against God he forces Anker to put up a sign at the farm gate that he is collecting money to buy glasses for God. When Anker tries to oppose his action and accuses Boet that he is the mocker and not God ("Alles, almal koggel jou glo. Maar jy ... jy is die groot koggelaar! Jy wil God speel!"/ [Apparently everything, everybody mocks you. But you ... you are the big mocker! You want to play God] (p. 55). Anker's naming Boet as the "mocker" – the "one who wants to play God" – finally unmasks Boet's arrogance and his disregard for everything and everybody, even God. Boet is thus not only psychologically unbalanced (i.e. out of balance with himself), but also out of balance with all the other elements around him.

Anker's behaviour and actions contrast Boet's in regard with God. His simple and heartfelt prayer in the veld for rain (p. 14) can be directly contrasted with Boet's prayer in the church (p. 42). In Anker's prayer he foregrounds the suffering of the animals and nature during this drought and humbly asks for help:

Vader in die hemel, wees nou Vader vir Jou kinders ... vir hul vee en bietjie wild wat nog hier loop. Rooikat en jakkals spog met spore by elke krip ... tot in die krale. Dooie lammers lê die kampe vol. Daar's ooie ook wat vrek, nie net van dors en droogte nie ... ek sweer ook van verdriet. Here, saans kom blêr hul in my slaap. Kyk asseblief na Nooitgedacht – die hele Koggelkaroo – kyk ons nie mis nie.

(p. 14)

[Father in the heaven, be a father to Your children ... to their cattle and the little game that is still here. Caracals and jackals are bragging with the tracks they are leaving at every manger ... even in the kraals. Dead lambs are lying

all over the camps. There are ewes that are also dying, not only of thirst and the drought ... I swear also from grief. Lord, at night they bleat in my sleep. Please look after Nooitgedacht – the whole False Karoo – do not overlook us.]
(p. 14)

3 Crossing Borders: Real and Figurative Borders

The close relationships between the various elements (Man/Animal/Plant/God) have been shown and discussed in both the above sections. These elements interact with each other and are also interdependent. This “interdependence” of the various elements can finally also be traced linguistically in this play. Two aspects will be highlighted to demonstrate this interdependence, namely (1) the various “sheep” references found in this play in which the real and figurative meanings of this word are used; and (2) the conjunction of different elements/worlds in one word.

3.1 The “Sheep” References

Knaplat, the breeding ram on this farm, represent all the sheep on the farm. By indicating in some detail in the first stage direction (p. 1) that the actor playing this role should be a black actor, dressed in a cream-coloured suit and wearing a white wire mask (in the form of a ram’s head) over his head, a further association is introduced in Knaplat’s description, namely that of the “racial other” (as mentioned by Vermeulen (p. 57)). Both groups (animals/people of colour) are exploited/oppresed by Boet, and by visually linking these two worlds together in Knaplat’s costume, the border between these worlds is crossed and the common ground (exploitation/oppresion) brought to the fore.

The border between the animal and human world is again crossed when some of the characters are described in terms of the “sheep” reference. Knaplat describes himself as being simply a sheep: “die skaap hier rond”/ [the sheep around here] (p. 1). When he later discusses Boet with Anker he makes the comment that Boet is a “stomme skaap”/[a wretched/-stupid sheep], i.e. a figurative use of the word “sheep” is now introduced in the play.

But it is not only Boet that is described in terms of a sheep. His wife, Anna, is also described in these terms when Boet compares her to a “grootuier-ooi”/pregnant ewe, and when he tells her that she is ready for her first “lamb”: “Jy’s reg vir jou eerste lam” (p. 6). When Anna does not fall pregnant again after Klein-Ben’s death, she sees herself as “’n uitskot-ooi”/ [a ewe that has been rejected] (p. 13).

Although Klein-Ben’s birth and later descriptions of him as a young boy are not presented directly in terms of sheep imagery, other animal comparisons and imagery are used. He is, for example, described at his birth

as a “ramkat”. (Vermeulen translates it as “a combination of *ram* and *tomcat*” (1996: 68)). When he is given liquor to drink at the borehole scene he is described as follows: “Sy ogies staan eintlik soos dié van ’n trek-sprinkaan”/ [His little eyes are staring fixedly like those of a flying locust] (p. 20).

3.2 Different Worlds Linked in One Word

When one looks closely at some of the words used by Fourie in this play to name/describe various plants and animals, it is interesting to note that he often combines various worlds (animals/plants/earth) in one word. We find an example of this linguistic technique in the “koggelmandervoet” reference (discussed in 1.2) and also in the following words:

- **kaiingklip**

According to Odendal, et al. (2005: 512) it is a “klein, swart klippie wat aan ’n kaiing laat dink”/ [a small black stone that reminds one of a crackling] “Kaiing”/ [a crackling/roasted animal fat (i.e. animal world), is thus combined with “stone” (i.e. earth/nature).

- **muistepelbos**

In the description of this bush (plant world) we find a reference/comparison to the animal world (“muistepel”/nipple of a mouse).

- **bergskilpad**

The “bergskilpad”/mountain tortoise links together the earth (“mountain”) and the animal (“tortoise”) worlds.

The use of this device again demonstrates how the various “worlds” (plant/animal/human) are interwoven in this play.

Conclusion

In my reading of Pieter Fourie’s *Die koggelaar* I wanted to move away from the more “traditional” reading and interpretation of this play, namely the focus on a so-called “human-centred approach” that analyses Boet Cronje’s role as the protagonist in this play, as well as his interaction with the other characters in the play. In my ecocritical reading of the play I focused on the “non-human” elements (animals, plants, earth/landscape) in this play and on their relationships with each other as well as with humans. These relationships are determined by two important natural forces, namely those of the interdependence of these worlds, as well as the fact that a certain balance

must be maintained between the various elements/worlds. Boet Cronje, in his arrogance, placed himself as a “God” above these elements and was out of balance with himself (his “psychosis”) and with the various worlds. His death in the end is necessary for balance to be regained in these worlds and for a successor who is more in tune with the various elements and these worlds, namely Anker, to take over.

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