

**APPRAISING THE COUNTERPOINT:**

Bifocal Readings of Literary Landscapes in the American Renaissance and Post-Apartheid  
South Africa



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## **DECLARATION**

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## ABSTRACT

This study constitutes an experimental bifocal reading that was prompted by historical and literary parallels and convergences between the United States and South Africa. In particular, the study demonstrates several thematic similarities between literature produced during the “American Renaissance” in the mid-nineteenth century and post-apartheid South Africa. Bifocalism is based on conceptions of world literature as 1) a domain that brings into contact texts from different geographical contexts, and 2) a mode of reading comparatively. Bifocalism is employed in conjunction with Edward Said’s characterisation of contrapuntalism, a means to reappraise long-standing interpretations or bring to the fore subtle or occluded features of one text through a reading of another placed alongside it.

Each chapter is devoted to a textual pairing that is based on similarities between the socio-historical contexts of the American Renaissance and the post-apartheid period. Chapter One looks at Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) and Julia Martin’s *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (2008), two female-authored travel narratives that engage with the effects of European expansion on the frontier and the resultant displacement of indigenous communities. Chapter Two focuses on inherited land among descendants of European settlers and the legacies of political and judicial injustices that helped to construct whites’ occupation of the land as a given while eliding the presence of those who inhabited the land before them. It analyses Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Gothic story, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and Michiel Heyns’s translation of Marlene van Niekerk’s Afrikaans *plaasroman*, *Agaat* (2006). Chapter Three concerns myths of paradisiacal landscapes, how these are employed to legitimise claims of landownership and how mixed bloodlines complicate such claims in its reading of William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or, the President’s Daughter* (1853) and Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2000). Chapter Four analyses Frederick Douglass’ slave narrative *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and Aziz Hassim’s historical novel *Revenge of Kali* (2009) to compare depictions of imported labour. The chapter juxtaposes Douglass’ view on slavery and Hassim’s depiction of indentured labour to compare their texts’ representations of national belonging for those who worked on plantations.

The bifocal readings are anchored in the significant body of comparative work that has already been done on American and South African society and literature. Attention to these literary contexts reveals that they have in common concerted efforts to put in writing the circumstances of a purportedly new nation built on the principles of democracy. I argue that such attempts are frequently addressed in these two eras by means of the motifs of land and landscape (the latter being the aesthetic configuration of the former). I analyse how land, as a deeply contested phenomenon in both countries in the periods under consideration, is used by writers to depict national struggles pertaining to democracy, national newness, identity and belonging.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie konstitueer eksperimentele bifokale leeswerk wat aangespoor is deur verskeie historiese and literêre parallele en samevloeiings tussen die Verenigde State en Suid-Afrika. Spesifiek demonstreer die studie verskeie tematiese ooreenkomste tussen literatuur wat gedurende die “Amerikaanse Renaissance” in die middel van die negentiende eeu geskep is, en literatuur wat in Suid-Afrika ná apartheid die lig gesien het. Bifokaliteit hou verband met sienings oor wêreldliteratuur, synde 1) ’n domein wat tekste uit verskillende maatskaplike en geografiese kontekste met mekaar in aanraking bring, en 2) ’n vorm van vergelykende lees. In samehang met bifokaliteit span ek Edward Said se kontrapuntale benadering in om subtiele of verborge kenmerke van een teks te openbaar deur ’n ander teks daarnaas te lees.

Elke hoofstuk word gewy aan ’n tekstuele paring op grond van ooreenkomste tussen die sosio-historiese kontekste van die Amerikaanse Renaissance en die tydperk ná apartheid. Hoofstuk Een bestudeer Margaret Fuller se *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) en Julia Martin se *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (2008) – albei reisverhale deur vroue wat die uitwerking van Europese uitbreiding na nuwe grondgebiede, en die gevolglike ontworteling van inheemse gemeenskappe, onder die loep neem. Hoofstuk Twee handel oor aansprake op erfgrond onder afstammeling van Europese setlaars, en die nalatenskap van politieke en geregtelike onreg wat witmense se besetting van die grond as ’n gegewe help konstrueer het, terwyl die teenwoordigheid van diegene wat die grond vóór hulle bewoon het, weggelaat word. Hierdie hoofstuk ontleed Nathaniel Hawthorne se Gotiese verhaal *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) en Michiel Heyns se vertaling van Marlene van Niekerk se Afrikaanse plaasroman *Agaat* (2006). Hoofstuk Drie konsentreer op die mites van paradysagtige landskappe, hoe dít gebruik word om aansprake van grondeienaarskap te staaf, en hoe gemengde bloedlyne sulke aansprake kompliseer. Dít geskied aan die hand van ’n studie van William Wells Brown se *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter* (1853) en Zoë Wicomb se *David's Story* (2000). Hoofstuk Vier ontleed Frederick Douglass se slaweverhaal *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) en Aziz Hassim se historiese roman *Revenge of Kali* (2009) om uitbeeldings van ingevoerde arbeid te vergelyk. Die hoofstuk plaas Douglass se siening van slawerny en Hassim se beskrywing van ingeboekte arbeiders naas mekaar om die voorstelling van nasionale verbondenheid onder plantasiwerkers in hulle tekste te vergelyk.

Die bifokale leeswerk is geanker in die beduidende lot vergelykende werk wat reeds oor die Amerikaanse en Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing en literatuur gedoen is. ’n Studie van hierdie twee literêre kontekste bring aan die lig dat, ondanks aansienlike verskille wat geografiese en historiese beskouings betref, albei gekenmerk word deur doelgerigte pogings om die omstandighede te beskryf van ’n veronderstelde nuwe nasie wat op die beginsels van demokrasie gebou is. Ek voer aan dat hierdie pogings dikwels in hierdie twee eras tot uiting kom in die motiewe van land en landskap (met laasgenoemde die abstrakte voorstelling van eersgenoemde). Ek neem waar dat land(skap), waarin etlike simboliese betekenis vir verskillende kulturele en etniese groepe opgesluit lê, in albei kontekste in ’n metonimiese verwantskap teenoor die nasie staan. Ek ontleed hoe land (grond), wat in die betrokke tydperke in albei kontekste ’n uiters omstrede verskynsel is, deur skrywers gebruik word om ’n nasie se stryd met demokrasie, nasionale nuutheid, identiteit en verbondenheid uit te beeld.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Narrativising Landscapes: The United States and South Africa Compared

American literature produced in the mid-nineteenth century, a period that came to be known as the “American Renaissance,” reflects the attitude that while emergent literature had to represent the nation’s ostensible greatness, this depended upon the presence of a substantial national literature. Early writers of the republic, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Russell Lowell, advocated the view that the source of much-needed “materials” for literary production was the landscape (Levine and Krupat 933). For many writers and other luminaries, the new social order rested on local geography rather than European traditions, relying on the noteworthy distinctiveness of the American landscape from that of England. Several writers and poets, as well as Hudson River School painters, called on their peers to produce work that equals the greatness of the nation’s geography. In *Rural Hours* (1850), Susan Fenimore Cooper (1813-1894) carries forward the same call, contending that the American landscape impels the nation’s writers and artists to be original and innovative:

There is no precedent for such coloring as nature requires here among the works of old masters, and the American artist must necessarily become an innovator; nay, more, we are all of us so much accustomed to think of a landscape only in its spring or summer aspects, that when we see a painting where the trees are yellow and scarlet, and purple, instead of being green, we have an unpleasant suspicion that the artist may be imposing on us in some of his details. This is one of those instances in which it requires no little daring simply to copy nature. [...] Still, some landscape Rubens or Titian may yet, perhaps, arise among us, whose pencil shall do full justice to this beautiful and peculiar subject. (215)

Cooper’s assertion that the autumnal hues on display in her surrounding nature require linguistic ingenuity to accurately represent them, instead of merely resorting to the techniques of established artists to depict the more venerated seasons of spring and summer, resonates with the words of a near contemporary, Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), the South African author. In her preface to *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), considered to be the first South African novel in English (Shapple 80), Schreiner discusses the duty of the writer in handling the South African landscape in response to the criticism received on an earlier edition:

It has been suggested by a kind critic that he would better have liked the little book if it had been a history of wild adventure; of cattle driven into inaccessible “kranzes” by Bushmen; “of encounters – with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes”. This could not be. Such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand; there the gifts of the creative imagination, untrammelled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings. But, should one sit down to paint the scenes among which he has grown, he will find that the facts creep in upon him. Those brilliant phases and shapes which the imagination sees in far-off lands are not for him to portray. Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the gray pigments around him. He must paint what lies before him. (30)

Schreiner endeavours to develop a “new” language to describe a landscape that is also strikingly different from that of England. Her use of Afrikaans and Dutch geographical terms in the novel – words like *kopje* that have since entered the lexicon of South African English –

is often taken as an attempt to part with colonial British influence (Raitskin 26). In the passage quoted above, Cooper also looks on the American landscape as offering an original character that cannot be articulated in the traditional terms or techniques of landscape art that were revered in Europe, but there are obvious tonal differences between their injunctions to prospective writers or artists. Cooper identifies the landscape's grandiosity as inspiration for artistic output; it is exceptional and singular, while Schreiner attests to the apparent barrenness of the Karoo landscape, a barrenness that supposedly inhibits, and is "inaccessible" to, European conventions of artistic inspiration. Cooper's landscape is awe-inspiring; Schreiner's is regrettably mediocre. But what they do have in common is recognition of a quality of singularity in their regional landscapes, acknowledgement that this presumed uniqueness presents a challenge to their nations' writers, and a desire for said writers to examine the geographical distinctiveness of the national landscape and to use it as inspiration for writing.

For Schreiner, as for writers of the "American Renaissance" period, it is the ability to *read* the landscape that serves as prerequisite insight for writing *about* the nation, and generations of American and South African writers following them have frequently featured land and landscape tropes as metonyms for their country. In the decades following the publication of *The Story of an African Farm*, South African writers chronicled the many socio-political changes in the country's history by homing in on the question of land and on the effects of these changes on people's relationships with various landscapes. It is through land imagery that Sol Plaatje told his *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), an illustration of the Natives Land Act of 1913; Afrikaners crystallised their cultural identity in the genre of the *plaasroman* (the Afrikaans farm novel) in the 1920s and 1930s; and segregationist policies kept people "in their place" during apartheid.<sup>1</sup> It is also through the land question that a host of writers have grappled, and continue to grapple, with the realities of "the New South Africa," producing several seminal works of fiction, such as J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000), as well as many works of non-fiction and poetry, that explore facets of the new dispensation as it relates to land, such as equality, redress, and belonging.

The continued use of the land as metonym for the nation in the post-apartheid era suggests a thematic likeness with writing of the "American Renaissance" period that Schreiner's work, appearing in a pre-national moment, does not exhibit. Like those working during the "American Renaissance," South African writers producing work in the post-apartheid moment demonstrate an inclination towards questions of land and landscape as a means to address and inscribe a nominally new nation inflected by the rhetoric of democracy. Writers of both contexts appear keenly aware of the question of literary nationalism and the two national oeuvres are both born of the urgency to create a national literature reflective of democratic ideals. My interest is in this particular form of national newness and the literature that seeks to reflect it; with how writers in these emergent democracies set about writing, anew, their historical moment. The impetus for this study is my conviction that the literary corpus known as the "American Renaissance" is thematically commensurable with post-apartheid writing<sup>2</sup> since they both demonstrate a broad and sustained focus on the metonymic use of

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<sup>1</sup> See R. Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond* (especially the Introduction) for an explanation of the apartheid-era injunction to "know one's place."

<sup>2</sup> There have been several designations for the literature produced after 1994, including "post-transitional," "post post-apartheid" and "post-anti-apartheid," generally classified around various nodes that appear to dominate the



land(scape) as a channel to write about the nation, a nation in the process of becoming, self-reflexively fashioning itself as a new democracy. Unlike other studies comparing the United States and South Africa, in which the comparison is often based on a shared or similar social phenomenon or historical moment, this study experiments by placing works of different historical *and* geographical contexts in dialogue.

This experiment entails what I would call a “bifocal reading,” and it is the burden of this project to establish what of scholarly interest may be generated by adopting such an approach, which analytically closes the distance between American Renaissance work and post-apartheid writing, putting them in dialogue with each other. Given that I am working with texts from different historical and geographical contexts, the reading strategy I have in mind can be described as employing a “bifocal vision.” Borrowing the phrase from John Robinson, Margaret Chatterjee asserts that comparative literature needs bifocal vision, that comparatists “need to look closely and also need long sight” (vi). Chatterjee was thinking about geographical breadth, positing what she saw as the “responsibility” of comparative literature to enrich a nation’s literature while simultaneously moving beyond the boundaries of the nation (vii). However, the image of bifocalism can, of course, apply to temporal differences too, and it is here where much of the novelty of the bifocal lies: in reading a text with attention to its historical as well as locational origins, one can consider how social values of the day and geographical character of place helped to shape a text and consider the effect of reading it from the perspective of, and as inflected by, another text.

My interest in the bifocal emerges in response to recent questions in the related fields of comparative and world literature. In the last decade, several English-language studies have explored the interest and relevance of comparative and world literature, reassessing their relevance, cogency, definition and methodology, particularly with respect to increasing awareness of globalisation and its effect on the fields. Examples include *A Companion to Comparative Literature* (2014), edited by Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas; David Damrosch’s *World Literature in Theory* (2014); and *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications*, edited by César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva (2015); as well as several releases marketed as readers for, or histories of, world literature.<sup>3</sup> These publications follow a series of releases from the early 2000s that challenged the contemporary status of comparative and world literature, such as Franco Moretti’s influential essay “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000), Damrosch’s *What is World Literature?* (2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* (2003) and Saussy’s *Comparative Literature in the Age of Globalization* (2006).

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given writing. The difficulty in settling on a definitive title is caused by the sense, among critics, that the work produced since the dismantling of apartheid lacks the cohesive focus that apartheid writing possessed and has been replaced by broader interests and more varied themes and approaches that defy straightforward cataloguing. See De Kock, “Notes” 109; Frenkel and MacKenzie 1-2; and Samuelson, “Scripting” 112 for these discussions. I simply use the term “post-apartheid literature” in a more general sense to refer to literary works produced after 1994.

<sup>3</sup> These include several Routledge releases, including their *Concise History of World Literature* by Theo D’Haen (2012); *Companion to World Literature* (2012), edited by D’haen, Damrosch and Djelal Kadir; *World Literature: A Reader* (2013), edited by D’haen, Domínguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen; and *Companion to World Literature and World History*, edited by May Hawas (2018). For a discussion of several publications billed as histories of world literature that examines the definition and scope of the concept as it appears in a few other studies, similar to the ones mentioned here, see Damrosch, “Toward a History.”

As these studies attest, uncomplicated definitions of world and comparative literature are elusive. The conventional definition of comparative literature, adopted from the work of Henry H. H. Remak, is “the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression” (Domínguez, Saussy and Villanueva, Preface xi).<sup>4</sup> Domínguez et al. define comparative literature as “another form of reading” (different from leisurely reading) by which a text is read through the lens of another (ix). Its central focus is the differences between literatures, while the object of world literature is the similarities, the search for the cosmopolitan or the universal between national literatures (McInturff 225). There is, of course, a degree of overlapping between them, and they tend to share the premise that one’s reading of a text is enriched when read alongside, or through, another. Damrosch has offered a comprehensive definition of world literature as he sees it: 1) as “an elliptical refraction of national literatures”; 2) “writing that gains in translation”; 3) “not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own” (*What is World Literature?* 281). For Damrosch, “works become world literature by being received *into* the space of a foreign culture, a space defined in many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present needs of its own writers. Even a single work of world literature is the locus of negotiation between two cultures” (*How to Read* 283, original emphasis). There have, of course, been criticisms of the scholarly treatment and practice of world literature. The general inexactness of the concept and the questions around which texts are to be admitted to the category of world literature (and on what basis) are some facets of the criticism that has been levelled at the field of world literature. Another is the assumption of translatability, according to Emily Apter, who argues in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013) that “untranslatability” (4) is unavoidable if one is to consider the various layers of context at work in language.

A more nuanced use of the bifocal that seems compatible with both Damrosch’s definition of world literature and with the way of reading I have in mind appears in an article by Chinese-Australian poet and scholar Kim Cheng Boey. In Boey’s view, “[r]eading is an act of border-crossing, moving or being moved across from one world into another. [...] If travel, or the act of moving across borders and states, is the metaphor that aptly describes the act of reading, then it is equally or even more apposite in mapping what happens in the process of writing” (2). Thinking through the potential challenges of introducing Creative Writing, “a Western cultural formation” (5), into Asian Pacific academes, which he suspects may be seen “as yet another form of Western cultural imperialism” (3), Boey proposes “transnational studies as a corollary of Creative Writing” (3). This, he believes, will allow the use “of American or Australian writers of Asian/Pacific origin or descent” as mediators in the process of implementing Creative Writing, so as to “allay fears of cultural imperialism” (3). It is “[t]he plurality and hybridity” of writers of Asian Pacific origin who live and work in the West, their joint access and attachment to at least two national regions and cultures, that “offer an instructive paradigm for fledgling Creative Writing programs,” according to Boey (5). Boey’s view of travelling cultures relates to the circulation and reception of texts outside their places of origin and therefore to the formation of world literature as defined by Damrosch. He draws on the metaphor of writing as travel to discuss the potentialities of migration for creative

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<sup>4</sup> For a consonant but more descriptive definition, see Tötösy de Zepetnek 13.

writing, asserting that travel presents émigré writers with a unique position in which to assess cultural exchange, for it “provides [them with] a bifocal or even polyphonic vision” (3). Boey goes on to argue that such a dual viewpoint affords émigré writers “a bifocal vision that telescopes disparate cultures and geographies” (6). Boey’s telescope image extends that of the bifocal as mentioned by Chatterjee by suggesting an apparatus that not only enables both far-off and close-up views but superimposes them, permitting the view of one *through* the lens of the other. I am therefore proposing the bifocal perspective as one means by which comparatists can educe meaning from one national literature through another based on their respective contexts; in other words, to generate the refraction posited by Damrosch:

This refraction, moreover, is double in nature: works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture, a space defined in many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present needs of its own writers. Even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures. The receiving culture can use the foreign material in all sorts of ways: as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition; as a negative case of a primitive or decadent strand that must be avoided or rooted out at home; or, more neutrally, as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined. World literature is thus always as much about the host culture’s values and needs as it is about a work’s source culture; hence, it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone. (“World Literature, National Contexts” 514)

Boey’s definition of the bifocal takes us some way in developing a reading strategy for the kind of comparative study I have in mind, but it needs amending. On its own, the notion of telescoping one text through another does not adequately explain how one might elicit the “double refraction” postulated by Damrosch. However, Boey’s identification of émigré writers as enjoying a degree of plurality – of access to different cultures and thus of plural vision – invokes the work of Edward W. Said, who defines the exile’s perspective, caught between a homeland and host nation, as “a plurality of vision” (“Reflections” 186): “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*” (186, original emphasis). Said elaborates on the counterpoint in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in which he invokes it to comment on the purchase to be made in comparative literature in a way that anticipates Boey’s more recent use of the term “bifocal”:

For the trained scholar of comparative literature, a field whose origin and purpose is to move beyond insularity and provincialism and to see several cultures and literatures together, contrapuntally, there is an already considerable investment in precisely this kind of antidote to reductive nationalism and uncritical dogma: after all, the constitution and early aims of comparative literature were to get a perspective beyond one’s own nation, to see some sort of whole instead of the defensive little patch offered by one’s own culture, literature and history. (43)

*Culture and Imperialism* is Said’s study of the political and economic mechanisms that underpin imperialism. The book’s primary subjects are canonical European (mainly British)

novels from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with which Said interprets how narratives helped to inform cultural attitudes towards imperialism, despite the immense spatial distances between the imperial centre and its colonies. The musical denotation of the counterpoint, as Said's wife Mariam reminds us, "describes two contradictory themes playing at the same time and creating a harmonious melody" (xv), and is deployed by Said to "juxtapos[e]" independent texts, not only to identify the similarities and differences, but to "le[t] them play off each other" (Said, *Culture* 32): "In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work" (51). For Said, applying contrapuntalism to literature alerts us to "the historical experience of imperialism as a matter [...] of interdependent histories [and] overlapping domains" (*Culture* 259); it suggests a connectedness that facilitates "a simultaneous awareness of the metropolitan history that is narrated and those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51). By way of example, he comments on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) as a work that is simultaneously "about England *and* about Antigua; [...] about order at home and slavery abroad" (259, original emphasis):

In *Mansfield Park*, which within Austen's work carefully defines the moral and social values informing her other novels, references to Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas possessions are threaded through; they give him his wealth, occasion his absences, fix his social status at home and abroad, and make possible his values, to which Fanny Price (and Austen herself) finally subscribes. (62)

Austen's references to Antigua are few and swift, but they are there; and for Said, these subtle presences of an outer influence that supports the story that unfolds in the narrative's foreground are evidence of a latent narrative energy, one that is brought to the surface by reading secondary material *in counterpoint with* Austen's novel. What Said proposes is "a matter of knowing *how* to read" the cultural history of both metropole and colony. Austen's novel, he contends, "can – indeed ought – to be read" as a novel that is as much about Antigua and slavery as it is about England and middle-class domestic order, "with Eric Williams and C. L. R. James alongside [it]" (259). Derek B. Scott notes that, for Said, "seeing works in social context [...] *enhances* our understanding of them" (104, original emphasis). Understood differently, the counterpoint can be taken, as Cameron Fae Bushnell writes, as "the simultaneous reading of multiple accounts of a historical moment or a cultural event in order to understand the moment or event in all its complexity" (5), or to better understand how texts process such complexity, sometimes in ways that reduce or obscure it; hence, Said's intention of placing secondary material alongside Austen's novel. He writes that "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others" (32).

My study is not concerned with identifying and analysing two geographical contexts that are connected in the realm of empire, as *Culture and Imperialism* is; the texts that I have chosen cannot be read as shedding light on the same contexts or events. It does, however,

propose the use of contrapuntalism as “a reading strategy,” as Bushnell defines it (4), operating in tandem with the bifocal, to elicit or accentuate meaning, or to trigger a reading in one text when placed alongside another. Attuned to oblique or even absent features of a text – its latent “tensions” (Telmissany and Schwartz xxiv) – contrapuntalism garners meaning as much from that which is unsaid as from that which is said in an opposing or supplementary text. In addition, even though Said’s counterpoint is rooted in the relationship between metropole and colony, and is thus geographically oriented, it can just as reasonably operate on a temporal juxtaposition as well, as this study sets out to do. My intention is not to work with any established corpus of world literature or to engage with the debates around its definition or function. Rather, I want to use premises surrounding the concept and its formation – mainly the idea that it is a “mode of reading” – to produce a heuristic study, something experimental that imagines an encounter – or “negotiation,” in Damrosch’s words – between work from the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa.

In doing so, I work with Damrosch’s view in mind regarding the reception of a text into a foreign domain: “[a]ny full response of a foreign text is likely to operate along all three of these dimensions: a sharp *difference* we enjoy for its sheer novelty; a gratifying *similarity* that we find in the text or project onto it; and a middle-range of what is *like-but-unlike* – the sort of relation most likely to make a productive change in our own perceptions and practices” (*What is World Literature?* 11-12, original emphases). In the following pages, I aim to sketch a few qualities of American Renaissance and post-apartheid writing – themes, sentiments and diction – that, to my mind, resonate with each other in terms of the aforementioned dedication to democracy. The “American Renaissance” was given critical currency by F. O. Matthiessen in his 1941 study, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. Matthiessen analysed literature of the 1850s and, although his choice of works by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman has been criticised for its exclusivity as an all-male, white canon situated almost solely around Massachusetts and New York,<sup>5</sup> the term “American Renaissance” gained traction as an apt name for a period of prolific and influential literary production. In his study, however, Matthiessen overlooks or deemphasises various socio-political phenomena like slavery and immigration (Levine and Krupat 929-30) and social categories like gender, race and class (Otter 229). Later scholars have tried to amend this apparent shortcoming by extending the American Renaissance timeframe from roughly 1820 to 1865 and broadening Matthiessen’s selection to minority groups like women, Native American and African American writers to “reflec[t] the diversity of literary production” during the period (Otter 229).<sup>6</sup> My study relies on such revisionism (as will become apparent in my selection of writers), but while other scholars have revised the American Renaissance according to various criteria, I am maintaining

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<sup>5</sup> Matthiessen chose Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850), Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852), Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855). For criticism on Matthiessen, see Boswell; for reconfigurations of the American Renaissance that alter or extend its scope to take women and/or people of colour into account, see Avallone; Harris; Nerad; Pease, “New Americanists”; and Tompkins (the chapter “The Other American Renaissance”); and for criticism of such revisionist treatments of the American Renaissance, see Crews.

<sup>6</sup> The 1820s were an especially productive period for literature in the United States during which writers first began to register a sense of literary nationalism, heralding the rebirth, or renaissance, that would come in the 1850s (Levine and Krupat 930).

the crux of Matthiessen's selection, namely the writers' "devotion to the possibilities of democracy" (ix). This claim recognises or assumes a link between the literary and the national, and it is this quality of American Renaissance literature that is pertinent for comparison with post-apartheid writing.

One characteristic shared by the two bodies of work is that the diverse social factors at work in the new dispensation have given rise to questions of what to write about and what form such writing should take.<sup>7</sup> When South Africa re-entered the global economy after the 1994 elections as an unstable entity, both the world and the country itself were uncertain about its condition. This uncertainty extended to the state of the country's literature, whose dominant theme up to the 1980s was the injustice and strife caused by racial segregation. The task had previously been to "represen[t] South Africa as 'a land apart' – a polity cut across by segregation that precluded the very notion of nation while simultaneously cut off from its elsewhere" (Samuelson, "Scripting" 113), a shared purpose among writers of the left.

The prospect of a nominally new nation presented the challenge of producing material unencumbered by perceived obligations to politics.<sup>8</sup> Since the instatement of a democratic government, there have been ongoing deliberations around, and analyses of, the forms literature in the new dispensation has taken and the issues it has confronted. In large measure, this "crisis of inscription" (De Kock, "Does South African Literature Still Exist?" 72) continues to play out in terms of national belonging and settlement, maintaining the tradition set in motion by Schreiner and demonstrating "[t]he fraught question of how one is to live in this land, be native to it, or, conversely, what it means to be alienated from it" (Wittenberg 1). Achmat Dangor explains that "[s]uddenly [after 1994] your *raison d'être* has been removed and you have to find new ones, [...] to move away from simply identifying old enemies, old foes, in the same old way" (Knecht). This is particularly pertinent given the palpable, negative legacy of the past, even two decades into democracy, and what many perceive as piecemeal progression that, in some cases, impels writers to rekindle bygone episodes that hold ideological significance in their literature. The difficulty of categorising contemporary South African writing is partly due to the experimental nature of the work, prompting occasional difficulty in clearly identifying genres. David Medalie argues that this experimental quality is a result of writers' confrontations with social change (36). One finds a similar nebulosity of genre during the exploratory time of the American Renaissance when writers consciously sought to "*create* American literary traditions" and consolidate them (Levine and Krupat 946, original emphasis). This is apparent in studies that analyse the esoteric sources that inspired some American Renaissance work, demonstrating the porosity of genres during this time.<sup>9</sup>

When the South African critic Sarah Nuttall theorised what she phrased "the now," she echoed Emerson's view when he called for the "the Here and Now" to replace the "wild, savage and preposterous There and Then" (4), revealing unease at the prospect of the past's hold on

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<sup>7</sup> This has been the focus of several journal issues. See also the collections edited by Attridge and Jolly, and Chapman and Lenta.

<sup>8</sup> See Ndebele, who writes of apartheid literature as "reveal[ing] the glaring history of spectacular representation" (33) and calls for literature in the post-apartheid moment to turn to "the ordinary," that is, "the opposite of the spectacular" (46) in order to "reveal the necessary knowledge of actual reality" and "de-romanticis[e] the spectacular notion of struggle" (45). Also see Sachs, who addresses the challenge faced by post-apartheid writers.

<sup>9</sup> See Benesch; Pease, *Visionary Compacts*; Reynolds; and Versluis for a look at other social and literary influences that may have contributed to the production of American Renaissance work.

the present and the vitiating effect it may have on the future as a locus of possibility. This is another feature shared by the two bodies of work – that efforts to fashion a sense of novelty, both secular and literary, or merely to explore “the now” are not straightforward but involve “what remains of the past” and “that which hasn’t happened yet” (Nuttall 732). Another South African critic, Ingrid de Kok, when commenting in 1996 on the effect of the new democracy on literary production in South Africa, claimed that “the inaugural moment imagined was the opening of a wing door. The harsh landscape of the past could be viewed from one side, and the hazy vista of the future could just be glimpsed from the other” (5). She famously described the situation as “a creased Janus face, vigilant of the past, watchful of the future” (5). In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, set up in 1995 to bring to light perpetrations of human rights violations during apartheid, have played a significant role in post-apartheid literature’s proclivity for themes like retribution and confession, as well as questions about the past’s relevance to the present.<sup>10</sup> When Michael Chapman and Hedley Twidle identify the tendency in post-apartheid South Africa writing to seek a “usable past” (Chapman, “Problem” 85; Twidle 101), they are adopting a phrase introduced by the American critic Van Wyck Brooks in a 1918 essay in which he exhorts literary scholars to galvanise American history as “an inexhaustible storehouse of apt attitudes and adaptable ideals” (339) to best reflect its democratic nature.<sup>11</sup> As George Abbott White argues, Matthiessen shared Brooks’s sentiment about the value of the past (451). *American Renaissance* took ten years to complete and Matthiessen, writing in the 1930s, was intently producing a work that he hoped would reignite a sense of American greatness while the country endured the Depression. The retrospective nature of his study helped to consolidate the idea of an American national literature<sup>12</sup> and his approach resounds with post-apartheid literature and literary criticism as several writers, including ones who have also worked as literary scholars, undertake their literary representations of the nation in a similar fashion to Matthiessen’s retrospective project: they conjure a *past* moment of national promise to help address questions in the present, revisiting and re-imagining the period in which the nation readies itself for, or adjusts itself to, the new political dispensation.

The tension between past and future in “seeking an understanding of the present” (Bell 71) can, of course, be expected during a time when a nation reconceptualises itself. This tension is normal for societies in transition, as Medalie asserts: “[T]he preoccupation with the past in the literature since 1994 is entirely understandable and could even have been predicted. In historical periods which feel strongly their own transitional status (the Edwardian age in Britain is a good example) there is an inclination to look at the present with dismay, the future with trepidation and the past with nostalgia” (36). America in the nineteenth century generally

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<sup>10</sup> See Gready, and Heyns, “The Whole Country’s Truth.”

<sup>11</sup> The phrase appears in the essay “On Creating a Usable Past.” Three years earlier, Brooks published *America’s Coming-of-Age*, in which nineteenth-century New England is seen as signifying the American spirit. Brooks’s work precedes a series of noteworthy publications that consciously aimed to establish American literature and criticism as an independent field, unique and separate from that of England. It is generally regarded that this series ends with the publication of Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* in 1941.

<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge that Matthiessen’s study and his ambitions are much more complex than this, as scholars have shown; delving, as they have, into the limitations of his project and the ways that his political and personal (especially sexual) inclinations influenced his work in the 1930s and 1940s (Otter 234), as well as its reception by fellow scholars. For such readings, see Bergman, Cain, Dolan, Grossman, Hickman, and Milder.

presented itself, and was recognised by others, as a country of the future. Although many of its most salient developments were initiated elsewhere, like republican and democratic government and the technological advances associated with the industrial revolution, they were fervently embraced in America, which demonstrated an openness to change (Simmons 1). In his *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-1841), James Fenimore Cooper conjures the image of an idyllic past centred in the American wilderness in the face of expanding waves of settlement. These novels illustrate conflict between the desire to restore an immaculate natural environment, representative of an idealised past, and the appeal of progress, the desire to expand and settle ever further west, anticipating imminent wealth by conquering the wilderness. The latter was perhaps the stronger force, for not only does Cooper illustrate a changing natural landscape but a doomed indigenous population as well, and the past is looked on with nostalgia. There are many parallels with South Africa in this regard, as both countries developed as frontier states which resulted in the near genocide of its indigenous populations and from which emerged comparable notions of cultural exceptionalism (Cuthbertson, "Reading" 27). In contrast to Cooper is the case of Nathaniel Hawthorne, for whom the past is a haunting reminder of ancestral iniquities. Hawthorne often explores guilt about familial improprieties, a theme prompted by his forebears' involvement in the Salem witch trials, and his oeuvre resonates with South African texts about white landownership and the dispossession of indigenous groups that said ownership entailed historically. This history of land dispossession appears as a backdrop to a number of novels by white writers probing notions of complicity and guilt around historical wrongs, feelings that confront the protagonist upon their return home (in the South African context, generally the family farm), an occurrence that sparks an awakening to the political realities of the country.

The doggedness of the past relates to another redolent feature of American Renaissance and post-apartheid writing: In attempting to articulate the realities of "the now," writers often seek to express the aims of creating a unified nation built on the ideals of democracy (the criterion by which Matthiessen warranted his selection) but repeatedly confront the exclusivity of the nation's liberties (a key problem with Matthiessen's selection). The intricacies of democracy's evolution are too broad to be elaborated upon here, but naturally there are discrepancies between how democracy was conceived in the United States during the nineteenth century and how it is understood in South Africa today. (Such discrepancies will be addressed in the chapters that follow when they appear pertinent to the discussion.) The United States' self-ascribed status as an exemplary democracy is established in the Declaration of Independence and its well-known core assertion, "that all Men are created equal" (qtd. in Cullen 38). However, as Jim Cullen points out, this was only applicable to white men (51), who solely enjoyed suffrage; "men" was not synonymous with "mankind." While post-Revolutionary America relished independence from British colonial rule it simultaneously exerted an imperialistic drive, captured in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, to expand and settle the continent, which encompassed the dislocation and decimation of Native American peoples, the annexation of parts of Mexico through war and the ongoing forced servitude of African slaves.

Many writers of the American Renaissance were committed to social revolution, and many, both white and black, challenged the exclusivity of the Declaration and championed an interpretation of it in the egalitarian sense that it is understood today. Although, as Albert J.



von Frank reminds us, white and black writers occupied very different positions in relation to their subject matter given their dissimilar cultures – they did not “occup[y] the same undifferentiated ‘American’ cultural space” – they tended to point to the incongruity of the United States modelling itself as the land of the free while profiting from the labour of slaves and dispossessing Native Americans. In “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” (1852), for instance, Frederick Douglass argues emphatically that “[t]o drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty and call upon him to join in joyous anthems [is] inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony” (2140). Douglass is in the company of many authors of slave narratives and slave autobiographies who aimed to exhibit the full horrors of the slave system as an affront to democratic principles. Like other African American authors of his day, Douglass endeavours to enter public discourse on democracy, the benefits of which were denied him. Related to democratic rights, the establishment of national identity features in several (often partially autobiographical) texts by African American writers in the American Renaissance.

These works arose from a context-specific need and had a clear purpose – the abolition of slavery. Thematically and stylistically, they appear to have little in common with post-apartheid writing. But the works of many writers of colour that assay the dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa reveal a similar attempt to address democratic rhetoric and to frame a sense of inclusion within the democratic vision. Many members of South Africa’s coloured<sup>13</sup> and Indian communities, for example, have felt marginalised in the national imaginary since 1994, overshadowed by the focus on abjection suffered by their black counterparts during apartheid. Both groups are comparable with the United States’ black population – coloureds because they, like African Americans, originated chiefly through histories of slavery and the imbalanced power structure of the farm; and Indians who descended from indentured labourers and whose migration to South Africa has in recent years been addressed in scholarship that reorients work on the Black Atlantic to the address the experiences of imported labourers who traversed the Indian Ocean.

A feature related to the challenging of democratic discourse that is also present in American Renaissance and post-apartheid writing is the grappling with identity, either on an individual or collective level. Nineteenth-century America embodied contradictions regarding citizenship, with the question of who qualified as “American.”<sup>14</sup> For example, Irish immigrants who arrived as a result of the industrial revolution and famine were accepted as American nationals while Native Americans were not, and while Anglos who squatted on land conceded to the United States following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were deemed “native,” the Mexican Americans who had legal deeds to those lands were labelled “foreigners” (Powell 12). Thus, the very principles that promoted the United States as a land of opportunity and a progressive “melting pot” enabled a “ruthless democracy,” to borrow a phrase Melville used in a letter to Hawthorne; that is, a relentless drive to fulfil its perceived destiny that was at odds with the melting pot image (Powell 5). Post-apartheid South Africa, whose multicoloured national flag and status as a “rainbow nation” might call to mind the American melting pot,

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<sup>13</sup> I explain my use of this racial term in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>14</sup> I refer to “America” as the writers and critics themselves do, although I am aware of the predicament that the term creates when seen as synonymous with the United States (discounting other countries in the Americas as also being American).

reveals a similar anxiety about national identity. This is evident in the spate of violent xenophobic attacks that have escalated since 1994, mainly against other African nationals whose status as “foreign,” like the Mexicans mentioned above, reveals racist undertones (Neocosmos 1). There is, moreover, an uneasiness with some subnational identities – groups who were assigned racial tags during apartheid and whose histories have largely been erased under oppression, who find themselves, like David Dirkse in *David’s Story*, claiming that “[w]e don’t know what we are” (29) and might seek to “revert” to another, apparently more ethnically homogeneous, group (as seen in “Kho-San revivalism”) or a more affirmative ethnic designation (such as Cape Malay identity).<sup>15</sup>

There exists a substantial body of comparative work with literary, historiographical and environmental foci between the United States and South Africa, but there is not, to my knowledge, any study that compares literature from the American Renaissance and the post-apartheid period. The scope of the existing comparative work is too broad to be given in full here, but generally these studies examine parallel historical phenomenon or cultural and political contact and exchange. Race relations is a common interest; examples include the Civil Rights Movement and the Struggle (as the anti-apartheid movement is called), exchanges between South African protest writers and writers of the Harlem Renaissance, as well as the politics of white supremacy and exceptionalism. The appeal of American popular culture for disenfranchised communities is another vibrant research area, evident in the veneration of American hip-hop and street culture among disadvantaged communities such as those on the Cape Flats. It can also be seen in the “musical diaspora” (Muller 67) in which permutations of jazz attracted “disenfranchised South Africans” for being “redolent not only of cosmopolitanism (appealing at a time of increasing marginalisation and cultural isolation), but of freedom, of strivings for racial equality and full citizenship (appealing in a context of increasing political oppression)” (R. Barnard, “An Introduction” 2).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the academic journal *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* is dedicated to the “analyses of the United States and South Africa from a transnational and/or comparative perspective, seeking to understand each country in relation to the other” (“Aims and Scope”).<sup>17</sup>

Inspired by, and rooted in, this rich body of work, my dissertation aims to probe the potentialities of a reconfiguration of the terms of comparison between the two countries. This study is delineated around two historical moments that, while in many respects radically unlike, appear to share similar concerns, encompassed by incitement to (re)conceive a national literature. Andries Walter Oliphant, writing about the problematic attempt to define a South African national literature, contends that if a nation is defined as a “distinct identity [of] a

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<sup>15</sup> These identities are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>16</sup> Although I have distinguished themes here as individual areas of research, there is considerable overlapping between them; music, literature and popular culture, for instance, are virtually inextricable from politics and issues of race. For studies on race, see Cell, Fredrickson and McKoy. For political, literary and musical exchanges, see R. Barnard, “Introduction: Comparative Thinking”; Bernstein and Cock; S. Graham, “Cultural Exchange” and “This Curious Thing”; Jacobs, “The Blues”; Masilela; Nixen; Rosenberg; Still; Titlestad; and S. Viljoen; and Vinson.

<sup>17</sup> Originally subtitled *The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*, *Safundi* produced an issue dedicated to new methods for conducting American Studies and abandoned the term “comparative” from its original title in 2006, given the fostering of transnational and transcultural exchanges that challenge the bimodal nature of comparative studies (Desmond 11-12).

people and serve[s] to unify them in a homogenous social formation,” it would imply “an overcoming of divisions, disunity and difference. Thus, the coming into being of a nation historically involves the fusion of previously divided peoples into a linguistic, cultural, territorial and political unity not once and for all but under specific historical conditions” (Oliphant 12). He identifies South Africa as “a democratic state without a nation” (18) given the legacy of inequality and division, and concludes that any attempt to define a unified category of South African national literature is “untenable” (18). This issue is related to language politics, about “whose language, culture, or story can be said to have authority in South Africa when the end of apartheid has raised challenging questions as to what it is to be a South African” (Chapman, *Southern* xiv), and with the issue of representation, about who gets to speak for whom – concerns that compound the task of classifying a distinctive national literature. My intention is not to seek to define the concept of “national literature” but rather to engage with writers’ attempts to enter into the formation of a national oeuvre amidst continued uncertainty about what writers will produce in a phase of national self-definition, initiated by democratic governance, during which issues relating to nation-building acquire renewed currency.

With its interest in exploring representations of the national in the literary, the study takes account of contemporary scholarly attitudes to the nation as an analytical framework in view of a wide-ranging and expanding focus on globalisation and its effects. “‘Globalization’ is the familiar term,” writes Wai Chee Dimock, “used to describe [the] unraveling of the national sovereignty” (“Introduction: Planet and America” 1). The destabilisation of the national framework has formed part of attempts to “internationalize”<sup>18</sup> (Desmond 7) or “deterritorialize”<sup>19</sup> American Studies, emerging from the view that American Studies has reached a state of being post-national.<sup>20</sup> In *Shades of the Planet: Planet and America, Set and Subset* (2007), a collection edited by Dimock and Lawrence Buell (both of whom have worked extensively on the American Renaissance), contributing scholars confront the question of whether the nation remains a valuable unit in the practice and study of American literature. Concentration on the nation has given way to alternative ways of conceiving systems of humans’ occupation in the world, such as the notion of planetarity, as defined by Dimock, by which “America” circulates beyond its geographic borders as an idea, symbol or commodity.

In South Africa, contemporary scholars have not relinquished their attention to the nation despite increasing efforts to fashion transnational links. In fact, transnational links have become a fundamental aspect in re-establishing the sense of belonging for many South Africans by acknowledging their ancestral places of origin, in addition to inserting South Africa’s contribution to broader processes in the global South. What recent scholarship has shown, however, is that this question saturates numerous post-apartheid novels, even in the face of “transnational forces” with “a new awareness of interconnectedness” (De Kock, “A History” 115). Leon de Kock, for one, asserts that “in a global or transnational public sphere which disavows the national as an entity for the purposes of self-identification[,] the ‘trans’ in ‘transnational’ [can be treated as] a cusp between the national and what lies beyond it, not a

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<sup>18</sup> See Desmond 7 and Giles, “Virtual Americas.”

<sup>19</sup> See R. Barnard, “An Introduction,” and Giles, “The Deterritorialization of American Studies.”

<sup>20</sup> See the edited collection by Rowe.

severance” (“Judging” 31), conceptualising the nation as a connective unit instead of a disjoining one. Recent work by Meg Samuelson, for instance, determines that despite many writers’ increased attention to new subject matter for a post-apartheid era, questions about the nation and what it means to belong persist through what she calls a “poetics of (un)settlement” (“(Un)Settled” 273). This can be seen in her analyses of diasporic works in which one also finds depictions of home-making, with the transplanting of national belonging and matters of South African citizenship.<sup>21</sup>

Since my focus is on the nation as negotiated in literature, and also the way this literature partakes in broader discourses of national self-determination, the understanding of the nation as a social construct that is in a perpetual process of becoming is useful to work with. Indeed, the amorphousness of the nation as an analytic category also emerges in recent publications on comparative literature and the related field of world literature, which is relevant in outlining the theory underpinning this study. The texts under consideration present discourses of the nation that consider the way individual, subjective interests are given, or not given, public signification. Such compositions of the nation resonate with the conception of the nation as a narrative, as “hybrid, unstable and ambivalent” (Handley 148).<sup>22</sup> This view is strongly influenced by Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation, which is useful here. According to Anderson’s well-known definition, the nation is “an imagined community,” theorised as such because it is always conceivable through comradeship even though its members will never encounter most of their fellow citizens (49-50). Conceptualised in part due to the production of a print culture and virtual media (56-7), Anderson’s concept is an apt interpretation to capture the “constructedness” of the nation (the fact that it develops and spreads along with forms of literacy). Inherent in Anderson’s concept of “nation-ness” (49) – that is, the idea of being a nation – is his understanding that the nation implies in its formation attitudes and practices of exclusion that raise questions about who in fact belongs in the nation and who partakes in its construction (Carr-West 81). Anderson’s definition usefully recognises the nation as a flexible entity and thus challenges essentialising views. Naturally, the nation figured differently in nineteenth-century America from its signification in modern-day South Africa, as will be seen in the chapters to follow.

Analyses in this dissertation centre on the depictions of land(scape) because, in the periods being investigated here, land emerges as a pressing issue in the respective processes of national (re)construction and discourses around nation-building have at times relied on land(scape) imagery which, in turn, has been reflected in literature. With South Africa’s inauguration as a democratic nation, land restitution became a fundamental concern, although the country continues to deal with the effects of territorial impositions by which various social groups’ movement in, or occupation of, land was controlled. The White Paper on South African Land Policy 1997 implores readers to view “*our land* [...] [a]s a cornerstone for reconstruction and development” (22, original emphasis), setting out its aims of (among others) redressing past injustices of land dispossession and implementing equitable land distribution (6). When Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously conceptualised the new country as a “Rainbow Nation” he signified racial diversity (182), drawing on its “different colours representing different

<sup>21</sup> See Samuelson’s articles “Walking through the Door,” “Scripting,” “(Un)Settled” and “Sea Changes.”

<sup>22</sup> See the collection *Nation and Narration* (1990), edited by Homi K. Bhabha.

people” (n. pag.).<sup>23</sup> Since then, two noteworthy invocations of the national mythology of the “rainbow nation” emerged in which landscape represents this image of diversity and inclusivity. During his inaugural speech in 1994, former president Nelson Mandela asserted that “each of us is intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world” (“Statement”). The sentiment that geographic diversity is representative of a multifarious national identity was reiterated by his successor, Thabo Mbeki, in a speech delivered in 1996 upon the ratification of the South African Constitution. Entitled “I Am an African,” the speech (partially given below) celebrates that

I owe my being to the hills and valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. [...] I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape – they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence and they who, as a people, perished in the result. [...] In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East. [...] I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom. [...] I am the grandchild who lays fresh flowers on the Boer graves at St Helena, the Bahamas, and the Vrouemonument, who sees in the mind’s eye and suffers the suffering of a simple peasant folk, death, concentration camps, destroyed homesteads, a dream in ruins. [...] I come of those who were transported from India and China, whose being resided in the fact, solely, that they were able to provide physical labour, who taught me that we could both be at home and be foreign, who taught me that human existence itself demanded that freedom was a necessary condition for that human existence. Being part of all of these people, and in the knowledge that none dares contest that assertion, I shall claim that – I am an African. (Mbeki)

Mbeki’s gesture to the diversity of natural spaces as signifying the assimilation of various peoples is contrapuntally evocative of Whitman, whose work famously lauded the United States as “not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations” (Whitman, Introduction 5). In his poem, “Our Old Feuilleage,” Whitman similarly records a variety of American geographic spaces to portray an image of national unity, but his diction foregrounds cohesiveness above difference, whereas Mbeki’s narrator commemorates racial, cultural and linguistic variety. In essence, while both celebrate national cohesion, Whitman does so by claiming a singular, essentialised American experience, while Mbeki images streams of different people converging in one nation. Whitman’s poem also promotes a sense of national endurance, evident in the repeated use of the word “always,” while Mbeki’s speech acknowledges historical change, particularly through traumatic, violent events. Apart from the closing line quoted above, the speech lacks the triumphant tone of Whitman’s poem. As part of his broader African Renaissance agenda according to which Mbeki conceptualised South Africa as a

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<sup>23</sup> Tutu also drew on biblical connotations of peace and prosperity associated with the rainbow. Gary Baines writes that “[a]s a cleric, [Tutu’s] image presumably draws on the Old Testament story of the flood where the rainbow symbolises God’s promise not to pass further judgment on humankind. [...] For Tutu, the image probably also resonates with the symbolism of the rainbow in South African indigenous cultures. For instance, in Xhosa cosmology the rainbow signifies hope and the assurance of a bright future” (n. pag.). Additionally, some have drawn comparisons with the Rainbow Coalition (R. Barnard, “Of Riots” 399), multiracial, community-led movements fighting for equality in America.

frontrunner for progressive change on the African continent, it eschews the bombastically patriotic attitude of Whitman, who envisages America as a singular and pioneering nation, separate from the rest of the world. Moreover, Mbeki's majestic, all-encompassing "I" emulates the speaker in Whitman's "Song of Myself" who, through a series of embodiments that transcend the individual, details the variety of American life and the nation's ordinary people.<sup>24</sup>

Reading the speech through the lens of Whitman, the poet upheld as a national bard who championed restoration and healing following the abolition of slavery and the end of the Civil War, alerts one to Mbeki's use of loss as an experience common to all South Africans. This is a brief demonstration of what a bifocal reading might entail – going beyond summarily identifying similarities and differences between texts but attempting to extricate meaning in one text through another, with the aid of the uncanniness evoked through counterpoints. How authors of both nations reflect, comment on and critique national (re)construction is tied to land(scape), the ground upon which questions relating to the joys, perils and responsibilities of life in a democratic nation – questions of identity, belonging and (un)settlement – are so often reified. This provides the chance to inquire about the creation of literature in a new democracy and the way the landscape has functioned as a canvas for such literary production. In my readings I will consider the literary construction of the nation by considering metonymic portrayals of landscape, inquiring about how the landscape functions in the narrative, and how is it representative of the author's view of the nation as a whole, and his or her subnational community's place in it.

The distinction between land and landscape requires unpacking. As Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove note, the representation of landscape may take multiple forms, on various surfaces – "in paint on canvas, in writing on paper, in earth, stone, water and vegetation on the ground" – and "the meanings of verbal, visual and built landscapes" indeed share "a complex interwoven history" (1). Cosgrove also explains that "landscape constitutes a discourse through which identifiable social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations with both the land and with other human groups" (xiv), thereby being essential to constructions of belonging and rootedness. Thus tied to identity, "landscapes are socially constructed entities that emerge on the basis of layers of memory," writes Paul Rich, and "provide a vital dimension of myth in the construction of ethnic and 'national' identities that is often lost in a narrow focus on political discourse and agendas such as 'the politics of nation building'" (518). Given the changing relationship between social groups and land throughout time – a factor dependent on its distribution and use (Cosgrove 1; Williams, *The Country* 120) – landscape's socio-cultural currency in the West has developed and altered between various groups since the Renaissance period. According to Barbara Bender, landscape functions at the nexus "of history and politics, social relations and cultural perceptions" ("Introduction: Landscape" 3). It is related to but distinct from "environment," which encompasses the conditions (including physical ones) in which someone or something resides (Williams, *Keywords* 217), and "nature," which refers to that in the environment not created by man (223).

Landscape is dynamic, perspectival and experiential. Although it entails a material aspect, it manifests when apprehended through observation (Bender, "Introduction:

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<sup>24</sup> Kerry Bystrom has also recognised Mbeki's speech as Whitmanesque (225).

Landscape” 1); it comes into being through the gaze. Landscape is therefore not merely an inert backdrop to events or narratives. It possesses a hermeneutic function. Scholars have labelled it variously as “a cultural image” (Daniels and Cosgrove 1), a “social product” (Cosgrove 14), an “ideological concept” (32), “a signifying system” (Duncan 3) and “the work of the mind” (Schama 7). Moreover, landscape embodies power relations (Mitchell, Introduction 1). What is significant regarding settlement and belonging is that landscape, as initially conceptualised in the western world, is “closely connected with the imperial eye,” as J. M. Coetzee describes in *White Writing* (174).<sup>25</sup> In a similar vein, Said argues, the incentive for voyages to foreign lands was about more than “curiosity and scientific fervor”; the desire for dominion also factored into these voyages (“Invention” 181) and the appropriation of land by colonisers is entangled with the view of landscape as a way of seeing the external world (which is evident in the development of landscape art). That said, landscape is not an exclusively western or Renaissance construct but has existed in places and times other than those related to imperialism. Landscape is constituted in the meaning an environment has and its significance can differ between groups of people. Therefore, as Bender posits, contextualisation is crucial to landscape (“Introduction: Landscape” 2): “The way in which people – anywhere, everywhere – understand and engage with their worlds will depend upon the specific time and place and historical conditions. It will depend upon their gender, age, class, caste, and on their social and economic situation” (2).

Though land might evoke images of more corporeal phenomena than landscape, it is a similarly polysemic term. As James Graham points out, the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies eight meanings for the term: among these, “land” refers to “an expanse of country; ground; soil” and a “country, nation or state” (1). Such connotations are imperative to the metonymic treatment of land(scape) as nation in the literature analysed in this study. The process by which countries draw “symbolic analogies between ‘landscape’ and ‘nation’” can come about as “the nationalization of nature,” according to E. Kaufmann and O. Zimmer (5), whereby “popular historical myths, memories and supposed national virtues are projected onto a significant landscape in an attempt to lend more continuity and distinctiveness to it. In this way, an image of national authenticity is developed in which a nation’s distinctiveness is seen to be reflected in a particular landscape” (5). Simon Schama concurs: National identity, he contends, “would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition, its topography, mapped, elaborated and enriched as homeland” (19). J. M. Coetzee describes such projection of nationalist ideology onto landscapes as follows:

In the early, patriotic phase of Afrikaans poetry, in the first decades of this century, the task was explicitly laid upon the writer to find evidences of a “natural” bond between *volk* and *land*, that is to say, to naturalize the volk’s possession of the land. In the logic of similitudes elaborated in patriotic poetry, from the spaciousness of the land follows spaciousness of character; a landscape that invites freedom of movement promises freedom of personal and national destiny; wide horizons are a sign of an expansive future; and so forth. In these respects, first the United States and then South Africa rehearse familiar themes from the ideological repertoire of Western colonialism. (61)

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<sup>25</sup> For more detailed analyses, see Bender, “Subverting the Western Gaze”; Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”; and Pratt (especially the Introduction).

In this passage, Coetzee explicates the task conveyed to the Afrikaner poet to demonstrate the embodiment of national identity in the South African landscape at a moment when the convergence of several socio-political changes produced a burgeoning sense of Afrikaner nationalism. In drawing parallels between the United States and South Africa based on their histories of settler colonialism, Coetzee continues a comparison he began in his debut novel, *Dusklands* (1974). In *Dusklands*, Coetzee delves into how the attempt to interpret and ultimately conquer the landscape is associated with a particular way of seeing it – hence the many references to gazes in the novel. The novel employs the United States’ and South Africa’s respective histories of (un)settlement through the interplay between two narratives, that of a Dutch elephant hunter (Jacobus Coetzee) roaming the Cape in the eighteenth century who sees himself as “tamer of the wild” (77) and a propaganda specialist (Eugene Dawn) writing about America’s involvement in the Vietnam War (the novel having been released during the late phase of the United States’ active involvement in Vietnam). By mirroring discourses of empire and violence through incursions into foreign lands, *Dusklands* underscores the connection between ways of seeing the land and mastering it and its people. For Stewart Crehan, the dualist narrative of *Dusklands* creates “a telescopic teleology: from the eighteenth century, we look forward to the twentieth century, and from the twentieth century we look back to the eighteenth century” (12). The way the novel is structured – that the narrative oscillates between the stories of Jacobus and Eugene – suggests that the author uses South Africa’s colonial history to elucidate the Vietnam War, while also using the war to reveal aspects of South Africa’s history. Although this reciprocity is not orchestrated by any narrative overseer, the narrative enjoins a bifocal reading. What I have in mind with this study is such a telescopic teleology, a way to read telescopically mid-nineteenth-century American literature and a moment in South African history more recent than Coetzee’s examples above, the post-apartheid era, when writers are also faced with the call to convey images of a nascent nationalism.

With this theoretical foundation in place, the study’s aim, scope and methodology can be recapitulated as follows: This research experimentally explores the efficacy of a bifocal approach to comparative literature and, by extension, endeavours to contribute to comparative work on the United States and South Africa by undertaking a study that places works from the mid-nineteenth-century American Renaissance in dialogue with post-apartheid texts. This is done on the basis that both periods are recognised as fruitful and influential moments of literary production born of the urgency to create a national literature reflective of a nominally new nation inflected by the rhetoric of democracy. The study asks: Given their respective states of national “newness,” how can the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa function as productive counterpoints in readings about the national in the literary? The study is structured around pairings of texts that depict relatable images of landscape, with a chapter dedicated to each pairing. Thematic overlaps between chapters are inevitable, yet each chapter adjusts the lens of inquiry to take into account a different dimension of (un)settlement. Applying the strategy of a bifocal reading, I will investigate the construction of nation-ness in view of relevant historical circumstances. This will be done to assess the texts’ depiction of what it means to belong or settle in a young democratic nation.

Inspired by the parallel settler histories in the United States and South Africa, Chapter One looks at Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) alongside Julia Martin’s *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (2008). Both are generically heterogeneous



travelogues which recount journeys that reiterate earlier colonial excursions – Fuller to the Great Lakes mainly, and Martin to excavation sites in the Northern Cape, with the authors mulling over the outgrowths of bygone frontiers. Both also reflect on anthropological and ecological processes from the perspective of women of settler ancestry. The chapter's focus is the (re)tracing of landscapes sullied by genocide and deracination, and the literal and intellectual unearthing of facts; for Fuller, as social commentary in the context of western expansion, for Martin in the interest of (geo)heritage preservation.

Chapter Two pursues the preceding chapter's focus on European settlement. It compares Nathaniel Hawthorne's Gothic Romance *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and Marlene van Niekerk's adaptation of the *plaasroman*, *Agaat* (2006), translated from the original Afrikaans by Michiel Heyns. Both novels depict waning settler family legacies (embodied by a formidable house with its precious garden, now neglected) and the transmission of familial guilt about past improprieties. Working from the position that agrarianism contributed ideologically to the formation of Anglo-American and Afrikaner South African identities, what is at stake in this reading is the comparison of culturally specific settler responses to land and the question of how a translation from Afrikaans to English (in order to accommodate an international readership) may contribute to such a reading.

Chapter Three turns from the earlier chapters' focus on white writing to works that represent questions of land from the perspective of people of colour. The focal texts, William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853) and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000), attempt to unsettle historic myths that employed biblical motifs of paradisiacal landscapes in order to nurture European settlement by demonstrating those myths' incompatibility with people of colour. Homing in on mixed-race communities with their roots in slavery, the chapter examines how attempts to settle are obstructed by intricacies of bloodlines and the physical and social ambiguities of race in racially segregated societies that refuse to view mixed-race identity as self-contained with any legitimate claims to belonging.

Chapter Four pursues a similar investigation to the preceding chapter in its comparison of American slave society with another community of imported labour, Indian indentured workers. Responding to recent literature that has explored parallels between Indian indenture and plantation slavery in the Americas, the chapter contrasts Frederick Douglass' autobiographical slave narrative, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) with Aziz Hassim's historical novel, *Revenge of Kali* (2009). Against the backdrop of transoceanic displacement and ancestral homelands in the background, Douglass and Hassim deploy plantation landscapes as sites of national origin, a process born of the earth, often through brutal labour, and serve imaginatively in the authors' depictions of servitude that raise questions about the nuanced definitional differences between slavery and indenture.

The concluding chapter brings together the individual chapters' findings about what is gained by the bifocal reading, as well as its limitations. By evaluating the extent to which such an approach may prove useful, I consider how these insights might in turn contribute to the fields of comparative and world literature and to the corpus of comparative studies between the United States and South Africa.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Imprints of Indigenes, Kinship, and the Optics of Settlement: Reading Traces on the Frontier in *Summer on the Lakes* and *A Millimetre of Dust***

One of the predominant areas of comparative research between the United States and South Africa concerns their frontier histories. Key examples of such research include the collection of essays, *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (1981), edited by Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, which delves into various developments on the frontiers in the two regions and the aftermath of incursion and expansion by settlers, and William Beinart and Peter Coates's *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (1995), which also looks at settler encroachment in order to compare the environmental histories of the two nations. Lamar and Thompson adopt Jack D. Forbes's definition of a frontier as "an intergroup situation" ("Comparative" 4). They therefore classify a frontier "not as a boundary or line, but as a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies," one of which is usually "indigenous to the region, or at least has occupied it for many generations; the other is intrusive" (7).<sup>26</sup> Along with the contact between indigenous and intrusive societies, two other fundamental characteristics define this phenomenon, according to Lamar and Thompson: first, territory, and second, the crystallisation of relations between the societies by means of processes initiated on the frontier (8). The frontier ceases to exist (is no longer "open") once one group consolidates political hegemony (Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier* 12), instigating a new social structure; in other words, historical processes continue, but "the ongoing historical process is no longer a frontier process" and "[s]ubsequent relations are relations of ethnicity and class within a single society, not frontier relationships between different societies" (10). Furthermore, Lamar and Thompson identify the following comparative details regarding the frontiers in southern Africa and North America:

Both were products of the same general process: the expansion of Europe and of capitalism. Both had roughly the same chronology. [...] There were, however, substantial differences in the extent of the European involvement in the two regions, and hence their political and economic systems. During the age of discovery, indeed, most Europeans regarded North America as well as southern Africa as potential stepping stones to Asia – hence the persistent search for a northwest passage by English and Dutch seamen; but whereas they soon recognized that North America had its own intrinsic attractions, the only substantial merit seaborne explorers saw in southern Africa, before diamonds were discovered in 1869, was the strategic location of the Cape peninsula. ("The North American" 14-15)

As their research has shown, studies into frontiers often present an entanglement of related issues – the human impact on the environment, the contact with indigenous peoples, settler hegemony, to name but three – so that several plausible ways exist that one could refocus comparisons between the United States and South Africa. With this in mind, the present chapter turns to a genre of writing that has been influential in representing the United States and South

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<sup>26</sup> Lamar and Thompson designate southern Africa as comprising the Republic of South Africa (as the country was known when *The Frontier in History* was published in 1981), Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and the area of Mozambique south of the Zambezi River ("The North American" 14).

African frontiers, and has contributed considerably to their incipient national literatures: travel writing.<sup>27</sup> The focal texts explored here (re)imagine erstwhile frontier zones from the perspective of an achieved but marred state of democracy to muse on efforts of national (re)construction in the face of destructive and detrimental historical events or circumstances.

*Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) by Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) sketches a view of the American frontier. Fuller's book, centred on a trip she undertook through the Great Lakes region, Illinois, and the Wisconsin territory, offers a look into the state of the ongoing migration of Euro-Americans of her day, their settlement on the western frontier, the particular role of women in this endeavour, and the ramifications of this expansion for Native American populations who first occupied the land.<sup>28</sup> Fuller defines the book's purpose as providing "the poetic impression of the country at large" (42), suggesting that it records not only what she saw on the western frontier but also, as Kathleen Healey argues, "what she envisions" for this West, a merging "of the real and ideal" (n. pag.). In this chapter, Fuller's book is compared with *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (2008) by Julia Martin (1959-), a work that charts a journey she undertook from her home in the Cape seaside town of Muizenberg to the Northern Cape (once a frontier zone),<sup>29</sup> along with her husband and young twins in order to visit excavation and heritage sites dating back to the Stone Age. The impetus for Martin's journey is quite different from Fuller's. In her book's opening chapter, Martin touches briefly on the ramifications of climate change, reflecting on a dry winter some years earlier that "became for

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<sup>27</sup> Historically speaking, writing is intricately connected with various forms of travel (Hulme and Youngs 2-3; Mikkonen 1) (also see Butor). For an overview of the role travel played in the formation of literature in the United States, see McAndrew (especially the Introduction, "The Case for Travel Narratives") and Spengemann (particularly the chapter "The Poetics of Adventure").

<sup>28</sup> "Native American" is employed throughout this chapter as an umbrella term for indigenous communities in the United States, although, like "Indian," it is a contentious term that is both accepted and rejected by different groups. James Wilson explains that what is problematic about "Native American" is the "assumption that all the immensely varied societies of the Western hemisphere – who before contact had no concept of being 'native' of 'America' and never saw themselves as a single, continental population – constitute a homogeneous, 'other' group," an assumption, he argues, that "is ultimately just as Eurocentric as 'Indian'" (411). He also explains that in a bid to bolster sensitivity towards minority groups in the latter part of the twentieth century, "Native American" came to replace "American Indians," although some Native Americans refer to themselves as "Indians" when unable to use their tribal names and consider the question of whether certain terms are indelicate as irrelevant in the face of more material concerns, such as poverty (410-11). Much of the controversy around the use of "Indian" stems from it being a misnomer, initially applied to aborigines in the United States in the wake of Columbus' arrival in the Americas following his misdirected journey to the nation of India (Berkhofer 4-5) (also see M. Y. Bird). Wilson notes that for many, especially those on reservations, doing away with the term "Indian" may jeopardise special legalities pertaining to them since these statutes in fact employ the word "Indian," and there may thus be less benign incentives to the practice of renaming than just the appeasing of liberals (410-11). There is similar controversy surrounding the use of "bushmen," a designation for the San (Adhikari, *The Anatomy* 23). As Robert J. Gordon claims, the term "bushmen" was introduced by colonial travellers (4), while "San" (derived from a Khoi word) was also imposed upon them by Khoi speakers, both bearing the connotation (via their etymology) of "bandit" (6). He explains that preferences between the terms "bushmen" and "San" differ among scholars (5). Throughout this chapter, I use "Bushmen/bushmen" and "Indian" as they appear in my focal texts or relevant research, but in my own argumentation, I maintain the terms "San" and "Native American" as perhaps more anthropologically sensitive and less racially loaded words. At times in the chapter, I use the term "Khoisan" when remarking on the Khoi (nomadic herders who practiced a pastoral way of life, sometimes called KhoeKhoen) and the San (who were hunter-gatherers) collectively.

<sup>29</sup> Not the only frontier to have emerged in the history of South Africa, "the little known northern frontier zone" discussed in this chapter witnessed contact between Cape colonists and Khoisan, and precedes the events of the better known Eastern Cape frontier, legendary for a series of wars between Xhosa agriculturalists and Cape colonists between 1779 and 1879 (Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier* 1).

[her] then the image of a parched civilisation that is burning itself up with an insatiable desire” (20). Her expedition is inspired by questions around the course of human civilisation and is undertaken with a disposition “like others who have looked to their forebears for guidance in times of distress” (21). Like *Summer on the Lakes*, which Marcia Noe calls “[a] melange of travelogue, autobiography, poetry, philosophy, interpolated narrative, and criticism” (5) for the variety of incorporated genres, *A Millimetre of Dust* employs *bricolage*, as Anthony Vital claims (109), combining elements of the travel narrative with autoethnographic insights, and Buddhist and ecocritical thought, with her interest in the folklore of the /Xam-speaking San people providing a connective narrative thread throughout the book.<sup>30</sup>

The chapter’s bifocal focus is motivated by several similarities between the two texts. One is the genre. The locational complexity of the frontier entertains potential for the multi-perspectival quality of the travelogue, a genre concerned, at its most basic level, with passing through and connecting places. Defined by Peter Hulmes as writing that recounts a journey that the author has undertaken (Youngs 5) in which he or she describes the localities visited (4), travel writing is “deeply implicated with visual practices,” as Giorgia Alù and Sarah Patricia Hill note (1). The visual aspect of travel writing – apparent not only in the narratives’ descriptions themselves but in Fuller’s and Martin’s inclusion of sketches<sup>31</sup> and photographs respectively – demonstrates the aptness of travel writing for a study centred on writers’ perceptions of landscapes:

Seeing, looking and gazing are entrenched in the majority of travellers’ narratives. According to Bernard McGrane, “To travel is to see – travel is essentially a way of seeing, a mode of seeing: it is grounded in the eye, in our visual capacity” (1989, 116). Historically, it is above all through seeing that distant places, landscapes, foreign people, animals and objects seem to gain consistency. The gaze is then transferred into the text whether in written or in visual form.

In travel writing, views and gazes express a narrative space from which narrator and reader scrutinise, judge and categorise the varied cultures and societies they explore through writing and reading. (Alù and Hill 1)

The heterogenous quality of travel writing, along with the writers’ different national and historical positions, introduces varied philosophical and theoretical perspectives and discourses related to the natural environment that are woven into the texture of the two narratives. Fuller was a central figure in the Transcendentalist movement,<sup>32</sup> a prolific journalist and reviewer who edited the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, while Martin is a writer and academic known for an extensive focus on ecocriticism or, as she prefers to identify it, “environmental

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<sup>30</sup> Travel writing is frequently a multifarious or nebulous genre. Mary Louise Pratt claims that it is marked by “heterogeneity” (12), while Georges Y. van den Abbeele writes that “like its subject matter, [travel writing is] not easily bounded. Indeed, if it can be said to constitute a literature, it is one of and on the boundaries of literature, if not what *describes* that boundary” (5, original emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> Susan Belasco Smith explains that *Summer on the Lakes* is a composite of the “portfolio and sketchbook writing” that emerged at the start of the nineteenth century as “largely an art form practiced by women” (xvi).

<sup>32</sup> Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement in the United States in the nineteenth century whose influence pervaded a number of social domains (the arts, the church, education, social reform, etc.) but which escapes definitional certainty because it lacked coherent, hard-and-fast beliefs among its members who adopted *and* adapted ideas from other areas (such as Eastern spiritualism). For descriptions and context, see Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism*, and the collection by Capper and Wright.

literacy” (“The Tiny Skin Boat” 3).<sup>33</sup> I do not treat any of these philosophies as the central lens through which to conduct my reading, choosing instead to foreground the travel genre for the way it accommodates such perspectival variety – it “interact[s] with other kinds of expression,” as Mary Louise Pratt asserts (12). Both Fuller and Martin approach, read and project onto the landscapes that they encounter epistemological and aesthetic schema borrowed from an eclectic mix of secondary material. (For instance, Fuller derives many ideas from ancient classics, while Martin incorporates the views of several anthropologists and writers, as well as indigenous folklore into her book.) This raises potential pitfalls if one attempts a reading of either or both texts that relies strictly on one or two areas of criticism or theory. Additionally, philosophies like Transcendentalism, Romanticism and ecocriticism do not fit neatly into hard-and-fast definitions but are instead very malleable theories, with some scholars purporting that there exists a theoretical lineage between them.<sup>34</sup> As a result, this chapter does not attempt to conduct a comparison solely from the perspective of one theoretical field. I acknowledge that these philosophies are integral to the authors’ positionalities and may be implicated in the cultural or intellectual inheritance of European settlement. I adopt Sara Mills’s position that “[t]ravel writing cannot be read as a simple account of a journey, a country or a narrator, but must be seen in the light of discourses circulating at the time” (69). I will therefore attempt to read the books’ handling of the traces in the landscape with an awareness of the ways these theories may inform the writers’ rendering of the places they visit, recognising that theoretical overlaps, intersections or even divergences may prompt conjectural areas in my bifocal reading. I therefore want to treat the various systems of knowledge present in the two books not as the theoretical basis for the bifocal engagement but instead as a contextual aspect of it.

Another similarity between the two texts is the subject matter. Both writers muse on the historical dynamics of an altered landscape – for Fuller, a newly occupied western frontier; for Martin, the former northern frontier already transformed by the exigencies of twentieth-century capitalism. Both writers ruminate extensively upon the consequences that European expansion across the frontier has had on the tapering off of indigenous populations who had been victims of genocide,<sup>35</sup> as they pick out traces of lives that once were; artefacts and trails of Native Americans, rock art produced by the bygone San and remnants of Stone Age tools.

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<sup>33</sup> Explains Martin: “What I am doing could be described as a version of what in North America is called ecocriticism, but I have tended to prefer the term environmental literacy for its connotations of empowerment and grassroots activism, and its association with the race, class, gender and other literacies which in recent years have become staple fare in literary studies” (“The Tiny Skin Boat” 2-3).

<sup>34</sup> Romanticism flourished roughly from the 1780s to the 1830s when Transcendentalism began to emerge (Packer, “Romanticism” 84), and the latter can be viewed as an American permutation of the former. For definitions of Romanticism, see Appelbaum and Day, and for Transcendentalism, see Myerson. Ecocriticism is a branch of literary studies that examines how texts, especially literary ones, look at the environment and, as some scholars have shown, its attention to the environment in a manner that resists its objectification lends itself to ecocritical analyses. Put differently, in the words of Cheryll Glotfelty, it “takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (qtd. in Garrard 3). Ecocriticism takes up the issue of whether ideas expressed in literature are congruous and helpful to environmental causes (4). Although the term “ecocriticism,” which Lawrence Buell calls “the commonest omnibus term for an increasingly heterogeneous movement” (*The Future* 1), first emerged in the 1970s, the field has much older roots (see Buell, *The Future*, especially the chapter “The Emergence of Environmental Criticism”). For the connections between Romanticism and ecocriticism, see Hall and Rigby.

<sup>35</sup> In his study of the genocide of the Cape San, Mohamed Adhikari defines the phenomenon as “the intentional physical destruction of a social group in its entirety, or the annihilation of such a significant part of the group that it is no longer able to reproduce itself biologically or culturally, nor sustain an independent economic existence” (*The Anatomy* 12).

Moreover, both texts are by women of settler ancestry who re-enact familiar courses in their respective national histories, as they both acknowledge pioneers, travel writers and other historic actors who had taken those routes before. In my consideration of the authors' gender, I do not intend to enter the conversation about whether women's travel writing differs from men's or to speak to questions about the marginalisation of women's travel writing.<sup>36</sup> Rather, I acknowledge their gender to be an attribute that influences their subjectivity, much like their race, economic status, and occupations might, especially since their reflections on topics like European conquest and its attendant scientific inquiries were masculinist endeavours.

Robert S. Levine and Arnold Krupat point out that the American Renaissance period saw attempts to forge American literary traditions, which often involved adopting colonial models and redefining them as American (946). This is not to say that there was little innovation among writers of this period. In the poetry of Walt Whitman, readers have found an answer to Ralph Waldo Emerson's call for literature that renders unique experiences of American life; "a new language" fit for a nation that set itself apart (Paul 265). The landscapes of the United States, geographically so different from those of England, certainly contributed to notions of American exceptionalism,<sup>37</sup> and the frontier experience, integral to the political, social and economic development of the nation,<sup>38</sup> offered boundless material for literary novelty. The frontier was a sphere of identity creation and novelty: the establishment of a national literature in the nineteenth-century United States was, as Jared Gardner puts it, "aimed to secure to white Americans an identity that was unique (not European) but not alien (not black or Indian)" and "that imagined [them] as a race apart, both from the Europeans without and the blacks and Indians within the new nation" (xi). This undertaking resembles that of their counterparts in southern Africa. In *White Writing*, J. M. Coetzee's study of literature produced by settlers and writers of settler origin in South Africa, he classifies "white writing" as work produced by "people no longer European, not yet African" (11). Furthermore, in a similar vein to American Renaissance writers trying to create a language to capture their society, Coetzee argues that writers of settler lineage in South Africa were confronted with the dilemma of lacking "language [...] in which to win [the land], speak it [or] represent it" (7), and strained to find a language in which to write about the landscape: "How are we to read the African landscape? Is it readable at all? Is it readable only through African eyes, writeable only in an African language?" (62). I therefore want to take as a point of departure for my comparison the ways that Fuller's and Martin's respective positions as descendants of European settlers impact the ways they encounter the landscapes they traverse.

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<sup>36</sup> See Bassnett, D. Bird, and Youngs 132-137.

<sup>37</sup> See Onuf for explanations of the concept of "American exceptionalism."

<sup>38</sup> In an enduring (now controversial) theory presented in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner proposed that the frontier "explain[s] American development" (1). Proclaiming it to be "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (3-4), Turner asserts that westward movement correlated to "the frontier [becoming] more and more American" (4), claiming that "the frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people" (22), "decreased [its] dependence on England" (23) and, most importantly for Turner, helped to promote democracy in the United States (30). Scholars have since repudiated the determinativeness of the frontier experience in the development of America, noting that many other factors were also responsible. For the impact of Turner's thesis on the rhetoric and longstanding ideology of the frontier, see Carpenter and G. D. Nash; for perspectives that dispute the singular contribution of the frontier to America's development and offer analyses of alternative contributions, see the collection by Cronon, Miles and Gitlin; and for other conceptions of the west by historians of the region, see Etulain.

According to Joel Myerson, “[p]erhaps the single most important question raised by the Transcendentalists is: How do we see the world?” (xxvi). The notion of vision as a matter of great import, and nature as a subject towards which the gaze is often deliberately directed, is a characteristic that Transcendentalists share with British Romantics. Adhering to aesthetic schema of the landscape tradition of her time, Fuller’s landscape descriptions are replete with picturesque and sublime impressions (both being aesthetic conventions associated with Romanticism). The experience of beholding the Niagara Falls earlier in her journey is awe-inspiring. The rustling of the wind around the cataracts of Niagara produce a vibration that “is very sublime, giving the effect of a spiritual repetition through all the spheres” (4), while the rapids from the waterfall appear “to have made a study for some larger design,” a scene that one can “mould [...] in congenial thought with its genius” (5). The numinous quality evoked by the Niagara region and Fuller’s conviction that she “was prepared by descriptions and by paintings” (8), “that drawings [...] had given [her] a clear notion of the position and proportion of all objects [t]here” (4), showcase the mutuality and interaction between travel and Transcendentalist writers and practitioners of the visual arts, such as painters associated with the Hudson River School; both media portrayed natural landscapes as a way to represent national culture (Heusser 151; Miller 41).<sup>39</sup> Fuller’s wonderment at the Niagara scene has the earmarks of the sublime as Coetzee interprets it; “far more often associated with the vertical than the horizontal, with mountains than with plains,” making “heights and depths [...] the locus of important [...] feelings such as fear and ecstasy, and values such as transcendence and unattainability” (*White Writing* 52).

Coetzee contends that these topographical differences meant that nineteenth-century American writers found the prairies to be less susceptible to Romantic evocations (59). This is true for Fuller’s initial impressions of the prairies in Chicago, which are in no measure profound. She remarks that they “speak of the very desolation of dullness,” that the “monotony of the lakes” surrounding them have been transposed onto the “monotony of land” (Fuller 22). In a chapter in *White Writing* entitled “The Picturesque, the Sublime, and the South African Landscape,” Coetzee contrasts the South African landscape tradition with that of the United States to illustrate the incompatibility of the South African landscape with the aforementioned aesthetic conventions. He does so primarily through an exposition of the work of two Europeans who travelled through the South African interior, the British explorer William Burchell (1782-1863) and the Scottish writer Thomas Pringle (1789-1834), comparing their impressions of the southern African hinterland with the ways landscape was conjured among nineteenth-century American writers and landscape painters. The initial dreariness of Fuller’s prairie landscape and its evocation of death finds a counterpoint in the South African context, in the difficulty of settlers forming a connection with the African landscape because it appears resistant to their presence. As Coetzee explains in the study mentioned above, the South African hinterland appears “empty” (48). Elsewhere in his study, he writes that the African landscape appears to the writer of settler origin as “an indifferent earth” (78), “alien [and] impenetrable,” with the writer lacking a “language [...] in which to win it, speak it [or] represent it” (7). What placing the prairie and veld in bifocal relation here allows one to see is

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<sup>39</sup> Angela Miller explains that a dominant belief in Anglo-American art of the nineteenth century was that of literature and painting as “sister arts,” influenced by the much older concept of *ut picture poesis* (41).

that Fuller, seeking uniqueness in the landscape, (initially) stresses dullness as the prairie's flaw; it is a resistant landscape, unwilling to show itself to a settler gaze.

In resorting to descriptions of the sublime and picturesque at the start of her journey, Fuller demonstrates the traveller's inability to view places previously unseen with a "naked eye," as Alù and Hill argue (2). For them, observation is always relational; they explain that "[v]ision is a cultural operation; it is shaped by places, objects, bodies, desire, images and words" (2). Coetzee makes a similar point to Alù and Hill, "that landscape (as opposed to terrain) is always viewed through the medium of a schema of representation, [...] that an interaction takes place between the spectator's schema and the scene before his eyes" (*White Writing* 56). Following this argument, it can be said that Fuller reads the landscape this way because she is "condition[ed]" (Alù and Hill 2) to do so by an internalised aesthetic schema that, when applied to an altogether different landscape, such as the prairies of Illinois, appears futile:

After sweeping over the vast monotony of the lakes to come to this monotony of land, with all around a limitless horizon, – to walk, and walk, and run, but never climb, oh! it was too dreary for any a Hollander to bear. How the eye greeted the approach of a sail, or the smoke of a steamboat; it seemed that any thing so animated must come from a better land, where mountains gave religion to the scene.

[...]

But after I had rode out, and seen the flowers and seen the sun set with that calmness seen only in the prairies, and the cattle winding slowly home to their homes in the "island groves" – peacefullest of sights – I began to love because I began to know the scene, and shrank no longer from "the encircling vastness."

It is always thus with the new form of life; we must learn to look at it by its own standard. At first, no doubt, my accustomed eye kept saying, if the mind did not, What! no distant mountain? what, no valleys? (22)

In her initial encounter with the prairie, Fuller is akin to white writers of settler origin attempting to capture the Karoo landscape but finding that aesthetic schemas operative in the European landscape tradition fail to create the original relation to the land that they seek. They lack the language to give expression to the tones and topography before them. The prairie's initial failure to impress Fuller prompts her to look more keenly. Through her visual conversion, however – her "accustomed eye" (22) – she resembles Burchell, who contended that "an eye trained in Europe sees no variety in the veld" (Coetzee, *White Writing* 58). Fuller proposes that the American settler (and writer) can still make something beautiful of the landscape if they take the scene as it is and acclimate their gaze according to a new standard of beauty. Ultimately, she comes to adore the prairies in Chicago that epitomise for her the beauty of the American landscape. Her later remarks about the prairies as "still all new, boundless, limitless" (40) testify to the nation's promise, for the American West was envisaged as a virgin land that was esteemed for its assumed abundance – a "fountain of youth in which America continually bathed," according to Henry Nash Smith (254).

Even though Martin (who covers some of the same terrain as Burchell did) is aware of academic and historical representation of the Karoo landscape, she demonstrates a Romantic longing for simpler times. Setting off on her journey, she expects bucolic scenes, foreseeing



their first stopover on a farm near Kimberley as “a nice retreat from the city” for “that fecund, wholesome farmyard I dreamed of as a child, a place of cows and sheep” (*A Millimetre* 60). Following the European explorers who ventured this route before and found the interior to be “impossibly brown and dry” (59), Martin encounters a landscape that is filled with “unkempt blond uncultivated grasses speaking of rain and the yearning for rain” (59), while the “[t]he actual farm is dry and scratchy” (60). Martin’s awareness of the ramifications of settler colonialism that her historical position grants her infuses her narrative with uneasiness at times. Describing the environment upon departure for Kimberley in the Northern Cape, Martin ends the chapter “Archive” by writing, “Run, here come the farmers. Here come the people from the city” (43), a statement that can be read as both an allusion to the colonists who appeared from the more urbanised Cape region nearer the coast, or as sign of the present situation in which she and her family, also from the Cape, head towards the hinterlands. Of the book’s “postcolonial dimension,” Vital writes that it “help[s] Martin’s narrator negotiate subjectively the social experience of ‘coming after’” (97). Indeed, recognising herself as modern colonial in a postcolonial moment, Martin inverts the settler’s gaze to the land when looking at the veld: “The place is witnessing us, even as we interpret it” (61). She concludes the chapter “Archive” with the words, “Here we now come to the places where they lived, our heads full of stories and desire” (43), and in the opening paragraph of the next chapter, “Travelling,” concedes that “I cannot help imagining that we also carry with us the ambiguous inheritance of those imperial travellers from the Cape who took this way before” (44). The “ambiguous inheritance” that Martin notes perhaps lies in this consciousness of herself as originating from an invading, foreign people who displaced indigenes – people whom she can recognise in her studies of the San as having had a disastrous impact on the lives of others – and a coinciding consciousness of herself as someone born in South Africa with a sincere attraction to the landscapes of the Northern Cape.

Martin pictures settler colonialism through botanical imagery. When she discusses the family approaching Three Sisters (a hilly formation in the Karoo), she reflects on the writing of the lay scientist Mary Elizabeth Barber, who journeyed by wagon through the same region in 1879 (a trek she recounted in a journal). She quotes Barber’s description of the surroundings of “a boer’s homestead,” including her observations “of two or three willow trees, a few miserable American aloes (*Agave americana*), a broken down fig tree, a couple of lonely, melancholy-looking Blue Gums” (qtd. in Martin 49). Martin writes that “[a]s a daughter of 1820 Settlers,” groups of British colonists who settled in the present-day Eastern Cape, “she was generally approving of the settler impulse, and her description of the boer homestead quite naturally turns the Australian blue gum into a positive metaphor for the ineradicable tenacity of foreign stock,” before quoting Barber: “Strange to say, that almost without exception, one or two of the last named trees are planted on most South African farms; no matter how desolate or out of the way they may be, there will also be found this dark, solitary, exiled Australian; vanished from its native land, yet clinging to dear life with a tenacity surpassing that of the indigenous trees of the country” (51). Barber’s words reveal both empathy for the *exiled* state of the Australian tree and admiration for its determination to survive on foreign soil – diction that dramatically personifies the tree. One can assume that Martin intends for her reader to pick up on the implications of likening European settlers to invasive vegetation since it is commonly known that such plants threaten the survival of indigenous plant species by robbing them of

nutrition and ultimately displacing them, a caustic analogy for the genocide of indigenous populations in southern Africa for the settlement of Europeans.

Like Barber, Fuller visualises the dispersion of settlers as the flowering of a new population, but the effect is quainter than Martin's. Fuller notices that immigrant families on the Chicago prairies have surrounded their new homes with flowers from their countries of birth. This image of transplanting foreshadows Fuller's discussions on cultivation, for the flowers signify the domestication of the landscape as a reflection of the settler's identity. When travelling further through Chicago, Fuller limns scenes of rurality that represent her vision of life in the West. One is the home of an English settler who had familiarised himself with American country life through books before finding a piece of land as he had envisioned:

A wood surrounds the house [...] a large and handsome dwelling; but round it are barns and farm yard, with cattle and poultry. These, however, in the framework of wood, have a very picturesque and pleasing effect. There is a mixture of culture and rudeness in the aspect of things as gives a feeling of freedom, not of confusion.

[...] This habitation of man seemed like a nest in the grass, so thoroughly were the buildings and all the objects of human care harmonized with what was natural. The tall trees bent and whispered all around, as if to hail with sheltering love the men who had come to dwell among them. (24)

The image of settlement that Fuller encourages is one of rural harmony, a landscape that melds nature and man's cultivating hand in a productive and balanced manner. Her description of the Englishman's home suggests a dwelling that is almost inconspicuously crafted within nature so as not to disrupt it. The farm and barn, surrounded by poultry and cattle, provide a picture of Fuller's aspirations for Western settlement – a landscape that combines “culture and rudeness” (24), carving out a midpoint between civilisation and untouched wilderness. Her repeated observations of gardens outside settlers' homes further support the notion of settlement that is careful and thoughtful – the landscape is being cultivated, not destroyed; there is design and intention involved. Healey suggests that Fuller's conception of the West as a garden can be understood as a configuration of a “middle landscape” (n. pag.) which, according to Leo Marx, is pastoral, subject to a tension between “the violent uncertainties of nature” and “a complex civilization” (22). Fuller's agrarian ideal, imaged as a garden, can be understood in Marx's words as “improved nature, a landscape that is a made thing, a fusion of work and spontaneous process” (112). Most settlers Fuller witnesses pursue “progress” in the West that is governed by materialism and is destructive to the natural world. Her description of a captive eagle, in the section dedicated to the Niagara Falls, illustrates that the mistreatment of the natural world is counter to the nation's destiny (the eagle, as the national bird of the United States, symbolising both nature and nation in this instance).<sup>40</sup>

Healey cites Daniel S. Malachuck's position that the garden as middle landscape “was gendered feminine” in the antebellum period, while also drawing on notions of conquest as masculine, masculinity being associated with the frontier (n. pag.). Healey asserts that Fuller's landscape descriptions that implore settlers to take a nurturing and cooperative relationship with nature are evidence of “a feminine principle” (n. pag.) in Fuller's ideal for the

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<sup>40</sup> See Healey.

development of the Western frontier. Throughout the book, she advocates for the active contribution of women in the West to counter the more aggressive ways by which men labour the land and to encourage “original growth” of ideas and ways “that might adorn the soil” (39). Read through the lens of *A Millimetre of Dust*, it can be said that the execution of a cultivated landscape as Fuller envisions it requires what Martin refers to as a “feminine eye” (51). In the vicinity of Three Sisters, Martin paints a picture of a “landscape [...] becoming more beautiful” (49); a quiet and simple rural life, including a windmill, a farmhouse and gumtrees. She writes that it “look[s] like the setting for a plaasroman” (49), a genre viewed as celebratory of European settlement and, in particular, of Afrikaner identity and its relation to the land.<sup>41</sup> The landscape reminds her of Barber, who was interested in a variety of fields including botany, zoology, geology and prehistory, and by Martin’s estimation, exhibited a unique drive in participating in botanical imperialism, exceeding the normal practices of women in the colonies who planted gardens, sketched landscapes and flowers, and posted seedlings back to England. In a way that clarifies the intersections between science, empire and masculinity, Martin writes that “Mary’s participation in the dissemination of plants, seeds and information across the Empire was of a different order” (50):

Over the years, having acquired the discovering and collecting habit in earnest, she sent about a thousand specimens to the Herbarium of Trinity College in Dublin, and many others to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. These days she is remembered taxonomically in the names of a number of plants and butterflies. [...]

I am not sure that her tale is what has been called a woman’s story either. Certainly she recounted what she had seen in an engagingly conversational and humorous style, much cluttered with commas. She was concerned with details like the making of supper or the loss of a coffee kettle. She remarked on the facial expressions of her fellow travellers and servants, responded quite personally and empathetically to wild animals, and reflected on the possibilities of domesticating mockingbirds, vultures or suricates. Perhaps these could be evidence of a feminine eye. Otherwise, she shares some of her male predecessors’ ways of seeing, sometimes even outdoing them in terms of colonial attitudes.

[...] [H]er writing is a reminder of how even the gentle science of botanising imports into the colonies a grid of categories by which to see and name and rule. (50-51)

Martin’s assessment of Barber’s taxonomic practices operates on the tentative assumption of “gender power” embedded in imperialism, as Anne McClintock has argued (6) – the notion that conquest and the enterprises that it constitutes, such as scientific practices and ideas about reason, are Eurocentric, masculine procedures. Barber’s more empathetic disposition toward animals, which Martin construes as feminine, certainly bears some resemblance to Fuller’s idea of human communion with nature, as opposed to dominance over it.

Like Fuller, Martin digests landscapes through negotiation between nature and culture, although she blurs the lines of this dualism throughout, while also demonstrating an inclination towards a “feminine principle” (to borrow Healey’s phrase). Throughout her journey, she is wary of the damage, even subtle, that is being done to the natural environment, such as when she notices garbage in the veld. Also like Fuller, who spots arrowheads, tomahawk marks and remnants of pottery – at one point observing “the site of an ancient Indian village” and

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<sup>41</sup> This definition is elaborated upon in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

observing that “the ground, above and below, is full of their traces” (33) – Martin is attuned to signs in the landscape, looking for “some trace of that which had been lost, and that which we might yet remember” (21). Of course, due to her historical position, Martin can assess the longstanding effects of the way history bears its mark on the landscape socially. As she and her family near the Hex River Valley, she notes the juxtaposition of vineyards, landscapes of production that thrive on order, with the chaotic, spontaneously erected squatter camps adjacent to them. Painting a less romantic and wholesome image than the neat farms on the prairies that Fuller beholds, the vineyards and squatter camps contrast the rich and poor, the attractions and the undesirables; in short, the continued inequalities in the post-apartheid period.

However, for the most part, Martin’s book investigates the ordering of landscapes not for the purpose of cultivation, as Fuller does, but for scientific pursuits, particularly archaeology. She writes that “[w]hen a place becomes a site, the earth is dug and measured, sieved and counted, and each thing small or large that is considered at all significant is labelled and put in a box” (140). Her probing of archaeological grids throughout the narrative is in concert with her view of Barber’s masculinist scientific procedures – although necessary, they entail projecting a sense of order onto the land that prescribes (and limits) the way of looking at it. But *A Millimetre of Dust* avoids privileging any one discourse as dominant (Vital 90), and Martin’s inclusion of /Xam narratives, or *kukummi* (Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier* 5), is intended to enhance her readings of scientific research. The mosaic quality of the /Xam narratives enables “ways of relating to the earth and to one another that are less dualistic, more sustainable and kind” (134), essentially offering a way of viewing the world that evades the bifurcation of nature and culture, instead wedding them as one. (This is the view of the American writer Gary Snyder, upon whom Martin draws [*A Millimetre* 134]).

In several instances, Martin explores “the natural world [being] full of culture” (53). The sociable weavers, a bird species that builds elaborate nests around telephone poles along the roadside, colonising them, is one example. Diamonds are another; “a thing of culture, excavated from the earth” (74). /Xam narratives about “a time when animals were people, and people were animals” (Martin, *A Millimetre* 109) feature most prominently in the narrative, and it is this aspect of *kukummi* that, I argue, Martin internalises and imbues with a “feminine principle.” This is seen when Martin gazes at a mother baboon breastfeeding her baby in an enclosure at a game lodge outside Kuruman with her children who “identify with the baby” (201) while “it is the mother, timelessly being here now with her child, whom I love” (202), elaborating on the pair’s playfulness and the mother’s tactile care. This is one of the ways that Martin demonstrates what Vital terms “a transhistorical sense of kinship with humans and non-humans” (109), a bond activated by the feminine (imaged as maternal, nurturing and loving). Another example is when she recalls a rite of passage of a pubescent San girl. Martin writes that “[t]he new maiden [...] stands in that powerful place between the hearth and the wild, between culture and nature. And here where we now stand are the marks of changing, of young girls at the threshold of fertility, here in this place at the river, the marks of blood and flow” (130-31). Her disappointment at the thought that when she experienced her first menstruation there were no rites to mark the transition to womanhood also suggests an affinity with the San girl through the trope of the feminine as life-giving.

The hearth mentioned in this scene connects to Martin’s reflection early in the book that her journey is spurred by a foreboding feeling about the global effects of climate change,

“the image of a parched civilisation that is burning itself up,” which she connects to W. G. Sebald’s understanding in *Rings of Saturn* (1995) “that all human culture is founded on burning” (20). In *A Millimetre of Dust*, the hearth is a universal symbol of human culture and civilisation. It is first introduced in the book in the opening chapter, “Excavation,” when Martin recounts a visit to the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town. As she discovers on a museum notice board, Iziko means “hearth” (22) – in isiXhosa, it is “traditionally and symbolically the social centre of the home; a place associated with warmth, kinship and ancestral spirits” (“About”). Martin points out that this museum is situated in the centre of the city, “where oak trees, pears and roses retain some memory of that first garden planted on this site [...] for the innocent cultivation of fresh fruit and vegetables” (21). This, of course, is a reference to the development of the Cape colony from what was intended to be a simple stopover for the Dutch East India Company to stock up on produce. The location of the museum is known as the Company Gardens. Images of fire and combustion are reiterated elsewhere, such as through Martin’s deliberations on diamond mining in Kimberley, offering pictures of the inception and development of modernity in South Africa.

Reading this alongside Fuller introduces the hearth as a counterpoint in this discussion. In what Annette Kolodny calls “the domestic novel of western relocation” (169), the hearth features regularly as a symbol of women’s duties within the home (167). For Kolodny, the hearth represents an image of domesticity in the West, for it promoted the view that women had a contribution to make to life on the frontiers (168). (Fuller briefly mentions the hearth in *Summer on the Lakes* as well, supporting settlement on the prairie frontier with the image of familial togetherness around “the parent hearth” [38].) In bifocal perspective, the decidedly female-centred interpretation of the hearth that is evident in Fuller’s context – that it not only signifies home but connotes the woman’s role in it – underscores Martin’s view of women as central to the continual flow of human civilisation, constructions of home, configurations of kinship and attachments to the ancestral; for it is women (according to Kolodny’s reading) who maintain the hearth, keeping the nature-culture dualism in balance. Furthermore, Martin’s perspective on the continuation of civilisation and culture through the biology of women brings to mind Fuller’s parallel exploration in *Summer on the Lakes* of the creation of a new American literature and settlement in the West. Although she mentions the hearth only once, it is worth remembering that it is also attached to storytelling. This in turn coincides with Fuller’s imploration for America to reform itself socially in order for writers to produce new literature when she speaks about “remak[ing] the soil by the action of fire” (qtd. in Rosowski 30). This, Fuller argues, in imagery so similar to Martin’s, will allow the nation’s literature to “take birth” (qtd. in Rosowski 30).

To return to the notion of a gendered gaze, constructions of the feminine eye as nurturing and cooperative is contrasted with the severe, domineering gazes that occur in *Summer on the Lakes* and that, in the vein of Martin’s comments on Barber, are characterised as masculine. This is evident in the “ocular confrontation[s]” (Baker 71) that Fuller witnesses, such as when a white settler recalls to her an altercation with a Native American guide:

I was not armed; he was, and twice as strong as I. But I know an Indian could not resist the look of a white man, and I fixed my eye steadily on his. He bore it for a moment, then his eye fell; he let go of the bottle. I took his gun and threw it to a distance. After a few moments’ pause, I

told him to go and fetch it, and left it in his hands. From that moment he was quite obedient, even servile, all the rest of the way. (71-72)

The white man's gaze in this passage functions "as a symbolic means of possession and control" (Baker 70); not only does he exert power over the Native American, but he claims that the game in the region are theirs, the settlers'. It is implied that, because the indigenous man does not reciprocate the white man's gaze, he is no match for him, and that the spot of land has been conceded to a worthier occupant. Fuller uses this moment to criticise settlers' unfeeling possession of the land that still bears evidence of former inhabitants ("the bones of his dead, the ashes of his hopes" [72]). In Anne Baker's words, Fuller "carries on an extended conversation with herself about the best ways to see, as well as about the moral implications of seeing" (61). Conscious of the slanted opinion of whites regarding Native Americans, Fuller proposes that what is required to counter these prejudices is a new way of looking at them. In her appraisal of the works she read prior to her journey, Fuller is tuned in to the biases that some Euro-Americans hold towards their Native counterparts. Although she claims to "have not wished to write sentimentally about the Indians, however moved by the thought of their wrongs and speedy extinction" (143), she opines that "the Indian cannot be looked at except with a poetic eye" (20) – that is to say, she cautions the reader not to accede to romanticised views of the Native Americans but does so herself, resorting to platitudinous formulations of them.

This implies that, according to Fuller, one ought to look at Native Americans differently from white settlers. As Lucy Maddox explains, Fuller finds it easier to behold Native Americans with a poetic eye than settlers because "they are themselves a unique feature of the American continent," they possess "an instinctive aesthetic sense" that enables them to appreciate natural beauty in a way that settlers do not, selecting locations for habitation based on beauty, and therefore do not destroy the environment (142). Unlike Martin, who images attraction to the "precious" as universal – through which she connects the ancient indigenes who covered their bodies in ochre with modern people's love of adornment, such as with diamonds – Fuller aligns appreciation of the beautiful almost solely with Native Americans.<sup>42</sup> Fuller interprets them as "true lords of the soil" (77), "the first-born of the soil" (114) and "students of the soil" (41). Fuller portrays them as having an appreciation for nature that white settlers lack because they are too consumed by their material ambitions. She also presents Native Americans as bearers of invaluable knowledge of the landscape, at an advantage over settlers who "had brought with them their habits of calculation" (12).

Fuller's discernment about Native American attachment to the landscape does not, however, translate into support for them remaining on the land. Quite the contrary. Although she bemoans their eventual extinction, she accepts it as an accomplished fact, noting that they were "fated to perish" (120). She cannot extricate herself from the Eurocentric images conjured about the west and finds herself haunted by thoughts of villainous Native Americans:

I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil. For continually

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<sup>42</sup> I come to this interpretation via Vital's reading of *A Millimetre of Dust*. See Vital 97-98.

upon my mind came, unsought and unwelcome, images, such as never haunted it before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks; again and again this illusion recurred, and even after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me. (4)

This allusion to savagery born of nature demonstrates the views of white settlers that Native Americans were a part of the wilderness – they were seen to live “in an undifferentiated relation to nature” (Rogin 117) – and, like the wilderness, would ultimately be subdued.<sup>43</sup> Placed on the level of other disposable elements in the environment – no more than animals or wilderness – they could be obliterated in the name of civilisational progress, thereby divesting them of any claim to the land. The close association of nature with Native Americans meant that the obliteration of one would go naturally with the obliteration of the other. The passage quoted above appears in the section in which Fuller thinks about the changing of the Niagara region as it became a popular tourist attraction and she implies that, as the natural environment changes, so too will the presence of the (supposedly wild) Native Americans.

During the nineteenth century, the notion of separate territory for white settlers and Native Americans gained traction to accommodate the advancement of the former group and the United States began implementing stringent measures of removal of the latter (Frantz 10) (although the ensuing policies, including the implementation of reservations, can be traced back to the seventeenth-century [Bowes 67; Frantz 10]). The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorised the relocation of Native Americans from eastern regions of the country westward of the Mississippi River (Bowes 65). Numerous scholars acknowledge that the process of removal was violent and coercive (Bowes 66). Similarly, events that led to the demise of the San was the result of increasing European infringement. The San were compelled to either assimilate into Cape colonial society or resist such absorption (which forced them northward, into modern-day Namibia and Botswana). As Nigel Penn explains, the *trekboers* – free burghers who took up semi-pastoralist livestock farming after abandoning the Dutch East India Company – led the colonial expansion into the interior, expropriating land from the San and decimating game, upon which the San’s way of life depended (“Fated” 81; *The Forgotten Frontier* 10).<sup>44</sup>

Of course, in her historical position, Fuller can only forecast the future of Native Americans. It was a commonly held belief in the United States during the nineteenth century, even among many who were sympathetic to the plight of Native Americans, that they were bound to die out. This view was expressed through the trope of “the vanishing Indian.” As Peter Nabokov and Lawrence Loendorf explain, many accepted the view that Native Americans would ultimately make way for a superior (white) race, their demise being “a natural consequence of” European encroachments on the frontier, of disease and of “an innate inability to evolve beyond the level of savagery” (288). The trope is summed up by the title of one of James Fenimore Cooper’s popular *Leatherstocking Tales*, in which a pure-blooded Mohican

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<sup>43</sup> For a look at the changing conceptions of the wilderness in American society, see R. F. Nash.

<sup>44</sup> These descriptions are based on the broad historical effects of the relations between colonisers and indigenes. There were, of course, instances of co-operation between the two groups in both countries, as Eugene van Sickle avers regarding the American frontier (119), as does Penn regarding the northern frontier in South Africa (*The Forgotten Frontier* 11).

warrior, Uncas, is killed in the Seven Years' War and venerated as "the last of the Mohicans." In the nineteenth century, United States political ideology greatly relied on the nation's status as a young republic because it encompassed ideas about newness and a pioneering spirit focused on the future, which fostered in Americans the sense of cultural emancipation from Europe and the past it represented. As R. W. B. Lewis interpreted this trend, the American was an Adamic figure, one "of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (1). However, the drawback of such insistence on youth and newness for a nation determined to make its mark upon the world stage was that without a substantial history (and literature) of its own, America lacked gravitas. Brian W. Dippie explains the elimination of Native Americans in the following way:

The answer seems to lie in the search for a distinctive national identity. Obviously, the recentness of civilization's penetration into the wilderness went a long way toward explaining the differences between the American and the European, the former progressive, the latter stagnant and time-bound. Without a past of its own, however, America lacked moral grandeur, its character remained distressingly two-dimensional; thus the desire to locate indigenous roots that might reach back to the New World antiquity, a lost heritage distinctively American. The Indian, as the First American, was necessary to any such attempt at self-definition. He *was* the American past. (16, original emphasis)

In other words, the disappearance of Native American communities gave way to Euro-Americans who positioned themselves as new originals. The Westward Movement was in essence a practice of replacing one people with another. Despite her great sensitivity about the extermination of Native Americans throughout *Summer on the Lakes*, this bias is apparent in Fuller's deliberations on the establishment of a "national institute" (143) – a museum or archive of sorts – revealing her acceptance of their eradication and endorsing an expansionist discourse that was popular among her fellow Euro-Americans. Fuller's view of the United States is resolutely future-oriented. According to Nicole Tonkovich, the museum will function as a charnel and stand as "a testament to the cultural domination and re-inscription enabled by technologies of writing, taxonomy, and image-making" (88). In this way, the museum becomes an extension of the frontier landscape, a contact zone in which, as Tonkovich argues, Native American artefacts are stripped of their actual use, aestheticised and situated within a "master narrative structure that has meaning for its viewer/visitors [...] as demonstrations of the Indians' primitivism" (89), subject to the gaze of a superior civilisation. (This is precisely Martin's critique of museums, that entities are "reconstructed for display [...] to repeat a familiar story" [*A Millimetre* 79]).

In the South African context, the attitude towards indigenous communities was remarkably similar. In words that echo Fuller's quote above, the South African historian George McCall Theal (1837-1919) wrote of the San, "They could not adapt themselves to their new environment, they tried to live as their ancestors had lived, and therefore they were fated to perish" (Penn, "Fated" 82). Martin presents a similar argument by Bertie Peers, who excavated a burial site at Skildergat in the 1920s along with his father. It contained vestiges of prehistoric San and, Martin explains, Peers "considered their descendants, the remnants of the later races found here by the early European settlers, to have been doomed by their own



natures”; “that civilised advancements and their peculiar temperaments could not permit the survival along with European settlers of the people he called the San”; and “they had to go, to make room for more honest men” (*A Millimetre* 15).

Fuller is also cognisant of Eurocentric biases and how these justified settler advancements into Indian territory. In fact, the “Indian Question,” as she addresses it, presents several similarities with colonial-era views of the Khoisan in South Africa, views that worked to invalidate their presence on the land. In both nations, settlers generally displayed a paternalistic attitude towards indigenes, viewing them as children who were inherently unrestrained and in need of guidance.<sup>45</sup> At one point, Fuller refers to them as “the children of the soil” (124), a common trope circulating in the United States at the time. Furthermore, Fuller’s observation of alcohol as a way for settlers to control Native Americans in Mackinaw mirrors the use of the so-called *dop* system in South Africa whereby white farmers manipulated labourers with alcohol as an “‘incentive’ to work harder” (Viall, James and Gerwel 133), a scheme that left them submissive to their employers (134) and played into white biases of the Khoisan and later the coloured community, broadly speaking, as having a penchant for drunkenness.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, literary representations also bear noteworthy similarities. The stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans served that of the frontiersman; he became, as Robert F. Berkhofer’s book on their stereotypical portrayal claims, *The White Man’s Indian* (1982). In what Dippie calls “a morality play about virtue (civilization) and vice (savagery),” where the former relied on agriculture and the latter on hunting,

[t]he Indian’s inability to perceive the necessity of settling down, tending his herds and becoming a happy yeoman, was part of an unmalleable nature riddled with imperfections – a thirst for alcohol, a susceptibility to disease, an addiction to war – that made his disappearance certain. The abridgement of tribal territory was an effect, not a cause, of the Indian’s downfall. (42)

Former truisms such as these abounded to rationalise the notion that the Native American was simply too primitive to survive. In American myths of the frontier, the process by which settlers extirpated Native Americans had a constructive purpose. White settlers were in the process of “self-consciously searching for a national identity,” argues Dippie (15); the ensuing conflict enabled what Richard Slotkin famously defined in the 1970s as “regeneration through violence” (5). This “process of creation and invention” (R. White xxv) for European settlers in the United States resonates with the formation of a cultural identity for descendants of the *trekboers*, the Afrikaners, who are interpreted “within the mainstream Afrikaner historiography” as having been “preoccupied [...] with the search for Afrikaner identity and the belief that this identity had emerged through struggle” (Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier* 10). Thus literary representations of Native Americans that show them to be oblique and evanescent

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<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of this paternalistic relationship among settlers and Native Americans, see Rogin; and for an overview of the legacy of such paternalism in the South African context, see Viall, James and Gerwel (the chapter “Paternalism – an Abnormal Relationship”).

<sup>46</sup> Also see London. This characterisation of coloureds and their predecessors is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

in order to support a white protagonist's claim to the land can be said to resemble the portrayal of black, coloured or indigenous people in settler writing in South Africa, as Coetzee argues in *White Writing*: "What inevitably follows is the occlusion of black labour from the scene: the black man becomes a shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then to hold a horse or serve a meal" (5).<sup>47</sup>

In both *Summer on the Lakes* and *A Millimetre of Dust*, the disappearance of indigenous peoples is registered as a loss through images of settler encroachment. In her book, Martin includes a meeting with the anthropologist Janette Deacon who recalls meeting an elderly man named Hendrik Goud on an expedition and enquiring of him whether he, a gardener on a farm who had the appearance of San heritage, could recall anything of the /Xam language:

"The old man sort of sidled up to me and said, yes, there actually was something he remembered 'in die /Xam taal' [in the /Xam language]. I thought it was quite significant that he used the term /Xam without our prompting. The farmer had said 'Boesman' [Bushman]."

It was a hundred years since Lucy Lloyd's last interviews, and when Hendrik Goud said he knew a few words in /Xam, he was probably the last person in the region to remember anything of the language. He spoke the words he knew and Janette got the tape recorder out of the car and recorded him. Afterwards they thanked him, finished packing the car and went on their way.

"It's one of the regrets of my life that I didn't take his photograph," she says ruefully, "but at least we taped the words."

They were not many words, barely two sentences. Hendrik spoke the /Xam words and then translated. What it meant, he said, was "Hier kom die Boere. Ons moet weghardloop."

The recording was later analysed by Tony Traill at Wits University, using a system derived from the Bleek-Lloyd material. Here the last /Xam words were interpreted to be [...] "Here come the Boere, we must run away". (41)

This passage speaks of irreversible loss; loss of a people, their words and thoughts, and of their landscape where, at the time when Deacon recorded Goud's words, "the multitudes of springbok were gone, the grass was cropped short by sheep and the old people had been destroyed" (Martin, *A Millimetre* 43). The scene also speaks of regret on the part of a researcher in an almost delusive attempt to recover something, *anything*, while it subliminally communicates feelings of mourning (as readers, we know Goud has died by the time Martin hears his utterance), together with angst and fear conveyed by the original speaker of Goud's words. These words call to mind the image of the "lone Indian" (Fuller 71) witnessed by a white settler whom Fuller encounters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The man tells of seeing the Native American on the banks of Nomabbin Lake where there was once a Native American village and, upon seeing the man, the Native American gave a cry of "indignation and pain" (71) before leaving. Here, too, the change in the landscape brought on by European forays into indigenous lands produces the image of a sole indigene who confronts this change and can do nothing but respond with anguish. The process of settler identity formation comes at a price.

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<sup>47</sup> Given the historical contexts that Coetzee analyses in *White Writing*, I interpret his use of "black" to be suggestive of people of colour, in general terms, who laboured for white settlers and their descendants, primarily on farms, and not only of black Africans.

Reading this section of *Summer on the Lakes* in conjunction with *A Millimetre of Dust* reminds one of Martin's chapter "Archive," in which she writes of her response to researching the Bleek-Lloyd archive, conducted at the University of Cape Town's Manuscripts and Archives Library. This archive comprises research undertaken by a German philologist, Wilhelm Bleek (1827-1875), and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd (1834-1914), who together transcribed and recorded in notebooks the language and folklore of the /Xam-speaking people of southern Africa and translated it into Victorian English (Martin, *A Millimetre* 26).<sup>48</sup> Stressing the losses attendant in such a cross-cultural practice, Martin writes:

Translation and interpretation are always in a sense betrayal, and particularly so in this case, when the fragments of /Xam are written into a Victorian English, the stories of animals and people are read from our contemporary frame, a particular group of informants are made to become the representative voice of a whole way of life, and the whole collection a record of practices and attitudes on the brink of extinction. (27)

The English translation is full of Biblical resonances and Victorian phrasing, and the word order sounds quaint in contemporary usage. Sometimes for pages only the /Xam column is filled in while the other side is left blank, save for the odd word that floats free: "child...old people...they understand...shoots...eat...heart". I wonder what else has been left out. (32)

Of course, the losses in the archives amount to erasures of language that parallel the losses in the landscape. "Poignantly," Pippa Skotnes writes, "it locates these traditions within the landscape, and shows how the taking away of land and its resources meant the destruction of the people themselves" (31). It is a loss both at the level of nature and culture.

The archive is, like the hearth, an important construction in *A Millimetre of Dust* for Martin's questions of what separates humans from other animals. Wai Chee Dimock makes this point in her reading of Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845): in working through the text's treatment of the relationship between the dead and the living, which Fuller depicts through reference to ancient Egyptian burial rites, Dimock contends that "[h]uman beings are the only creatures on the planet who reproduce through archives" ("The Planetary Dead" 31). I find Dimock's explanation to be consistent with the way archives function in Martin's book to bring into her present-day research the voices of the departed San, extending forms of kinship between the present and the past, the human and the non-human, the living and the dead:

Humans are the only creatures on the planet who reproduce through archives. They are the only ones who can have "kin" above and beyond what biology permits. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* honors this kinship and gives it the largest possible scope, not only by embracing the

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<sup>48</sup> Bleek arrived in Natal with John Colenso (Bishop of the Church of England in Natal), before moving to Cape Town to interpret and catalogue the Grey Collection for Sir George Grey (Governor of the Cape Colony) (Skotnes 27). In 1870, the opportunity arose for Bleek to study "a bushman language" because the Breakwater Convict Station in the suburb of Mowbray, Cape Town, made /Xam prisoners available to aid as informants (30). The result is 11 000 notebook pages of recorded /Xam orature. What helped to make this possible, as Janette Deacon explains, is that some of the /Xam-speaking San had encountered colonials prior to their arrests or had laboured on farms, and therefore knew some Dutch, the language in which Bleek and Lloyd initially communicated with them (101). See Bleek and Lloyd for the notebooks.

history of the entire species, but also by refusing to distinguish between those who now inhabit the earth and those who once did, those who have a kind of territorial sovereignty in the present moment and those who, in dying, have lost that sovereignty. (“The Planetary Dead” 31).

The impression of losses is evident throughout *A Millimetre of Dust* in the many instances that reveal Martin’s lack of knowledge about the locations she and her family move through. These tend to involve her encounters with or observations of people, and they signal her unfamiliarity with the landscape, her foreignness as a visitor. One such incident occurs when the family arrives at Blinkklipkop near Postmasburg, where they intend to visit a specularite mine, and they are approached by a group of begging children. Martin’s husband, Michael, comments, “I wonder whose descendants they are” (232), a question that she leaves unanswered. (Given the racial makeup of Postmasburg and the indeterminateness of their race at a glance, one can assume that they are coloureds, descendants of Khoisan.)<sup>49</sup> The moment therefore appears somewhat incidental, although it draws the reader’s attention to the question of historical continuity of forms of affliction (poverty being a reoccurring observation of Martin’s throughout the journey). In turn, Martin’s focus on the mine and the ochre, which “has been in human use for possibly 400 000 years or more” (Martin, *A Millimetre* 237), suggests that, for her in this moment, the past takes precedence over the present, that she is more interested in prehistoric figures than their descendants who reside in the vicinity. When the family exits the mine, they are covered in shiny ochre and Martin writes that it seems “as though the stars and earth have marked this modern skin like poems of our inheritance” (238). With the swift acknowledgements of Khoisan descendants living in dire circumstances and the claim to inheritance by a family of settler origin in a prehistoric cave, mined thousands of years ago by Khoisan, there is much to unpack here.

I want to begin by returning to Michael’s question about the begging children. It mirrors an earlier moment when the family is seated at a café window in Kimberley and they spot two women passing “whose features look just like the Bushmen in the tourist books,” the elder one with a “face lined with a thousand wrinkles” and “distinctive” cheekbones (146). It is likely that, like the children, these women are coloured people, members of a racial group who are descendants of both indigenous Khoisan and European settlers. The facial features Martin recognises in the women might be no more than genetic traces passed down through generations, unaccompanied by any sociological ones. Martin, perhaps unintentionally, leads one to perpend the fading away of traces when she asks, “Where do they come from, where are they going?” (147). The first question hints at the anthropological curiosity that spurs Martin’s investigation into the lives of the San. Sadly, as coloureds whose indigenous roots were extirpated, there is no way of knowing whether they can answer that question themselves. Martin and her husband (as their questions suggest) are in search of traces of an original figure. One also sees this in *Summer on the Lakes* when Fuller scrutinises the faces of Native Americans she encounters; for instance, remarking of them in Sault St. Marie that “[t]he half-breed and half-civilized chiefs, however handsome, look vulgar beside the pure blood. They have the dignity of neither race” (142). Such comments uphold racial purity as indicative of

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<sup>49</sup> More information on the history of miscegenation and coloured communities in South Africa is provided in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

cultural authenticity, and attest to both Fuller's and Martin's eagerness towards a figure who represents a world not yet acquainted with European contact. That said, this shared interest in something original plays out very differently in their respective narratives.

Martin is more critical than Fuller of European expansion and intrusion into foreign lands, and her present-day perspective provides her with a diachronic view of the progression and outcome of the deracination of her nation's indigenous communities in a way that Fuller, in her day, could only forecast for Native Americans. This greater critical awareness produces in Martin's narrative a complex perspective on belonging: as mentioned earlier, she at times reveals a sense of unease or ambiguity because of her settler lineage, but she also appears to allay such feelings by situating her family within a broader notion of the original which the book explores. As the hominid fossils that Martin uncovers in excavation sites remind us, South Africa is home to an extensive array of archaic specimens believed to be the progenitors of modern humans. These excavations and the questions about evolution that they inspire are entangled within the narrative's focus on the interconnectedness of various lifeforms. The notion of an original presented in *A Millimetre of Dust* is encapsulated by the words of Batista Salvador, the Angolan guide whom the family meets at Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Centre, a man also of San descent, that "[i]f you go back far enough, we're all South Africans" (199).<sup>50</sup> For this reason, when Martin dreams of her grandfather in the book's final chapter, she proclaims him "the founding patriarch of our family, domestic emblem of the Empire," and remembering his love of natural history and botany, writes, "I recognise now our continuity" (251). She also reflects on Salvador's words about the healing power of ancestral connection. In this way, Martin acknowledges her settler roots while again proposing a form of kinship, one that transcends race, generations and the historical conjunctures of conflict and subjection. The notion of kinship is reiterated by the chapter's focus, reflections on home and family, and by its title, "Hearth."

This is also true in another memory of what Martin calls her father's "garden myth," his belief that all people should be hunter-gatherers (a belief he attached to his outings to buy groceries), and her picturing him reading Laurens van der Post, an Afrikaner author who served in the British army and wrote tales of exploration in Africa and later about the San. These memories serve to indigenise Martin and her family in the South African landscape, fortifying a sense of belonging in Africa for people of settler descent. (The connection to Van der Post supports the sense, in Martin's book, of loss – loss of a people and a way of life. Van der Post himself considered the San to be a "walking pilot scheme of how the European man could find his way back to values he had lost and needed for his own renewal" [qtd. in L. van Vuuren 141]. However, Van der Post's attitude towards the San has been discredited in recent decades, which problematises Martin's use of him as a way to claim aboriginal identity.)<sup>51</sup> Unlike

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<sup>50</sup> The San are thought to have originated in the African Great Lakes region and travelled southward, ultimately scattering along the Cape peninsula and along the west coast towards Saldanha Bay (Watson 5), which helps explain Batista's San lineage as an Angolan. He appears in the book as a representative of the San, giving voice to their history, and although Martin believes what he tells the family, their encounter also causes her to "wonder about questions of authenticity" as she wonders how much of what he knows is acquired from university specialists as opposed to being from his own experience (115), which she suspects would be more mosaic than scholarly discourse allows.

<sup>51</sup> Van der Post wrote books and made films about the San, presenting them "as an archetype for humanity – a symbol of natural purity in all mankind, if seemingly more so in certain people (notably in the real Bushmen and

Fuller's treatment of Native Americans in *Summer on the Lakes*, in which an originary figure is provisional, serving only to give way to a new race, the many connections and interconnections present in *A Millimetre of Dust* – between settlers and indigenes, between humans and nonhumans – frame Martin and her settler heritage within the fabric of human history, so that her family can be traced, as one of her children claims, “[a]ll the way back to Wonderwerk Cave” (251) (one of the archaeological sites the family visits). For Fuller and her contemporaries, the question of an original instigates a process of replacement in service of nationalist rhetoric, but for Martin it signals an ongoing continuum that reaches beyond the literal and imaginary boundaries of the nation.

In the final section of this chapter, I want to return to the brief recognitions-in-passing that Martin makes along the road from which the above reflection on origins stemmed. There is another such recognition described just before the encounter with the begging children at Blinkklipkop that warrants elaboration, when Martin sights “poignant shelters grouped together on the side of the road” (231) that she suspects belong to the *karretjiemense* (Karretjie People), so named after the donkey carts in which they customarily travel and live (De Jongh 442). This is another incident that reveals Martin's relative unawareness as traveller; she does not, in fact, know for sure that the tiny shelters she spots belong to the *karretjiemense* but only suspects they do, and after identifying them as descendants of the Khoisan, she supplements her recognition with secondary research by Michael De Jongh. I draw on this moment because it speaks to the question of mobility, which invites a comparison with *Summer on the Lakes* in view of its attention to waves of westward migration, particularly since large portions of Martin's book are set on the road, a motif that American authors have often utilised to explore the theme of mobility. Under the conditions of the Jacksonian era, mobility was a requisite for expansion and thus desirable for settlers, but was begrudged by whites when it came to Native Americans, whose mobility was seen as invasive and a threat to white family stability (Rogin 121). What is intriguing about the perceived disinclination of Native Americans to settle down is that, because of the optimism generated around the western frontier in the Jacksonian period, Euro-American settlers appeared distinctively restless (McKinsey 1; Theron 1-2). What distinguished whites from Native Americans regarding their movement was ownership of property; in other words, because Native Americans lacked private property – which signified a home for white Americans – their mobility was taken to be a “roaming from place to place” (qtd. in Rogin 121), a hazard to white settlers' homes, presenting “a threat to boundaries” (121). But for white Americans, mobility become an indicator of several factors, including the possibility of socio-economic improvement and freedom, as well as privilege.<sup>52</sup>

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perhaps in van der Post himself) than in others” (A. Barnard 104). Lauren van Vuuren argues that “[V]an der Post's description of the Bushmen as a ‘pilot-scheme’ was apt, but more as a pilot-scheme for his own highly subjective philosophies” (141).

<sup>52</sup> Movement seemed so fundamental a condition of American life in the nineteenth century that Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, in his seminal work on the country, *Democracy in America* (1835), identified Americans as a restless people who forever pursue the promises of a richer life elsewhere (151-52). While Tocqueville is critical of the insatiability that transpires in a democracy which glorifies the possibilities of self-improvement, he comments little on the mobility that makes this restlessness conceivable; for the American citizen, mobility is a given. See Cresswell, *On the Move* (the chapter “Mobility, Rights, and Citizenship in the United States”); Cullen (the chapter “Dream of the Good Life (II): Upward Mobility”); Hamera and Bendixon 1; Stout (the chapter “The Journey and American Aspirations”); and Theron 1-6.

Fuller picks up on a feverish desire among her fellow travellers to get out west. Recalling her arrival in Cleveland via the river St. Clair, Fuller comments that “[t]he people on the boat [with her] were almost all New Englanders, seeking their fortunes” (12). The western frontier that Fuller encounters is a bustling locus of “mushroom growth” (18), populated with those “talking not of what they should do, but of what they should get in the new scene” (12). She observes critically that it “was to [these travellers] a prospect [...] of more ease, and larger accumulation,” a place “where the clash of material interests is so noisy” (12). Recording a conversation aboard a steamboat *en route* to Chicago between characters identified only as J., S. and M. – the last-mentioned representing Fuller – she writes that “S. and I, like other emigrants, went not to give but to get” (19). These comments capture the essence of American expansionism, integral to the mythology of America as a land of opportunity. “[T]he Westward Movement,” as it became known, was propelled by the allure of the “West” which, as Edwin Fussell explains, became the locus around which a powerful myth of American civilisation was formed (6). Put differently, the West embodied a region as well as an idea (Rosowski 15), a locus of possibility, suggestive of newness and the conviction that better circumstances lie in that direction. Hence social mobility and material prosperity became ideals associated with configurations of the American Dream.<sup>53</sup>

In the chapter that covers Martin’s glimpsing of the shelters, she refers to De Jongh who, in his research on the *karretjiemense*, defines them as “rural foragers – the modern nomads of the Great Karoo,” an expansive, arid region whose economy relies on sheep-farming (444), with most farmlands being white-owned (445). De Jongh calls them “a rural underclass” who are “amongst the poorest of the poor”; “virtually unknown and socially invisible to other South Africans,” particularly those who do not reside in the Great Karoo, while Karoo residents who are familiar with the sight of these dwellers tend to know little about “them as people” (446). Their lineage can be traced to the Khoisan of the Great Karoo and like their forebears, they partake in a foraging lifestyle of sorts because they rely on opportunities from the settled population around which they roam to sustain them (446). During the eighteenth century, with colonial invasions, the settler population began to outnumber the Khoisan, who eventually partook in the agricultural economy of the region by being employed by the settlers, either as servants or as farmhands (De Jongh 447). Those who came under settler employment were generally regarded as “tame Bushmen” for their disinclination to rebel against settler incursions (although some were simply kidnapped as young children and forced into such service) (447). As settlers began to consolidate their ownership of farmland, they attempted to secure the Khoisan as a steady labour force (447), railing against their tendency for itinerancy which they hoped to “rehabilitat[e]” (448). As a result, the nineteenth century saw the establishment of pass and vagrancy laws under British colonial rule as a means “to limit the mobility” of the Khoisan and “tie them to the employment of new landowners” (447).

The Khoisan could not procure land during the nineteenth century under colonial tenure, even though nineteenth-century legislature made it permissible in theory (449). Under British colonial authority, attempts were made to implement land grants for mission institutions where Khoisan people could live – not directly under the dominion of settler farmers, but on conditions of submitting to “missionary tutelage and communal land tenure” – as a way of

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<sup>53</sup> See Cullen for derivations and versions of the American Dream.

assuaging possibilities of rebellion against settlers (447). However, these were generally unsuccessful because farmers viewed such institutions as sanctuaries for “spoilt” and “troublesome” Khoisan who became entirely displaced with the collapse of these mission arrangements (447). The complete consolidation of settler ownership of farmland in the nineteenth century created opportunities for commercial agriculture and set in motion a series of developments: the growth of towns, improvements in travel, greater demands for the region’s principle agricultural product, wool, as well as technological advancements such as the introduction of wire fencing, which all contributed to changes in labour requirements (447-48). Consequently, farmers’ need for permanent shepherds to guard animals across vast expanses lessened because fences protected their stock, while the cyclical nature of the sheep-shearing meant that shearers were forced to move between farms to find seasonal employment, meaning that the *karretjiemense* came to serve as “an auxiliary labour force” (448). The balance that initially existed between available shearers and farmers requiring their services was disrupted in the early stages of the twentieth century for a number of reasons (such as the decline in farming units), creating a surplus of shearers vying for work (448-49).

This history, which stretched across approximately three centuries, is explained by Martin in this way: “After the genocide [of the Khoisan], the remaining so-called tame Bushmen usually became farm labourers. Within a few generations, the introduction of wire fencing, among other things, meant that many had to leave the farms, since shepherds were no longer needed” (*A Millimetre* 232). This concise definition – the identification of fences with no specific acknowledgement of the “other things” that also contributed to the emergence of these itinerant groups – assumes significance if one considers Martin’s excuse to a farmer who is the proprietor of a self-catering cottage near Kimberley, where the family spends one evening of an initially-planned weeklong stay. She explains the family’s speedy departure by telling the farmer, “[W]e’re city people. When we come this far, we want to feel what open space is like. We don’t want to be living with so many fences” (62). Martin’s research commitments notwithstanding, this journey is her family’s temporary escape from the city, “from fynbos to thorn bushveld, in the hope that [their] journey might discover some quality of spaciousness, some memory of the land before guns and sheep and wire fences” (61). Martin’s demurring to the presence of fences, as with her survey of archaeological grids, can be tied to her narrative’s critical survey of the way that colonialism (like certain scientific pursuits) operates by imposing spatial delineations. There is also some irony to her demands. As the progeny of European settlers, Martin and her family’s presence in the country can be conjoined with that of guns, fences and other measures by which the environment was and still is controlled and ordered in service of property and agriculture. When read as a quest in the Romantic tradition, as Vital does (97), Martin’s journey reveals expectations of ahistorical landscapes, “outside that colonial past, untainted by its cultivated forms of apprehension” (97).

More than that, the fence trope articulates the different implications of fencing for the likes of Martin and for the *karretjiemense* she thinks of. Although restrictive for both, the constraint that these constructions have caused the *karretjiemense* is a life-altering one, whereas they represent more of an inconvenient encumbrance for Martin. The distinctive implications of fences for Martin’s family can be understood with reference to Zygmunt Bauman’s denotations of “tourists” and “vagabonds.” In *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), Bauman thinks through the effects of globalisation in the postmodern,



consumerist world and identifies mobility as “the uppermost among the coveted values,” or commodities, of such a world (2). “Nowadays we are all on the move. Many of us change places – moving homes or travelling to and from places which are not our homes” (77). But mobility, he argues, “becomes the main stratifying factor” (2), bestowing on some, “tourists” (92), the benefits of a globalised world – the freedom to come and go as they please (2) and the choice of where to be (86). As a result of them having choices, tourists can, as “gatherers of *sensations*” (83, original emphasis), defer their destinations, thereby continually generating the pleasure of an as-yet-arrived-at pleasure elsewhere. But their less fortunate counterparts, “vagabonds” (92), are fated to a different kind of mobility, one that does not make available the profits of globalisation but instead the opposite, a stultifying localisation (2). “Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation,” Bauman explains (2). For them, “their plight [is] anything except the manifestation of freedom” (92), passively subjected, as they are, to changes in the world around them, not changes they themselves bring about in their environment (88). Explaining the distinction between tourists and vagabonds further, he writes:

The tourists stay or move at their hearts’ desire. They abandon a site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere. The vagabonds know that they won’t stay in a place for long, however strongly they wish to, since nowhere they stop are they likely to be welcome. The tourists move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly *attractive* – the vagabonds move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*. The tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds because they have no other bearable choice. The vagabonds are, one may say, involuntary tourists; but the notion of ‘involuntary tourist’ is a contradiction in terms. However much the tourist’s strategy may be a necessity in a world marked by shifting walls and mobile roads, freedom of choice is the tourist’s flesh and blood. (92-93, original emphases)

That the *karretjiemense* are named for their mode of transport is poignant because the type of mobility that their life circumstances permit is not the fulfilling mobility available to Martin and her family, the kind of mobility that is instigated by choice and which acquires its value from access to desired destinations and from invariably having a place (a home) to return to. Martin’s mobility is pleasurable because it is not the only option available to her; it is a sporadic respite from permanent residence. As Bauman writes, “[b]eing on the move’ has a radically different, opposite sense for, respectively, those at the top and those at the bottom of the new hierarchy” (*Globalization* 4). This a point driven home by the way Martin ends her discussion of their landlessness and itinerancy by noting a man in a cart who “looks out as [their] car flashes by” (*A Millimetre* 232), which registers a degree of self-awareness on Martin’s part. The mobility of the *karretjiemense* is a destination-less wandering. They have limited access to work on farms, if any at all, and for many, sedentarism presents more ills than merits, while itinerancy makes healthcare and school attendance for children difficult (De Jongh 451-52). Generally, they reside in corridor camps between the fenced boundaries of farms and public roads or on outspans on public land, both of which is illegal for periods surpassing twenty-four hours (450). Their stays are often policed, so they are forced “to keep moving” (450). For De Jongh, these factors illustrate the shortcomings of a relatively new democracy that is not yet accommodating enough of all its citizens and “has thus far failed to deliver the full benefits of

citizenship to large numbers of people, but conspicuously to local communities in the rural areas” (442).

To interpret South Africa’s democracy from a Jacksonian standpoint that posits geographical movement as socially significant or constructive only when registered between the confines of property would help to put into perspective the personal alienation that Martin at times conveys. Without invalidating Martin’s obvious unease as a woman of settler origin witnessing the ramifications of colonial insurrections in South Africa, it is crucial to bear in mind, as Vital does, that Martin’s journey is “taken from home and back” (91). Relatively speaking, Martin and Fuller both belong to elite groups in their respective societies – Martin as an academic, Fuller as an educated woman from “literate, literary New England” (Maddox 136), a place she called “a chief mental focus of the New World” (qtd. in Maddox 131) – and their journeys, research purposes notwithstanding, are leisurely trips that culminate in a return home. For the *karretjiemense*, however, mobility is a symptom of their exclusion from basic rights of the South African democracy.

*Summer on the Lakes* and *A Millimetre of Dust* have in common a writer-narrator who, in trying to represent a former frontier to her readers, is confronted by the representational limitations of the critical paradigms that she has access to. Both texts pivot on the tension between a propulsion to read the landscapes travelled through and an (at times uncomfortable) awareness that their positions as women of settler origin confines the lens through which they look, affecting the readability of the land from their perspective. Neither Fuller nor Martin condemns man’s desire to foray into the natural environment, they are critical of the losses attendant upon settler colonialism (as their respective depictions of mobility make clear), and through the nature-culture dualism, both criticise the repercussions of man’s unchecked interventions in nature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Incriminating Deeds and Forgotten Plots: The Burden of Landedness in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Agaat***

Continuing the previous chapter's consideration of the similarities between European settlement in the United States and South Africa, the comparison in this chapter centres on agrarian development as pivotal to the rise of ethnonational identities in the two countries. American writing of the eighteenth century defined the new national identity as one founded on an agrarian relation to the land, with the yeoman emerging as an exemplary figure. In his well-recognised *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), the French-born J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur identifies the American farmer as one whose labour qualifies him as a "new man" (69), instigating the kind of customary and institutional novelty that, for many at the time, characterised American life: "He is an American, who leaves behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds" (70). Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) also celebrates the yeoman, with "[t]hose who labour in the earth" deemed "the chosen people of God" (170). For Jefferson, the farmer surpasses his urban-dwelling compatriots as "the most virtuous and independent citizens" (181), and through his attachment to the earth – being both physical *and* metaphysical – is committed to maintaining familial presence on the land for generations (Conlogue 11-12). William Conlogue writes that American agriculture in the nineteenth century bore the legacy of the previous century's literary agrarianism, one heavily inspired by pastoral depictions in classical art (11). The farmer, typified as male, was seen as "virtuous, hard-working, independent, happy, neighborly, family-sustaining, and faithful to the republic and God" because of his close relation to nature (11).

In South Africa, one finds a similar employment of ideals associated with agrarianism to shape Afrikaner identity, particularly in the twentieth century. Afrikaners constitute a white ethnic group descended from Europeans, are traditionally Christian and distinguish themselves from anglophone white South Africans (Todd 114). The origin of Afrikaners can be traced to free burghers of Dutch and German origin who deserted the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century and moved away from the Cape of Good Hope, settling further inland where their communities expanded with the introduction of Huguenot immigrants (Patterson 3-4). These free burghers were farmers, hence the Dutch and Afrikaans designation "Boere," which preceded use of the term "Afrikaners" and is today still used interchangeably with it.<sup>54</sup> Afrikaners' connection to land is embodied substantially in the genre of the *plaasroman*, a mode of fiction that takes as its premise their putative mystical connection to the South African land, especially farmland, and treats the danger of losing this land as "an epiphanic moment" (Wenzel 95). Popularised during the 1920s and 1930s (Wenzel 93), the *plaasroman* emerged out of a variety of social pressures, as J. M. Coetzee explains, particularly the Great Depression (*White Writing* 76), and explored several concerning issues; among them, the expected inheritance of the farm by the farmer's sons and potential disputes among them over it, the threat of land speculators, natural disasters, movement away from rural to urban areas (which

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<sup>54</sup> See Giliomee, *The Afrikaners* xix for a brief insight into the evolution of the terminology.

also poses a threat to traditional values) and the struggle for employment between whites and blacks on mines or railways (82-83). This historical moment that witnessed a “generation that found itself deprived and dispossessed” emerged as an “epoch in the history of the Afrikaner” (83). The work of C. M. van den Heever, whose fiction was formative of the traditional, or normative,<sup>55</sup> *plaasroman*, is “self-consciously concerned with the creation of a new Afrikaner nation,” explains Carli Coetzee (116) and shows “the farm stand[ing] metonymically for the land as the farmer stands for the Afrikaner” (117).

There are other cultural commonalities in the history of Afrikaners and Euro-Americans that are implicated in the creation of group identity through an agrarian attachment to the land. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the transformation of European to American through conquest over the wilderness and labouring the earth is analogous to the metamorphosis of European into Afrikaner. Central to both cases is a Calvinist work ethic and the idea of being a chosen people, re-enacting the Israelites’ “errand into the wilderness,” a conviction that ultimately produced comparable notions of cultural exceptionalism.<sup>56</sup> Given how analogous the construction of Afrikaner and Euro-American identity through the possession and cultivation of farmland appears to be, this chapter aims to perform a bifocal reading that includes a work originally written in Afrikaans, a contestatory *plaasroman*, *Agaat*, translated into English (2006) by Michiel Heyns (1943-) from the original (published in 2004) by Marlene van Niekerk (1954-).<sup>57</sup> It is compared with *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), a Gothic Romance by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). *Agaat*’s depiction of white settlement on the land is thus a glimpse of one cultural group’s experience, not an all-encompassing representation of colonial settlement in South Africa as a whole. This is not to suggest that there is not any overlap between the attachments to land between Afrikaners and their English South African compatriots, of course. In *White Writing*, in which J. M. Coetzee offers a genealogy of the farm novel in South Africa (surveying the various literary influences of both the English and Afrikaans versions), he contends that the English-speaking writers Olive Schreiner and Pauline Smith cannot be seen as “hav[ing] defined a ‘farm novel’ genre in English to parallel the *plaasroman*” because, as English women writers with freethinking dispositions, they “stood too far outside the insular patriarchal culture of the Boer farm to write of it with true intimacy” (63). I have therefore chosen to use the term *plaasroman* throughout this chapter to underscore the “ideological slant” (Buxbaum 30) that the *plaasroman* possesses because of its emergence alongside the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism, which many scholars assert sets it apart from its English counterpart in South Africa.

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<sup>55</sup> A distinction has been made between “normatiewe plaasromans” (normative *plaasromans*) and “kontesterende plaasromans” (contestatory *plaasromans*), the former being works that emerged principally during the 1930s, a period that consolidated the genre (Prinsloo 34). Contestatory *plaasromans* are those that emerged since the 1960s (a period of prolific literary output, especially by recalcitrant Afrikaner writers). Loraine Prinsloo identifies Etienne Leroux’s *Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins* (1962) as originary of this later variety of the *plaasroman* (35). See also A. Coetzee, whose book Van Niekerk read before writing *Agaat* (De Kock, “Intimate Enemies” 141).

<sup>56</sup> Cuthbertson has pointed out the parallels between ethnonational exceptionalism in the United States and South Africa (“Racial Attraction” 1132; “Reading” 27). For expositions on divine election or exceptionalism as it pertains to the American context, see Onuf; and as it pertains to Afrikaners, see Cauthen, Cloete 43-45, Dobošová and Du Toit.

<sup>57</sup> The translation used in this chapter is the first English translation – that is, the South African English translation, also entitled *Agaat*. All citations from the novel that appear in this chapter are taken from this edition.

A prevailing theme in Hawthorne's fiction, prompted by his ancestors' involvement in the Salem witch trials, is guilt over past familial offences and the transmission of shame through subsequent generations. This theme resonates with contemporary South African white writing, especially those focused on Afrikaner uneasiness in post-apartheid society, that explores issues of collective shame and ancestral complicity. Such texts abound since the late 1980s and into the post-apartheid period, and regularly depict an awakening to political realities in the event of a return to the family home, which in South African writing frequently takes the form of the family farm, once the site of childhood innocence.<sup>58</sup> It is primarily an agrarian history that involves land dispossession and literary depictions of feelings of ancestral complicity that compel my comparison of *Agaat* with Hawthorne's novel.

The eponymous house of Hawthorne's text is home to Hepzibah Pyncheon, an elderly spinster who, obsessed with the family's aristocratic background, reluctantly opens a cent shop in the lower storey of the house to make ends meet; her brother, Clifford, recently released from prison after serving a murder sentence for thirty years; Phoebe, the daughter of a Pyncheon cousin from the country; and the lodger Holgrave, a drifting and radical young man who, after a series of occupational changes, currently works as a daguerreotypist. It is undisclosed for much of the novel that Holgrave is a descendant of the original owner of the land on which the Pyncheon house was built, Matthew Maule, who was subject to accusations of witchcraft by an earlier Pyncheon, the Colonel, and subsequently executed. When Colonel Pyncheon dies unexpectedly on the day of his housewarming it sparks rumours that Maule had cursed him before he died with the words "God will give him blood to drink!" (7). This invocation of retribution is significant, for while *The House of the Seven Gables* criticises the ruinous effects of historical continuity in the form of undue class privilege (represented by the Pyncheons), it also warns against the appeal of revenge for past offences (introduced by the actions, and potential actions, of Maule descendants). The Judge's avarice and Holgrave's inherited mesmeric abilities, however, fuel the novel's attention to the possibilities of repeating past offences which, on the part of the Pyncheons, manifests as the refusal to renounce outmoded English sensibilities. Much of the novel's action revolves around the quest of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, a cousin of Hepzibah and Clifford who bears a remarkable physical resemblance to the Colonel, to gain a missing deed to land in Maine, referred to as "the Indian deed" (14). Upon the Judge's death, Phoebe and Holgrave are set to wed, and the newly formed Pyncheon-Maule clan move to territory in Maine.

Van Niekerk's *Agaat* deals with similar anxieties and the plot is likewise set in motion by a search for documentation that recognises landownership. Kamilla "Milla" de Wet (née Redelinghuys) is determined to view the maps of her farm, Grootmoedersdrift, one last time before she succumbs to Motor Neuron Disease. In what Milla hopes to be "a self-portrait, an autobiography" (21), *Agaat* chronicles her adult life, largely through memories and diary entries. Most of the diary entries follow her adoption of four-year-old Agaat Lourier in 1953. Agaat is the coloured daughter of Milla's childhood minder whom Milla fetches from her mother's farm (it is suggested that she was abused and neglected) and whom she raises as her

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<sup>58</sup> Such works can be placed in a category that David Medalie calls "My Apartheid Childhood Revisited" (37), in which white adult protagonists reassess Apartheid-era childhoods. Also see R. Barnard, "Ugly Feelings, Negative Dialectics" for a review of academic discourse on Apartheid shame.

own daughter until she, Milla, falls pregnant with her own child seven years into her marriage to the vain, abusive and racist Jak de Wet. Their son, Jakkie, has no interest in inheriting his parents' farm, although he remains throughout the novel someone who may counter Agaat's claim to the land. Hereafter, Agaat is relegated to the position of domestic worker in the De Wet household and forced to sleep in a backroom. The narrative shifts between the apartheid period and Milla's final days in 1996. These latter sections show Milla to be bedridden due to Motor Neuron Disease, with minimal and diminishing movement in one eye as she tries to communicate by blinking to Agaat, now her caregiver, to whom she intends to bequeath her farm. As in *The House of the Seven Gables*, inheritance in *Agaat* lays bare the encroachment of the past into the present, the result of which complicates Milla's reconciliation with Agaat on her deathbed and which Van Niekerk explains with a Biblical reference, that "the sins of the fathers will be transplanted from generation to generation until the third and the fourth generation" (PEN America). This sentiment is strikingly Hawthornean. In the Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, in which Hawthorne sets out his definition of a Romance, he claims that the genre has a moral, which in the case of the Pyncheon story is "that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones" (3). Like Hawthorne's novel, *Agaat* illustrates a world of socio-political change from which a colonial-era home can no longer insulate itself, with the consequential disintegration of the family being suggestive of the change in the nation. Both novels register this change through the relationship between two opposing parties: the patrician Pyncheons and plebeian Maules in Hawthorne's novel, and the Afrikaner farmer and her coloured domestic worker in *Agaat* who, as Derek Attridge writes, each "stand for much broader populations and politico-economic forces" ("Contemporary Afrikaans Fiction" 398).

The comparison in this chapter is based, firstly, on the similarities between Euro-American and Afrikaner settlement, as outlined above, and secondly, on the fact that translation is one way by which texts enter the arena of world literature. *Agaat*, a novel that has been translated into several languages, is strictly about Afrikaner culture. Questions of translatability are especially pertinent when cultural particularity is germane to the essence of the story (conveyed by Van Niekerk in the original novel in the many registers of Afrikaans, as well as the inclusion of songs, children's rhymes, literary allusions and popular expressions). Heyns's translation of *Agaat* self-reflectively engages with the question of language and translatability, as when the character Jakkie reflects on translating Afrikaans place names for his Canadian colleagues: "Translate Grootmoedersdrift. Try it. Granny's Ford? Granny's Passion? What does that say?" (6). Heyns's translation (published under the same title in South Africa and the United States) has been critiqued by some scholars for alterations that may be deemed too creative or unnecessary, although they were done with the support of Van Niekerk.<sup>59</sup> In his Translator's Note, Heyns identifies the original novel as "a highly allusive text, permeated, at times almost subliminally, with traces of Afrikaans cultural goods" and explains that while he chose to "make [his] own translations of these, in an attempt to retain something of the sound, rhythm, register and cultural specificity," when it came to the novel's incorporation of

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<sup>59</sup> For readings that question or critique aspects of the translation, see Attridge, "Contemporary Afrikaans Fiction"; England; and Van der Vlies. Also see Heyns's Translator's Note and the interview he conducted with Van Niekerk and Leon de Kock (De Kock, "Intimate Enemies") for comments on the author and translator's collaboration in translating the novel into English.

Afrikaans poetry, he “tried to find equivalents from English poetry” (n. pag.). In an article explicating his work even further, Heyns writes about the role of the translator:

[A] translation is a licenced trespass upon a rich but relatively unknown territory, upon which the translator has to report back to people to whom the territory is not only unknown but foreign. [...] He must give as accurate account of this territory as he can, to enable his audience to understand something of this territory in their own terms but without losing the sense of foreignness. (“Irreparable Loss” 125)

Heyns recognises his choices in translating as either to “domesticate” or “foreignise” the text; the latter refers to the production of a text in the target language as though it originally appeared in that language or is done in a way that makes the reader aware that they are reading a translation, while the former entails integrating qualities of the source language into the translation (127), “as constant reminders that it *is* a translation and as a means of conveying some sense of the distinctive qualities of the original language and culture” (Attridge, “Contemporary Afrikaans Fiction” 398, original emphasis). Heyns claims to have selected the latter, and he draws on Umberto Eco’s assessment of translation as being fundamentally between two cultures and not between two languages (127). My objective in this chapter is not to analyse all the strategies that Heyns employed in foreignising *Agaat*. The scope of the chapter does not allow for the consideration of many such strategies. When I do engage with the text as a translation, I have taken my cue from the novel’s interplay with Hawthorne’s text and concentrated on linguistic elements that appear to be worth elucidating in bifocal relation. The aim is not to critique the translation, but rather to think through the effect of the translation strategies when read alongside *The House of the Seven Gables*.<sup>60</sup>

My reflection on such strategies is relatively brief, as the foundation of the comparison is the thematic similarities between the novels. In this regard, I am especially drawn to Heyns’s response when asked about the novel’s “scope and its range and its audience, and its place,” in which he alludes to notions of gain by identifying thematic similarities between literature in South Africa and the United States:

I think what makes it also not unique, but exceptional, is that it’s not just a South African book in the sense that, if you go back to T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, you get the idea that every work draws on tradition, changes the tradition, while it is also added on to it. And while I think this novel is very much *uit eie bodem* [from own soil], it’s also a fiction that subsumes good European tradition, links into that, and that is where I think the connection appears. It becomes almost a natural one. So I think it has the best of the novel that is from this country and yet it also recognises that it’s not just an African tradition that we’re working in,

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<sup>60</sup> I follow Attridge’s point:

Translation is a form of interpretation, and the responsibility of the translator, like that of any interpreter, is to do justice to the singularity of the work – the work as text but also the work of the author in creating that text. The work’s singularity is, precisely, its untranslatability: that is what calls out to be translated not by a machine but by an equally singular human. This is the impossible but necessary task of the translator. But note: the singularity of the work is not a fixed thing; it varies from time to time, place to place, reader to reader, reading to reading[.] [...] This is why there can never be a final translation (as opposed to a machine conversion) just as there can never be a final interpretation. (“Contemporary Afrikaans Fiction” 399)

and I think that's enormously enriching, and that's why I think *Agaat* should have a worldwide appeal. There are certainly things here that I think, say, an American reader might find strange, but I think interesting. Someone I know who's just spent seven years in America claims that Americans will just love it because it's their kind of feel, the largeness of it; *Agaat* is land, it's blood, it's family ... so I can't see why American publishers would think they can't bring it to the public. (De Kock, "Intimate Enemies" 138)

As a starting point for my analysis, I want to reflect on the themes that Heyns mentions above – land, blood and family – which are closely related to one another in Hawthorne's and Van Niekerk's novels and appear significant in representations of the works' respective home gardens. When Milla desires a "paradisiacal garden" (458) on the farm, she urges Jak: "A paradise [...] that's what you promised me, do you remember? Long ago. A flower garden without equal. Let's make a garden for Jakkie, he won't always want to fly jet fighters. He'll come home one day, and then we can show it to him, a sign of ... a sign ... You couldn't say it, of what it was supposed to be a sign" (458-59). But this project fails because Jak is disdainful of any of Milla's ventures and refuses to participate in them, and the garden becomes a space of marital disunity where one of the novel's most traumatic fights between Jak and Milla occurs. The farmland rejects attempts at self-made paradises. This may be because, like many of the events on the farm, the garden's renovation is instigated by Milla for her own fulfilment and not, as she pretends, for the good of the family. In this way, Milla disrupts the paradigm of the normative *plaasroman*.

*Agaat* has been recognised as a phenomenal (re)interpretation of the *plaasroman* genre, largely because it inverts the tradition in which the husbandman tends a feminised land that is passed down to male heirs. Traditionally, the *plaasroman* casts male characters in the foreground. In *Agaat*, Milla acquires her knowledge of, and love for, the land from her father, but she inherits her farm from her mother, who inherited it from her own mother. Its name, Grootmoedersdrift, reflects this maternal dynasty (Wessels 36), and the region in which it is situated further emphasises a feminine quality – Tradouw, meaning "the way of the women" (36).<sup>61</sup> The matriarchal line of inheritance will eventually divorce the land from the family's bloodline if *Agaat*, not Jakkie, inherits the farm following Milla's death. Unlike Milla's aggressive involvement in the running of the farm, Jak's role is largely ornamental. Milla even thinks to herself that "he was good only for decoration" (116). Although they start their married life fervently trying to make the farm prosper, their individual ambitions lead to competition between them. Milla and Jak's dynamic often reverses the gender roles of the normative *plaasroman*, for it is Jak who is "owned" by his wife; he helps ensure the continuation of her bloodline (and, hopefully, the continued prosperity of the farmland) (Prinsloo and Visagie 77-78). This is evident in Milla's seduction of him during a car ride shortly before their marriage, a manoeuvre she attempts throughout the novel, including when she entices Jak to redo the garden. The garden is symbolic of Milla's life as a farmer, for which Jak is merely a means to an end, as is apparent when Milla thinks to herself, "You wanted a child. And for that he was good enough. Because that was something you didn't have. It was in him. His seed" (107). Jak is later killed on the farm – and in a way *by* the farm – when he is impaled through the chest by a tree branch during a car crash. From the perspective of the normative *plaasroman*, in

<sup>61</sup> *The Way of the Women* is also the title of the edition of the novel released in the United Kingdom.



which the farm's existence and significance exceeds the individual generations who serve as temporary custodians, Jak's death renders him obsolete.<sup>62</sup>

Writing about the gendered nature of the home space, Rosemary Marangoly George claims that as the "shelter for the incapacitated," women and the home serve as a "momentary escape and respite" for men (19). This dynamic is demonstrated in both *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Agaat* in the attention respectively lavished upon Clifford (cured of his anxiety by Phoebe and Hepzibah) and Jakkie (who is spoilt and tended to during vacations from school and military service for various, mostly non-existing, physical ailments by Agaat and Milla). George also claims that "to linger too long at these [home] comforts is to be lost" (19). We see this with the "feminised" portrayal of Clifford, whose aesthetic appreciations are bound to the home, and with the rugged, outdoor pursuits of Jak and his determination to instil this robustness in Jakkie by taking him mountaineering and encouraging his military career. Jak's devotion to outdoor life (in the form of extreme sports rather than traditional farming) and his attempts to steer Jakkie away from Milla and Agaat, and thus away from the home, also registers a counterpoint with the popular appearance throughout a number of canonical American texts in the mid-to-late nineteenth century of men quitting domestic life for (usually unbounded or wild) outdoor environments.

Leslie A. Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) famously delves into this rejection of home life in such works as *Moby-Dick* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, declaring that since the hero of Washington Irving's "Rip van Winkle" (1819) abandoned home for the Catskill Mountains, "the typical male protagonist of [American] fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest or out to sea, down the river or into combat – anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility" (26). Read through the lens of Fiedler's book, Jak's behaviour disrupts what is traditionally a family-centred genre.<sup>63</sup> It can also be said, from the perspective of the normative *plaasroman* in which technology and the lure of the city portend the demise of the farm (J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing* 82-83), that Jak's urbanity and favouring of modern and sophisticated machinery and methods, in contrast to Milla's more organic, tactile and traditional approach, contribute to the farm languishing (over time, at least). This suggests that, although *Agaat* departs from the normative "rules" of the *plaasroman* as regards gender roles, it still upholds a conservative image of the agrarian Afrikaner farmer.

Hawthorne's novel also celebrates an agrarian relation to land. Hepzibah's waning patrician status is mirrored by the dilapidated Pyncheon garden, for which an earlier Pyncheon, Alice, played custodian. Phoebe tends to it and initiates its revival, along with Holgrave, whom she first meets there, in what Mark Rifkin calls a "'breathing-place' of rurality in the city" (46). This illustration of the rural working classes labouring the land is symbolic of the status of the

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<sup>62</sup> J. M. Coetzee interprets the relation between farmer and farmland as a marriage of sorts; "a marriage not so much between himself and the farm as between his lineage (*familie*) and the farm" (*White Writing* 86). The *plaasroman* is typically concerned "with the destiny of the ancestral farm" (Prinsloo and Visagie 98); farm-owners sustain the farm not only for those currently living on it, but also for future generations (Fourie 42). Therefore, "the farmer," explains Jennifer Wenzel, "recognizes himself as a mediator between past and future generations, as a transitory steward of permanent family land" (94). Put another way, the *plaasroman* sacrifices individuality in favour of a "transindividual" identity; the farmer and his land are fused as one, and as such symbolise Afrikaner identity (Prinsloo and Visagie 75).

<sup>63</sup> See Prinsloo and Visagie 83, and Wenzel 94.

nation as a whole: the ever-developing urbanisation surrounding the Pyncheon home casts their garden as an image of fading American rurality and the qualities embodied by that mode of life. By providing vegetables for the Pyncheon home, the renewed garden becomes one of sustenance and makes evident “the generative capacity of gardening” (Rifkin 44). In this manner, it is contrasted with the English landscape garden on which Alice initially modelled it, which is beautifying but not utilitarian. As Rifkin opines, Phoebe and Holgrave’s gardening signals the possibility of “displac[ing] the *wrongful, estranging* legacy of Pyncheon landedness with an alternative whose rejuvenating power comes from its connection to ‘toil’ in ‘the wild’” (46, original emphasis). Holgrave, who associates himself with new and free-spirited social movements, sees the renovating nature of gardening as contrasting the enduring nature of dynastic property ownership:

This old house, for example, which sometimes has positively oppressed my breath with its smell of decaying timber! And this garden, where the black mould always clings to my spade, as if I were a sexton, delving in a grave-yard! Could I keep the feeling that now possesses me, the garden would every day be virgin soil, with the earth’s first freshness in the flavor of its beans and squashes; and the house! – it would be like a bower in Eden, blossoming with the earliest roses that God ever made. Moonlight, and the sentiment in man’s heart, responsive to it, is the greatest of renovators and reformers. And all other reform and renovation, I suppose, will prove to be no better than moonshine! (152)

The creative efforts that Holgrave espouses in relation to the land are recognisably “American”: an agrarian way of being that leads to his marriage to Phoebe and secures the survival of the Pyncheons *and* Maules, it indicates “the garden’s democratic impulse” (Bode 47). The garden’s rejuvenation at the hands of “a little country-girl” (58) and a descendant of the Maules who worked the land before the Pyncheons acquired it associates physical labouring of land with democratic prospects. It is a union (effectuated in the chapter “The Flower of Eden”) that transforms a “wilderness of neglect” (Hawthorne, *The House* 54), of “decay” and “vagrant and lawless plants” (63), into a garden with both “aristocratic flowers, and plebeian vegetables” (64) through “careful labor” (63). In contrast to the De Wet garden, Phoebe and Holgrave’s agriculture result in matrimonial promise and social change.

Significantly, the De Wet garden performs a regenerative function, but only when it is in other hands – Agaat’s. Loraine Prinsloo and Andries Visagie point out that Agaat is likely of Khoi descent and her ancestors would have occupied the land on which Grootmoedersdrift is situated before Milla’s ancestors acquired it (73, 84-85). *Agaat*’s explicit portrayal of a coloured worker’s contribution to farm work is another aspect of its modification of the traditional *plaasroman* in which naturalisation of white settlers is premised on the erasures of the labour of people of colour. This erasure served to naturalise the bond that, according to J. M. Coetzee, the Afrikaner farmer feels for his farmland – his “natural right” (*White Writing* 85). This naturalness of settlement is likewise present in *The House of the Seven Gables*. The manner in which the novel repeatedly describes land evokes a sense of newness: the Colonel’s dwelling prior to seizing the House shows “the soil around him [...] bestrewn with the virgin forest-leaves” (8), while the territory in Maine is a “pathless forest” (15) and “an unbroken wilderness” (16). Such descriptions of land as supposedly untouched facilitate the case for settlement by identifying phenomena that can ultimately be transformed or cultivated and

“creates the impression of an unmediated and regenerative relation to supposedly unoccupied land” (Rifkin 42). Matthew Maule claimed land which amounted to an “acre or two of earth which, with his own toil, he had hewn of the primeval forest, to be his garden-ground and homestead” (6). The novel thus opposes Maule and Colonel Pyncheon (who used his political influence to displace Maule); Maule is instead aligned with the “actual settlers” who “had wrested [settled land] from the wild hand of Nature, by their own sturdy toil” (15). The Judge suspects Clifford of being privy to the whereabouts of a deed to land in Waldo County, Maine. That the deed is colloquially referred to as the “Indian deed” (14) and hangs next to a map that depicts “hieroglyphics of several Indian sagamores” (223), subtly invokes the presence of Native Americans, but the obliqueness of these references undergirds the discourse of white settlement.

With reference to the Indian deed, Rifkin examines how legalities that enabled absentee landownership affected the prospects of settlers in the District of Maine who espoused the corporeal nature of agricultural labour as a legitimate measure of ownership. Discussing governmental endorsement of such laws (represented in the novel by the seventeenth-century title deed), Rifkin identifies what he terms “settler common sense”: “the ways the legal and political structures [...] enable non-native access to Indigenous territories to be lived as given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood” (xvi). Such institutional endorsement of white settlement facilitates what Rifkin calls a “phenomenological sense of givenness” (16) for non-natives, which resembles the supposed naturalness of the Afrikaner’s attachment to the land in the normative *plaasroman*. By affirming the Maules as original settlers who transformed supposedly uninhabited land, the novel sheds light on ambiguities that are fundamental to the myth of America; and while *The House of the Seven Gables* – like other canonical texts of the American Renaissance – cannot strictly be said to be *about* Native Americans (Rifkin xvii), their historical displacement haunts the text, much like “the black man [who] becomes a shadowy presence” in the normative *plaasroman* (J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing* 5).

Renée L. Bergland’s description of a “discourse of spectralization” (1) pertaining to the displacement of Native populations in the United States is reminiscent of J. M. Coetzee’s exposition of the conditions for white writing in South Africa: “the ghosting of Indians is a technique of removal. By writing about Indians as ghosts, white writers effectively remove them from American lands, and place them, instead, within the American imagination” (4). She writes further that, “[f]or the most part, [...] Indian ghosts are deployed for nationalist purpose” (3). The history of confiscated land and dispossessed communities underpin both *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Agaat*, which are centrally domestic stories, stories about events within the confines of a home.

I find conceptualisations of domestic service as engaging a “colonial encounter” (Haskins 16) and the kitchen space, especially, as a contact zone to be edifying in my readings of these novels because they make quite explicit the ways that domestic life is undergirded by histories of land dispossession.<sup>64</sup> Both novels depict attempts to shield the house from social change that is represented by racial(ised) others who “haunt” the domestic space. Observing Phoebe preparing food, the narrator observes that “the ghosts of departed cook-maids looked

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<sup>64</sup> See Haskins, and Jansen, “Ek Het Maar” 108.

wonderingly on” (72), a reference to servants, including slaves, who fulfilled domestic duties in middle-class American kitchens.<sup>65</sup> This shadow of racial inequity mirrors the domestic service in white South African homes, a practice which began with slave women, and which is commonly characterised by a degree of elusiveness, such that it is often formulated in terms of hauntedness. Indeed, Agaat’s “role in the house” (Van Niekerk, *Agaat* 570) transforms her into a “ghost” (396), showing that, as in Hawthorne’s novel, racial others are often cast as spectral beings. Even so, the hauntedness in *Agaat* differs in subtle ways. Scholars have analysed the workings of intimacy and, relatedly, the uncanny in *Agaat*, which point to the intermediary position that Agaat occupies in the home as someone who is closely attached to the family while not being a part of it.<sup>66</sup> Such readings stress what Shireen Ally calls “the ambiguities of intimacy” (qtd. in E. Hunter 75); how, as Denise DeCaires Narain explains, one thinks of intimacy as “a warm word” while it “might have other sharper meanings” (“One of the Family”). Taking her cue from Ally’s work, Eva Hunter argues that “Van Niekerk’s novel exposes the shallow, unexamined sentimentality of platitudes such as ‘She is just like one of the family’” (75).<sup>67</sup> The direness of this expression is magnified by the fact that Agaat was brought into the home as an adopted child, a member of the family, before being cast out into a backroom and trained to be a servant.

Milla’s employment of Agaat as a domestic worker forms part of a longstanding practice of women of colour being taken into white homes to serve as cleaners, cooks and childminders, a custom that stretches back to the introduction of slave women into homes at the Cape of Good Hope (Baderoon, “The Ghost” 175; Jansen, “Ek Het Maar” 108).<sup>68</sup> Some of Milla’s actions in response to Agaat’s domestic and childrearing work parallels earlier colonial practices, such as her sanctimonious Christianisation of Agaat (or at least, her attempts at doing so). Gabeba Baderoon explains that domesticity was a means used in Cape colonial society to “civilise” African subjects; it was “a form of colonial ‘translation’ of Africans into ideal colonial subjects, and servitude was integral to translating African women into exemplary colonial figures” (“The Ghost” 177). Another example is Milla repeatedly spying on Agaat around the farmstead. This surveillance of Agaat’s movement at home, coupled with the limitations of her mobility in public (in one instance, she must wait in the car while the De Wet family dines in a restaurant, disbarred from such public spaces due to apartheid laws) evokes the regulation of slaves but also of domestic workers in apartheid society.

Agaat helps to raise Jakkie, but when Milla eavesdrops on her with her son, it appears out of fear that she is losing her child to another. Agaat’s deeply affectionate, and often indulgent, treatment of Jakkie is interpreted by Milla as her stealing him (Prinsloo and Visagie 77), an accusation that exposes the way the domestic worker’s duties “revea[l] and unsettl[e] the boundaries of childhood and intimacy” (Baderoon, “The Ghost” 180) as she becomes mother to another’s child (Jansen, “Ek Het Maar” 111). What her and Jakkie’s attachment to one another reveals is the way domestic workers may become “inherently unsettling figures”

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<sup>65</sup> See Baldwin.

<sup>66</sup> See E. Hunter, and Van Houwelingen.

<sup>67</sup> See Jansen’s book, *Soos Familie* (2015), which also explores the social complexities behind this adage.

<sup>68</sup> One of the first domestic workers at the Cape was a Khoi woman known as Krotoa (ca. 1642-1674), who was taken in as a young girl by Jan van Riebeeck and his wife, Maria de la Quellerie, and given the Christian name Eva. She performed as a mediator and translator for the Dutch and the Khoi.

(Baderoon, “The Ghost” 180) who, “[b]ecause they work in the intimate space of the house, [...] are always under suspicion” (185). Agaat is, as Caren Van Houwelingen claims, “ambivalently placed between belonging and estrangement, within a physical space linked to and separated from homeliness and belonging” (102). When Jakkie takes a plate of food out of a restaurant to Agaat (waiting in the car in the abovementioned incident), he is punished by his father, whose reaction reminds both Jakkie and the reader that, despite the familiarity between the boy and his family’s domestic worker, it is not socially acceptable to treat her with any compassion. Agaat haunts because she is needed for the tasks of home-keeping and childrearing to be done, but the nature of the work renders her a constant threat to the home she serves.

Agaat, it has been noted, is situated between two social spheres, that of the Afrikaner landowners and the coloured farm workers (Van Houwelingen 102; H. Viljoen 176). As with Keiko Aria’s idea that Phoebe’s background makes her both Pyncheon and not Pyncheon (44), Agaat’s position suggests an unhomely in-betweenness. Even though Agaat inherits a “good Afrikaner education,” as Jak claims about her upbringing in the home (545), it does not admit her into the same social realm as the De Wet family. She is, moreover, taught to dissociate from the other coloured workers on the farm (whom she refers to with racial slurs, a strong indication of her disdain for them), further complicating her position on the farm, for she neither belongs fully to the family nor to the other workers. The state of being kept at arm’s length despite the need for proximity to perform one’s work speaks to anxieties about keeping the home impenetrable from the outside world.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to Agaat being portrayed as a threat, Phoebe has been read by scholars as an embodiment of the “angel in the house” figure (Baldwin 62; G. Brown 79; Haack 318; and Noble 270), the “Victorian icon” who helped to manage the house “as a haven, a private sphere opposed to the public, commercial sphere” (Langland 8). Certainly, Hawthorne’s narrator suggests as much: “Angels don’t toil, but let their works grow out of them; and so did Phoebe” (61). However, she does not shelter the home from the world beyond – she is herself an outsider to the upper-class Pyncheons (Hepzibah is initially reluctant for Clifford to encounter her, saying, “If he were to find her here, it might disturb him!” [52]); she runs the cent shop, thereby absorbing the outside world into the home; and her presence draws out Holgrave, whose bohemian lifestyle is contrary to the conservative Pyncheons and whose identity as a Maule descendant is revealed only after his engagement to her.

The two novels’ attention to houses and their entrenchment in histories of colonial encounters demonstrates how the domestic space is inextricably tied to the history of the land on which it rests; or, as Homi K. Bhabha puts it, “the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions” (“The World” 141). Patricia Hill Collins explains that the power inherent in the family – in its traditional formation, patriarchal and heterosexual – “lies in its dual function as an ideological construction and as a fundamental principle of social organization” (63). The correspondence between the family unit, the house and the nation can be recognised as an intersectional assemblage of the home; home, with its

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<sup>69</sup> Acknowledging the supposedly protective nature of the home, Judge Pyncheon, who has tasked others with spying on the House, tells Hepzibah, “Your neighbors have been eye-witness to whatever has passed in the garden. The butcher, the baker, the fishmonger, some of the customers of your shop, and many a prying old woman, have told me several of the secrets of your interior” (167).

array of meanings, fundamentally as a place of belonging (Collins 63). Home is a multivalent concept. Engendering “both material and imaginative dimensions,” home signals a tangible place that evokes “feelings of comfort, security and belonging” and, argues Emma Power, is produced through “homemaking practices” (86). Power argues that such practices encompass “relations of belonging and exclusion” (86), a point also made by George, who writes “that the basic organizing principle around which the notion of ‘home’ is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference” (2).

One of the ways difference is established in these novels is through domestic segregation, which exists as a remnant of colonialism and is displayed in the homes’ architecture. As symbols of “stability and prosperity” for all classes, American homes in the nineteenth century reflected socio-economic hierarchies (Kleinberg 142), and according to S. J. Kleinberg, middle-class families were generally reluctant to welcome visitors, lodgers and servants into their homes (149). As Daniel E. Sutherland has shown, nineteenth-century American homes were structured in such a way as to keep contact between employers and their servants to a minimum, “to insulate as much as possible the American ‘home’” (qtd. in Baldwin 64). The House of the Seven Gables is delineated according to social status, as Martha Baldwin argues: in passages recollecting the earlier Pyncheons, Alice inhabits the central portions of the home, while Hawthorne describes the servants as on the periphery – “stood at the side-door” or “in the lower part of the house” (qtd. in Baldwin 65). Baldwin also points to Matthew Maule’s confrontation with Gervayse Pyncheon’s black slave, Scipio, when he arrives at the front door and refuses “to go to the back-door, where servants and work-people were usually admitted; or at least the side-entrance, where the better class of tradesmen made application” (qtd. in Baldwin 66). This segregation of the domestic space is reflected in the novel’s present events, with Phoebe generally described as being in the kitchen and Holgrave lodging in one of the gables.

This architectural delineation is similar to the home in *Agaat*. During apartheid, domestic workers often moved in with the family who employed them, exempt from the restrictions imposed by the Group Areas Act (Baderoon, “The Ghost” 178). Baderoon writes that “[i]n addition to its gendered and racialized meanings, domesticity in South Africa also has a geography, architecture and language” (179). When reading *Agaat*, one can imagine that the house on Grootmoedersdrift, situated in the Overberg region close to Swellendam, is built in the tradition of colonial Dutch homesteads, with a backroom that serves as servants’ quarters.<sup>70</sup> Consigned to this backroom as her personal space (although Milla still spies on her there), *Agaat* is attached to the main house but separate from both the nuclear family and the other farm workers, who live in small outhouses further away on the farm.<sup>71</sup> The house mimics, and helps to enforce, the wider socio-political segregation at work in the country during

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<sup>70</sup> For an exposition of the legacy of colonial architecture in this region, see Burrows.

<sup>71</sup> Likewise, regarding the house as symbolic of the inhabitants’ class, Andries Wessels reads *Agaat* as exhibiting many traits of the Big House genre that existed in Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which the dominant group, as in South Africa, occupies the land – viewing themselves as the proper inhabitants thereof – at the expense of the indigenous population (34). Wessels is concerned with the way the historical and political play into the private lives of the family and the farm, and he quotes Vera Kreilkamp’s assertion that the Big House genre demonstrates “an explicit concern for the connection between the private domestic world of the landlord’s decline and the world of history – the political transformations of Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (34-35).

apartheid. That Agaat sleeps in the “liminal space of the passage” (Van Houwelingen 101) during the present course of the novel when attending to Milla demonstrates her unwillingness – perhaps stubborn refusal – to sleep in a room in the house, and this refusal to concede change (both within the home and society) underscores the anguish of her initial banishment from the house, which functioned as a microcosm of the broader society that it was situated in.

What such domestic segregation accomplishes is not only a degree of invisibility – at least in the case of Agaat – but also awareness of one’s position in the home (and society at large) and conformance to parameters which that position entails. An illuminating example of the relative invisibility of South African domestic workers can be found in Mark Behr’s novel *The Smell of Apples*, when the young white narrator Marnus says of his family’s domestic worker, Doreen, “After all these years she knows her place” (32). He then explains this “place” by observing her discreet presence in the household, noting that “she only speaks when spoken to – and even then she doesn’t say much. Sometimes days pass without me knowing whether she’s here or not” (32). Agaat is likewise described by scholars as being “in her place” (Buxbaum 39; Van Houwelingen 101-02). In a similar fashion, Phoebe, the daughter of a Pyncheon cousin who married a woman “of no family or property” (20) and is thus deemed to be “no Pyncheon!” (59), is said to remain “within her sphere” (209).

The marked association of domestic work with class and race in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Agaat* respectively, and the subsequent need to contain anxiety around otherness, identifies a convergence between postcolonial literature (of which *Agaat* is an example)<sup>72</sup> and Gothic work.<sup>73</sup> Both postcolonial and Gothic literature are centred around confrontations with alterity (Anolik 1; Khair 3-4). Much of the Gothic atmosphere of Hawthorne’s novel is created by the house’s appearance. Externally, it bears a “battered visage [...] black and heavy-browed” with “dusky windows” (Hawthorne, *The House* 60). Internally, it is a “dismal house” with “stifled air” (93) and “grime and sordidness” and “[t]he shadows of gloomy events, that haunted the else lonely and desolate apartments; the heavy, breathless scent which Death had left in more than one of the bed-chambers” (98). In David Anthony’s reading, however, the Gothic also comes to the fore in instances of contact between the house and the world outside it, and operates by means of “an aesthetics of race” in its portrayal of the Pyncheons’ waning aristocracy, where their class status is intertwined with a “‘pure’ ‘Anglo-Saxon’ whiteness” (251).<sup>74</sup> Anthony suggests that moments when the Pyncheons’ class status appears under threat of being destabilised through contact with the outside world, the world of the working classes and mass culture, are often mediated by racial tropes, and that through the novel’s “Africanist presence” (the phrase is Toni Morrison’s) (251), Hawthorne makes class “into a racial issue” (253). The instances Anthony analyses include the sale of the Jim Crow gingerbread cookie to a young boy in shabby clothes, Ned Higgins (the son of working-class Irish immigrants [253, 261]), whose money stains Hepzibah’s hand; the “anthropomorphic” minstrel-like monkey on the organ-grinder’s shoulder outside the home who represents “a thinly veiled caricature of a

<sup>72</sup> See Prinsloo.

<sup>73</sup> See Anolik, Azzam, Holden, Hughes and Smith, and Khair for work on the intersections between the Gothic and the postcolonial.

<sup>74</sup> The Pyncheons’ assumed racial purity is alluded to with the metaphorical illustration of the chickens that roam in the garden. Described as being “pure specimens of a breed which had been transmitted down as an heirloom in the Pyncheon family [...] the race had degenerated, like many a noble race besides, in consequence of too strict a watchfulness to keep it pure” (Hawthorne, *The House* 65).

performative black masculinity” (254); and the encounter between Gervayse Pyncheon’s slave, Scipio, and Matthew Maule, during which the latter “claim[s] a position analogical to racial victimage” when he asks the slave, “Do you think nobody is to look black but you?” (qtd. in Anthony 260). In revealing how racialised Gothic tropes threaten to disrupt domestic boundaries that are tied to identity, power and ownership,<sup>75</sup> Anthony’s interpretation demonstrates the convergence between the Gothic and the postcolonial.

Traditionally a genre attuned to the “economic and socio-political transformations in nineteenth-century Britain” (Holden 359), the Gothic is well suited to narratives expressing uneasiness about shifts within the nation, such as the changeover “from colonial subjecthood to national citizenship,” and “exclusions and internal colonialism after independence” (356). Relatedly, the genre’s attention to the past is another appropriate trope for postcolonial contexts, drawing attention to the past’s insistence in the present and “the selectivity of pasts that are remembered” (357). These qualities suggest the possibility of reading *Agaat* as a “postcolonial Gothic.” Philip Holden explains that when writers insert “Gothic motifs in[to] a postcolonial context [they] explore a ‘link between the Gothic and the colonial’ in order to reassess and abrogate colonial ways of seeing” (354). *Agaat*’s unhomely presence is, of course, a substantial aspect of the novel’s Gothic quality: it is tied to histories of usurped land and it therefore problematises issues around inheritance and bloodlines. These are critical motifs in the Gothic. Julie Hakim Azzam explains that the Gothic concerns the dissolution of “an ancestral line through the actual destruction of a family and their house” (and she identifies *The House of the Seven Gables* as an example), before quoting a passage from J. M. Coetzee’s *White Writing* to illustrate the similarity between the Gothic and the *plaasroman*: family farms are “the seats to which [farmers’] lineage are mystically bound, so that the loss of a farm assumes the scale of the fall of an ancient house, the end of a dynasty” (84).<sup>76</sup> The way *Agaat* routinely reads Milla’s diaries back to her (and the mental torment that entails) amounts to a confrontation with a sordid past that refuses to be buried. Moreover, if one follows readings of the body as a metaphor for the new nation (and the corpse as a Gothic motif), then Milla’s declining corporeal state and eventual death also contribute to *Agaat*’s Gothic atmosphere.<sup>77</sup>

Elaborating further on the Gothic, Phoebe’s domestic aptitude can be read as a more occult manifestation of the angel in the house since her facile manner of operating is described as “a kind of natural magic” and “homely witchcraft” (53). Hepzibah’s claim that Phoebe’s aptitude with domestic chores “must have come to [her] with [her] mother’s blood” (57) since

<sup>75</sup> For William Hughes and Andrew Smith, the Gothic genre “is, and always has been, *post-colonial*, and this is where, in the Gothic text, disruption accelerates into change, where the colonial encounter – or the encounter which may be read or interpreted through the colonial filter – proves a catalyst to corrupt, to confuse or to redefine the boundaries of power, knowledge and ownership” (1, original emphasis).

<sup>76</sup> See Azzam (the chapter “‘May It Come Back’: The South African Farm as Gothic Topography”) for readings of *plaasromans* as examples of the postcolonial Gothic. Rita Barnard interprets of J. M. Coetzee’s exposition on the *plaasroman*’s erasure of black hands to legitimise the white landowner’s claim to the farm as “*the secret historical precondition* of the Afrikaner’s idyllic map of rural homesteading” (qtd. in Azzam 82, original emphasis) which, Azzam explains, makes the displacement of indigenous people the genre’s “heimlich element” (82). Also see R. Barnard, “Dream.”

<sup>77</sup> Van Houwelingen argues that “Van Niekerk’s novel is placed against the background of the ‘imagined political community’ [...] of Afrikaners” (97), while noting that “Milla’s illness [...] coincides with the political transition in the novel” (98), which can be read as her dying body “registering her inability to uphold acceptable standards of white property” [...] and “marks her as a politically inactive subject while her ability to assert herself as a wealthy and empowered white Afrikaner slowly diminishes” (102).



Pyncheons possess no acumen in such matters reveals how, as with Phoebe's gardening, her domestic work is an embodiment of her class. That these domestic chores are conceived with reference to witchcraft serves to draw a distinction between her and the Pyncheons, associating her more with the Maules (Aria 42; Elbert 158). This identification of a subordinate class with accusations of the occult introduces a curious contrapuntal connection to domestic enchantment in South African colonial kitchens. The emergence of Malay cuisine in the slave-holding era at the Cape (a fusion of Asian, European and Khoisan influences) was accompanied by suspicion around domestic servants' agency in the kitchen and likened their cuisine to magic:

[B]ecause it is the location of everyday exchanges, the kitchen is also the space of overheard information, of shared food, of secret knowledge such as healing potions among slaves – the site of small resistances encoded into tastes, sound, touch, glances, and smells. Here slaves learned not only how to survive but gathered a small store of subjectivity and resistance. [...] The image of the skilled and compliant servant shares space with her double – the slave woman who exercises the dangerous power of the kitchen to “gool,” or conjure, by adding insidious, undetectable ingredients to food to form magic potions or, worse, poison. [...] This fear, derived from the proximity of slaves, and later, of their descendants, circulated in the Cape long after the end of slavery. (Baderoon, “The African Oceans” 99-100)

Milla exhibits a similar cynicism about Agaat; watching her dance in the distance on the farm, Milla wonders whether she is muttering incantations.<sup>78</sup> It is possible that such colonial discourse around otherness and the uncanny has been internalised and perpetuated among the descendants of slaves themselves. One finds similar suspicions of witchcraft among coloured communities in South Africa where, as in *The House of the Seven Gables*, suspicions about the occult are used to express class anxiety. Consider, for instance, the character of Tokkie in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), a dark-skinned coloured woman who marries a fair-skinned man, Flip. Flip's family are members of the coloured petty bourgeoisie, a demographic that was relatively privileged and tended to align itself with ideas about respectability, with social superiority over their less privileged coloured compatriots and with aspirations towards whiteness in terms of appearance.<sup>79</sup> The community, including Flip's family, perceives Tokkie to be socially inferior to her husband because of her dark complexion, and it is surmised that “being black, [she] must have used witchcraft” (137) to attract “a handsome, light-skinned man with dreamy hazel eyes” (135). This bifocal aspect reveals that Hawthorne's use of discourse around the occult to express intraracial class anxiety (Hepzibah's initial misgivings about Phoebe) finds a counterpoint in the coloured petty bourgeoisie, who voice unease with the upward mobility (real or perceived) of those from whom they wish to distance themselves and whose admittance to their social sphere is seen as a transgression. (Given that these intraracial suspicions might have originated with the domestic work of slave women and Malay servants, it is noteworthy that when Tokkie visits her fair-skinned daughter, who is living as a white woman during apartheid, she does so under the pretence of being the maid.)

<sup>78</sup> Van Niekerk alludes to this history in an interview with Toni Morrison and Kwame Anthony Appiah, in which she mentions that *Agaat* and *Triomf* (1994) are both family stories that encompass “backroom children” who “live on the margins of their families” and, tellingly, “in the backrooms, they do some magic stuff” (PEN America).

<sup>79</sup> I explain the coloured petty bourgeoisie in more detail in Chapter Three.

The focus on homemaking, especially as it pertains to idealised versions of womanhood, is a prominent commonality between *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Agaat*. In the former novel, Phoebe's reinvigoration of the home is attributed to her youth, wholesomeness and spirited nature, and she is frequently referred to as a "girl": "a young girl" (51), "a little country-girl" (58), "a nice girl" (60), and so forth. Phoebe's girlhood is associated with her youth and vigour, and she breathes new life into Clifford who, after decades in prison for a crime he did not commit, is overcome by apathy. Described as being "almost childlike" (59), Phoebe's girlhood contrasts Hepzibah's enfeebled state as an "old maid" (24 and passim). Her girlhood, however, is impermanent, and is transformed after her acquaintance with Holgrave when "her expressions had made her graver, more womanly, and deeper-eyed" (209). This change in her demeanour is mourned by Hepzibah.

These terms, "girl" and "maid," flag an aspect of Heyns's translation of *Agaat* that is worth unpacking in comparison with Hawthorne's text. Heyns also utilises the term "girl" (99 and passim) throughout the novel, but it carries none of the connotations of innocence, youthfulness and purity that applies to Phoebe. In South Africa, a woman performing char work, especially within a home, was (and sometimes still is) referred to as a "girl." As discussed earlier, domestic workers in South Africa were traditionally women of colour employed by white families, so that matters around domesticity entail complex and sensitive racial politics, and this is revealed in the language commonly used to describe them. Usage of the term "girl" is generally perceived as offensive because it is infantilising language melded with racial prejudice, as is the corresponding "boy," to refer to a man who does menial labour (such as a gardener or farmhand). In the South African context, therefore, references to "boys" and "girls" (when applied to employees) are products of a paternalistic attitude on the part of white employers (Connellan 251) and are representative of social stratification exemplified by roles within and around the house.<sup>80</sup>

South African anglophone readers would likely be aware of these connotations and would therefore still recognise the term as patronising. When read in view of Milla's reference to Jak as a boy, it helps to bring to the surface her manipulation in the marriage. Before they wed, Milla says to him, "You're not afraid of becoming my farmer boy, are you, Jak" (26), which seems like innocent teasing, but her eventual exploitation of him for her own ends, the way she emasculates and infantilises him, suggests that this remark may be a foreshadowing

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<sup>80</sup> Hermann Giliomee comments on the use of these terms during the slavery era, noting that the use of *jong* (boy) and *meid* (girl) continued into adulthood because within the family that they served, they "remained perpetual minors" ("The Rise and Fall"). In explaining their "freighted social role" in South Africa, Baderoon identifies the ways that terms for this occupation are racially loaded in the South African context:

In South African English, the word *domestic* serves not only as an adjective, for instance in the phrase *domestic flight*, but as a noun which means "servant," as in, "she is the domestic." The linguistic transformation of the malleability of an adjective into the unvarying solidity of a noun suggests the sharply bounded terrain of the private sphere in South Africa. This terrain has enabled a sustained system of exploitation and violence over hundreds of years. Similarly, the word *maid* not only denotes "servant" but is also a demeaning way of saying "black woman." The word *girl* is a correspondingly offensive term that merges servant and black woman. ("The Ghost" 175)

of her treatment of him on the farm.<sup>81</sup> However, there are also losses attached to Heyns's use of the term. In the original Afrikaans, the word frequently used, and which Heyns's substitutes with "girl," is "meid." An Afrikaans word of Dutch origin, it translates roughly to "maid," but over time, and largely because of contact between whites and their domestic servants, it acquired a more injurious and distasteful edge. Heyns explains:

Originally a neutral Dutch term for a young woman (compare *maid* in English) it came to mean, in South Africa, female servant (again like *maid* in English). From here the process of what semioticians call pejoration degraded the word further, as it came to constitute a disrespectful reference to a black or coloured woman, and in schoolboy slang, a cowardly person. One of the realities reflected in *Agaat* is the whole range of registers still surviving in a single word. (Becker)

I would add to Heyns's definition that, when applied to a woman, the term implies inferiority as well as vulgarity and filthiness, including of a sexual nature – alluded to in the translation "kitchen-skivvies" (99) – and this is entirely different from the meaning of "maid" when used to describe Hepzibah, where it merely paints a picture of an old woman who is pitifully viewed as an unwed virgin. "Meid" (which would be familiar to English South African readers and could thus have been retained) is more forceful in its degradation of a servant's status and more revealing of the history behind domestic service and racial tension in the country. It makes more explicit the acrimonious relationship between Jak and Agaat. When Milla uses the term for Agaat, its meaning is more neutral because her intention differs from Jak's, but it is still "patronizingly affectionate," claims Heyns (Becker); it still makes clear a power difference between the pair. These connotations are important given the social context of the novel, not just to understand the apartheid narrative but also the sections set in 1996, to grasp the mistreatment that shaped Agaat's life. In translating the term to "girl," much of the word's potency is lost, so that in the English translation, there is a vaguer distinction between usages of "girl" that may obfuscate the intentions and attitudes of the speaker (such as when Milla refers to the young Agaat consolingly as "my little girl" [100] but elsewhere simply as "the girl" [99 and *passim*]).

Instances where Heyns incorporates passages or allusions to canonical English poetry as a replacement for Afrikaans rhymes or expressions is another area that actuates bifocal consideration. One could argue that these passages diminish the cultural specificity of the original Afrikaans text, forsaking literary references that are singularly attached to a small locality for ones that fall in the global realm of world literature. In some of these cases, again, English fails to capture racial nuances evident in the Afrikaans linguistic choices made by Van Niekerk and, in so doing, weakens her depiction of quotidian life in an Afrikaner home during apartheid. Heyns's integration of allusions to "A Game of Chess" from T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (itself using William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* as intertext) demonstrates

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<sup>81</sup> I am not suggesting that Jak is a victim. He is verbally and physically abusive to Milla throughout their marriage and treats Agaat and the other workers horrifically. However, Milla's flaws are also apparent; she is sanctimonious and, as Eva Hunter argues, an unreliable narrator (77), and she admits to herself at one point, "You knew it, Milla Redelinghuis, you played [Jak]" (23). I agree with Wessels' argument that the novel is not a straightforward feminist indictment against a patriarchal system because it depicts a familial setup in which both the husband and wife are at fault (37).

this. In a passage in which Milla, who can no longer see clearly, imagines seeing Aagaat climbing into a wheelchair, she thinks, “There it looms in the middle of the room, a throne of black leather and chrome, the embroidery heaped up on the seat. The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne” (493). The scene, with Aagaat manoeuvring the chair backward and forward, is somewhat comical and the allusion to Eliot perhaps points to the absurdity of going through the motions of quotidian life (as “A Game of Chess” deals with). Nonetheless, Eliot’s representation of decaying bourgeois affectations fits more aptly with Hawthorne’s novel in its portrayal of stultifying interior spaces. There is nothing about Aagaat’s situation to suggest decadence, even stale decadence, as is found in that section of Eliot’s poem.

What Heyns’s incorporation of canonical English literature does manage, however, is to showcase that, although *Aagaat* deals with Afrikaners, a cultural and linguistic minority, European influence looms large in the story’s background. Like *The House of the Seven Gables*, in which the Pyncheons still cling to European identity (viewing herself as “patrician” [29] with an “English branch of the family,” Hepzibah longs to be made an “heiress” [48]), Afrikaner identity in *Aagaat* is ensconced within a greater European character. This can be seen in Milla’s taste in music (like German opera). Furthermore, Heyns’s alterations to Milla’s bookshelf, which in the original Afrikaans version amasses books related very closely to Afrikaner culture, has garnered some criticism for being a more international selection, but the canonicity of the texts that he integrates seems compatible with the De Wet home so far as it stresses a highbrow quality to Milla and Jak, their cultural snobbishness, as their individual tastes make clear.

Just as in *Aagaat*, when the wronged servant sets in motion a time of reckoning with the past by reading Milla’s diaries back to her,<sup>82</sup> Hawthorne embeds the story of Alice Pyncheon in the present tale and has Holgrave read it to Phoebe, presenting it as his own fiction. Holgrave presents a refreshing perspective on the dangers of inherited wealth and property, as well as class consciousness – and criticises Hepzibah accordingly. He helps to absolve the family feud and introduce a more egalitarian union through his later marriage to Phoebe but is, nevertheless, deemed a dangerous and deceptive character for much of the novel. He inhabits the House of the Seven Gables under an alias, his motives for being there unclear. Hepzibah tells Phoebe that Holgrave has “a way of taking hold of one’s mind” (63) and it is confirmed in the scene when he delivers his account of Alice that Holgrave possesses the same mesmeric abilities as his ancestor, the later Matthew Maule (the accused’s grandson), who – according to Holgrave’s tale – is summoned to the titular house by Gervayse Pyncheon. Gervayse hopes that Maule will help him locate the missing deed and, under the pretence of offering this assistance, Maule hypnotises Gervayse’s daughter, Alice, subjecting her to a series of public embarrassments at his whim. The humiliation of these acts ultimately leads to Alice’s death, which has an intriguing effect in the greater Pyncheon-Maule saga; it evens the score in some ways as Maule “appropriate[s] her spirit as the Pyncheons did his land” (Michaels 175). Alice became “Maule’s slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand-fold, than that which binds its chains around the body” (Hawthorne, *The House* 149). The later Matthew Maule feels guilty

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<sup>82</sup> This of course foreshadows another embedded story, revealed right at the end of the novel, snippets of which are given to the reader throughout the book: Aagaat’s bedtime story to Jakkie, which tells the tale of her adoption/abduction by Milla and eventual casting out of the house upon Jakkie’s birth.

about Alice's fate (he had only intended to "humble" her [150]), and the potential that such wrongdoing can be repeated is ever present in Holgrave's reading scene with Phoebe, when his own mesmeric abilities become apparent.

These reading scenes signify the dangers of an unresolved past and introduce the lure of retribution. When Agaat reads Milla's diaries back to her, it resembles the Maules' entrancement of Pyncheon females; although she is not under compulsion, as Alice was, Milla is nevertheless powerless. Whereas Holgrave reads a story that he authored, Agaat reads Milla's own words back to her; she has appropriated authority over Milla's story. Incapacitated due to her illness, Milla cannot defend herself; she can only confront the self-righteousness and folly of her younger self and endure the embarrassment as someone else becomes privy to her private thoughts. It is an inescapable reckoning with the past. Agaat appears to take pleasure in these moments: she feigns innocence at times, but her tone is often sarcastic.<sup>83</sup> It is similar to the moments when Agaat acts oblivious to Milla's attempts to get her attention in order to bring her the maps of the farm. Scholars have read this as indicative of Milla's land ownership and her need to still have some control even in her deteriorating condition<sup>84</sup> (and in view of the gaze's capacity to interpret the landscape it beholds, it is of course significant that Milla's sight is the last faculty to decline). The maps set the story in motion. They first appear early in the novel when they are shown to Jak by Milla's mother before his marriage; they herald the life on the farm that is to follow, including Agaat's "adoption." Therefore, when Agaat does not show Milla her maps and when she escapes Milla's gaze during these attempts at attracting her attention, she is reclaiming power and control, and mocking the story of inheritance that Milla holds so dear. This power struggle casts doubt on the benevolence of Milla's "rescuing" of Agaat as a young child and introduces the parallels between Milla's mastering of her farmland and her shaping of Agaat to her own liking.

*The House of the Seven Gables* and *Agaat* both fasten on to and elucidate the idea that inherited property, when the product of suspicious historical land transactions or usurpations, is a source of bondage to the past. For Hawthorne, an overzealous and unquestioned attachment to place, like the sentimental assertion by Milla's mother that the farm is "in Kamilla's blood" (28), presents the danger of a family's circumstances ebbing over time, as he writes in "The Custom-House" (1851), the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*:

The sentiment is probably assignable to the deep and aged roots which my family has struck into the soil. It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement, which has since become a city. And here his descendants have been born and died, and have mingled their earthy substance with the soil [...]. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past, which I scarcely claim in reference to the present phase of the town. I seem to have a stronger claim to a residence here on account of this grave, bearded, sable-cloaked, and steeple-crowned progenitor [...]. This long connection of a family with one spot, as its place of birth and burial, creates a kindred between the human being and the locality, quite independent of any charm in the scenery or moral circumstances that surround him. It is not love, but instinct.

<sup>83</sup> Van Niekerk claims that Agaat's actions are learned behaviour, further supporting the notion of retribution: "She's a devil, Agaat; I mean, you can't be educated by a devil without having something of her in you" (De Kock, "Intimate Enemies" 149).

<sup>84</sup> See Buxbaum 36-38, Fincham, and Van Houwelingen 97-98.

[...] Nevertheless, this very sentiment is an evidence that the connection, which has become an unhealthy one, should at last be severed. Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth. (1356-57)

Such uneasiness with one's relation to the past, whose indiscretions remain unresolved, rings true for Jakkie. Prinsloo and Visagie argue that Jakkie's rejection of the farm is a rejection of the land's influence over his identity (78-79) and that his residence in Canada is an indication that Afrikaners are no longer merely agrarian folk, but have expanded as city-dwelling global citizens (74). (A popular location for immigrants, Canada has a reputation as a liberal and progressive nation that sets it in opposition to the parochial and reactionary South Africa that Jakkie leaves behind in the 1980s and the uncertain one that he returns to.) Jakkie's disillusionment with his parents and the country of his birth does not undo his love for the landscape, seen in his nostalgic recollection of plant species on his return to the country (to attend his mother's deathbed). Nor does it undo pride in his culture, which is evident in his work as an ethnomusicologist researching Afrikaner folk music. (Although, read alongside Hawthorne's passage above, Jakkie's work may also suggest an element of estrangement – estrangement from one's homeland, one that bore substantial cultural products but also produced significant disaffection, even for those whom apartheid was intended to benefit; estrangement coupled inseparably with nostalgia.) Instead, what Jakkie rejects is the uncompromising power that ideologies of the land have had over all of its people and the narrowminded provincialism of a nationalist regime that predetermined his life's path (first, military service, then inheritance of the family farm).<sup>85</sup> Read from the perspective of the American Renaissance, Jakkie's disavowal of the family farm puts in mind Henry David Thoreau's warning in *Walden* (1854) against the potential predicaments of inherited property – the example he gives is, in fact, a farm – in the way it may thwart the inheritor's choice of a route in life based on individual values.<sup>86</sup>

In both novels, the possibility of a different future is hinted at through the transformation of the initial family unit and a relinquishment of the land on which the narratives' central homes are built. In *Agaat*, dates are significant in indicating historical events

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<sup>85</sup> Van Houwelingen writes that since Jakkie narrates the prologue and epilogue (while the rest of the novel is narrated by Milla), Van Niekerk “structures the text around a rejection and withering away of Afrikaner power” (103).

<sup>86</sup> In the chapter “Economy,” Thoreau writes:

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? [...] The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh. [...] Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. [...] Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day[.] (1873-74)

and Van Niekerk claims that the novel can be read as an “allegory of [the] country” (PEN America). The date of Milla’s passing is certainly significant politically; she dies on December 16<sup>th</sup> in 1996. December 16<sup>th</sup> was previously the Day of the Vow, an important day for Afrikaners that marked their victory over the Zulus in the Battle of Blood River (1838) and thus symbolised conquest (M. Van Vuuren 102) but was replaced with the Day of Reconciliation by the first democratic government.<sup>87</sup> It was also the day Milla fetched Agaat on her mother’s farm in 1953. Scholars have suggested that one plausible interpretation of Agaat’s inheritance of the farm is that it is symbolic of land reform aims.<sup>88</sup> However, it is uncertain what Milla’s reasons are for leaving her farm to Agaat, so whether the endowment of the farm to her servant is intended as reparation in the way that policies of redistribution are intended is unclear. Either way, what problematises the symbolism of Agaat’s inheritance is that the land will go back into Jakkie’s hands upon her death, despite his noninterventionist attitude toward the farm and the country.

In contrast to the breakdown of the De Wet family, *The House of the Seven Gables* ends on what appears to be a more optimistic note. Yet many readers have been perplexed or disappointed by the ending since it appears to contradict the novel’s admonitions about inheritance by conferring two properties to the remaining Pyncheons upon the Judge’s death, namely, the House of the Seven Gables and the Judge’s own estate, to which they all move.<sup>89</sup> What is particularly striking about this outcome is the apparent change it prompts in Holgrave, a character who, like Jakkie, serves as an individualising voice throughout much of the narrative, one who questions the status quo and distances himself from social conformity. The novel depicts the inheritance of dynastic property as placing a burden on successive generations because it inhibits the aspiration to create for oneself.<sup>90</sup> As Rifkin argues, the House “circumvents the need for anyone after you actually to build something” (44). Prior to his marriage to Phoebe, Holgrave claims to want to prosper on his own terms and he epitomises the attitude to dynastic property ownership that Hawthorne presents in the novel’s Preface, where he cautions against “the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them” (3). Holgrave’s critique of the House and the Pyncheons is underscored by his itinerant lifestyle – he is essentially homeless. What is notable is that, despite his earlier derision for the consequences of generations-long settlement and acceded property, Holgrave’s radical views are subdued with his impending marriage to Phoebe, which means that he “does not actually earn his wealth, he marries it” (Michaels 165). Phoebe and Holgrave’s marriage is generally seen as the catalyst for the novel’s depiction of “a transition from one structure of society, and

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<sup>87</sup> Supporting this reading, Van Houwelingen writes that “[Van Niekerk] shows Milla’s personal history not as a singular story, but rather as one that closely converges with the history of a people (the Afrikaner volk) as well as Agaat’s life narrative” (103). Marijke van Vuuren concurs: “Though the novel resists reductionist readings, the relationship between the two protagonists [...] does reflect elements of South African history. Forty years later, as power relations shift in the country, relations between the women are also reversed, and the coloured servant’s ascendancy is inversely proportionate to her mistress’ loss of control” (92). For more analyses of Milla’s body, see Fourie and Adendorff, and Pretorius, who interprets it in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the grotesque.

<sup>88</sup> See Prinsloo and Visagie, and Wessels 42.

<sup>89</sup> See Gilmore.

<sup>90</sup> For a reading of the novel that takes into account nineteenth-century American attitudes to, and laws pertaining to, the inheritance of property, see H. Jackson (the chapter “The Transformation of American Family Property in *The House of the Seven Gables*”).

one system of belief and knowledge, to another,” as Frank Kermode argues (qtd. in Trachtenberg 425). However, the fact that property inheritance is expedient for this relocation to the countryside where they can also live as “actual settlers” (Hawthorne, *The House* 15) serves as a reminder that there are unavoidable precepts entrenched in society.

The ending of Hawthorne’s novel, like Van Niekerk’s, is ambivalent. Both suggest moderately the potential for a different social structure in the future, but also insinuate that significant change will be slow in coming. Both novels offer warnings about the insidious ramifications of past misdeeds, making clear that the past cannot be undone or escaped from. Manifestations of the past are apparent in the novels’ manifold forms of the uncanny, which show the social inclusions and exclusions within the Pyncheon and De Wet homes, as well as their societies at large. Probably the most poignant of those exclusions can be seen in the way both novels celebrate the regenerative potential of an agrarian relation to land while making clear that such restoration occurs within a closed cycle of generational landownership that does not pay dividends to those historically dispossessed of the land.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Literary Geneses: Family Trees and Edenic Gardens in William Wells Brown's *Clotel* and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*

The previous chapters in this dissertation acknowledged that the garden was a pervasive metaphor throughout European settlement in the United States and South Africa. In the United States, the myth of an Edenic garden situated in the New World flourished with particular potency in Virginia, which was often represented in travel writing as a garden or an orchard as a way of justifying and encouraging British relocation (P. Martin 3). Between the early seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, a tradition developed “of seeing, or wanting to see, the [Virginian] wilderness” as such, often projecting the fascination with English gardens onto a landscape that was anything but bucolic (3). Conrad Eugene Ostwalt points out that the pastoral ideal became a dominant idea in the second half of the eighteenth century because of the writings of Thomas Jefferson and remained so until approximately a century later (27). The idea that America was a “new Eden,” that it was embodied by a tranquil environment and not the wilderness, was advanced by Jefferson, a frequent visitor to English landscape gardens, who patriotically advanced the conviction that American soil is more receptive to democratic ideals (P. Martin 144). Throughout much of the nineteenth century, many Americans held the belief that they inhabited “a peaceful garden that was a natural and social paradise” (Ostwalt 27).

Among slaves who laboured to maintain “the South’s Eden trope (the plantation idyll)” (Greene 17), there existed a “counterimage” (13) of the plantation-as-garden, which entailed a rejection of “the Anglo-American Edenic ideal” (18). This is where Jefferson becomes an intriguing figure. President of the United States and co-author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was also a slave-owner and much controversy surrounds a relationship he is thought to have had with one of his slaves, a mulatta woman called Sally Hemings. Historians of Jefferson long denied the veracity of claims that he had fathered children with Hemings but, following DNA analysis in 1998, it is now generally accepted to have been the case.<sup>91</sup> Sexual exploitation of slave women by their masters was common. As Gregory D. Smithers explains, it often occurred in service of “[s]lave breeding,” the “coercive, often violent, reproductive practices” in which “women who were purported to be particularly fecund [...] were to reproduce, or breed, future generations of slaves” (Introduction). Although sexual relations between masters and slaves were quite widespread, sometimes consensual but often a result of rape, miscegenation was prohibited according to statutes implemented in all thirteen colonies, beginning in Virginia and Maryland (Khanna 98). In antebellum America, offspring of such relations inherited the status of the mother – if the mother was a slave, so too were her children – and, given the racial segregation of the time, they were deemed to be black due to “the one-drop rule.” Conceived of as a taxonomical practice, “the one-drop rule” (later referred to as the hypodescent rule by the anthropologist Marvin Harris) prescribed that, in cases of miscegenation involving a black and white person, offspring would be “assigned” the “lowest

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<sup>91</sup> For the history of, and debate and controversy around, Jefferson and Hemings, see DuCille, Gordon-Reed, Ishida and Nicolaisen.

racial caste” (Boisseron 28) – black. According to this rule, a person in the United States who “is believed to have any African ancestry [...] is regarded as black” (Jordan 99), even if it is, metaphorically speaking, as little as “one drop,” and even if their appearance gives the impression of being white. Bénédicte Boisseron writes that the rule “[left] no room for anything other than blackness. In other words, the role of the hypodescent rule is to indefinitely set the limits of racial dilution, thereby reaffirming the compulsion of drawing the ‘color line’ (W. E. B. Du Bois) continuously” (28). It was a regulation for classification that Winthrop D. Jordan calls “superficially simple” (99).

The history of slavery and race-mixing in the United States gave rise to a motif in its national literature, that of “the tragic mulatto.” The motif gained traction in the mid-nineteenth century and was employed for abolitionist causes (Mafe 17-18), as can be seen in novels like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and Lydia Maria Child’s *Romance of the Republic* (1867).<sup>92</sup> Such texts, exploring the fate of mulattos, tend to expose the predicament of mixed-race heritage in a society governed by segregation (18). The motif calls to mind what Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2000) paints as “the tragedy of being coloured” (117). Indeed, South African literature has also confronted the issue of miscegenation. Segregationist laws and acts prohibiting intercourse between whites and people of colour dominated the twentieth century,<sup>93</sup> and although literature from both the pre-apartheid and apartheid eras exhibit differing attitudes to miscegenation,<sup>94</sup> many works by white writers established unfavourable stereotypes about people of mixed-race descent.<sup>95</sup> Having also emerged as a result of slavery (at the Cape Colony), they were also subjected to a system dominated by a black/white dichotomy.

This population, however, was identified in the twentieth century as coloureds (sometimes written with an uppercase “C”) and, within the racial hierarchy of apartheid South Africa, were pigeonholed to act as a buffer group between the white and black populations (K. Brown 199). Like black and mulatto slaves in the Americas, coloureds in South Africa and their diverse ancestral slave communities were largely responsible for agricultural work in the colonial settlement of Europeans, while in the present day, many proletarian coloured people

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<sup>92</sup> Regarding the use of the term “tragic” in the motif, Diana Adesola Mafe clarifies:

The emphasis on the “tragic” mulatto is also misleading, as [Werner] Sollors explains. At face value, the adjective “tragic” for the mulatto has less to do with Greek tragedy or the work of Aristotle than with “‘heavy’ emotions, tough confrontations between the recognizable forces of good and evil, innocence beleaguered by perfidious villainy, disastrous turns of the plot, the power of coincidence, and tears at the end.” Sollors concludes that the word effectively implies “melodrama” rather than “tragedy.” Nonetheless, he admits a second possibility, namely that “The dramatic conflict of ‘family’ and ‘race’ may have continued the tragic tradition in the New World and the modern age.” Here, Sollors refers to Aeschylus and Sophocles as plausible models for those tragic mulatto texts involving mysterious beginnings, the claims of kinship, fatal flaws, and the role of the state. (17)

<sup>93</sup> The Immorality Act of 1927 barred intercourse between whites and blacks, while its 1950 amendment forbade intercourse between whites and any person of colour. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 made marriages between whites and people of colour illegal. These acts were repealed in 1985.

<sup>94</sup> These include Perceval Gibbon’s *Souls in Bondage* (1904), William Plomer’s *Turbott Wolfe* (1925), Peter Abrahams’ *The Path of Thunder* (1948) and Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *King of the Bastards* (1950).

<sup>95</sup> See Adhikari, “God Made the White Man”; February; and Mafe for discussions of popular apartheid-era stereotypes of coloured South Africans.

remain a source of labour on white-owned farms and in home-gardens. Although a contentious term for some, the word “coloured” as a racial designation in South Africa does not connote a pejorative term for black people as it does in the United States or the United Kingdom but is a recognised racial category. Coloureds trace their ancestry to the creolisation of various ethnic groups, such as European settlers, Malay slaves, indigenous Khoisan, St. Helenians, Madagascans, and various other African and Asian peoples. Their group identity became relatively crystallised in the late nineteenth century (Adhikari, “Contending Approaches” 1).<sup>96</sup> However, because of the diversity of their racial admixture, coloured communities in South Africa form “a phenotypically varied social group of highly diverse social and geographical origins” (1).

Zimitri Erasmus argues that colouredness was configured in terms of lack: coloured individuals were “neither full citizens (in terms of access to rights before the law), nor complete subjects. Their socio-political position was characterized by both racial exclusion and selected inclusion” (“Recognition” 71). According to the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, coloureds were identified as those “persons who are neither ‘natives’ nor white” (84), suggesting an identity based on negation. Marike de Klerk’s egregious comment about coloureds shows a commonly-held perception during apartheid, that “they are a negative group,” and, pointing out their identification as neither white, black nor Indian, she designated a coloured as “a no-person. They are the leftovers. They are the people that were left after the nations were sorted out” (qtd. in Adhikari, “Hope” 480-81). In scholarship, the vagueness around coloured identity shows itself in the tendency to place the term in inverted commas – “coloureds” – or, as Erasmus points out, to qualify the term with “so-called” (“Recognition” 71), a trend that underscores the contentiousness of the term and the fact that those designated to this category may lay claim to differing views of colouredness. Colouredness is thus an ambiguous identity (Adhikari, “Contending Approaches” 12; Erasmus, “Recognition” 71) that has caused difficulty for people under its designation in fashioning a collective self-definition. As a political stance, the term was rejected by some politicised and more formally educated coloured people in tandem with the Black Consciousness movement (a time when the reference to “so-called” emerged [Simone 165]) that endorsed solidarity among people of colour, and acceptance of coloured identity at this time was regarded by some as a “concession to apartheid thinking” (Adhikari, “Contending Approaches” 4): “Colouredness increasingly came to be viewed as an artificial categorization imposed on the society by the ruling minority as part of its divide and rule strategies” (4) – as an “instrument of social control” (8).

In post-apartheid South Africa, when issues around identity politics gained traction, several authors turned their attention to the topic of race, probing the complexity of racial identification and the power dynamics involved in the country’s race relations, both past and present. Subsequently, some writers have taken up the racial category of colouredness as an important problematic, which subtends novels like Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001) and

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<sup>96</sup> Sometimes referred to as *bruinmense* (“brown people”), their history, sociology and politics have been written about extensively. See the sources by Adhikari, Bickford-Smith, Erasmus, February, Goldin, James et al., G. Lewis, Simone, Van der Ross, Yarwood and Yon. Also see Baderoon, *Regarding Muslims* (the Introduction) for descriptions of Malay culture at the Cape, which can be seen as subsumed under a wider banner of coloured (or Cape coloured) identity but which engenders traditions and cultural artefacts specific to the Cape and its Islamic heritage.

Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006). There are others, too, that delve into questions of genealogy, "often indicated by a family tree," as Derek Attridge explains ("Zoë Wicomb's Home Truths" 159).<sup>97</sup> This trend, Attridge writes, "no doubt reflect[s] a need to complicate the myths of purity, linearity, and separation on which apartheid was founded" (159). The circumstances around racial admixture in the context of slavery in the Cape and the American South is the foundation for the bifocal reading in this chapter. It looks at *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter* (1853) by William Wells Brown (c. 1814-1884), who was born into slavery, and *David's Story* by Wicomb (1948-), a South African writer who has for the most part resided in the United Kingdom since the 1970s. Regarded as the first African American novel (Levine 3), *Clotel* is exemplary of American anti-slavery fiction<sup>98</sup> in its depiction of the perilous life on plantations and slave escapes, as well as its imploring, sentimental tone.<sup>99</sup> Brown based his novel on the story of Sally Hemings, merely a rumour in his day. It tells the story of Clotel, a fictional slave daughter of Jefferson who, upon his death, is sold into slavery along with her mother, Curren, and sister, Althesa. While Clotel enters into a common-law marriage with the white man who purchases her, Curren ends up on a plantation belonging to a preacher, Rev. Peck. What ensues is the titular character's quest to gain freedom, first for her mother and sister, and later for her own daughter, Mary.

On the other hand, *David's Story* chronicles the efforts of a coloured man, David Dirkse, former commander in uMkhonto weSizwe (the armed wing of the African National Congress) to find his roots, a journey which takes him from Cape Town to Kokstad. David wants to produce a history of his ancestors, the Griqua people, and commissions an unnamed female amanuensis, who serves as the novel's frame narrator, to write it. The narrative shifts between the year 1991 (in the interim before the first democratic election and the novel's present) and pre-apartheid eras. It incorporates various members of David's family, past and present, including his wife, Sally, while also focusing on a mysterious woman named Dulcie, a guerrilla fighter who served alongside David and about whom the amanuensis wants to write. In sections covering segregationist pre-apartheid South Africa, the novel illustrates the efforts of a Griqua leader, Andrew Le Fleur, to find a permanent settlement for his people in the face of growing unease with the presence of coloureds who emerged as a result of race-mixing in an expanding colony at the Cape.<sup>100</sup> Like *Clotel*, *David's Story* is concerned with family origins, with both novels' fictional families standing for broader racial communities in their respective countries.

The chapter's bifocal lens is attuned to the historical dynamics whereby the successful settlement of Europeans and the agricultural development of the United States and South Africa were actualised in large measure through the labour of people of colour, many of them slaves

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<sup>97</sup> Attridge gives as examples Etienne van Heerden's *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*, Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness* and Elleke Boehmer's *Bloodlines*, all released in the year 2000.

<sup>98</sup> I use the term "anti-slavery fiction" here to make a distinction with non-fiction slave narratives, which I discuss in Chapter Four.

<sup>99</sup> Four editions of the novel were published. The first, dealt with in this chapter, is titled in full *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*. Subsequent editions, with some variations in the plot, are *Miralda, or The Beautiful Quadroon: A Romance of American Slavery Founded on Fact* (1860); *Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States* (1864); and *Clotelle; or The Colored Heroine: A Tale of the Southern States* (1867).

<sup>100</sup> For descriptions of the background and governance of the Griqua people, see Cavanagh and Ross.

and their descendants. It aims to consider the ways that mixed-race people experience and conceive of their attachments to land (or lack thereof) in view of their respective nations' myths around settlement and agriculture, principally in respect of Edenic constructions of belonging. Sarah Phillips Casteel posits the versatility of the garden trope in literature in a way that is insightful for imperial contexts:

Etymologically, the garden is linked to both 'culture' and 'colonization' and thus invites reflection on two concepts that are of particular concern to theorists of globalization and diaspora. The garden also has important connections to hybridity, both metaphorically as a figure for the hybridization of cultures, and historically in that nineteenth-century theories of racial hybridity drew on the science of botany [...]. In addition, because of its associations with the biblical Garden of Eden, the garden almost inevitably recalls the themes of exile and displacement. ("New" 14)

Given its exposition of the way the Southern slave system controlled the movement of slaves, *Clotel* is fundamentally about marginality and dislocation in a racially segregated society, and it demonstrates the exilic aspect of the Garden of Eden that Casteel identifies in its portrayals of a domestic garden as a dreamed-of but unattainable space. The garden in question is the one surrounding the cottage on the margins of Richmond society where *Clotel* lives in seclusion with a man named Horatio Green, who purchased her and who takes her as his common-law wife, promising to make her "free and [her] own mistress" (86). The isolated cottage is a familiar image in American anti-slavery writing, appearing in works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Romance of the Republic* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). It generally represents a refuge from the everyday life – and attendant dangers – of slavery in the South, an ostensible improvement over the more common slave cabin. It is here, in a picturesque environment that Blyden Jackson calls a "small private Elysium" (333) that *Clotel* dreams of being "mistress of her own dwelling" (W. W. Brown 86):

It was a perfect model of rural beauty. The piazzas that surrounded it were covered with clematis and passion flower. The pride of China mixed its oriental looking foliage with the majestic magnolia, and the air was redolent with the fragrance of flowers, peeping out of every nook and nodding upon you with a most unexpected welcome. The tasteful hand of art had not learned to imitate the lavish beauty and harmonious disorder of nature, but they lived together in loving amity, and spoke in accordant tones. (100)

The epigraph to this chapter is also "an archetypal vision of pastoralism" (Bourne 147): "How sweetly on the hill-side sleeps/The sunlight with its quickening rays!/The verdant trees that crown the steep,/Grow greener in its quivering blaze" (W. W. Brown 100). While outwardly the picture of fixity and calm, *Clotel's* life, "secluded from the world" (100), remains vulnerable to it. Just as temptation enters the original Eden and leads to its downfall, the initial tranquillity of *Clotel* and Horatio's garden setting cannot survive his political ambitions, which may benefit from a marriage to Gertrude, the white scion of a wealthy and prominent family. This idyll, as Ashley L. Bourne claims, is an "illusion" (148), and the narrator's measured observation that the couple lived "as happily as circumstances would permit" (W. W. Brown 101-02) demonstrates "an inherent flaw in the arrangement" (Bourne 148). Not safeguarded

from the strictures of Southern life, the garden in fact mirrors the novel's plantations in the swiftness with which chattel changes hands. Horatio's promise to Clotel to also buy Currer and Althesa to rescue them from slavery once he has inherited property stresses the legal identification of them as property as well, no different from the inanimate assets he stands to inherit. This can be explained by the fact that American slave narratives generally employ "the basic Enlightenment correlation of humanity with property," as Siân Silyn Roberts explains; "[t]he legal codes upholding this law determine that individualism is a property that each person holds within himself, so slaves are excluded from this model on the tautological grounds that property cannot own property" (148). The elusiveness of ownness for Clotel essentially equates to the absence of rights, and when she returns to the cottage later in the novel as a fugitive in search of Mary, the pastoral scene has expired: "It was winter, and the clematis and passion flowers were not there" (W. W. Brown 200).

This change in the garden scene can be seen as part of a wider inclination among Brown's contemporaries to argue against slavery through descriptions of environmental change, often by contending that slavery was degrading to the environment.<sup>101</sup> Although the change in the cottage scenery comes about not due to environmental damage, it remains significant because it appears near the end of the novel as Clotel's plight as a fugitive nears its climactic moment. It therefore stands in opposition to the idyllic scene from early in the novel when she lives happily with Horatio. The garden's transformation comes about instead because of the effects of time (the season has changed), significant since traditionally the Edenic garden image suggests a realm that is timeless, a place outside of history (Casteel, "Location" 486). This observation of the environmental effects of historical change can be counterpointed with post-apartheid literature that recognises the way passages of time register cultural trauma which is, in turn, seen in unproductive environments in coloured communities, particularly the home-garden. Recent poetry by Gabeba Baderoon and Rustum Kozain, for instance, reveals the land in coloured areas as exhibiting traumas of the past. Their work reflects upon the environmental damage pervading coloured communities and recognises an ecological component to trauma exerted upon people. "The garden is no longer a place of beginnings," the speaker muses in one Baderoon poem ("On the Bench" line 7). In another, there is the memory of a grandmother's garden where "the soil is already too acid/for roses to grow" ("Landscape" lines 10-11) and the result is a sense of loss – "the landscape is passing into language" (line 13).<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Some of this writing takes the form of Free Soil literature, Free Soil having been an antislavery movement that was active in America during the mid-nineteenth century. It opposed slavery on the basis that it was "an environmentally unsustainable system that would have to grow into new territory in order to survive" (Finley 2), thus posing an environmental challenge to parts of the nation not involved in the slave system. Of course, the focus of Free Soil literature is different from works on the environmental degradation in coloured communities in that it often highlights the negative effects of slavery for oppressors and the oppressed, as well as those not directly involved in slavery. James Finley explains that "Free Soil literature [...] typically constructs an environmental dichotomy, one that juxtaposed the beauty and productivity of Northern landscapes, despite their poor soil, with the landscapes of the South, dilapidated and degraded despite their superior natural resources" (2). According to Cristin Ellis, Free Soil literature has, in many respects, prefigured ecocriticism, which she identifies as "the inheritor of antislavery rhetoric," especially in terms of how the former has used deference for non-human others to shape its political agenda (277).

<sup>102</sup> In addition to Kozain's *Groundwork* (2012), see Baderoon's collections *The Dream in the Next Body* (2005) and *The History of Intimacy* (2018). I was also influenced by Bourne's use of "cultural trauma" (credited to Ron Eyerman) as a phenomenon that can occur in tandem with "environmental trauma" (see Bourne 1-4). For an

These works help to explain Sally's failure to garden in *David's Story*. A former comrade in the anti-apartheid movement, Sally has given up her activism upon marriage in favour of life as a wife and mother. Apprehensive about the prospect of a fresh start in the form of domestic life in a "house on the sandy Cape Flats" (16), Sally consoles herself with the prospects of growing a home-garden but soon abandons the idea: "A garden would have been nice, but she soon gave up on that strip of coarse sand where marigold seedlings would wobble for a day or two like undernourished toddlers before keeling over for good" (16). Dan Wylie explains that the practice of gardening, which Sally is deprived of, is "[t]he pleasure, status and security of possessing your own patch of ground, over which you can take full control and exercise your gentrification and your creativity, your privacy and your love, your exclusions and inclusions" (73). This description, although brief, fits within the novel's broader narrative of displacement and marginality, drawing historical connections to the impoverished soil that the Griquas repeatedly settled upon in their search for a piece of earth on which to reside as "natives in their own land" (90). It recognises a severance of a connection to the land as a source of sustenance that large groups within the broader coloured community historically enjoyed. That her desire for a home-garden is thwarted by blighted soil therefore subtly evokes South Africa's history of forced removals.<sup>103</sup> The Cape Flats is a region in Cape Town consisting of several suburbs to which people of colour, predominantly coloureds, were relocated during apartheid. It is also an atrophied landscape in comparison with the suburbs closer to Table Mountain, where many coloured people originally lived and that boast richer vegetation. Sally's want of a garden is thus tied to her ancestors' displacement from productive land, exposing what Kozain calls "the earth's balance of grief" (line 63).

What follows Clotel's departure from the cottage is a portrait of plantation life against which her fate can be read. Brown's fictional slave owners and overseers repeatedly try to beguile slaves into seeing the plantation as a place where they belong and their labouring of another's plantation as the only means to, one day, creating a paradisaical landscape of their own. On Peck's plantation, the missionary Hontz Snyder preaches to congregated slaves, proclaiming the prospect of personal ownership, claiming that in "Christian America, [...] you can sit under your own vine and fig tree" (113). The allure of having one's own, especially as a product of one's labour, is notably evocative of American national ideals, but in the context of slavery, where one's labour benefits another, it evokes hypocrisy. Labour on the plantation is constraining, not liberating or rewarding. In making Jefferson Clotel's fictive father, Brown not only establishes the inconsistencies of American democracy with slavery, but he suggests that the former institution birthed the latter. Furthermore, Jefferson's lineal proximity to Peck's slaves stresses the foundational role slaves played in building the personal property of American citizens (like Jefferson's Monticello home) but also larger, more significant American institutions, such as the White House.<sup>104</sup>

While Snyder meshes American ideals with religion, Peck privileges the Bible over the Declaration on the basis that it is older. He dismisses the views of the atheist Mr. Carlton who,

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ecocritical reading of *The Dream in the Next Body*, see Nkealah and Rakgope, who argue that the loss of land corresponds to "the loss of [a] source of livelihood and [a] sense of community" as well as "the loss of [a] cultural and spiritual heritage" (113).

<sup>103</sup> See Trotter for the influence of forced removals on coloured identity.

<sup>104</sup> See the studies by Holland and Lusane.

based on what he calls “[their] great Declaration of Independence” (108), believes that all men have rights inherently. Peck protests:

I have searched in vain for any authority for man’s natural rights; if he had any, they existed before the fall. That is, Adam and Eve may have had some rights which God gave them, and which modern philosophy, in its pretended reverence for the name of God, prefers to call natural rights. I can imagine they had the right to eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; they were restricted even in this by the prohibition of one. As far as I know without positive assertion, their liberty of action was confined to the garden. These were not ‘inalienable rights,’ however, for they forfeited both them and life with the first act of disobedience. Had they, after this, any rights? We cannot imagine them; they were condemned beings; they could have no rights[.] (107)

Peck has a pessimistic view of human nature as embodied by Adam and Eve’s sin, and he uses it to support his opinion that the Word justifies slavery. The Garden’s confinement necessarily limited their agency and such limitation, which they managed to obstruct, translates for Peck into the restrictions on liberty and denial of rights for those who labour on his plantation.

The story of the Garden of Eden is, of course, also a story about the loss of innocence, with Adam and Eve’s awareness of their nakedness, a source of shame, coming about as a specular revelation – “the eyes of both of them were opened,” the biblical narrative claims (*New International Version*, Gen. 3.7). Notions of paradise, shame and vision are central to understanding Le Fleur’s search for a settlement for his people, who find themselves “with nothing of their own” (Wicomb, *David’s Story* 85). Self-identifying as “chosen people,” they undertake several migrations to “b[e] led out of bondage” (85) in search of “the Promised Land” (97), believing that their salvation is dependent on “tilling their own soil” (90). Thinking that they have come upon the Promised Land in Beeswater, they attempt to establish themselves there “as a new nation” (97) and celebrate their settlement with a photograph next to a “ceremonial tree” (100), symbolic of their assumed rootedness. Le Fleur invokes the Israelites’ exodus, thereby relying on the typology of the exodus rather than ancestral claims to specific areas of land. The Griquas’ toil is integral to their settlement mission and, under the leadership of Le Fleur, labour is superficially inspired by biblical doctrine. Wicomb’s depiction of the Griquas’ continual toil in their numerous failed attempts at yielding prolific land presents a retort to the Eurocentric depiction of indigenous labourers as indolent.<sup>105</sup> However, the series of displacements that they suffer produces, in Le Fleur’s view, precisely this kind of idleness, arising from a dearth of suitable land upon which to toil. He asserts that the Griquas have been “[r]educ[ed] by annexation to a people without a patch of earth to call their own, a people without pride, a yawning people, following the sun around the crumbling walls of their pondoks, a dispossessed people who had given up and who had lost their God” (42), and he undertakes to restore them as a “[p]roud Griqua race, not [...] coloured bastards” (146) who are “a motley, nameless people” (102). Le Fleur stresses that their rootlessness is a result of European interference, of which one visible outcome is the coloured population, and while he is able to recognise European prejudice towards Griquas and coloureds, his opinion that coloureds are a

<sup>105</sup> See J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing* (the chapter “Idleness in South Africa”).



people without a culture and history of their own demonstrates an internalisation of the European bias he objects to. As Minesh Dass argues, Le Fleur's plans to establish a settlement removed from the country's white population – his efforts at “removing [the Griquas] from the white man's ‘sight’” – is “undermined by his own internalisation of the white man's sight and his projection of this gaze onto his own people (78).

Le Fleur is unaware of his hypocrisy. When he renounces the coloured population's existence as being unanchored in South Africa, he overlooks the fact that the Griquas do not pursue their various treks by their own volition but are continually subjected to coercive measures of relocation as well as his own fickleness that contributes to their itineration. In fact, instead of producing a fruitful and sustainable settlement, their iterated relocations culminate in ever-deteriorating conditions in which to garden, much like the conditions that Sally would later confront, and their laborious but futile toil is later emulated in Le Fleur's drudgery on Robben Island after being sentenced to fourteen years' hard labour. This punitive labour is in turn repeated by the work of Robben Island prisoners during apartheid (Driver 225), which also mirrors the labour of slaves at the Cape (many of whom were exiled prisoners)<sup>106</sup> whose work sustained Van Riebeeck's “garden.” Griqua industriousness in *David's Story* is thus an attempt to insert Griquas – and coloureds more broadly – into the Eden-inspired myth of nation-building.

This is an attempt by Wicomb to acknowledge the labour of people of colour who were, in the tradition of white writing, misrepresented as largely absent in agricultural matters. This misrepresentation was to bolster the perceived natural bond between whites and the land they usurped; the image of a new Garden of Eden they manufactured was seen to be devoid of any labour beside their own. This attempt to re-inscribe “black hands”<sup>107</sup> into the South African literary tradition on land may be contrasted with Brown's positioning of slaves in *Clotel* as always already there – as necessarily present in the administration of the plantation-as-garden, a vilified but indispensable player in the American rendition of the Eden myth. Acknowledgements of black labour in Brown's novel are few and tacit, but they are present. This is because black labour in the plantation-as-garden is acknowledged in the American South as part of the Edenic myth. The slave's presence on the plantation was rationalised by proponents of slavery by the image of harmony that is found in classical and Hebraic conventions of the garden and suggestions that the slave's labour was an indispensable part of maintaining this accord (Simpson 343). Under charge of the plantation's patriarchal master, explained William Byrd II, slavery in the United States “is no more than Gardening & Less by far than what poor people undergo in other countrys” (qtd. in Simpson 343). Arthur Riss explains that one way of justifying the slave's presence was the identification of the serpent as a “negro gardener” by drawing on the etymology of *Nachash*, the Hebrew word for “snake,” which also meant “to be or become black” (189n14), thereby giving the slave an integral, if thankless, position in the Edenic vision. Furthermore, the Christianisation of slaves, as evident in Peck and Snyder's work, was seen as a measure for making slaves “more pliable” and less likely to protest their positions (Greene 14). The idea that slaves were present in the plantation-

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<sup>106</sup> See C. Anderson.

<sup>107</sup> The phrase is taken from J. M. Coetzee's notable formulation, discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, about the erasure from white writing of the labour of people of colour.

as-garden as the result of “the intruding evil (the snake)” and “not [as] descendants of the original parents” (14) troubles the possibility of having one’s own vine and fig tree, so to speak.

This explains Clotel’s departure from the cottage. For Katie Frye, Gertrude’s race possesses an authenticity that Clotel’s lacks, which in turn confers privilege on her husband and thus aids Horatio’s political ambitions (532). It will not suffice that Clotel looks white; legally, and therefore socially, she is not. She is merely able to “borrow the trappings of whiteness, [but] Gertrude *owns* them” (Frye 532, emphasis added), a fact which identifies an association between garden ownership (representing settlement or rootedness) and race. The ease with which Gertrude effects Clotel’s departure from her (but really Horatio’s) cottage and also consigns Mary to work in the garden as opposed to inside the Greens’ house later in the novel, attaches garden ownership to whiteness and garden maintenance to blackness. Clotel’s marginality is evident in the ways she approximates whiteness while never being able to settle permanently into the station of middle-class white women in her society, and her repeated sales and repurchases show the ease with which she is dispelled from spaces she tries to claim as her own. The fate of mulattos like Clotel can be encapsulated by the title of Sarah Gertrude Millin’s novel, *God’s Stepchildren* (1924), which Wicomb draws on and critiques in *David’s Story* and which captures the image of illegible dwellers in Eden. In contrapuntal relation, *Clotel* enacts this figuration of stepchildren with Gertrude’s treatment of Mary, her husband’s child with Clotel, who shares her mother’s fair skin and straight hair. Believing slaves to be the rightful labourers of the land because of their race and jealous of Mary being her husband’s illegitimate child, Gertrude removes Mary from her home and relegates her to the role as labourer in the garden to darken her skin under the glare of the sun. This is an attempt to substantiate her removal from the home as a child of its owner, not only because the status of slave is passed down through the maternal line, so that Mary does not share her father’s status as a free and recognised citizen of the United States. It is also because Mary’s racial ambiguity troubles Gertrude, who feels that because Mary is black under the country’s legal designation, her skin should reflect this, and she should not have the privilege or immunity of being made racially inconspicuous by a light complexion.

In *God’s Stepchildren*, Millin portrays miscegenation as a sin, deplorable, adulterated and calamitous.<sup>108</sup> Her impression that coloureds form a remnantal people who do not fit in anywhere resounds in Le Fleur’s attempts to “revert” his people to a state of Griqua “purity” in a land they can call their own.<sup>109</sup> Le Fleur repeatedly identifies the coloured community’s subjection to relocation in combination with their mixed-race heritage and his displeasure with them reveals how mixed-race identity is viewed with abhorrence. The irony of his assurance that, as Griquas, they “[w]ill wipe out the stain of colouredness and gather together under the Griqua flag those who have been given a dishonourable name” (42) is that the Griquas are themselves the product of miscegenation between Europeans and Khoikhoi. He decides to ignore this, with the narrator explaining that “of those, the ships from Madagascar or Malaya, Le Fleur did not wish to think, and in any case, the high cheekbones, the oriental eyes were as likely to come from the native Khoisan. Of his own European ancestry, well, that blood was

<sup>108</sup> See J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing* (the chapter “Blood, Flaw, Taint, Degeneration: The Case of Sarah Gertrude Millin”).

<sup>109</sup> Le Fleur’s mission can be read as an example of “Khoe-San revivalism,” a movement among people who would be regarded as coloured but who have rejected the designation as a product of colonial rule. See Besten.

by now so thin, so negligible, there really was no need to take it into account” (88).<sup>110</sup> This shame around miscegenation recalls the fact that Griquas were previously known as “Bastards” (or “Basters”), which signals “both hybridity and illegitimacy” (Marais 22). This shame drives Le Fleur’s mission to establish “a grand Griqua race” instead of his people being “coloured nameless bastards” (Wicomb, *David’s Story* 146). For Le Fleur, ownness emanates from a sense of racial cohesion. His rejection of colouredness is a rejection of heterogeneity; coloureds’ blended ethnic backgrounds, so often read in the negative (as neither one thing nor another), dismantles claims to ownness. Ironically, Le Fleur’s search for a piece of earth on which his people can reside as “natives in their own land” (90) appears oddly to mirror Afrikaner rhetoric around ownness, since nationalist discourse around the consolidation of Afrikaner hegemony frequently appealed to the allure of *ons eie* (“our own”).<sup>111</sup>

The bifocal reading of Brown’s and Wicomb’s novels introduce several convergences between slavery in the United States and South Africa. Peck’s slaves being identified as “sons of Ham” (107) recalls the curse Noah is thought to have placed upon his son Ham’s descendants in the Bible – namely, that they will be slaves (Braun 103). This supposed curse was often used as justification for slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (based on the idea that Ham was cursed to be dark), and arose in stigmas around the identity of the coloured menial class, particularly in the Cape (Adhikari, “The Sons” 95). In addition, there is the image of the mule, from which the word “mulatto” is believed to derive (Mafe 15): when Le Fleur is sent by his father to fetch two mules that had strayed from the barren, his father mutters that the animals are “obstinate like these wretched Griquas” (42). As an experiment in crossbreeding, the mule is the offspring of a female horse and male donkey, and is deemed unintelligent and lazy. The characterisation of mixed-race lineage as mulish is apparent in colonial-era views of indigenous groups and apartheid-era stereotypes about coloured people, who are often seen as uncouth, unrestrained in vices and sexually vulgar (seen in the way Dulcie is teased as a child by school peers, who “rhymed her blackness with her cunt” [80]). They are shamed as the products of miscegenation, which is further enveloped by speculations of rape, historically speaking, and they occupy an uncomfortable and often ambiguous position between oppressor and oppressed, since they were conceived from both. Rooted in prejudices around racial impurity, these convergences entangle religious ideas of innocence and pseudo-scientific suspicions around dysgenics.

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<sup>110</sup> Marais explains:

The related and deeply ironic point which *David’s Story* makes [...] is that Le Fleur’s subscription to the discourse of pure blood *endorses* the aesthetic process through which blood inscribes a history of shame on the faces of coloured people. For instance, the novel articulates the tension between Le Fleur’s assertion of a primal Griquaness and the contradictory evidence of his somatic features. [...] Wicomb’s contention is not simply that the somatic evidence of racial hybridity calls into question Le Fleur’s postulation of Griquaness; it is rather that this postulation *affirms* the ideology that enables the eye to construct a racial lineage from a person’s somatic features. (26, original emphases)

<sup>111</sup> *Ons Eie* was the name of a magazine for Afrikaner-Boer communities (Todd 117) and the phrase is commonly associated with the dictum *sowereiniteit in eie kring* (“sovereignty in each sphere”), which served as the basis for apartheid ideology (see Dubow).

There is a stark attitudinal difference between the slaves in Brown's novel and coloureds in Wicomb's. While the slaves in Brown's novel cannot make a similar claim to ancestral belonging in the United States, their plight is framed by a tone of determination to belong and be recognised as citizens. This determination also suggests the theme of exodus – although much more subtly than with Le Fleur's people – in that a tumultuous and unsolicited journey is believed to lead to a fruitful outcome. When Georgiana, Peck's daughter who was educated in the North, determines to free the slaves that she has inherited from her father upon his death, her husband considers having them sent to Liberia, arguing that “[t]hey would be in their native land” (160). But she despairs at the idea. She points out the contribution made by blacks to American independence, thereby asserting their sense of belonging as circumscribed by the dominant ideals of American citizenship. Georgiana suggests that, because the slaves work the land, they are entitled to a sense of belonging there, a view that is at odds with her society's attitudes towards property and ownership:

Is this not their native land? What right have we, more than the negro, to the soil here, or to style ourselves native Americans? Indeed it is as much their homes as ours, and I have sometimes thought it more theirs. The negro has cleared up the lands, built towns, and enriched the soil with his blood and tears; and in return, he is to be sent to a country of which he knows nothing. Who fought more bravely for American independence than the blacks? (160)

Georgiana's refusal to repatriate her family's slaves on the basis that it is in the United States that they have laid down roots gestures towards an attitudinal contrast between African Americans as Brown portrays them and coloured South Africans in Wicomb's depiction. The former group demonstrate an affirmative relation to the land of their birth, while the latter have resigned themselves to existential rootlessness as a condition of coloured identity. Although David and Sally can claim ancestral roots in South Africa in a way that American slaves cannot, they both exhibit frustration at the generally unsteady positions of coloureds in the country (and it is worth noting that, in contrast to the slaves' attachment to America, many coloureds left their country during apartheid to live more freely abroad, including Wicomb). Several coloured characters in *David's Story* display cynicism about colouredness that approaches self-loathing and resignation because of the internalisation of racist derogations. Toothless Thomas, a man David encounters in Kokstad, tells him, “You're a coloured teacher, man, and who can keep a coloured teacher from an extra drink, hey?” (164). This is clear in the dismay of both David's and Sally's parents at their involvement as guerrillas: Ouma Sarie, Sally's mother, is troubled by the resemblance to the term “gorilla,” a slur that was hurled at Sally by a white shop-owner as a child (8), and David's father Dawid, worried about what others will think of them, views the former's abandonment of a career as a teacher to join the Movement as evidence of him “giv[ing] coloureds a bad name” (21) and succumbing to “the coloured condition – drunk, lawless, uncivilised” (22). Dawid complains contemptuously to David about his involvement:

Look what it's taken your mother and me, sweat and blood, to shake off the Griquaness, the shame and the filth and the idleness, and what do you do? Go rolling right back into the gutter, crawling into all kinds of dirty hovels to speak with old folks about old Griqua rubbish,

encouraging the backwardness. [...] Ja-nee, he sighed, his face drawn in self pity [...]. Once a Griqua, always a Griqua. (23)

David, moreover, laments to the amanuensis that coloureds “don’t know what [they] are” (29), while Sally notes – perhaps disparagingly, perhaps sarcastically – that “the beauty of being coloured [...] [is] that we need not worry about roots at all, that it’s altogether a good thing to start afresh” (27-28). Her words subtly imply the reason for her not being in a position to maintain a home-garden of her own, although she appears to be unaware of the connection. Her dismissal of coloured people having roots, despite them having some ancestral links to Africa, is the inverse of Peck’s slaves in *Clotel* who wish to remain in the United States when presented with the possibility of repatriation to Africa once freed. She says that for coloured people “[t]here’s nothing to reclaim” because of their status as “a mixture of this and that” (28). Sally’s dilemma may be explained by Georgiana’s exhortation above, the latter’s reasoning being that in a nation consisting predominantly of the descendants of immigrants and imported labourers, appeals to being recognised as native – having something to reclaim – would necessarily rely on superficial roots, ones that are not historically deep. (The gravity of Georgiana’s and Sally’s statements is heightened by the knowledge that both Brown and Wicomb produced some of their work in the United Kingdom and not in the countries of their birth, Brown having resided there because of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and Wicomb as part of a self-imposed exile.)

When Dawid bemoans the fact that his sacrifices for David’s education and eventual career as a school principal have, to his mind, been in vain, he applies an insightful simile to explain what he considers to be a lack of progress that coloureds have made. “What has been the fruit of my labour but shame?” he asks, likening it to “a tree in the front garden just laden for all to see with the shiny apples of my shame” (21-22). Just as David is unable to escape the misdeeds of his ancestors, Dawid can also not extricate himself from David’s actions. Mohamed Adhikari explains that this sense of shame results from “[t]he import of white supremacist discourse about the South African past [...] that the coloured people were the unwanted and unfortunate consequence of the colonisation of southern Africa” (“Hope” 482). Wicomb has also written about the presence of shame in the coloured community, broadly speaking, in the 1998 collection of essays *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*. She explains: “Miscegenation, the origins of which lie within a discourse of ‘race’, concupiscence, and degeneracy, continues to be bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid’s strategy of the naming of a Coloured race, and recurring in the current attempts by coloureds to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame” (“Shame” 92).

The definitional obstacles presented by coloured identity and its intermediary position in *both* apartheid and post-apartheid society makes it an alienating one. There is a common aphorism that captures the “disaffect[ion]” of coloured people in South Africa in the post-apartheid moment – “first we were not white enough and now we are not black enough” (Adhikari, *Not White Enough* 176). David’s remembrance of his family’s attitude to both colouredness and other races reveals a people strongly at odds with their identity. A notable aspect that re-emerges throughout David’s recollections is the feeling of insecurity due to

awareness of coloureds' position and perceived character under apartheid. This is reflected in his family's awareness of their tenuous position of relative privilege. Since coloured people occupied an "intermediate status" in racial and political life during apartheid (Adhikari, "Hope" 477), some adamantly held onto the notion that while they were regarded as inferior to whites, they were superior to blacks, a position made clear by Dawid reproaching David for "mess[ing] around with kaffirs" (19), and Ouma Sarie's assumption that Nelson Mandela "must have some good coloured blood in him" for being "a fine-looking gentleman" (207). This dissociation from blackness is coupled with the acceptance that whiteness represents the pinnacle of civility; hence Sally's question when confronting David about his Kokstad trip, "[H]ave we turned white or something that we no longer can speak loudly?" (26).

The internalisation by coloureds of dominant white ideas about beauty is suggested elsewhere in the novel, as when the receptionist at the Crown Hotel thinks of David that he is "handsome [...] in spite of his frizzy hair" (66) or how Sally admires the fact that "[t]here is no hint of a Griqua slant in [David's] eyes" (98). The position of being between black and white socially, as coloureds were hierarchised during apartheid, results in a set of prejudices being perpetuated by coloureds, despite being the victims of racial discrimination themselves. Dawid especially appears to adhere to the pretensions of what Adhikari calls the "Coloured petty bourgeoisie" ("Ambiguity" 116), a collective who enjoyed relative privilege in comparison to working-class coloureds as a result of better education or more skilled professions. In general, they clung to notions of respectability – for Erasmus, the antithesis of shame (Introduction 13) – and valued proficiency in English, were class conscious and aspired towards whiteness, both in perceived affectations and in physical appearance (valuing straight hair and fair skin).<sup>112</sup> Dawid's desire for David to become a school principal (teaching having been a highly regarded profession for coloured people during apartheid),<sup>113</sup> as well as the many instances of anglicisation of family names in subsequent generations (David from Dawid, Rachael from Ragel, Sally from Sarie) also correspond to the novel's tongue-in-cheek view of "a respectable coloured home" (Wicomb, *David's Story* 117) and its values.<sup>114</sup>

The attitudinal difference between Wicomb's coloured characters and Peck's slaves registers a tonal contrast between the novels as well. Both novels frame episodes around authoritative literary voices, seen in the excerpts which preface chapters or subsections of chapters. In *Clotel*, the integration of passages from canonical western texts serve to substantiate the story being told, with excerpts from the likes of the Declaration of

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<sup>112</sup> Desiree Lewis explains that "[t]he authority conferred by Englishness, civility and 'being cultured' is inextricably entangled with class" (145). Further, Adhikari explains his use of the phrase "petty bourgeoisie":

For lack of better alternatives [...] the terms "elite" and "petty bourgeoisie" are used interchangeably to refer to this social group. Though neither an elite nor a petty bourgeoisie in the usual senses of the words, this group was distinguished from the Coloured proletariat by their literacy, relative affluence and adherence to the norms and values of "respectability". A considerable proportion of the Coloured elite consisted of "respectable", as opposed to "rough" working-class elements. This social group is perhaps best described as an emergent petty bourgeoisie. ("Ambiguity" 120n16)

<sup>113</sup> See Adhikari, "Coloured Identity."

<sup>114</sup> Race categorisation during apartheid was not narrowly concerned with ethnicity, as Posel explains, but "race as a construct [had] cultural, social and economic dimensions" (53).

Independence intended to validate his tale of black Southern slaves as a story about American people. The incorporation of such passages that Brown's predominantly white readership would be familiar with also explains his use of fair-skinned mulatto protagonists in what is a sentimental novel – white readers, it was assumed, would be more inclined to empathise with people who look like them. Contrastingly, Wicomb's novel showcases cynicism towards voices of authority. The passages integrated into the storyline, including accounts of the history of the Griqua people and commentary on coloureds, are provided not to give authority to her story but to be undone by her story, which is narrated in sometimes sardonic, sometimes exasperated, tones by a critical and sceptical amanuensis.

*David's Story's* critical awareness of the flimsiness of racial categorisation for coloured people and its dispelling of the notion of racial purity (as sought after in Griqua revivalism) might elicit questions around the collapsing of colouredness into Blackness, a trend that goes back to the Black Consciousness Movement<sup>115</sup> and which re-emerged in the post-apartheid moment, especially given the way coloureds' physical features are read. AbdouMaliq Simone explains:

The hair texture, facial features and skin colour of many coloureds are either indistinguishable from local Africans or in another context, eg, the Americas, would be immediately read as blacks. [...] "African" and "Coloured" could be dissolved into the commonality of "Black", again undoing the apartheid logic that every person has their naturally-assigned places in heaven and earth.

Yet recognition of the arbitrariness of racial distinctions cuts many different ways. If blackness then has no unequivocal defining features in the last instance – note the persistent complications of including blue-black skinned Tamils with straight hair and kinky-hair Arabs with light skins – those "coloureds" looking just like Africans could as well avoid the "inevitability" of black identification as concur with it. (167)

Simone's point is that some coloured South Africans could, given their appearance, assume the identity of black Americans if placed in a foreign geographical context. Even so, the novel appears to suggest that the intricate history of the coloured population – both their racial mixing and their position in the middle of a racial hierarchy – challenges the inclusivity of Blackness. *David's Story* is about the coloured experience, and the difficulty of the amanuensis to generate a clearly defined, singular story from David's memories and research testifies to the ineffectuality of seeking a singular narrative to convey that experience. Significantly, what the potential for conflating colouredness and blackness, or colouredness and whiteness, on the basis of outward appearances indicates is the body's capacity to mislead.

The reading of racialised bodies in the contexts of miscegenetic histories is influenced by several issues, including the (dis)connection between bloodlines and physical features, which is shown in the novels' treatments of what Elaine K. Ginsberg calls "[c]ultural associations of the physical body" (4). The miscegenetic heritage born of the American and South African slave contexts reveals the capacity for the body to mislead; that identifications

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<sup>115</sup> The value of coloured support for the Black Consciousness Movement has been debated, with some arguing that the movement failed to recognise unique coloured experiences (Erasmus, "Recognition" 72).

of race predicated on readings of the body can be insubstantial. *Clotel* and *David's Story* challenge the notion that the body is a site that unambiguously signifies racial identity by demonstrating the incongruity of somatic features and socially imposed identities through racial passing. The ability of Clotel and other fair-skinned mulattas to “pass” as white in certain social situations offers an advantage, albeit a risky one, by which they can better their social standing by being bought by white men and taken in as their common-law wives. But they all fail to pass consistently and, apart from Mary, are not successfully extricated from the slave system. Instead, they only manage to temporarily “play,” the colloquial apartheid-era term used when coloureds pretended to be white and enjoyed certain privileges because of this pretence.<sup>116</sup> The image of playing introduced by this counterpoint more accurately captures the feigned life Clotel briefly enjoys with Horatio, not only because of the falsity inherent in her passing but because others participate in this playing as well.

Although passing emerged in contexts of race, Ginsberg defines it in terms of both race and gender, arguing that “like racial identity, gender identity is bound by social and legal constraints related to the physical body” (2). The ability to pass threatens the rigid racial and gender spheres. As Ginsberg explains, “passing forces reconsideration of the cultural logic that the physical body is the site of identic intelligibility” and she quotes Amy Robinson: “The ‘problem’ of identity, a problem to which passing owes the very possibility of its practice, is predicated on the false promise of the visible as an epistemological guarantee” (4). Passing offers the mulatto an escape from a life of bondage, albeit a precarious, possibly only temporary, one, that is sometimes (as with Clotel’s and Althesa’s marriages) made possible because of prejudices regarding the fairness of their complexions.<sup>117</sup> The opposite prejudice also exists, as Clotel discovers. When the slaves on Rev. Peck’s plantation reject Clotel for her appearance, assuming that she considers herself superior to them by thinking of herself as white and claiming that she “strut[s] round” (150), they expose an inverted attitude of colourism. This is the issue of “ethnic legitimacy,” which questions whether those whose features are not quintessentially recognisable as belonging to their prescribed race can be viewed as “authentic” (M. Hunter 244).

Margaret Hunter defines colourism as “the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts” (237) and is rooted in colonialism and slavery (238). Clotel’s and Althesa’s fair skin tones increase their eligibility for white men – hence their invitation to mulatto balls and Curren’s practice of raising them to be ladies before they are all sold by Mr Graves. Their appearances are esteemed as beautiful; when auctioned, the daughters are praised as “very superior,” rumoured to be the most beautiful young women among both blacks and whites (85), an estimation based on Western prescriptions of beauty. In fact, whenever their appearance is commented on, their beauty is tied to their fairness. For instance, when Clotel stands on the auction block, men remark that she appears to be a “[r]eal albino” (87). In truth, it is the *appearance* of whiteness that heightens the mulatto woman’s appeal. Brown presents the selling point of fair-skinned mulatta women

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<sup>116</sup> See Daymond, and Wicomb, *Playing in the Light*.

<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, while passing presents the possibility of relative freedom, it does not guarantee manumission. As Jim Cullen points out, the well-known *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case of 1857 showed that black Americans, even when free, were not regarded as citizens and “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (qtd. in Cullen 106). For black Americans, “freedom” and “equality” were not synonymous (Cullen 113).



to be their physical beauty and they are fetishised by white men at slave auctions and quadroom balls for being simultaneously white and other, something that approximates the real thing but is essentially a fantasy. This appeal is, however, a dangerous one since mulattas are exposed to a legal system that enables their sexual exploitation, and Brown probes this danger with Clotel's rejection of her second master's advances, which include the purchasing of a "gold watch and chain, and other glittering presents" (167) in attempts at seduction, and Althesa's daughter Ellen who, because her mother was never manumitted, falls into slavery upon her parents' deaths and commits suicide to avoid sexual exploitation. Meeting the standards of white beauty is therefore a potential means to attain some degree of freedom but is also a marker of vulnerability.

Frye argues that Curren's daughters "are caught between two worlds, having been born as slaves but brought up as ladies" (529). She explains the use of the term "albino" during their auctions as a misnomer that underlines the sexual availability of black women: since first being introduced by the Portuguese ecclesiastic Balthazar Tellez to describe the people he saw on the coast of West Africa in the seventeenth century, it was believed that the condition only occurred in black people and it initiated a "fixation on the paradox of albinism – to be both white and not white," which is evident from theatrical exhibitions of albinos in institutions like dime museums in America during the nineteenth century (530). Viewed with fetishist interest as an aberration, as Charles D. Martin explains, the auctioning of fair-skinned mulattoes was a "spectacle of pure whiteness [that] depended upon the audience's expectation of pure blackness" (qtd. in Frye 531). Alongside her whiteness, emphasis is also placed on Clotel's chastity, and Frye points out that "fancy" indicates sexual pleasure for the fair-skinned slave (529-30); according to slave trade jargon, a female deemed a "fancy girl" was coached in domestic chores, but it was generally understood to indicate the prospect of her becoming a concubine" (Williamson 68-69).<sup>118</sup>

Clotel's hair and complexion are markers of her mixed heritage and a symbol of her beauty according to those who see her. But her appearance singles her out as a rival to the slave owner's wife, Mrs French, who instructs her to cut her straight hair so that it appears "as short as any of the full-blooded negroes in the dwelling" (150). It brings to mind the way West Africans, who came from cultures where hair carried aesthetic, social and spiritual significance for both men and women (Byrd and Tharps 1-5), were stripped of their cultural identity when their heads were shaven during the transatlantic slave trade and transformed into "anonymous chattel" (10). It also corresponds to the instance when Gertrude forces Mary to work in the garden to darken her fair skin and thus eradicate her resemblance to the white owners of the home. These impositions on the slave women's bodies are essentially ways of reinforcing their socio-legal "place," that is, for their station in life to be reflected in their physical appearance. This impression that one's physical features should be clearly indicative of one's race is almost humorously undermined by one of Peck's slaves, Sam, who (being half-black, half-mulatto) shows a strong dislike towards dark-skinned slaves. He claims, "My hare [sic] tells what company I belong to" (137), although he in fact rubs butter through his hair to make it appear slick. Sam, whose mother was a fair-skinned mulatta, also contends, "If I had my rights I would

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<sup>118</sup> Howard Bodenhorn points out that fair-skinned female slaves were, in some regard, relatively advantaged in comparison to slave men because they often received preferential treatment, either economic or sexual, and were sometimes taught domestic, educational and conversational skills (45), such as to cook, read and converse about literature and current events, respectively: "They were given all the desirable attributes of a mistress" (45).

be a mulatto too” (136). The point underscores the lack of rights and self-determination ascribed to blacks in the United States at this time; although, more evidently, it is ironic that Sam does not dispute racial discrimination as such, but rather that he should be subject to it.

Furthermore, the ill-treatment committed against fair-skinned mulattoes by the wives of slaveholders and the dissociation of Peck’s dark slaves from *Clotel* are both due to their appearance being a reminder of their parentage (Toplin 188). In this regard, Brown’s novel offers a possible explanation why Wicomb’s David loathes his green eyes: while he might choose to explain or dismiss his coloured race as being “[o]f no consequence” (Wicomb, *David’s Story* 11), his animosity towards his eyes, a feature he shares with his European ancestors but which he thinks have “dropped as if by accident into his brown skin” (98), can be seen as resulting from his knowledge (perhaps subliminal) that he is in fact a “consequence” (as crude as that word may sound). As his own research shows, as a coloured person he is a consequence of a long, convoluted history of colonial rule and, with it, miscegenation. There is nothing accidental about David’s eyes – they are the phenotypic result of his genetic makeup. In Le Fleur’s Griqua revivalist community, where the possibility of white lineage is disapproved of, David’s eyes are markers of an interracial bloodline. It is the inverse of Mary’s situation. In a society that exhibits anxiety about black blood, the only clue Mary’s body apparently presents regarding her background is that one eye possesses “melting mezzotinto, which remains the last vestige of African ancestry” (W. W. Brown 101). Both Brown and Wicomb use characters of interracial extraction to criticise racial discrimination, with *Clotel* rendering the relation between black and white not as a strict binarism but rather as a continuum. Along this continuum, Brown’s mulatto characters serve to illuminate and problematise legal and moral codes that are devised according to a rigid colour line.

Deborah Posel explains that during South Africa’s segregationist pre-apartheid era “[d]ifferent laws invoked racial categories in variable, often inconsistent, ways,” enabling “ambiguous and mobile identifications at the margins of different racial groups [that] allowed some people to move up or down the racial ladder according to changes in circumstances,” such as work, marriage or “station in life” (54). With the onset of apartheid, however, the government aspired “to produce a clear, immobile grid for racial classification of the entire population” and implemented one that was “constituted as commonsensical, insinuated into habits of thought and reflexes of experiences as though ‘facts’ of life” (51). Racial classification during apartheid assumed a supposed link between someone’s somatic traits and their membership in a racial group: white people, for instance, were classified according to the Population Registration Act of 1950 as “a person who (a) in appearance obviously is a White person, and who is not generally accepted as a Coloured person; or (b) is generally accepted as a White person and is not in appearance obviously not a White person” (qtd. in Marais 21). This formulation produces an intriguing interplay – in some cases perhaps a tension, as the remainder of the chapter will show – between the body as “a signifier of racial identity” (Marais 21) and social integration dependent upon a shared understanding of a person’s accepted place in society. As Posel explains,

[a]partheid was underpinned by a hankering for *order* – an orderly society and an orderly state to tame the perceived dissolution and turbulence during the 1940s. [...] Racial borders too, had grown more porous, with racial mixing producing higher incidences of the dreaded miscegenation and its threat to racial ‘purity’. The result was an overriding sense of social chaos

and moral peril[.] [...] *Die apartheid-gedagte* (the apartheid idea) offered the promise of heightened discipline, regulation and surveillance: boundaries were to be reasserted and spaces reorganised, the movements of people systematised and contained, races rescued from ‘impurity’ [.] [...] At the core of this aspiration to order lay a vigorous and thoroughgoing reassertion of racial difference. Apartheid’s principle imaginary was a society in which every ‘race’ knew and observed its proper place – economically, politically and socially. Race was to be the critical and overriding faultline: the fundamental organising principle for the allocation of all resources and opportunities, the basis of all spatial demarcation, planning and development, the boundary for all social interaction, as well as the primary category in terms of which this social and moral order was described and defended. (52, original emphasis)

In his reading of Wicomb’s novel *Playing in the Light* (2006), Emmanuel Ngwira employs Zygmunt Bauman’s metaphor of the modern nation-state as a garden to reflect on the way apartheid society enforced, as Posel describes above, a sense of order that segregated the races (186). Bauman labels the modern nation-state to be one of “gardeners” who “treat society as a virgin plot of land expertly designed and then cultivated and doctored to keep to the design form” (*Modernity* 113). Following Ngwira, I want to suggest that Bauman’s formulation of the nation’s ordering is also applicable to *David’s Story*, as becomes apparent when considering the novel’s depiction of botanical gardens in the recollection of David’s visit to Glasgow in the 1980s. Originally envisioned as a recreated Garden of Eden, the botanical garden evolved during the colonial period as a means of housing and cultivating imported plant species which were documented and classified, and formed part of a broader scientific venture of the era that extended to animals and people. The botanical garden offers order and the possibility of control over the chaos of the wilderness, signalling a taming of an ostensibly unpredictable, unruly and dangerous environment. It reveals the complicity of the natural sciences in imperial or colonial enterprises by demonstrating how attempts to impose order on the external world, to systematise, name and sort through, functioned as harbingers of Social Darwinist convictions that would be implemented in South Africa for much of the twentieth century.

*David’s Story*’s interest in taxonomy and nomenclature, supported by the botanical garden motif, forms part of the Enlightenment drive to impose order on the external world by systematising and naming in a way that harbingers later forms of subjection used to control subaltern communities. The impetus to impose order that is at work in gardening is echoed in the text’s acknowledgment of control exerted over racialised bodies, as suggested in David’s visit to the People’s Palace during the same trip to Glasgow. In a painting of John Glassford, the Scotsman who owned plantations in Maryland, and his children – a painting showing “an abundance of flowers” (191) and “a basket of fruit” (192) – David detects the vague face of a black man, which inserts the realities of the slave trade into an otherwise innocent pastoral image. In *Clotel*, references to ecological imperialism are more subtle. The plant species identified in the garden scene surrounding the home that Clotel shares with Horatio are noteworthy foreign types, their presence hinting at transnational exchanges and recognising the many forms of displacement engendered in the wider imperial project of which Clotel’s black ancestors are, of course, part and parcel. Like the image of weeding evident in his elucidation of the garden, Bauman’s account of a culture or state’s ability to excise elements

of the whole is also evoked in Brown's novel.<sup>119</sup> Like Wicomb, Brown attests to forms of duress committed in the name of science, depicting physicians looking for ill slaves for dissection for mere "anatomical knowledge" (102), some of whom are bled to death. There is also the case of Sam, one of Peck's slaves who acquired both medical knowledge from his former owner, a physician, and a disregard for blacks, and who shows an interest in performing operations on slaves with little care for their survival. These cases also remind one of Dulcie's torture, which "seem[s] so like a surgical operation" (Attridge, "Zoë Wicomb's Home Truths" 163), and accentuate the role of medical science in questions of race and, relatedly, in proslavery discourses.

The idea that blacks were medically and anatomically different from whites formed part of the justification to keep them as slaves and subject them to harsh working conditions (Savitt 351), demonstrating that the body became "a site for the construction of [colonialism's] own authority, legitimacy, and control" (Arnold 8). Jefferson, although in opposition to slavery, also conceded to such reasoning, writing that "the difference [between whites and blacks] is fixed in nature" and that blacks' "greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat" (qtd. in Eze 98), an argument that was frequently engaged by slavery apologists (hence the claim as part of a sermon on Peck's plantation that "the Lord intended the negroes for slaves" since "their hands are large, the skin thick and tough, and they can stand the sun better than the whites" [115]). Brown's portrayal of such incidents correspond to Bauman's expansion on the image of the nation-as-garden to include "the medical metaphor," explaining that "[o]ne can train and shape 'healthy' parts of the body, but not cancerous growth. The latter can be 'improved' only by being destroyed" (65). It is this insistence on politically motivated scientific codification, arising with the Enlightenment, that Brown and Wicomb criticise. Both reveal a confrontation between allusions to race rooted in biblical parables and those rooted in pseudo-scientific knowledge, the latter being explored in both novels through their use of Enlightenment taxonomical discourse, which serves as reproof of scientific racism.

*David's Story* shares *Clotel's* scrutiny of women's bodies by a male gaze but directs this scrutiny to African women, women cast as the antithesis of European beauty, so that the scrutiny amounts to debasement. This is clear in the novel's inclusion of Sara Baartman, the Khoi woman whose body was demeaned and fetishised by European viewers, and ultimately dissected and displayed in Europe. Baartman is incorporated into David's history of the Griqua people by the amanuensis, against his protests. Baartman was born in South Africa in the 1770s and was taken to Europe where she was paraded, exhibited and "studied," and where, upon her death in 1815, her body was dissected by Georges Cuvier, the renowned scientist and anatomist (Crais and Scully 1-2). Based on Cuvier's analysis, Baartman, who was renowned for her steatopygia, became emblematic of the ideas circulating, both within the scientific and public spheres in Europe, about the physical and mental inferiority of "non-European" peoples. This was an epoch preoccupied with ideas about evolution and Baartman came to be seen as "the living missing link separating beast from man" (6), although it was assumed that she was in

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<sup>119</sup> Tim Cresswell writes about weeding as one example of "metaphors of displacement" ("Weeds, Plagues, and Bodily Secretions" 330) which, for him, are "rooted in a belief that place is one of the primary factors in the creation and maintenance of ideological values (what is good, just, and appropriate)" (334). Cresswell contends that "[w]eeds are plants that are uncultivated specimens in the garden or farm field. Many plants become weeds simply by being in the wrong place" (335).

fact closer to the former than the latter (2). Wicomb's inclusion of Cuvier in her novel demonstrates the lengthy history of racist classification in South Africa. Categorising humans into three groups (Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian), Cuvier asserted in *Animal Kingdom* that "[a]lthough the promiscuous intercourse of the human species, which produces individuals capable of propagation, would seem to demonstrate its unity, certain hereditary peculiarities of conformation are observed which constitute what are termed *races*" (qtd. in Zack 305, original emphasis).

The obscenity that was attached to Baartman's body is invoked elsewhere in *David's Story* in other female characters: in Rachael's steatopygia, in the shame that Sally associates with her own body and her hair, and in the physical torture of Dulcie, whose memory David is haunted by. *David's Story* makes explicit the similarities between the histories and treatment of black and mulatto slaves in the United States and coloured South Africans through allusions to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a neo-slave narrative that Dulcie reads. This reference serves to make connections between the physical trauma of women fighters in MK and female American slaves. The narrator, likely assuming Dulcie's perspective through free indirect style, evokes the image of the formation of scars that resemble a chokecherry tree on the slave Sethe's back in Morrison's book, claiming that she "nevertheless is able to turn [the scars] into a tree" (19). This is an ironic view of the charm of trees in a slave-holding society. As is described in *Clotel*, trees are used for restraining and lynching slaves and, as Brown sketches in the chapter "The Slave Market," a slave may be instructed to bare his back for a prospective slave-buyer to see whether he has been whipped by previous owners (an indication of whether he has been "obedient" or not). Of course, unlike Sethe, Dulcie suffers abuse from those who are meant to be on her side.

At *David's Story's* end, when the amanuensis sits by her window and looks out at her garden, she sees – or imagines seeing – "her sturdy steatopygous form on the central patch of grass, where she has come to sunbathe in private. She is covered in goggas crawling and buzzing all over her syrup sweetness, exploring her orifices, plunging into her wounds" (212). This vision of a maimed Dulcie that is simultaneously carnal and putrid prompts the amanuensis to ponder, "Is this no longer my property? [...] I have never thought of Dulcie as a visitor in my garden" (212). In a novel continually thinking through the tradition of Edenic gardens and Promised Lands, this moment registers the amanuensis's realisation about the falsity of a prelapsarian ideal – the garden is no longer a safe and sanctified space but rather a fallen world, an image which casts a gloominess on the "new" nation that awaits her. The torment inflicted upon Dulcie by her male comrades, both in and out of their training camps, has been interpreted by scholars as an indication of the abuses perpetrated in the name of freedom and serves to signal Wicomb's trepidations surrounding the status of women in the New South Africa.<sup>120</sup> (That David carries a drawing of a mutilated female body and is uneasy about Dulcie, not wanting to divulge anything about her to the amanuensis, hints at guilt over, or culpability of, her abuse or the abuse of other female MK operatives.) Brown and Wicomb suggest that a working democracy is one which is attuned to the various dimensions of

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<sup>120</sup> The assaults suffered by Dulcie and everyday forms of discrimination of women in *David's Story* has been studied widely. See, for instance, Baiada; Barris; Choveaux; S. Graham, "This Text Deletes Itself"; Marais 28-31; and Samuelson, "The Disfigured Body."

inequality in society, and they attempt to validate race *and* gender as terrain for democratic promise.

This is apparent in the novels' treatment of female transvestism: when, in more examples of passing, Clotel twice dresses as a white man to evade capture (once with another slave, William, whom she pretends to own)<sup>121</sup> and when Dulcie assumes what is perceived by the men in her cell to be an all-too-masculine role, posture and attire, the results are ultimately their demise. Taking an intersectional approach to gender and race, the novels differentiate quite markedly between the oppression suffered by black, mulatta and coloured women, in contrast to their male counterparts. Male characters, some of whom police and violate women's bodies, are depicted much more critically, as figures who have fathered a family and a people with a misguided vision for settlement. In the vein of the biblical mythology that pervades both novels, it can be said that it is the Adam figure, not the Eve, who sets in motion a history of affliction for his people. The erasure or repeated silencing of female characters in the novel – dominated by headstrong men and side-lined or entirely neglected in official narratives – can be seen as Wicomb's attempt, as Christa Baiada writes, "to lif[t] the shroud of silence obscuring women's history as participants in and victims of nation building" (33). The use of Baartman and Hemings as "mother of the nation" figures in *David's Story* and *Clotel*, respectively – however tacitly in the latter – signals their confrontation with the oppression and silencing of women, which equates to a distortion of national history.

In comparison to Hemings, whose role as a progenitor for innumerable black Americans has been a contentious and protracted issue, the 2002 repatriation of Baartman's remains to be buried in the land of her birth carried significant connotations for democratic South Africa's project of historical reparations.<sup>122</sup> The reluctance of some to acknowledge Hemings – which would of course entail acknowledging Jefferson's misdeeds – might be seen as symptomatic of American society's general unease with its slave-holding past and an unwillingness to confront its history of slavery. Here, a bifocal perspective of the two women's contemporary reception in their home countries, emphasises the indemnificatory nature of democracy in South Africa, while revealing an uncomfortable truth about the inception of democracy in the United States: so frequently upheld as a model for other nations, democracy in the United States is intrinsically implicated in a practice that is antithetical to democratic ideals.

David's search for his roots and Clotel's quest for freedom end unaccomplished. Their fates are both deaths by drowning. Clotel, pursued by slave catchers, commits suicide by throwing herself into the Potomac River, in close proximity to the White House, while it is suggested that David also commits suicide, his body washing ashore in the vicinity of Chapman's Peak.<sup>123</sup> These drownings are the very antithesis of the sought-after attachment to

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<sup>121</sup> See Berthold for an analysis of transvestism in the novel.

<sup>122</sup> Depictions of, or allusions to, Baartman have appeared regularly in various art forms in South Africa in recent years, including literature. For views on her significance as a cultural figure in the post-apartheid era, see Holmes – who provides an overview of the variations of Baartman's first name (xiii-xiv) – and Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* (the chapter "Sarah Baartman: Re-cast and Re-covered").

<sup>123</sup> Clotel's suicide, described in the chapter "Death is Freedom," might be read as a sign of desperation or despair but can also be indicative of defiance against a system that confines her. Jonathan D. Little interprets her actions "less as victimization than as a powerful statement" (513). This manner of suicide recalls the way African captives threw themselves overboard during the Middle Passage (and it is noteworthy, in this sense, that Clotel's name evokes the *Clotilda*, believed to have been the last ship to bring Africans to the United States). Also see Rediker (especially the chapter "Life, Death, and Terror in the Slave Trade").

land that drives both novels. In tracing the origins of miscegenetic histories, both *David's Story* and *Clotel* make use of – and ultimately challenge – the myth of the Edenic garden and ideas around ownness that it embodies. Wicomb and Brown both depict a garden ideal that remains exclusive in nations with rigid racial divisions, and with it seemingly inflexible social strata, and thus remains inaccessible to communities with histories of racial intermixing. Due to such restrictions, it is evident in the two novels' depictions of unattainable or unsustainable garden scenes, and that the control exerted over land by the respective dominant cultures is paralleled by the authority and violence imposed on the bodies of subjugated peoples. The authors depict territorial claims as interlaced with uncertainties about the bloodlines of coloured and mulatto people respectively. Both illustrate the way that miscegenetic histories complicate efforts of national belonging, with the bifocal perspective exposing the garden's exclusivity as a commodity and the association of its ownership with whiteness. The novels' critique of Enlightenment discourse around scientific codification is also a critique of political subjection because both writers register a link between violations of the body and the configuration of gardens.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “Born out of Bondage”: Carceral Plantations, Freedom and the Cultivation of National Belonging in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Revenge of Kali*

The previous chapter compared *Clotel* and *David's Story* based on histories of racial mixing and the influence that these have had on attempts by mulattoes in the United States and coloured South Africans to establish themselves through horticultural and agricultural pursuits. By positioning the bifocal to encompass a dual perspective on chattel slavery in early nineteenth-century America and South Africa on the cusp of democratic reign, the chapter looks back on a history of dislocation and segregation, examining how these attempts at national belonging are fraught with racial ambiguities in societies bent on enforcing rigid, uncompromising and oppressive racist ideologies. While American chattel slavery and the creole population it produced prompts a comparative reading vis-à-vis South Africa's coloured population, it also elicits one from the perspective of transoceanic migrations of labour forces. One analytical avenue of work focused on the Indian Ocean World (IOW) responds to studies of the “black Atlantic” (a phrase popularised by Paul Gilroy's 1993 work of the same name), with the aim of delving into the Indian Ocean as a geopolitical space that, like its Atlantic counterpart, carries the histories of networks of exploration, trade and labour. Isabel Hofmeyr, who has looked into scholarly lacunas that arise when applying theorisation of the black Atlantic to the IOW, sums up the task at hand: “We need to build on this legacy and at the same time extend it by thinking more about the Indian Ocean and its intersections with, but also its differences from, the black Atlantic” (4). The current chapter speaks to such scholarship that juxtaposes Atlantic and Indian Ocean histories in its consideration of two texts that detail experiences of plantation bondage.

The chapter looks at Frederick Douglass' (ca. 1818-1895) second autobiographical account of his quest for manumission, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), a book which depicts the constraints of plantation life for Southern slaves.<sup>124</sup> As an extension of the tale covered in the autobiography published a decade earlier (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*), *My Bondage and My Freedom* encompasses Douglass' introduction into the abolitionist movement and his tour of the United Kingdom as a lecturer for the anti-slavery cause. The second autobiography is chosen for this analysis because, as Joseph Bodzioc asserts, it offers a more expansive view than its prequel of “a potent myth of place [...] – that America was a New Land, a place to redeem and be redeemed, a place for revision, the Garden restored” (252). *My Bondage and My Freedom* is read bifocally with the novel *Revenge of Kali* (2009) by Aziz Hassim (1935-2013), which explores the legacy of Indian labour on Natal sugar plantations and illustrates decades of Indian life in South Africa from the arrival of indentured servants in 1860.<sup>125</sup> The aim is to examine

<sup>124</sup> Another revised and extended version was published as *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, 1892). Douglass was also the author of a novella, entitled *The Heroic Slave* (1853).

<sup>125</sup> Those who arrived as indentured workers in 1860 were not the first Indians to reach South Africa. Migrants from the Asian subcontinent arrived at the Cape in the seventeenth century. For an account specifically about Indian slaves at the Cape, see Reddy. The figure of the Indian slave at the Cape is not pertinent to this chapter, which centres on the plantation (a landscape that Natal, and not the Cape, has in common with the Americas) and the community that sprung from the indentured workforce, which has maintained a relatively homogeneous



two distinct histories of bondage and servitude that help to compare the experience of national newness for African American slaves and ex-slaves on the one hand, and Indian South Africans who descended from indentured servants on the other.

*My Bondage and My Freedom* records the author's life from the time of his birth in Tuckahoe, Maryland, through a series of plantations as he is exchanged between various owners (first Col. Lloyd, then Lucretia and Hugh Auld). It recounts the physical and mental abuse meted out to slaves by plantation owners and overseers, and shows how Douglass' developing literacy facilitates his growing insight into the injustices of slavery and his urgency for freedom. The book also covers his escape to the North, a liberating but unsettling experience given his unfamiliarity with his whereabouts and the possibility of recapture, emphasising the circumscribed existence for most slaves on plantations. It concludes with his introduction into the abolitionist movement, through which Douglass became a preeminent orator and writer whose autobiographies are distinguished examples of slave narratives, in both theme and structure.

Slave narratives were often revised and extended versions of speeches given by former slaves at the request of anti-slavery organisations (Davis and Gates, Jr xvi) and their specific purpose – to help bring about the abolition of slavery – meant that they were polemical in nature (xxvi) and tended to conform to rigid conventions of form and content (Olney, “I Was Born” 150).<sup>126</sup> There was a clear understanding between the writers of these narratives, their readership and the abolitionist organisations who requested them, or “sponsors,” to use James Olney's term (“I Was Born” 154). Given the definite purpose of slave narratives, authors who produced them had to adhere to strict literary conventions because, as William L. Andrews points out, they “and their sponsors had learned that certain kinds of facts plotted in certain kinds of story structures moved white readers to conviction and to support of the antislavery cause” (23-24). Many slave narratives take the form of autobiographies, as Douglass' does, although the understanding is that the life being accounted for is indexical of all slaves in the United States. As Olney explains, “[t]he lives in the narratives are never, or almost never, there for themselves and for their own intrinsic, unique interest but nearly always in their capacity as illustrations of what slavery is really like” (“I Was Born” 154). Defining autobiography as “a recollective/narrative act in which the writer [...] looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how that past history has led to [the] present state,” Olney notes that “the autobiographer is not a neutral or passive recorder but rather a creative and active shaper” whose “memory creates the *significance* of events in discovering the pattern in which those events fall” (149, original emphasis).

Such retrospective ascription of significance to oppressive events of the past, especially with the plantation as a central locus of said events, is a compelling factor in the comparison

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ethnocultural identity, in contrast to Indian slaves at the Cape, who were predominantly absorbed, along with slaves from elsewhere in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, into the “Cape Coloured” and “Malay” racial groups (see D. B. Govinden, “Healing” 286; Vahed and Bhana 5; and Worden).

<sup>126</sup> Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr identify “the slave narrative proper” as those published prior to the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865, which exhibited a discernibly generic and didactic nature (xxii). Hundreds of slave narratives, many in the form of autobiographies and memoirs, were published in the years following the end of the Civil War, but the expectations for these later texts were different and they brought about modulations in black autobiographic forms (xxii). Olney provides a list and description of the quintessential elements and plot structure of the slave narrative proper (“I Was Born” 151-53).

of Douglass' autobiography and Hassim's novel. Hassim's literary works, which he began in his late 60s after retiring from his career as an accountant, are predominantly historical fiction and reveal a proclivity to look back with the aim of understanding the present and determining progress in the future. The inside covers of his first two novels reveal the author's view of the constructive value of the past in this quote: "we, all of us, need to know where we come from before we can know where we are going" (*Revenge of Kali* n. pag.; *The Lotus People* n. pag). *Revenge of Kali* begins with Thiru's journey to recover the memory of his ancestors who worked in the cane fields in the vicinity of Port Natal (now Durban). In addition to a prologue and epilogue, the novel is divided into three sections – "The Canefields," "The Duchene," and "The Casbah" – and depicts the fates of indentured servants and their descendants' survival throughout the apartheid era (primarily the 1960s). "The Canefields" begins with Thiru's nightly visit to the Canelands in the Durban suburb of Newlands where he encounters a mystical old man, Veerasamy – later revealed to be his grandfather (originally named Kolapen) – who directs Thiru's trance-like journey upon which he witnesses the daily strife of the indentured, a group of Indians of various ethnic and religious extractions. The principal figure among this group is Ellapen, Veerasamy's father. In its second and third sections, *Revenge of Kali* follows the divergent fates of Ellapen's descendants; mainly Ismail "Miley" Kader and his cousin, Thiru, who make ends meet by eking out a living in the criminal underworld.

As with Hassim's other work, the novel explores the position of Indians in South Africa. *The Lotus People*, his debut publication that forms part of a trilogy along with *Revenge of Kali* and *The Agony of Valliamma* (2012), homes in on political protests that feature portrayals of real-life Indian struggle heroes, with the primary characters being descendants of "passenger" Indians who came to settle in South Africa by their own means. By contrast, *Revenge of Kali* takes as its focus the descendants of indentured servants. But here Hassim portrays plantations (landscapes generally associated with the Americas [Stiebel, "Planted Firmly" 22]) as supervised by compatriots and tracks the lineage of the indentured through Durban's segregated urban space to portray the injustices not only of a grievous government, but also of the Grey Street System, the business network by which Indian entrepreneurs exploited their workers, fellow Indians. Commenting on the difference between his first two novels, Hassim claims that *The Lotus People* is about "what apartheid did to the Indian community" but that *Revenge of Kali* concerns "what the Indians did to each other" (Stiebel, "Sugar-Coated" 16).

In recent years, the history of Indian migration to South Africa has gained traction as a subject in literature, with several writers exploring the journeys of both traders and indentured workers, and the descendants of both.<sup>127</sup> The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the indentured was commemorated in 2010 through events and writing by scholars, politicians, artists and ordinary citizens, and a number of publications that attempt to give voice to those who worked on the sugar plantations of colonial Natal. A noteworthy stance that recurs within this body of "plantation literature," as Lindy Stiebel calls it ("Sugar-Coated" 8), as well as in broader social discourses about the indenture experience (including those honouring the abovementioned anniversary), is the analogising or outright equating of indentured labour with slavery. In Ronnie Govender's *Song of the Atman* (2006), indenture is referred to as "a polite word for

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<sup>127</sup> For studies on post-apartheid Indian South African literature, see Frenkel, Hand and Pujolras-Noguer, Rastogi, and Singh and Chetty.

slavery” (19); in the short story, “Where the River Flows,” from Neelan Govender’s collection *Girrrmit Tales* (2008), it is described as “a colloquial form of slavery” (89); and in the foreword of the same collection, activist and writer Pat Poovalingam calls it “a limited form of slavery” (xiii); while Hassim has been emphatic in identifying the two as one and same, calling indenture “slavery disguised in a legalized document” (qtd. in Stiebel, “Sugar-Coated” 11).<sup>128</sup> My aim in this chapter is to think through whether bifocalism can make any theoretical contributions in light of this trend. I work from the position that the two focal texts stress the realities of life on plantations and follow two quests for freedom from bondage: Douglass looks back on his immediate past with the purpose of attaining freedom, so that the democratic ideals of antebellum America may be equally available to African Americans. Hassim, writing from a free and democratic position, looks back on a more distant past to explicate the road to freedom for Indians in South Africa who derived from the indentured. My bifocal method entails placing the plantations of the antebellum South in contrapuntal relation to those of colonial Natal.

Conceptually, slave labour and indentured service are not the same enterprise, although there are affinities regarding the circumstances that underpinned the two systems and their means of execution. M. L. Bush remarks that “[i]ndentured service has been designated *a kind of slavery*” (30, emphasis added), the main reason being that both slaves and the indentured constituted chattel, the former permanently so, the latter temporarily; and, as Marina Carter and Khal Torabully assert, the indentured has been called a “neo-slave” (45). *Revenge of Kali* introduces the correlation between slavery and indenture relatively early on, when Thiru explains the emergence of indenture to his wife Malliga. In what he calls “the underbelly of history” (76) – the oft-unacknowledged realities of the past – Thiru describes how the emancipation of slavery within the British Empire in 1833 failed to completely terminate the practice. Faced with the “quandary” of a shortage of labour to continue enriching the Empire (76), indenture was introduced as a means to recruit the desired labour force, but its legal divergence from slavery was, in Thiru’s view, merely a technicality:

“An ingenious innovation was resorted to: the reintroduction of the despicable system of human bondage, in the guise of a cunningly conceived subterfuge that left its fiercest supporters gasping with admiration.

“‘Reintroduce slavery,’ the crafty gnomes advised, call it by another name, a more palliative alternative. Garnish it with a few choice carrots, sweeten it with large dollops of sugar (you can be sure the irony was not lost on them), mix in a slew of noble intentions and, as seasoning, add the promise of financial reward. Flavour it with guarantees of freedom, spice it with a soupçon of pious sanctity to disguise the foul odour. Sit back and watch them lap it up.’

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<sup>128</sup> Regarding the use of the term “slavery” in these cases: the point is not made explicitly, but a look at the discourse around indenture in South Africa indicates that the term “slavery” refers to chattel slavery in the Americas. The “indenture-as-slavery thesis” (proposed by Hugh Tinker in his 1974 study, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*) is contentious, and was the subject of debate at talks during the commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the indentured (Desai and Vahed, “Indenture and Indianness” 22). Similar views were expressed by some politicians in commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary; see Maharaj (“Commemoration” 89-92). Rajendra Chetty takes the same position (13), while the indenture circumstances are judged by Brij Maharaj as having been “conditions of near slavery” (“Commemoration” 77) and by Meg Samuelson as “slave-like conditions” (“(Un)Settled” 282). Concerns were raised about whether the anniversary of the arrival of indentured workers should be commemorated or celebrated, as some felt that celebrations of “enslavement and oppression” would be “inappropriate” (Maharaj, “Commemoration” 80). This is a view supported by Hassim; see Stiebel, “Sugar-Coated” 11.

“It was a brilliant contrivance, brilliantly executed. By a stroke of the pen India replaced Africa as the source of slave labour.

“The innovative hybrid was given the lofty title of ‘Indenture.’” (77-78)

Thiru’s claim is not unfounded. In *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade since 1807* (2007), Marika Sherwood shows that although both Britain and the United States made slave-trading illegal in 1807, and while the Emancipation Act was passed in 1833, these sanctions failed to take effect throughout the Empire for substantial periods thereafter, in practice being largely ignored (15-16). Sherwood’s study demonstrates that slave-trading continued throughout much of the nineteenth century through various evasions of these laws and, in some cases, in fact increased, such as in the United States, which was to “becom[e] one of the most active slave traders from the middle of the nineteenth century” (16). It was in the context of these legal loopholes that indentured service (of Asians, mostly) was introduced to replace slavery.<sup>129</sup> While indenture was “[n]ot a continuation of slavery, [it] remained largely confined to non-Europeans, [...] was abolished in a campaign that stressed its incompatibility with humane standards of free labour” (Hansen 87) and was mostly concerned with the production of sugar (Tinker 12).

The influx of Indians into South Africa as part of the Empire’s recruitment of an indentured workforce began with the arrival of the *SS Truro* in Port Natal on 16 November 1860. Aboard were 340 men, women and children (Bhana and Brain 28). As the term “indenture” implies, they were contracted to serve out a period of labour, initially lasting three, and later five, years (Elder 116).<sup>130</sup> The practice was ceased by Indian legislation in 1911 (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “The Place of India” 22), by which time 152 184 indentured labourers had arrived in Natal from India (Bhana and Brain 15). Not all indentured Indians worked on plantations; some filled other servile positions, such as cooks and waiters, or were municipal or railway employees (Gopalan 196; Vahed, “Constructions” 78), although they had no choice in the type of work they were permitted to perform (Desai 3). Reasons for assenting to indentured service vary and include economic upset and poverty, landlessness and the effects of natural disasters (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 10-11), as well as administrative disruptions brought on by British rule which followed a series of wars during the Mughal Empire (Desai and Vahed, “Indenture and Indianness” 23).

While the indentured knew very little about their destinations or what their indentured experience would entail, most came willingly,<sup>131</sup> although some fell victim to recruiters who deliberately misled them (Carter and Torabully 20-21; Meer, *Portrait* 7). One of the main differences between New World enslavement and indenture is that the former originated with

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<sup>129</sup> For the different phases of indenture in modern history, see Bush 28. The phase extending between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved the passage of Asians primarily, but also included Africans and Pacific Islanders, to places like Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Mauritius and Réunion (28).

<sup>130</sup> Contracts for indentured service were drafted in five-year terms and were renewable for another term of equal duration – in theory, with the labourer’s consent (D. Du Bois 16).

<sup>131</sup> It is difficult to distinguish between those who were deceived and those who volunteered, according to David Northrup, since most would have had little idea of exactly what they were signing up for and could not have imagined their destinations (Carter and Torabully 86). Those who enlisted with little information or because of misinformation were therefore no wiser than those who came against their will because they were not conscious of the circumstances awaiting them.

the capture of freemen and was perpetuated through birth, while indentured workers generally consented to relinquish their freedom in search of betterment elsewhere, generally with the intention of returning (Bush 28-31). In *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim likens indenture in South Africa to New World slavery and depicts several ordeals that are also present in Douglass' text. These include the sexual exploitation of female workers on the plantations;<sup>132</sup> the ill-treatment of disabled workers who are perceived as a burden on the master because they are unproductive in field service; suicidal ideation and suicide itself as a means of escaping the brutality of plantation life; and the lack of legal support and representation for workers. Indeed, Meg Samuelson contends that “[t]he story of Ellapen and his fellows unfolds in what [she] term[s] an ‘Atlantic register’ – a register in which the experience of indenture is conveyed through tropes of the ‘middle passage’ and ‘new world’ plantation slavery” (“(Un)Settled States” 276). The pith of Hassim’s critique of indenture resides in him challenging the presumptive relinquishing of freedom by depicting Ellapen as “[having] been *shanghaied* off the street of a village in Madras” (modern-day Chennai) (82, emphasis added).<sup>133</sup> Kidnapped to supplement the ship’s shortfall, Ellapen wakes up aboard the *SS Truro*, a journey he later reveals to his fellow indentured to have been one marked by sickness, physical and sexual abuse, death and insufficient ablutions.

For many, the experience of indenture was seldom different from that of slavery in the viciousness of the physical treatment on the plantation. Hassim further dismisses any perceptions of indenture as an undemanding and uncomplicated business venture that allowed workers to determine their own course. This is shown in his illustration of Ellapen’s master who has his workers’ contracts renewed without their consent and omits dates for the termination of their work, keeping them on his farm indefinitely.<sup>134</sup> Treatment on the Natal plantation of George Jackson in *Revenge of Kali* is characterised as barbarous; the master “spur[s] the overseers to greater heights of inhumanity” (22) and, as the worker Mohideen laments, “They drive us like animals” (23). When Nabee’s case is taken to the magistrate’s court after he is assaulted by *sirdars*, lawyers representing their master dismiss the indentured as “coolies, [...] products of a savage race” (40).<sup>135</sup> Remembering his capture, Ellapen narrates that he woke up on the *Truro*, was brought to Natal and allocated the label “Coolie number 252,” the name he was then called when inspected by prospective farmers and sold, as he bemoans, “Our names meant nothing to them” (52). A number of explanations exist for the origin of the term “coolie.” As Devarakshanam Betty Govinden points out, the *Encyclopaedia*

<sup>132</sup> See Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 6; and B. Govinden, “The Indentured Experience.”

<sup>133</sup> Hassim has been assertive about the coercive nature with which some Indians were boarded on the ships that brought them to South Africa, and in a letter to a newspaper honouring the sesquicentennial of the arrival of Indians as indentured workers in Natal, claims that “thousands [...] were shanghaied and forcibly loaded on to the ship” (qtd. in Stiebel, “Crossing the *Kala Pani*” 78).

<sup>134</sup> As Rehana Vally points out, although indentured labour was governed by a contract that stipulated terms of imbursement, housing, work and medical care, in reality, these conditions were disregarded by many employers, whose labourers suffered callous treatment (24).

<sup>135</sup> In South Africa, a Protector of Indian Immigration was appointed, whose duty it was to see to the interests of Indians working in the country on the recommendation of an 1872 Commission of Enquiry (Vahed, “Constructions” 80). The indentured were also seen to depend on the magistrates but, as Desai and Vahed acknowledge, the legal system was “intrinsicly biased against them. While some magistrates may have upheld the law, the law itself was weighed in favour of the employer. This was reinforced by the attitude of the majority of magistrates and judges towards Indians, which was overlaid with racial stereotypes” (*Inside Indenture* 84).

*Britannica* traces the term to the Hindi word for a day labourer, *quli*, which is also the Urdu word for a slave (“Healing” 299). Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed explain that the term “coolie” derives from the Tamil *kuli* which “referred to payment for menial work for persons without customary rights, from the lowest level in the industrial labour market, while the Gujarati root of *kuli* referred to a person belonging to the Kuli tribe. The ‘personhood’ of Kuli and payment of *kuli* were combined to create a new entity: the ‘coolie’” (*Inside Indenture* 440), or rather, as Jan Breman and Valentine E. Daniel contend, “the person collapsed into the payment” (qtd. in Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 78).<sup>136</sup> The term thus implies “a denial of personhood” (84). Similar means of divesting New World slaves of identity markers as documented by Douglass – the inconsequentiality of names, the dissolution of the family unit, the savage physical goading – appear in Hassim’s novel where the indentured, like the slave, is reduced to the labour he is tasked with performing.

This rejection of the labourer’s personhood persists after the termination of indentured service under the governance of the Union of South Africa (1910-1961) and the apartheid regime (the novel ends in the late 1960s or early 1970s). Recalling his experiences after escaping the plantation and changing his name, Veerasamy tells Thiru that he was called Sammy, “the way you call a dog” (14) – Sammy being a common derogatory name for Indian men, presumably because the suffix “samy” is common in many Hindu surnames (Vahed, “Constructions” 84). The benevolent-sounding effect of this diminutive name is vastly different from the Graeco-Roman names that many masters gave to male slaves in the Americas; often associated with a powerful historic figure, the names carried weight.<sup>137</sup> There is, of course, an element of mockery to the practice of bestowing powerful names upon the disempowered. Sammy sounds less derisive. On the face of it, it appears to be an anglicisation and thus suggests cultural assimilation, but like the names of male American slaves, it is in fact a deceptive marker of slavehood. Here *Revenge of Kali* looks back, drawing connections between colonial and pre-democratic South Africa, in which the subaltern community is denied personhood. From a post-apartheid perspective, this reads as reclamation of an identity previously denied.

By representing the Natal plantation as yielding circumstances associated with chattel slavery, Hassim essentially challenges the ontology of indenture, and the stripping away of the indentured workers’ personhood reveals that, for Hassim, indenture relied on the same logic of racial inferiority as chattel slavery. This, in turn, troubles the notion of chattel slavery as predicated on blackness. Susan Buck-Morss quotes Eric Williams’ remark that “[s]lavery was not born of racism; rather, racism was the consequence of slavery,” and explains that, because the use of Africans for plantation labour was so lucrative, proponents of slavery sought to promote differences based on race as a way of justifying the practice, appealing to theories that Africans were naturally fit for it (89-90). This resulted in an imbrication of slavery with blackness (90), so that what was essentially an economic venture acquired a racial slant.

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<sup>136</sup> Further explanations for the term’s possible origins are provided by Tinker 41-42. Degrees of acceptance of the term “coolie” differ throughout the Asian diasporic realm and throughout its historical use, sometimes meaning only an Asian labourer, oftentimes one employed by a European. In South Africa, where it can refer to someone merely of Indian descent and not specifically one who performs menial labour, the term is regarded as highly derogatory, as it is in many other regions. *Coolitude*, however, attempts to reclaim the once “debased and pejorative word,” suggests Khal Torabully (Carter and Torabully 144), thereby reaffirming those whose origins lie in indenture.

<sup>137</sup> For the practice of slave naming, see Cody and Inscoc.

Hassim's and Douglass' critique of plantation brutality is similar – their labourers project notions of brutishness back onto their oppressors – but their treatment of resistance to the brutality is quite different. The dehumanising treatment meted out to the indentured in *Revenge of Kali* generates caution over the possibilities of retaliation. Ellapen's warning to avoid retaliation in the wake Nabee's demise (the result of being flogged by *sirdars*), impugns the notion, supported throughout slavery and indentured projects, of the labouring subaltern peoples as irrational and barbaric.<sup>138</sup> In the events that follow Nabee's assault, the workers decide to resist the *sirdars*' brutal treatment upon witnessing his flogging; incited by their heritage as descendants of Krishna Deva, a warrior king in Indian philosophy, they resolve to retaliate but, as “[t]he danger of a bloodthirsty mob seeking vengeance” (39) begins to stir, they are stopped by Ellapen, who cautions: “Anger, without a sense of responsibility, is a futile emotion. It is an instinctive reaction, the response of an animal. It achieves nothing of lasting value. When your brain is on fire you lose your reason, you become irrational” (40). For Ellapen, to resort to physical vengeance would be “the response of a barbarian” (41).

Hassim shows how the physical harshness perpetrated against the indentured underscores his protagonists' reluctance towards violent resistance as a means of attaining freedom. They instead undertake a stance of “organised resistance” (43) by tying Ellapen to the Flogging Tree (against which workers are routinely tied and whipped) and, by clasping onto him, form a chain of bodies, to the bewilderment of the *sirdars*. The demonstration against the Flogging Tree prefigures a common position in the experience of Indians in South Africa during the early- and mid-twentieth century. It resembles the practice of passive resistance that was later developed into *satyagraha* by M. K. Gandhi during his years in the country and redeployed by Indian South African activists, both leading up to and during the apartheid period, and which helped to assert an Indian South African identity and sense of belonging within the national imaginary.<sup>139</sup> Gandhi championed abstention from violence, opposing the notion that freedom as an end could be justified by whatever means (Metcalf and Metcalf 171). Hence the foreboding title of the novel, which mentions Kali, a Hindu goddess whose charge it is to protect her devotees: justice will prevail, the novel avers, but the onus to avenge wrongs does not lie with the oppressed.<sup>140</sup>

In depicting the violence of the system of slavery, one of Douglass' notable strategies is to invert racial prejudices by depicting slave drivers as animalistic: Edward Covey, or “[t]he creature” as Douglass calls him at one point (261), had a “fierce and savage disposition” (258), was “of thin and wolfish visage,” spoke “in a sort of light growl, like a dog” (261), and was nicknamed “the snake” because of his cunning – “in his eyes and his gait we could see a snakish resemblance” (265). Douglass also repudiates notions of the subaltern's lack of personhood but does so through violent resistance. In the chapter “The Last Flogging,” Douglass describes a two-hour struggle with Covey, a “farm renter” and notorious “negro breaker” (258) to whom Douglass (now only 16) is hired out to by Thomas Auld in order to be disciplined into

<sup>138</sup> Many planters imaged the indentured process “as part of the civilising mission,” projecting various defects onto those not of European extraction, to absolve themselves and dominate or abuse colonial subjects (Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 123).

<sup>139</sup> For Gandhi's own explanation of the difference between passive resistance and *satyagraha*, see Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 120-25; and Gandhi, *The Collected Works* 350.

<sup>140</sup> In one of the novel's subplots, Miley loses his way because he resorts to violence and seeks revenge on his father, who had abandoned the family.

submission.<sup>141</sup> It is here in St. Michael's that Douglass works as a field hand for the first time. He describes Covey as a stealthy agitator who, having been an overseer, "well understood the business of slave driving" (265) and attends to the field hands to persistently deliver harsh words or lashes. Of his own altercation with Covey, Douglass writes:

[It] was the turning point in my 'life as a slave.' It rekindled in my breast the smouldering embers of liberty; it brought up my Baltimore dreams, and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and self-confidence, and inspired me with renewed determination to be a FREEMAN. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. [...] From this time, until that of my escape from slavery, I was never fairly whipped. Several attempts were made to whip me, but they were unsuccessful. [...] [T]he case I have been describing, was the end of the brutification to which slavery had subjected me. (286-87, original emphasis)

A pivotal moment in Douglass' journey to freedom, his confrontation with Covey displays his rejection of one of the basic premises of chattel slavery – that the slave is not a man. This prolonged incident of aggression and forcefulness becomes for Douglass an identity-forming and humanity-affirming encounter. Unlike the pacifism of Ellapen and his peers, Douglass' citation of Lord Byron's plea in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, "Hereditary bondmen, know ye not/Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow?" (287), is resonant with the view that he expresses elsewhere, that physical resistance is fundamental to attaining liberation. In his novella *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass equates the attempt of Madison Washington and other slaves partaking in a revolt on the sailing vessel *Creole* to the pursuits of America's Founding Fathers to separate themselves from the grip of English rule: "We struck for our freedom, and if a true man's heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, *so were they*" (2169, original emphasis). (The character and events are based on the experiences of the real Madison Washington. Considering Douglass' argument pertaining to freedom and his view of the Revolution as the nation's birth in American history, the name Washington is, of course, significant.) For Douglass, physical resistance is an objection to the exclusion of blacks, and especially black slaves, from American civil society, which is accentuated throughout much of his work with his strong identification of himself and his fictional slave protagonists as Americans by way of birth. What Douglass appeals to is an essentialist American history and identity within which African American slaves are accommodated. Recourse to the ideals of the Founding Fathers serves his purpose of informing readers in the North of the plight of slaves and gaining their sympathy by establishing an association with them as fellow Americans, instead of invoking an African American identity. His ancestral roots lie elsewhere, but so do theirs, and he belongs on American soil as much as they do.

On the other hand, when Ellapen tells his fellow workers not to avenge Nabee's death because "[they] are the offspring of the most civilised nation on earth" (53-54), he avows an Indian identity unaffected by life in South Africa, a cultural legacy that transcends the dislocations of indenture. In *Revenge of Kali*, indentured service in South Africa is located

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<sup>141</sup> For the conditions of slave hiring, see Kolchin 109-10.



within a long history of Indian cultivation of land. Although the indentured were brought over to perform unskilled labour and are dismissed as “‘illiterate’ coolies” (48), the novel portrays them as knowledgeable and proficient in agricultural matters, evidenced by the plantation gardener Veeran’s knowledge of the surrounding environment’s plants, a product of his wisdom in Ayurvedic medicine. Hassim situates this knowledge within Indic civilisation’s considerable antiquity, seen in the ironic portrayal of the Macedonian general Niarchus’ “discovery” of *sakkar* (sugar) in the novel’s prologue (9). This episode, which recollects Alexander the Great’s campaign to conquer India, reveals the country’s contribution to other nations’ projects of expansion in which India’s people, their knowledge and their skills were ultimately exploited:

Niarchus was unaware that he had chewed on a piece of *sakkar*, cultivated in India for several millennia and mentioned, even before then, in the sacred text of the Hindu scriptures – the Atharva-veda.

As much as its syrupy taste, it was the cultivation skills, possessed by no other race on earth, that the colonists in Natal clamoured for several millennia after Niarchus’ overwhelming discovery.

The sweetness of the sugar cane was soured by the brutality of the slavery that followed, and the bitter legacy it spawned. (9)

This passage identifies a pre-national India and reminds one that by the time the indentured (and the traders who followed) left for South Africa, India as it is now known was not yet in existence, for they left behind “one colonial territory for another one” (Hansen 110). In dissolving intra-Indian difference to draw a more pointed disparity between Indians and those who exploited their labour, Hassim celebrates a civilisational attachment that accompanies the desire for settlement in South Africa. In this way, he reveals how many Indians in South Africa retain an image of a “Mother Country,” as Pallavi Rastogi contends, “an icon charged with mythic resonances” (10). In *Revenge of Kali*, “Mother India” figures conspicuously in the background throughout the story. When read alongside Douglass’ narrative, the (perhaps more familiar) trope of “Mother Africa” as counterpoint occupies a more muted position. Douglass distances himself from African origins and culture, which he regards with suspicion, and instead asserts autochthony to support his appeals for equal rights to white Americans.

Given the immediacy of the problem Douglass is addressing – the fate of the Southern slave – he is likely compelled to be much less sentimental about a civilisational homeland than Hassim can afford to be. This is because, to drive home the injustices of slavery, the writer of slave narratives must present himself as “embodying the public virtues and values esteemed by his intended audience” (Olney, “I Was Born” 252) and, in the case of Douglass’ narrative, the author wants to represent the slave as a native of the United States. Hence Douglass’ suspicions of Sandy, a fellow slave whom he describes as “a genuine African” (280), who presents him with a root for protection against Covey, an idea he dismisses as infringing upon his Christian beliefs. Douglass laments his status in the land of his birth as essentially foreign. He writes: “[A]s to nation, I belong to none. I have no protection at home, or resting-place abroad. The land of my birth welcomes me to her shores only as a slave, that I am an outcast from the society of my childhood, and an outlaw in the land of my birth,” and quotes a passage from Psalms, “I am a stranger to thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were” (372). The implication

of sojourning is of course ironic; slaves in the New World were not intended to be returned to their lands of origin (as with the indentured), and Douglass determines the slave's fate as one of rootedness, not an esteemed state of rootedness but rather an inflexible, forbidding rootedness produced by a lack of freedom to move as one wills:

The people of the north, and free people generally, I think, have less attachment to the places where they are born and brought up, than have the slaves. Their freedom to go and come, to be here and there, as they list, prevents any extravagant attachment to any one particular place, in their case. On the other hand, the slave is a fixture; he has no choice, no goal, no destination; but is pegged to a single spot, and must take root here, or nowhere. (238)

Douglass comprehends his movement between plantations as a never-ending search for home, a plight that supports Saidiya Hartman's view that "[t]he domain of the stranger is always an elusive elsewhere" (4). His narrative is characterised by several (often-recursive) iterations. At the same time, the movements that indicate his lack of belonging simultaneously provoke a fiercer desire for freedom, as they introduce him to the world beyond the plantation. Being moved around between duties and plantations was common and could mean a change of status for the slave (Kolchin 110). Douglass makes the point that his first transfer between plantations is what sets in motion his eventual escape from slavery, although it would be years before it was realised. His desire for movement instead of the fixedness of plantation life is further revealed in his wonder at the vessels he spots at Chesapeake Bay, of which he thinks: "You are loosed from your moorings, and free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip!" (268). Douglass' position as field hand leaves him moored to the land and unable to satisfy his hankering for movement. He recognises his only movement as that imposed through violence upon his body, revealing the way that slavery, as John D. Cox writes, denied slaves what is "[p]erhaps the central, even defining, freedom promised to citizens of the United States," namely "the freedom of movement" (64). However, the movement that slaves were generally subject to – as a result of being sold off and transported elsewhere – underscores their lack of agency. In fact, the narrative as Douglass presents it prior to his escape is one marked by recursive movement, back and forth between plantations, at the whim of masters and plantation owners.

What is more, Douglass' somewhat sarcastic inclusion of the word "sojourn," as quoted earlier, instigates consideration of a more forthright use of the term. In contrasting the transoceanic journeys of New World slaves and Asian indentured workers, it is the latter group whose residence in far-off lands was intended to be temporary. But in many cases, often of their own choosing, indentured labourers chose to remain permanently in their host countries, part of the reason being that the transoceanic passage incited the formation of a new identity. As Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie explains in the context of South African indenture, "the minute the journey from India began a new identity was starting to develop, one that would grow further on African soil" (*From Cane Fields* 13). The fact that Thiru hails his quest to recover the memories of his indentured ancestors as his "coolie odyssey" (a phrase he shares with the title of David Dabydeen's poetry collection and Rajesh Gopie's South African play) prompts one to consider *Revenge of Kali* in terms of the theoretical parameters of *coolitude*. Conceived by

Mauritian poet Khal Torabully in *Cale d'Etoiles* (1992) as “a sort of Indian version of *Négritude*” (Carter and Torabully 15), *coolitude* seeks to articulate the lives of those in the diaspora as a result of indenture (148) and to recover “the song of a forgotten voyage” (16), since the transoceanic journey is pivotal to these diasporic experiences. Defined as “a process of identity construction” (155) that posits “the interplay between cultures” to create “a composite identity” (145), *coolitude* seems an apt description of the identity formation sketched by Hassim in his portrayal of Veerasamy and his descendants.

In view of the vexing question of how the Indian communities in South Africa choose to identify themselves in the post-apartheid period – as (South) African, as Indian, or as Indian South African,<sup>142</sup> Veerasamy and his progeny are Indian (South) Africans, or what Rastogi terms “Afrindian” (1). Hassim posits a complex identity formation for the indentured and their descendants, one that comprises a quality of “twoness,” to use W. E. B. du Bois’s term (7): they are both Indian and South African (despite lacking official citizenship status) through their labouring of the land.<sup>143</sup> In contrast to Douglass’ more essentialist identity, which is presented squarely as “American,” Hassim presents an identity that is a fusion of Indian and African, one that maintains an attachment to a civilisational home country. Hassim’s indentured are isolated from the colonial culture in which they are employed, while also seeing their environment as “the land of the Zulu” (35), hence the difficulty of constructing a sense of belonging. This is clear when Thiru pleads the following to Malliga:

I’m through apologising for sins that my ancestors were never guilty of. This new war cry: ‘Go back where you came from’, what does it mean? Back to the Canefields? The Duchene? India? If I don’t belong here, does the so-called Negro, the descendants of slaves, belong in America? What about the Italians and the Irish? Do they not belong there either? What about the Afrikaners, who are truly a tribe of Africa; where are they supposed to go? (168)

Samuelson interprets this as “an Africanist rejection of the Indian presence in Africa” (“(Un)Settled” 277).<sup>144</sup> Several African countries have witnessed anti-Indian sentiments since gaining independence, with Idi Amin’s expulsion of Indians from Uganda being a well-known example. Xenophobic comments about Indians by eminent Africans have also emerged in post-apartheid South Africa (Ramsamy 475). (Hassim’s use of the riots of 1949 as a backstory for Thiru and Miley is suggestive of this. We learn that Miley’s absent father is the only surviving child of Veerasamy, whose two other children – including Thiru’s mother, Angamma – were killed in these riots.) The theoretical assumption of “coolitude” that “seeks to emphasize the

<sup>142</sup> See the discussion by Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 9-10.

<sup>143</sup> The term appears in connection with Du Bois’s conceptualisation of “double consciousness,” the dual perspective through which subjugated people have “[a] sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (7) in trying to occupy a space in society as, for instance, both “an American, [and] a Negro” (7).

<sup>144</sup> The late 1940s witnessed increased tension between Indians and black South Africans because of competition regarding property rights and trading. See Desai 10-12. The presence of Indians was likewise a cause for much irritation by whites, for whom “the Indian Question” entailed competition in commerce, acquisition of property, and integration into residential areas (D. Du Bois 10), as well as agricultural production through the purchase or rental of land which placed them in competition with their former masters (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 15). Whites decried what they called “the Indian ‘menace’” (Meer, *The Ghetto People* 3) and numerous strictures were put in place to curb the presence of Indians in the country.

community of visions between the slave and the indentured labourer, shared by their descendants, despite the fact that these two groups, were placed in a situation of competition and conflict” (Carter and Torabully 150) is not, as Rastogi rightly points out, applicable in Africa as it is “in other labor diaspora societies” since Africans are indigenes here and not slaves (8-9). The settlement of Indians in South Africa was regarded by many black Africans as invasive and there exists a tense history between the two groups in South Africa: neither black nor white, Indians became a buffer group in the racial hierarchy of apartheid; initially refused citizenship rights, as Smitha Radhakrishnan explains, they had privileges denied black Africans because of their placement in said hierarchy (Rastogi 14).<sup>145</sup>

The relationship that Indians in South Africa had with their host country was no doubt influenced by what was for many a complicated relationship with their homeland.<sup>146</sup> Among the free Indians who did not return to India after serving the terms of their indenture, many took up market gardening, as well as farming and hawking (Vahed 79). This is the case with Veerasamy, who escapes the plantation as a young man (Kolapen) and flees to the nearby settlement of Newlands where free Indians worked market gardens, and explains why Thiru describes him as “an ancient descendant of those early settlers” (13). Here lies a significant difference in Hassim’s and Douglass’ representations of their respective bondsmen. Douglass’ attempts at freedom and his eventual escape are characterised by an adamant rejection of the plantation landscape and insistent movement. Hassim shows the South African landscape, the very landscape that introduced oppression, as a conduit towards freedom and independence, a point that is supported by Carter and Torabully, who write that “[u]nlike the slave who envisaged liberation *from* the land which had for generations tied him to the whim of the estate owner, the coolie, frequently dispossessed in his own country, saw a path to prosperity and status *through* the land, firstly as a wage labourer under indenture, and ultimately through its cultivation on his own account and acquisition in his own right” (103, original emphasis).

The first of the fictional indentured to be born in South Africa and the first to attain relative freedom, Veerasamy becomes a beacon of a transplanted national identity, the link between colonial subject and national citizen who, as Ellapen foresees, “will carry with him our dreams of a free future” when he escapes from the plantation to the nearby market gardens (72). In the passage quoted above, Thiru identifies with descendants of American slaves who were not in the United States of their own volition, as well as with immigrant groups who relocated willingly to the United States and South Africa in search of a better life. The naming of Afrikaners is particularly significant because it is ordinarily accepted that Afrikaner identity is one that transpired through labour on the land; that it is a European identity reanimated through work on African soil. Hassim thus “locate[s] his subject between the binary of ‘settler’ and ‘slave’” (Samuelson, “(Un)Settled States” 283), as Thiru clearly beseeches Malliga to comprehend the adaptive potential of cultivation, the way new national identities may take root

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<sup>145</sup> For information on the socio-political position of Indians in post-apartheid South Africa, see Ramsamy.

<sup>146</sup> With time, the indentured – who could make use of the Protector of Indian Immigration to deliver letters or send money to loved ones at home – lost contact with India, so that subsequent generations were unfamiliar with ancestral villages (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 14). Although permitted to return to India for free upon expiration of their contracts, many returned to re-indenture (Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 3, 15) or chose the alternative, the acquisition of a piece of crownland. Vally explains that the process of re-integration for those who repatriated to India was challenging: stripped of caste distinctions and unwelcome in the villages from which they came, many of the ex-indentured experienced their homeland as “a ‘foreign’ country” upon their return (31).

through it. There is also a proclivity to read the experiences of Indian indenture throughout the various diasporas, including in South Africa, as narratives of victimisation,<sup>147</sup> argues Thomas Blom Hansen, “without according much substantial agency to the diverse sets of people under this rubric” (109). His point reminds one that, for many, indenture was a gamble that paid off, if not immediately. This is evidenced by Thiru’s life. As Miley’s long-lost cousin, Thiru is also a descendant of the indentured, who is raised by his grandparents. Although he also spends his youth working illicitly to provide for his family, he is able to put himself through school and becomes a successful criminal lawyer. As a foil to Miley, whose life story is one of chaos and disruptions, Thiru’s fate calls attention to the fact that many Indians in South Africa have enjoyed substantial and, at times, relatively rapid social mobility. As the term “odyssey” implies, Thiru’s mission is one intent upon a recovery, that of origins, and not, as Douglass’ lack of rootedness compels, a creation of origins.

Douglass does not present such an overt association of cultivation and belonging, but he subtly suggests circumstances of rootedness contingent upon autonomy when he remarks that his grandparents, Isaac and Betsey Baily, are regarded as “old settlers” (140) in their community. Douglass does not make it clear why exactly they are regarded thus, but he acknowledges that they had lived in their region for a long time and were no longer working as field hands due to old age, that they lived in cabins that resemble those of “the first settlers” (141) and that Betsy was highly regarded among neighbouring blacks for her potato crops, which she shared among the community. North American slaves were sometimes permitted to have their own gardens, as well as some animals such as chickens and pigs, to supplement the rations they received from their masters.<sup>148</sup> In view of this final point, one could infer that perhaps Betsey assumes the status of settler because she (finally) labours the land according to her own will and not for the benefit of another. Yet, as Peter Kolchin has also indicated, these plots were not inheritable (109) – the slaves or ex-slaves did not own them as such – so that the rootedness, if it even amounts to that, enjoyed by Betsey and Isaac has no legal status and will not inhere for later generations.

Douglass’ description of Isaac and Betsey is a brief glimpse into the lives of relatives in a work that stresses throughout the scant relations enjoyed by slaves. The breaking up of families, suggests Kolchin, was one way in which the domestic slave trade “replicated” the international trade (96). Kolchin acknowledges that there was significant “interference in the family lives of slaves,” noting that “[l]egally, slave families were non-existent: no Southern state recognized marriage between slave men and women, and legal authority over slave children rested not with their parents but with their masters” (122). The disintegration of slave families in the South is one of the first hardships that Douglass writes about. His early years are spent with his grandparents, but when he is dropped off at the plantation of his owner, Captain Anthony, he is estranged from his siblings and cousins who are already there: “Brothers and sisters we were by blood; but *slavery* had made us strangers” (149, original emphasis). He also writes:

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<sup>147</sup> See Carter and Torabully 45-87.

<sup>148</sup> See Bush 108 and Kolchin 109-113.

The practice of separating children from their mothers, and hiring the latter out at distances too great to admit of their meeting, except at long intervals, is a marked feature of the cruelty and barbarity of the slave system. But it is in harmony with the grand aim of slavery, which, always and everywhere, is to reduce man to a level with the brute. It is a successful method of obliterating from the mind and heart of the slave, all just ideas of the sacredness of *the family*, as an institution. (142, original emphasis)

Douglass' observations about the estranging effects of slavery are supported by Hartman's view in her travelogue and memoir, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007). In it, Hartman recounts her trip to Ghana, the nexus of nine slave routes, and concurs with the alienation of blood relations as described by Douglass. For Hartman, "[t]he most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country, dishonoured and violated, the coerced migrant, the foreigner, the shamefaced child in the lineage" (5). Douglass sees little of his mother as a child, for she (a slave hand hired out to work on another plantation, a considerable distance off) makes brief visits to Lloyd's plantation, mostly at night. Stripped both of mother and, historically, motherland, Douglass is a much more unknowing figure than Hassim's Ellapen. Ignorant of his birthdate, his place of birth and his family name (or whether they even have one) Douglass is deprived of "[s]ignificant temporal markers" and the "spatial presence" that enables "familial cohesion," according to Cynthia Nielsen (253). He has no certainty about the identity of his father and can only speculate that it is his master. "Born for another's benefit" (*My Bondage* 147), Douglass lacks a past and, with little hope of ever leaving the plantation, appears to be devoid of a future too.

Ellapen, by contrast, has a past in India that grounds his identity, including a fiancée back named Soondrum. He was originally named Venketasamy and it is unknown under what circumstances or by whose volition Ellapen's name is changed, but upon his eventual arrival at an immigration depot in Port Natal, he is given the classification "Coolie number 252." It is here where Ellapen witnesses labourers being lined up and selected by farmers, severing families as members are sold to different masters, eliciting images of the New World slave trade. Nevertheless, with time, Ellapen forms close friendships with other workers, Mohideen and Runga, and marries a fellow indentured labourer named Angamma.<sup>149</sup> When Angamma gives birth to Kolapen, "[t]he inhabitants of the tiny hutment, who had moulded into a close-knit community, were revitalised. They had forgotten their tribal origins and caste differences, considered themselves as part of an extended family" (69). The dissolution of social boundaries among the indentured has been read in terms of traversing the *kala pani*, the "black water" of the Indian Ocean, which some Hindus believe eradicates one's caste status (Carter and Torabully 37) and, as Samuelson has done, suggested the image "of the ship as social leveller"

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<sup>149</sup> Many indentured workers, as Hassim's novel acknowledges in the same passage that covers Ellapen's kidnap, left their homeland without family, choosing to start new ones in their host country (Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 199). The formation of a family in South Africa was a noteworthy response to the system that aimed to reduce labourers to numbers and ship them back to India once they had fulfilled their contractual obligations (199).

(Samuelson, “(Un)Settled” 274).<sup>150</sup> In *Revenge of Kali*, it is the plantation that serves as such a leveller.

Notwithstanding the interferences in family life, Douglass and Hassim depict similar social orders on the plantation, stressing the presence and influence of overseers. In the American context, as Kolchin has written, the overseeing position could be occupied by a neighbouring white who is not a slaveholder, the sons of planters preparing to become proprietors themselves, or men whose professions entailed managing plantations and slave labour; and their responsibilities and degree of authority differed depending on whether they served absentee or resident owners (103). Often, a male slave – chosen “for his strength, intelligence, loyalty, and managerial ability” – was assigned the duty of driver, assisting the master or overseer, to lead and supervise each slave gang (as the groups in which slaves worked were called) (103). Sometimes, black slaves served as overseers, but, Kolchin writes, “the term ‘overseer’ was usually reserved for whites” (104). Hierarchies were thus established, and especially intricate ones on large plantations (103). Slaves were subjected to varied living conditions and because of slave sales and the hiring out of slave hands, they tended to be moved about significantly, which prevented substantial social divisions forming among them (110-11). Therefore, as Kolchin notes, “antebellum Southern slaves formed a population that paradoxically was marked by great uniformity even as it exhibited great diversity” (111).

The South African plantation differs from its American counterpart in that the overseer, who occupies an intermediary position between masters and workers, is “one of the ‘indentured’s own’” (Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 110). Known as *sirdars* in the context of Asian indenture (meaning “foremen” or “drivers”), they were chosen for their positions on the basis of their ability to impose the plantation rules – as it was often put, to bully (Carter 51; Lal, *Chalo* 51) – or any other advantage over the other workers, many of whom lacked formal education in English, which hindered their ability to communicate with their superiors (Lal, *Chalo* 51). In *Revenge of Kali*, Daniel, the indentured servant who works in the master’s house, could have become a *sirdar* since he speaks English, initially unbeknownst to his master. The *sirdar* was usually of a higher caste than the field hands and was expected to maintain conventional hierarchies – “to keep workers ‘in their place’” (Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 110). Acting as “buffers” between workers and masters, they would do the latter’s bidding (110), and their presence recreated a hierarchal structure among the indentured (108). In Hassim’s depiction, the *sirdars* routinely flog the workers, pass by them lashing their whips as they work, threaten them with fierce dogs, and, being fluent in English as well as Indic languages, perform the role of interpreter between masters and labourers, although often misinterpreting the labourers’ words deliberately to put them at a disadvantage.

While it is difficult to sympathise with the *sirdars*, it is well to remember that for them, appearing to fulfil their duties was also a matter of survival, and some were promoted to the position after working as labourers themselves, which sometimes led to animosity between workers. Hassim does not portray *sirdars* to be universally antagonistic. His depiction of

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<sup>150</sup> For many indentured labourers, the possibility of leaving India and abandoning caste loyalties, offered liberation from a confining, hierarchical system, one which engenders “many taboos and restrictions governing work, eating and socialisation in India” (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 13). For insight into the operation of the caste system in India, see Bhana, *Indentured* 60-82; and Ebr.-Vally 112-21. For the legacy of the caste system in South Africa, see Ebr.-Vally 122-42.

Beharie, an overseer who surreptitiously brings food to the labourers while pretending to revile them and who assists a worker who had collapsed with exhaustion, reveals the varied experiences of plantation life for indentured Indians.<sup>151</sup> The dominant impression in the novel, however, is that the allegiance of the *sirdars*, who enjoyed relative privilege, lies with their masters, not with their fellow Indians. The disaggregation amongst, and generally discordant relationship between, the labourers and *sirdars* magnifies the labourers' isolation on foreign soil and exhibits a fragile social order, which presages a lack of community among the Indian population in the latter sections of the novel, set during the early to mid-twentieth century. This is seen in the labourers' disapproval of the actions of Nabee, a fellow worker who repeatedly escapes and seeks help from any Indian he encounters because he assumes that national or racial identity is grounds for solidarity and support: "He doesn't differentiate, assumes *all* Indians can be trusted" (32, original emphasis).

The disintegration of class and caste distinctions among the indentured in *Revenge of Kali* – and the eventuation of a new family order among Ellapen and his peers – is a sign of their solidarity in their shared predicament. But it differs starkly from the divisiveness experienced by Ellapen's descendants in the Durban communities of the Duchene and the Casbah in the Grey Street area. Regarded as "the symbolic heart of the KwaZulu-Natal Indian community" (Jacobs, *Diaspora* 101),<sup>152</sup> the Grey Street area comprised the central business district for Indians (Maharaj, "The Integrated Community" 252). The merchant class, or "passenger" Indians, were not part of the indentured system. They came to settle in South Africa by their own means, the chance to trade supplies from India having become available due to the presence of the indentured (Desai 34). Although subject to laws of the colony, they were unaffected by those that determined the residence of the indentured (Jacobs, *Diaspora* 100) and could own land in the city (Maharaj, "Commemoration" 78). While they relied on the indentured for business, they were critically aware of, and wanted to maintain, their class differences.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> See N. Govender, "Land of Last Content" for an illustration of the indiscriminate nature of *sirdars*. In her memoir, *A Tribute to Our Forefathers* (2011), Tholsi Mudley describes the more conflicting position of the *sirdars* with reference to an ancestral overseer, Chinnien:

As a *sirdar*, Chinnien was greatly respected by all. You see, earlier on *sirdars* gained a reputation for being cruel and despotic; in order to be on good terms with their employers, they mistreated their labourers. The British were cunning. They provided *sirdars* with better facilities and wages. They ensured the *sirdars* extracted the maximum work from the labourers, irrespective of their physical condition. Many *sirdars* were known to beat the workers. In some instances, workers perished from ill treatment; a few even committed suicide. The *sirdars* went to extreme lengths to ensure that they and their families benefitted from their employers as much as possible. Chinnien, however, was a gentle soul. The labourers looked up to him. (61)

<sup>152</sup> The Casbah (a name that references the Arab medina quarters of North African cities such as Algiers) is what the Warwick Avenue Triangle, a working class residential area in the inner-city part of Durban, was colloquially known as (Maharaj, "The Integrated Community" 250).

<sup>153</sup> Divergent circumstances and backgrounds (such as variations in language, religion, class, and so on) characterise the immigration of Indians to South Africa, which has led scholars to concur that the Indian population in South Africa has never been a homogeneous one (Chetty ii; Desai 4; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 28) but rather, as Rastogi asserts, "marked more by difference than by similarity" (11). Moreover, as Desai notes, by 1893, three distinct groups of Indian immigrants existed in South Africa, consolidating the lack of



In *Revenge of Kali*, these Indians of relative rank are nicknamed “larnies,” defined in the novel’s glossary as “wealthy people [and] businessmen” (211). They enjoy relative privilege for people of colour at the time, generally as the proprietors of shops and apartments catering to other Indians. Affluent neighbours in the Duchene area dismiss Sarah, Miley’s mother, as a “girmit wallah” (108) because of her ancestral origins in indenture (the term “girmit” meaning “agreement,” in reference to the labour contract [Lal, *Girmitiyas* 27]).<sup>154</sup> The narrative action surrounding Miley and his mother in the novel’s second section, “The Duchene,” occurs against the backdrop of what is informally called the “Grey Street System,” described in the novel as a “system of vassalage” (115) and, more pointedly, as “a system of slavery” by Hassim in one interview (Basckin and Molver 00:37:35-00:37:36). It was an intricate business system that working-class Indians could not avoid since most could only work inside the Casbah, and it was controlled by wealthy, conniving businessmen who fleeced their workers and abused the latter’s families, and whose affluence and power expanded because they tended to own multiple branches throughout the complex (00:37:13-00:41:50).

The novel’s third section, “The Casbah,” follows shrewd shop owners who pay their workers less than is due to them by exploiting kickbacks. Moreover, since many of these businessmen also own the flats in which working-class Indian families live, they unjustly evict tenants to gain deposits from new ones. It is a system of servitude and exploitation that harkens back to the days of indenture and its demands of maximum labour; “the Grey Street businessman,” Hassim has opined, “was worse than any slave owner you could think of. They didn’t own you as a slave legally, but maybe [in] other way[s], they owned their workers” (00:41:18-00:41:37). On the grounds that this shows an exploitation of labour for economic benefit, Hassim deploys a metaphoric of slavery to show, as he has put it, “what the Indian did to his own people” (00:37:29-31). He is careful to offer a nuanced portrayal of the position of Indian South Africans to show that for those whose origins lie in indentured service, the injunctions of apartheid continue a longstanding process of alienation not just from other nationals but from fellow Indians.

Through its attention to the disenfranchisement of Indians in South Africa, “The Duchene” and “The Casbah” resemble *The Lotus People* because they share a focus on apartheid injunctions, especially in urban spaces. *The Lotus People* is Gandhian in its championing of Indians in South Africa; indeed, the Mahatma himself appears in the early stages of the novel, giving an impassioned speech advocating freedom.<sup>155</sup> Gandhi established the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in 1894 in an attempt to instil a sense of unity amongst Indians (Bhana and Vahed 14), an effort that persisted through his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, established in 1903 (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 21). Through the newspaper, Gandhi strove to shed light on the struggles of Indians in South Africa, including the indentured (Bhana and Vahed 114). “We are not,” Gandhi proclaimed, “and ought not to be, Tamils or

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cohesion within the broader community, namely: workers still contracted to perform indentured service; “free” Indians, that is, the ex-indentured who had served the duration of their contracts and chose not to repatriate; and “passenger” Indians (4). The diverse quality of Indian communities in South Africa distinguishes its Indian population from those elsewhere in Africa, which mainly comprise merchant classes (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 28) who enjoy an elite station (Ramsamy 477). For information on the relationship between Natal’s indentured and trading immigrants, see Bhana, *Indentured* 7-33; Bhana, “Indian Trade”; and Brain.

<sup>154</sup> The word “wallah,” from *wālā* in several Indian languages, is an agentive suffix. See Mesthrie 30.

<sup>155</sup> See Hassim, *The Lotus People* 65-68.

Calcutta men, Mahomedans or Hindus, Brahmins or Banyas, but simply and solely British Indians” (qtd. in Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 21). Gandhi’s philosophy was reformulated by Indian South African activists in the years leading up to and during apartheid, most prominently Yusuf Dadoo, to address South African issues.<sup>156</sup> The centrality of Indian struggle heroes in *The Lotus People* – figures such as Dadoo, Kesavaloo Goonum and Monty Naiker<sup>157</sup> – and the various protests they spearheaded, make it a novel that, in keeping with the often-celebratory revisionism of post-apartheid narratives, lauds resistance efforts and political idols whose struggles become representative narratives for the communities they fought for. With its depiction of resistance to apartheid through its central characters who are the descendants of Pathans, Sikhs and Gurkhas, *The Lotus People* is a celebration of the Gandhian “we.”

*Revenge of Kali* is different. Time and again, Hassim stresses that the indentured and their descendants endured a unique experience in South Africa, one not shared by Indians who arrived (or whose ancestors arrived) outside of the waves of indentured immigration. Under rule of Jan Smuts’s United Party, the government implemented the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946, colloquially referred to as the Ghetto Act, by which land in Natal was divided between “controlled areas” reserved only for white purchase and occupation, and “free or exempted areas” with no restrictions on the basis of race (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields* 17). When Miley’s childhood friends and fellow hustlers, Mo, Monty and Siphon, become more involved in political resistance because of the Ghetto Act (being influenced by real-life figures like Naiker and Dadoo), he grows increasingly disillusioned by life in the Casbah. He resents the violence inhering in resistance efforts, while the animosity and uneasiness within the broader Indian community explains why he refuses to support such efforts against the apartheid government, believing that the “larnies” are only disgruntled at the treatment of Indians now that they too are affected, after having already enriched themselves from the labour of fellow Indians. He cries out: “Do you ever hear anything about the exploitation of our people, *by our own* people? Do they hold rallies to protest against that crime? That has been going on for over a hundred years. Now, suddenly, there is this new law, which politicians call the ‘Ghetto Act’, in opposition to which we must lay down our lives. They want the exploited to take up arms to defend the assets of the exploiter” (192, original emphasis). He suggests that the noble efforts of the indentured – who frequently occupied a destitute position in India and again in South Africa – have been lost in the struggle, in the prominence of figures like Dadoo and Naiker, who represent relative privilege not enjoyed by

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<sup>156</sup> Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo was a medical doctor and anti-apartheid activist who played a significant role in liaising between the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, and the South African Indian Congress, the last two of which he chaired. He studied medicine at Edinburgh University. Born in South Africa, he visited India as a child, and as an activist, was deeply inspired by India’s endeavours for independent rule, calling the country “a resting place of the imagination” (qtd. in Hansen 110). The former Grey Street in Durban now bears his name.

<sup>157</sup> Kesavaloo Goonarathnum Naidoo, commonly remembered as Dr Goonam (sometimes spelled “Goonum”), was an anti-apartheid activist who studied medicine at Edinburgh University and authored a seminal text in the oeuvre of Indian South African literature, *Coolie Doctor: An Autobiography* (1991). Gangathura Mohambry “Monty” Naiker also qualified as a medical doctor from Edinburgh University before returning to South Africa and becoming involved in the Natal Indian Passive Resistance Campaign. He was president of the NIC from 1945-1963. For sources on the adoption of Gandhian ideas by South African activists, see Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “Satyagraha in South Africa”; Raman; and Vahed, “Monty.”

the likes of Miley, and in the way that post-apartheid narratives of struggle heroes tend to neglect the plight of the common man.

Although Hassim's novel does not subscribe to the view of a unified Indian experience in South Africa, and while some chapters are narrated from Thiru's perspective, it is not his story alone but rather the story of a collective – those who were indentured and their descendants – whose memory Thiru is tasked with recovering. Hassim's is a more selective "we" than that proposed by Gandhi but, in bifocal perspective, it directs our attention to the collective focus of Douglass' book. For in undertaking to produce a slave narrative, Douglass is responsible for presenting the plight of many although the autobiographical quality of the narrative makes it an individualistic hero's path to freedom; and it is not an "I" who stands straightforwardly for many, but an "I" who comes into being *en route* to emancipation. Although Douglass sets himself the task of presenting his life in slavery as typical for slaves in the South, and while he has become known as a representative figure in African American studies, his autobiography presents an inherent tension between the notion of a communal experience and the self-actualisation of the author that the narrative represents.<sup>158</sup> Since the narrative is focalised through his perspective and his perspective alone, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (a title that magnifies the singularity of the experience retold) is Douglass' quest, not only for freedom but for self-creation. He resembles the singular male hero of the American Renaissance, an American Adam who creates himself by overcoming his society's infractions upon his freedom.<sup>159</sup> For former slaves aiming to convey their experiences, the autobiographical form offered an expression of protest, solidifying the notion of the slave as an articulate person and not, as proponents of slavery would suggest, less than human. As Paul Gilroy writes: "[Slave autobiographies] express in the most powerful way a tradition of writing in which autobiography becomes an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation. The presentation of a public persona thus becomes a founding motif within the expressive culture of the American diaspora" (69). The story that Thiru recovers – the story embodied by Miley's life experiences – is the story of an everyman; but the story that Douglass presents, in which "Fred" as he is known growing up, becomes "Frederick Douglass," is a story of a personality who stands apart from the rest.

The issue of focalisation also draws attention to genre. Historical fiction has become a popular genre for writers in post-apartheid South Africa addressing the subject of Indian arrival in the country.<sup>160</sup> The genre shares with traditional American slave narratives a tracing of the trajectory of a people from bondage to freedom and self-actualisation. Of course, the difference is that the South African authors look back to a much more distant past than writers such as Douglass. Reflecting on a more immediate past to produce accounts of their lives in bondage, writers of slave narratives in the mid-nineteenth century were writing to resolve political circumstances pertinent to their present. Writers like Hassim are obviously not driven by a

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<sup>158</sup> For views on Douglass' representativeness, see Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black* 108; McDowell 208; Moses; Olney, "The Founding Fathers"; and Zafar.

<sup>159</sup> In this sense, Douglass' text is a product of the Romantic era. "As a literary and philosophical movement," Daniel Shanahan explains, "Romanticism represents what one might call a celebration of the empowered self. The individual – fully conscious and anxious to test his or her powers of awareness to the utmost – is the overriding Romantic motif[,] as virtually self-originated; self-discovery amounted to a process of self-creation" (91).

<sup>160</sup> Others include Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding* (2001) and Praba Moodley's *The Heart Knows No Colour* (2003).

similar objective and are therefore not bound to genre in the way Douglass was. Still, since the bifocal involves a temporal disjuncture in the texts' retrospective nature, it is worth reflecting on the potential purchase of utilising the genre of historical fiction for those portraying the history of indenture in South Africa. In extending the story over three distinct eras in South African history (colonial, pre-apartheid and apartheid), Hassim is able to depict the prolonged history of Indians in the country. This offers validation for a people whose presence in, and allegiance to, an adopted homeland has been questioned, and who have questioned it themselves with the onset of South Africa's democracy. In other words, the genre helps to attach historical substance to the presence of Indians in South Africa, contesting the idea that Indians maintain a flimsy, insubstantial connection to the nation and firmly grounds them in the national imaginary. Furthermore, in detailing a family saga that covers a range of economic and socio-political impositions that affected generations of Thiru's family, Hassim challenges the idea that Indians form a universally prosperous immigrant community who have thrived as imposters and exploiters of truer indigenes. Instead, he insists that Indians suffered many of the same injustices as other racial groups afflicted by colonialism and apartheid, in some cases enduring discrimination wholly unique among the broader Indian South African community and the even broader Indian diaspora. Indeed, by depicting Indian indenture as parallel to transatlantic slavery, Hassim renders the question of indigeneity to be of secondary importance.

To return to the question of self-actualisation noted in the above discussion of focalisation, it is notable that both Douglass and Hassim chart journeys to freedom that begin on plantations and end in urban spaces. Both *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Revenge of Kali* situate their protagonists' lives post bondage in cities. For Douglass, the city (New York) is a place of opportunity and liberation where he lives under his newly chosen name and gets married. The city is thus a locus of self-creation. For Hassim, however, the city detracts from, instead of contributing to, his protagonists' identities. We read that Veerasamy, the first of Ellapen's descendants to be born on African soil, is taught Tamil while on the plantation because "[i]t will remind him of his roots" (70), but with time, as the socio-political atmosphere in South Africa worsens, these roots are relinquished, as seen when Veerasamy laments to Thiru that when his children moved to the city, they anglicised their names. Life in the city constitutes a stripping away of roots. Hence Thiru's odyssey to recover them, although this does not lead him to India, but to the landscapes of the earlier plantations. For Hassim, this crude connection with the land is transfigured into an affective one. Although the indentured initially long for a return to India, their later efforts for Veerasamy to break away is proof of an acceptance of South Africa as the home on which their lineage will continue. Moreover, that this journey to the Canelands is, as Veerasamy calls it, "a homecoming, a return to your roots" (15), reveals that the enervating labour of the indentured is in fact registered as a juncture of national belonging.

The opposite is true for Douglass. The plantation landscapes he encounters offer very little; they merely bear the agricultural damages of slave labour, environmental depletion that taints inhabitants with demoralising characters.<sup>161</sup> As he shows in the opening line of his narrative, the landscape reveals a type of deficiency, both of land and inhabitants:

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<sup>161</sup> For a reading of the anti-pastoral in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, see Bennett.

In Talbot county, Eastern Shore, Maryland, near Easton, the county town of that county, there is a small district of country, thinly populated, and remarkable for nothing that I know of more than for the worn-out, sandy, desert-like appearance of its soil, the general dilapidation of its farms and fences, the indigent and spiritless character of its inhabitants, and the prevalence of ague and fever. (139)

Outwardly, the plantations in both Douglass' and Hassim's texts flourish, but both writers offer grim descriptions of the landscapes' verdurous conditions as sustained by human bondage in effusively somatic terms. *My Bondage and My Freedom* includes a letter to the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in which Douglass recalls "that with the waters of [America's] noblest rivers, the tears of my brethren are borne to the ocean, disregarded and forgotten, and that her most fertile fields drink daily of the warm bloods of my outraged sisters" (373). Countering the mythologised image of the American plantation-as-garden as regenerative, as a new Eden, Douglass' words suggest a landscape of depletion. This pained assertion echoes Thiru's view of his visit to the Canelands, about which he tells Malliga that his "ancestors are buried there," that the "land is soaked with the blood of our people. The soil was irrigated by their tears" (12), and Veerasamy tells Thiru that "the river that chills your bones flows with the tears of those who came before you; that the verdant land [...] was irrigated by those very tears" (15). It is more than the physical transaction of labour that preserves and enriches these landscapes; it is a sacrificial exhaustion of human flesh.

Only once are the indentured given a glimpse of the plantation that verges on the totality of the landscape. When Ellapen and Runga are assigned to work on the roof of their master's house alongside Mohideen, another indentured worker, they are given a comprehensive view of a breathtaking landscape:

Once in a while, one or the other would lean on a truss and survey the countryside, entranced by the grandeur of the landscape. From their heightened position they had a bird's-eye view of the gentle hills and neat furrows of cane stretching far into the distance. The spectacular panorama left them breathless, stirred by its magnificence. For the first time since they had disembarked at Durban harbour, they felt mellow and at peace with their world. It was a transient emotion, swiftly dispelled the moment they lowered their eyes and saw their countrymen labouring at their dreary chores in the yard below them. (27-28)

Their elevated position reconfigures the daunting and confining plantation landscape as awe-inspiring. Hassim's invocation of their coming ashore in Durban while conveying this subliminal moment reinforces the fact that for most of such labourers the process of indenture was intended to be a beneficial excursion. This sense of wonderment is, however, undercut by the rest of the scene. Their vantage point mimics the gaze of their master, who surveys his land on horseback, and the inclusion of their fellow workers in the image serves to remind them that they are not uninvolved viewers of this landscape but are, like the workers in Douglass' antipastoral depiction, part of the landscape that is being cultivated. Not unlike the scene of Douglass beholding Chesapeake Bay, this is a moment of both elation and disappointment.

This is the only moment when the indentured are able to comprehend the magnitude of the landscape. It points towards the labourers' incomprehension of the land they inhabit. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, this incomprehension is employed by overseers as a surveillance strategy. Seemingly omnipresent, Covey performs "a series of adroitly managed surprises" and "would creep and crawl, in ditches and gullies; hide behind stumps and bushes" (265), and Douglass notes that it became "scarcely necessary for Mr. Covey to be really present in the field, to have the work performed industriously. He had the faculty of making us feel that he was always present" (265). In other words, what transpires in the slaves is the internalisation of the master's panoptic gaze. This is showcased by the garden-like description of the plantation belonging to Douglass' second master, Col. Lloyd:

The carriage entrance to the house was a large gate, more than a quarter of a mile distant from it; the immediate space was a beautiful lawn, very neatly trimmed, and watched with the greatest care. It was dotted thickly over with delightful trees, shrubbery, and flowers. The road, or lane, from the gate to the great house, was richly paved with white pebbles from the beach, and, in its course, formed a complete circle around the beautiful lawn. Carriages going in and retiring from the great house, made the circuit of the lawn, and their passengers were permitted to behold a scene of almost Eden-like beauty. (162)

As discussed in the reading of *Clotel* in the previous chapter, the southern garden merely appears unspoilt but is corrupted by the employment of slaves to maintain it. The same rings true for the above description of Lloyd's plantation, as Douglass goes on to juxtapose the buoyant beauty of the plantation's anterior with the "the stately mansions of the dead," the home's burial ground (163). Described as "embowered beneath the weeping willow and the fir tree," the scene has been known to display "[s]trange sights" and "[s]hrouded ghosts, riding on great black horses, had been seen to enter; balls of fire had been seen to fly there at midnight, and horrid sounds had been repeatedly heard" (163). In the passage from which these lines are taken, Douglass stresses the wealth of the Colonel and his family, pointedly remarking that this acceded prosperity is thanks their ownership of slaves, and it is this that adds the haunted aspect to the plantation. As Douglass reasons, "Slaves know enough of the rudiments of theology to believe that those go to hell who die slaveholders; and they often fancy such persons wishing themselves back again, to wield the lash" (163). The wholesome and invigorating exterior of the plantation's façade is thus just that, a façade, a misleading image (Bodzioc 253), that succeeds in deceiving because of the containment that surveillance ensures. Bodzioc singles out the following lines from the above-quoted passage: that "[t]he lawn is 'watched with the greatest care,' and the enclosure was 'select.' That passengers 'were permitted to behold' suggests a certain, carefully chosen grace has been granted," and he concludes that the scene subtly suggests an element of "guardedness," that this is an "insular" space (252). The picturesque nature of the American landscape is therefore attenuated by Douglass' claims of the plantation's self-containment and the punitive strategies that this containment relies upon. Indeed, surveillance of labour and insularity of the landscape emerge as common qualities between the Southern plantation and its Natal counterpart. Despite claims of relative freedom for the indentured, they need to possess passes in order to move beyond the plantation, severely restricting their mobility. Desai and Vahed have read the colonial Natal plantation in Foucauldian terms, interpreting it as carceral and regimented, as "the place where power was

manifested in its most excessive form” and where “[e]mployers felt obliged to inculcate the virtue of discipline to squeeze labour out of the indentured” (108). Since the common imperative in slavery and indenture is the optimal extraction of labour, plantations were subject to strenuous supervision and enforced austere physical punishment. In the texts under consideration here, the plantations are strictly monitored and circumscribed landscapes that deny the workers any freedom.

A common method of resistance among slaves in the antebellum South was their attempts to escape, defying notions that the slaves were content in their circumstances, as Rebecca Ginsburg explains (36). Various means were implemented to regulate the movement of slaves, including “passes, patrols, shackles, runaway posters, and curfews” (36), and any white citizen could apprehend a black person in case they turned out to be a fugitive slave. Plotting to escape is a prevailing theme throughout *My Bondage and My Freedom*. But the possibility of executing an escape is thwarted by the apparent immeasurability of the plantation and the slaves’ ignorance of the world beyond it. Douglass, however, narrates how interiorising the master’s gaze enables the vastness of the plantation to enhance labourers’ perceptions of the master’s control when he later plots to escape from Covey’s plantation: “The real distance was great enough, but the imagined distance was, to our ignorance, even greater. Every slaveholder seeks to impress his slave with the belief in the boundlessness of the slave territory, and of his own almost illimitable power. We all had vague and indistinct notions of the geography of the country” (310). Given the many measures taken to control the movement of slaves,<sup>162</sup> Douglass muses that “[t]he reader can have no idea of the phantoms of trouble that flit, in such circumstances, before the uneducated mind of the slave” (311). The sheer magnitude aids the containment of those who labour on it to its boundaries because they lack the knowledge of the surrounding environment. Its parameters are unknown and unknowable.

Douglass’ observations about the slave’s “uneducated” assessments of the plantation and its surroundings can be interpreted according to Ginsburg’s definitions of the “slave landscape.” For Ginsburg, the slave landscape refers, in a material sense, to “the system of paths, places, and rhythms that a community of enslaved people created as an alternative, often as a refuge, to the landscape systems of planters and other whites. It was largely a secret and disguised world, as compared to the planter landscape of display and vistas” (37). It may also refer to “an expression of geographical intelligence,” that is, “the cognitive order that [they] in general imposed upon the settings they shared with slaveholders and others” (38). The vastness of the plantation vitiates labourers’ ability to construct an intelligible picture of their surroundings and thereby produce an effective slave landscape. This can be illustrated with reference to Fredric Jameson’s interpretation of cognitive mapping. Jameson expands the work of urban theorist Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960), in which he proposes ways to make the city more intelligible for its dwellers, to explain the difficulty of situating oneself in an environment whose totality cannot be conceived. Jameson writes:

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<sup>162</sup> Like American slaves, indentured labourers were not permitted to leave the plantation (or estate) without passes granted to them by their masters (Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indenture* 114). Once off the plantation, regulating the movement of indentured workers was perhaps more difficult because the indentured were employed in many positions besides the plantation, thus creating a “fluidity” between them and free Indians that made it tough “to impose an ‘iron wall’” (15).

The conception of cognitive mapping proposed here therefore involves an extrapolation of Lynch's spatial analysis to the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of class relations on a global (or should I say multinational) scale. The secondary premise is also maintained, namely, that the incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience. It follows that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping in this sense is an integral part of any socialist political project. (353)

If one is to apply this definition of cognitive mapping to the plantation, one could argue that the immeasurability of the landscape makes it difficult, if not impossible, for slaves to map and thus to navigate their surroundings, for they exist in a landscape not of their own making. This is also true for the plantation in *Revenge of Kali*. Likewise a vast space, it "stretch[es] as far as the eye can see," as Veerasamy tells Thiru (15). The initial escape plan devised by Ellapen and his cohort sees Daniel, the labourer who understands English, steal a map from the master's house and "mark all the trails and towns in Tamil" (21). Although the plan is thwarted, it helps to illustrate how labourers were kept rooted to the plantation through an inability to map a way out – cognitively or scripturally – and the employment of workers who are mostly inarticulate in English approximates American slaveholders' aversion to slaves learning to read and write. Escaping is therefore perilous, as Veerasamy's proves. He makes it out alive with the help of Runga, an indentured worker who is attacked and killed by *sirdars'* dogs in the attempt.

This chapter aimed to bear comparison between *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Revenge of Kali* in view of the analogising of indentured service with slavery in recent South African literature. I counterposed the texts' rhetoric of bondage, their attitudes to resistance and their representations of freedom. By focusing on the texts' respective representations of plantations, I argued that the depiction of indentured workers' original relation to land in South Africa in Hassim's novel is, like that of slaves in the United States, prohibitive and grievous. Based on ideas about the field hands' lack of personhood in both texts, life on the plantation is brutalising, and the landscape is configured as restrictive and carceral. Cultivation by indentured workers in colonial Natal is shown to be similar to that of African American slaves in Douglass' text, who labour in landscapes that prove to be deleterious for labourers. As texts belonging to national literary corpuses that are regularly interpreted in relation to the nations' democratic statuses and the attendant issues of citizenship and belonging, the exhaustive cultivation of land examined in this chapter produces very different pronouncements on these issues. Douglass understands the exclusion of African Americans from the fruits of the American landscape as an affront to the country's democratic principles, but these principles operated within the context of nineteenth-century dissensions in the west regarding the status of blacks as people, and his account shows that even once he has attained manumission, he lives as an outsider in the land of his birth. A similar estrangement from civic life is evident in the lives of descendants of the indentured in *Revenge of Kali*, but this novel – which ends with a rain-soaked landscape, an image of renewal – suggests that it is the prostration from working the land that lays the foundation of national belonging for later generations of Indian South Africans. As the bifocal reading shows, even though Hassim sets himself the task of an accurate depiction of indenture – one that reveals slave-like treatment and a loss of cultural roots – there remains a sense of hopefulness.



Bifocality in this chapter reveals the indentured experience portrayed by Hassim as remarkably similar to American slavery in its purpose and the management of labour on the plantation. Hassim's nuanced portrait of the complexities of Indian residence in South Africa – their divergent attitudes both to their host country as well as to their compatriots – shows indenture as a multi-layered experience that precipitated many forms of oppression that are certainly comparable with aspects of slave life. However, despite Hassim's resolute equating of indenture with slavery, his novel's ending, which sees Thiru and Miley reunited with Veerasamy in the former cane fields – fulfilling what the old man deemed “a return to [their] roots” (15) – reveals an acceptance of South Africa as natal land and presents a resolution which slave narratives simply cannot accomplish: as the repeated departures that end Douglass' narrative show, and as Hartman has written, for those descended from slaves, “there is no going back” (100).

## CONCLUSION

### Reading Bifocally

The foundation of this study is the intriguing semblance between the American Renaissance period in the nineteenth century and South Africa's post-apartheid era. Writers in both moments demonstrate an urgency to fashion a national literature for and about a nation (re)conceptualising itself as socio-politically new. The study is a response to recent developments around the nation as an analytic category of interrogation in literary studies, and how scholars working on the American Renaissance and post-apartheid moments have tried to (re)configure the nation in light of this. The prolificacy of literature in both contexts is ascribable to different reasons respective to the nations' individual histories, which posed challenges for writers in these moments. That said, American Renaissance and post-apartheid writing share a pervasive ambition to address aspirations of nation-building and to conceptualise an imagined national community via literature (amongst other media) – a tendency, that is, to image the fact of “nation-ness,” to use Benedict Anderson's term for the idea of being a nation (49). Questions about what topics writing will cover and what forms it will take, the complexities of society's relationship with “the now” and how best to reflect the intricacies of life in a young democracy are among the most pervasive faced by writers and critics of both eras.

In literature of the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa, such matters pertaining to nation-ness are often engaged with through depictions of land(scape). As a geographically and discursively contested *topos* in both American and South African history, land(scape) represents a key similarity for writers of both eras because of their inclination to draw on physical environments and the mythologies surrounding them as material for literary production. Specifically, literary devotion to land(scapes) in the periods being analysed reveals a metonymic relationship with the nation. Land ownership, occupation and labour, historical displacement and forms of redress, diverse cultural views of landscapes and conflicting aspirations for settlement and belonging, are some of the topics through which writers of the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa engage with the conditions of their respective nations. As such, the study works with the common distinction between land and landscape: the former is a geographical space that sometimes connotes a nation, while the latter represents abstract impressions of land that are generally imbued with ideological value for various groups of people.

With the abovementioned commonalities in mind, I set out to conduct a comparative analysis of texts from these two bodies of literature to contribute to the substantial comparative work that already exists on the United States and South Africa. In doing so, I have relied on current research in the field of world literature, identified as a tributary of comparative literature. World literature offers me a theoretical framework from which to conduct a comparative study that reads the American Renaissance period through the lens of the post-apartheid South African moment and vice versa. I utilised recent scholarship on world literature as the (real or hypothesised) circulation of texts across national borders and amongst foreign works, and their consumption by foreign readers. I especially drew on David Damrosch's description of world literature as an “elliptical refraction of national literatures” and a “mode of reading” that makes possible an “engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time”

(*What is World Literature?* 281) because it speaks to my interest in a bifocal reading of the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa; that is to say, a comparative reading of texts that are geographically and historically disjoined, but which nevertheless become newly readable when read proximately. His description resonates with the drive to compare texts that may not seem obvious candidates because of historical and/or geographical differences between them and other additional differences resulting from these, such as variations in genre. Damrosch's definition stresses the role of a reader's subjective perspective in shaping his or her reception of a foreign text.

In delineating a methodology for my comparative reading that takes into account the disparate historical and geographical contexts, I adopted the term "bifocal" as a way to describe the "telescop[ing]" (Boey 6) of the literary contexts and the historical and geographical differences that they entail. The methodology relies on the image of world literature as an elliptical scope that delineates two textual foci and produces a "negotiation" between them based on their respective "cultur[al] values and needs" (*What is World Literature?* 283). This means that the bifocal approach not only involves a comparison between two texts to identify their similarities and differences but considers the effect of reading one text from the perspective of, and inflected by, the other. Given this negotiatory quality of the comparison, I aimed to treat the bifocal method as heuristic and experimental in order to elicit refraction, which can be understood as the possibilities opened up, or interpretive transformations undergone, when a text from one national literary tradition moves through the prism of a text from another national tradition.

To this end, I adopted the literary counterpoint, as expounded by Edward W. Said, relying on a common interpretation that is discernible from its musical denotation; simply, the interplay of two (or more) entities to create a harmonious whole that does not privilege either but allows either one to lead at times. This is a reasonably straightforward use of the counterpoint to conduct a comparative reading. I also considered the way that Said discussed the mutual influence of imperialism, colonialism and dominant cultures in the canonical novels he analysed. His employment of contrapuntalism was thereby a means to bring secondary material into dialogue with his principal texts to bring to light factors of the text that are veiled or obscured. This element of contrapuntalism suggests latent tensions at work in the text that may be eclipsed by more prominent textual or thematic features but that could surface when read alongside another text, or secondary scholarship that orbits the main texts, in which said features are more apparent. My adoption of the counterpoint positioned it as a component of bifocalism. In essence, the methodology of my readings aimed to identify similarities and differences between works from the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa by reading one text (say, *Clotel*) – considering aspects like genre and the social values that helped to shape it – alongside and *through* the lens of another (*David's Story*) and vice versa; to consider how the one text enables or adds to a reading of the other, whether either helps to resolve any tensions present in its counterpoint, and what could not be accommodated by such a bifocal reading.

Predicated on the circulation of texts beyond the national boundaries within which they originated, bifocalism may be prompted by redolent qualities within works from foreign backgrounds. In other words, a bifocal reading might be impelled by compelling evidence of factors within a text – thematic, generic or other – that is reminiscent of a foreign text, despite

there being differences in both geographic and historical contexts. As a potential method of literary analysis aimed at the fields of world and comparative literature, bifocalism seeks not to ignore these contextual differences. Instead, it operates with them from the position that the texts possess enough discernible similarities and differences to elicit valuable analysis when brought into proximity with each other. The rationale for bifocal readings therefore lies in its capacity to identify convergences between texts with disparate locational and temporal frameworks and to utilise these differing frameworks to read aspects of a text more clearly through the lens of another.

In the case of this study, bifocalism was employed on the grounds that there are literary works from the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa that share several (mainly thematic) similarities. These similarities are underpinned and animated by contextual parallels concerning the countries' histories as settler colonies in which significant developments were inextricably land-based issues. Many writers in these contexts directed their attention to themes pertaining land – its occupation, the importation of slave labour, the displacement of indigenous peoples – and the criteria for the selection and pairing of texts in the study centred on the landscapes that the United States and South Africa have in common; namely, the frontier, the farm, the garden and the plantation. Questioning the possibilities of social novelty that characterises democracy in its infancy, the given writers represent these landscapes as historical contact zones upon which to vivify democratic discourse as it relates to various ethno-cultural groups negotiating their positions in the imagined community of a “new” nation.

The study's bifocal optic yielded readings that demonstrate how both bodies of work exhibit criticism of, and scepticism over, the subject of national newness. Even though the texts depict aspirations around their respective democracies, the writers are also shown to be acutely aware of the legacies of oppression and displacement. These encumber efforts at socio-political renewal. The degree of inequality produced by historical offences and irrevocable environmental change renders these literary landscapes – invested with varying and, at times, competing cultural meanings and ideals – impervious to attempts at more inclusive re-inscriptions. Plainly speaking, these texts suggest that the prosperity enjoyed by some under the banner of democracy is always accompanied by tenacious privation for others, and the nation-ness that they help to construct is typified by disunity, distress and fractiousness. In its attention to various subjectivities and positionalities at play in the focal texts – for instance, around questions of race, gender and class – the readings acknowledge social inclusions and exclusions entangled within the dynamics of a democratic dispensation. In this way, the readings are informed by both democracy's potentialities and its limits. In what follows, I reflect on the most palpable gains of each chapter, identifying novel commonalities that may point ahead to new work, either pertaining to one text or in terms of comparisons between the two nations, before remarking in more general terms on the benefits and limitations of a bifocal study.

Chapter One's comparison of *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* and *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* is an analysis of travel narratives in which erstwhile frontiers are discursively reopened. Fuller and Martin offer perspectives on colonial-era discourses around European exploration, expansion, and settlement. Neither encounters landscapes naively, but both project onto the land the stories and images of the places visited and their original

inhabitants. The chapter reveals a common desire to comprehend and promulgate a landscape by writers who are native-born but self-conscious of both their settler ancestry and their inheritance of European aesthetics and the epistemological schemas with which they attempt to engage with the land they pass through. The key insights garnered by my reading stem from two points.

The first relates to the challenge for settlers in both the United States and South Africa to forge their sense of belonging by mythologising themselves as distinct and new men and women who were no longer European but not Native American or African either. What appears through the bifocal interplay is that the lack of inspiration that Fuller experiences when facing what she expected to be spectacular landscapes can be understood through the tradition of South African white writing. The dilemma Martin recognises is fundamental for the settler in southern Africa: a confrontation with an indifferent landscape, supposedly dull, and unresponsive to the white gaze. Martin herself encounters this problem and ascribes the unreceptiveness of the land, as the popular literature on the topic does, to its apparent destitution and barrenness. However, the inversion of the bifocal in this instance also shows that the inability of the writer to capture the landscape cannot be accounted for by the landscape itself. The grand and abundant landscapes Fuller struggles to appreciate are vastly different from the purportedly empty landscapes that challenged white writers in southern Africa, suggesting, as Fuller argues, that the fault lies not with the landscape but with the unaccustomed eye of the viewer.

The second aspect discerned through the bifocal concerns the nature of the travel narrative; in particular, the role of mobility in the two texts. Fuller's representation of westward migration envisions the "West" in all its mythic glory – a place of opportunity and promise in a new age – and establishes a counterpoint with *A Millimetre of Dust*, which takes the form of a road narrative, a popular genre in the United States through which writers have often explored themes well-established in the national psyche, like freedom and possibility. The relationship between spatial and social mobility evinced by Fuller's encounter with the "West" – the notion that physical movement holds the promise of social betterment – enriches the analysis of Martin's reflections on her family's excursion to and around the Northern Cape when contrasted with the perpetual journeying of the *karretjiemense* who squat on the roadside. Tracing the *karretjiemense*'s itinerancy to the nomadism of their ancestors, the San, the chapter correlates this with the movement of Native Americans, which was perceived by Euro-American settlers as hazardous roaming, devoid of the purpose and ambition they ascribed to their own movement. Interpreting Martin's mobility against that of the *karretjiemense* through the lens of Jacksonian expansion amplifies the grim reality for many in the New South Africa: the inheritance of historic displacement and a lack of social progress.

Chapter Two continues the preceding chapter's focus on European settlement on the frontier and the consequent deracination of indigenous communities but turns to the farm as the central landscape of analysis. In its reading of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and Heyns's English translation of Van Niekerk's *Agaat*, the chapter takes as its basis the agrarian lifestyle that played a significant ideological role in the formation of both Anglo-American and Afrikaner identities. Given the part that the Afrikaans language played in the latter's development, the chapter takes the additional dimension of translation into account in its comparison. The main interventions produced in the chapter centre on the dynamics of the

homestead. The anxieties that Hawthorne and Van Niekerk explore with respect to the increasing difficulty of maintaining an existence insulated from a changing world beyond the home is analysed through the similarities between the gothic and the postcolonial novel, two genres that both articulate anxieties about an unknown other. Following this argument, I propose that *Agaat* can be read as a postcolonial gothic because of Milla's ailing body (symbolic of familial decline), the mental torment *Agaat* subjects her to and the novel's focus on bloodlines and inheritance.

Further exploring the domestic dimensions of the novels, the chapter draws on scholarship on domestic workers that posits the home, and the kitchen especially, as a contact zone between opposing cultures, and points to similarities between Hepzibah's and Milla's apprehension about the domestic aptitude of Phoebe and *Agaat* respectively, expressed in both cases through suspicions of witchcraft. While I acknowledge that Hepzibah's suspicions towards Phoebe bear the markings of the Puritan mentality that led to the Salem witch trials, it also resembles Milla's angst concerning *Agaat*'s solitary dancing and muttering which, I argue, arises from the historical suspicions around domestic workers of colour in white colonial homes, whose work in the kitchen is likened to witchery and whose cooking presented the threat of poisoning. Further, through a bifocal reading, I argued that because Phoebe's supposed witchery is tied to her inferior class status and her rural background, it brings to mind another version of the domestic suspicion that exists in South Africa – one which is intraracial. Placed in counterpoint with the South African context, I proposed that Hepzibah's initial misgivings about Phoebe mirror the ways the coloured petty bourgeoisie used suspicions of witchcraft to express anxiety about the upward mobility or any perceived acumen of other coloureds from whom they wished to distance themselves.

Employing bifocalism also points to the ways Heyns's translation is confronted with the issue of untranslatability. Heyns's inclusion of canonical European literature to supplement the Afrikaans idioms and rhymes in the original novel lends gravity to the historical weight of the novel – the fact that Van Niekerk shows Europe looming in the background of Afrikaner nationalism, as is apparent in Milla's love of German opera and Heyns's retainment of several German phrases in the English version of the novel. This is a quality that *Agaat* shares with *The House of the Seven Gables*; a sustained connection to European civility that is convoluted with an ethnonational identity transplanted on the empire's peripheries. However, there are also instances where Heyns's interweaving of European poetry and his linguistic choices in translation fail to adequately capture the socio-historical realities of Milla's home and *Agaat*'s position in it. I argued that these aspects, while perhaps making the book more understandable to an international readership, denuded it of specificities that a South African reader would likely understand.

To illustrate, I focused on the gender dynamics of the novels, noting that there is a pronounced difference in Hawthorne's and Heyns's use of the term "girl" when referring to Phoebe and *Agaat* respectively. Phoebe's girlhood exhibits connotations of youth, innocence and sexual purity; the semantics of *Agaat*'s girlhood, however, implies both a coloured or black domestic worker and a position of inferiority. These connotations are, however, specific to the South African context; a foreign reader would likely not register them. But for a South African reader, the connotation of "girl" in Heyns's translation adds substance to the depiction of Jak, referred to in the English translation as Milla's "boy," which carries similar degrading

connotations as “girl” in South African society. It colours Heyns’s take on the dynamics between Milla and Jak because it emphasises Van Niekerk’s inversion of the traditional *plaasroman*’s gender dynamics, positioning Jak as a mere helper in the fulfilment of Milla’s ambitions as farm owner. Nevertheless, the word “girl” does not capture the full implications of the term which Heyns deliberately substituted, *meid*, which is etymologically related to “maid” as it is used by Hawthorne to describe the unwed Hepzibah but which in the South African context is heavily freighted with racism – both a servant and a coloured woman who is characterised as vulgar and immoral. Both “girl” and *meid* in the South African context subsume a lengthy history of settlement in the country that is racially and sexually exploitative, something Heyns’s English version masks.

The basis for the analysis in Chapter Three is the fact that those who constructed myths of paradisaical landscapes during European voyages and expansion relied predominantly on the labour of others to realise those dreams of settlement. I considered the outlook on such landscapes from the position of people of colour who were historically responsible for labouring white-owned land, considering especially the circumstances and consequences of miscegenation that occurred in the United States and South Africa in the contexts of slavery. The portrayal of garden spaces that Clotel and Sally desire to make their own is read within wider historical dynamics whereby the successful settlement of Europeans and the agricultural development of the United States and South Africa were actualised in large measure through the labour of people of colour, many of them slaves and their descendants. In so doing, they served as agents for the manifestation of the myth of a new Edenic garden in both national contexts, myths created by and for white landowners. Clotel’s garden, which abates after her expulsion from her marital home because of her status as a mulatta, and Sally’s incapacity to grow a garden on her plot due to its poor soil demonstrate how their race bars them from reaping the benefits of the Edenic promise.

The bifocal reading of the socio-political dynamics surrounding Clotel’s and Sally’s home-gardens, when read alongside contemporaries of Brown and Wicomb, points to a likeness in the characterisation of American slave gardens and those of coloured communities specifically. I asserted that this is an ecologically focused objection to the forms of oppression exerted on their respective communities. In short, anti-slavery writing from the American Renaissance shares with post-apartheid work produced by writers from coloured communities a trend of challenging unjust socio-political impositions on the basis that it is detrimental to the natural environment and thus, by extension, harmful to the populace that resides in it. The essence of anti-slavery writing that focuses on the environment helps explain the link between Clotel’s fate and the deterioration of her garden, and is echoed in post-apartheid work. I read Sally’s inability to bring her garden to fruition due to blighted soil in her community in the context of recent work by the poets Gabeba Baderoon and Rustum Kozain. Their work reflects upon the environmental damage pervading coloured communities and recognises an ecological component to trauma exerted upon people. Interpreting Clotel’s antebellum home-garden through the lens of Sally’s post-apartheid one suggests that, although the American Renaissance predates ecocriticism as an academic field, anti-slavery writing of the period intimates the merging of the ecological with the political in a manner evocative of post-apartheid writing about coloured gardens.

I argued that the novels' focus on gardens is framed by an amalgamation of Enlightenment ideas about religion and science, and that the latter is employed to reveal societal desires to regulate and control its inhabitants, to excise elements of the whole in an act akin to weeding a garden. The regulation of bodies is especially pertinent to the female characters in both books; even though their storylines develop from the figures of founding fathers, both are female-centred. Women are portrayed as mothers of the nation and the bearers of historical trauma and erased histories. *David's Story's* recognition of Sara Baartman's status as an icon of South African history in the relatively early years of democracy amplifies the decades-long mystery surrounding Sally Hemings, a slave woman (upon whom Curren is based) who gave birth to several children fathered by Thomas Jefferson. This is read as part of a wider unwillingness in the United States, generally speaking, to discuss its history of slavery. The employment of bifocalism, which emphasises the indemnificatory nature of democracy in South Africa, reveals an uncomfortable truth about the inception of democracy in the United States. Despite being so frequently upheld as a model for other nations, democracy in the United States is intrinsically implicated in a practice – that of slavery – that is antithetical to democratic ideals.

Extending the focus on plantation slavery in the American South, Chapter Four compared Frederick Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* with Aziz Hassim's *Revenge of Kali*. The pith of the comparison, with the plantation as the central landscape analysed, was that they both reflect, from the perspective of a young democracy, on a history of bondage and the subsequent life of relative freedom away from the plantation. The chapter concurs with contemporary discourses surrounding Indian indenture in South Africa that the experience was, in many respects, analogous to slavery in the Americas. My reading agrees in particular with Meg Samuelson's opinion that Hassim chronicles the experience of indenture by means of "an Atlantic register" ("(Un)Settled States" 276), showcasing various experiences on a Natal plantation that mirror the events commonly depicted in traditional slave narratives. As scholars have argued, the exploitation of slave labour to meet mercantile demands was supported by – and helped to create – a racist mentality that denigrated the black labourer to the position of animal and as a constituent of inanimate nature. In Hassim's novel, the treatment of the indentured in colonial Natal shows indenture to operate under the same logic of racial discrimination when read through a bifocal lens with chattel slavery in the American South. Here the bifocal enhances *Revenge of Kali's* challenging of the ontology of indenture as well as perceptions of chattel slavery as a practice predicated on blackness.

Despite *Revenge of Kali* displaying multiple incidents that mirror, quite closely, events in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, bifocalism also helps to showcase a distinction between the role of indenture as a historically significant phenomenon in the lives of some South African Indians and the way Douglass portrays slavery for African Americans. Much of this distinction rests on the different ways that the authors attempt to insert their protagonists and the communities they represent into the broader social imaginary of their respective democratic nations. Unlike Douglass, who is subject to a system that purposely extirpates Africans' cultural ties to Africa and who, in writing primarily to promote manumission, promoted an essentialised image of Americanness that aligns African Americans with Euro-Americans, Hassim presents the descendants of indentured workers as maintaining cultural connections to



India. This sustained civilisational attachment, read from the perspective of Southern slavery, introduces a few novel areas of research.

Historical fiction, which is becoming a popular genre for writers in post-apartheid South Africa venturing into the subject of Indian indenture, shares with traditional American slave narratives the course of following the route to freedom and self-actualisation of a people in bondage. As a mode of exploring the lives of a subset of South Africa's Indian population, the genre of historical fiction helps Hassim to identify a long and often tortured history of Indian presence in South Africa, offering validation for a people whose presence in, and allegiance to, an adopted homeland has been questioned, and who have questioned it themselves with the onset of South Africa's democracy. The genre attaches historical substance to the presence of Indians in South Africa; in other words, it grounds them in the national imaginary. It thereby impugns the notion that Indians maintain a flimsy, insubstantial connection to the nation. Additionally, because the novel is formulated as a family saga that details the many economic and socio-political impositions that affected generations of Miley's family, it also challenges the idea that Indians form a universally prosperous immigrant community that has thrived as imposters and exploiters of truer indigenes. Hassim instead clarifies that Indians suffered many of the same injustices as other racial groups afflicted by colonialism and apartheid, while in some cases enduring discrimination wholly unique among the broader Indian South African community and the even broader Indian diaspora.

One aspect of the two texts that the bifocal brings to light is their differing focalisation. In the Romantic fashion of his times, Douglass' narrative focality stresses an undisputable "I" and, in so doing, falls short of the generic conventions of slave narratives in their supposed focus on an African American "we," members of the slave community. The individuality that is so pertinent to Douglass' narrative makes clear that his is a story that charts the development of a heroic figure who bears the markings of the quintessential nineteenth-century American protagonist; the narrative lacks much of the representative quality of texts in the genre. While the collective that slave narratives ordinarily speak for evokes the counterpoint of the pan-Indian "we" advocated by Gandhi, Hassim draws clear distinctions between the indentured labourers' experiences of migration and transplantation and those of passenger Indians who, by contrast, lived in relative privilege. Thus, more clearly than Douglass' book, Hassim's is representational of a people – the indentured and their descendants.

To reflect more generally on the bifocal, a potential pitfall that a study like this should remain cognisant of is to not resort to uncritical presentism. Involved in my comparison between the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa is the attempt to negotiate attitudes and phenomena from Enlightenment-era texts with more recent ones, the latter group produced by writers who possess the luxury of contemporary hindsight. Therefore, studies making use of the bifocal need to fully acknowledge the historical dimensions of a given text, allowing the text's historicity to generate new meanings alongside contemporary texts rather than treating the latter as a measure against which to analyse the former. Damrosch makes a similar point in arguing for the inclusion of long-established work in the gamut of world literature, contending that world literature should be recognised as "multitemporal as well as multicultural" (*What is World Literature?* 16). According to Damrosch, "presentism deprive[s] us of the ability to learn from a much wider range of empires, colonies, polities, and migrations" and "leaves out of account the dramatic ways in which the canons of the earlier periods

themselves are being reshaped through new attention to all sorts of long-neglected but utterly fascinating texts” (17).

In terms of the ways bifocalism might prove useful, I turn to the historicity of literature, specifically the view of literature put forward by Wai Chee Dimock, as “an artificial form of ‘life’” that “outlives the finite scope of the nation” and “brings into play a different set of temporal and spatial coordinates” that “urges on us the entire planet as a unit of analysis” (“Literature for the Planet” 175). Taking inspiration from Albert Einstein’s “relativity of simultaneity,” the theory that holds that an absolute determination of two events occurring at the same time cannot be made if they are spatially separated, Dimock proposes configuring literary space-time as a “continuum” that “mess[es] up territorial sovereignty and numerical chronology” because of the ways literature might be read differently as it endures over time and how it traverses various places. Such a continuum “grants adjacency to any two points in space and time,” creating “literary bonds” (174), “couples who have no chronological reasons to be seen side by side” (181), defying historical, geographic and linguistic origins.

I want to suggest that bifocalism might serve as an interpretive mode for the kind of promiscuous “adjacency” of writers and texts (Dimock, “Literature for the Planet” 174-75) that Dimock has in mind; that bifocalism might introduce new continuums of literature by extending Dimock’s approach. This is because the bifocal is commensurable with, but more capacious than, the concepts on which Dimock bases her views. Dimock is primarily concerned with how new meanings can be generated in the present from texts from the past. She claims that traditional historicism “rests largely on semantic synchronism” which lodges a text’s meaning firmly in its historical period where “it remains undisturbed by anything beyond” (“A Theory of Resonance” 1060-61). What Dimock argues for is compatible with Damrosch’s definition of world literature utilised in this study, for she identifies semantic transformation that a text might undergo when received into a foreign space:

To “historicize” in this sense, then, is to impute meanings to a text by situating it among events in the same slice of time. This synchronic model hardly acknowledges that the hermeneutical horizon of the text might extend beyond the moment of composition, that future circumstances might bring other possibilities of meaning. Nor does it recognize that the passage of time, deadening some words and quickening others, can give a past text a semantic life that is an effect of the present, rather than the age when the text was produced. [...] I want to propose a somewhat different kind of historicism, what I call a diachronic historicism. This approach tries to engage history beyond the simultaneous, aligning it instead with the dynamics of endurance and transformation that accompany the passage of time. This long view of history, restoring the temporal axis to literary studies, allows texts to be seen as objects that do a lot of traveling: across space and especially across time. And as they travel they run into new semantic networks, new ways of imputing meaning. Such changes in the registers of reception, making a text continually interpretable, also mean that any particular reading is no more than a passing episode in a history of reading. (“A Theory of Resonance” 1061)

Although bifocalism is also premised on the travelling capacity of texts, unlike “diachronic historicism,” it does not privilege the temporal over the spatial in the configuration of a literary continuum. In reading bifocally, one would ask what it means to read a particular text from a certain time and place in another time and place – place being elementary to the way diachronic transformation occurs. Bifocalism thus recognises texts as simultaneously historicised and

diachronic. Moreover, when Dimock illustrates one such continuum in discussing the diachronic endurance of Dante being read by the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam in the Soviet Union, what she calls “the extension and telescoping of space and time brought about by the literary encounter” (“Literature for the Planet” 175) differs from the telescoping involved in the bifocal. The bifocal entails the possibility of reciprocity – it is not merely concerned how a past text might be read in the present (a text from the distant past might inflect the more recent text) but with what the present might offer a past text (in that the more proximate perhaps offers a new or varied reading of the older text). A bifocal reading would ask not only what Mandelstam finds enduring in Dante; it will read Dante through Mandelstam *and* Mandelstam through Dante, considering what each brings to a reading of the other.

Dimock’s use of Mandelstam and Dante is, of course, an adjacency based on influence or inspiration – Dante was a poet whom Mandelstam admired. The bifocal readings I conducted in this study did not rely on similar links between authors. Nor has it produced textual pairings for comparison, as others have done, that are based on textual reincarnations of earlier narratives that “haunt” more proximate stories. (Here I have in mind readings like that by Vilashini Cooppan who, also recognising Dimock’s continuum concept, argues for the uncanniness of world literature as seen in the many embodiments of the story of Gilgamesh, something Dimock has also explored.<sup>163</sup>) Instead, they relied on my perceptions of what Damrosch calls the “*like-but-unlike*” (*What is World Literature?* 11, original emphasis) in entirely unrelated texts. Here, too, the bifocal might expand Dimock’s notion of the continuum. Borrowing from diachronic linguistics, her revised historicism focuses on semantic change that words may undergo over time. A primary concept in such change is resonance, upon which Dimock claims literary continuums depend:

This primarily aural and primarily interactive concept offers a helpful analogy of semantic change. Modeled on the traveling frequencies of sound, it suggests a way to think about what [...] I call the traveling frequencies of literary texts: frequencies received and amplified across time, moving farther and farther from their points of origin, causing unexpected vibrations in unexpected places. (“A Theory of Resonance” 1061)

Understood this way, resonance is certainly pertinent to Chapter Two’s analysis of the implications of Heyns’s linguistic choices in *Agaat*, such as the different way a South African reader might understand the term “girl” in the post-apartheid moment from a contemporary reader of Hawthorne’s. However, bifocalism, encompassing the contrapuntal, can also be regarded as entailing resonances; for the likenesses identified between the American Renaissance and post-apartheid South Africa that formed the basis of this study show a broader configuration of the aural, as also relating to character, atmosphere or sensations. Bifocalism expands Dimock’s use of resonance to other units of meaning besides words – to thematics, to genre or to the *zeitgeist* from which texts emerge, making available new “semantic networks” (“A Theory of Resonance” 1061) or new foci on an ellipsis (to return to Damrosch’s formulations). These resonances enable what is perhaps the overall strength of the bifocal

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<sup>163</sup> See Cooppan, from whom I borrow the notion of haunting. Also see Dimock, “Recycling the Epic” and “*Gilgamesh*’s Planetary Turns.”

method, which returns to the foundations of world literature as initially articulated by Goethe. Goethe saw world literature as enabling nations to engage with that which is foreign but also to hold up the foreign as a mirror with which to better view and understand themselves (Cheah 27-28). This meant not discarding or ignoring the unique qualities of a particular nation and its literature, while nevertheless recognising its convergences with others.

Bifocalism has enabled fresh readings in the comparison between the literatures of the United States and South Africa and anticipates new ways of exploring world literature. It might be one answer to the question of how to approach the globalisation of literature, be it as contributing to studies that support or resist the denationalisation of literature. Comprising the counterpoint, bifocalism authorises a new way of reading works from disparate contexts in a manner that does not privilege either party in the comparison or either axis in the space-time continuum; a meaning-making method that telescopes and refracts.

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