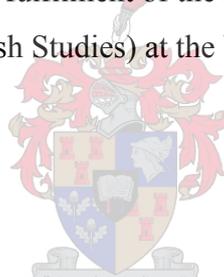


**Bodies and Borders:
Space and Subjectivity in Three South African Texts**

F. Adèle Mulder

14267012

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Supervisor: Prof. D.C. Klopper

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Declaration

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the relationship between body, subjectivity and space in three antipastoral novels. The texts which I will be discussing, Karel Schoeman's *This Life*, Anne Landsman's *The Devil's Chimney* and J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*, all foreground the female protagonist's relationship to a specifically South African landscape in a colonial time-frame. The inter-relatedness between the body, subjectivity and space is explored in order to show that there is a shifting interaction between these registers in the novels. Arising from this interaction, the importance of perspective as a way of being in the world is foregrounded. The approach adopted in this study is based on the assumption that our experience depends upon how we make meaning of the world through our bodies as we encounter people, places and objects. The lived, embodied experience is always a *subjective* experience.

The conceptual framework is derived broadly from psychoanalysis and phenomenology. My primary concern in this study is how marginal subject positions are explored in the space of the South African farm, which, traditionally, is an ideologically fraught locus of Afrikaner patriarchy and oppression. The novels are narrated by distinctive female voices, each speaking differently, but all having the effect of undermining and exposing the hegemony of the patriarchal farm space. In all three novels the question of genre is involved as forming the space of the text itself. The novels speak to the tradition of the *plaasroman* and the pastoral and, in doing so, open up a conversation with the past.

Opsomming

In hierdie tesis word die verhouding tussen die liggaam, subjektiwiteit en ruimte ondersoek in drie romans wat teen die pastorale literêre tradisie spreek. Die betrokke romans is *This Life* deur Karel Schoeman, *The Devil's Chimney* deur Anne Landsman en *In the Heart of the Country* deur J.M. Coetzee. Die romans speel af in 'n koloniale tydperk waar die vroulike protagonis se verhouding met die Suid-Afrikaanse landskap op die voorgrond gestel word. Die verwantskap tussen die liggaam, subjektiwiteit en ruimte word ondersoek om die interaksie tussen hierdie drie konsepte ten toon te stel. Wat vanuit hierdie interaksie voortspruit is die ontologiese rol wat perspektief speel as wyse om met die wêreld te verkeer. Hierdie studie benader die romans vanuit die siening dat die mens se ervaring afhang van hoe hy/sy die wêreld verstaan deur die interaksie tussen die liggaam en ander mense, ruimtes en objekte. Die beliggaamde ervaring is dus 'n subjektiewe ervaring.

Die konsepsuele raamwerk van hierdie ondersoek is afgelei van psigoanalise en fenomenologie. Die kern van hierdie studie is om te ondersoek hoe die posisie van die randfiguur in die ruimte van die Suid-Afrikaanse plaas ten toon gestel word. Die plaas is tradisioneel 'n ideologiese bestrede ruimte van Afrikaner patriargie en onderdrukking. Die romans word verhaal deur drie kenmerkende en verskillende vroulike stemme wat dien om die hegemonie van die patriargale opset op die plase te ondermyn en ontbloot. Die vraagstuk van genre is in al drie romans betrokke aangesien genre die ruimte van die teks self uitmaak. Die romans spreek teen die tradisie van die plaasroman en die pastorale roman en tree sodoende in gesprek met die verlede.

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“I am corrupted to the bone with the beauty of this forsaken world.”

In the Heart of the Country

- J.M. Coetzee

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing the question of space into ways in which we seek to speak about identity in literature confronts us with issues of physical and social borders. These borders are constructed to keep certain people in, and others out. Borders are thus places where conflict arises, where one comes face to face with the *other* from whom one is trying to separate oneself. Literature provides a way of understanding how space influences identity-construction because, as Viljoen et al explain, “space in literature as in life is never just an empty, neutral extension but much rather a place that has been named, demarcated, allocated” (3).

The three texts which I will be discussing, Karel Schoeman’s *This Life* (1993), Anne Landsman’s *The Devil’s Chimney* (1998) and J.M. Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country* (1976) all portray life on the farm in a colonial context. The novels foreground the farm as space in which the characters function. However, the farm is not portrayed as a mere backdrop for the actions of the characters, but is seen to constitute the identities of the characters. This relationship is not one-sided: while the identities of the characters are determined by the spaces they inhabit, their identities in turn affect the way in which they experience their surroundings. This interplay between identity and space may be viewed as a “symbiotic relationship, a mutual dependency creating meaningfulness” (Viljoen et al 12).

While the three novels I will be looking at focus on the female protagonists’ experience of the farm, these novels should not be cast as typical pastoral narratives. In his book *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams traces the development of the pastoral narrative, and observes that, by working through images of the Golden Age and Paradise, the traditional pastoral narrative is concerned with providing the reader with “the quiet, the innocence, the simple plenty of the countryside” (35). Williams stresses that this representation is an exalted *image* of “actual English country life and its social and economic relations” (38). He argues that this idealised image depends mainly on the contrast between the country and the city, and that this contrast is largely dependent on the role of the observer, to whom the “means of agricultural production” (61) are attractive in comparison with the industrialisation in the city. Along with this contrast between modes of production, the inhabitants of the country are endowed with “rural virtue” whereas the city-dweller is filled with “urban greed” (64). To shift this focus on “rural virtue” to a South African context, consider the following extract

from Pauline Smith's *The Beadle*, first published in 1926. The reader is given access to the thoughts of an Englishman upon encountering the inhabitants of Aangenaam¹ valley:

in the valley he had been welcomed with a simple, almost Biblical hospitality which had delighted him ... He had taken pleasure in everything – in the kindness of the people, in the people themselves, in their houses, their lands, and the slow, simple ways of their life. (15-16)

The novels which I will be examining are deeply critical of the idyllic “slow, simple” lifestyles which are portrayed in pastoral narratives. Instead of following in the tradition of pastoral literature, these novels treat the pastoral image ironically, thereby providing what one might call a post-pastoral perspective. Whereas traditional pastoral narratives depict humans living in harmony with their surroundings, the relationship here is registered as one of disjunction. Another important difference is the way in which the landscape is described. It is not uncommon to find lyrical passages devoted to the magnificence of the almost sacred landscape in pastoral narratives, whereas the three novels take care to describe both the beauty and the cruelty to be found in nature. The novels share common ground in the way that all three protagonists are isolated, even though there is sometimes family near them. This lack of interpersonal relationships is in many ways ascribed to the locality of the farm itself. There is simply a lack of society in which to move about. In the absence of meaningful interpersonal relationships, the women's relationships to their surroundings are emphasised. Viljoen et al argue that the farm is also a space which is “marked with ambivalence: on the one hand it is a safe place, home; on the other there is a constant fear of loss, an anxiety about the land, a feeling of insecurity” (10). In the ambiguous context of the South African farm, the relationship to the landscape is never harmonious. J.M. Coetzee identifies a disharmony that would seem to be inherent to the farm as locality. He maintains that the farm, as space, is not only nature:

the farm is also a place of human habitation, and indeed so human in its bigotry, hypocrisy, and idleness that all that redeems it from being an African town in miniature is its setting in nature. The farm thus has two aspects: nature and town. These aspects merely coexist. They form no synthesis. (*White Writing* 64-65)

¹ Literally translated ‘Pleasant’ or ‘Agreeable’.

The idealised image that pastoral literature portrays is undermined as the reader is confronted with the harsh reality of life on a farm, where nature and culture clash. While the typical pastoral narrative inherited by South African writers derives from a European tradition of landscape writing, the contemporary rewriting of the pastoral narrative by South African writers suggest that this transposition is inadequate in dealing with both the South African landscape and its social conditions. Through rewriting the traditional pastoral narrative, South African writers intimate that traditional pastoral narratives ignore the physical and psychic labour required to survive in these circumstances.

This study focuses on the relationships between women and their environments. The farm environment, as the key space I will be examining, comprises various spaces. The farmhouse as a domestic space is very important because of the way in which the female protagonists function within it. This domestic space is a meeting-place between the women and the workers on the farm, as they very often occupy the same space. Certain rooms are locked or off-limits, whereas the women are mostly in the spaces of the houses where work needs to be done. The narrator in *This Life*, for instance, chooses to occupy marginal spaces where she can escape human contact or keep from being noticed (Louise Viljoen 194). The labour which the women perform has an effect on how they experience the spaces around them. Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* and the unnamed narrator in *This Life* spend the bulk of their time inside the house and their daily tasks are mostly those related to taking care of the people who run the farm. These two women live in the large space of the farm, yet they are mostly confined to the inside of the house. Beatrice in *The Devil's Chimney*, however, takes charge of the farm after it transpires that her husband cannot cope with its demands. Beatrice not only takes over in the form of her transformation into what Jill Nudelman describes as “a strongly sexualised woman who attains a degree of freedom and agency through her successful foray into capitalism and empire building” (116), but also through physically changing her appearance by cutting off her hair and wearing men's clothing. Consequently, the spatial investigation conducted by the study will involve not only physical surroundings, in other words, the tangible world around the female protagonists, but also the social and imaginative spaces in which these women find themselves. The nature of the women's relationships to their surroundings will be examined in terms of how their bodies perceive, and respond to, the spaces around them.

In South African anti-pastoral literature, the question of land-ownership is one of the main concerns which, at times, make these farms seem inhospitable. Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* articulates this feeling of not belonging when she says “I do not think it was ever intended that people should live here” (118). Loflin comments on the feeling of being rejected by the land and notes that “[f]or white South African writers, the landscape of South Africa is scored with the history of an oppression which seems to preclude any natural relationship to the land” (101). She continues by saying that “white characters have a difficult time feeling at home in the landscape” (Loflin 101). In contrast to the psychic harmony of the characters in pastoral idylls, the female protagonists in the novels are, to varying degrees, all presented as being psychically unstable. In *This Life*, the protagonist isolates herself in such a way that she is perceived by those around her as a mad spinster-figure. In *The Devil’s Chimney*, Beatrice’s personality is shown to collapse as her identity becomes merged with the landscape. *In the Heart of the Country* complicates the already melancholy daydreams of the protagonist with the addition of the daughter’s incestuous desire for her father.

The novels I will be discussing are situated within a postcolonial framework, in as much as they are concerned with giving voice to the marginalised, forgotten figures in colonial history. Commenting on J.M. Coetzee’s earlier novels, Rita Barnard says that his work is concerned with “bringing whatever is marginalized and occluded into view” (10). She continues by saying:

In the case of the South African pastoral, the chief occluded element is, of course, the labor of the black worker, whose inscriptions of and claim to the land constitute, as Coetzee has argued, the genre’s embarrassing blind spot. (10)

Although the main characters in the novels which will be discussed are white women, these novels make visible the ‘blind spot’ of traditional South African pastoral narratives by bringing the interactions between the women and the farm workers to the forefront in varying degrees. Both *The Devil’s Chimney* and *In the Heart of the Country* create moments of sexual interaction between the white women and the farm workers, which foregrounds those who would normally be absent in typical South African pastoral narratives. Although *This Life* does not stage physical encounters of this kind, various other interactions between the protagonist and the farm workers are shown. *This Life* questions the white farmers’ claims of land-ownership, with the protagonist remembering how her family forcibly removed a man

named Jan Baster from his land, which ironically enough is called Bastersfontein. In varying ways, then, the novels draw attention to the people who were previously ignored in typical South African pastoral narratives².

The farm narrative in South Africa, especially in its anti-pastoral form, has become an important critique of the patriarchy that reigns on South African farms (Viljoen et al 10). The novels I will be discussing rewrite the colonial situation from the point of view, then, of yet another marginalised figure on the South African farm. The colonial appropriation of land is a masculine act, and the novels give voice to the ambiguous figure who is both part of this endeavour and yet also victimised within this patriarchal hierarchy. The importance of projecting the female voice within this pastoral setting is emphasised if one reads the anti-pastoral novel as a rewriting of the colonial, patriarchal narrative. This friction with patriarchy is registered in the novels I will be discussing. In Schoeman's *This Life* the female narrator relates how it was her grandmother, and her mother in particular, who took care of the farm and especially its expansion. *The Devil's Chimney* relates how an Englishwoman is forced to take charge of the ostrich farm after her husband fails to cope with the farm. Coetzee's novel confronts this struggle with patriarchy head-on in the form of Magda murdering her father (or imagining this patricide) and burying him on the farm.

Perhaps the best way to examine how the three protagonists are set against patriarchal structure is to trace how they resist the Symbolic, the realm of speech and law which regulates cultural practices and norms, and which is associated with the name of the father. Within this Symbolic or patriarchal structure people are assigned hierarchical roles, where, in the farm-space, the white male owner is dominant, followed by the female, and finally the farm workers, who are subservient to both. As the realm of language, law and culture, the Symbolic is countered by something which evades easy assimilation into its structures. Derek Hook locates the body as being neither fully in the realm of nature nor culture, arguing that the body should rather be seen as a meeting place between the two. He claims that the body "remains a challenge to what is signifiable" (44). The further aim of this investigation is, then, to explore the concept of identity as relating to space, specifically in respect of the location of the female body. In order to do so, I shall make use of some concepts that allude to the importance of the body. In particular, I shall draw on notions of the imaginary, the

² When speaking of the typical South African pastoral narrative, I have in mind the kind of idealisation evident in Pauline Smith's *The Beadle*, or the occlusion of the black labourers in C.M. van den Heever's *Summer*.

uncanny, the abject, and of bodily intentionality. Although these concepts are used and adapted quite liberally throughout the chapters, they do not constitute the main focus of this study. These concepts will be used simply as heuristic tools to explore my primary concern, which is how marginal subject positions are explored in the space of the farm.

Lacan's concept of the imaginary sees that the subject's ego is formed through identification with an other, or something outside of the subject. Identity is thus seen to be constructed from the outside. Lacan's account of the mirror stage, the "threshold of the visible world" (3), where the subject has to distinguish his or her own body from the space it inhabits through differentiation, is particularly useful since it establishes a spatial relationship between the body of the subject and the space it inhabits. Elizabeth Grosz argues that this recognition in the mirror "not only presents the subject with an image of its own body in a visualised exteriority, but also duplicates the environment, placing real and virtual space in contiguous relations" (87). Grosz's reading shows that the subject not only has to identify with the image in the mirror, but that this identification also locates the subject's body in space and thus sets the stage for spatial relationships. Her distinction between 'real' and 'virtual' space can also be useful in understanding how it might be harmful to the subject to relate to virtual space instead of the real, or how it can become easy to confuse one with the other.

Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny describes "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). This is important in order to understand how something which is familiar can become threatening to the subject. Freud states that "[t]he better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it" (221). Freud interestingly makes use of the word 'orientated' to show how something can produce an uncanny effect. This shows that nothing is inherently uncanny. Something has to be *perceived* in a certain way in order to produce an uncanny effect. Freud defines *Heimlich* (homely) as "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar" (222). I will use this distinction between homely and unhomely to focus on the farmhouse as space. Vidler, for example, describes which aspects of a house are able to produce uncanny effects in people, namely "its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort" (7). Vidler's commentary opens the door for understanding the farm house as a place with an excess of memories, objects and values which do not belong to the protagonists. The houses and almost everything in them are

passed down over years and are indeed spaces where the familiar can become unfamiliar and threatening. Hook describes the uncanny as “an upsetting of the subject’s dividing lines, of its constitutive inside/outside distinctions” (47). The uncanny disrupts the borders between the ego and the outside of the body because the body is, for some reason, not finding the necessary stabilisation in the objects around it (47). The uncanny can thus be seen as being a threat to the unity of the ego, a threat which impacts on the body itself in the form a visceral reaction.

The body is a socio-cultural construct, in as much as society assigns specific roles to the subject. The women in the novels take up several roles assigned to them, yet these roles are seen to disintegrate throughout the novels as the women resist them. Landscape is seen to determine how the social community of the novels is structured, seeing as the people within this community are physically situated few and far apart. By reading the women’s actions and the responses of those around them to their actions through Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject, I will examine how their position in society is structured. Kristeva projects the abject as an indefinable thing which threatens the very boundaries upon which society is founded. It is that which “disturbs identity, system, order”; “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*Powers* 4). As with the uncanny, then, the abject is that which serves to destabilise the ego, and which also causes visceral effects in the body. My concern is largely with the fact that the abject is also a threat to the Symbolic itself, as it points to and disrupts the boundaries upon which the Symbolic is founded. The abject “is what the symbolic must reject, cover over and contain” (Gross 89). The protagonists of the novels all threaten and transgress society’s rules, thereby pointing to the inherent fragility of the Symbolic borders. The women draw attention the unstable Symbolic in various ways. The protagonist in *In the Heart of the Country* draws attention to the oldest taboo through her incestuous desire for her father. In *This Life* the protagonist refuses to participate in society and instead stands outside of it. The protagonist in *The Devil’s Chimney* has sexual relations with the workers on the farm.

The visceral affects caused by the abject and the uncanny, affects which threaten the unity of the ego, show how the body is in the ambiguous position of being located somewhere between the purely physical and the psychological. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s exposition of the concept of perception provides an account of how the body relates to the space it inhabits. He moves away from the traditional mind/body dualism in order to arrive at an integrated

definition. He argues that we move through the world via perception, which he describes as “neither brute sensation nor rational thought, but an aspect of the body’s intentional grip on its physical and social environment” (Carman & Hansen 12). Merleau-Ponty’s concept of bodily intentionality as stated above illustrates that perception is an active process. Merleau-Ponty explains it as follows:

By considering the body in movement we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them. (102)

Bodily intentionality is thus a creative process which describes how the body makes meaning of the physical and social world it inhabits. Our perception shapes how we see the world, which means that spaces *become* something different for each subject. It is then also the body that determines perception. Merleau-Ponty’s observations on movement show the following: “The things which I perceive, I perceive always in reference to my body, and this is so only because I have an immediate awareness of my body itself as it exists ‘*towards* them’” (Langer 41). Breeur notes that phenomenology is able to focus on the importance of a *lived* experience. Where an object would usually be thought of “against the background of a universally valid nature of the object – now the nature of the object will be thought of as dependent on the access one has to it” (419). People attach different meanings to objects, or lack of objects, in their world depending upon how open they are to sensations. The spaces we find ourselves in have an affect on our identities, and our identities in turn constitute the way in which we experience our surroundings. The importance of perspective as a way of being in the world is brought to the fore in all three novels. In *In the Heart of the Country*, the unreliable protagonist admits throughout the novel that she is constructing a story which is probably not true. In *This Life* the narrator constantly draws attention to the fact that memory and imagination have become indistinguishable. In *The Devil’s Chimney* the story is narrated by an alcoholic woman who lives in a different time from that of the protagonist.

By extrapolating the issues raised in the three novels within the interpretive framework of psychoanalysis and phenomenology, the importance of a *lived, embodied* experience will be highlighted. By locating the body in a space between sensation and mind, this study aims to shed light on the position of the female in the ambiguous space of colonial patriarchy and that of the marginalised worker. The concepts of subjectivity, body, and space, and how these

interact with one another in each of the texts, will be explored in order to see how these can be useful in understanding female subjectivity.

Chapter 2: Memory and Reconstruction in *This Life*

Karel Schoeman's *This Life* is the story of a woman who, on her deathbed, recollects her life on a farm in the Roggeveld. Through her hesitant narrative voice, the reader gains insight into her relationships with her family and immediate community during the late 19th and early 20th century³. Although the task of remembrance is difficult for her, it is something she is "powerless to control" (7). This resistance to recollection is evident throughout the novel. The narrator's story is interspersed with scenes that return the reader to the deathbed where she lies. She wishes to stop this flood of memories she has to make sense of, but is powerless to do so. Her story revolves around her two brothers, Jakob and Pieter, and Sofie, the woman whom they both loved. It also relates the difficult relationship between the narrator and her mother, whom she describes as a "slender, dark, quick woman with a fierce temper and a sharp tongue" (18). The narrator leads the reader through a labyrinth of entangled memories: daily life on the farm, the gradual development of the small town, and the people she has to bury during the course of her life.

This Life is a highly introspective novel which is only concerned with the mind of the narrator. We are never given access to events except through the filter of her consciousness. The questioning consciousness of the novel resonates with the aspirations of modernism as articulated by Virginia Woolf. In her essay "Modern Fiction", Woolf critiques several writers by saying that the "characters live abundantly, even unexpectedly, but it remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for?" (186). The crux of the modernist venture is not *what* is experienced, but *how* it is experienced.

Woolf articulates modernism's turn away from realist fiction in seeking not descriptions of the outside world and its stimuli, but of the inner world and its processing of those stimuli. She argues that in rendering the outside world realistic, "[s]o much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception" (188). Woolf describes a type of fiction that moves away from rendering the outside world believable and substantial, because these realistic props detract from what she feels should be the real focal point of the artist. She continues: "Life is not a series of gig lamps

³ Eva Hunter notes that at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, the narrator is in her early seventies (6).

symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo” (189). What she brings across is the urgency of not staring into a light and being blinded by it, but instead the action of averting one’s eyes and focusing on what is illuminated. The focus of modernism shifts away from phenomena and seeks to illuminate the operations of consciousness – as chaotic as that may be:

Let us record the atoms [of impressions] as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. (190)

Modernism traces the impressions of the outside world upon consciousness to “reveal the flickering of that innermost flame” (190).

The narrator of *This Life* admits to the failure of her memory at times and admits to possibly leaving important things out or highlighting otherwise unimportant events. The reader is given access not so much to her experiences as to her thoughts *on* her experiences. These experiences are not only rendered malleable by time and incompleteness of memory, but are also subject to the narrator’s conscious recreation and restructuring of events. In doing so, *This Life* provides the reader with an account of the narrator’s phenomenological experience of her life as spinster on a farm rather than an objective realist account of life. It explores what Woolf calls “life itself” (192), as it is perceived and shaped by consciousness, to which the reader is led by the narrator in *This Life*.

The novel’s prologue finds the narrator at the end of her life in her childhood bedroom struggling, as she puts it, with “[t]he darkness before my eyes, the helpless body, and this banked mass of memories through which I have to feel my way blindly” (8). She is completely immobile as she lies in the bed, “speechless and paralysed” (7), and she moves around the farm through her memories. As Du Toit notes, the narrator imagines that she has to take leave of the place where she lived before she is able to die (50). This final goodbye to the farm where she grew up is described as follows:

[a] journey back into the past, through the dark, alone across the years. I must move through the darkness of the sleeping house, soundlessly so no one will hear me, and pull open the front door; I must cross the threshold and venture outside. (9)

This journey starts in her bedroom, a place which is so filled with memories that her journey outside is hampered by intrusions from another time. The narrator expects her brother, Pieter, to climb through the window at any moment, but then she remembers that it is now impossible, for the windows were altered later in her life and he would not be able to do so. The expectation of what is supposed to happen and the realisation that this cannot happen anymore causes a psychic discontinuity and unsettlement which can only be described as uncanny. As her memories are linked to the objects and spaces around her, the sudden realisation that what should be there, according to her memories, and the reality that it is not there, causes an influx of awareness that “the windows were fitted with glass panes”, the shed where Pieter used to sleep has been demolished, and “Pieter himself is dead and rests under the chiselled stone [she] ordered from Oom Appie and paid for [herself]” (6).

Situations like the one mentioned above occur throughout the novel, where her memory and the presence of the physical objects around her do not coincide. The uncanny has an affective quality, one which impacts the body physically. The fact that the narrator is “buried in her body” (2) as Hunter describes it, necessitates the need for the narrator to imagine not only the spaces where her life took place, but to imagine her body within those spaces. The task of remembering is described in physical terms as the body’s movement through space:

The past is another country: where is the road leading there? You can but follow the track blindly where it stretches before your feet, unable to choose the direction in which you want to go. (35)

From this passage it is clear that, although the narrator’s body is physically unable to facilitate her leave-taking of the farm, the task of remembering involves, for her, an embodied consciousness. Her nostalgic monologue locates her body in the spaces she remembers with the farm as context rather than as mere backdrop. Grosz, employing Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, explains that the relationship between body and space is crucial to identity-formation:

The exploration of conceptions of space and time as necessary correlates of the exploration of corporeality. The two sets of interests are defined in reciprocal terms, for bodies are always understood within a spatial and temporal context, and space and time remain conceivable only insofar as corporeality provides the

basis for our perception and representation of them. (84)

The narrator's recollections show an active involvement with the land, a relationship which is ambivalent when one sees how she describes the space as "[m]eager land, bitter land, beloved land" (10). Grosz's emphasis on *perspective* as the meeting point between body and space shows how this relationship between body and space is always subjective. Louise Viljoen, for example, argues that *This Life* portrays a spatial form of writing history, with its emphasis on the character's sensations in the physical spaces she occupies (191). Another critic notes that Schoeman's novels often focus on what history would perceive as "unimportant individuals' recollections of the past" (Burger 32). The novel's focus is limited to a single voice in a very small geographical location, which is made even narrower due to the narrator's lack of interest in the world outside this small area. The narrator's close involvement with her environment necessitates a rewriting of history that is neither linear nor presented as objective. Her experience of the past is related in physical and spatial terms, providing the novel with a frame of reference which is closely linked to the land. She wonders, "where do those memories spring from all of a sudden, like echoes from the bottom of a well, things I did not even know I remembered any more?" (21).

Van Wyk Smith describes the South African farm as a space which is even more complicated than the nature/culture opposition invoked in my introduction would suggest. He maintains that on the South African farm the conflict between the "symbiosis with natural forces" and the struggle for survival "have acquired a peculiar intensity precisely because possession of much of the territory by whites is seen to be controversial if not illegitimate" (18). The controversy over land-ownership is registered in Schoeman's *This Life* through the voice of the narrator. The issue of ownership is brought up in the first chapter, with the narrator relating how "[t]he farm was granted to Father's grandfather when the first white people toiled up the passes of the Roggeveld mountains" (13). The implications of the words "granted" and "first *white* people" reveal that the land on which the farmers settled could hardly have been uninhabited. The novel suggests that if the white people choose to ignore the displaced, the land would serve to remind them. The narrator remembers picking up arrow-heads on the farm as a child, and her father telling her that Bushmen attacked them when he was a boy. She also remembers how "men making a furrow or digging in a field would come upon beads of polishes ostrich eggshells or a bracelet, and sometimes upon a grave with skulls and bones" (13-14). When one compares this with the narrator's voice at

the end, it is clear that these remains, however subtle they may be, are not unimportant within the structure of the novel. The narrator thinks about what people after them will find when they examine the graveyard of her own family, comprising nothing but rocks, headstones with “inscriptions that can no longer be deciphered or understood” (225), and the remains of the gifts she received, a cross and a ring.

The first description of the graveyard “with its few stone mounds and headstones in the shelter of the encircling wall of stacked stones” (11) is given in the novel’s prologue. The novel also ends with a description of the graveyard, but this time it reads: “The stones once stacked there, have broken and fallen apart, and there is no sign of them among the rocky ledges, outcrops and ridges in the flat, faded landscape of stone” (225). The circular form of the wall surrounding the graveyard is a fitting image for the circular structure of the novel, which begins and ends with the narrator in her deathbed, also her childhood-bed. The narrator finds placing events in a specific time arduous, since “[s]ummer and spring flow together and one year passes into another, and no certainty remains” (80). The family’s seasonal journey to their settlement in the Karoo is only hampered three times in her life by births or injury. The rest of the journeys go ahead as soon as a change in the weather occurs. Louise Viljoen argues that the narrator’s lack of ability to place events in specific times causes the emphasis of the novel not to be on the sequence of events, but rather on the spaces where the events take place (193). Furthermore, she argues that this shift of emphasis undermines a teleological interpretation of history, where the passing of time does not bring about progress in the novel, but rather cyclical repetition (193). Her argument does not only demonstrate that the circular structure of the narrative stands opposed to a linear interpretation of history, but is also useful in showing why the narrator is relating her story at all. The narrator’s story is not aimed at anyone. There is never an implied person she is speaking *to*.

Du Toit notes that even though there is no one the narrative is aimed at, the narrator’s monologue possesses a self-reflexivity that makes the act of story-telling apparent (47). The narrator never presents the memories she recalls as being fully factual or objective. The reader is provided with a narrative limited to a single observer and restricted to only certain geographical spaces. The narrative tells the story of the protagonist’s experience on their family farm in the Roggeveld district where they spend their summer months, but the reader is never given access to any of the happenings on their dwelling in the Karoo where they spend the colder parts of the year. This focus on her subjective experience, where memory

and imagination become entwined, is admitted by the narrator at various points in the novel, such as her utterance, “I am telling it as I experienced it. I tell it as I remember it” (57). What we are presented with here, then, is not a historian’s perspective. Instead, as the name of Schoeman’s trilogy, *Stemme (Voices)*⁴, suggests, we are presented with a voice offering not history, but experience. This experience is hardly easily shared and there is at times a certain amount of resistance to this flood of memories:

I remember too much, for during my entire life I had too much occasion to look and listen, to see and hear, and to remember ... I did not gather this information intentionally, nor did I ask to retain it, but here at the end of my life, reflecting on all this accumulated wisdom, I suddenly realise that it is not meaningless, like the incidental swelling of the soil that indicates the hidden paths where the mole has tunnelled. All that is left is this knowledge; all that remains to me of this life is this collected wisdom. (7)

The narrator portrays herself as someone who is burdened with the knowledge she has come to possess over the years of her life at the edge of society, with a sense that this knowledge is somehow important. Van der Merwe comments that the narrator in *This Life* “collects the *skerwe*, ‘fragments’, of memory and recreates them into a meaningful pattern” (181). The narrator’s task is likened to that of the archaeologist who pieces together fragments left behind by history in order to provide a reconstruction of the lives of the people who lived at a certain time, in a certain place. The narrator herself claims that she seeks “[t]o sift through and arrange the bits and pebbles and chips, the patches and threads and ribbons and notes, and finally to piece together from these the story in which I have figured over all these years, silent and vigilant in the corner or at the edge of the company” (9). Her almost voyeuristic presence amongst other people allows her to see and hear gestures and words that were never meant to be observed by others. It is precisely because of her marginal presence that she is able to present her knowledge, fragmented as it is. It is only at the end of the long night that she can say: “The pattern has been laid down and the slivers and fragments joined together, my task fulfilled, and it is not for me to judge whether it had been done well or poorly” (218).

The narrator’s story, self-conscious and circular as it is, attempts to rewrite the context of the South African farm of the late 19th century. Her musings on the inscriptions of the headstones

⁴ The other two novels in the trilogy are *Die Uur van die Engel* (1995) and *Verliesfontein* (1998).

in the graveyard reveal that history is never a single narrative, whether or not it is set in stone: “but who could determine its authenticity or say what it had once meant?” (225). By questioning the authenticity and authority of the linear history one finds in traditional Afrikaans farm-novels of the 1920’s and 1930’s, the narrative provides a critique of the practices which were found on the farm. In his discussion of Schoeman’s representation of the South African farm, Renders offers a strong critique of Afrikaner culture, calling the narrative portrayed in *This Life* a thorough demythologising of the traditional image of the idealised and God-fearing Afrikaner community (74). This ‘demythologising’ is largely due to the narrator’s access to conversations she should not hear, and to her position in places where people do not expect her to be. Her location on the periphery allows her to witness and remember the greed, cruelty, gossip and hardships to which a more involved character would not have access. Her position as an outsider provides her with a privileged view on how society is structured.

The novel reveals quite soon that the social structure on the farm is not what one would expect to find on a farm in the late 19th century. Hein Viljoen sees the farm as “a site rich in ideological undertones” (110), most notably that of the patriarchal order. The narrator relates how the farm-house was overseen by her grandmother, “for Oupa was probably a gentle and meek man, much like Father, and so she had taken the lead” (14). The narrator’s mother is also portrayed as a very strong woman, one who demands respect and obedience. She instils in the narrator a firm sense of her place within the hierarchy on the farm. The narrator says that “while the boys never learned to control their tempers or hide their feelings, I was taught at an early age to keep quiet, to obey and accept” (27). There is never any doubt as to who actually runs the farm, since it is the mother who takes charge of the duties, especially those relating to the expansion of the farm. Later in her life, when her father becomes ill, the narrator’s mother is left in charge of the day-to-day tasks on the farm as well. As the narrator relates, the small community does not react favourably to this:

Father was a good person, an honest and just person, but he had never actually been a farmer. It is good when a woman is the boss on a farm. Who said that? Surely no one in our parts would have said anything like that, except in jest and scorn? Good or not good? It is not good...? (115)

As Van der Merwe so aptly puts it: “The set-up [on the farm] seems to be Christian, but it is not; it also seems to be patriarchal, but in reality events are dominated by women” (182). The patriarchy which is usually so prevalent on the farm is undermined both by the narrator’s voice and by her mother’s ambition. Other than this reversal of gender roles on the farm, the farmhouse itself is presented as a difficult place to negotiate. The narrator comments on the division in the family:

We lived together in the same house, shared the same yard, worked together on the same land, met with the same predicaments and faced the same threats and dangers, inescapably dependent upon each other on those barren heights, inextricably connected in our isolation, and nonetheless irrevocably divided, with no hope that the rift would ever be healed. Nine people in the same house and on the same farm, bending over the same task, working together shoulder to shoulder, and yet we never really got to know each other, or made any real effort to get closer, but just brushed past each in our daily lives, and gradually the abrasions developed into festering wounds. (49-50)

The farm is a space where people of different genders, races and classes are forced to work together in order to survive. The narrator mentions many other instances where people who would normally not have contact are thrown together. The forced interaction between the inhabitants is purely due to the physical layout of the farm. There are attempts to keep the distinctions between the races and classes, but the farm-space itself necessitates that the spaces be fluid. Boundaries are set up and enforced, but these are never absolute. The farm, as space, is presented as a site rich in conflict and repression.

In a sociological study entitled “Gendered Spaces and Women’s Status”, Spain argues that

although women’s status is a result of a variety of cultural, religious and socioeconomic factors, the *physical separation* of women and men also contributes to and perpetuates gender stratification by reducing women’s access to socially valued knowledge ... Women’s position within society ... is related to spatial segregation insofar as existing physical arrangements facilitate or inhibit the exchange of knowledge between those with greater and those with lesser status. (137)

Spain's argument on space as a key in determining social status is important when showing how the narrator's presence in marginal spaces contributes to her authorial voice. Her emphasis on the distribution of knowledge within the social context is played out in *This Life*. The narrator gradually gains an education, first through the character of Meester, who has been hired to teach her brother. The narrator learns to read and write and develops a love of reading, one which she shares with Sofie, Jakob's wife. Her mother, however, is not favourably inclined towards her children spending time reading when there is work to be done, and the narrator shares numerous instances where she is reproached and told to go back to work. The next tutor, Miss Le Roux, is hired especially for the narrator. Her enjoyment, however, is short-lived as she soon realises that she is only being educated in order to teach Maans, the heir to the farm.

The narrator's education, even though it is not for her own sake, changes her social situation. She remembers how one day she is summoned into the *voorhuis* where her father and other men from the neighbouring farms are discussing business. The men struggle with writing a letter and the narrator is called upon to act as a scribe. The scene is described as an uneasy situation. The narrator recalls how the men "watched [her] skilfulness with silent disapproval" and how afterwards she "withdrew to the kitchen without any of those present expressing a single word of approval or appreciation" (126). While the narrator and her mother also join the father in the *voorhuis* at times, they are usually busy with needlework. In this instance, however, the narrator's presence is registered as an intrusion. Spain describes the house as having not only a physical dimension: "[t]he houses in which we live ... reflect assumptions about the proper relations among family members, colleagues, and strangers" (141). The space of the *voorhuis* in the farm-house is a masculine one and the narrator's proficiency at writing is perceived more as an anomaly than a skill.

The narrator's entry into the social world is shown to be directly related to her ability to read and write. Not only does she encounter people with whom she would not under normal circumstances have engaged, she also gains actual knowledge about the wider social conditions in which she finds herself. She learns about the community's plans to establish a congregation, the schools being built in their area, and happenings in Worcester and the Boland. The narrator says that her father was proud of her for being able to help in this way, and yet she also says: "When I got up and withdrew from the *voorhuis*, I soon forgot about all these matters, however, just as I forgot about the letters or petitions I had drawn up, for these

were the men's affairs and did not concern me" (128). The narrator's entry into the realm of the broader society is of little significance to her, for she views these affairs, which do affect her, as men's business. Her word choice in this instance is also compelling. She uses the words "summoned" and "withdrew" to describe her movements in these circumstances, suggesting that she is not entering into the world of the social willingly, but is bound by duty. The narrator sees this new task only as "something in the world I could do apart from helping Mother in the house and teaching Maans" (127).

The narrator's activities in the farm-house deserve special attention. Geyh recognises the house as a patriarchal set-up: "the house *addresses* the woman in terms of certain *places* or roles, and the woman then recognizes herself as a subject within that place" (109). The narrator is given specific tasks to do which place her in certain parts of the house. She is engaged with needle-work, something she professes she is not proficient in, and with helping in the kitchen and serving guests when they visit. As she grows older and is left alone with her mother and her father, she is needed more in the house and finds herself with less time to spend outside. She describes the feeling "as if life were something I watched as it occurred outside in the brightness of day, in the yard beyond the threshold, outlined by the doorframe" (115-116). This scene conveys not only loss, but speaks strongly of a sense of being fenced in by the threshold and the doorframe. The narrator ascribes life and activity to the outside rather than the inside of the house, with the house being the physical barrier between the two. She recalls a time when she was bedridden due to illness when she was young, and upon leaving the house again she was "overwhelmed by the wideness of the yard in front of [her], by the sudden expanse of the veld and the blinding brightness of the silver light streaming from the lofty sky" (99). In contrast to the inside of the house, of which she says very little, the outside world is perceived as a sudden shock.

Her duties, as a woman, confine her to the inside of the house. Louise Viljoen notes that the narrator later prefers the liminal spaces which she is granted: the kitchen rather than the *voorhuis*, the corner of a room rather than the centre, the seat at the back of the church rather than the front, and the garden instead of street (194). At one point, the narrator reveals where *she* feels most at peace: "I returned to my room, returned to myself, returned to my silence" (98). This bringing together of space, identity and sensation in her own words explain why space and experience figure so prominently in this novel. The narrator also tellingly feels most at home in a space where she would not encounter other people.

The full significance of this rejection of the social world can perhaps best be understood in terms of the notion of the abject. The relationship between the Symbolic, the realm of speech, law and structure, and the abject, is a precarious one. Kelly Oliver explains:

[the] Symbolic can maintain itself only by maintaining its borders; and the abject points to the fragility of these borders. The Symbolic is the order of borders, discrimination and difference. Reality is parcelled into words and categories. Society is parcelled into classes, castes, professional and family roles, etc. (56)

Kristeva's abject is founded on the idea that the abject poses a threat to the structure of the Symbolic. Butler's reading of abject bodies provides a more practical understanding of the concept: "The abjection of certain kinds of bodies, their *inadmissibility to codes of intelligibility*, does make itself known in policy and politics, and to live in such a body in the world is to live in the shadowy regions of ontology" (Interview with Meijer & Prins 277, emphasis added). Butler's concept of the abject is useful in understanding the narrator's identity as perceived by others. Stienie's declaration that "Well, you must understand, Tantetjie has always been a little strange" (168) allows one to see how, while others find it easy to classify her as a good daughter, a loyal sister, or the spinster-aunt, the narrator can never fully be accepted into any clear classification. Her lack of interest in the people around her and her unclear position within the hierarchy on the farm makes it difficult for the people around her to place her within the wider social structure⁵. It is interesting to note that the physical separation which she at first prefers later influences her social isolation:

I learned, one might say, to pretend and dissemble where I remained seated in the corner all the years of my life, the unnoticed girl, the unmarried daughter, the spinster aunt, always somewhere in a corner of someone else's home or at the fringe of the company where she did not belong, at the fringe of other people's lives in which she played no part, busy watching and listening, busy observing, busy remembering (27).

⁵ This is highlighted when Stienie arrives on the farm: "Initially [Stienie] was still feeling her way, of course, uncertain of my established authority and sensitive to my being so much older, as well as her husband's aunt" (160).

As the first-person voice gives way to a third-person narration, the narrator's reflection on her life registers a separation from her *self*. Her mention of "the unnoticed girl, the unmarried daughter, the spinster aunt" seems to facilitate this separation. These are titles she was *given* throughout the course of her life, not identities she took on. Butler explains that the abject refers not to bodies themselves, but "about the ways bodies figure in discourse" (Interview with Meijer & Prins 282). This view is perhaps illustrated best by the most prominent aspect of the novel, the fact that the narrator remains nameless throughout. She never mentions her own name; neither do any of the people address her by her name. Schoeman's unnamed narrator stands outside of signification by the mere fact that she is never marked as a signifier.

The narrator's position in society is further complicated by her marginality in physical spaces. Louise Viljoen notes that although she is distinguished from the workers through her race, she is closer to them in respect of class than to that of her own family, as registered in the physical spaces she occupies (199). As an unmarried white woman she has always been subservient in her own family, always subservient to mother, then to Stienie, which puts her on the same ground as those of a subjected race and class (200). Seeing the narrator in this light helps to understand the kitchen as a liminal space, a space of ambivalence which is characterised by it being the meeting-place between the white woman and the worker. Viljoen et al argue that this liminal space is often occupied by the hybrid, "the hybrid also belonging to neither of the opposing worlds, but rather existing in the space that comes into being by the dialogue between them" (18). In understanding the narrator as a 'hybrid', her fluidity in movement between various spaces can be seen not as a social obstacle, but as a site from which to understand the organising structures which operate within the farmhouse.

The kitchen, as the place where the narrator performs most of her duties, is also the space where the narrator interacts with the servants in the house. They share the same space and are often involved with the same tasks. The narrator also sees the kitchen as a safe space for her as it is situated away from the intrusion of guests and most of her family members (Louise Viljoen 199). Schoeman's marginal narrator allows the reader to witness not only her interaction with the servants but also, since the servants often forget about her presence as well, how they interact with one another. Recollecting the numerous conversations she overheard in this manner, she struggles to "remember their voices and listen across the years to what they can still tell me where they talk among themselves, by the kraal wall, in the yard

or in front of the hearth in the kitchen, without taking notice of the white child who is listening” (29). These relationships between the workers are not presented as being harmonious either. Jacomyn accompanies Sofie to their new home, and Dulsie, who has been living on the farm much longer, refers to Jacomyn “scornfully as a Slamaaiermeid and maintained she practised magic, while Jacomyn berated her as a Hotnot, and treated her with insolent indifference” (49). In the novel Schoeman registers what Hunter refers to as the “rungs of the pecking order” (7), showing how the hierarchy on the farm is also prevalent amongst the servants and farm workers. Schoeman also portrays conflict between white people based on class mainly through his depiction of the *trekboere* and Meester’s ambivalent position on the farm. This class-difference is illustrated in spatial terms as well, since Meester, a Dutchman, has to live in “one of the outside rooms and Dulsie and Gert looked down on him as if they felt he should not be regarded as one of the white people” (35).

The main social structuring element on the farm, however, is that of race. The narrator is embedded in her context, and her dismissive remark, “one is inclined to forget about the servants” (27), supports a postcolonial reading of the text. The black people who are displaced and ignored are shown to leave traces where they lived. The narrator recalls how the conflict between them and her mother caused the workers to leave the farm, with “only the black mark of their fireplace still [showing] where their shelters had stood” (30). Although the workers are shown in the “floating, fluid shadows along the wall” (50) of the farm, the expansion of the farm’s boundaries draw attention to the displacement of the former inhabitants. Upon reflection, the narrator remembers how her “early childhood was actually filled with the ongoing blurred arguments about the boundary fences and beacons of Kliprug” (32). One of the white men who stands in the way of the farm’s expansion can only shout, “I won’t be driven away from here like Jan Baster!”, and the narrator reflects how they would not be able to do so, “for he was a white man and they could not simply burn down his house and evict his family” (32). The boundary of the farm is shown to be a contested space, one which the narrator’s mother is intent upon enlarging.

The mother’s history as one of the *trekboere* is offered as the cause of her need for financial stability and for her firm hand on the farm. Her apprehensiveness towards Sofie, who comes to the farm laden with material goods signalling riches, is also attributed to her poor background. The visual signifiers of Sofie’s wealth set her apart from the mother: “[m]ore

money, more servants, more comforts, ... the satin dress and ruby necklace she had brought along in her trunk when she got married, all these things distinguished Sofie's world from ours" (42). Hunter calls the mother in *This Life* "the main agent of patriarchy as it interacts with racism and classism" (10). If one reads *This Life* as a questioning of patriarchy, Hunter's accusation seems at first glance to be overly critical. Yet the mother's actions are questioned throughout her life, not only because she is a woman in charge of a large piece of land, but because of her strict and often cruel actions. The mother eventually gains the respect she seeks, most notably shown in the clashes between her and the church elders relating to her front seat in the church. The mother's "bitter, silent end" (19) as related by the narrator questions, however, whether her actions were ever justified. As a final insult, the mother is not buried on the farm, but due to circumstances she is laid to rest in town. When one contrasts the mother's fate to that of her daughter, the mother, as the enforcer of patriarchal ideas, is shown to be erased from the farm. The narrator will be buried on the family farm and she will spend her final moments on the farm. The mother's silent deathbed also reveals that the patriarchy which she enforced cannot remain forever. Opposed to her daughter's voice retelling history, the mother's death is described as "long, painful, wordless" (19). The narrator questions whether all her mother's years of cruelty and ambition were worth it, and the reader has to acknowledge that they weren't, especially when one considers that her goal – that of sustaining the family line – is left unsuccessful.

As the farm is so closely linked with Afrikaner identity, the importance of inheritance, of keeping the farm in the family, is scrutinised in *This Life*. This is mainly illustrated through the mother's relationship to Sofie, the wife of the narrator's oldest brother. The mother treats Sofie with indifference when she comes to live with them on the farm, but when Sofie is pregnant with "the child of the eldest son, the first grandchild and the future heir" (57), the narrator marks a newfound respect in her mother's attitude towards Sofie. When the child, Maans, eventually marries Stienie, who is the only woman the mother approves of, the mother also eagerly anticipates an heir. It is at this point, though, that the lineage ends. At the time of the narrator's death, there is still no heir. Referring to the hypocrisy, the racial and class biases and the greed on the farm, Van der Merwe states the following: "The ultimate termination of the family line, through infertility, seems to be ... the just penalty for the sins of the farm" (181).

The novel ends with the narrator's acceptance of her death. She is only now able to do this because she has reconstructed her past in her own sequence, in her own way. Most importantly, to her, she has recollected all the knowledge she has gained during her life-time. Her peace is largely due to her recollections of Pieter and Sofie, and laying them to rest as well: "They have found peace, and now this life can end too, the report delivered, the account given and the balance determined. The water has dried up and the soil did not retain the footprint. The darkness obscures it all" (225). The narrator's mention of the footprint and the dried-up water refers back to the hereditary line being broken. At the end of her life, the farm will not be handed down to anyone. She extends an invitation, "Let others come, other people one day long after us" (225), for someone else to engage with the land in a different way than her own people did. The greed and the cruelty she has been witness to has ended up in nothing. It only signifies the inherent instability of a patriarchal system that has been based upon false claims of land-ownership and white Afrikaner supremacy.

By focusing on an introspective and retrospective account of experience rather than the sensations and perception themselves, *This Life* creates a phenomenological account of the marginal body in an already marginal space. As Woolf puts it: "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (195). The fact that the body in this instance is a *projected* body and not a physically present body highlights how subjectivity, space and embodiment are interrelated. The narrator can only take this 'virtual' tour through her life with the aid of a body which can relate to the space which surrounds it. The idea of the imagined body takes on another guise in the next chapter, where the narrator creates and lives through this other body.

Chapter Three: Renegotiation and Magical Realism in *The Devil's Chimney*

Anne Landsman's *The Devil's Chimney* is a narrative which confronts two crucial historical moments in South African history. The novel centers on women living in Oudtshoorn in different historical times. The narrator, Connie, is an alcoholic who lives with her abusive husband in post-apartheid South Africa. A visit to the Oudtshoorn Museum prompts Connie to relay the story of Beatrice, an immigrant from England in 1910. The interplay between past and present creates a narrative which is described by Christopher Warnes as "a farm romance embedded in a post-apartheid novel" (*Engendering* 54). While Connie struggles to make sense of her new present and the social and political changes which came after the 1994 elections, Beatrice's story is set up against the traditional farm novel – and turns it on its head. The novel's female perspective on important events in South African history separates itself from the colonial male-dominated recording of history, rewriting it from different subject positions and with the inclusion of fantastic events. The rewriting of South African history in the genre of magical realism allows marginalised voices to be heard and different sensibilities to arise.

In Schoeman's *This Life*, the reader who is searching for a reliable and confident narrator will be disappointed. With his unsure narrator, Schoeman portrays the fallibility of memory and the instability of consciousness. What happens in *The Devil's Chimney*, however, is a different story. Although the narrator is also unreliable, the very notion of reality is brought into question. This is in part due to Connie's narration, but it is largely an effect of genre. *The Devil's Chimney* is a magical realist text, where the very notion of reality is rendered unstable. The term 'magical realism' is one which is closely allied to postcolonial literature. Magical realism as a literary genre was at first associated with texts from Latin America, but it has since been globally adopted by writers from countries with colonial backgrounds. What makes magical realism as a genre so powerful is its interweaving of two narrative modes: realism and the magical. Faris explains magical realism as follows: "In terms of cultural history, magical realism often merges ancient or traditional – sometimes indigenous – and modern worlds. Ontologically, within the texts, it integrates the magical and the material. Generically, it combines realism and the fantastic" (21). Magical realism lends itself to postcolonial literature especially because it allows for a type of knowledge other than empirical fact to exist in the (re)telling of a story. These texts are concerned with rewriting

history by challenging the linear colonial narrative which is usually accepted as cold hard fact by allowing the voices and cultures of the colonised to speak.

It is useful to read magical realism not as a conjunction of two seemingly incompatible terms, but as a genre which challenges their polarisation. Bowers argues that the genre “fuses the two opposing aspects of the oxymoron (the magical and the realist) together to form one new perspective” (4). Bowers’s use of the word ‘perspective’ is important to note, because magical realism can be very challenging to the reader who is not familiar with this mode. In magical realist novels the reader is expected to accept the fantastic along with the empirically verifiable in the same sentence. Magical realism blends the two realms with the result that an everyday occurrence can seamlessly become fantastic. The consequence of the commingling of empirical observation and what one might call animistic sensibility in the same narrative is that “neither of these two realms is able to assert a greater claim to truth than the other” (Warnes, *Naturalizing* 2). It questions the notion of a single, unified truth in favour of offering different perspectives to make new meaning from seemingly static historical events.

Because of its hybrid nature, magical realism is a useful genre when employed to overcome stereotypes and binary thinking. Because it emphasises fluidity, it “is a mode suited to exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic” (Zamora & Faris 5). As Wendy Woodward notes, it is often dualistic modes of thought which can be found at the basis, for example, of violence and racism (22). The emphasis on cultural, racial and social fluidity which can be found in magical realist texts endeavours to undo these strict boundaries. The status of magical realist texts is not that of reality *versus* the fantastic, but an attempt at introducing a constantly shifting point of interaction between the two which allows for boundaries to be continually challenged and renegotiated. In doing so, the genre not only points to some boundaries which may seem matter-of-fact, but also locates the constructed nature of these boundaries.

Magical realism is inevitably tied to postmodernism in its questioning of history. Faris points out that while magical realist texts are very often “grounded firmly in historical realities”, the stories which are offered to the reader are “often alternate versions of officially sanctioned accounts” (15). This is done in various ways, not the least of which is offering those voices which have been left out of the official histories to tell their own tales. This provides the reader with different versions of something which might be well known. Landsman’s

historical settings, that of 1910 and the mid-1990's, are crucial times in South Africa's political history, in as much as both periods entail the constitution of South Africa. 1910 saw the formation of the Union of South Africa, which Nudelman describes as "the beginning of legislated racial discrimination and the 'invention' of organized Afrikaner nationalism" (117). Connie's time-frame can be seen to unravel these racial and nationalist constructs. Warnes' description of Beatrice's section of the novel as a 'romance', a term which is no doubt used very loosely here, refers to Connie's perspective of the events in 1910. As Nudelman points out, the colonial time-frame is, at least in Connie's eyes, romantic "because of the romance and adventure associated with the ostrich feather boom, when Oudtshoorn abounded with wealth and opulence" (117). The contrast is rather stark when compared to Connie's present-day Oudtshoorn, where human interaction is meagre and her own life is an anti-romance.

The story of Beatrice opens with Connie and her sister's visit to the Oudtshoorn Museum, where they find artefacts of Beatrice's life. Among these items are a railway ticket dating from 1910 and a green dress, which Connie thinks looks like "rotting seaweed" (14). This visit to the museum is cut short and Connie and Gerda leave for the bar, where Connie proceeds to tell the story of Beatrice to her deaf sister. Beatrice came to Oudtshoorn in 1910 with her husband Mr. Henry after he was sent away from England by his parents for accumulating too much debt. We are told that "[i]t was either jail or a workhouse or Highlands" (17), which gives the reader a fair amount of insight into Mr. Henry's attitude towards coming to South Africa and Highlands, the farm, in particular. Although Highlands is not completely isolated from society as it is not far from town, we are shown, especially through the eyes of Beatrice and Mr. Henry, both of whom come from metropolitan England, that they are very much isolated from contemporary modernity. A sense of estrangement from, and in Mr. Henry's case, a certain amount of antagonism towards, their new physical environment deepens as Connie relates that Beatrice and Mr. Henry "didn't *understand* how to live here which was why they made such a mess" (16, emphasis added). Connie's words refer to a certain type of relationship to the land which, at that stage, neither Mr. Henry nor Beatrice had manifested. One can also deduce that Connie means that the land is not merely a backdrop for people's lives, but something with which the subject enters in a relationship of identification or estrangement, and sometimes both in creating an uneasy ambivalence.

Landsman demonstrates Mr. Henry's struggle to adapt to his new environment via physical descriptions and depictions of his interaction with the environment. His otherness is established by setting him up against people who, to use Connie's phrasing, understand the land: "Mr. Henry had hands that were as soft as a baby's and he always wore white. None of the farmers wore white. They always wore khaki and *veldskoene* like they still do" (17). The simple act of describing clothing – the farmers do not wear white because it is impractical in this harsh landscape – alerts the reader to the fact that not only is Mr. Henry not fitting in, but that he is also not making any effort to adjust to the surroundings. Connie derisively relates how Mr. Henry would stand in the veld drawing on an easel – not the landscape, but "demons and monsters crawling out of the mountains and the sky" (17). Mr. Henry is unable to appreciate or relate to the landscape and his lack of association can only find expression in these monsters drawn from his imagination.

When Mr. Henry loses even more money after staging an ostrich-race, he takes his 'big walk' into the Swartberg Mountains. While his visions in the mountains are filled with vague images of snow and indeterminate figures, Beatrice has to deal with reality of life on the farm. Abandoned by her husband in a strange environment, Beatrice is at first scared at the thought of having to run the farm by herself. The change in her happens as she is writing a letter to her father, "when suddenly the pen stops in her hand and she finds herself throwing the paper away. On the page on the ground, so that the ants can read, [the letter] says Papa, I am writing because. 'Because' is half-scratched out" (31). Beatrice abandons this apparent plea for patriarchal help and allows her gaze to fall over the farm and the ostriches, where she forms a new connection:

She knows that she is the female ostrich, dressed in the colours of the earth, set here, on this piece of land, to belong. In a split-second, everything is different. She cannot live here with Henry. She no longer wants to lick that envelope like a good girl. She will not go back to England. This land is hers. (32)

Beatrice and Mr. Henry react very differently to this new environment which is forced upon them and their embodied existence. Mr. Henry refuses to let go of his English frame of reference and wants to impose English standards and references onto the South African landscape. While her husband is emblematic of the English pastoral tradition not working in South Africa, Beatrice embraces the land and associates with it. The fact that she associates

herself with an ostrich, the animal she will be working with, suggests that she sees them as more than just objects from which there is money to be made. Connie also remarks that Beatrice started to *look* like an ostrich: “[h]er eyes got bigger and her neck got longer, and she got on with the birds so well that people made jokes about plucking her, and selling her feathers” (48-49). Beatrice forms a bond with the farm as well, with Connie relating how Beatrice “made Highlands her country” (43). There is a relationship to the land here which goes beyond mere ownership. Beatrice has made herself at home.

While the farm is an ideologically contested space because of issues involving politics and especially racial exploitation and oppression, Landsman seems to tap into another type of divide of the farm as space: the tension between nature and culture. The farm-space can be seen as the intersection between nature and culture, and these boundaries are fixed in the physical structures on the farm. Nature is literally enclosed on the farm as the ostriches have specific camps where they are allowed to roam. On the farm, nature can never be just unspoilt Nature. It is a site that needs to be made productive. Warnes comments that the farm “as an idealised notion is thrown into crisis” (*Engendering* 54) in *The Devil’s Chimney*. The relationship between the subject and the land can never be wholly innocent because the farm will always be “subject to the whims of commodity capitalism” (Warnes, *Engendering* 54). This point is made clear when, many years after the ostrich-boom has ended, the only attraction is the Cango Caves, which is why the town Connie describes is portrayed as a rather desolate place to live. The land itself seems to be resistant to culture, considering that Highlands and the neighbouring farms are suited for nothing but ostrich-breeding.

Beatrice’s relationship to the land is based more on a sentimental attraction than on material gain. While her association with the landscape on a very personal level seems in danger of ending up in a confirmation of the dualistic paradigm of ‘male equals culture’ and ‘female equals nature’, the situation is much more complex. Faris identifies a ‘feminine’ element in magical realist writing. She argues that “magical realism has affinities with and exemplifies certain aspects of the experience of women”, and that it can “begin to erode a dualistic mode of thinking that draws clear boundaries between self and other, an erosion that has been associated with some strains of female writing” (170-171). The erosion of boundaries between self and other, subject and object, is made very clear in *The Devil’s Chimney*, as the reader is shown how Beatrice not only identifies with the animals and the land, but also how she seems to become a part of the landscape itself at times. Beatrice’s association with the

land is constantly shifting and ranges from that of a productive farmer to an animal that needs the land to sustain itself. The result of this constant shift in her relationship to the land is that she becomes one of the most successful ostrich-farmers in the district.

When Beatrice takes over the farm it becomes a more fluid space, with fewer clear boundaries and more freedom of movement, including at the levels of race and gender. Beatrice lets down the boundaries on the farm, and in doing so she allows the wilderness into her home, allows her own femininity to merge with masculinity, and allows the racial divides to become weakened as well. Faris goes on to say:

Although the narrative mode of magical realism belongs, in a sense, to both genders, it may be possible to locate a female spirit characterized by structures of diffusion, polyvocality, and attention to issues of embodiment, to an earth-centered spirit world, and to collectivity, among other things, that is active in magical realism generally, regardless of authorship. (170)

Although it would be advisable to be wary of the “female spirit” Faris locates in magical realist texts, her point becomes clear when one turns to the customary polarity in male and female. While concepts such as rationality and culture will inevitably fall into the ‘male’ category, the ‘female’ side will include sensory experiences and the animistic quality of magical realism.

Landsman makes good use of visual signifiers in order to convey the shifting of racial, social and personal boundaries. Beatrice’s venture into farming coincides with her abandonment of dresses and corsets, as she now wears the pants – Mr. Henry’s pants – and convict shirts. When she pays a visit to Mrs. Jacobs on the neighbouring farm and feels the need to put on a dress, she finds that a spider has made a nest in her corset and cockroaches have taken up residence in her shoes. The wilderness is quite literally climbing into the relics of her previous life. Tellingly, the dress does not fit her anymore either, suggesting that Beatrice cannot fulfil the roles of both English lady and farmer. This perhaps has less to do with the incompatibility of the two roles than with Beatrice’s active decision not to be a ‘good girl’. The inversion of gender roles is signalled through clothing as well: “Mr. Henry and Miss Beatrice had the whole thing upside down. He wore floppy hats and she wore pants”, says Connie (17). Landsman does suggest that these gender switches are just that. Mr. Jacobs is at

first affronted by the woman in men's clothing, yet when Beatrice "bent down to knock something into the ground ... he could see her breast under the convict shirt and he went blood-red, in front of all those *volkies*" (53). This glimpse of female flesh causes an awareness of sexuality which leads to their first sexual encounter in the farmhouse.

As with *This Life*, the site of the farm is a firmly structured space. It is a fenced-in location with various racial and social divides. The farm workers live in small temporary houses on the farm, in contrast to the solid structure of the old farmhouse, signalling the usual temporary status of farm workers. The people's work also designates the spaces where they are supposed to be. We see Nomsa in the kitchen and September outside with Mr. Henry, where Mr. Henry is doing a very bad job of running the farm. The moment Mr. Henry leaves, however, all these borders seem to collapse. Speaking about the workers on the farm, Connie says that Beatrice "is almost ready to lead them into the farmhouse, like the Pied Piper" (33), but because they are sleeping she does not. The next morning, enlivened by her new-found freedom, Beatrice opts to eat at the "table where the servants eat" (34) instead of at her normal place. As she sits down at the table she tells September and Nomsa about her plans to build new houses for the workers and fix the fences around the farm. Beatrice shuffles the spatial locations of everyone on the farm, including most prominently her own.

Beatrice's actions have a rippling effect on the entire Oudtshoorn. As she is renegotiating the spatial relations on the farm, she comes into contact with both the law and the society of Oudtshoorn. Society's views on a woman running a farm quickly becomes clear, where "all the mothers were afraid that their daughters would catch what Miss Beatrice had so they pulled them into the Post Office or the General Dealer's when she was there" (43-44). Because Beatrice is female, she encounters a fair amount of apprehension from the other farmers. She tries to acquire knowledge of the ostrich-business by going into town, but finds it difficult, considering the farmers talk to one another at the bar in the hotel, which is strictly a male site. On one occasion, Beatrice goes to the hotel wearing a dress over her pants, signalling that she knows she has to comply with the rules in order to get what she wants. Significantly, the hotel is the place where "Miss Beatrice found out about fences" (44). As Warnes points out, her relationship with Mr. Jacobs begins when she tries to strengthen the borders of her own farm (*Engendering* 55). This meeting with Mr. Jacobs also introduces the reader to the highly stereotyped and offensive racism which was a part of the society in that time-frame. Beatrice's own racism, targeted mainly against Afrikaners and Jews, becomes

apparent. Her own point of view also sets up Mr. Jacobs and his family as being othered, even though he is the most successful ostrich-farmer in the district. Her feelings are shared by many of the people in town. Beatrice's reliance upon September causes quite a stir as well, where "people in Oudtshoorn said it was a disgrace to watch a Coloured man come into town and order things and drive around as if he was *baas*" (18). While Beatrice is able to run the farm successfully on her own, the society she lives in cannot tolerate the collapsing of borders which allows her to do just that.

Beatrice quite literally lets the wild into her house. However, the two do not mix. She decides that she wants to have a fountain in the house, but things go awry quite soon. Animals walk into the house and die in the fountain, leaving her with no option but to refill it. What is suggested here is that although the boundaries on the farm have been renegotiated and many of the spaces have become fluid, the farmhouse itself is a sort of sacred patriarchal space which does not allow for change. After Beatrice and Mr. Jacobs have sex in the Caves, she returns to her house thinking about Mr. Jacobs. In the presence of Nomsa and September in the house, she imagines the following scene:

They could see Mr. Henry dragging behind her, his hands clasped around her ankles, his feet hooking on the furniture. They saw Mr. Jacobs, more hair than man, fanning out behind her like an Old Testament prophet. The less they said, the more the house rang. (83)

Mr. Henry's feet, "hooking on the furniture", might be seen to represent the patriarchal attachments of the house. The description of the scene makes it seem as if Beatrice had sinned against the house itself. In this traditional locus of patriarchal power, the ghosts of Beatrice's inappropriate liaison with Mr. Jacobs begin to haunt her. Another "transgression into familial space" (Warnes, *Engendering* 55) occurs with Beatrice's visit to the Jacobs' farmhouse. Beatrice calls on Mr. Jacobs' wife and daughters and finds herself unable to remain in the house. When she looks at it "all she saw was Mr. Jacobs' body, the sandstone walls the colour of his hands, the roof black as his hair. No thank you, she whispered, feeling the dust in her mouth. She couldn't walk in that door. It led straight to the engine-room. His heart" (64). While they were in the Caves, their sexual conduct did not bother anyone. However, when Beatrice 'trespasses' into Mr. Jacobs' house the results are somewhat catastrophic and largely comic. It is in the farmhouses especially where social rules

overwhelm Beatrice. In upsetting the family structure, Beatrice upsets the laws of the Symbolic.

Beatrice's skin, burnt by working on the farm, is described as becoming darker "and people had to look at her twice to see if she was White because by now her skin was very brown" (43). Her physical appearance alerts the reader to changes on a racial level, where Beatrice starts to look like, and adopt the subject position of, one of the farm workers. This notion is taken further to a *ménage-trois* with September and Nomsa in their hut. Connie describes the event as something "so bad it wasn't even a sin anymore" (88). The threesome is problematic within the novel, since Beatrice enters September and Nomsa's hut without permission in a situation that is still tangled up in power-relations. Beatrice's restructuring on the farm renders the event even more complicated, since "while there is a suggestion that Landsman wants to signal something of Beatrice's freedom in having her have sex with her employees, it is difficult to see her actions as anything but exploitative" (Warnes, *Engendering* 61). Connie tries to figure out who initiated the sexual act, and wonders whether it was "Miss Beatrice who started, who made the blanket into that cave she and Mr. Jacobs were in?" (88). The suggestion is made here that Beatrice tries to recreate the conditions of the Caves in Nomsa and September's hut. Yet, as will be shown later, this is impossible, because the space of the Caves is ideologically very different to that of the hut. The scene Landsman portrays is indeed one which hints at sexual freedom and the transgression of racial boundaries, with the fantastic elements of the novel reaching a peak, yet when it is over, Connie describes a rather more subdued atmosphere: "When [Beatrice] lifted her head, Nomsa was holding September and he lay in her lap like some old man who has been shot in the stomach" (90). According to Warnes, in the space of the hut, Beatrice is still "implicated in a politics of colonialist land relations that restricts Nomsa and September to serf-like status" (*Engendering* 60).

The Congo Caves figure prominently in both narratives. Connie lives nearby the Caves and looks after visitor's dogs while they go into the Caves. This is how she first discovered how Pauline went missing in the Caves. The novel opens with the disappearance of Pauline, a Coloured woman who goes missing from the Congo Caves. Her absence haunts the novel and Connie's consciousness. The reader is alerted to the importance of the Caves in the opening paragraph, where Connie observes:

Ever since Pauline Cupido's disappearance during the Christmas holiday in 1955,

I have been trying to remember things. Nobody made much of a fuss about it, really, nor did we. But around that time, I started to think what it would be like if I disappeared suddenly like that, or died. (1)

The disappearance of Pauline in the Caves prompts Connie to re-evaluate her own life. This link between Pauline, the Caves, and Connie is drawn on an unconscious level as well, with Connie saying:

I keep thinking that if I find Pauline everything will go back to the way it was before. No more bad dreams at night, no more *skollies* under the bed with knives, no more fights with my husband, Jack. (2)

Connie's apparently irrational association with Pauline prompts fears on a personal and social level. Connie feels that if she can learn what happened to Pauline in those Caves her own life would revert back to a state of innocence.

The reader never finds out the truth about what happened to Pauline. Pauline's absence resonates with the disappearance of Beatrice's daughter, Precious. Connie's theory – that Pauline is actually Precious – is discredited since the discrepancy in time makes it impossible. Connie sees Pauline/Precious as a symbol of the change which is happening in her South Africa. She relates the story of how she went to Pick 'n Pay and “thought [she] saw Pauline or Precious sitting in a *bakkie* next to a white farmer with curlers in her hair and [she] got such a *skrik* because the world is really changing if you can see something like that and it's not the maid” (276). Pauline seems to be little more than a constantly changing signifier for the rest of the characters as well. Connie recounts quite horrified, how all the men who remember Pauline thought she was a beautiful woman, even Jack, who tells Connie “that she reminded him of a deer, with big, scared eyes and soft features. One man even says that she had long, thin legs!” (5). Jack scares Connie by telling her that Pauline was a sacrifice to the devil, and was supposedly molested by the devil himself and disappeared deep in the Caves. Under the male gaze Pauline is only a pretty woman who got lost. Jack's tale is merely a racist jab at Oom Piet, a tour guide in the Caves, who allegedly made a pact with the devil to bring him young women to ensure that his grandchildren can go to university.

Just as people assign meaning to Pauline, the Caves is also a space of shifting signification.

Many people try to claim ownership of the Caves, or at least inscribe their names in it. There are various references to people's names being written on the walls of the Caves. After Beatrice and Mr. Jacobs' sexual encounter in the Caves, Mr. Jacobs says, "Cango, he said, this is part of the Cango Caves. The words dropped into Miss Beatrice's lap like pellets. She didn't answer. She didn't want this to be a place where anyone had been. You are the first man, she said. I am the first woman. This is ours" (72). Beatrice tries to claim the Caves for herself and Mr. Jacobs in a way which is similar to people carving their names on the walls of the Caves. Once the Caves have been identified, Beatrice cannot help but assign meaning to the space and recalls her own visit to other parts of the Caves. This attempt to inscribe the Caves with a meaning which only belongs to them is problematised as Beatrice realises that Mr. Henry, or at least a spectre of Mr. Henry, has joined them in the Caves.

When Beatrice returns to the Caves with Precious in her arms, she becomes "one of the night animals herself, the yellow fur on her head up and stiff and her nose sniffing the dark cave air for stories of strangers" (236). These "stories of strangers" are the inscriptions that people have left on the walls of the Caves. She looks "with her fox's eyes and [sees] the name Frikkie like a bunch of sticks scribbled on the wall" (237). Where Beatrice once tried to own the Caves herself, she now looks at these inscriptions with resentment – an animal apprehension. The experience in the Caves is now a pre-verbal, pre-signification experience. The Caves belong to no one. Beatrice experiences a cacophony of sounds from everyone who has ever been in the Caves, everyone from herself and Mr. Jacobs to "the voices of the Boesman painters and the Nooitgedacht ladies" (239).

Nomsa also encounters Frikkie's name in the Caves, yet she looks "at the paintings of animals hidden underneath the big, fat letters of his name" (271). By recognising the Bushman paintings underneath Frikkie's name, Nomsa draws attention to the history of the Caves before it became a mere tourist attraction. The discordant representation of the Caves renders it impossible to pin down. It stands outside of time, yet is inscribed by various peoples in a definitive historical period. It is not only a threatening, unplottable space, but also a space of new possibility. It is here where Nomsa kidnaps Precious as restitution for "all her children who she had left and lost, and all the white noses and bums she had wiped, long lines of them, so many that they were like guavas on a tree going *vrot*" (242). The Caves are not free from the political and ideological strife which happens above ground, which can be seen to seep through the earth. Even language fails here as Nomsa can only find Precious by

reverting to clicking sounds akin to bat-sonar. The people who enter the Caves bring their ghosts with them, and the Caves become a vortex of voices and desire. It is a place without boundaries which is marked by loss – for Beatrice the loss of her child, and for Connie the threat of loss of self.

Beatrice and Mr. Jacobs find an underground entrance to the Caves on his land which, he tells her, no one else knows about. The fantastic elements of the novel first erupt in this space. The boundaries between human and animal are once again blurred as Connie relates how Beatrice reacts to how Mr. Jacobs' fingers “or were they the fingers of some animal, some underground monkey – were talking to her, pressing her palm, her wrist, the spot inside her elbow” (70). Note that his fingers are “talking” to her. This is a space where the body signifies without the use of speech. The actual sexual act that flows from this is described in graphic, if surreal detail:

The cave she was in was him, and she moved in it and it rose up against her. There was a river, an underground river, flowing from her into him, and they swam with it, until it swelled over and flooded them. (71)

The usual flow – from man to woman – is disturbed and inverted here in the Caves. Apart from this, other biological distinctions are reversed as well. The connotation of cave as vagina is fairly obvious. Here, however, a signifier of the female genitalia is explicitly linked to the male body, where Mr. Jacobs becomes the cave. Whereas *gender* roles are upturned in other parts of the novel through the description of clothing, in the Caves it is all about refiguring the body and biological differences. The image of a cave is attached to other parts of the body as well. Beatrice “would think about lots of things especially the caveness of the body. Your stomach is a cave and so are your lungs, with millions of tiny live stalactites and stalagmites made out of flesh” (82).

In understanding what Landsman is doing here, it is important to look at the physical location of the Caves. The Caves is a subterranean space. This image of the fluid, non-differentiated space below ground can be read as the unconscious. The many references to water, a well-known signifier of the unconscious, reinforce this reading. The passage to the Caves is located below ground and Beatrice and Mr. Jacobs have to dig even further before reaching the Caves itself. A rather obvious, but crucial point is that the Caves are literally located

beneath the farms. The farms, as spaces where questions of identity erupt in ideologically fraught locations, where issues are dealt with and confronted (or ignored) on the farms, and where there is the presence of visible and enforceable boundaries, suggest Lacan's Symbolic. The Caves, then, as a space of non-differentiation, fluidity and lack of boundaries stand in contrast to the structured Symbolic. It may be tempting to identify the Caves with psychoanalytic terms which stand in contrast to the Symbolic. Lacan's Imaginary and the Kristevan semiotic are two terms which are used in conjunction with the concept of the Symbolic. The problem is that neither of these is able to coherently capture the space of the Caves. The description of the Caves does not match the way in which Lacan presents the Imaginary as a spectral fixity of positions. The semiotic is more appealing, seeing as it is associated with the pre-verbal, yet the way in which Kristeva presents the semiotic as being pre-Symbolic and associated exclusively with drives and pulsations and rhythms does not conform to the representation of the Caves. The most evident objection is that Kristeva expressly states that the semiotic is associated with the mother's body. Landsman's description of the inversion of sexuality in the Caves and the masculinisation of the Caves greatly problematises the idea of seeing the Caves as *only* feminine⁶.

Woodward argues:

[t]he opportunity for the characters to move beyond hegemonic selves is spatialised in the 'in-between' space of the Caves themselves ... What Landsman seems to suggest is that in order to inhabit a space beyond binary categories the characters have to go through a transformative, even traumatic experience, one which critiques implicitly and explicitly dominant constructions of 'race', motherhood and parental ownership. (33)

That the Caves, a space for characters to "move beyond hegemonic selves", is by definition an empty black hole, suggests that this state of being is not sustainable. In keeping with the theme of loss, the possibility to revert back to a pre-modern, animistic self is also rendered improbable. Grosz notes that "[f]or the subject to take up a position as a subject, he must be able to situate himself as a being located in the space occupied by his body. This anchoring of subjectivity in *its* body is the condition of coherent identity" (89). The undifferentiated body

⁶ Warnes argues that the "phallic suggestiveness of the stalagmites" (*Engendering* 56) goes beyond mere suggestion when Beatrice returns to the caves and "[t]hose soft rocks went inside her ... the stalactites and stalagmites picked her up and poked her and entered her this way and that" (239).

in the Caves is highly problematic. While Beatrice was at first able merely to show animal characteristics which speak of an instinctive relationship with the world, her actual conversion into an animal shows the dangers inherent in loss of self as constituted in the Symbolic.

The trauma both Connie and Beatrice experiences is that of losing a child. In *The Devil's Chimney*, trauma is figured as loss. Pauline, whether read as Precious or not, is emblematic of this loss in the way she slips through the confines of the novel. Pauline can be read as the inexplicable part of the novel which cannot be assimilated into its narrative surface. That which cannot be assimilated into the logic of the Symbolic is the abject.

The abject is that which is expelled when the structures of the Symbolic are erected. If we look for things that disappear, that cannot be assimilated in the novel, the most prominent would have to be Pauline/Precious. That Precious supposedly disappears into the Caves, which is linked to a vagina or womb in the novel, resonates with Kristeva's reading of the abject as a fear of being assimilated back into that space of non-differentiation, the pre-Symbolic. We never find whether there is any truth to Connie's interpretation of the events, which is largely due to the faulty logic she employs. We are never given any other explanation of what happens to Pauline either, which leaves a gaping hole in the structure of the novel. The impetus of Connie's fear is the disappearance of Pauline, and her own fear of disappearing like that. The disappearance is also never solved, which leaves a rather agitated reader wondering what happened.

The abject is first and foremost a bodily experience in as much as it elicits a visceral response from the subject. Kristeva describes the abject as inherently destructive: "I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders" (*Powers* 4). The abject is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (*Powers* 4). Gross embroiders on this by saying that the abject "is what disturbs identity, system and order, disrupting the social boundaries demanded by the symbolic ... Abjection is the body's acknowledgement that the boundaries and limits imposed on it are really social projections – effects of desire, not nature" (*Bodies* 90). The abject threatens the borders of the body. It serves as a reminder that the subject/object distinction is fragile and that this distinction is based on *exclusion*.

With this emphasis on boundaries, I would like to discuss the concepts of dirt and cleanliness as relative to space. Douglas examines the concept of purity and pollution in relation to the structure of a society. She explains the concept of dirt as *something which is out of place* with a very simple, yet effective, analogy:

Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications. (35-36)

What Douglas is saying here is that the idea of dirt, or pollution, is always relative to the space it is in. In a different setting, what we perceive as dirt now, could be perceived in another, different light. Another important concept from this paragraph is the idea of classification, and the fact that dirt threatens, or defies, easy classification. Douglas explains how one's perception is challenged upon encountering something which is dirty, or out of place. She refers to the *schema*, or the "pattern-making tendency" of perception, and how we "[construct] a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence" (36). While most of these objects and ideas are easily recognisable and therefore unproblematic during classification, "[discordant] ones tend to be rejected" by the *schema* (36). These objects and ideas are seen as threatening to the *schema*, because "[i]f they are accepted the structure of assumptions has to be modified" (36). This modification which Douglas points to involves a crisis in the subject. There is a need for renegotiation, not only of the nature of the structure, but of the boundaries of that structure – what needs to be excluded and what needs to be included.

Douglas's work on dirt as 'something out of place' could help explain why abjection is so horrifying to the subject. While dirt has a place, abjection (especially in the case of Connie's narrative) is experienced when something that should be/was inside the body is expelled. The various references to the abject in Connie's narrative create a tension between what is expelled from the body and the borders of the body. Landsman portrays various text-book scenes of the abject, ranging from depictions of semen, vomit and faeces to after-birth⁷.

⁷ Other instances of abjection not relevant to this exploration include the following: Connie mentions her dog disappearing into the Caves at night: "The next morning you can smell the caves on him. He wears the darkness

The contexts in which she portrays these images are worthy of exploration. Connie describes watching Jack masturbate on the bed: “I opened the door so you couldn’t tell it was open and then he grunted just like a pig. Next minute Flo is on the bed and she’s licking him, there right in his pants, and on his stomach, as if she’s having her breakfast” (40). She describes a night of drunken sex with Jack as follows: “Jack pushed himself inside me and I looked into the eyes of the dog. Jack screamed and then he came. It made him dizzy so he vomited on my stomach. The dog licked it up” (107). Lying in hospital after drinking methylated spirits, Connie remembers when her water broke: “The only time I laughed was remembering the water rushing down onto the floor, all that water that came from the baby, and the dogs standing in a circle licking like mad, my toes and the inside of my knees and my ankles. Flo, my basset, got the tips of her ears all wet with that juice and Jack kept saying, *Sies!* and kicking her away. But I didn’t mind” (223).

The abject “draws the subject to the limits of its own defining boundaries. This crisis of place (‘Where am I?’) precipitates a crisis of meaning and identification (What is that? Is that me? What am I?)” (Becker-Leckrone 32). The horror of abjection can thus be seen as a crisis of *place*. These depictions of the abject portray a system of classification at a turning point. The subject constructs boundaries formulated on an assumption that the ‘I’ is a rational, thinking, and above all, solid ‘I’. Faced with the horror of abjection, with bodily secretions and expulsions, the ‘I’ is reminded that it is still always subject to the whims of its body. Within the nature/culture paradigm, the subject is reminded of the fact that while wholly entrenched in culture, the subject is straddling the dividing line with one foot carefully immersed in culture, and the other always rooted in nature.

While Kristeva classifies the abject as female in relation to the Semiotic, the *chora*, etc, Landsman confounds this classification by including Jack in many of the references to the abject as well. Furthermore, the presence of dogs in most of these images suggest that

in his wet coat like the smell of sex. I often watch him licking himself afterwards. His tongue pulls at the soft white hair around his penis until it stands up in little peaks” (2). Connie visits her mother at her house: “The smell hit you in the face as if you were lying. She had been wrapping up her own waste matter in neat little newspaper packets and they were all around the room, soldiers marching along the skirting board out of the door all the way to the kitchen. I was the one who had to pick them up and throw them in a big rubbish bag” (100-101).

Landsman is not only using the abject to shock. As domesticated animals, dogs can be seen as a type of meeting-place between what is human and what is animal. The fact that the dogs are portrayed as ingesting bodily expulsions is also of interest. Connie's close association with the dogs (Jack thinks Connie is "part dog" (2)) can be read as a precursor to Beatrice's fate of actually turning into an animal. Connie is able to experiment with this desire to return to an animalistic way of life through Beatrice.

The interaction between Beatrice and Connie is an active process. From what the reader is aware, Connie knows little more about Beatrice's life than what can be found in the museum, yet "[t]he fictive Beatrice affects the reality of Connie's life: Beatrice's past informs Connie's present. Connie's identification with a woman who is othered by her colonial society and whose life is beset by violence, gives Connie access to parallel events in her own life, thus facilitating a rendezvous with her own past" (Nudelman 117). This relationship between Connie and her presumably largely fictitious Beatrice goes beyond that of mere 'informing', however: there is an identification which speaks more to a sense that Connie is living *through* Beatrice. At one point in the novel Gerda asks Connie what Miss Beatrice "is up to", to which Connie replies "I'm fine" (80).

There is a certain amount of apprehension which must be addressed, not only because Connie is under the influence of alcohol for most of her retelling, but also because of the apparent futility of relating Beatrice's story to a person who cannot hear. Connie's hallucinations under the influence of alcohol feed into the magical realist elements of the novel and renders it less incredible. Keeping in mind Faris's views on magical realism as having a 'feminine element', the latter objection also loses its vigour. Warnes argues that

The fact that Connie verbally narrates Beatrice's story lends an oral dimension to the novel, but there is little evidence that orality in the novel refers to any kind of traditional culture. It is possible that it serves as a feminised alternative to the phallic authority of the pen, and the image of the deaf Gerda 'listening' through her hand on Connie's throat suggests a privileging of communication through feeling. (*Engendering* 60)

Connie's imagined agency through Beatrice serves as a way of dealing with her own loss. It is suggested that Connie merely needs someone to listen: the *act* of storytelling is important here, not the audience.

While Connie is portrayed throughout the novel as a stereotype lower-class racist, Landsman leaves some hope for her. Although Connie thinks "Miss Beatrice was wrong to lose Precious in the Caves like that ... Precious did live, not like [her] poor baby" (274). Via her association with Beatrice, Connie appears to be facing her grief over the loss of her own child. Connie's apparently steadfast racism seems to be wavering as well. Connie says: "When you go to the beach in Cape Town, they say it's like Seal Island with all the black people lying down in the sun. I don't mind seals so much" (276). This rather curious concession on Connie's part allows for a glimmer of hope for Connie in the new South Africa. It is this inclination towards *change* which is rewarded in *The Devil's Chimney*.

On the other side of the spectrum, Mr. Henry can be read as an example of what happens when one is opposed to change. Mr. Henry returns from his 'big walk' to find a farm which has been restructured in such a way that he has no place in it. He ignores this and enforces his rule over the farm with disastrous effects. Mr. Henry's demons and monsters make way for a sense of displacement which finds affect in his body. He experiences pieces of his body going missing: "My hand, he sobbed, My right hand. He held it up, as if it was on fire. It's almost gone" (180). His previous displacement now finds expression in a sensation of dismemberment. He evicts the farm workers from the houses Beatrice built to make way for ostrich sheds to keep them warm for a snowy winter which is not coming to Oudtshoorn. He plucks all the feathers of the ostriches in order to make enough money to go back to England, and the ostriches die one by one. His rejection *of* the land culminates in the land rejecting him. When Mr. Henry is disembowelled by an ostrich and has to be buried, Connie describes a scene which alludes to rejection: "It was hard getting him into the Karoo ground which is baked hard like very stale bread. It was even harder with him because people said he didn't want to be buried there and his soul was making the spades buckle and the *volkies* who were digging the grave fall down" (265).

This refusal of being interred into the ground echoes with the mother in *This Life* not being buried on the family farm. This image is also a precursor to what takes place in *In the Heart of the Country*, where the old order is killed off and yet struggles to be buried.

Chapter 4: Imaginative Landscapes in *In the Heart of the Country*

On the back cover of Vintage's 2004 edition of J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*, Paulin describes the novel as "a piece of cultural psychoanalysis and diagnosis". As far as trying to sum up the events of *In the Heart of the Country*, this is perhaps as close as we are going to get. The novel seemingly describes the inner workings of a spinster stranded on a desolate farm somewhere in the Karoo⁸. The structuring of the novel suggests that it is a succession of diary entries, containing a profusion of references to literary theory – most notably that of psychoanalysis, complete with an intricate Oedipal relationship and ruminations on desire. Paulin's mention of 'diagnosis' is very fitting as well, since, in contrast to the norm where the critic is allowed to interpret and extract meaning, Coetzee's narrator joins in the game of interpretation by diagnosing herself.

Attwell describes Coetzee's oeuvre as "a form of situational metafiction" (*J.M. Coetzee* 3), a name which depicts his undertaking to tackle Coetzee's work as both postcolonial and postmodernist⁹. *In the Heart of the Country*, however, is difficult to put into a box labelled 'postmodern'. The question of genre is likely to remain unresolved. Attridge, for example, prefers to call it "an instance of 'late modernism', or perhaps 'neomodernism'" (2). Although he shies away from calling it a postmodern text, he admits that it can be classified as such due to its "use of nonrealist or antirealist devices, its allusiveness, and its metafictional proclivities" (2). Out of all of these aspects, the novel's use of antirealist devices tends to be the brick wall one comes up against during the process of interpretation. The novel's plot is confusing and rife with uncertainties as to what actually takes place. Cantor argues that, as critics, "[w]e cannot simply look at the story that seems to be told; we have to look at how it is told. That is one of the ways in which the novel is postmodern – it tells a story, but at the same time it raises fundamental doubts about that story, about what really happens" (Cantor 86).

⁸ Words such as 'seemingly', 'apparently' and 'perhaps' abound in most of the critical reviews of *In the Heart of the Country*.

⁹ Although I will not pursue this preoccupation with trying to merge postcolonialism and postmodernism, a problem which one encounters quite often is that of critics arguing that Coetzee (this applies mostly to his work during the apartheid-years) does not take a firm enough political stance. It is thus on ethical grounds where one picks up the 'friction' between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Attwell reconciles the two by saying that his "account of Coetzee's fiction [...] touches on the question of postmodernism only *in medias res*, for although Coetzee's oeuvre draws significantly on modernism and its legacy, its strength lies precisely in his ability to test its absorption in European traditions in the ethically and politically fraught arena of South Africa" (*J.M. Coetzee* 20).

Cantor seems to be wary of calling *In the Heart of the Country* an outright postmodern text and instead opts for pointing out certain traits which conform to the postmodern venture. This method of analysing *In the Heart of the Country* is especially fruitful when one takes into account the modernist and magical realist elements of the narrative. Magda's introspective account of herself and an awareness of the labyrinths of consciousness resonate with that of the narrator in *This Life*. The aestheticism of *In the Heart of the Country* also contributes towards reading it as a modernist text. At the same time, however, the text has elements of magical realism. The metanarrative self-reflexivity is a trait which is shared by postmodern and magical realist texts. The text has fantastic elements as well. Magda recounts how she and Hendrik "saw through the foundations" of the house, whereupon it "rises into the air, a ship of odd angles sailing black against the stars. Into the night, into empty space it floats, clumsily, since it has no keel" (89). Given the uncertain narration where nothing is confirmed as solid fact, the reader is tempted into believing that this is actually possible. In confounding the question of genre, the novel instigates an awareness of genre, and this is perhaps the aspect of *In the Heart of the Country* which sings most to the tune of postmodernism.

While both *This Life* and *The Devil's Chimney* can be read as antipastoral, neither of them actually states it in black and white. On being asked whether Magda is a pastoral character in a pastoral novel, Coetzee replied, "It is not for me to decide this question, but I would like to point out that letters demanding payment of taxes don't usually penetrate Arcadia" (Interview with Attwell 62). The novel is clearly, then, meant to be read as antipastoral. The word 'antipastoral' shows what the novel does: criticising from the inside out. Hutcheon comments on the use of parody in various postmodern texts and argues that "[p]arody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (11). This is not the only way in which *In the Heart of the Country* draws attention to genre. Barnard refers to Magda's speculations about "what kind of action or event might justify her insubstantial presence in the elusive heart of the country: not Greek tragedy, despite the imagined ax-murder and the surrounding 'theatre of stone' ... or Gothic romance, despite her brief fantasy of waiting for 'a castle to crumble into the tarn' ... or even the colonial idyll, with its dreary possibilities of marriage to neighbour's second son or dalliance with an itinerant schoolmaster" (23). I return to Coetzee on this aspect, where he says, "[p]eople in Hardy's novels don't ask questions about what genre they belong to. People in *Don Quixote* do. Insofar as Cervantes is the giant on whose shoulders we pygmies of the postmodern novel stand, *In the Heart of the Country* is not just pastoral or antipastoral

but Cervantean pastoral or antipastoral” (Interview with Attwell 62). Coetzee facilitates the interrogation of genre through Magda’s self-conscious narration. Cantor comments that “this story is being made up by someone who spends her afternoons reading books, that is, caught up in a fictional world rather than the real one” (87). Magda is not only ‘caught up’ in the fictional world she inhabits through reading – she is literally a product *of* literature and *in* discourse. This causes some very peculiar oppositions in the novel. On the one hand, Magda reveals herself as a character in a novel, but this is contrasted with a very real sense of inhabiting *a* body. This body is firmly rooted in an environment which is, at times, extremely vivid, yet also frustrating in its indeterminacy. Language plays a crucial role in concretising this world of Magda’s, however, there is also an overwhelming sense of language’s failure to capture the world.

One has to be wary of trying to construct a reading involving *a* reality which takes place in *In the Heart of the Country*. Magda gives multiple accounts of various instances, most prominently that of her father bringing home the new wife (which later metamorphosis into Hendrik bringing Klein-Anna to the farm), Magda’s act of patricide, and her rape by Hendrik. Even the endeavour of constructing a *reality* from Magda’s musings seems to be rendered completely unstable upon encountering the end of the novel and Magda’s communication with the sky-gods. Penner succinctly remarks that “the reader is bewildered from the outset” (56). The opening paragraph of the novel is perhaps the best place to begin, since the reader can extract from it various clues pertaining to the nature of Magda’s story. I quote it in full:

1. Today my father brought home his new bride. They came clip-clop across the flats in a dog-cart drawn by a horse with an ostrich-plume waving on its forehead, dusty after the long haul. Or perhaps they were drawn by two plumed donkeys, that is also possible. My father wore his black swallowtail coat and stovepipe hat, his bride a wide-brimmed sunhat and a white dress tight at the waist and throat. More detail I cannot give unless I begin to embroider, for I was not watching. I was in my room, in the emerald semi-dark of the shuttered late afternoon, reading a book or, more likely, supine with a damp towel over my eyes fighting a migraine. I am the one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines. The colonies are full of girls like that, but none, I think, so extreme as I. My father is the one who paces the floorboards back and forth, back and forth in his slow black boots. And then, for a third, there is the new wife, who lies late abed. Those are the antagonists. (1)

The novel is structured into 266 paragraphs such as the one above and a linear flow of events occurs until one reaches paragraph 36. The plot reaches a point where Magda murders both her father and his new wife and is left wondering how to dispose of the evidence. It is then with a great amount of disorientation to the reader that Magda rather abruptly announces in paragraph 36, “For he does not die so easily after all”, and, “He has not brought home a new wife” (18). In paragraph 38 we learn that the new arrival to the farm is Hendrik’s wife. To use Derek Attridge’s words, the reader “can never quite achieve the same *confidence*” (664, emphasis added) in Magda’s story after this. This is a rather strange development, since there is usually a certain amount of trust inherent to a first-person narrative. The structure of the novel becomes even more convoluted as Magda starts with one version of an event and then changes it. For instance, she describes five scenes in quick succession of Hendrik raping her – the level of violence, the setting and Magda’s response change with each version and we have no idea which version comes closest to the truth. Magda’s telling, retelling and revising of her story distances the reader from Magda herself and the constant doubt about what is happening prevents the reader from ever ‘settling into’ the novel. Head comments that “there is a dominant dynamic of circularity which short-circuits the forward-looking impulse” in the novel (52). This provides the novel with not only an uncanny sense of constant *déjà-vu*, but leaves the reader stuck in a hermeneutic circle which gives no clear answers. Vaughan points to the subverting nature of the numbered paragraphs, saying there is “no unequivocal progression in Magda’s monologue” (125). Instead of progression, the reader is provided with a story which reaches back into itself many times over, repeating and changing an event and then providing yet another change. The short entries contribute to this feeling of alienation and the reader is thus thoroughly distanced from Magda’s story.

The timeline is also of interest since the reader is at first presented with clear descriptions of objects and clothing which would not seem out of place in a novel set in the late 19th or early 20th century – an assumption which is confirmed by our narrator referring to “[t]he colonies” (1). The setting in time becomes more problematic when, as Dominic Head points out, aeroplanes and requests for municipal taxes enter the novel, which “brings us into the late twentieth century” (51). The question of whether what we are reading is, in fact, a diary, also needs to be raised since there are no dates to accompany any of the entries. The absence of dates and the uncertainty as to when the novel plays out leave the novel rootless in time.

The first paragraph introduces the reader not only to the problematic of *time*, but also to that of space. It creates a spatial awareness in the sense that Magda firmly locates the characters in a particular physical setting. She consciously places herself in her “emerald, semi-dark” shuttered room in the “dark west wing” of the house, a room of sensory deprivation, efficiently shutting out the outside world (1-2). Magda does not only assign a space in the house to herself. Her father’s pacing in the hallways invokes the predatory. The imaginary new wife is allocated almost entirely to the bedroom she shares with Magda’s father. She only “sleeps and eats and lazes” (1). Magda’s experience of the new wife is described in vivid sensory images. This gluttonous woman smelling of “orange-blossom and rut” (4) is obviously perceived by Magda as an intrusion into this dark, morbid house.

Unlike Beatrice in *The Devil’s Chimney*, Magda does not do any work outside the house and seems to move only between the kitchen and her bedroom. Like the protagonist of *This Life*, she finds herself bound to duties in the kitchen, where her life coincides with those of the servants. At the beginning of the novel, Magda says, “We have our places, Hendrik and I, in an old old code. With fluid ease we move through the paces of our dance” (27). In a manner akin to the narrator of *This Life*, Magda also occupies peripheral spaces. Whereas the narrator in *This Life* did so in order to avoid society and shelter her solitude, Magda’s presence in the farmhouse is somewhat more ominous, bordering on voyeuristic. She is to be found lingering in hallways, peeking through curtains and listening at doors. Magda reads herself as an absence in both the house and her father’s life. Stone argues that the father’s resentment towards Magda “plays itself out spatially” (215) in the house. Magda says that “instead of being the womanly warmth at the heart of this house I have been a zero, null, a vacuum towards which all collapses inward, a turbulence, muffled, grey, like a chill draft eddying through the corridors, neglected, vengeful” (2).

Magda’s occupation of “‘nowhere’ spaces”, as Stone puts it, echoes with the lack of spatial orientation of the farm itself (222). We are never given a clear indication of where the farm is – which greatly troubles the idea of examining an *embedded* subject. Magda describes the farm as being “on the road from no A to no B in the world, if such a fate is topologically possible” (21). Rita Barnard argues that the farm is “figured, at times, as a kind of antispace”, for “[i]t is not located in the proverbial ‘middle of nowhere’ (such remoteness would accord with the realist notion of the vastness of the Karoo), it *is* nowhere” (22). It would appear that

Coetzee is hinting here that for all the apparent materiality Magda bestows upon the farm, it is nothing more than a fictional space with no anchor in *a* reality.

What makes this so peculiar is the fact that Magda takes care to describe people, objects and spaces in vivid detail, as can be seen from her description of the horse's plumage down to the new wife's tight-fitting dress. Magda's reluctance to continue for fear of 'embroidering' takes on new meaning when it becomes apparent that she is quite capable of conjuring up histories and stories merely by looking at objects. She wonders, "Perhaps if I spend a day in the loft emptying old trunks I will find evidence of a credible past: ornamental fans, lockets and cameos, dancing slippers, favours and souvenirs" (41). Even more annoying is Magda's insistence upon constantly making the reader aware that she is, in fact, constructing a story. For instance, "When I was a little girl (*weave, weave!*) in a frilled sunbonnet I would sit all day in the dust, so the story goes" (6, emphasis added). For all her skill in creating people, places and objects, Magda also shows another writerly trait, that of constant revision. After offering the reader a rather tragic account of how the doctor, who was summoned by a messenger on a bicycle to assist her mother during childbirth, was too late, Magda's next entry reads, "(But why did he not come on horseback? But were there bicycles in those days?)" (2). Apart from throwing the reader back into the chaos that is the time-space continuum of *In the Heart of the Country*, one encounters the figure of a writer struggling with rendering authentic the objects of realism.

After it becomes reasonably clear that it was Hendrik who arrived with his bride from Armoede, she says, "I have never been to Armoede, but with no effort at all, this is one of my faculties, I can bring to life the bleak windswept hill, the iron shanties with hessian in the doorways, the chickens, doomed, scratching in the dust" (19). The reader is also presented with her statement, "Those are the antagonists" (1), presumably relating to her father and his new wife – yet this statement does not clearly exclude herself. Already in the first paragraph, Magda is alluding to the textuality of her situation.

In an exercise of Cartesian doubt, the reader is left with the impression that the only thing that is certain, is Magda's "stony monologue" (13). The question has to be asked: 'What really happens in the novel?' Since the notion of *reality* is rendered dubious by our narrator floating in this "island out of space, out of time" (134), a more appropriate question is perhaps, 'What am I reading?' In a very useful article, Glenn once again draws attention to the "explicitly

artificial structure of the numbered paragraphs” (123). This artificiality is not only applicable to the paragraphs, but to the ‘diary’ itself. The reader is constantly made aware of the hand *constructing* the narrative. Magda portrays herself as a writer who is not too concerned with realism: “Lyric is my medium, not chronicle. As I stand in this room I see not father and master dying on the bed but the sunlight reflected with unholy brilliance from his beaded forehead” (77). Magda opts to forego linearity in favour of aesthetics in a scene where her main concern is not the fact of her father dying, but the way in which she feels compelled to convey the moment. Glenn’s article focuses on Magda as “a storyteller, both writer and character endlessly reflecting on ‘my story’” (123). This aspect is often relegated to the background in readings focusing purely on the novel’s colonial aspects and feminist possibilities. While they offer a great deal in explicating *certain* troublesome aspects of the novel, they are less useful in trying to figure out the ontological status of the novel.

The truth of the matter is that Magda seems implausible as a character¹⁰. During an interview with Coetzee, Stephen Watson raised the same concern about Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, voicing his opinion that it was improbable that “Magda, a colonial spinster, should speak in a manner that is obviously associated with twentieth-century urban consciousness” (Penner 57). The following exchange took place:

Coetzee: I would like to reply to a criticism like that by saying that (a) Jacobus Coetzee is not an 18th century frontiersman and (b) Magda is not a colonial spinster.

Watson: Who are they then?

Coetzee: I... figures in books. (Glenn, Interview with J.M. Coetzee, 122)

Glenn clarifies the rather confusing ellipsis by suggesting that it should correctly read ‘I-figures’ instead (122). Understood in this way, Magda does not need to ‘make sense’ as a realistic character. When one starts to get behind the realistic props Coetzee employs so effectively, the contradictions in the novel become less constricting. An alert reader can find various clues throughout the novel to support this self-reflexive reading. Magda says, “If for one moment I were to lose my grip on the world, it would fall apart” (79). It is crucial to note that Magda says *it* would fall apart, instead of *I*, an Atlas holding up the heavens. Magda is

¹⁰ Stephen Watson eloquently asks what the reader should make of a “supposed nineteenth-century colonial ignoramus, lost in the historical backwater of the South African hinterland, [who] has read Roland Barthes’s *S/Z* and can regurgitate some of his reflections on the frustration of language when it attempts to capture desire and create a verbal image of physical beauty” (17).

essential to this constructed world because she is the creator of it. The issue of the novel's structure is relevant here. The numbered paragraphs point to "the artificiality of fictional progressions" (Vaughan 125). I return to Coetzee, this time in an interview with Attwell, where he speaks about the structure of *In the Heart of the Country* and the influence of film and photography:

There was a moment in the course of high modernism when first poets, then novelists, realized how *rapidly* narration could be carried out: films that used montage effectively were connecting short narrative sequences into longer narratives much more swiftly and deftly than the nineteenth-century novelist had thought possible *In the Heart of the Country* is not a novel on the model of a screenplay, but it is constructed out of quite brief sequences, which are numbered as a way of pointing to what is not there between them. (Attwell 59, emphasis in original)

Magda actually registers the rapid narration in the novel and comments on times of which she has no recollection. She says, "I seem to exist more and more intermittently. Whole hours, whole afternoons go missing. I seem to have grown impatient with the sluggish flow of time" (87). Although Magda's world would "fall apart" without her, her intermittent existence points to the fact that she is also only a component in a narrative which is ultimately out of her control. The question of what is happening in the novel takes on a whole new meaning when seen in this light. Treating Magda not as a person, a psychological entity (as readers are inclined to do) but as an 'I' with no reality, we are "made conscious of what we usually keep out of our minds as we read: that novels, unlike histories, do not report on events that have happened but bring them into being" (Attridge *Ethical* 664). Coetzee shows us how Magda's world is brought into being by not only showing how Magda creates fictional histories and landscapes, but also how she constructs herself and *is* constructed.

Magda goes through all the motions of self-diagnosis, analysing her "need to be needed" (6), her black clothing signifying her status as the "widow-daughter of the dark father" (3), dismissing Freud's talking cure (4), and claiming that she is "a woman who has never lost possession of herself" (11). She appears to pre-empt any attempt to find a reason for why she is the way she is. Amongst these reasons the idea that her social alienation is registered in relation to the space she inhabits receives most attention and can be found most frequently in the novel. Indeed, she wonders whether "an elementary life [burns] people down to

elementary states” (13), and claims, “I do not think that it was ever intended for people to live here” (118). Magda appears to be approaching the subject from every possible angle, for although one can easily believe that her environment is the cause of her discontent, she counters this hypothesis with the question whether it is something inside her that “loves the gloomy, the hideous, the doom-ridden” or whether it comes from “the monotony of [her] surroundings? From all these years in the heart of nature, seven leagues from the nearest neighbour, playing with sticks and stones and insects?” (25) She ends this speculation by saying, “I think not, though who am I to say” (25).

The reader is never allowed to settle on one single speculation as Magda’s self-diagnosis continues. The next most likely victim, that it is possible that she is “a prisoner not of the lonely farmhouse and the stone desert but of [her] stony monologue” (13) is also debunked in her confrontation with the rather mysterious sky-gods. Magda protests when they accuse her of “turning [her] life into a fiction, out of boredom” (139-140) and the reader is forced to acknowledge that this is unlikely. The sky-gods’ words – to use Magda’s phrasing – have “the reek of print” (51), and are a conglomeration of words by some of the most prominent thinkers in literature and philosophy¹¹. The deduction is quite evident: it is impossible to apply psychology to a fictional character and Magda resists any attempt to do this. Magda’s declaration, then, of “I make it all up in order that it shall make me up” (79) should not be taken lightly or read merely as identity-formation, but instead lays bare the construction of Magda herself.

If we treat Magda as an I-figure in a novel, and not a person, the question of her environment becomes more interesting. Amongst the many things Magda theorises about, the question of genre is one which attracts much attention. The reader is never allowed to forget that Magda seems to inhabit a variation on the *plaastroman* or traditional pastoral. Certainly, all the markers are present, but they are presented in a way which completely denies the prospect of the ‘colonial idyll’. Magda counters the pastoral with the question: “Which is the more implausible, the story of a my life as lived by me or the story of the good daughter humming the psalms as she bastes the Sunday roast in a Dutch kitchen in the dead centre of the stone desert?” (140). One is inclined to agree with Magda. In questioning the validity of the traditional pastoral, and in asking whether it can be read as realism when *her* response to her

¹¹ Dick Penner compiles a list of some of the references, mentioning amongst others Blake, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heraclitus, Blaise Pascal, Rousseau, Freud, Kafka, Sartre and Samuel Beckett (69).

environment (political, social and physical) seems much more authentic, Magda inhabits both genre and theory.

In the Heart of the Country can be read as a dramatisation of the various discourses which one encounters in a *plaasroman*. She *enacts* her conflict-filled status as a female coloniser, where she is both oppressed and the oppressor. She takes care to describe how she “spoke like one of [the servants] before [she] learned to speak like this” (7). She continues: “I played their stick and stone games before I knew I could have a doll’s house with Father and Mother and Peter and Jane asleep in their own beds ... while Nan the dog and Felix the cat snoozed before the kitchen coals. With the servants’ children ... I sat at the feet of their blind old grandfather while he whittled clothes-pegs and told his stories of bygone days when men and beasts migrated from winter grazing to summer grazing and lived together on the trail” (7). The first image Magda describes seems to be taken from some romantic vision of life in the countryside – it is definitely not her history and reads more like an English pastoral where the virtues of the quiet countryside are about to be extolled. This blatant fabrication makes the second image troublesome as well, since Magda presents the reader with a lyrical and nostalgic scene where “[a]t the feet of an old man [she has] drunk in a myth of a past when beast and man and master lived a common life as innocent as the stars in the sky” (7). What she appears to be doing is counterbalancing two stereotypical idyllic views on life ‘in the heart of the country’. Dragging these opposing views of history from a hotchpotch of communal fantasies, Magda engages with her desire to merge these histories: to create a confluence of two very opposing histories in herself. The result of this is an unstable whirlpool of conflicting cultural memories.

One of the few constants throughout the novel is Magda’s conflicting perception of the landscape in relation to her perception of herself as an empty signifier. She sees herself as a “sheath, as a matrix, as a protectrix of a vacant inner space”, “a hole with a body draped around it”; she is “a hole crying to be whole” (44). While she sees herself as “a vacuum” and a “chill draft” (2), she is at the same time afraid of “becoming one of those people who look into mirrors and see nothing, or walk in the sun and cast no shadow” (25). In comparison with Magda’s feelings of being insubstantial, she regards the landscape as complete. Staring through the window at night, she says, “I stare out through a sheet of glass into *a darkness that is complete*, that lives in itself, bats, bushes, predators and all, that does not regard me, that is blind, *that does not signify but merely is*” (10, emphasis added). While Magda is

complicit in joining the reader in trying to assign meaning to her existence, she longs instead to be exactly the opposite. Her desire is that of stepping outside of the Symbolic, in order not to have acquired the status of signifier.

Canepari-Labib argues that Magda is an “extremely contradictory character who would like to achieve a position in the Symbolic Order, yet simultaneously tries to overcome language, to go beyond it” (116). Canepari-Labib points here to the essential problem Magda is struggling with, that of language as obstacle. Magda’s constant craving is for “a life unmediated by words: these stones, these bushes, this sky experienced and known without question; and a quiet return to the dust” (147). The problem with Magda is that she seems to be nothing but language, words and quotations from philosophers. Coetzee presents Magda as someone who is thoroughly and inextricably embedded in the texts she reads and from this there can be no escape. Magda is fully aware of the discrepancy between voicing one’s desire and the futility of doing so: “Language is no medium for desire. Desire is rapture, not exchange. It is only by alienating the desired that language masters it” (28-29). This ‘mastering’ of desire, if it exists at all, occurs only fleetingly. Magda says: “To the spur of desire we have only one response: to capture, to enclose, to hold. But how real is our possession? The flowers turn to dust, Hendrik uncouples and leaves, the land knows nothing of fences, the stones will be here when I have crumbled away, the very food I devour passes through me” (124). Magda appears to point to the fact that language allows only for a temporary illusion of possession of the desired. Language cannot hold it; desire cannot be fulfilled when it is named.

While Magda aches to go beyond the world of language, she is embedded in language and her “learning has the reek of print, not the resonance of the full human voice telling its stories” (51). At various stages in the novel, she tries to overcome language by going beyond it and instead turns to the body. She explores the body as a way of being, as a way of affirming herself where language fails, where she is forced against the “cavern of the mouth from which echoes and echoes [her father’s] eternal NO” (18). Her hold on reality slips and she momentarily abandons her stance of ‘I think, therefore I am’ and turns instead to the body to find stability. Her description of her own body reads very much like her descriptions of the landscape and objects she conjures up. It seems at times as if she wills the body into being – into being real and substantial. She says, “I am sure that I am real. This is my hand, bone and flesh, the same hand every day. I stamp my foot, this is the earth, as real to the core as I”

(139). She tries to affirm herself by her body's interaction with stimuli as though to sense that her body is not merely a body, but a body *living in the world* as well: "I touch this skin and it is warm, I pinch myself and it hurts. What more proof could I want? I am I" (59). Magda's "I am I" reads ironically when one contrasts it to an earlier statement where she finds instead her reality in her story: "I am a miserable black virgin, and my story is my story, even if it is a dull black blind stupid miserable story, ignorant of its meaning and of all its many possible untapped happy variants. I am I" (5). At times she distances herself from her body and denies its excretions: "These are not my tears, they are merely tears that pass through me, as the urine I pass is merely urine" (60). Magda wavers insubstantially between being an embodied figure and merely being a consciousness with a body.

The borders between what Magda allows as part of herself and not are permeable and always shifting. These borders are not always only bodily, but extend to her social relationships as well. In keeping with the thread of psychoanalysis which runs through the novel, the Oedipal relationship between Magda and her father seems to string it together. The configuration is given right from the start. Magda is competing with the new wife for her father's attentions. Magda's sexual attraction towards her father is made very clear: "when I think of male flesh, white, heavy, dumb, whose flesh can it be but his?" (9). In a novel as complex as *In the Heart of the Country*, such an obvious Oedipal relationship seems too clear-cut and the already suspicious reader *should* be wary once again. Briganti comments that the overt references to one of the most basic psychoanalytical complexes "demand that we are never comfortable with simply seeing Magda as a repressed spinster who spins erotic fantasies about her father or as a violated daughter" (41), and that this involves both an "appropriation and rejection of her master-narrative" (40). Magda's incestuous desire rather appropriately finds expression in the abject: "Every sixth day, when our cycles coincide, his cycle of two days, my cycle of three, we are driven to the intimacy of relieving our bowels in the bucket-latrine behind the fig-trees in the malodour of the other's fresh faeces, either he in my stench or I in his Where exactly the bucket is emptied I do not know; but somewhere on the farm there is a pit where, loped in each other's coils, the father's red snake and the daughter's black embrace and sleep and dissolve" (34-35). While Magda denies her tears and urine as being part of her, she finds wish-fulfilment in retaining a psychological connection with excrement. This rather graphic image performs Magda's ultimate desire for union with her father.

Coetzee extends the Oedipal relationship to the level of colonialism as well. After Magda has supposedly killed her father, she gives some clothes to Hendrik and Klein-Anna. Hendrik surprises Magda in her father's clothes. Magda proclaims the act as being "grotesque" (106), whereupon Hendrik mockingly offers to take the clothes off and starts to take off Magda's father's trousers. Caught up in a power-play she has not anticipated, Magda is only rescued by Klein-Anna who objects. While Hendrik's act of putting on the father's clothes speaks of assuming power, the threat of taking the trousers off – her *father's* trousers – culminates in a gesture of not only fulfilling Magda's darkest desire, but also of *taking* power. Confronted with the idea of fulfilling a desire which threatens so many boundaries (implied incest and the social taboo of having sexual relations with a servant), Magda backs away frightened. While Magda may desire her father, she does not want to sleep with him. While she longs for a personal relationship with the servants, she realises that this is not the way she wants to get it.

Magda tries to connect with Klein-Anna on a verbal level, but soon realises that once again, language is the obstacle. She tries to build a relationship with Klein-Anna by a seemingly small gesture of trying to get Klein-Anna to call her by her name. The exchange is as follows: "Can you say Magda? Come, say Magda for me.' 'No, miss, I can't'" (111). Magda comes to the realisation that all she can offer Klein-Anna is "colonial philosophy, words with no history behind them" and tries to "go beyond its mediations by attempting to achieve a "non-verbal" dialogue between "substances" through sex (an intimate contact between real bodies, unmediated by words, is, she thinks, the only possibility of overcoming language)" (Canepari-Labib 117). Magda does lose "possession of herself" in the novel. After the confusing rape scenes (an act which is preceded by Magda's failure to pay the servants) Magda and Hendrik enter into a sexual relationship. This fails as well, because Magda is always caught up in a power-play – as a woman, and then also as a colonial woman. As with her desire to merge with her father, the landscape, and her desire to merge with other people, this does not succeed with Klein-Anna or Hendrik either. "Hendrik uncouples and leaves" (124) and her wish to "climb into Klein-Anna's body ... to climb down her throat while she sleeps and spread [herself] gently inside her" (118) remains futile. Magda's attempt to shift language to the side by allowing the body to take over does not work. As a woman, and as part of the colonial project, her body is fully immersed in the discourse of power. Coetzee presents this conundrum in a rather curious way:

The law has gripped my throat, I say and do not say, it invades my larynx,

its one hand on my tongue, its other hand on my lips. How can I say, I say, that these are not the eyes of the law that stare from behind my eyes, or that the law does not occupy my skull, leaving me only enough intellection to utter these doubting words, if it is I uttering them, and see their fallaciousness? How can I say that the law does not stand fullgrown inside my shell, its feet in my feet, its hands in my hands, its sex drooping through my hole ...? (91-92)

Coetzee creates the image here that the reason she cannot fade into Klein-Anna's body is because there is no space in her body to allow that. Her body is inhabited and inscribed by the law, which encompasses colonialism and power and language and lack. Magda's final attempt of communication with the sky-gods is also doomed from the start for the same reason. They converse using a modified version of Spanish, but Magda finds herself unable to "move" (145) them. Using stones she creates "a sketch of a woman lying on her back, her figure fuller than [Magda's], her legs parted" (145) stones in order to lure them down, but Magda fails to recognise that this is still only a feeble act of signification. The difference between what she *wants* to say and what she manages to convey to the sky-gods is exposed. Unfortunately for Magda, this rings true to her relationships with Hendrik and Klein-Anna as well.

Magda returns from this reverie of the sky-gods just in time for the conclusion of the novel. The reader is still not sure whether her father is dead or alive, but the picture she paints of him stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal figure who walked around the house filling her head with the sound of his heavy footsteps. She feeds him, clothes him and positions him on the porch where she shares more stories of a childhood which in all probability was not hers. When Magda had tried earlier to bury her father in a porcupine hole, she found that his body would not fit. She discovered that "[t]he hips are too wide for the hole, the body will not slide in on its side and the bent knees cannot be straightened inside the tarpaulin" (100). Magda eventually succeeded, but one is reminded of the struggle to bury Mr. Henry in *The Devil's Chimney*. This refusal of the earth to swallow these men is a fitting metaphor not only for the subjugation of patriarchal idea(l)s, but for *In the Heart of the Country's* resistance to closure.

Magda's last diary insert consists of an overview of her situation on the farm. She teasingly says: "At moments like the present, filled with lugubrious thoughts, one is tempted to add up one's reckoning, tie up the loose ends" (150). The reader who expects closure is left

unsatisfied. She does not, however, end without at least giving a hint as to her circumstances. She asks, “What have I been doing on this barbarous frontier? I have no doubt, since these are not idle questions, that somewhere there is a whole literature waiting to answer them for me. Unfortunately I am not acquainted with it; and besides, I have always felt easier spinning my answers out of my own bowels” (150). Magda is a conduit of discourse and embedded in language. Magda tries to make sense of the world – her world – through discourse, but that desire is left as unfinished as the reader’s desire for resolution.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In *White Writing*, Coetzee writes about the tradition of landscape painting and the ensuing problems the English painter comes up against in trying to paint a faithful rendering of the South African landscape. He mentions four problems, but the first is the most intriguing:

the artist's entire palette must be modified and subdued: deep greens being rare, the discrimination of shades of green at which north European landscape art excels must be replaced by discrimination of a variety of fawns, browns, and greys. (42)

This image of the artist having to alter his palette brings to mind two things. The first is that this is a rather fitting metaphor for the outsider having to change his/her frame of reference upon encountering a new environment. The second is not so much a revelation as a reminder of Mr. Henry in *The Devil's Chimney* who, apparently struggling with the wrong colours of paint, opts to forego realism in favour of drawing what he *really* sees in the South African landscape, the projections of his own fears.

This study has argued that landscape and the perception of that landscape is central to the novels under consideration. This interplay between landscape and perception is closely associated with subjectivity, or the problematic of the subject. By abandoning the deep greens of European landscape painting in favour of a South African palette, the European pastoral is abandoned in favour of a South African antipastoral, and new understandings of subjectivity arise in the process.

Other than a preoccupation with space and subjectivity, the three novels share one image which speaks to genre. The image of the burial of the unwavering agent of patriarchy is one which has been pointed out at various times during this thesis and I return to it one last time. This image is the one constant moment where there is an interweaving of space, subjectivity and body. This image cannot be disentangled from the antipastoral, because the idea of being 'laid to rest' in the land is disrupted. In these novels, the landscape does not figure as a separate entity, but as an interactive one. The question of *how* the body interacts in this environment is brought to the fore in all three novels as well. The body which rejects the land or the body which strives to exploit the land is ultimately rejected by it. Is it as simple as this? No. In refusing to lay to rest the authoritarian mother whose only desire is for progeny on a

piece of land of which ownership is highly contested, Schoeman raises questions about land-ownership and Afrikaner-identity. The struggle to bury Mr. Henry occurs not only because he refuses to let go of his English roots, but perhaps more likely because he does not make space to accept the South African landscape. The burial of Magda's father in *In the Heart of the Country* is the most problematic of the three novels, because although there is a burial, the reader is never quite sure whether he is, in actual fact, buried. At the end of the novel, it appears as if the patriarch is still alive, if not kicking.

The marginal and highly introspective voices that have been explored in this thesis are able to step back and reflect on their own and others' subject positions vis-à-vis the land. What is apparent is that the relationship between subject and landscape is never static. It is constantly negotiated and is never a given. It is a way of being that the subject comes into either by refusing or confirming the boundaries they approach. This navigation is made possible through the body: whether it is a body that revisits spaces it has inhabited, an other's imagined body or even a body of texts. The status of the body is not fixed either: "The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically 'incomplete'; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering, and long-term 'administration'" (Grosz, *Space* 104).

As has been made apparent in *In the Heart of the Country*, the text *itself* is a space – a space which has been crafted and controlled. As Magda learns, literature and discourse cannot stand on its own as an interpretive structure. For all her knowledge, Magda fails to understand her own situation. The text is not a formal object of structure. It needs interaction – it needs to be brought into being.

Hans-Georg Gadamer offers perhaps one of the most comprehensive theories on hermeneutics and what aspects are involved. His understanding of hermeneutics sees that meaning is not to be found in the text alone. Interpretation is "always guided by a horizon of interests and motivations that dictates in advance the questions the text is supposed to answer and the answers that can make sense" (Guignon 278). The interaction between the text and the reader is thus a dialogical one, and the reader is supposed to be open to "changing his or her presuppositions in the light of what emerges in reading the text" (Guignon 278). To further the metaphor of the act of interpretation as a dialogue, the reader has to be able to let the text lead his or her questions. It is obvious that meaning for Gadamer is a process and that

it is based upon interaction – not only that between the whole and the parts, but between the reader and the text as well. Meaning is the interaction of the “self-understanding of the person ... with what is encountered” (Palmer 183). Gadamer also talks about the text’s *being* – “its identity as a text” (Guignon 276) – and that this *being* can only be realised in its readings.

Genre is an important way of situating the text and how it is read. In this manner, it makes sense to speak of the text’s genre as its *space*. The text is informed by its genre, and the reader, on the other hand, obtains certain presuppositions based on genre. Yet genre is not a fixed, stable construct either. The degree of overlap between the novels’ concerns causes one to only tentatively label it as belonging to a certain genre. *This Life* is a novel which is extremely aware of consciousness, which one can rather safely label as a modernist or at the very least a late-modernist text, and yet the awareness of and engagement with history shows a deconstructionist tendency which one would classify as a postmodern concern. The degree of fantasy, which filters through in all of the novels, lends power to *The Devil’s Chimney* in its absolute refusal of the notion of authoritative history and a single, epistemological way of seeing (and being) in the world. Of the three novels which have been discussed, *In the Heart of the Country* is the most obvious example of a text resisting a single genre, but in refusing to be boxed in the novel opens up a conversation with not only modernism, not only postmodernism or only magical realism, but all three at once. In doing so the hermeneutic circle is widened exponentially, which in turn opens the door to more questions.

The novels provide different ways of understanding: understanding the fallibility of the mind, understanding different ways of seeing the world via the fantastic, and finally understanding that we don’t always need to understand. All three novels share the postmodern quality of deconstructing South African history in such a way as to question previous assumptions in order to start the conversation from anew. By focusing on marginal identities one finds a new gaze on history and a request for abandoning the palette.

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