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Human-animal relationships and ecocriticism: a study of the representation of animals in poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa

Mthatiwa, Syned Dale Makani

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Chapter 1: Literary Animals, Ecocriticism and Zoocriticism

1.0 Preamble

We live in an era partly governed by the realisation that our mechanistic worldview and irresponsible behaviour towards, and utilisation of, nonhuman nature have pushed the world into an environmental crisis that threatens our survival. This realisation has prompted scholars in various disciplines such as history, anthropology, philosophy and others to open up environmental dimensions to their respective disciplines as a way of contributing to environmental restoration. Literary scholars have joined the debate through the fields of ecocriticism and zoocriticism.[1] It is within the contexts of these emerging bodies of ecocriticism and zoocriticism that my study is located.

Animals are part of the physical environment/nature, and the fact that many species have become extinct while others are on the brink of extinction, makes it imperative that we undertake studies geared towards understanding our attitudes to animals that emerge through forms of cultural production, in this case literature. In this thesis I wish to analyse and critique the various ways in which Jack Mapanje and Steve Chimombo from Malawi; Chenjerai Hove, Musaemura Zimunya, and Bart Wolffe from Zimbabwe; and Douglas Livingstone and Chris Mann from South Africa, represent animals in their poetry. I intend to explore the place that these poets accord animals in the poetry in their exploration of social, psychological, political, and cultural issues, and how as symbols in, and subjects of, the poems, animals, in particular, and nature in general, are used for the poets' conceptualisation and construction of a wide range of ideas, among others, regarding questions of justice, identity, heritage, and belonging to the cosmos. I also wish to show in this thesis how studying animal representation in the selected poetry not only reveals the poets'

[1] There are several definitions of ecocriticism (Buell 2005, Heise 1999, Rueckert 1978 [Glotfelty xx]). And as a burgeoning field of literary criticism, it is still being defined. However, Glotfelty's definition broadly captures what ecocriticism is all about. Glotfelty simply defines (and broadly too) ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (xviii)." The name of this branch of literary study is still being negotiated. Ecocriticism is also known by names such as green cultural studies, ecopoetics, and environmental literary criticism. Zoocriticism refers to the practice of animal studies in literary studies which focuses on animal representation, animal subjectivity, and animal rights (Huggan and Tiffin 18).

ecological sensibility, or lack thereof, but also opens a window through which to view and appreciate the poets' conception, construction and handling of a variety of culturally, politically, philosophically, and ecologically significant ideas about human to human relationships and human-animal/nature relationships.

Wendy Woodward (2008) rightly observes that "[r]epresentation has ethical repercussions" (15). Of animal representation in selected fictional and non-fictional narratives from southern Africa Woodward says "[r]epresentation of animals in [these] texts […] may not impact directly on animals themselves, but they do so obliquely." She goes on to say that "[r]epresentations resonate ethically as they influence the ways humans conceptualise and respond to 'real', embodied nonhuman animals" (8). Woodward's words here guide my approach to the poetry discussed in this thesis.

In the thesis I will also examine the ecological and ethical possibilities and limits of the ways in which the selected poets represent animals. I will explore how Jack Mapanje's representation of animals is closely connected to his resistance of social injustice, especially the debasement of culture, abuse of power, despotism, oppression and exploitation of the masses by the hegemonic regime of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda in Malawi. My focus in Mapanje's poetry is on his use of animals in resistance poetry to try and explore the relationships between animals, poetry and political resistance in African literature.

I will also examine how Mapanje's Malawian counterpart, Steve Chimombo, uses mythic, cultic and fabulous animals to respond to the changes in his social and political environment. In my discussion of Chimombo's poetry I am particularly interested in the way the poet uses allegorical, mythic and fabulous forms in his work to respond to social and political issues in his country.

Further, in the thesis I wish to explore the ways in which an ecocritical reading of Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya's poetry helps us understand the two Zimbabwean poets' conceptions and construction of urban and rural landscapes in Zimbabwe. I will also explore the ecological sensibility that their manner of animal representation reveals and the ways in which the rural and urban landscapes work as metaphorical maps of their childhood and adulthood experiences, real or imagined, and of their attempts at self-exploration and discovery.

In the last three chapters of this thesis I will examine the poetry of Bart Wolffe, Douglas Livingstone and Chris Mann. In my discussion of the poetry of these poets I wish to examine and critique the ecological, philosophical and psychological views and issues they raise and explore through their manner of animal/nature representation. The central/guiding question in my discussion of the poetry of these three poets is: What ecological vision inspires, or emerges from, their manner of animal or nature representation? With regard to Bart Wolffe in particular, I wish to explore the ways in which he represents animals and nature in relation to questions of identity and belonging to postcolonial Zimbabwe.

With regard to Douglas Livingstone's poetry I wish to analyse and critique his modes of animal representation in relation to ecological ways of living. I also wish to examine the ecophilosophical views that inform his manner of animal representation.

Finally, in my discussion of Chris Mann's poetry some of the questions I explore are: In what ways does his poetry explore the complex ways in which humans relate to other animals? What sort of subjectivity emerges from Mann's depiction of animals? In my analysis of Mann's poetry my focus is on the themes of kinship, interconnectedness of life, relational selfhood, and belonging to the cosmos.

In this thesis, therefore, I set out to explore the relationship between the social and ecological visions and consciousness (that emerge in relation to the seven poets' representation of animals and nature) and modern environmental orthodoxy that acknowledges the interconnectedness and kinship of all things, encourages a sense of belonging to the cosmos and community with animal others, and decries our alienation from, and destruction of nature, in general, and animals, in particular.

2.0 Contextual Background to the Study

Animals have appeared in written and oral literature, both African and Western, since time immemorial. They have been used as examples for humans to follow or avoid in fables that serve as standards of moral didacticism, they have represented various human and godly attributes, they have been used to teach moral and religious lessons, and in satire they have held up mirrors that serve to ridicule human foibles and political corruption. More recently, they have served, within the context of ecocriticism to problematise the limits of the category human and interrogate the supposed discontinuity between humans and animals (Garrard 148).

Three notable ways of representing animals in literature can, according to Kate Soper (2005), be termed naturalistic, allegorical and compassionate. In the naturalistic mode animals "are described in a fairly straightforward way and figure as part of the narrative situation and environmental context" (Soper 303), while the allegorical register depicts animals not as natural beings but as metaphors for human beings or registers of human forms of behaviour. The compassionate mode of animal representation, on the other hand, uses literary works "as a way of meditating upon or bringing us to think about our treatment of animals" (ibid. 307).[2] But, as Allen also observes, "[t]he metaphorical [read the allegorical] far outnumber the literal animals in literature" (6).

The ubiquity of animals in literature proves the validity of Claude Levi-Strauss's observation that animals are "good to think with" and Kate Soper's observation that "[i]n animals we discover our own loathsome and most laudable qualities, projecting onto them both that with which we most closely identify, and that which we are most keen to be distanced from" (307). For instance, among the Shona people, dogs' names are a means of indirectly communicating with relatives, neighbours, or the community (Tatira 86) in situations where direct communication would be difficult or impossible. Most dogs' names among the Shona are used to express grievances that cannot be discussed, rebuke, insult, or correct morally deviant behaviour relating to witchcraft, marital problems, bad neighbourliness, and other social issues (Tatira 2004). Animals also feature a lot in the everyday life of Malawians. Animals and animal symbolism are also used widely in initiation ceremonies, religious cults, spirit possession rituals and, among the Chewa people of central Malawi, in the Nyau secret society.[3]

Animals, then, as these few, initial examples show, have frequently stood as allegorical figures to represent human nature and as a rich body of metaphors for the inanimate as well as the animate. As Aubrey Manning and James Serpell observe with regard to the role of animals in history and philosophy:

> [a]nimals have been worshipped as gods, reviled as evil spirits, endowed with souls, or regarded as mindless machines. They have been killed for food with careful respect but also slaughtered for sport. Whilst some species have been objects of terror or loathing,

[2] In my view these modes of representation are not necessarily mutually exclusive as allegorical and realistic representations can sometimes also include compassionate representations.
[3] See Brian Morris, *Animals and Ancestors: An Ethnography* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000).

> others have been taken into our homes and treated as if human themselves (Manning and Serpell xi).

According to A. Lytton Sells, people of ancient times in general saw little distinction between a human's soul and that of an animal. He goes further to say that a belief in metempsychosis[4] was prevalent not only among the Chinese, Hindus, Persians, Arabs, and Egyptians, but also among certain of the Greek philosophers, "whose speculative mind and mathematical genius nevertheless favoured an objective approach to the problems of animal psychology" (Sells xiv). Anaxagoras, one of the ancient Greek philosophers, was of the view that no essential difference existed between the animal soul and the human, while Pythagoras of Samos believed that a human's soul might inhabit any of the various animals (including a human) and birds in successive reincarnations – a doctrine that led to vegetarianism. Other Greek philosophers such as Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato, along with other later philosophers, also propounded a doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Although such a doctrine recognises the centrality of animals in human life or the closeness of humans to animals, it did not necessarily have a positive effect on the welfare of animals among the Greeks. Furthermore, Aristotle, one of the most important ancient Greek philosophers, believed that many animals have the capacity for memory and are capable of instruction. But unlike humans, they are incapable of recalling the past at will (Sells xv). His observations on the mental and moral features of different animals, birds, and insects were as detailed as they were subtle and refined, and Sells draws the conclusion that "the only difference *in kind* which [Aristotle] distinguishes between the animal and the human intelligence is that while the animal has memory, the power of learning, and sagacity, or *practical intelligence,* man alone possesses what we may call 'speculative reason'" (ibid. xvi – xvii, italics in original). However, although Aristotle "does not drive any deep gulf between humans and the rest of the animal world," he nevertheless saw animals as existing for the sake of humans; for their use as food and "other accessories of life" (Singer, *Animal Liberation* 206). For him in the hierarchy of nature "those with less reasoning ability exist for the sake of those with more" (ibid.).

Unlike in the days of Aristotle, people of the Middle Ages, with the notable exceptions of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua, who advocated for fair

[4] Transmigration of the soul, or the passing of the soul at death into another body, either human or animal.

treatment of animals and all Creation,[5] were rarely interested in the question of animals. St. Thomas Aquinas, a well known philosopher of the period who is so profound in other matters, was undistinguished on the subject of animals (Sells xvii; see also Singer, *Animal Liberation* 207 – 214). This, however, does not mean that medieval people had no use for animals. Esther Cohen tells us that people at the time frequently used animals to symbolize human traits in various contexts such as in literature, in pageants, in public rituals and in criminal trials (Cohen 60). Animals at the time, particularly in Burgundy, France, would be put on trial like human beings for criminal offences such as murder in which, if found guilty, the animals would be executed. A few pigs were recipients of such a sentence. Cohen attributes this unusual behaviour (of putting on trial nonhuman animals which could not defend themselves against a crime they were alleged to have committed, let alone understand the prosecution processes) by people of the Middle Ages to their attempt at self-definition. For Cohen self-definition usually depends on the "existence of boundaries for the self, and of some 'other' beyond those boundaries," and so for late medieval people the only alterity, or "otherness" immediately available to them was the animal alterity. The tendency of placing animals in human positions had the result of making "their own humanity stand out in sharper contrast" (Cohen 76).

A. Lytton Sells concurs with George Boas that there were some writers in the sixteenth century who considered the animal superior or at least equal to humans. But, besides drawing their arguments from their predecessors such as Pliny and Plutarch, they indulged in paradox instead of relying on observation as Aristotle had done. One such writer was Montaigne, who strongly believed that animals had intelligence and also maintained that they surpassed man in virtue and nobility. Among the scholars who accompanied or followed Montaigne in his positive attitude to animals was Pierre Charron. In his book *De la sagesse*, Sells tells us, Charron dwells on the advantages, both moral and physical, which animals have over man and attempts to show that animals have the capacity to reason, though not as perfectly as humans (Sells xviii).[6]

[5] Although Singer tells us that even the stories about St. Francis' compassion for animals are conflicting. He is said to have rebuked a disciple who "cut a trotter off a living pig in order to give it to a sick companion," not for being cruel to the pig, but "for damaging the property of the pig owner" (Peter Singer, "Prologue" 3).

[6] Like Charron, philosophers who support the empiricist theory of knowledge (the view that our knowledge comes from experience) such as David Hume, believe that animals have the capacity to

According to Sells, René Descartes' infamous position that the animal was irrational and insentient like a pure machine which worked automatically like a clock, may have been inspired by his (Descartes') opposition to Charron (xix). Thus, Descartes' overzealous opposition which completely denies feelings to animals, has had, and continues to have, terrible repercussions on these non-human creatures. However, Cartesian views of nature in general, and animals in particular, have not been without their critics and supporters in history. Among Descartes' opponents were Louis Verlaine, Marin Cureau de la Chambre, Pierre Gassendi and Descartes' own niece Mademoiselle Descartes who totally rejected her uncle's views about animals. Besides according intelligence and reason to Descartes' otherwise animal-machine, Pierre Gassendi speculated that despite their inability to employ language as humans do, animals are capable of conversing together in their own ways (Sells xxii).[7] Among Descartes' staunchest supporters were Sir Kenelm Digby and John Norris who lived in the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth century respectively. Both thinkers gladly accepted and supported Descartes' theory of the animal-machine (Sells xxiii).

Although Cartesian philosophy had a warm reception at Cambridge, (see Sells xxiii), some of Descartes Cambridge admirers, like the Aristotelians whose philosophical thought was dominant in the universities in France of Desecrates' day, were sceptical about his ideas on animals. Later Descartes' mechanistic theory was to be pushed to its logical conclusion by Julien-Offrey de la Mettrie who saw it as applicable not only to animals but also to human beings, thereby replacing dualism with monism and bringing the human being down from his elevated position on the natural hierarchy to the same level with animals (Sells xxv). Julien-Offrey de la Mettrie's views anticipated Alfred Russel Wallace's and Charles Darwin's influential

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reason. Critiquing those who think otherwise, Hume says "[n]ext to the ridicule of denying an evident truth, is that of taking much pains to defend it; and no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men. The arguments are in this case so obvious that they never escape the most stupid and ignorant". For Hume, just as humans "in adapting means to ends, are guided by reason and design, and that 'tis not ignorantly nor casually we perform those actions, which tend to self-preservation, to the obtaining pleasure, and avoiding pain[,…] other creatures, in millions of instances, perform like actions, and direct them to like ends;" this shows that these creatures too are guided by reason ("Of the Reason of Animals" 69). This manner of thinking, however, did not stop Hume from seeing animals as inferior to humans (Maehle 91).

[7] Questions of animal intelligence, emotions, and communication have preoccupied ethologists and philosophers alike over the years. Some of them categorically declare that animals posses these attributes. These scientific and philosophical views about animals also affect the way they are represented in literature.

theory (on modern attitudes towards animals) in the nineteenth century about human beings' ancestry from animals.

The modern environmental or 'green' stance, which recognises an important link between animals and ourselves and tries to re-establish a balance, has intensified the debate on the relationship between humans and nature, in general, and animals in particular. While some scholars look at the environmentally-friendly relationship that ancient humans or the earliest human societies of the hunter-gatherers had with animals, others turn to biblical exegesis for its role in promoting or curbing abuse of the environment, while others still seek to incorporate animals in the realms of ethics and rights. Yet others seek to preserve or conserve animals in national parks and game reserves.

Tim Ingold (1994) sees (controversially perhaps) a positive, non-exploitative relationship between the hunter-gatherers and their environment, and more specifically their animal prey (9). For him, it is closer to the truth to say that hunter-gatherers "aim to *keep up a dialogue*" with their environment, rather than to say that they exploit it (11, italics in original). This is opposed to the subjugation, domination and exploitation of animals under domestication where the animals' intentional agency or personality does not count (17). Ingold concludes with the environmentally-conscious observation that in the wake of the current ecological crisis "whose roots lie in this disengagement, in the separation of human agency and social responsibility from the sphere of our direct involvement with the non-human environment, it surely behoves us to reverse this order of priority." He goes on to suggest the need to "rewrite the history of human-animal relations, taking this condition of active engagement, of being-in-the-world, as [a] starting point" (19).

In her study of animals in medieval perception, Esther Cohen makes the observation that the basis for "the most common perception of animals in western learned culture" was the creation story in the biblical book of Genesis. From Genesis humans rightly or wrongly discover their sense of superiority over non-human nature which was created prior to their ancestors, Adam and Eve, as preparation for their existence (see also Singer, *Animal Liberation* 203–205). Here also emanates humanity's sense of destiny as "the crown of creation" to lord it over nature and exploit it for its own ends (Cohen 60). This anthropocentric view of nature (or speciesism, as Peter Singer calls it) mostly taken from the "Divine command"

interpretation of the bible (the view that man should subdue all kinds of animals) has led to the abuse of nature in general and the massacre of animals through sport hunting and the quest for animal products.

Not all interpretations of the bible are detrimental to the welfare of animals and nature, however (see Maehle 82ff). Andreas-Holger Maehle's "Cruelty and Kindness to the 'Brute Creation': Stability and Change in the Ethics of the Man-Animal Relationship, 1600 – 1850" is an illuminating work on the "development of the discourse on the ethics of using animals." In this article Maehle examines the role of biblical exegesis and Christian morals, animal psychology, theory of moral rights and duties, vegetarianism, and love for pets (81) within the development of the aforementioned discourse. Frances Hutcheson (1694 – 1747) is one of the important figures cited by Maehle on the debates on the rights of animals. Hutcheson declares that animals "have a *right* that no useless pain or misery should be inflicted on them" (qtd. by Maehle 92, italics in original). However, his observation that animals "can have no right … against mankind in any thing necessary for human support," (ibid.) was clearly anthropocentric. Maehle also tells us that "in 1776, Humphrey Primatt in England made the decisive second step towards animals' right to happiness." He argued that since animals have no hope for a future, their suffering is worse than that of humans. Their lack of the capacity for human speech makes them unable to accuse their tormentors and, therefore, suffer all the more. Besides, animals' lack of rationality, according to Primatt, means that they cannot "act immorally and therefore [can]not endure pain as punishment" (93). Primatt's argument anticipated Jeremy Bentham's (1748 – 1832) well known plea for the recognition of animal rights. Bentham's famous dictum on animals "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*?" (qtd. by Maehle 93, italics in original) has proved influential on current philosophers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan who have made sentience or the ability to feel pain (and the fact that animals are subjects of life) the criteria which gives a moral status to animals.

The declining numbers of wildlife and the extinction of some animal species prompted conservationists to intensify their campaign to have animals protected in national parks and game reserves. Conservationist ideas came to Africa as early as the nineteenth century following the realisation that if the massacre of wildlife by both Africans and Europeans went unchecked, the wildlife that had been roaming the

continent for centuries would soon disappear. Conservation efforts have led to the creation of a number of wild-life sanctuaries in different parts of Africa which have made a difference to the lives of many animals.

However, the conservationist/protectionist ethic has not gone down well with Africans themselves for a number of reasons. To begin with, given that "nature conservation policies are highly political issues," (Carruthers, *The Kruger* 4) conservationism in Africa smacked of an imperialist agenda to gain control and mastery over the colonies and their resources. Further, the conservation drive led to loss of agricultural land for some Africans who were moved from the reserve areas – for instance the Maasai and Black South Africans from Serengeti Game Reserve and Kruger National Park respectively – and relocated to agriculturally unproductive areas that also held no cultural, historical and religious memories and significance for the people. This gave the impression to Africans that whites cared about animals more than they did about Africans. Besides, as Jane Carruthers observes, pre-independence African parks and reserves which are considered "ecologically commendable" today came about for a number of reasons, some of which have little to do with moral virtue, for instance white self-interest and Afrikaner nationalism (in the case of the Kruger National Park), ineffectual legislation, elitism, capitalism, and the exploitation of Africans (ibid. 4).[8] Moreover, in many parts of Africa, white conservationists blamed Africans (hunters) for the decline of wildlife on the continent. Consequently Africans were banned from hunting, and their conservation ethics (environmentally-friendly totemic culture, taboos and cults) ignored as insignificant. Carruthers tells us that "[i]n published accounts of early white travellers and settlers, Africans are usually portrayed as intruders in, and ravagers of, an environment which deserved European custodianship" (ibid. 90).

Meanwhile, hunters continued to kill hundreds or thousands of animals; they still continue to do so, albeit at a lower scale, in trophy hunting (see Pickover [2005]). During the nineteenth century and early twentieth century white hunters, to quote Carruthers again, "revelled in slaughter and their hunting forays were shooting orgies during which they killed hundreds of animals, frequently leaving the carcasses to

[8] Not all conservationists are interested in the welfare of animals *per se*, but basically their own personal welfare. Animals in protected areas have in many cases been turned into a spectacle – considered better alive than dead because watching them in their sanctuaries is believed to have therapeutic value (See Peace [2005] and Servais [2005]).

decay on the veld" (*The Kruger* 10). The Africans who for hundreds of years before the colonial encounter had inhabited the continent and used the available natural resources for shelter, food and subsistence in a sustainable manner were cast as villains in white conservation efforts. Scholars, however, have observed that it was the colonial encounter, the contact between whites and blacks, that worsened the relationship between humans and animals in Africa. The strong market economy and firearms introduced by whites "together tipped the scales towards over-exploitation" (Carruthers, ibid. 7–8).

Given the colonised Africans' displeasure with the colonisers' conservationist drive, it is unsurprising that

> [i]n both the settler states of South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as in British colonies, the most acute phase of rural anti-colonial struggle in the 1940s and 1950s coincided with heightened government commitment to conservation and development. Agricultural schemes, which touched on the arrangement of settlements, and the control of land, labour, and livestock, were sometimes highly effective in mobilizing rural communities against the state (Beinart 332).

Ironically though, some of the game reserves and parks in Africa bear names of the greatest European hunters such as Paul Kruger and Frederick Courteney Selous, who heavily contributed to the death of many animals in Africa (Carruthers 1995, and Adams and McShane 1992). Where, in my view, the conservationist drive more generally, and in South Africa in particular, becomes problematic in green studies or ecocriticism is that it did not have the same result for all animal species. Those animals classified as vermin such as lions, leopards, monkeys, caracals, and jackals, among many others, whose needs inevitably collided with those of farmers, were shot, trapped, or poisoned (Beinart 2003, and Carruthers 1995).

The manner in which animals are depicted in literature often reflects the attitudes about animals embedded in cultural, religious, philosophical and scientific debates on animal rationality, the moral status of animals, animals' emotions, and their significance to human spiritual and psychological well being, among others. In this study I analyse the representation of animals in selected poetry from Southern Africa, that is, from such countries as Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa, from an ecocritical perspective. I begin by examining the work of Malawian poets, Jack Mapanje and Steve Chimombo. I then turn to Zimbabwe, examining poetry by Chenjerai Hove, Musaemura (henceforth Musa) Zimunya, and Bart Wolffe. Thirdly, I focus on South African poets Douglas Livingstone and Chris Mann. The study seeks

to identify the ways in which these texts represent human relations to animals in particular, and nature in general, at particular moments of their countries' history, and the values that they assign to nature and why. The study attempts to show that the social vision of these poets deeply influences their manner of animal representation in their poetry.

3.0 Aim of the Study

This study explores, analyses, and critiques the various ways in which animals are represented in selected Malawian, Zimbabwean and South African poetry in English within the contexts of the emerging bodies of ecocriticism and zoocriticism. In a preface to his book, *Picturing the Beast* (1993), Steve Baker observes that "it is clear that Western society continues to draw heavily on symbolic ideas involving animals and that the immediate subject of those ideas is frequently not the animal itself, but rather a human subject drawing on animal imagery to make a statement about human identity" (ix). The question that one wishes to ask, then, is how true this observation might be with regard to poetry from Southern African? Amongst the many questions that ecocritics and theorists ask (see Glotfelty xviii - xix), the questions that are immediately relevant to this study are as follows: How is nature represented in the poems under study? What sorts of animal allegories are set up and why? What political analogies can we draw from the poetry, and in what sorts of socio-political contexts? Who do the poets write for or see themselves as representing? Are the values expressed in the poems consistent with, or different from, current ecological orthodoxies? How do the metaphors generated in relation to animals influence the way we treat them? What kinds of poetic forms are employed in the representation of animals? And finally, in what ways and to what effect/extent is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary southern African poetry?

More specifically, the study analyses the way animals are represented in the selected Southern African poetic texts; determines the motivation for, and investigates the significance of, using particular animals within particular historical/political and cultural contexts; identifies the writers' attitudes to animals and the relationship that such attitudes produce between humans and nature (what conceptions of animals emerge through the various depictions of animals in the poetry? what do such

depictions say about the people's view of their relationship with the animals?[9]); and evaluates the poetry in terms of its usefulness to the current global debates on environmental issues.

There are many writers in Southern Africa who depict animals in their writings, both fiction and poetry, all of them potential candidates for a study of this nature. However, it is virtually impossible to include every one of them in my study. The demarcation of my area of study is informed by the generic focus on contemporary poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa and the themes I wish to focus on in the poetry. I have, therefore, chosen the poets and their works included in this study consciously and carefully. The selected poets from the three countries (Jack Mapanje and Steve Chimombo from Malawi; Chenjerai Hove, Musa Zimunya and Bart Wolffe from Zimbabwe; and Douglas Livingstone and Chris Mann from South Africa) represent key trends and poetic sensibilities in southern Africa where the representation of animals is concerned. Given that ecologically-oriented criticism is relatively new in African literature, there is ample room for further studies of this nature to supplement or address the limits of the present study.

4.0 Rationale

Today, more than ever before, we have come to the disturbing realisation that we are living in "the age of environmental limits", (Glotfelty xx) that we have come to the point where our mechanistic worldview and irresponsible behaviour towards the nonhuman world are "damaging the planet's basic life support systems" and so, a change of behaviour and attitude toward nature is necessary if we are to curb the extermination of countless "fellow species" and the destruction of the planet's beauty, on our road to self-destruction (ibid.). It is for the purpose of contributing to environmental restoration that scholars in the humanities are exploring ways of adding "an environmental dimension to their various disciplines" such as history (where scholars have begun to consider "nature not just as a stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama") (xxi), anthropology, psychology, and philosophy. In philosophy, a number of subfields like environmental ethics, deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology have emerged, all in an attempt

[9] It is important to note that in spite of the different and, at times, contradictory views in the field, ecocritics agree that ecocriticism aims at changing our views/attitudes of the environment or the cosmos (Levin 1097, Michael Cohen, "Letter" 1093, and Kerridge 5).

to come to terms with and "critique the root causes of environmental degradation and to formulate an alternative view of existence that will provide an ethical and conceptual foundation for right relations with the earth" (ibid.). In a similar vein, literary scholars, upon realising the urgency of the need to find solutions to the environmental crisis, have joined the debate on environmental restoration through the field of ecocriticism. It is within this broad field (combined with aspects from animal studies) that my study of the representation of animals in southern African poetry is located.

For a number of years after gaining popularity, ecocritical practice remained confined to the analysis of American literature (particularly nature writing), followed by English/Anglo-European literature. Besides, presentations at the first two conferences of ASLE (the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) – in 1995 and 1997 – were dominated by whites. It is not surprising therefore that ecocriticism is considered "a subfield of American literature" and "a predominately white movement" (Dodd 1094).

However, ecocriticism should be understood as not restricted to either American or Anglo-European literature or nature writing. Ecocriticism can and should be practised anywhere and its methods applied to any genre. Furthermore, it is important for black scholars to begin to work within the field of ecocriticism, reflecting, not least, on its intersections with the question of race. It is interesting to note that over the past few years the field has found followers (scholars) in African and Asian countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, India and Japan. A few South African critics have used ecocritical approaches to analyse some works by South African writers. The focus of these critics has been specifically on environmentally-conscious works by writers such as J.M. Coetzee, Zakes Mda, Ruth Miller, and Jane Rosenthal, among others. My study is an attempt to join these nascent voices in Southern Africa that attempt to extend the geographical boundaries of ecocriticism beyond America and Europe. But unlike these voices, my study is not restricted to environmentally-conscious writing. I aim to investigate more widely the representation of animals in literature, in this case, poetry.

Animals are part of the physical environment or nature,[10] and the fact that many species have become extinct while others are at the brink of extinction, makes it imperative that we undertake studies geared towards understanding our attitudes to animals that emerge through forms of cultural production, in this case literature. Joseph W. Meeker was right in asserting that literature

> should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment, and to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of humanity, and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us (4).

Moreover, Dan Wylie rightly tells us that "[t]he symbiosis between the physical distributions of these sometimes autonomous, coherent, individual creatures around us – animals, wild and domestic – and their literary and psychological presences and effects in all our lives, is a relationship which holds the promise of endless avenues for reassessment of those lives" (Wylie, "Introduction" 1).

This study is an attempt to investigate and assess the portrayal of "these sometimes autonomous, coherent, individual creatures around us" (animals) in Southern African poetry. In African literature, like in the literatures from other parts of the world, animals have featured prominently.[11] Representation, as Wendy Woodward rightly observes in her book *The Animal Gaze* (2008), "has ethical repercussions" considering that "[t]he way that an animal is represented and constructed discursively [in a culture] has […] an interrelationship with the way that culture responds to the real animal" (15).

This study broadens ecologically-oriented study in the region by focusing on a wide number of poets from three different countries and examines the poets' manner of animal representation and their vision for their societies specifically and the world in general.

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[10] I am aware of the problematic nature of terms like "environment" (that which surrounds us), "nature", and "animals", as they re-enforce the destructive dualistic thinking of humans versus environment/nature/animals. Yet humans are part of the physical environment or nature, and they are animals. However, for practical purposes, I still employ terms like environment and/or nature in this study for their popular meanings, and I mostly simply refer to non-human animals as "animals" and human animals as "humans".

[11] Titles of literary works with names of animals or references to animals abound. Examples are Jack Mapanje's *Of Chameleons and Gods, The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, and *Beasts of Nalunga*; Steve Chimombo's *Napolo and the Python,* and *Epic of the Forest Creatures*; Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller*; and Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, among many others.

Ecocriticism is not restricted to environmentally-conscious or nature writing (Heise 1097, Slovic 1102). To suggest that nature writing is or should be the sole object of ecocriticism is, as Ursula Heise puts it, "comparable to claiming that feminism is only applicable to texts by or about women" (1097). Ecocriticism also deals with texts which appear to have nothing to do with nature. Any literary work from any part of the world can be subjected to ecocritical interpretation; no literary work "is off-limits to green reading" (Slovic 1102). Whatever the nature or media of the text might be (film, novel, image) ecocriticism is simply interested in, among other things, analysing the manner in which the human relation to nature is represented, and examines how particular ways of representation shape "social and cultural attitudes toward the environment" (Heise 1097).

Some ecocritics have been accused of simply engaging in praise-singing for those writers who are seen as portraying nature in a positive light (Wylie, "Elephants and Compassion" 80; Michael Cohen, "Blues in the Green" 13). A "green" reading of seemingly environmentally–conscious works selected for this study reveals ruptures, tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities in the way in which animals and nature are represented. In this study I scrutinise the way animals are represented in the seemingly environmentally-conscious works and the others from a multiperspectival ecophilosophical position whose unifying factor is the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of humans and animals and all entities on earth and also the separateness or difference of animals from humans.

This thesis treats discrete but interrelated bodies of poetic works from three countries within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Apart from being countries that belong to a regional body, people from these countries have always interacted in many ways since the colonial period making possible the diffusion of cultures and ideas. My choice of poetry from these countries follows scholarly trends in African literature that divide the African continent into linguistic zones (Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone) and geographical regions (such as West, Central, East, and South Africa). Although literature from Malawi and Zimbabwe is sometimes treated as central African literature (see Roscoe 1977 and Roscoe and Msiska 1992), in my thesis I follow Michael Chapman (1996) in treating the selected works as Southern African poetry in English. Among the compelling reasons for treating these works as southern

African literature is the fact that these countries share socio-cultural, political and economic linkages with other countries in southern Africa. My critical focus is also informed by my personal scholarly trajectory. I have lived and worked both in Malawi and South Africa and this has had the result of deepening my interest in the literature of the two countries. Further, my interest in Zimbabwean literature also stems from the fact that Zimbabwe was one of the countries that formed part of the colonial federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi).

This study is not a comparative one, although I attempt to draw similarities, especially in the conclusion, in the ways in which the poets represent animals. I treat the selected works as distinct poetic works which from within their own context represent animals for their own ideological and political ends. These works speak in the first instance in relation to national boundaries, as the poets address issues they consider relevant at the particular moments in their countries' history. As such, while some poets (especially the Malawian and Zimbabwean poets) address socio-political issues within their countries (thereby making the political context indispensable in my analysis of the poetry) and represent animals allegorically, others (especially the South African poets) address both nation-based and wider political issues of ecology and environmentalism. This enables me to draw a variety of concepts such as political resistance, socio-political change, stewardship, identity, relational selfhood, and belonging, among others, in relation to animal representation in poetry from the three countries.

5.0 Literature Review

Given that my study engages with ecocriticism and zoocriticism in analysing the selected poetic texts, I should mention here that the literature review that follows considers works that belong to these two related but historically, theoretically and/or ideologically different positions regarding our relationship with the extra-human. In their book *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin tell us that "whereas ecocriticism, at least in part, has developed out of literary studies in response to changes in perception of the extra-human and its place in literature, animal studies (except where it is regarded as a sub-branch of ecocriticism) has developed independently through disciplines such as philosophy, zoology and religion." They go on to say that it is not surprising, then, that "zoocriticism - as we might term its practice in literary studies - is concerned

not just with animal *representation* but also with animal *rights*" (17-18, italics in original). I should also mention here that these two fields of literary inquiry (that is, ecocriticism and zoocriticism) "frequently overlap" (Huggan and Tiffin 19). For instance, where they combine with postcolonial theory, giving rise to what Huggan and Tiffin refer to as postcolonial zoocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism, zoocriticism shares with ecocriticism

> the exploration of conflicted areas and problems: wildlife protection and conservation on land needed for poor human communities; human communities evicted from their homeland to make way for game parks to benefit wealthy tourists; and, contained within these and other examples, a deep concern for rights (18).

Related though these fields are, the conflicts and challenges that arise within them vary. Many of the challenges and conflicts in zoocriticism are "attached to the philosophical limitations of rights discourses themselves," triggering such questions as "Should animals, for example, have equal rights with humans; and if so, under which circumstances? With whose rights should we begin, and with whose rights - with what possible philosophical understanding and/or legal notion of rights - can we end?" among others (Huggan and Tiffin 18). On the other hand the challenges and conflicts in ecocriticism, especially in its Euro-American guise, relate to the discourse of biodiversity, especially its threat of becoming an overriding discourse that obscures the material, social and economic challenges of people in Third World countries.

In reviewing the literature below I begin with a consideration of works and views that are mainly zoocritical before engaging with those that can strictly be called ecological or ecocritical.

As already indicated in all of the above, many studies have been conducted about our relationships with animals in different disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and literature, among others. Approaches in these studies vary from symbolic, economic, structuralist, political, and ecological or environmental (Mullin 1999). Given the immensity of the literature on human-animal relationships and animal representation globally and in Euro-American accounts, I would like in what follows to indicate some key studies and lines of argument, particularly from Euro-American thought, regarding animals that are relevant for my study. These are mainly scientific and (eco)philosophical studies. In any case anthropological, historical and sociological studies of human-animal relationships

have been criticised for being anthropocentric as they are seen to perpetuate the "objectification of animals by focusing only on the human side of such relationships" (Mullin 217).

More generally, Euro-American accounts pursue the following interrelated lines of argument: human abuse of, and cruelty to, animals is morally and legally objectionable; animals, like human beings, should be accorded moral (and even legal) rights; humans are not lords and masters of creation; the discontinuity between humans and animals is exaggerated; animals should be protected/conserved in parks to curb species extinction; and, finally for my purposes here, literary representation of animals should explore/promote ethical approaches to animals rather than dualistic and hierarchical attitudes to them. Most of the available ecophilosophical/ environmentalist, zoocritical, and ecocritical literature combines two or more of these arguments.

The question of human abuse of, and cruelty to, animals has preoccupied scholars for a long time. Scholars of various persuasions (Christian moralists, animal psychologists, philosophers, and vegetarians, among others) have objected to cruelty to animals for a variety of reasons (see Maehle 1994). Although "no law regulating animal protection" existed in any European country as late as the nineteenth century (Maehle 95), today many countries around the world have laws that prohibit gratuitous violence to animals. One suspects though, that the legislations against cruelty to animals in many countries are not for the sake of the animals themselves but for the sake of humans, as it is held by many that cruelty to animals leads to "callousness towards other human beings" (ibid. 84). The existence of abattoirs where animals die in great numbers and laboratories where animals are experimented upon away from the eyes of the public is enough testimony to this fact. The laws against cruelty to animals are also another way of demonstrating human superiority over animals as they act as a mark of rationality and civilization.

A diversity of views characterises the debate about the nature of humans and animals and the question whether or not humans have obligations to animals. While Aristotle believed that animals shared many capacities with humans (such capacities as consciousness, desire, pain, and imagination), René Descartes, the 17th century continental philosopher introduced a radical view that not only separated humans from animals but rendered the question of human obligation towards animals redundant. Descartes denied animals, not only rationality, consciousness and

language, but sentience as well. For Descartes, animals are mere automata or machines and "[l]ike manmade machines, animals are not conscious beings; they are 'thoughtless' [and t]hey cannot be said to have a mind or soul" (Regan, "Introduction" 4). This view threw animals outside the borders of moral consideration.

Thinkers such as Saint Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant believed that animals are lower than humans because of their alleged lack of rationality, and autonomy, and objected to cruelty to animals not for the sake of the animals but for the sake of humans. Aquinas objected to cruelty to animals because he thought that "people who treat animals cruelly are naturally inclined to treat rational beings in a similar way, while those who extend their kindness to animals are disposed to extend their kindness to rational beings as well" (ibid 9.). For Kant only humans, the only species with an exclusive claim to rationality, have intrinsic worth or are "ends-in-themselves" and should never be used as a means to an end. In his view "[a]nimals are not persons because they are not rational, self-conscious beings capable of grasping the moral law. Since they are not part of the kingdom of moral legislators, we who are members of that 'kingdom' do not owe them anything" (Pojman & Pojman, "Introduction to 'Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth'" 63). He declares that "so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man" (Kant 64).

Kantian and related views about animals are not without their supporters in Western thought. But they have many critics too. One of Kant's supporters is Holly Wilson who considers Kant's views as relevant to green thought.[12]

The second major and most well-known argument in Euro-American thinking regarding animals is the argument that animals have rights and that humans have a direct moral obligation towards them. Unlike the mechanistic and dualistic Cartesian view and the dualistic views of Aquinas and Kant, among others, those thinkers who object to cruelty to animals from an animal rightist position do so not for the sake of humans but for the sake of the animals themselves. The thinkers most associated with the animal liberation or animal rights views are Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Peter Singer is a philosopher associated with the birth of the animal rights movement

[12] See "The Green Kant: Kant's Treatment of Animals" in Pojman & Pojman (2008).

through his epoch-making book *Animal Liberation: Towards an End to Man's Inhumanity to Animals* (first published in 1975). Following the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, Singer advances a utilitarian[13] defence of animal liberation. He, like his predecessor, argues that the fact that animals feel pain and pleasure means that we should desist from inflicting unnecessary pain upon them and instead should aim to maximise pleasure for all, humans or animals. Singer maintains that

> if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – in so far as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. […]. So the limit of sentience […] is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others (*Animal Liberation* 9).

However, critics have raised questions about the cut off points for the sentience criteria: which animals qualify as moral patients and which ones do not based on their sentience? What degree of sentience qualifies a creature to be morally considerable? Besides, Singers "defense [sic] of euthanasia and infanticide for 'severely disabled' human beings" (Best, "Philosophy" np.), a direct consequence of his distinction of persons and nonpersons that logically reads some humans out of personhood and moral consideration, has sparked heavy criticism from many people and disabled rights activists some of whom brand him a Nazi[14] or charge him with the prejudice of what Steve Best calls "disablism" (see Steven Best, "Philosophy" nd.). In spite of its controversial aspects, Singer's position, which in environmentalist parlance is referred to as *ethical sentientism*, is one of the well-known and widely respected environmentalist/ecological positions in the world today.

Unlike Singer who adopts a utilitarian perspective, his counterpart in animal liberation/rights theorizing, Tom Regan, adopts a deontological or duty-oriented perspective.[15] Regan champions equal rights between humans and animals contending

[13] As Pojman and Pojman rightly observe, "[u]tilitarians follow Jeremy Bentham in asserting that what makes beings morally considerable is not reason but *sentience*. All sentient creatures have the ability to suffer and, as such, have interests. The frustration of those interests leads to suffering. Utilitarianism seeks to maximize the satisfaction of interests whether they be those of humans or animals" (Pojman & pojman, "Animal Rights" 61, italics in original).

[14] Such critics point out that "there are alarming parallels between [Singer's] views and those of the Third Reich, where mentally and physically disabled people were special targets. Singer's "protest at these analogies" are to no avail (Best, "Philosophy" np).

[15] The deontological (duty-oriented) ethical theory was developed by Immanuel Kant who held that the "consequences of an action are irrelevant (one can do the right thing for the wrong reasons); what matters solely is the intention of the agent and whether that agent is acting in accordance with reason

that "the same essential psychological properties – desires, memory, intelligence [among others (see Regan, "The Case" 22 and *The Case* 81)] – link all animals and the human animal and thereby give us equal intrinsic value upon which equal rights are founded. These rights are inalienable and cannot be forfeited" (Pojman & Pojman, "Animal Rights" 62).

Further, unlike Singer, who allows "necessary" killing of, and experimentation on, animals, Regan is against all experimentation and all killing. Regan is therefore more radical than Singer as he maintains that he is committed to (a) "the total abolition of the use of animals in science," (b) "the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture," and (c) "the total elimination of commercial and sport hunting and trapping" (Regan "The Case" 13). In a clear opposition to Utilitarianism he says

> what's wrong isn't the pain, isn't the suffering, isn't the deprivation [that humans cause to animals]. These compound what's wrong. Sometimes – often – they make it much, much worse. But they are not the fundamental wrong. The fundamental wrong is the system that allows us to view animals as *our resources*, here for *us* – to be eaten, or surgically manipulated, or exploited for sport or money. Once we accept this view of animals – as our resources – the rest is as predictable as it is regrettable ("The Case" 13-14, italics in original).

Regan, nevertheless, acknowledges that "the great appeal of utilitarianism rests with its uncompromising *egalitarianism*: everyone's interests count and count equally with the like interests of everyone else" (ibid. 19, italics in original). But he still believes that "[t]he equality we find in utilitarianism […] is not the sort an advocate of animal or human rights should have in mind. Utilitarianism has no room for the equal moral rights of different individuals because it has no room for their equal inherent value or worth" (ibid.). For Regan it is this inherent worth that should make us treat humans and animals equally since "[i]nherent value […] belongs equally to those who are the experiencing subjects of a life" (ibid. 23).

Regan's position with regard to human treatment of animals has not escaped criticism either. Mary Ann Warren accuses Regan of failing to recognise the important differences between humans and animals (for example rationality) and for relying on an obscure term like "inherent value." Warren tells us: "Inherent value is a key concept in Regan's theory. It is the bridge between the plausible claim that all

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and moral obligation" (Best, "Philosophy" np.). For deontological ethics therefore, "acting in accordance with reason and moral obligation" are some of the "features in the moral act [that] have intrinsic value regardless of the consequences" [Pojman and Pojman, "Animal Rights" 62).

normal, mature mammals – human or otherwise – are subjects-of-a-life and the more debatable claim that they all have basic moral rights of the same strength. But it is a highly obscure concept, and its obscurity makes it ill-suited to play this crucial role" (92). For her "[t]he subject-of-a-life criterion can provide us with little or no moral guidance in our interactions with the vast majority of animals (93). She therefore rejects what she calls Regan's "strong animal rights position" arguing that "Regan's case for the strong animal rights position is unpersuasive and that this position entails consequences which a reasonable person cannot accept," (91) and comes up with what she refers to as "the weak animal rights" position which, while ascribing moral rights to "all sentient animals, that is all those capable of having experiences, including experiences of pleasure or satisfaction and pain, suffering, or frustration," recognises the fact that the moral rights of some non-human animals are not "identical in strength to those of persons" (ibid. 91). As such, the weak animal rights position accepts that "[t]he rights of most non-human animals may be overridden in circumstances which would not justify overriding the rights of persons" (ibid.).

Although some ecophilosophers and enviromentlists such as ecofeminists[16] find fault with the discourse of rights as a basis for according moral worth to animals, and with the exclusionary and masculinist rationalist nature of Regan's and Singer's manner of theorising which for them inferiorises other modes of knowing (Plumwood 1993), the views of these thinkers have proved very influential in ecophilosophy and environmentalism. Many scholars have joined them to demonstrate, speculatively sometimes, that animals have capacities (such as emotions, consciousness, intelligence, and autonomy) previously denied them by such philosophers as Descartes and Kant.[17] This has also been followed by a proliferation of scholarly work, such as Mary Warren's above, that object to the idea of according animals equal moral status via what the authors see as a deliberate blurring of the distinction

[16] Ecological feminists (ecofeminists) believe that "the conceptual connections between the dual dominations of women and nature are located in an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework characterised by a logic of domination" (Karen Warren 33, see also Carol Adams 2004 and 2006, and Plumwood 1993) and blame patriarchal modes of thought and behaviour for the current ecological crisis. They, therefore, argue that "the logic of traditional feminism requires the expansion of feminism to include ecological feminism" and that "ecological feminism provides a framework for developing a distinctively feminist environmental ethic." For ecofeminists "any feminist theory and any environmental ethic which fails to take seriously the interconnected dominations of women and nature is simply inadequate" (Karen Warren 33).

[17] See Section 2: "Animals as Reflexive Thinkers" of *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings* (2007) edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, and Part 2: "Animal Capacities: Pain, Emotion, Consciousness" of *The Animal Ethics Reader*, 2nd ed. (2008) edited by Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler.

between humans and nonhumans in Regan and Singer's positions. Michael Leahy dismisses outright the whole idea of animal liberation. In his controversial book *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (1991) Leahy scoffs at the idea of animal liberation, regardless of the perspective one chooses to adopt, calling it a mere flight of fancy. For him animals are "primitive beings" and since they lack language and consciousness they cannot be said to have desires, fears and expectations like human beings. Although he does not necessarily condone "random killing of animals," (199) he, contrary to the animal liberationists, has no objection to the various uses that humans put animals. Although a consensus on human obligations to animals is unlikely to be reached anytime soon, if ever, animal rights movements around the world are proving beneficial to the lives of many animals as many of them are rescued from certain death in the hands of cruel humans.

The demonstration of animal capacities, sentience and their similarities with humans has brought into sharp focus questions of human discontinuity with animals and human superiority over animals and nature. Many accounts in Euro-American thought today hold that the idea of human discontinuity with animals is highly exaggerated. Many people today believe that humans are more similar to animals than they are different. The question of human similarity and kinship to animals was most provocatively raised by Charles Darwin's path-breaking biological studies in the 19th century. In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1890) Darwin argued that humans "descended from some less highly organised form" (606) through the process of evolution which is why "[m]an [sic] still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin" (619). Darwin maintains that

> [t]he grounds upon which this conclusion rests will never be shaken, for the close similarity between man and the lower animals in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and constitution, both of high and of the most trifling importance, – the rudiments which he retains, and the abnormal reversions to which he is occasionally liable, – are facts which cannot be disputed (606-607).

He goes on to say, controversially, that

> [b]y considering the embryological structure of man, – the homologies which he presents with the lower animals, – the rudiments which he retains, – and the reversions to which he is liable, we can partly recall in imagination the former condition of our early progenitors; and can approximately place them in their proper place in the zoological series. We thus learn that man is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World. This creature, if its whole

> structure had been examined by a naturalist, would have been classed amongst the Quadrumana, as surely as the still more ancient progenitor of the Old and New World monkeys (609).

Although he was heavily criticised by many theologians and Christians (a thing he anticipated when he said " I am aware that the conclusions arrived at in this work will be denounced by some as highly irreligious" [p. 613]) for overturning the biblical theory of creationism (the belief that God created all things *ex nihilo*), Darwin's theory of evolution is entrenched in scientific studies today. Unlike the creationist theory, the evolutionist theory holds promise for an ecological way of life as it establishes kinship between humans and nonhuman animals. As Erica Fudge notes,

> [w]hat Darwin's theory proposed […] was an end to human distinction: an end to the separation of man from beast. It was impossible, following his scheme, that humans should have ever existed as a breed apart. Instead, humans were animals, just the most evolved species. The Christian narrative of superiority and dominion was seemingly destroyed in one movement (19).

In the wake of Darwin's theory many ecocritics and environmentalists persistently question human superiority over, or difference from, other animals that gives us the right to abuse them.

Another development that raises questions about the discontinuity between humans and animals is the issue of xenotransplantation, that is, "the transplantation of tissue and organs between different species, and in particular the transplantation of animal tissue into humans" (Fudge 105). Fudge rightly notes that xenotransplantation signals our acknowledgement that animals "are enough like us to be able to contemplate using them to patch up our own bodies" (109) – although the practice also shows our instrumental attitude to animals who "[w]e regard […] as tools [or] the carriers of spare-parts" (ibid. 108-109).

Related to the contentious idea of human physical, psychological and social discontinuity from animals is the idea of human superiority over animals in the Great Chain of Being. However, studies such as Darwin's, which demonstrate the continuity between humans and animals, have also helped to depose humans from their supposed God-given position on top of the hierarchy of creation adopted from the creation story in Genesis. Other Euro-American thinkers even go further to blame the Judaeo-Christian religion for the current ecological crisis. In an article first published in 1967 titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" Lynn White argues that "our current ecological crisis [is] primarily due to 'the orthodox Christian arrogance

towards nature,' […] arrogance […] rooted in a domineering, anthropocentric attitude that [can] be traced back to Genesis" (Pojman & Pojman "Perspectives" 10). White observes that "in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), [Christianity] not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (White 18-19).[18] To contain the crisis White suggests the virtue of humility like that of St. Francis of Assisi who, in White's view, "tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures" (ibid. 20). He further suggests that we need a "new set of basic values" (ibid. 21) with regard to nature or else "we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" (ibid.).

In reaction to White's argument, Lewis Moncrief considers White's explanation of the cause of the current crisis "simplistic" because "the fact that another culture does not associate spiritual beings with natural objects does not mean that such a culture will invariably ruthlessly exploit its resources. It simply means that there are fewer social and psychological constraints against such action (23).

Like Moncrief, Patrick Dobel is also unconvinced by White's argument. He characterises "[t]he attempt to discover historical roots" for the ecological crisis as "a dubious business" that "borders on the ludicrous" and accuses those he calls "Christianity's ecological critics" of "consistently underestimat[ing] the economic, social and political influences on modern science and economy" and their impact on the environment (29). Far from being a cause of the environmental crisis, Dobel sees in Christianity, through its "combined emphasis upon God's ownership, our trusteeship and the limits of life," a stewardship imperative that calls "for an attitude of humility and care in dealing with the world" (31). Dobel's is but a different and environmentally-friendly interpretation of God's blessing to Adam and Eve to "[b]e fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it [and] [b]e masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of the heaven and all living animals on earth" (Genesis 1:28). Besides, the stewardship imperative still leaves humans at the pinnacle of creation as God-appointed overseers and, therefore, fails, in my view, to address the instrumentalist attitude of nature that has led to the current ecological crisis.

[18] Speaking metaphorically of Christianity's contribution to the ecological crisis, Ted Hughes says "Christianity deposes Mother Nature and begets, on her prostrate body, Science, which proceeds to destroy nature" (qtd. by Scigaj 122).

The extinction of some animal species and the declining number of animals in the wild around the world have provoked other scholars to argue for the need to conserve or protect animals in parks, game reserves or even in zoos. Reasons given for the protection of animals, like the conservation of nature in general, vary from concern for future generations to sustainable use of resources and spiritual/therapeutic benefits from enjoying animals and wilderness. Although Western-driven conservationism has helped in the recovery of some animal species from the brink of extinction and ensured the protection of wildlife in parks both in Africa and beyond, as I mentioned earlier, the western model of conservation is controversial both socio-politically and ecologically. In Africa, for example, conservationism was motivated less by the need to preserve animals than by the naked show of imperialist power over the colonised (Carruthers, *The Kruger* 4). Africans, who were (and still are) constructed as ravagers of the environment and poachers of animals that required the selfless sacrifice of Europeans to act as custodians (ibid. 90) lost land as they were moved from areas designated as wildlife parks and reserves.

Further, in his book *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation* (1981) John A. Livingston finds wildlife conservationism too anthropocentric to be of much value to the animals. Livingston observes that all arguments advanced in favour of wildlife belong to the self-interest family of conservation arguments which are "entirely and exclusively man-oriented [and] anthropocentric" (42) as animals are viewed as a resource for humans. The construction of animals as a resource in conservationism, and the killing of animals such as elephants in the name of "population management" in South Africa, for example, is heavily criticised from an animal rightist position by Steven Best. In his article "The Killing Fields of South Africa: Eco-Wars, Species Apartheid, and Total Liberation" Best argues that

> [i]nstead of confronting systematic violence against animals as a profound problem with enormous implications for humans themselves, the brutality of species apartheid is linguistically sanitized in the discourse such as 'culling,' 'sustainable use,' 'sustainable off take,' 'humane use,' 'harvestable resource,' 'adaptive management,' and 'population management'" (np).

Best, like Regan, advocates for total liberation of animals from human ab/use. But one wonders whether it would be wise to allow animal populations in parks and reserves to explode to the extent of rendering the small pieces of land allocated to them incapable of sustaining them.

As for zoos, in a provocative and controversial essay Dale Jamieson quashes all the arguments (such as for entertainment/amusement, education, scientific research, and preservation of species) advanced in favour of their existence and calls for their abolition. For Jamieson, none of these arguments, which he compellingly shows as unpersuasive, justifies keeping animals in captivity. Attacking anthropocentrism that he sees as characterising the need for zoos, he contends that "[m]orality and perhaps our very survival require that we learn to live as one species among many rather than as one species over many. To do this, we must forget what we learn at zoos. Because what zoos teach us is false and dangerous, both humans and animals will be better off when they are abolished" (103). Given the argument's economic and political ramifications it is no surprise that the essay "has been greeted with some hostility" (Pojman & Pojman, "Introduction to 'Against Zoos'" 97).

The above perceptions of animals and debates about our relationships with them have an effect on the ways in which animals are represented in literature. In an introduction to a multidisciplinary collection of essays that trace or explore "the ways people have thought about or presented animals in different cultural and historical circumstances" Nigel Rothfels tells us that the basis of the collection is "[t]he idea that the way we talk or write about animals, photograph animals, think about animals, imagine animals – represent animals – is in some very important way deeply connected to our cultural environment, and that this cultural environment is rooted in a history" (xi). Steve Baker makes a similar observation in his *Picturing the Beast* (1993) when he says "[c]ulture does not allow unmediated access to animals themselves. Our attitudes, our prejudices and indeed our sympathies are all filtered through or clogged up in this thick but transparent mesh (or mess) of history, culture, public opinion, [and] received ideas" (10). Influenced by various ideas that seek to curtail human exploitation of animals and the environment, ecocritics and ecologically-oriented writers (eco-writers) agree that the environment should not be represented in ways that reinforce hierarchical and dualistic thinking but in ways that should engender an ecological way of life.

Baker's book referred to above, which Greg Garrard calls "an excellent example of liberationist criticism," (141) is an important critical work in this direction on the representation of animals in Western culture. Unlike other works on animal representation which have nothing to offer to the real animal, one of the objectives of Baker's book is to inquire about the relation of the various "kinds of cultural

representations [of animals] to the circumstances of actual living animals in that same culture, and to figure out what […] the animal rights movement [can] learn from this evidence in its attempt to develop and promote a less contemptuous and condescending attitude to animals throughout the culture[…]" (x). Baker looks at "how the animal currently figures in the thinking of people who for the most part don't care, or don't care much, or don't consciously think much about animals," focusing on "the forms and structures of the symbolic availability of animals – an availability which is of course in no way restricted to those who have a particular view on animal rights" (5). Although my area of focus is different from Baker's, his critique of images of animals and the "rhetoric of animality"[19] in the media in Britain and America offers useful insights for my study on the symbolic /metaphoric use of animals in Jack Mapanje's poetry, for example.

In his zoocritical book *Poetic Animals and Animal Souls* Randy Malamud laments the way we exploit animals imaginatively when he says

> [a]nimals are vehicles, burdened with the anthropocentrically symbolic projections of our own minds. We engage animals in a fashion that keeps them distinct from us, as we define ourselves against them. One could hardly imagine an orientation less amenable to harmonious and ethical coexistence with animals. Claude Levi-Strauss's dictum in *Totemism* that animals ate good to think with […] describes a paradigm of imaginative exploitation. We conceive of animals as means to an end […] (4).

Writing with reference to American culture, but in ways that apply to many cultures around the world, Malamud goes on to observe that

> [o]ur culture has conditioned us to expect that our animals will be copiously present to treat as we please: whether we want to eat them, or wear them, or dissect them, or just look at them. And in our aesthetic enterprises, we demand of animals a similar accessibility and ubiquity of service, as metaphors, symbols, vehicles, toys, fodder for contemplation, backdrops, flatterers of our omnivorous cultural grasp. Certainly most literary representations sustain this conceit of the subject animal's availability, boundless pliability, and unproblematic implication in whatever text at hand happens to require a quack-quack here or an oink-oink there (18).

Malamud is, however, aware of "rare and interesting exceptions, in which the animals overcome their subordinate subjectivity, in a trope where they do not figure as the happily second-class foils that we have come to expect, and refuse to proceed submissively into an abattoir of cultural mauling" (ibid.). In his analysis of animal

[19] The tendency of giving people, institutions, or societies that we do not like or despise derogatory animal names such as "beast" and "brute", or referring to them using names of particular animals as a crude tactic of name-calling (Baker 77ff).

poems in the book Malamud "resist[s] and reverse[s] the hegemonic subordination of animals [and] identify[ies] the destructive representations of animals – derogatory and demeaning, encouraging disrespect and trivialization – that pervade our culture and that certainly impact our real world conception and treatment of animals." He also offers a countervailing ecocritical, or more specifically, zoocritical aesthetic that "should inspire people to work to rescue animals from the degradations, the manipulations and decontexualizations that they suffer in so many of our cultural processes and products" (43). For Malamaud, an eco/zoocritical,[20] and one would add, ethic, should entail (1) "[e]ncouraging people to see animals without hurting them" whether literally, spiritually, or metaphysically); (2) [u]nderstanding how animals exist in their own contexts, not in our contexts, and without impinging upon or damaging their contexts in the process"; (3) "[t]eaching about animals' habits, their lives, their emotions, their natures, as much as can be done from our limited and biased perspective"; (4) "[a]dvocating respect for animals, on their own terms – not because of what they can do for us or what they mean to us"; and (5) "[k]nowing animals, somewhat: learning who they are and how their lives relate to ours" (44-45). Malamud's eco/zoocritical ethic is shared by many environmentally-conscious writers and critics today. In this study some of Malamud's eco/zoocritical views inform my approach to the poetry.

In Africa the debate on human-animal relationships and the environment generally follows Euro-American lines of argument. Aware of the current environmental crisis and human abuse of nature, animal rightists in Africa call for the total liberation of animals from human ab/use while ecocritics and zoocritics call for non-hierarchical, non-dualistic and non-exploitative representation of animals, in particular, and nature in general. They also critique ecological imperialism by the capitalist West, whose business dealings in Africa despoil the environment and causes misery to many people. Other ecocritics see African beliefs and oral literature as a site from which environmental knowledge can be recuperated to complement the ecological views from America and Europe.

Michelè Pickover's *Animal Rights in South Africa* (2005), in which she offers an impassioned defence of animal rights, is an important book on the subject of animals. Disappointed by the confused, ambivalent and morally schizophrenic

[20] The expression eco/zoocritical signals the overlapping nature and relationship between ecocriticism and zoocriticism.

relationship that humans have with other animals that she calls "our close relatives," Pickover sets out to expose the ruthless, oppressive and exploitative ways in which South Africans treat animals. While pets are treated with love and care, those animals that fall outside the boundaries of the definition of "pet" are eaten and exploited in various ways. This categorization of animals, Pickover argues, reveals the conflicting attitudes with which South African's, and perhaps, human beings in general, see animals: "sometimes as intelligent and sentient beings capable of emotions and worthy of respect; sometimes as the 'Other' – unfeeling tools and lucrative 'resources' or items of property to be used as we see fit." While the former view "leads to kinship, affinity and reconciliation," the latter leads to "contempt, alienation and disconnection." Little wonder that in her book Pickover aims to:

> give voice to the voiceless, to make the invisible visible, […] [to] open a window on a hidden world of suffering and break down the walls that prevent us from making connections beyond our own species [and] to make us aware of the pervasiveness of injustice, or to show how our relationships with animals can be a metaphor for human society, reflecting our own identities, culture, ideological structures and social systems of control, oppression and violence (2 - 3).

Besides, an important aim of hers in this book is "to show the abuse, pain and suffering that takes place behind closed doors and that is sanctioned by abstract injustice" (3). Despite the fact that Pickover's book deals with real life situations of animals in South Africa it will doubtless be a useful source of information about people's attitudes to animals in the country, in particular, and in the world as a whole.

While ecocritical and zoocritical voices are scanty in Africa more generally, ecologically- and animal-oriented studies of literary works are fast growing fields in South Africa. Over the past few years, colloquia have been held on various aspects of the environment (such as wilderness, forests, animals, and birds) in literature and special issues of journals on these aspects or on ecocriticism have been published.[21] Works by the Nobel Laureate, J[ohn] M[axwell] Coetzee, which have previously been read from perspectives that include mythic, post-colonial and post-modern, are in recent times gaining ground as sites for zoocritical study. Of interest for this new reading of Coetzee are his works *Disgrace* (2000) and *The Lives of Animals* (1999).

[21] A group of literary scholars working on environmental issues, landscape and animal studies have been meeting once every year for a Literature & Ecology Colloquium since 2004. In 2007 ecocriticism was the subject of a special issue of the South African *Journal of Literary Studies*, volume 23 numbers 3 and 4.

"The Lives of Animals" defies simple generic identification, that is, whether it is fiction or non-fiction (moral philosophy).[22]

The Lives of Animals is a result of two Tanner Lectures on Human Values that J. M. Coetzee gave at Princeton University in 1997, under the general title "The Lives of Animals." The lectures, to use Stephen Mulhall's words,

> took the form of two fictions – two linked short stories about the visit of the eminent novelist Elizabeth Costello to Appleton College to deliver the annual Gates Lecture (together with a seminar in the literature department) in which she chooses to speak about animals, and in particular the ways in which animals have been and are treated not only by human beings in general, but by philosophers and poets in particular (1).

In *The Lives of Animals* Coetzee critiques the exploitation, abuse, and killing of animals by humans and appeals for change in our treatment of them through the fictitious character Elizabeth Costello.[23]

Elizabeth Costello attacks the whole edifice of Euro-American philosophical/ethical debate about animal rights or moral considerability of animals by arguing that "[t]he question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common – reason, self-consciousness, a soul – with other animals? (With the corollary that, if we do not, then we are entitled to treat them as we like, imprisoning them, killing them, dishonouring their copses)" (34). Here, Coetzee, as Gutmann observes, offers "a critique of a more typical [western] philosophical approach to the topic of animal rights" (3). In her lecture Costello also attacks the science of ecology revealing what her son, John Bernard, refers to her "antiecologism" (55). For her the ecological vision which she refers to as "the greater dance" is weak as a liberationist vision for animals since in it "[t]he whole is greater than the sum of the parts" (53). As a result, it pays attention not so much on the welfare of the "particular beings who play" a role or "particip[ate] in the dance" (54) but on the stability of the dance itself. For her "[a] nimals are not believers in ecology" (ibid.) and every individual creature that fights for its life matters.

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[22] Wherever the title appears inside quotation marks I am referring to the text or manuscript rather than its reincarnations in publication, in which case the title is in italics. Different people have identified it differently, foregrounding one or other of the books aspects. The three published reincarnations of the work have contributed even more to its indeterminate nature. See Patrick Denman Flanery, "(Re-)Marking Coetzee and Costello: *The* [Textual] *Lives of Animal*," *English Studies in Africa* 47.1 (2004). 61-84. Personally, I regard "The Lives of Animals" as a work on moral philosophy, specifically animal ethics.

[23] There is enough reason to believe that Elizabeth Costello is Coetzee's doppelganger – both Coetzee and Costello are novelists, both are vegetarians, Costello delivers her lecture at Appleton College, a thinly veiled name for Princeton University where Coetzee delivered his Tanner Lectures. In what follows therefore one can, with a few exceptions, use the names Costello and Coetzee interchangeably.

Rather than philosophical thought and scientific experimentation, for Costello the burden of opening our hearts to animals lies in what she calls "the sympathetic imagination" that is, the ability to think ourselves or our way into the place or life of another creature "to which poetry and fiction appeal more than does philosophy" (Gutmann 4). It is this "sympathetic imagination" that sets some poets well above the philosophers when it comes to showing us ways of relating with other animals. Not all manners of depicting animals in literature or poetry are worthwhile in constructing a "sympathetic imagination," however. Poetry in which animals stand for human qualities" (50) or where animals are depicted allegorically does not qualify, but "poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him" (51). In other words, she argues for poetry that constructs humility and respect for the individual being of another. A good example of such poetry for Costello is Ted Hughes's "The Jaguar" and "Second Glance at a Jaguar." It is Costello's belief that in these poems

> Hughes is feeling his way toward a different kind of being-in-the-world, one which is not entirely foreign to us, since the experience before the cage [of the Jaguar] seems to belong to dream-experience, experience held in the collective unconscious. In these poems we know the jaguar not from the way he seems but from the way he moves. The body is as the body moves, or as the currents of life move within it. The poems ask us to imagine our way into that way of moving, to inhabit that body (51)

She goes on to say

> [b]y bodying forth the jaguar, Hughes shows us that we too can embody animals – by the process called poetic invention that mingles breath and sense in a way that no one has explained and no one ever will. He shows us how to bring the living body into being within ourselves. When we read the jaguar poem, when we recollect it afterwards in tranquillity, we are for a brief while the jaguar. He ripples within us, he takes over our body, he is us (53)

From a receptionist point of view one wonders how much of this reading of Hughes's poetry is a "purely textual meaning" rather than the result of the ideological context in which Costello reads it (Nixon 54).

Costello's ideas about rationality and animal rights are not without detractors.[24] One of Costello's critics is her daughter in-law Norma, a holder of a PhD in philosophy with specialization in the philosophy of mind. In Norma's view Elizabeth Costello's philosophising, especially what she says about human reason, is

[24] Coetzee anticipates criticism for his views from his audience.

naïve. For here "[i]t's the kind of easy, shallow relativism that impresses freshmen. Respect of everyone's worldview, the cow's worldview, the squirrel's worldview, and so forth. In the end it leads to total intellectual paralysis. You spend so much time respecting that you haven't time left to think" (47). But in dismissing relativism offhandedly and upholding universal rationalism, Norma is caught in the hierarchical and dualistic thought that elevates humans above nature and animals, as thinkers, inventors of mathematics, and builders of telescopes, among other things (48); the very dualistic and hierarchical thinking that for Costello is detrimental to the lives of animals.

Costello's [read Coetzee's] impassioned plea for animal rights, though persuasive, sadly falls into the very trap it seeks to avoid: the maintenance of a gulf between reason (which she sees as incapable of leading us in the right direction in our relationship with animals) and imagination/emotions (which she sees as a proper guide to ethical relations with animals). One South African poet, Douglas Livingstone, critiques this dualism in his long poem "*Traffic Interlude*: Descent from the Tower" (*RF* 300-303).[25] In the poem Livingstone tackles, through the metaphor of a tigress, an internal conflict within a creative individual "between intellect and instinct, between his left-brain and right-brain activity" (Everitt, Abstract 90). In her reading of this poem Mariss Everitt, drawing on Charles Darwin's argument in *The Descent of Man* that humans are animals, argues that "the poem uses the genre of fable to tell the story of man's internal tussle between intellect and instinct, between his left-brain and right-brain activity and that the tigress in the poem represents his animal or instinctual nature" (Everitt 90). She sees the poem as Livingstone's "portrayal of a man's quest for synthesis with his animal nature" which is represented by the tigress. In the poem Livingstone critiques the valorisation of intellect over imagination or vice versa and highlights the need for synthesis and recognition of both our rational/intellectual and instinctual/imaginative natures.

Further, *The Lives of Animals,* invites a critique of narrowness of focus on the type of animals that attract the author's attention. Like other liberationist works, in its critique of speciesism *The Lives of Animals* also seems to focus more on farm or captive animals and excludes animals living in the wild (the cover of the Princeton

[25] Livingstone may have been influenced by Ted Hughes whose poetry, in Leonard Scigaj's view, "repeatedly asserts that a human being is a composite who asks for trouble by paying attention only to rational consciousness" (69).

University Press edition, which depicts a cutting board, a pig, cattle, chickens, and a turkey, is revealing enough).

The need to represent animals compassionately and unhierarchically or undualistically is a major concern of Wendy Woodward, one of the South African zoocritics interested in the relationship between humans and animals.[26] In her book *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (2008) Woodward explores the work of southern African writers such as Zakes Mda, Yvonne Vera, Marguerite Poland, Noni Jabavu, Mia Couto and J. M. Coetzee, among others, and argues that these writers represent animals as subjects who experience complex emotions and have agency, intentionality and morality.

A similar concern with the relationship between literature and ecology, humans and animals, features in her article, which arguably forms part of her book, "Postcolonial Ecologies and the Gaze of Animals: Reading Some Contemporary Southern African Narratives" which she locates within the field of Animal Studies. Here she focuses on notions of ecologies, especially human/animal relationships, in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* and Mia Couto's *Voices Made Night*. Interestingly, in this article (as in the book above that followed) she crosses geographical and literary borders into the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In her reading of *The Heart of Redness* she generally seems to focus on the ecological consciousness of the amaXhosa in the novel. In so doing she ignores the problematic nature of this ecological awareness. Although the ecological awareness is there, it is not so self-evident, straightforward and unproblematic as Woodward would have us believe. The characters' interaction with nature smacks of anthropocentrism - they seem to value nature for its utility.

In her zoocritically-informed article titled "'Frail shared seconds': Encounters between Humans and Other Animals in the Poetry of Douglas Livingstone" Woodward looks at the politics of the representation of animals in Douglas Livingstone's poetry. Here she argues that despite the fact that animals embody ideas or metaphors in Livingstone's poetry, "it does not follow that they are judged

[26] I have come across five zoocritically-oriented articles by her which include "'Dog[s] of the Heart': Encounters between Humans and other Animals in the Poetry of Ruth Miller" (2001), "'Frail shared seconds': Encounters between Humans and Other Animals in the Poetry of Douglas Livingstone" (2003), "Lions, Leopards and Liminal Spaces: Representations of Biosociality in the Writings of Katy Payne, Linda Tucker and Gillian Van Houten" (2006), and "Whales, Clones and Two Ecological Novels: Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* and Jane Rosenthal's *Souvenir*" (2009).

instrumentally. Nor does the opposite obtain" (45). Livingstone's weakness for Woodward is "his predominant tendency to view nature and animals within a dualistic paradigm, [and] interactions between the speaking self and the animal are often hierarchic" (ibid.). Moreover, "his metaphysics may retain some 'Cartesian dream[s] of power' which duplicate the dualisms of what Plumwood calls a master consciousness" (52). Chapman corroborates Woodward's critique of Livingstone's dualistic view of animals when he observes that Livingstone "perceives animals as creatures in their own right with a legitimate world of their own" (*Douglas* 48). In spite of the weaknesses identified by the critics above, Livingstone's sympathetic portrayal of animals and his depiction of their struggle to survive in the wild (ibid. 54) goes a long way in showing that animals suffer as much as humans do and therefore need to be treated in a humane manner.

Although one hopes that ecocritical debate would be "more energetic" in Africa given that "most of the literature has a rural setting or a degenerate urban background that expresses a longing for the lost rural peace" (Mwangi np.), with the exception of South Africa, ecocritical voices are scarce in Africa at the moment. One hopes that the 36th Annual African Literature Association (ALA) conference (2010) which was organised around the theme of sustainability and ecocriticism will intensify debate on nature in African literature. The few ecocritical voices that one comes across on the continent, however, are significant in fostering ecocriticism both in Africa and beyond.

In an ecocritical reading of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Michael Lundblad judiciously cautions ecocritics that in their attempts "to foster better relationships between and among humans and nature" "in the context of postcolonial nations struggling for social equality" they need "to be much more aware of the human costs involved" and of the "need to explore the ethical implications of speaking for nature, even if our sympathies might generally be labelled 'green'" (np.). Lundblad takes a cue from Chinua Achebe's essay "The Truth of Fiction" where Achebe makes a distinction between "malignant" and "beneficent" fictions[27] to give the warning that if taken uncritically or if we place "supreme value on biological diversity" the

[27] Malignant fictions "are those narratives that are presented as unconstructed 'reality' and result in a reduced sensitivity to injustice" while beneficent fictions "are readily acknowledged as fictional and contingent, and thus able to teach us some sense of morality or at least sensitivity" and also "allow us to draw 'essential insights and wisdoms for making our way in the world'" (Lundblad np.).

ecocritical or biodiversity discourse might turn into a malignant fiction that may ignore "'pressing concerns of daily life' not only in today's Nigeria or in Achebe's novelistic Igboland, but also in many other Third World countries. Lundblad further cautions that "[i]f Americans and Europeans demand the protection of biodiversity, for example, and ecocritics focus on it in their work, there is the potential for a new form of imperialism that ignores the specific human contexts involved" (np.). Lundblad, therefore, rightly calls for balance in addressing environmental issues and human rights issues. Too much emphasis on any one of these may lead to unintended consequences such as destruction of the environment or violation of human rights in the process of addressing environmental problems.

Tanure Ojaide is another Nigerian writer who has received ecocritical attention. In an essay titled "Poetics of Resistance: Ecocritical Reading of Ojaide's *Delta Blues & Home Songs* and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*" Uzoechi Nwagbara sees Ojaide as a poet who "considers the ecocritical art of poetry as a kind of public duty, which he owes to the Nigerian people, to expose, reconstruct, and negate the actualities of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria." Nwagbara then argues that "since Ojaide's poetry intersects with the realities of ecological imperialism, it is […] a dependable barometer to gauge the Nigerian environmental/ecological experience" (17). In his poetry Ojaide laments the abuse of the environment by international oil companies in the oil-rich Niger Delta that has led to severe environmental degradation, acid rain, and the loss of livelihood for many people in the region. Like Ojaide, some of the selected poets in this study lament the abuse and exploitation of nature in their poetry.

In trying to widen the scope of ecocriticism, some scholars have turned to African oral literature to identify aspects of traditional knowledge that are worthwhile for the environmentalist discourse. In his PhD thesis titled "Ecocriticism and Environmental Knowledge of Asante Oral Traditional Poetry" (2006), Kwaku Asante-Darko argues for the "worth of the traditional oral poetry of Asante/Ashanti [peoples of West Africa] and its relevance as a source of inspiration for the raising of environmental consciousness" (vii). It is Asante-Darko's belief that "there existed within traditional oral literature some environmental knowledge which responded to the needs of traditional society. The knowledge in this literature can be revamped and harnessed to help direct the environmental aspect of current developmental approaches" (ibid.) Asante-Darko's is an important work that calls for the

examination of the often-denigrated traditional African practices and beliefs for ecologically relevant aspects that can compliment the received ecological/environmentalist views from the West. Like Asante-Darko, my own focus on selected poets from southern Africa is an attempt to expand the scope of ecocritical debate in African literature.

In South Africa writers such as Zakes Mda and Douglas Livingstone, among others, have received critical attention from an ecocritical perspective. Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, Harry Sewlall observes, explores "the tensions in [the] novel occasioned by the historical clash of ecological ideologies, juxtaposed with the exigencies of metropolitan life on the present generation" (208). For Sewlall, *The Heart of Readiness* "fits the bill as a postcolonial literary document that satirically explores, among other issues, the epistemic aggression of the early colonisation of South Africa, particularly the Eastern Cape region, and the ecological implications of this event for the present generation of protagonists" in the novel (210). Central to our debate on animals is Sewlall's observation that "[e]nriching [the] variegated texture of [the lives of the Xhosa in the novel], are animals, which exist in an interpersonal relationship with humans." He goes on to say "[t]he dualistic Western view of the human kingdom versus the animal kingdom is replaced by a prismatic one, in which we see humans interacting symbiotically with animals […]" (220). However, Sewlall does not say how important this symbiotic and interpersonal relationship is to the welfare of animals in the country or on the continent. What do we learn from such depiction of animals regarding our relationship with the wild? Significantly, in the same novel cattle are massacred following the prophecy of Nongqawuse who tells her people (the amaXhosa) that the slaughtered cattle shall be resurrected and new ones shall come from the spirit world. One wishes Sewlall had told us how to reconcile this act of ruthlessness to sentient cattle with the seemingly enduring bond between humans and animals seen in the novel. Besides, what attitudes to animals emerge through Mda's depiction of animals in *The Heart of Redness*?

The issue of environmental degradation and the need for an ecological way of life is taken up by Mariss Stevens in her study of Douglas Livingstone's poetry. Reacting to Michael Chapman's criticism of Douglas Livingstone for preferring to work "largely within a non-political framework" while "[w]riting in a politically turbulent country" (ibid. 10) She argues that Livingstone "is *not* a political poet and […] to try to read him as this is to seriously misread him." She goes on to say

"Livingstone as a poet has a vision which extends far beyond the politics of the day and into the future of the whole human race" (2, italics in original). Of course, Stevens' is a narrow understanding of the political because there is a sense in which reading a work of art from an ecocritical or ecological perspective can be considered political. With a special focus on *A Littoral Zone* Stevens reads Livingstone's poetry from an ecocritical perspective and argues that the message that comes out of A *Littoral Zone* is that "humankind faces certain extinction unless it can (miraculously) learn to co-exist with one another and the rest of the natural world" (2). The choice open to mankind is therefore "symbiosis or death" (Livingstone, *A Littoral Zone* 61). For Stevens, "Livingstone's poetry continually reminds us of this ecological position and implicitly admonishes us for our anthropocentricism" (2). Stevens further contends that "Livingstone, particularly in *A Littoral Zone*, seeks to remind his human readers that our survival as a species depends on our understanding that the Earth is our greater home and that we need to both find and know our place within it" (4). According to her, "the predominant theme in [Livingstone's] ecologically-oriented poetry is one of ecological despair" which is countered with "a tentative thread of hope" as he sees "possible resolution" of this grim state of affairs "in human capacity to attain compassion and wisdom through the judicious use of science, creativity, the power of art and the power of love" (ii).

My approach is therefore similar to that of Mariss Stevens, although unlike her I am not interested in one collection but in animal poems as they appear in Livingstone's oeuvre. In my view a focus on the animal poems might give us insights into Livingstone's ecological views that might enable us to move beyond merely saying he is an ecological poet to consider the sort of ecological and ecophilosophical perspectives that inform his poetry.

6.0 This Study

This study, to my knowledge, would be the first to analyse the poetry of some of the selected Zimbabwean and Malawian poets from an ecological perspective. Critical attention on Hove, Zimunya, Mapanje and Chimombo has for a long time now focused on the social and political issues in their poetry – politics understood narrowly as referring to the affairs of humans in society.

The context within which Malawian poetry evolved and developed has been explored by many authors (Short 1974, Vail and White 1990, 1991, Lwanda 1993, Nazombe 1995, 1996, Moto 2001, among others). Malawian poetry developed within an oppressive regime characterized by stiff censorship laws (Maja-Pearse 1991, 1992). As a result the poetry tended to be cryptic, notoriously obscure in Nazombe's view ("The Role of Myth" 93) and relied heavily on myth and metaphors to elude the censors. For instance, Mapanje says of his own poetry in *Of Chameleons and Gods*:

> The verse in this volume spans some ten turbulent years in which I have been attempting to find a voice or voices as a way of preserving some sanity. […] But the exercise has been, if nothing else, therapeutic; and that's no mean word in our circumstances! (ix)

Following the introduction of the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act in 1968, a National Censorship Board was established in 1972 with a mandate to declare publications as undesirable (Moto, *Trends* 5). The Board, in Tiyambe Zeleza's words, "discharged its calling with impeccable thoroughness, regularly issuing 'permits' and 'certificates of approval' and declaring numerous publications, pictures, statues and records 'undesirable'" (Zeleza 11). Records indicate that from 1st August 1968 to 31st August 1979 over 1000 books, 62 periodicals and magazines, 20 films and 43 gramophone records were banned (*Catalogue of Banned Publications* [1979]).

Apart from books, periodicals, films and records, Banda's 'omniscient' regime also "censored memories, stories, and words that contested and mocked its singular authority, banishing and imprisoning numerous opponents, real and imaginary, hunting and murdering exiled 'rebels'[. . .]" (Zeleza 10). Jack Mapanje leaves one in no doubt that it was this kind of censorship that saw him in the notorious Mikuyu Maximum Security Prison for three and a half years after what he calls "my peeping into the dictator's drawer" (exposing the evils of the Banda regime) ("The Changing Fortunes" 219).[28] It is from this background that Mapanje's and Chimombo's earlier poetry should be read. And indeed critics such as Chirambo, Nazombe, Vail and White, among others have not failed to do so.

[28] It is difficult to unequivocally state that it is his poetry that led to his arrest or to link Mapanje's arrest to the activities of the National Censorship Board considering that his first collection of poetry, *Of Chameleons and Gods*, was published in 1981, six years before his arrest. Although the book was later "banned," Mapanje was never arrested immediately and continued to teach at Chancellor College, a constituent college of the University of Malawi. The real reason for Mapanje's arrest may remain secret but one thing is obvious: he was arrested on political grounds.

Most Malawian poets, including those chosen for this study (Mapanje and Chimombo), are social critics. Their poetry exposes the follies of dictatorship and tyranny. The themes of "detention and torture, tyranny, […] and despotism, exile and alienation and disillusionment with the leadership" (Chirambo, "Malawian Literature" 17) find expression in their poetry.

The focus on the political and social messages in the poetry, while commendable, has led to the sidelining of other interesting issues such as the role and depiction of animals in the poetry and fiction. Where animals are mentioned it is usually in passing, the larger aim being the pursuit of the social and/or political message in the poem(s). In his "Malawian Poetry in English from 1970 to the Present Day: A Study of Myth and Social Political Change in the Work of Steve Chimombo, Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula and Felix Mnthali" Anthony Nazombe does mention the metaphorical and symbolic role of certain animals in the poetry of Steve Chimombo and Jack Mapanje but, evidently enough, it is not his considered aim to look at the role of the animals and the manner of their depiction in the poetry. Similarly, in his article, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition: Steve Chimombo's *A Referendum of the Forest Creatures* and Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*" Nazombe rightly sees Steve Chimombo's *A Referendum of the Forest Creatures* as a fable in which the animal characters represent humans. But, either due to the newness of the ecocritical idiom or mere lack of interest, he does not pursue the attitude reflected or reinforced by the way some of the animals are depicted in the poetry. Like Anthony Nazombe, Brighton Uledi-Kamanga analyses the symbolic nature of some animals in Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* in the article "The Symbolism of Bondage and Freedom in Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*." But like his counterparts, the intention to analyse and evaluate the poetry in terms of its usefulness, if any, to the current global debates on environmental issues is remote to him.

Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya, the focus of the first "Zimbabwean" chapter, are two of the major Zimbabwean poets. Their poems have appeared in individual collections, magazines and anthologies both in Zimbabwe and beyond. Musa Zimunya has been writing poetry since the late 1960s while Hove started writing in the 1970s. The two writers began to stamp their authority on the Zimbabwean literary scene after independence in 1980, Hove with the publication of his first collection *Up in Arms* in 1982, and Zimunya with the publication of his

Thought Tracks also in 1982. Four more collections of poetry and works of fiction and nonfiction were to follow for Hove, while Zimunya also went on to publish four more collections as well as a collection of short stories among others.

Like other Zimbabwean writers Hove and Zimunya deal with the violence and suffering unleashed on the black majority in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) by settler colonialism from the 1890s to independence in 1980. They tackle land dispossession, which often involved the violent removal of people from their fertile ancestral and therefore spiritually sacred land to the agriculturally unproductive areas of the country; the poverty and suffering resulting from this injustice; the oppression and exploitation of people on farms and mines where they provided cheap labour for the white owners; the devastation the guerrilla war of liberation in the 1960s and 70s caused amongst the rural peasantry; and, after independence, the disillusionment and despair of the majority poor following the self-serving behaviour of the government and failure of the realisation of the hopes of independence. Apart from recording the colonial experience and the failure of the promises of independence, the poets also look inward to take stock of what they had lost in their way of life as a result of the colonial encounter (Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 24) and the introduction of new ways of living in the urban centres of the country. Here poetry therefore functions as a project of cultural self-rediscovery of a previously denigrated and oppressed people (Zimunya, *Thought-Tracks* x). Hove and Zimunya's poetry "fulfils the function of social conscience" (Primorac and Muponde xix) as the two poets act as spokespersons for fellow Zimbabweans, especially the oppressed. In this way the poetry acts as the "voice of the people" (Hove in [Veit-]Wild, *Patterns* 38) as it articulates the people's past suffering, and their hopes, pain, frustration and despair after independence.

Beside the above issues Hove and Zimunya also reveal their conceptions of rural and city life in Zimbabwe in their poetry. In some of their poems the old agrarian way of life contrasts with the new modern way of life in the city such as Harare. In their poetry the rural and city/urban landscapes/spaces are conceived as sharply divided, with rural spaces being "seen as more 'authentic' than urban" spaces (Primorac and Muponde xiv). To their credit though, the poets do not ignore the suffering inherent in rural life/existence (Zhuwarara, "Introduction" i). My focus in this study is on the way animals and animal imagery are mobilised to express the poets' conceptualisation and construction of the two landscapes and to contrast the "natural" rural and traditional life and the "unnatural" colonial and urban life

(Kaarsholm 5). In their poetry Zimunya and Hove show that they "feel[…] attached to nature and landscape" of their country and its people (Wild 11). But a landscape is also a culturescape (Wylie, "Mind" 149) and as such the two poets' construction and response to the landscape provides a lens through which to understand rural and city cultures of Zimbabwe. Besides, "no animal, plant, bird or insect – co-inhabitants, even co-creators of that landscape – is inscripted (or even encrypted) without aesthetic or iconic import" (ibid.). Paying attention to the animals in the poetry reveals not only their aesthetic and iconic import but also the attitudes of the poets to animals in general and the specific animals in particular.

Although critics have commented on these aspects in the poetry of Hove and Zimunya, very few critics (notably Muponde 2000) have commented on the animals in the poetry. In any case, although there are several critical works on Zimbabwean fiction, there remains a conspicuous neglect of poetry as an area of study in Zimbabwe (Wylie, "Mind" 148). The dearth of ecologically-oriented study of Zimbabwean literature is even more conspicuous. This study seeks to continue and deepen the conversation on Zimbabwean poetry and ecology pursued by Dan Wylie.[29]

In addition to Hove and Zimunya, Bart Wolffe is also one of the Zimbabwean poets whose poetry forms part of my study. Unlike the two black Zimbabwean poets, Wolffe is conspicuous by his absence in critical debates on Zimbabwean literature. This could be a result of the perceived binary between the two literary "traditions,"[30] white and black. While black poets are committed to the fears, hopes and aspirations of the poor, white poets are accused of having "created a whole genre of tropical safari poetry which left gaping moral blank spaces about the down-trodden and suffering humanity in their midst" (Zimunya qtd. by Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 21). White writers are also seen as "lacking in talent, broadness of vision and generosity of spirit" (Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 22), things that render their poetry mediocre, self-indulgent, and sentimental. The charge of sentimentalism is with regard to contemporary white Zimbabwean poets' concern with nature, plants and animals as their counterparts of the colonial era. Zhuwarara tells us that white Zimbabwean poets are considered to have produced "a wealth of poetry about suburban gardens and the

[29] In his articles such as "Mind Has Mountains': Poetry and Ecology in Eastern Zimbabwe" in *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*, pages 147-160, and "Unconscious Nobility: The Animal Poetry of Harold Farmer" in *English in Africa* 34.2, pages 79-92.

[30] I am using the term "tradition" loosely here as I am not sure the two constitute what can be called traditions of Zimbabwean poetry.

rather ever blossoming jacaranda tree, as well as sonnets about sonnets.... The jacaranda sentimentality sometimes spills over into the general, local flora and fauna'' (Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 22).

Bart Wolffe's concern with nature and Zimbabwe's wildlife means that he is painted with the same brush strokes of the sweeping charge of sentimentalism. Yet it does not occur to critics like Zimunya and Zhuwarara to accept and appreciate "plurality, inclusiveness and the breaking of boundaries" (Primorac and Muponde xviii) that enables readers to get acquainted with different versions of Zimbabwe. The dearth of critical attention to Wolffe's poetry is unfortunate given that he has a substantial body of published work that includes fiction, poetry and drama. Wolffe himself comments that his poetry has been seen as unworthy of serious critical attention because it is considered romantic. But given the dearth of ecologically-oriented criticism of Zimbabwean poetry, in particular, and African literature, in general, this lack of critical debate on Wolffe, some of whose works are more ecologically-oriented (as they deal substantially with animals and nature rather than questions of human struggle for survival in an inhospitable world), is understandable though not excusable. Wolffe's poetry, especially the collection *Changing Skins* (1994), makes a valuable contribution to issues of stewardship (custodianship) and heritage with regard to Zimbabwean wildlife.

Important though the previous studies on the selected works are, they differ from mine in terms of scope, the genre in which the study is located, and the depth of analysis my study seeks to achieve. This study, as I already mentioned above, among other things, attempts to identify the writers' attitudes to animals and the relationship that such attitudes produce between humans and nature in their societies in a highly sustained and substantial way. This study also scrutinizes the language the authors use when writing about the animal subject. Besides, my study evaluates the poetry in terms of its usefulness to current global debates on environmental issues.

It is my hope that this work shall be a substantial/important resource in the debate on ecological consciousness and behaviour and our relationship with the ecosphere in the southern African context.

7.0 Scope of the Study

Unlike feminist criticism, for instance, which in its reading of texts examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism which brings to our attention the various modes of production and the conflicting economic classes in society, ecocriticism's approach to literary studies is earth-centred. The unifying thread in all ecological criticism, given its wide scope of inquiry and the different levels of sophistication, is the fundamental premise which acknowledges the connectedness of human cultures to the physical world, affecting it and at the same time being affected by it. As a critical stance, therefore, ecocriticism "has one foot in literature and the other on land; [and] as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman" (Glotfelty xix).

It is also this acknowledgement of the connectedness ("everything is connected to everything else") of human culture to the physical world that distinguishes ecocriticism from other critical approaches to literature. While in its examination of the relations between writers, texts, and the world, literary theory basically sees "the world" as synonymous with society or the social sphere, ecocriticism broadens the idea of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere. Given the connectedness of all things in the ecosphere, literature should not be seen as floating "above the material world in some aesthetic ether," but, rather, it should be seen as playing "a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact" (Glotfelty xx, italics in the original). All this shows ecocriticism's indebtedness to the science of ecology.[31]

Ecocriticism has often been accused of being 'soft', of being theoretically unsophisticated. Ecocritics are accused of simply borrowing from, or drawing on, other theories to explain the ways in which "human interactions with nature are reflected in literature," instead of creating a new critical theory (Sarver np.). Needless to say, this is typical of most, if not all, burgeoning critical approaches. Besides, this criticism ignores the fact that most theories, for instance, feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and historicism, among others, borrowed a lot from the theories that preceded them. No critical practice would claim

[31] The science of ecology "looks at nonhuman nature, studying the numerous, complex interactions among its abiotic component (air, water, soils, atoms, and molecules) and its biotic components (plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi)" (Merchant 8).

complete independence from other existing theories; "[a]ll theories are a synthesis" (Estok, "Report Card" 4). It is true, nonetheless, that ecocriticism needs proper theorising because most of it is heavily thematic, but this is not to say it is 'soft' or wholly devoid of a theoretical basis or bases. Ecocritical practice has its theoretical and methodological bases in a number of theories, which is why it is best understood as a variety of "semioverlapping projects" (Buell, "Letter" 1091) or to borrow Eckersley's words, "as representing a *spectrum* of thought" (26, italics in original) rather than a single unitary or coherent ecopolitical approach/theory. This is why as an ecocritic SueEllen Campbell characterises herself as magpie when it comes to the theories she uses when analysing her texts (Campbell 1998). The eclectic and improvisatory nature of ecocritical theoretical explorations accounts for the diversity of ecocritical approaches or projects which, while agreeing on some issues, clash on others.

Although ecocritics or ecological thinkers disagree on many different issues, in my view the most important divisions from an ecological or ecophilosophical perspective are between those practitioners who embrace an anthropocentric (or a homocentric) ecological perspective/ethic, those who espouse an ecocentric ecological perspective/ethic, and those who embrace a transpersonal ecological perspective (see Merchant 1992, Eckersley 1992, and Fox 1995).

It is ecocriticism's rootedness in an ecocentric and environmentally-conscious homocentric ethics, and the fact that it draws from theories such as deep ecology (and its different varieties), social ecology, and spiritual ecology, that relates it to (a) radical environmental movements such as the green political activists that include The Group of Ten, Earth First, Greenpeace, The Greens, Greens in the Second World, among others; (b) some varieties of ecofeminism (notice that ecofeminism is both a theoretical foci and an environmental movement), that include liberal ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, socialist ecofeminism, and Women in the Third World; and (c) the sustainable development or resource conservation movement.

However, unlike these environmental movements ecocriticism, though it seeks to transform people's ecological and environmental consciousness, focuses on the analysis of cultural productions such as fiction, poetry, film, and photography, among others, to tease out the manner in which nature is represented, rather than participate

in environmental activism (such as petitioning governments, participating in demonstrations, tree planting and other activities). An ecocritic is an environmentalist in the sense that s/he seeks to transform, or change our attitude to nature through his/her analysis of the aforementioned cultural productions and not because of his activism on behalf of the environment/nature. Simply put, an ecocritic deals with texts in their various forms, written, visual, or aural.

Although the "animal", who, along with nature in general, is the focus of this study, is an important trope in ecocriticism, like such tropes as "pastoral" and "wilderness" (Garrard 140) his/her entry into ecocritical debate is not without attendant conflicts and problems. The areas within which the relations between animals and humans are studied in the humanities namely, animal liberation, animal studies and/or cultural analysis of the representation of animals are not *directly* related to the ecocentric ethic or deep ecology which informs some ecocritical approaches. This is because ecocentrism or some modified forms of homocentricism (within which ecocriticism is located) conflict with *animal liberation* and animal studies (read zoocriticism) in both theory and practice (Eckersley1992, Garrard 2004). While supporters of animal liberation elevate sentience as the basic criteria for entry into the realm of moral consideration (take Peter Singer for example), an ecocentric ethic does not focus on any individual entity and simply sees pain and suffering as a necessary part of nature. For ecocentrists or deep ecologists and some ecocritics, animate and inanimate, sentient and insentient things, and rivers and mountains, merit moral consideration (Garrard 139–140). The practical consequence of this ethical conflict is that liberationists and zoocritics are opposed to hunting and killing of animals, whereas ecocentrists and ecocritics condone culling of some animal species if and when their exploding populations are perceived as a threat to their environment as a whole. This is why ecofeminists think that ecocentrism or deep ecology (and, by extension, ecocriticism) cannot be relied upon to champion animal liberation (Vance 1995). This ideological and theoretical difference between ecocentrism or the science of ecology (and the ecocritical approaches it inspires) and animal liberation/studies (zoocriticism) is further highlighted by Elizabeth Costello's attack on the science of ecology, revealing what her son, John Bernard, refers to her "antiecologism" (55) in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*. For her the ecological vision which she refers to as "the greater dance" is weak as a liberationist vision for animals since in it "[t]he whole is greater than the sum of the parts" (53). This results in its paying more

attention not so much on the welfare of the "particular beings who play" a role or "particip[ate] in the dance" (54) but on the stability of the dance itself. For her "[a] nimals are not believers in ecology" (ibid.) and every individual creature that fights for its life matters.

Another noteworthy difference between liberationist cultural critics (zoocritics) and ecocritics is that liberationist cultural critics tend to focus more on the place of domestic animals within this rhetoric, while – when it comes to the question of animals – ecocritics mainly study the representation of wild animals. In their attempts to undermine the moral and legal distinctions between humans and animals, liberationists and/or zoocritics often take for granted the difference between wild and domestic animals. Liberationists rarely enjoin people to desist from inflicting pain on wild animals, perhaps because they see people's moral responsibility as more applicable to those animals they use for food, transport, and companionship, among others. While ecocritics also rely on the wild/domestic binary or divide, they "tend to venerate wild animals while treating cattle, sheep and cats as the destructive accomplices of human culture" (Garrard 149).

In spite of these differences, Greg Garrard makes the important concession that "since much livestock farming is objectionable on both environmental and welfare grounds, liberationist cultural studies [and I dare say zoocriticism as well] may be seen as […] important all[ies] of ecocriticism if not strictly […] branch[es] of it" (140). I prefer to consider liberationist cultural studies (read zoocriticism) as a branch rather than an ally, a distant "other", of ecocriticism. In my view, one cannot do zoocriticism without doing ecocriticism at the same time, although one can do ecocriticism without necessarily doing zoocriticism. Both ecocriticism and zoocriticism espouse varying degrees of an ecocentric ethic. Moreover, both wild and domestic animals are part of the physical world to which human beings form a part. If ecocriticism professes to study the relationship between literature and the physical environment, it should not contradict itself by making such unfortunate distinctions between wild and domestic animals. Besides, the selectiveness in focus in both ecocriticism and liberationism (and more narrowly zoocriticism) smacks of parochialism. Both wild and domestic animals are sentient and are part of the ecology. As such, they merit consideration and protection from both the zoocritical and ecocritical perspectives. It should be observed, however, that this difference in focus

is an exception rather than the norm. Pickover's liberationist book, *Animal Rights in South Africa*, lays as much emphasis, if not more, on the abuse and suffering of wild animals as it does on domestic ones.

In her *Animal Rights in South Africa*, Pickover makes a clear distinction within the animal liberationist discourse between *animal rights* and *animal welfare*, a distinction which has different effects on social arrangements and public policy. For her and other animal rightists, animal welfare is too anthropocentric as it believes that human interests outweigh those of animals. It does not strongly object to ruthless cultural, religious and social beliefs that are a menace to the lives of animals and sees animals as "property and resource." She therefore concludes that animal welfare cannot be relied upon to provide protection to animals in any meaningful way (10). The main distinction between the two movements, according to Pickover, is that while animal welfare "wants more humane killing methods," animal rights "wants commercial animal production systems totally dissolved – a final end to the exploitative use of animals" (ibid.) Simply put, "animal welfare stands for reform and animal rights for abolition" (10).

Important though the distinctions are, I resist the temptation to valorise one approach (say animal rights) over the other (animal welfare) in my engagement with zoocriticism, which is informed by such discourses, in this study. This follows the realisation that both positions have their merits and demerits. While animal rights longs for the day when animal abuse and meat eating shall be history, animal welfare deals with the here and now. It considers the fact that animals are being killed and consumed everyday; rather than let them be killed ruthlessly while looking up to a distant future when the current abuse of animals shall be a thing of the past, it advises those who slaughter animals not to subject their "victims" to unnecessary pain. Nevertheless, this position has its own weaknesses which are not of immediate interest in this study. While the realisation of the rightist dream shall ensure the total liberation of animals and humanity's responsible relationship with the "other" species, its critique of animal welfare gives the impression that it is not interested in mitigating the suffering of animals that are slaughtered every waking day, but simply in the ultimate end of animal exploitation and oppression.

The related but sometimes conflicting ecophilosophical theories outlined above will intersect at various points and stages in this study. However, in the study I mainly

refer to ecocriticism and use concepts such as (inter)connectedness and difference (or separation) as ecocritical frameworks for my analysis of the poetry. The idea of connectedness of all entities on earth runs through all the ecophilosophical positions mentioned above. The idea of interconnectedness or similarity between humans and animals is seen by many ecotheorists as a basis for including animals in the moral sphere. While also acknowledging the interconnectedness between humans and animals, ecofeminists also highlight the need to acknowledge animals' otherness, separateness or difference from us. For them the cancellation of boundaries and difference between the self and the other observable in deep/eccentric and transpersonal ecology is symptomatic of the arrogance of a "master consciousness" of exploitative and oppressive ideologies such as colonialism, sexism, speciesism, and classism.

This study is divided into seven chapters plus a conclusion as follows:

Chapter One, "Literary animals and ecocriticism," is the introductory chapter. It maps the area of investigation, justifies the study, and gives an outline of the objectives and the scope of the study. It also sketches the eco/philosophical context of the study and reviews the literature on ecocriticism in African literature.

Chapter Two, "The 'rhetoric of animality' and animal imagery in the resistance poetry of Jack Mapanje" examines Jack Mapanje's use of animal metaphors in protest and resistance poetry against dictatorship and oppression.

Chapter Three, "Mythical, cultic and fabulous animals and socio-political change in the epic poetry of Steve Chimombo" analyses the ways in which animals mirror social and political change in Chimombo's Malawian society.

Chapter Four, "Animals and rural/city landscapes in the poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musaemura Zimunya" explores the two Zimbabwean poets' representation of animals and nature as a means of constructing and conceptualising rural and urban landscapes in Zimbabwe.

Chapter Five, "Natural heritage, stewardship, and identity: Zimbabwe's wildlife in the poetry of Bart Wolffe" examines Wolffe's animal/nature poetry to explore his notions of heritage and stewardship and the inscription of his identity onto the Zimbabwean landscape.

Chapter Six, "Predation, animal suffering and death in the poetry of Douglas Livingstone" discusses Livingstone's exploration of predation and animal suffering and death in his poetry in relation to the African landscape and ecophilosophy.

Chapter Seven, “Chromosome cousins and familiar strangers: relational selfhood and sense of belonging to the cosmos in Chris Mann’s ecopoetry” analyses *Lifelines* (2006) more generally, and Mann’s poetic texts in the collection, in particular, to examine concepts of relational selfhood and belonging to the earth.

The Conclusion acts as a synthesis of the findings of the preceding chapters; drawing similarities in the manner in which the selected poets represent animals and signalling how a range of concepts – social, political, ideological and psychological, among others – converge on the figure of the animal in the poetry. I argue that the poets’ failure to appreciate the inseparability and interconnectedness of human, animal, and earth exploitation undermines their socio-political and ecological positions.

Chapter 2: The "Rhetoric of Animality" and Animal Imagery in the Resistance Poetry of Jack Mapanje

1.0 Introduction

This chapter critically analyses the representation of animals in John Alfred Clement (Jack) Mapanje's poetry from ecocritical and zoocritical perspectives. The chapter does not "merely pontificate […] about the intricacies of animal representations [and] forget entirely about the animal presences that had helped give rise to them" but seeks to show "how [the] representations affect the animals, or the ethical issues involved in representation" (Kahn np). In the chapter I discus the ways in which Mapanje uses animals as metaphors[32] for human characters that he holds in contempt or seeks to criticise, satirise, scorn, and lampoon. In most cases these are Malawian politicians – especially those of the First Republic (1964-1994). Mapanje believes that a poet, like the *griots* or *izibongi* (imbongi)[33] of old, should offer "constructive criticism of either the leadership or the society" (Mapanje, "The Use" 32-33). As a writer, Mapanje sees his role as involving the examination of all aspects of life in his society for he believes that criticism of a society's institutions and structures is a very healthy thing as it helps the people in that society to move forward (wa Thiong'o, "Open Criticism" 82). This constructive criticism was all but lost in Malawian oral poetry (songs) during Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda's reign (1964-1994) as they became versions of "watered down propaganda to praise the new leaders with very little poetic insight" (Mapanje, "The Use" 29-30).

In his poetry Mapanje, the intellectual, identifies himself with the poor and oppressed in his Malawian society and aligns himself with the continued struggle of the masses for a better society, a society in which good governance and respect for human rights and dignity are recognised and respected. Mapanje, like Ayi Kwei Armah, writing in the context of Nkrumah's Ghana, is disillusioned with Banda's

[32] For purposes of brevity, the minimalistic understanding of 'metaphor' is used in this study, that is, as the application of 'a word or expression which in literal usage denotes one kind of thing or action […] to a distinctly different kind of thing or action, without asserting a comparison' (Abrams 65). It stands to reason that the metaphoric meanings so produced would often be more than one as they are generated in metaphoric usage.

[33] The *griots* and the *imbongi* were/are oral praise singers (or poets) in West Africa and South Africa respectively. Mapanje considers their role enviously as they "acted as the nation's entertainers, historians, poets, teachers and critics at once"("The Changing Fortunes" 222). As Anthony Nazombe observes, "Mapanje has increasingly been adopting such a stance towards Malawi's political leadership in his poetry" ("Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 147).

Malawi and sees independence simply as "a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the hunted" (Armah 162). Unsurprisingly, therefore, in his poetry he deconstructs the view that Kamuzu Banda was a wise and courageous leader, as his supporters would have us believe, by portraying him negatively as an animal. In human culture at least some animals are seen as violent, cruel and irrational. By portraying Banda and his cohorts as animals Mapanje shows that through their cruelty and ruthlessness they had traded their humanity and rationality for lowly regarded beastliness and irrationality. Through the animal metaphors too Mapanje shows that Banda, leader of the anti-colonial struggle who loved to remind the people during his many mass rallies that he had come to break "their" (the colonialists') stupid federation and give his people freedom, had become a traitor.

The focus of this chapter is Mapanje's poems in the collections *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981), *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993), *Skipping Without Ropes* (1998), *The Last of the Sweet Bananas* (2004) and *Beasts of Nalunga* (2007). These collections correspond with the stages of the poet's development as a writer, and each of these collections is divided into two or more sections corresponding to the particular experiences or events that informed and inspired the particular poems. Structurally, this analysis does not discuss Mapanje's poetry chronologically or according to sections because some of the ideas discussed and the animals whose images and metaphors are used for such ideas overlap between sections and between collections. Before tackling the poems, however, the chapter gives a brief background to the context of Jack Mapanje's poetry and takes a look at the place of animals in Malawian society, literature and criticism.

2.0 Jack Mapanje's Poetry and Resistance

Jack Mapanje started writing poetry in the 1960s and his first collection, *Of Chameleons and Gods*, appeared in 1981. Anthony Nazombe, a leading Malawian poetry critic, in 1990 came up with three generations of Malawian poets (the Blantyre generation, the Chirunga generation, and the Muse generation). He grouped Mapanje amongst the first generation of Malawian poets which he calls the Blantyre generation. This is the earliest generation of Malawian poets who first came to the notice of the reading public in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the University of

Malawi had all its campuses in Blantyre (Nazombe, Introduction 3).[34] But Steve Chimombo has exposed the weaknesses of Nazombe's model of Malawian literature as being, among other things, unclear about the cut-off points of the generations (Chimombo, "Two Models" 8-9). Jack Mapanje, for example, has been writing poetry through and beyond Nazombe's three generations. And there are other poets such as Steve Chimombo, Frank Chipasula and Zondiwe Mbano who have been writing for decades now. What Nazombe's categorisation achieves, perhaps, is a highlighting of the fact that Mapanje has been writing poetry for over four decades.

Like Steve Chimombo, Anthony Nazombe, and Frank Chipasula, among others, Jack Mapanje produced some of his poetry during the most troubled period in Malawi's history, the 1970s and 80s. This was a time when the excesses of the notorious dictatorial leadership of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda which ran from 1964-1994 were at their peak. During this time Malawians experienced a regime characterized by terror and repression. Those who opposed or were suspected of holding contrary views to those of Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) suffered long detentions without trial or were murdered. The most prominent amongst the political murders during the MCP regime were the Mwanza murders of ministers Aaron Elliot Gadama, Dick Tennyson Matenje, John Twaibu Sangala and a Member of Parliament, David Chiwanga, who were "arrested and murdered by the police in the border district of Mwanza" on 18th May 1983 (Muluzi, *et al* 132). A cloud of fear hung over the country as one's spouse or friend could become one's betrayer.

Sam Mpasu, one of Banda's political prisoners, sums up well what the political atmosphere was like in the First Republic:

> [i]t is true that we had what looked like peace. But it was the peace of the cemetery. It was enforced silence which was misunderstood for peace. Our lips were sealed by fear and death. Our pens were silenced by long jail terms without trial. It is true that we had what looked like stability. But it was the kind of stability which is caused by overwhelming force. When the thick boot is on the neck of a person who is prone on the ground, there can be no movement. The jails were full and murders were rampant. The murderers were above the law (2).

[34] The Chirunga generation refers to a generation of writers who "became recognized as gifted poets one or two years after the removal of Soche Hill College, Institute of Public Administration and Chancellor College from Blantyre to the unified campus" at a place called Chirunga in Zomba, while the Muse generation refers to a group of poets "whose rise to prominence coincided with or followed the founding by Ken Lipenga […] of the Writers' Workshop newsletter, *The Muse*, in November, 1975" (Nazombe, Introduction 4).

To engage in creative writing that was critical of Banda's style of leadership was generally considered foolhardy. Not surprisingly, other well known Malawian writers such as Frank Chipasula, Lupenga Mphande, Felix Mnthali, and Legson Kayira, among others, went into exile. Those authors operating from within Malawi had to resort to "a private and cryptic, [obscure and metaphor-ridden], mode of expression in [their] writing to elude the tough censorship laws of the country and the real possibility of political persecution" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 138-139). Nevertheless, as one such author, Steve Chimombo, comments, there were times when "[e]ven myth[, for example,] offered no route for escape" (qtd. by Larson 259). Jack Mapanje leaves one in no doubt that it was this kind of censorship that saw him in the notorious Mikuyu Maximum Security Prison for three years, seven months and sixteen days without charge or trial for what he suspects was "my peeping into the dictator's drawer," in other words, exposing the evils of the Banda regime in his poetry (Mapanje, "The Changing Fortunes" 219). Jack Mapanje was arrested at Gymkhana Club in Zomba on 25th September 1987 and kept in the notorious Mikuyu Maximum Security Prison until his release on 10th May 1991, thereby joining the long list of African writers who have been detained without trial, tortured, and imprisoned on false charges by dictatorial leaders since the departure of the colonialists.

The oppressive and repressive context within which Malawian poetry evolved and developed (Short 1974; Vail and White 1990, 1991; Lwanda 1993; Nazombe 1995, 1996; and Moto 2001, 2008) is fairly well known to the world today. The country's stiff censorship laws and the victimisation of those who held, or were perceived to hold, dissenting views, as I mentioned above, resulted in poetry that tended to be cryptic, "notoriously obscure" in Nazombe's view (Nazombe, "The Role of Myth" 93) and relied heavily on myth and metaphors to elude the censors. For instance, Mapanje writes of his own poetry in *Of Chameleons and Gods*:

> [t]he verse in this volume spans some ten turbulent years in which I have been attempting to find a voice or voices as a way of preserving some sanity. […] But the exercise has been, if nothing else, therapeutic; and that's no mean word in our circumstances! (ix)

The National Censorship Board was established in 1972 following the introduction of the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act in 1968. The board was mandated to declare publications as undesirable (Moto, *Trends* 5). As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, this Board, in Tiyambe Zeleza's words,

"discharged its calling with impeccable thoroughness, regularly issuing 'permits' and 'certificates of approval' and declaring numerous publications, pictures, statues and records 'undesirable'" (Zeleza 11). Apart from books, periodicals, films and records, Banda's omniscient regime, like Tsarist Russia and other postcolonial states in Africa (Ngugi's Kenya and Soyinka's Nigeria for example), also "censored memories, stories, and words that contested and mocked its singular authority, banishing and imprisoning numerous opponents, real and imaginary, hunting and murdering exiled 'rebels' [. . .]"(Zeleza 10). Moreover, censorship which became "an iron veil to hide the lies, deformities and fantasies of a ruthless, unproductive power" begot self-censorship, "a numbing collective fear of meaningful social conversation, of public discourse, of openly questioning the way things are and imagining what they ought to be" (ibid.).

Censorship in Malawi had its own dramatic moments. Leroy Vail and Landeg White observe that Mapanje recalls an occasion when Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda recommended to his cabinet a book given to him at Meharry College in the United States of America, which was in fact amongst the banned books in Malawi (Vail and White, "Of Chameleons" 43). It is from this background that Mapanje's and Chimombo's poetry of the 1970s and 80s, and that of other Malawian poets writing at the time, should be read.

As a result of the uncompromising censorship laws and the ruthlessness of the Banda regime in dealing with its critics, many Malawians wrote escapist literature (the kind of literature that failed to address the crucial issues of misrule and corruption by hiding amongst the safer themes of love and promiscuity, for instance, to avoid a frontal assault with the leadership) while others wrote cryptic and obscure poetry, or chose to remain silent.

In the case of Jack Mapanje, one of the toughest critics of the excesses of the Banda regime, poetic obscurity is clear in *Of Chameleons and Gods,* a collection that came out before his arrest. This is not to say the meanings of the poems were lost, however. A perceptive eye could see the threads of protest, irony, grim humour and mockery of the leaders and the system embedded in the carefully chosen words, metaphors and rhetorical questions. In fact, some poems in this volume show fierce sparks of daring as Banda is attacked explicitly – at least for someone aware of Malawi's history and culture. Good examples here are Jack Mapanje's "On His Royal Blindness Paramount Chief Kwangala" and "When This Carnival Finally Closes"

(*OCAG* 57, 61) which clearly reveal the culprit of the poet's scathing lines, namely the former president of Malawi, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda.

The volume, *OCAG*, which was later "banned," set the stage for the critical politically loaded poetry of Jack Mapanje. I am using the word "banned" cautiously here because the volume was

> neither officially proscribed nor cleared for sale. Thus bookshops were not allowed to display it, but no one could be prosecuted for possessing a copy. In 1985 the Ministry of Education and Culture issued a circular banning its use in schools and colleges (Africa Watch 76).

Mapanje's poetry in *OCAG*, like in his subsequent collections, is resistance poetry. Resistance here should not be understood strictly as poetry emerging from within the context of

> organised political and guerrilla movements which had and continue to have as their aim the liberation of the land and the people through armed struggle from the forces of outside oppression, from the political, military and cultural hegemony and domination by imperialist and colonialist countries, (Harlow 46)

but as poetry emerging from within the context of a postcolonial tyrannical regime where the elites who wrested power from the colonialists oppress and exploit the people they professed to liberate during the anti-colonial struggle. Unlike other countries in Africa and beyond such as Nicaragua, Augustino Neto's Angola, Mozambique, Amilcar Cabral's Guinea-Bissau, and Pablo Neruda's Chile, to mention but a few, Malawi's path to independence did not involve warfare, although the country, like many other postcolonial states, did not escape the suffocating grip of a despotic leader. Mapanje's resistance is against social injustice: the debasement of culture, abuse of power, despotism, oppression and exploitation of the masses by the hegemonic leadership of Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Chirambo 2007b). He protests against "the politics of evil, of force and violence, deceit, of corruption and greed, of banditry masking as patriotism" (Saro-wiwa, qtd. by Ejeke 20) that led to the suffering of many Malawians. A reading of his poetry shows that Mapanje quests for an oppression-free Malawi and world; a world where no human oppresses another, and a world where human rights and democratic governance as well as cultural values are promoted, not destroyed. Like other radical writers of postcolonial Africa such as Armah, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thion'go and Wole Soyinka, among others, Mapanje exposes the Malawian elites in all their "ruthlessness and vulgarity": their

conspicuous consumption, corruption, greed, crass materialism and cruelty (Lazarus 20).

Unlike in *OCAG*, Mapanje makes no attempt to obscure the victim of his sardonic humour, satire and lampoon in subsequent poems. This can be attributed to the fact that all his poetry collections after *OCAG* have appeared while he is in exile in the United Kingdom. In the subsequent collections he dispenses with cryptic language but maintains his use of metaphors, especially animal metaphors. It is also in these subsequent collections, especially in *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* and in *Skipping Without Ropes,* where the "rhetoric of animality" and animal metaphors are most prevalent. One suspects that his anger and bitterness against the people and the regime that imprisoned him inspires him to criticise and satirise them explicitly. The fact that Mapanje maintains the use of animal metaphors in his post-Banda poetry also reveals the deep influence of Malawi's oral narratives, in which animals act as mirrors of human society and behaviour.

I should mention here that, ironically, censorship in Malawi had its positive side. It helped Malawians to produce the kind of poetry whose richness in meaning, metaphors and gripping sense of humour defies time and space. It is the kind of poetry whose witticism and appeal are still unmatched in spite of the fact that the crippling censorship laws were weakened when the country attained multiparty democracy in 1994. Reflecting on how repressive regimes help in improving the quality of literary works Mapanje, who is "amused that the Malawi Censorship board may have actually improved his poems," quotes Tadeusz Konwicki, a polish novelist, who was of the view that censorship "forces the writer to employ metaphors which raise the piece of writing to a higher level" (Africa Watch 76, Vail and White 44). It can boldly be stated that Malawi is yet to produce poets of the calibre of Mapanje, Mnthali, Chimombo and Nazombe. This perhaps underscores Femi Abodunrin's observation that "[d]ifficulties have always brought out probably the best in human beings and writing is not excluded from that" (qtd. by Mzati Nkolokosa 13).

Mapanje's assumed role of the *imbongi* and his resistance to oppression has had the effect that most of his poems deal with the political situation in the country during and after Dr. Banda, especially the former, and his experiences at Mikuyu Prison. This means that to discuss Mapanje's poetry is to indirectly discuss the historical events in the country. Thus, the context of writing is as important a part in this chapter as the poetry itself in discussing the animal imagery in the poetry. Most of

the poems by Mapanje, especially those in *CWMP*, *SWR* and *LSB* are "driven by the engines of memory rather than the engines of imagination" (Collins 81) and are therefore personal in subject matter as the poet describes biographically actual experience. As such it is easy to identify the speaker of the poem with the writer (Matthew 12).

The context is also important in interpreting animal metaphors. Adesola Olateju (2005) rightly observes that "[a]nimal metaphors involve transference of meanings, and whatever meanings or interpretations are assigned to a particular animal metaphor, are culture and context dependent" (368). For him "[t]he contextual situation or condition under which animal metaphors are used is of paramount importance" (370). For instance, the traits that a hyena is associated with in Malawi might not be the same as the ones the animal is associated with, say in Kenya. Besides, interpretation of a hyena as a metaphor for the behaviour and habits of a human being will depend on the context within which the metaphor is used.

Olateju also observes that "before an utterance can be regarded as an animal metaphor" three conditions or factors need to be fulfilled, and these are: shared assumptions between the speaker and hearer, meaning transfer, and motivation. On the question of shared assumptions between the speaker and hearer, all that is needed is that both the speaker and hearer should believe that what has been uttered is a metaphor and they should share "knowledge of animal characteristic traits and behaviour which serve as a basis on which [the metaphor] is drawn." The second condition, meaning transfer, has to do with the transfer of "the attributes and actions associated with an animal […] to the person being predicated [on] an animal," while motivation, which is "culture dependent," has to do with the culture and philosophy of life of the people who use the metaphor (376-377). This basically has to do with the attributes and associations that particular animals have in a given culture or society. Olatuji's observations, as we shall see later, hold true when it comes to the interpretation of animal metaphors in Mapanje's poetry.

3.0 Animals in Malawian society, literature and criticism

The intimate relationship between humans and animals in Malawi (see Morris 2000a & b) is demonstrated in, among other things, oral literature where animals, especially in folk stories, are humanised, in the Nyau secret society of the Chewa

people where animals are imitated and symbolise ancestors, and in the Yao initiation ceremonies where the initiates are given or assume animals' names.

In Malawian folk stories, animals act and behave like human beings. They have social organisations, families, villages and kingdoms, like those of human beings and some of them, such as the lion and the elephant act as kings or chiefs (Chimombo, *Malawian Oral Literature* 133; Morris, *The Power* 176). Malawian proverbs and riddles also "indicate a wealth of empirical knowledge about the ecology and behaviour of [animals] which is then used metaphorically to respectively affirm or [critique] what are considered important" (Morris, *The Power* 184) or deplorable social values or behaviour. The use of animal names in the Yao initiation ceremony perhaps shows that during their initiation the initiates are in a "'liminal state" (Morris, *Animals* 100) between childhood (irresponsible, bad-mannered, and ignorant) and adulthood (responsible, good-mannered and knowledgeable).

More importantly, as a result of their long interaction with animals that dates back to antiquity, Malawians have attributes and behavioural traits which they, epistemologically, associate with certain animals. For example the lion is associated with bravery and cruelty, the elephant is associated with strength, while the hyena is associated with potency, weakness and stupidity. These attributes are exploited in myths, proverbs, poetry and in idiomatic expressions.

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* which has sometimes been read as a fable for Soviet history with Major, Napoleon and Snowball representing Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky (Hollis 145), demonstrates how writers use ancient satiric techniques in which animals embody the vices and folly of humans to address contemporary problems or convey their bitter messages. In his poetry Mapanje employs animals mainly as mirrors that expose and ridicule the foibles of postcolonial Malawi's ruling elites and their minions.

Of the three notable ways of representing animals in literature, namely the naturalistic, allegorical and compassionate modes of representation (Soper 2005), it is the metaphorical (allegorical) uses of animals, which, as Mary Allen observes, "far outnumber the literal animals in literature" (6), that we encounter most often in the poetry of Jack Mapanje. In his poetry Mapanje depicts animals not as natural beings but as metaphors for human beings or registers of human forms of behaviour.

The animals that appear in Mapanje's poetry include mammals, birds, amphibians and insects.[35] More often than not the mammals and birds that feature in the poetry are wild rather than domestic ones. References to domestic animals are very rare in Mapanje's poetry. This perhaps owes to the fact that Mapanje's representation of animals is influenced by oral literature and as Brian Morris observes "domestic animals play a minor role in [Malawian] folk tales" (*The Power* 181). As Vail and White rightly observe, Mapanje's is attracted by the oral aesthetic and uses aspects of it in his poetry ("Of Chameleons" 30-32, see also Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 161). Vail and White observe that

> [t]o Mapanje, the language of the oral poet is sophisticated and mischievous, dense with history refined to metaphor, yet capable of dynamic effects of communication precisely because those metaphors are understood and have achieved currency. To recreate in Malawian English a language of such local resonance, recapturing the toughness and complexity of oral poetry and especially its capacity for intellectual rebellion, has become his literary programme (31).

They go on to say that

> [t]he profoundly oral nature of Mapanje's style needs little demonstration. The poems are dominated by the speaking voice, usually in the first person and the present tense. They shift line by line both in tone and syntax, from bald statement to quiet reflection to satiric jibe to open interrogation. They are intensely dramatic with strong beginnings and forceful endings and incorporate a good deal of direct speech (38).

Although Jack Mapanje's poetry has attracted a lot of critical responses from different parts of the world, very few of these responses have commented on his use of animal imagery. And those that briefly do, hardly comment on the actual conditions of animal lives as lived in the world, for whatever reason. Most of Mapanje's critics have focused on the political and social messages in the poetry. Although this is commendable, the tendency has led to the sidelining of other interesting issues such as the role and depiction of animals in bringing out the social message in the poetry. Where animals are mentioned it is usually in passing, the larger aim being the pursuit of the social and/or political message in the poem(s). As earlier mentioned, in his "Malawian Poetry in English from 1970 to the Present Day: A Study of Myth and Social Political Change in the Work of Steve Chimombo, Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula and Felix Mnthali" (1983) Anthony Nazombe mentions the metaphorical and symbolic role of certain animals in the poetry of Steve Chimombo

[35] In this study I consider reptiles birds, fish and insects along with mammals as animals.

and Jack Mapanje but, evidently enough, it is not his considered aim to look at the role of the animals and the manner of their depiction in the poetry.

Like Anthony Nazombe, Brighton Uledi-Kamanga analyses the symbolic nature of some animals in Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* in the article "The Symbolism of Bondage and Freedom in Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*" (1998). These animals, according to him, fall into two groups. The first group is that of harmful creatures which Mapanje associates with prison and prison experiences. The second group includes birds and insects of the air that are harmless to man which the poet associates with freedom (42). This categorisation however, as Uledi-Kamanga also acknowledges, is not without its problems as wagtails, which are birds and are generally harmless to man, are also associated with suffering or unpleasant prison experiences. In this chapter I attempt to show that the animals in *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, as in the other collections, do not only symbolise freedom and bondage but also harmlessness, victimhood and suffering of prisoners and other Malawians during the tyrannical rule of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. For Francis Moto (2008) "[i]n Mapanje's poetic world – which mirrors Banda's Malawi – the animals are people who exhibit animal characteristics [and these people] are divided into two animal groups: those who are seen as wild by the regime for being very critical and the tame – those who went along with the regime, sang its praises and did nothing to criticise the status quo or fight for the concerns of the oppressed" (*The Context* 70). Contrary to this view, the major animalised human groups in Mapanje's poetry are, from the poet's rather than the MCP regime's perspective, those of oppressors and the oppressed. Needless to say, the above Malawian literary critics do not attempt to analyse and evaluate the animal imagery in the poetry in terms of its usefulness, if any, to the current global debates on environmental issues.[36]

[36] Further, in their "Of Chameleons and Paramount Chiefs" (1990) Vail and White focus more on the context of Mapanje's poetry in *Of Chameleons and Gods* and the technique he uses to, like the chameleon, blend with his hostile environment. A similar concern is also noticeable in Emmanuel Ngara's chapter "The Artist as a Chameleon: Jack Mapanje of Malawi" in *Ideology and Form in African Poetry: Implications for Communication* (156-166). Ngara, like many other critics of Mapanje's poetry, sees Mapanje as a "social critic" and his poetry as "protest poetry" (162, see also Chirambo, "Poetry for Democracy" 17). He also sees Mapanje's role as a poet as "that of opening the eyes of his readers to what is going wrong and of a gadfly in the flesh of political leaders, whom he reminds of their misdeeds" (ibid.). And like other critics such as Nazombe and Vail and White, Ngara also sees Mapanje's style as being influenced by "extensive use of myth and oral traditions." From the latter, as Ngara observes, he gets his satirical tools of apostrophe, "brotherly advice" and lampoon. Furthermore, in her largely obscure article "Changing Metaphorical Constructs in the Writing of Jack

As it happened everywhere in postcolonial Africa, the new elites in Malawi surrounded themselves, like the pigs in *Animal Farm*, with supporters and sycophants who protected them as they abused their power and milked the country dry. Mapanje's metaphors are aimed at satirising and lampooning these leaders by signalling their stupidity, distasteful and contemptible nature as well as their fickleness and untrustworthiness. In this way Mapanje sardonically laughs at Banda and his cohorts, he pokes fun at them and satirises them to counter the heroic image of Banda created and championed by his sycophants. Mapanje also uses animal metaphors for the poetic voice (or himself), fellow prisoners at Mikuyu Maximum Security Prison, exiled Malawians and other victims of Banda, as well as other victims of oppressors and despots around the world. Where animals are used in this way the aim is to underscore the harmlessness, victimhood, and suffering of these victims while emphasising the oppressors' evil and injustice. In using animals in this way Mapanje exposes the excesses of the new elites, their oppression and exploitation of the people they claimed to have liberated from colonial bondage. In cases where the animal metaphor is used for the poetic voice it also highlights the creativity and ingenuity of the poet who remains forever vigilant in a corrupt society. Besides representing animals as images for certain individuals, the poet also represents them as symbols for events in his life.

4.0 Animals, Banda and the MCP's Brutality

One strategy that Mapanje adopts to emphasise Banda's wickedness and cruelty is to dehumanise him by calling him a beast, brute, monster or fiend. We begin to see this dehumanisation of Banda in the title poem of the collection "The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison" (*CWMP* 48-52). As Uledi-Kamanga rightly observes in "The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison" Mapanje uses "the technique of literary self-effacement as a strategy for excluding his own physical and emotional reaction to his situation by presenting the poem through the point-of-view of another

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Mapanje" (2002) Alison McFarlane looks at what she considers a transformation in Mapanje's thematic concerns and his use of oral literature materials and the metaphors derived there from in *OCAG* through to *SWR*. Her understanding of metaphor, which she does not define, remains largely unclear in the essay. But it is obvious that she does not deal with animal metaphors and symbolism as this chapter seeks to do. While these and other critical works on Mapanje remain relevant to this chapter, the chapter itself departs from the previous readings of Mapanje's poetry by focusing on the way animals are represented in the poetry and what implications this representation has on the lives of animals.

inmate" of Mikuyu Prison (43). The speaker in the poem welcomes the poet to the section of the prison called D4:

> Welcome to the chattering wagtails of
> D4. Before your Gymkhana Club story,
> Let's begin with the history of the wing
> You've come from. They call it the New
> Building, which is so marvellously blank
> As you saw, that you'd have cracked up
> Within months, however tough-willed;
> Thank these D4s for moving you here (48).

The speaker then proceeds to tell him that the "Secretary General of the Party," who is unnamed in the poem, conceived that wing of the prison which is called "New Building" on behalf of the people. The Secretary General had conspired with an unnamed Chief of the Special Branch to depose their country's leader – who is variously called "the despot," "the M[m]onster," "the tyrant," "the Beast," and "the Brute" in the poem – in a bloodless coup after which he and his "'trusted' henchpersons" (49) would be thrown into this wing of the prison. The remaining "Party Executives" would be thrown "into / One of [the] eight large cells […] divided / Into fourteen little cells, two paces by / One, named A-wing […]" (ibid.). The plot was, however, uncovered and the conspirators were arrested. Ironically, they were the first people to be detained in the "New Building." The poet calls their detention "opening the gates of the New Building," / [and] Mopping the wagtail shit of their creation," (50) that is, confronting the evil of their creation.

In this poem Mapanje is being faithful to the history of Malawi of the 1970s. The despotic and brutish leader in the poem is of course Banda. The references to Machipisa Mnthali, one of the longest serving prisoners in Malawi whom the prisoners call "Nelson Mandela of Malawi" (he had spent twenty-four years in Banda's prison by then) (49-50), place names such as Gymkhana Club, Mikuyu Prison, Zomba Central Prison, Dzeleka Prison, and historical figures like Dick Matenje, Aaron Gadama, Twaibu Sangala, and David Chiwanga, make it clear that what are being referred to in the poem are historical events in Malawi. The unnamed Secretary General of the party is evidently Albert Muwalo Nqumayo while the Chief of Special Branch is Focus Martin Gwede. Albert Muwalo Nqumayo was the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress Party while Focus Martin Gwede was the Chief of the Special Branch in the 1970s, one of the most troubled decades in

Malawi's history, when scores of Malawians found themselves behind bars without charge or trial. Muwalo Nqumayo and Gwede have gained notoriety for masterminding most of these arrests. Speculation has it that they deliberately arrested people to tarnish the image of Banda who they were planning to depose so that Malawians should not feel sorry for him after the coup. It is also Albert Muwalo who is credited with planning the "New Building", an additional wing to Mikuyu Prison which he allegedly intended to house Banda and his henchpersons – who include members of the Kadzamira family to which Banda's Official Hostess ("official mistresses" in the poem [49]) belongs. In 1976 Muwalo and Gwede were arrested and charged with plotting to topple Banda in a coup. They were sentenced to death, but later Gwede's sentence was commuted to a life sentence. Muwalo was hanged ("opted to hang" [50]) and Gwede who "eventually went bonkers" (ibid.) did time at Zomba Central Prison.

The speaker in "The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison" further continues to tell Mapanje more about the inmates and the experiences in D4 as we shall see later in dealing with the theme of harmlessness. But of immediate concern here is the fact that for the first time in his poetry Mapanje begins to exhibit what Francis Barker refers to as "a language of monstrousness and bestiality" (qtd. by Simon C. Estok, "Theory from the Fringes" 67) by calling Banda "the M[m]onster," "the Beast," and "the Brute." This dehumanisation underlines Banda's inhumanity. His wickedness shows that he is no longer human but he is an animal, a beast; he lacks something essentially human, and one of these essential human aspects is compassion.

In this way Mapanje resists the liberatory discourse of Banda and the ideology of Kamuzuism that depicted Hastings Kamuzu Banda as the Father and Founder of the Malawi Nation, a Christ or Messianic figure who left his thriving medical practice in Ghana to come and liberate his people from colonial bondage and lead them for life, and as "the fount of all wisdom [who] always knew what was best for the nation" (Phiri 2; see also Chirambo 2007a & b, 2004).

In "The Deluge after Our Gweru Prison Dreams" (*CWMP* 95-98) where Banda is also called a beast, Mapanje exposes Banda's prison dreams as ordinary dreams with no prophetic value. In the poem Mapanje announces:

> Today, the H M Prison Gweru dreams that
> Fogged our vision once began to rupture

One by one: that pride of Capital Hill
Splintered in the heat of our endless

Droughts, the fallout muzzling the most
Civil of tenants; […] (95)

The poem is "a detailed account of the fate that [befell] the dreams of Malawi's development which Dr. Banda claim[ed] that he had in Gweru Prison, Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe], when he was a political prisoner there between 3 March 1959 and 1 April 1960, during the state of Emergency in Nyasaland [Malawi]" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 149). This poem was inspired by riots by students at Chancellor College, a constituent college of the University of Malawi, and civil servants (referred to as "the most / Civil of tenants" in the poem) in Blantyre and in the Capital, Lilongwe.[37] In the poem Mapanje attributes the riots and strikes to the realisation that the much talked about dreams of Banda while in Gweru Prison, which the poet calls "the beast's / Fantasies" (95) had lost their potency. Banda claimed that while in Gweru Prison he had dreams for three development projects for Malawi, namely to move the country's capital from Zomba to Lilongwe, to build a tarmac road along the western shores of Lake Malawi linking the southern and northern parts of the country, and to establish a university for his people. The first part of the poem shows how the dreams had lost their potency as the very dreams whose fulfilment had almost blinded Malawians ("Fogged our vision once" [95]) to the excesses of the Banda regime "began to rupture / One by one […]" (ibid.), that is, their insignificance began to show. In the poem, hitherto docile civil servants in Blantyre and Lilongwe went on strike demanding better pay to meet the high cost of living. This unprecedented event, according to the poet, destroyed the pride that Banda had in his capital which in fact has largely remained incomplete for lack of funds (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 149). The second dream had equally lost its lustre as the poet tells us

[…] his luminous great

[37] "These disturbances have come to be called the May riots of 1992." University students at Chancellor College, main campus of the University of Malawi, demonstrated in support of the pastoral letter of March 1992, issued by Malawian Catholic bishops, which criticised the human rights abuses by the MCP regime. Later workers in Blantyre and Lilongwe went on strike demanding "higher wages and better working conditions." The looting and violence that followed on the heels of the strikes resulted in the death of forty people in the hands of the police and Malawi Young Pioneers (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 135-136).

Lakeshore highway is crustaceous tarmac
In broken china, with yawning potholes

That crack landrover absorbers worse
Than those forest roads long ago (95)

As regards the third dream university students, who had endured the wickedness of the regime, took to the streets in protest of the violation of human rights in the country and even "took the institution to court over dismissals" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 149) as we are told:

Even our quiet University students (having
Carefully balanced the shards of the beast's

Fantasies) only recently dared to sue
The Chairman of University Council for

Embezzling the truth and our University's
Head of Law for once defended justice! (95)

The second and third sections of the poem attribute the change of the political atmosphere in the country to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Western donors' demands for democratic governance as a precondition to aid. The final section demystifies Banda's prison dreams. The poet suggests that there was nothing special about Banda's prison dreams for every prisoner dreams anyway. Even the poet himself dreamt in Mikuyu, as he tells us

[...] even I dreamt
Tearing up lions, hounds and leopards

Which in defeat served scones and tea
On Bamboo trays to my released inmates (97)

Here Mapanje wryly dismisses Banda's dreams as typical of prison experiences with no substance as even he dreamed in Mikuyu of having defeated his incarcerators and oppressors; represented by vicious animals: the "lions, hounds and leopards" in the poem. The emphasis on the word "Tearing" in the extract above underlines the poet's anger and bitterness against his oppressors; the metaphorical "lions, hounds and leopards." The alliteration in the phrase "served scones and tea" on the other hand, emphasises the imagined servitude of the oppressors after their defeat.

For the poet, Banda's dreams were fast turning into nightmares as he would no longer be able to stem the tide of change that was sweeping through the country. And indeed in 1993 a national referendum revealed that a majority of Malawians were in favour of multiparty government and in a general election the following year Banda lost the presidency to Eleson Bakili Muluzi.

In "The New Rebels of Zalewa Highway Bridge" (*SWR*, 71-72) Mapanje calls Banda "life beast" in a deliberate corruption of the title "Life President" conferred on Banda in 1971 such that afterwards he was constantly addressed as "His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda." In calling him "life beast" (71) Mapanje highlights the wickedness of president Banda. Mapanje further emphasises Banda's monstrosity in "Beginning Where We Left Off" (*SWR*, 61) where he calls him

> […] the monster [who] pulped his own cubs
>
> Leaving the village tainted in sweat, tears & blood
> Alarming his mates across the valleys, beyond the seas (61)

Here Banda is depicted as a fiend who kills his own people ("pulped his own cubs") much to the dismay of his fellow presidents in neighbouring countries ("mates across the valleys") and abroad ("beyond the seas"). In Banda's days many people died at the hands of death squads even while in exile and some of the murders were covered up as accidents.[38] Similarly in "Guilty of Nipping Her Pumpkin Leaves" (*SWR* 66-67) Banda is referred to as a "monster," "beast," and "fiend." In this poem Mapanje, who returned home in October 1994, after the removal of Banda in a democratic election, "with a film crew from Diverse Productions of London to record for the BBC's TV programme *Africa '95*" (Mapanje, Notes, *SWR* 78) decides to pay a woman vegetable seller for the pumpkin leaves he had borrowed from her seven years before – that is before his detention and exile. In the ensuing conversation the woman who does not remember him accuses him of returning home "to ridicule her / Nudity [poverty] with his cameras as strange visitors / In the dead monster's regime once did" (66). The death in the poem is not literal but a metaphor for the loss of political

[38] Atati Mpakati and Mkwapatira Mhango are some of the people believed to have been killed while in exile by Banda's agents. After surviving a letter-bomb which destroyed eight of his ten fingers, an act for which Banda claimed responsibility, Atati Mpakati was found dead in March 1983 in a storm drain in Harare, Zimbabwe (Bakili Muluzi *et al* 118-119). Mkwapatira Mhango was a freelance journalist whose house in Zambia was petrol bombed on 13th October 1989. His two wives, seven children and Mhango himself died in the terrorist attack (ibid. 125).

power. Banda died on November 25, 1997. The woman declares that she would not allow her children's pictures to be taken either, regardless of whether he is a tourist or traveller because pictures of them taken by tourists in the days of Banda have brought no relief to their poverty but have ended up being pieces of amusement for the photographers ("have fattened the albums of the like / Of him before" [ibid.]). She declares that she would not allow such a thing to happen again in the new political dispensation: "Not today with the beast / Gone, never if he should decide to resurrect!" (ibid.) Mapanje tells her he understands her anger against Banda saying "I too withheld / The spite I felt for the beast to save my life / And my children" (67) and goes on to remind the woman who he is and the joke they shared (the woman buoyantly marrying her daughters to him "Every time he visited [her] stall" [ibid.]). This jogs her memory and wonders what kept the poet from returning home immediately after Banda's fall like the other exiles whom she calls "Those buffaloes who left these kraals many dry / Seasons ago" (ibid.). Later, before accepting his money, she tells him that the country is still poor and hunger-stricken (as a result of a drought) after Banda but the people expected no less, as she wonders "But whoever dreamt that the fiend would go for / The thundering rains to pour?" (ibid.).

As already mentioned above this reference to Banda as monster, fiend or beast seeks to expose Banda's wickedness and misrule. But in equating Banda to a beast (common reference to animals) and monster Mapanje's poetic persona is deepening the alienation of animals by humans, and indirectly sanctioning the cruel treatment of such "beastly" creatures.

Mapanje also refers to other oppressive systems, institutions and structures as beasts and monsters. In "Warm Thoughts for Ken Saro-Wiwa" (*SWR* 46), a "letter […] smuggled to Ken Saro-Wiwa" whose reply did not reach the poet until Saro-Wiwa's execution (Mapanje, Notes, *SWR* 77) Mapanje recalls bragging upon meeting Ken Saro-Wiwa at Potsdam "about / The fleas and swarms of bats pouring stinking shit / Into our mouths as we battled the eternal beast // Of our wakeful slumbers" (46).[39] Mapanje's use of words such as "shit" which are "usually considered obscene" (Moto, *The Context* 148) in many Malawian societies, and the paradoxical expression "wakeful slumbers" underscores the squalor and pain suffered by victims of

[39] Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian author, television producer, environmental activist and president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) who was hanged by the dictatorial military regime of Sani Abacha in 1995.

oppression. The use of "wakeful slumbers" (K*ugona tsonga* in Chichewa, meaning "to spend the night without falling asleep") also shows Mapanje's use of local expressions in his poetry (ibid. 151). The beasts in the poem refer to a lot of things such as despotic leaders (like Banda) and their supporters, as well as oppressive institutes, structures and systems the world over "that have no sympathy for human suffering" (Mapanje, Notes, *BN* 63). This broad, generalised and pluralised use of beast that begins here finds its most sustained use in the title poem of the collection *Beasts of Nalunga.*

The long poem "Beasts of Nalunga" (10-14) is about these beasts in their various forms, from actual beasts (read animals) to vampires, the IMF and the World Bank. All these beasts are generally referred to as "beasts of Nalunga." The "beast of Nalunga" of the title, however, as the author tells us in the notes, has to do with "a real beast" that wrecked havoc in Nalunga village, Dowa District, in Malawi in 2003.[40] The poem has seven sections. In the first section the poet refers to the "puzzling cyclic temporal existence" of the various blood-sucking creatures referred to in the poem, be they human, beast or vampire. The poet tells us that

> beasts of Nalunga
> have a mind of their own
> that draws out the most
> tenacious in us within
> their temporal spirals,
> trying our temper and
> tempting our faith (10).

The "temporal spirals" refer to their periodic occurrence in various societies in Malawi. As the poet makes it clear in the note "these blood-sucking creatures have fascinated historians and other academics; they have a puzzling cyclic temporal

[40] As Mapanje tessl us in the Notes, mysterious beasts whose origin remains unknown suddenly appeared in 2003 "in a village called Nalunga in Chief Chiwere's area, Dowa district, Central Malawi." The beasts that "were variously believed to be rabid hyenas, lions, leopards or cheetahs […] killed or maimed domestic animals and people, scattering [thousands of]them from their homes." Human-like beasts are said to have appeared earlier in the year "in Chief cheSomba's area, Zomba district, Southern Malawi." These ones "sucked people's blood in their sleep at night, apparently using intravenous tubes." Mapanje tells us that "[t]he mystery surrounding these human/beast/vampire stories was subject of singers and storytellers some of whom compared the character of these beasts to that of the IMF, the World Bank and other profit-oriented multinational economic suckers that have no sympathy for human suffering" (*BN* 63). These stories and the beliefs surrounding them are the subject of this poem. Stories of such beasts resurface in Malawi once in a while.

existence of their own" (63). Mapanje underlines the creatures' insensitivity and lack of sympathy by describing them as having

> eyes with mind-
> boggling cataracts, ears
> which won't hear, flesh
> and bones that won't feel (ibid.)

before proceeding to connect their appearance in society with evil committed by leaders when he says

> they are most eloquent
> when the gods conspire
> with despots to suppress
> people's inventive ways (ibid.)

The description of mysterious beasts as having "ears / which *won't* hear, [and] flesh / and bones that *won't* feel" (my emphasis) underscores the robotic and, therefore, cruel and insensitive nature of these bests. The second section and the first half of the third section describe another beast in the form of Napolo. This is a "mythical subterranian serpent residing under mountains and associated with landslides, earthquakes, and floods in Malawi" (Chimombo, Preface, *NP* iiv). This myth is a recurrent feature in Steve Chimombo's poetry as we shall see in the next chapter. The destructive behaviour of this snake too, according to Mapanje, is triggered by injustice in society; for instance when "cave panthers / rip out frogs that might / shelter them" (ibid). There is an allusion to the Cabinet Crisis here.[41] Banda, like the "cave panthers" in the poem, alienated himself from the founders of the MCP (the "frogs" in the poem) who invited him to Malawi to lead the party in the struggle against the colonialists. Some of these died mysteriously within the country while others such as Kanyama Chiume, Henry Masauko Chipembere and Orton Chirwa fled into exile. Orton Chirwa was to be lured back to a border district of Zambia from where he was abducted into Malawi

[41] "It began on 26 July with a speech by President Banda on his return from the Cairo summit of the Organisation of African Unity in which he attacked unnamed members of his cabinet for questioning his policies" (Vail and White, "Of Chameleons," 32). This later led to the dismissal of several so-called rebel ministers, Kanyama Chiume, Orton Chirwa, Augustine Bwanausi and Rose Chibambo. In sympathy with the dismissed ministers, Yatuta Chisiza, Willie Chokani and later Henry Masauko Chipembere resigned. Two insurrections were consequently launched by Chipembere and Chisiza to try to depose Banda but he (Banda) squashed them both and proceeded to build his hegemony. (See also Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: South African Voices in History* [Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1991], Bakili Muluzi et al, *Democracy with a Price: The History of Malawi Since 1900* [Blantyre: Jhango Heinemann, 1999], John Lwanda, *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi: A Study in Promise, Power and Paralysis {Malawi Under Dr. Banda (1961-1993)}* [Bothwell, Glasgow: Dudu Nsomba Publication, 1993] and Philip Short, *Banda*, London: Routledge, 1974, among others).

where he later died in prison in 1992 (Chirambo 2010). Here Mapanje exploits the belief that it is when such injustices occur in society, when visitor turns against host, that evil forces wreck havoc in society, that

> […] torrential rains
> are unleashed dragging
> away fireplaces, gobbling
> up jars, pots, ladles, hoes,
> calabashes, sending homes
> tumbling down canyons,
> swirling with people's cattle,
> sheep, goats, dogs, chicken –
> the lot – as men, women,
> children fumble, knock
> about, forever sashaying
> to nondescript labyrinths
> en route to far-off waters
> and lakes, seas and oceans (ibid.)

There was a belief in Malawian societies, which in fact survives to this day, that the flouting of traditional norms and values by the whole society or by some of its members resulted in plagues and epidemics as punishment for the society.

The second half of the third section introduces another kind of "beast(s) of Nalunga" in the form of vampires

> that suck ordinary peoples blood at
> night, often with intricate
> intravenous tubing, leaving
> behind invisible blemishes
> as people flee their homes (11).

And in the fourth section the poet mentions places where such events are reported to have occurred. As he makes it clear in the "Notes"

> beasts and vampires have bothered people throughout the country from the time the British ruled Nyasaland Protectorate, perhaps even earlier. And during Hastings Banda's autocratic rule these blood-sucking creatures appeared in several townships in the country's southern and central regions. They became popularly associated with the enigmatic 'Chilobwe Murders' (63).

The belief during the late 1960s and early 70s was that Banda was exchanging this blood with money from South Africa. A similar thing happened during the Muluzi era when blood-sucking events were reported in chief cheSomba's area and the marauding beast in Chiwere's area. The belief around these new beasts, according to

the poet, is that they are being used by the government of the day (incidentally called beasts) to find excuses for

> food-aid to
> beat eternal famines,
> malaria, AIDS, plagues that
> our western pharmaceuticals,
> patented by their beast of
> IMF, World Bank, forever
> profit from […] (11).

The IMF and the World Bank's supposed lack of sympathy for human suffering because of their profiteering justifies their being called beasts in the poem.

It is in the fifth section where the "beast of Nalunga" of the title is tackled. Allegedly this beast could not be identified both by the rangers who eventually shot it or the elders in the surrounding villages. As the poem makes it clear it had body parts of different animals, alluded to by the reference to "lion heads, / rhinoceros / trunks and hyena hinds –" (12). As the section also makes it clear the beast killed and maimed people and livestock. It evaded all attempts to kill it for a long time before it was finally killed by rangers who are believed to be very good at magic. Towards the end of the section the poet sees these "beasts of Nalunga" as results of our own creation, they "are cyclic sagas / of people besotted by wars, / battles / tyrants, / plagues" (ibid.). In the sections that follows (section six) Mapanje cites a belief that acts as an explanation of how the acts of tyrants such as Banda can lead to the creation of marauding beasts. Some sections of the society, whom he calls "riddlers" (ibid.), believe that these beasts are spirits of people who were murdered during the MCP era and were buried without following the right procedure. The poet believes that it is perhaps right that in the new political dispensation people should talk freely about these evils of the past regime that people were silent about then for fear of reprisals. The nation deserves to know of

> ad hoc mat-coffins that
> took some mangled bodies
> past ordinary doors, when
> they should have gone out
> to their impromptu graves
> past windows, according to
> tattoos from the medicine
> men and women who gave

them new lease of life (12-13)

From Mapanje's own clarification

> [t]he idea of corpses being taken to the grave through windows rather than the main door, as described in the poem, has an ancient origin. Tradition has it that coffins of people who took medicines [tattoos from the medicine / men and women" in the poem] in order to live long had to pass through windows rather than doors on their way to the cemetery; this ensured that, after their burial, such people did not turn into monsters that molested people in villages ("Notes," *BN* 63).

During the MCP such procedures were easily flouted with respect to the victims of the death squads, especially if the victims were considered dangerous rebels. Some of their coffins were "buried / at gun point" (13) while the bodies of some ("carcasses of / the 'politicals'" (ibid.) in the poem) dissolved in "basins / of sulphuric acid at Malawi / young Pioneer bases" (ibid.). The government also banned mourning at funerals of people considered "rebels." Some of the "beasts of Nalunga" then are spirits of some of such victims come to haunt the living for flouting their burial procedures.

In the final section the poet argues that whatever the suspected origin of these beasts might be, whether they are believed to be the spirit of Banda ("life despot" [ibid.]) "returned / from hell fire to taunt easy / up country people" (ibid.) the truth is that nobody knows their origin and the sure fact is that, as the poet says

> when our temporal spirals
> have done their final round,
> we'll find beasts of Nalunga
> lurking here, lurking there,
> lurking even in you and me (14).

The fact that "beasts of Nalunga" can lurk in people extends the meaning of "beasts of Nalunga" to include human frailty and faults such as envy, jealousy, hatred and other foibles. This type of beast is explored in "Can of Beasts Madonna Opened" (*BN* 60-61). The context of the poem is the adoption of an orphan boy, David Banda, by the pop star Madonna in Malawi in 2007. Some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the country and some ordinary people opposed the adoption on the grounds that the country's laws do not allow a foreign national to adopt a child in Malawi. Others argued that the child would be culturally alienated while still others were not amused by Madonna's questionable morals. The poet, who supports the adoption, wonders

> Why must adopting an orphan

open another can of beasts for our
Christian claimed states? (60)

He calls the opposition a "can of / holier beasts" and goes on to ask

[…] And these culture-identity
crises we invent for this child, what
justice, what laws, what dignity
can mean beasts like you and me
truly restore […] (ibid.)

Here Mapanje's shows his loss of confidence in human beings. He sees more of their frailty and folly than their uprightness. In as far as we are plagued by jealousies, greed and other failings we are "mean beasts." Here he narrows the gap between the humans and the animals we vilify.

Besides making references to humans, vampires and animals, Mapanje also refers to machines as brutes, monsters, and beasts. We see this in the poem "The Fish Eagles of Cape Maclear" (*SWR* 68) where he calls beasts or monsters bulldozers, cranes, caterpillars, d-sevens and other machines that he finds clearing a road and building bridges to Cape Maclear on his arrival from exile in 1994. However, the reference to the machines as "yellow monsters" in the lines "But with tyrant-for-life now definitely sorted / The yellow monsters have been brought in" (68) could carry another meaning. The "yellow monsters" could also refer to the United Democratic Front (UDF) party politicians who took over power from Banda and the MCP. Yellow is the party colour for the UDF and the poet could be referring to the UDF politicians as monsters, another breed of oppressors, and exploiters. If this be the case then the poet was visionary enough because the legacy of the UDF in power is not without gross human rights violations and abuses. Members of the youth wing of the party, anomalously calling themselves Young Democrats, harassed and even murdered people who were critical of Muluzi's leadership style.

Mapanje highlights the ruthlessness of Banda and his supporters by associating them with ferocious carnivorous mammals such as lions, leopards, and hyenas; reptiles such as crocodiles, lizards and snakes; pests and vermin such as rats, scorpions, bats and wasps; and vectors and parasites such as mosquitoes, and cockroaches, among others.

In his reign of terror Banda was assisted by a number of agents such as the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), the police, and the army, as well as members of the MCP Youth League and Women's League. The MYP, the most repressive instrument at

Banda's disposal, were a paramilitary wing of the Malawi Congress Party. They were established in 1963 (Phiri 2000) and legislated into existence by parliament in 1964 (Chirambo 2004). Initially they were conceived as a means by which the MCP would mobilise the country's youth "for a clearly defined role in the development of the emerging nation;" this would included spearheading rural development and indoctrinating the Malawi people in the fashion of Kamuzuism (Phiri 1-3). But later the MYP were to be heavily armed and receive adequate military training that enabled them to serve as the Banda regime's private army used to arrest, detain, torture, kill, maim or force into exile those who did not conform to the dictatorship. In this regard they duplicated some of the duties of the army and the police (Chirambo 2004). The MYP policed party meetings, markets, and bus stations. They also forced people to attend party meetings and activities and to buy the party membership card. They recruited academics to spy on their fellow academics, students to note what their lectures said, cleaners, secretaries and messengers to eavesdrop on their bosses' telephone conversation, monitor their mail, or scrutinise their visitors and their conversations (Mapanje, "Leaving No Traces" 75; Chirambo, "The Vipers" 1; and "Operation Bwezani" 153). In the 1970s and 80s they drove thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses out of the country into exile in neighbouring Zambia and Mozambique for refusing to join the MCP or attend Banda's many rallies. Several others were murdered by the MYP (Africa Watch, 1990).[42]

Where Banda is predicated on any of ferocious and/ or carnivorous mammals such as lions, leopards, and hyenas, it is the negative attributes assigned to these animals by society that are of concern for the poet. In the poem "The release: *Who Are You,* Imbongi?" (*CWMP* 71-72), the first poem in the section "The Release and Other Curious Sights" of the *Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* Mapanje refers to Banda as the lion, rhinoceros and leopard. The poem details the experiences Mapanje had on the day he was released from prison. The impression one gets upon reading the poem is that the police were surprised by the public outcry that was triggered by Mapanje's arrest and wanted to know who exactly he was. And this is how Anthony Nazombe understands this poem ("Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 146-147). The truth, however, is that the inspector general of police at the time of his arrest asked

[42] For more information on the MYP see Kings Phiri, "A Case of Revolutionary Change in Contemporary Malawi: The Malawi Army and the Disarming of the Malawi Young Pioneers," *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Military Studies* 1.1 (2000). 10.12.2009. http://www.uz.ac.zw/units/cds/journals/volume1/number1/article3.html.

him this question before sending him to Mikuyu Prison.[43] His reply to the inspector general of police's question comes in the poem where he wonders why the police failed to ask him that question before they arrested him. Reverting to animal metaphor he uses three animals: lion, rhinoceros and leopard to represent Banda:

> When the lion wrung the gazelle
> Under his smoking armpits, when
> The foaming rhinoceros pierced his
> Sharp horn or the leopard pounced;
>
> Did you ask, *imbongi*, who are you? (71)

The three animals are portrayed as violent and brutal. The lion "wrung the gazelle" while the rhinoceros "pierced his / Sharp horn" and the "the leopard pounced" (ibid.). The murderous fury of the lion and the rhinoceros is also clear in the poem. The lion has "smoking armpits" while the rhinoceros is said to foam at the mouth. There is a correspondence between the murderous fury of the animals in the poem and that of Banda when he sanctioned the incarceration of the poet who is the hapless "gazelle" in the poem. With regard to the leopard, in his poetry Mapanje mostly uses the expression "the leopards of Dedza" in reference to the Tembo and Kadzamira families as is the case in "Making Our Clowns Martyrs (or Returning Home Without Chauffeurs)" (OCAG, 59-60). Here the "leopards of / Dedza hills" (59) are said to "comb the land or hedge before their assault" in reference to the families' ruthless dealings with everyone who appeared to be a threat to their ambitions to succeed

[43] When Mapanje was arrested the police wanted to know from him why he was arrested. Mapanje tells us about his interview with the police in the following words:

> There was a huge oval table. At the head of it was the inspector general of police and the rest of the table was filled with the chief commissioners of police from the whole country. I sat in the corner and the inspector general said: 'Dr Mapanje, His Excellency the Life President has directed me today to detain you. Because this is His Excellency's directive, I am afraid to tell you that we are not going to investigate your case because it would look like we were not trusting the higher authorities.
>
> 'But, because we are not investigating, I brought these commissioners here to tell me what it is that you have done, to find out whether you are in our books. They all tell me that they don't know of you. So, we thought, before we take you to where His Excellency wants you to be, we should ask you: first of all, who you are, and, secondly, why do you think we should arrest you?'
>
> […] It was madness, more Kafka than you could ever think of. He was actually asking his prisoner why he should be detained. I didn't say anything, I couldn't say anything. The man was so embarrassed he didn't know what to do. (Chris Bunting, *Times Higher Education Supplement* [December 2000], n.p.).

Banda or their continued enjoyment of Banda's favours.[44] The rhinoceros, on the other hand, is positively depicted in "The Return of the Rhinoceros" (*SWR*, 56-57) to celebrate the restoration of the rhino population in Liwonde National Park by South African game rangers or the return of exiles to Malawi in the 1990s. After Malawians voted overwhelmingly in favour of multi-party type of rule on 17th May 1993, "[a] general amnesty was declared leading to the release of all known political prisoners and enabling all citizens who went into exile to return to their country and help determine its future" (Nazombe "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 138, see also Chirambo 2010). One of the families that returned to Malawi is the Chipembere family, and *chipembere* is the Chichewa term for rhinoceros.

The brutality, cruelty and ferociousness of Banda as represented by the lion metaphor also comes through in "Rested Amongst Fellow Hyenas, Finally" (*LSB* 198-199). A hyena is the animal that plays the role of a dupe in many Malawian folk stories. Steve Chimombo observes that "in Malawian folk narratives, *Fisi* [the hyena] has never been depicted triumphant" (*Malawian Oral Literature* 180). It is often portrayed as dull, stupid, and cowardly. In real life the animal is generally viewed in Malawi with a mixture of fear, contempt and disgust, and is often ridiculed and mocked for its eating habits, nocturnal behaviour, and ungainly gait. A hyena is seen as a coward and a filthy animal. It is perhaps this association of the hyena with filth that a man who is asked to help cleanse a woman who is considered unclean for various reasons through consensual sexual contact is called *fisi* (hyena). Ironically, the hyena is also associated with potency. It is this potency or the nocturnal behaviour of a hyena that is exploited in traditional parlance where a man whose sexual services are requested in private to help father a child for a man who is failing to do so with his wife is called *fisi*. Like a hyena which comes to the village at night to steal livestock, a man whose sexual services are needed by a childless couple performs his duties under the cover of darkness. However, some parts of the hyena's anatomy are highly priced for their magical purposes mostly by people who wish to unleash evil on society such as witches and wizards and thieves (Moto, *The Context* 74-75). Its brain, nose, ears, tail, toes and other body parts often disappear as soon as a dead hyena is discovered. Popular belief also has it that some hyenas are owned by witches and

[44] Cecilia Kadzamira, Banda's official hostess (or mistress as is popularly believed) and John Tembo, her uncle, are believed to have ruled Malawi along with Banda as a "triumvirate". These two are also believed to have been behind some of the atrocities that the MCP regime committed. See Malawi High Court, "The Republic versus Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda and Others" (1995-96), and Africa Watch (16–17).

wizards who use them as their familiars. Regarding similar beliefs, which fall within the realm of the magical as opposed to the real, in Cameroon, Peter Geschiere observes that "these supposed acts, real or not, play an important role in [social and] political processes [as o]ther actors do take them into account in devising their strategies[, given that] even imaginary actions can induce concrete reactions" (122).

In "Rested Amongst Fellow Hyenas, Finally" the poet muses about the death and burial of Banda. The "finally" in the title gives one the impression that the poet feels that Banda's death was long overdue. Although the actual date of birth of Banda remains controversial, there is consensus that he died in his late nineties. The poet asks rhetorical questions (a major aspect of technique in Mapanje's poetry) that signal his surprise that Banda, whose reign led to the death of many of his political opponents, could be buried amongst the very people he used to vilify and in whose death he might have had a hand. Using his usual tongue-in-cheek rhetorical questions, the poet wonders:

> So the undertakers have buried
> Their lion of the nation for life
> Among the hyenas he ridiculed
> At political rallies once? (198)

The reference to the undertakers in the poem recalls "When This Carnival Finally Closes" (*OCAG*, 61), a poem which prophecies what would happen after Banda's death or fall from power. In this poem the poet-protagonist projected that after Banda's death the undertakers would jest: "What did he think he would become, a God? The devil!" In the present poem the undertakers finally fulfil the prophecy by burying Banda. The reference to Banda as "lion of the nation for life" is another deliberate corruption of Banda's title as Life President. The poet mischievously imagines Banda embalmed "In his waistcoat, stripped dark / Suit, bowler hat, overcoat and / … sunglasses …" (ibid.).[45] In the poem Banda, the lion, is depicted as king of the jungle as his followers are characterised as woodpeckers, squirrels, cats, and snakes, all of which, except in the case of the scheming snake, are weak and can never hope to oppose Banda. This insinuates that Banda's supporters were mostly weak and cowardly people. The "Lion King" on the other hand is brutal and ambitious as he is said to have fought battles "To become another Almighty God"

[45] These were Hastings Banda's favourite clothes. Much to the amusement of some observers, he preferred three-piece suits, overcoats, and homburg or bowler hats, "even in the height of the tropical summer" (Africa Watch, 17).

(199). The poet then wonders whether this ambition was "Worth spilling his people's blood / For, eventually […]" (ibid.), since he was a mere mortal. Further, the poem's title seems to suggest that in spite of all the brutality and the worship he received from his followers, he was no lion but a hyena. Here Mapanje deconstructs the favourable image of Banda constructed by his sycophants and exposes Banda's wickedness and folly. Mapanje here is the Andersenian child who sees the nakedness of the king and mentions it when everyone else pretends that the king is dressed.

Besides reducing Banda to a cowardly hyena, in the poem Mapanje also mockingly depicts him as a wizard who keeps hyenas as his familiars. Commenting on the "association of politics with witchcraft" in postcolonial Africa, Peter Geschiere observes that "[n]early everywhere in Africa, discourses on power continue to be marked by […] notions" of sorcery and witchcraft (5, 7). He goes on to say that "[w]itchcraft not only dominates relations between the new elite and villagers but also marks elite behavior and their struggles in the arena of modern politics" (114). Although Mapanje's purpose in referring to Banda's purported witchcraft is satirical, he demonstrates how "witchcraft remains, for both elites and villagers, the preferred discourse when it comes to interpreting the vicissitudes of modern politics" (114-115). Besides, as was the case during the reign of Ahmadou Ahidjo in Cameroon, there was "a striking parallel between the political climate engendered by" the authoritarian Banda regime and "the occult world of witchcraft: both are worlds of uncertainty and violent but secret confrontations" (Geschiere119).

In the poem we hear that the poet-protagonist wishes to be taken by taxi to the "solitary barbed / Wire cemetery where his [Banda's] rabid hyenas / Gather at night stomping about and / Foaming for his bones […]" (199). Now that Banda is dead the very hyenas he possessed are now clamouring for his bones. In the poem therefore the poet employs a hyena as a metaphor for Banda and also uses traditional beliefs about the hyena's role in witchcraft to depict Banda as an evil man who reared hyenas through magic to deal with his opponents and to protect his political position. The three representations of a hyena in the poem are all negative; as such the poem cannot act as a model for good relations between humans and this scavenger who cleans the environment of dead animal remains.

Further, we encounter the lion's brutality in the poem "Beginning Where We Left Off," (*SWR* 61), where Banda is referred to as "the senile lion" who accidentally falls "In the chasm of his own doing" (61):

So now that the senile lion has accidentally fallen
In the chasm of his own digging, let us thank the Lord
And resume the true fight we abandoned years ago

Let us begin by singing in the native tongues the old
Guards cut under the pretext of building our nation
[…] (61)

The brutality of this lion is seen in the fact that his fall encourages the poet-protagonist to ask his fellow country men and women to "thank the Lord / And resume the true fight we abandoned years ago" (ibid.). The fight here is the struggle for human rights and dignity, for a good life free from oppression and exploitation that Banda derailed and betrayed after independence. For him this fight will have to begin by "singing in the native tongues the old / Guards cut under the pretext of building" (ibid.) the nation. The fight that needs to be resumed here is the struggle for freedoms which Banda suppressed during his reign. The native tongues that were cut on the other hand are the local languages that were suppressed in favour of Chichewa, Banda's mother tongue, allegedly to foster unity amongst the diverse tribes in Malawi. The reason offered at the time for favouring Chichewa over any of the other languages was that Chichewa was spoken by a majority of Malawians. But this assertion was challenged by Professor Wilfred Whiteley from the University of London who "observed in a report for the University of Malawi that the number of Chewa speakers was clearly exaggerated in official estimates" (Africa Watch, 57-58). As a result Dr. Banda ordered that Whiteley's services should no longer be used in the university. The fact that Mapanje is concerned about Malawi's minority languages comes as no surprise as, besides being a well known poet, he is also a distinguished linguist.

In the poem "Just Another Jehovah's Witness" (*SWR* 62-63), we see Banda's wickedness as a lion in his persecution of members of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the Jehovah's Witnesses, in the 1970s. The Jehovah's Witnesses refused to join any political party and to buy the Malawi Congress Party card which every adult Malawian – and later even babies in arms – was supposed to have. As a result of their refusal they were hounded by the various vigilante groups of the MCP who drove thousands of them into exile in neighbouring countries (Mozambique and Zambia) and killed several others. Sadly some of the exiles were sent back, by the governments of the countries in which they sought asylum, to Malawi where they

faced more harassment. The poem, the poet tells us, is a family history inspired by the sudden death from stroke of the poet's brother in-law, Ibrahim Nyalenda, (the addressee in the poem) who was a Jehovah's Witness ("Introductory Note" 78). The news of the in-law's death triggers memories of the nice times the poet spent together with him and the suffering that the in-law went through in the hands of Banda and his MCP. In the poem Banda is referred to as "our lion-for-life,"[46] or simply as "our lion" and more tellingly as "our life serpent" to emphasise his viciousness, deceit and failure to provide Malawians with the freedom they fought for in the struggle for independence. Banda's regime is blamed in the poem for contributing to Nyalenda's stroke that later killed him as we hear the poet declare

> Your stroke began when the MCP red-shirts[47]
> Impounded the sweat of the house you built
> Opposite Chikoko Bay[48] charging you, 'These
> Jehovah's Witnesses despise His Excellency's
> Malawi Congress Party cards, badges…'
> As they took home your beds, mattresses, pans… (62)

Besides losing property the addressee had also suffered other terrible things such as imprisonment at Fort Mlangeni and Dzeleka where he experienced horrors he swore never to divulge to his relations, "howling / 'The horrors this tyrant has loaded over / us I will chant among strangers far away" (63). What emerges from the poems discussed above and others is the fact that, in his representation of the lion, which stands for Banda in the poetry, Mapanje focuses on the negative attributes associated with the animal: the lion's cruelty, brutality and viciousness.

One can argue that Mapanje shows ecological awareness or is aware of his environment by virtue of the fact that there is a lot of reference to African fauna in his poetry. However, this ecological awareness does not go beyond implicit acknowledgement of the existence of the various animals to provide an ethical message about the environment or about the relationship between humans and nature, in general, and animals in particular. In using animals as metaphorical references for his and his country men's situation in postcolonial Malawi Mapanje's concern is the exposure of human injustice against fellow humans and not against nature. He quests for the creation of a better society in which human freedom and justice should flourish

[46] Similar reference to Banda is also seen in "The New Rebels at Zalewa Highway Bridge" (*SWR* 71 - 72).
[47] Youth Leaguers.
[48] Also name for a house Banda built on this bay on Lake Malawi.

and does not broaden the concept of justice to include nature or biodiversity. As such the metaphors that Mapanje generates in relation to animals in his poetry have little or no influence on the way we treat them.

5.0 Animals as Weapons of Satire, Ridicule and Scorn

Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes:

> [s]atire takes for its province a whole society, and for its purpose, criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious, laughter ("Wole Soyinka" 55; see also Greenblatt 103).

Mapanje's poetic and allegorical form, tone, word choice, and rhetorical questions reveal his "moral indignation" and his "derision and ridicule on society's failings" which he attempts to correct through satiric humour and interrogation. His poems, as Vail and White observe, shift "line by line" and stanza by stanza "both in tone and syntax, from bald statement to quiet reflection and satiric jibe to open interrogation" ("Of Chameleons" 38).

In the poem "Rested Amongst Fellow Hyenas, Finally" (*LSB* 198-199), the poet lampoons Banda by calling him a hyena. The tone in the poem is full of sardonic humour as the poet, using his trademark conversational style and rhetorical questions wishes to know what happened during Banda's funeral:

> Did
> The woodpeckers, squirrels, cats
> And snakes spit in disbelief as
> The fly whisk which swiped their
>
> Laughter shut was placed on
> His right – lest another mosquito
> Zang past to upset his eternal
> Glory? (ibid.)

And again

> What welcome did
> His Young Pioneer invented rebels
> Give him on arrival? Did they ask
> How it felt to be finally there, alone? (199)

The nine stanzas of this poem constitute a series of questions, some of which cut across stanzas, aimed at underlining the futility of Banda's overweening ambition and

despotism, oblivious of his own mortality. This poem demonstrates "[t]he profoundly oral nature of Mapanje's [poetic] style […] (Vail and White, "Of Chameleons" 38). As Vail and White rightly observe, and as this poem exemplifies, Mapanje's poems "are dominated by the speaking voice, usually in the first person and the present tense. […] They are intensely dramatic with strong beginnings and forceful endings and incorporate a good deal of direct speech (ibid.). The opening stanza of the poem which reads

> So the undertakers have buried
> Their lion of the nation for life
> Among the hyenas he ridiculed
> At political rallies once? (198)

demonstrates the dramatic nature of the poetry and the strength of the beginning of Mapanje's poems, while the forcefulness of the endings that Vail and White mention above can bee seen in this poem's ending with the exclamation "glory be!" (199).

Mapanje achieves satiric humour through, among other things, the use of descriptive phrases and expressions that depict the thing or person described as ridiculous and stupid. Banda's failure to interfere in or influence events surrounding the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin wall invites "derision and ridicule" as he is referred to as a "battered hyena" who fails "to crack / Rotten bones in the dustbins of East / /Versus West" (96) in "The Deluge After Our Gweru Prison Dreams" (*CWMP* 95-98). The expression "battered hyena" evokes the old age, frailty and helplessness of Banda who was in his nineties when he lost power in 1994, while the nearly oxymoronic phrase "to crack / Rotten bones" (rotten bones may not require cracking) also evokes Banda's weakness and helplessness. The choice of a hyena (an animal endowed with the most powerful jaws in the animal kingdom which, nevertheless, fails to "crack / Rotten bones") to allegorise the aged Banda also aptly depicts Banda's frailty. Mapanje's choice of descriptive phrases and expressions in this poem paint a picture of an old, frail and helpless Banda who greedily maintains his hold on power. It is no surprise then that the poet calls on the "Youths to dance" and "take / / The arena" (ibid.) – in other words, take over power.

In the poem, "For Another Village Politburo Projected" (*CWMP* 11) Mapanje describes Banda as a "squirrel in kinked flywhisks, / Flashing [his] nausea" and parodies him as a hyena "with the gilt of our skulls behind" him (11). These allegorical and satiric descriptions evoke contrasting images of Banda. In the first

description Banda emerges as harmless and stupid while in the second he comes across as murderous and evil. In allegorising Banda as a squirrel Mapanje focuses on Banda's old age and weakness while in characterising him as a hyena he shifts his focus to Banda's despotism and ruthlessness.

Mapanje's satiric jibes also emerge in the poem "Hyenas Playing Political Prisoners" (*SWR* 64-65) where he scorns some fellow poets and academics in Malawi who pose in the new political dispensation as if they too suffered greatly during the one party leadership. In the poem these people allegedly wish that they too were imprisoned like Mapanje to get famous. But the poet, who accuses them of being informants during the dark era of Banda, warns them that having been in prison, he knows that these hypocritical academics and poets would not have survived the ordeal. The poet tells them:

> knowing your
> Frailty and the pest-riddled red-kidney beans in
>
> Prison I wonder if you in particular would not
> Have needed more than the ancestral tattoos
> On your bottom to come back alive!" (64)

The expression "ancestral tattoos / On your bottom" refers to traditional medicine applied into incisions cut on various parts of the body for protection against enemies and misfortune. The notion of carrying "ancestral tattoos" on the buttocks ("bottom" in the poem) carries a satiric jibe that depicts the elites as ridiculous people ruled by fear of witchcraft. Here Mapanje, unintentionally perhaps, also highlights the role of occult forces in "the accumulation [and protection] of wealth and power" (Geschiere 5) in Malawi. The extract above also shows the centrality of "the speaking voice" in Mapanje's poetry as the poet directly addresses his intended audience.

In the poem "Warm Thoughts for Ken Saro-Wiwa" (*SWR* 46) the security forces who abducted Saro-Wiwa following directives from Sani Abacha are called "The armed vultures" (46). With this descriptive expression Mapanje uses words to caricature the security forces who, in the image of a vulture carrying weaponry, emerge as impotent and ludicrous.[49]

[49] The vulture is an unfortunate animal that is held in great contempt by many people. It is seen as ugly and its scavenging behaviour invites similar scorn as that visited upon the hyena. By calling the armed forces "armed vultures" therefore Mapanje also characterizes them as contemptuous and hideous.

Further, Mapanje employs the poetic technique of self-irony and mockery as a survival strategy after the shocking sudden reversal of fortunes from a respected linguist, poet and head of an academic department at Chancellor College to a despicable prisoner in Mikuyu. He therefore scornfully refers to himself and fellow prisoners as dung-beetles to suppress the grim reality that confronts him. In "Scrubbing the Furious Walls of Mikuyu" (*CWMP* 53-54) the thunderstruck Mapanje who has been ordered to clean the graffiti-riddled walls of a cell in Mikuyu ponders:

> Is this where they dump those rebels,
> these haggard cells stinking of bucket
> shit and vomit and the acrid urine of
> yesteryears? (53)

The word "dump" suggests that the alleged rebels are trash or refuse to be disposed of from society, while the personification of the prison cells through the use of the word "haggard" underscores the unsuitability of the cells for human habitation. The scatological imagery in the above lines also emphasises the squalid conditions of Mikuyu prison cells where political prisoners were condemned to spend their lives. Casting doubt on whether anybody could have foreseen the possibility of his detention in Mikuyu the poet wonders:

> Who would have thought I
> would be gazing at these dusty, cobweb
> ceilings of Mikuyu Prison, scrubbing
> briny walls and riddling out impetuous
> scratches of another dung-beetle locked
> up before me here? (ibid.)

The phrase "another dung-beetle locked / up before me" gives the impression that he sees himself as yet another dung-beetle.[50] The poet then proceeds to hint at the anger of the previous detainees by pointing where "Violent human palms / wounded […] blood-bloated mosquitoes / and bugs (to survive), leaving vicious / red marks" (ibid.). Mapanje's choice of words such as "violent," "wounded," "blood-bloated," and "vicious" here underscores not only the anger and violence of the former occupant of the prison cell, but also the violence and ruthlessness of the regime that condemned harmless citizens to squalid prison cells where they fell victim to disease carrying

[50] The dung-beetle is yet another creature whose station in life is considered lowly and despicable – pushing around faeces day in and day out. One can argue that by referring to himself and other Mikuyu prisoners as dung-beetles he is adopting the perspective of his incarcerators who see the prisoners as scornful and despicable creatures for allegedly rebelling against their wise leader, Banda.

mosquitoes and bugs. In the end the poet decides to abandon his task to avoid being party to the liquidation of "too many / brave names out of the nation's memory" (54).

6.0 Harmlessness, Victimhood and Suffering

In his poetry Jack Mapanje also uses animal metaphors and symbols to emphasize the harmlessness of Banda's presumed political enemies and their experiences of victimhood and suffering. In his article, "The Symbolism of Bondage and Freedom: Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*," Brighton Uledi-Kamanga argues that Jack Mapanje uses harmless animals to associate with freedom. This might be the case in a few instances in the collection of his focus, but in his poetry in general Mapanje uses these animals to associate them with harmlessness, victimhood and suffering. By using these harmless animals (wagtails, sparrows, geese, moths and dragon flies) Mapanje seeks to show that those who were persecuted during Banda's regime were harmless people who fell victim to the excesses of a despotic leader. This strategy depicts Banda's MCP regime in Malawi as a cowardly and insecure one that, instead of developing the country and bringing the fruits of freedom to the Malawian people, spent time looking over its shoulder and trailing, harassing, torturing and detaining people who posed no conceivable threat to it.

Further, the animal imagery helps to expose the great physical and psychological suffering that detainees in Banda's prisons such as Mikuyu faced (Uledi-Kamanga 44-45). The animals that Mapanje uses as metaphors for harmlessness, victimhood and suffering are mostly birds: chickens, wagtails, and marabous, among others. In general this derives from his familiarity with birds and their ubiquity in Malawi and in Malawi's oral tradition, but also his actual encounter with them during his imprisonment and thereafter. From within his own context, he has drawn on what Leonard Lutwack refers to when he points out that birds "are used more frequently in poetry than in any other genre because they can be incorporated more easily in the minute imagery that makes up the basic stuff of poetry than in the broader elements of plot and character upon which drama and fiction depend" (xii). Lutwack also observes that "[f]amiliarity and transcendence have given birds a wider range of meaning and symbol in literature than any other animal" (xi). There is no doubt that his familiarity with birds inspired Mapanje's use of them in his poetry.

In literary works more generally, and in some cultures in Africa, birds have featured as, for instance, "harbingers of the time of day and seasons of the year" (Lutwack 23, Biyela 2009). Their songs are associated with intense sorrow and joy, while a lone black bird or crow in a tree in winter has been seen by many poets as an image of forlornness (Lutwack 29). Whereas the nightingale is a favourite muse of the poet as its song has been a pre-eminent symbol of poetic inspiration, the dove has featured as a favourite Christian or biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit and of purity. Night birds, large black-plumaged birds and birds with carrion-eating proclivities, such as ravens, crows and vultures, are seen as villains, supernatural agents of evil or prophets of doom.

In some of his portrayals of birds, Mapanje rejects traditional conceptions by selecting small and vulnerable species that are generally viewed as harmless, such as wagtails, and by extending a tender attitude towards birds that are normally reviled, such as the marabou stork. These portrayals are perhaps influenced by the dynamism of oral literature where a narrator may decide to alter the role of otherwise stock characters, challenging his/her listeners' expectations in the process, to suit the moral s/he intends to attach to the narrative.

Those portrayed in the poetry using bird metaphors as harmless victims of Banda's paranoiac fear of rebellion are Malawians in general, prisoners in the various detention centres in the country, especially in Mikuyu, and the poet himself. Mostly, wherever the poet uses a metaphor for himself the metaphor points to his creativity, inventiveness and ingenuity. To the prisoners themselves, the behaviour of some animals also symbolises freedom from bondage or release from prison.

In what follows I discuss poems where use of animals (birds) highlights the harmlessness and victimhood of Banda's victims before moving on to those in which the birds underscore the victims' suffering.

6.1 "Song of Chickens": Bird Metaphors and Harmlessness

Master, you talked with bows,
Arrows and catapults once
Your hands steaming with hawk blood
To protect your chicken.

Why do you talk with knives now,
Your hands teaming with eggshells
And hot blood from your own chicken?
Is it to impress your visitors? (*OCAG* 4)

In Jack Mapanje's poem "Song of Chickens" above, the chickens accuse their master, a human, of duplicity for protecting them from predators but later killing them for food. This is an instance of a typical human-animal relationship (especially between a farmer and his/her domestic animals) where a human protects his/her livestock from predators only to be the predator him/herself later on. However, in the context of the poem, as some critics have rightly observed, the poem's extra-poetic referent is Malawian dictator Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. The allegorical persona of the chicken collectively represents ordinary Malawians (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 176; Chirambo, "Orality and Subversion" 82-83, and "Subverting Banda's Dictatorship" 144-146, Ngara 158).

The mention of blood in the poem evokes the "Chilobwe Murders" of the 1960s and 1970s. Accompanied by various rumours, these were mysterious murders that took place in "several townships in the country's southern and central regions" (Mapanje, *BN* 63), particularly in Chilobwe township in the commercial city of Blantyre. According to Paul Brietzke "[o]ne rumour held that the Government was responsible for the murders, and was draining the victims' blood and sending it to South Africa to repay a loan, since white men are believed to drink African blood and manufacture money from it"(362).

In the poem the collective persona of the chicken represents the victims of oppression, although they themselves are harmless. It is typical in Malawi to have a host slaughter a chicken for a visitor. Having a chicken slaughtered for you as a visitor is one of the greatest symbols of welcome and honour. In the poem the visitor could be South African Prime Minister John Vorster who paid a state visit to Malawi in 1970, the year the poem was written (Chirambo, "Orality and Subversion" 82 and "Subverting Banda's Dictatorship" 144). The visit followed on South Africa's agreement to finance Banda's project of moving Malawi's capital from Zomba to Lilongwe (see Potts 188ff). It was around the time after Banda had struck the deal with the South African government that the mysterious murders in Chilobwe and other townships in Malawi began to take place and rumours began to make the rounds that South Africa had agreed to fund Banda's project in exchange for blood. Besides,

during the 1960s and 1970s, the period Mapanje deals with in "A Song of Chickens," up to the 1980s, the Banda regime "arrested, tortured, and killed hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses" who refused to buy the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) membership card, "salute the flag, or attend [Banda's] official functions" (Chirambo, "Orality and Subversion" 83; see also *Africa Watch* 64ff). Many of them were forced into exile in Zambia and Mozambique. In the poem the chickens are portrayed as harmless victims of the whims of their master. Similarly, Malawians whom the chickens represent were victims of Banda's despotism.

Mapanje also exposes the harmlessness and victimhood of those Malawians who found themselves in prison in his poem "The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison" (*CWMP* 48-52). In the poem the speaker welcomes Mapanje who has been arrested by the Banda regime to a section of Mikuyu Prison called D4 with the thought-provoking statement: "Welcome to the chattering wagtails of / D4" (48) before filling him in on the history of the New Building section of the prison and the experiences in D4 as discussed earlier in this chapter. In the poem the wagtails are both real and metaphorical. The metaphorical wagtails are the prisoners who are introduced to the poet by the speaker as "these chattering wagtails of D4" and are later referred to as "these / sparrows in D4" or "swallows":[51]

> We won't bother you with cases of these
> Sparrows in D4, talk to them to share
> Their humour; but let not the years some
> Swallows have clocked here horrify you
> (Sixteen, eleven, seven, that's nothing) […] (*CWMP*, 50).

The real wagtails on the other hand are introduced to the poet as "the other wagtails / Of Mikuyu Prison; these that chatter in / Circles showing off their fluffy wings / To you, singing all day –" (51). The features of the human wagtails, sparrows or swallows, that stand out in the poem are their kindness (they moved the addressee from the "New Building" to D4), their humour (the poet is advised to "talk to them to share / Their humour"), and the injustice done to them by their long detention (as the poet gets the advice "but let not the years some / Swallows have clocked here horrify you / [Sixteen, eleven, seven …]"). The prisoners are called "chattering wagtails"

[51] The prisoners are also referred to as "Those D4 wagtails" in "You Caught Me Slipping Off Your Shoulders Once" (*CWMP* 84-86) while exiles are called "feverish swallows" to underline their feelings of uncertainty and lack of a sense of belonging in their host countries in "The Return of the Rhinoceros" (*SWR* 56-57).

because, like the real wagtails that sing all day, they have a great sense of humour and chatter a lot as they share life and prison experiences and jokes.[52] However, the use of the bird metaphor here (especially the particular birds used – wagtails, swallows and sparrows) emphasises the prisoners' harmlessness and accentuates their victimhood. Wagtails, swallows and sparrows are generally harmless birds.

Mapanje also makes reference to the victimhood and suffering of his fellow prisoners in "Hector's Slapping of Mama's Brother" (*SWR* 20-21) where he refers to them as "marabous." The poem itself is the poet's recollection of the release from prison of Hector, who was arrested for slapping Cecilia Kadzamira's (mama in the poem) brother, and other prisoners. These are prisoners with whom Mapanje shared the trying experiences of detention in Mikuyu. One such experience was insomnia which necessitated that the prisoners discreetly acquire valium to help them get a wink of sleep. Hector and more than twenty other prisoners were released leaving Mapanje (who was "prisoner *never* to be released"[53]) behind bars as we hear him lament:

> […] now that Hector and more
> Than twenty marabous have been liberated[54]
> Leaving us alone, unwanted, sterile, I dread
> The time our turn will come […] (*SWR*, 20).

Beside other prisoners, the poet also employs animal metaphors to refer to himself. And beyond highlighting his harmlessness and innocence, the metaphors also expose his creativity, ingenuity and craftiness. This creativity and craftiness comes out clearly in his reference to himself as a chameleon in "Another Clan of Road-fated

[52] In reply to an interview question from Landeg White as to why he uses wagtails in *CWMP*, Mapanje said about the real birds: "When I was in prison wagtails annoyed me and all the other inmates. They disturbed my creative and my spiritual life – initially, every aspect of my life in prison was irritated by the wagtails" (Mapanje, "The Chattering Wagtails" 54). About his wagtail metaphor, he said: "I discovered that the majority of the inmates were, if you like, chattering wagtails. They are chattering away about their own little story, why they came here, why they weren't taken to court, what the government has done to them" (ibid.).

[53] When the Inspector General of Police recommended Mapanje along with four other prisoners to Banda for release, Banda approved the release of the other prisoners and inscribed "never" against Mapanje's name. See "Our Friend Police Inspector General" (*SWR* 23-24).

[54] The marabou stork is a victim of human contempt and ridicule as it "is commonly portrayed as being mean and ugly and as lacking good motive" (*Awake!* np). Like the marabou, the prisoners were victims of contempt and scorn by their incarcerators. Apart from their victimhood, one suspects that it is Hector's and indeed the inmates', selfish tendencies that influence Mapanje to call them "marabous." The marabou "is a carrion eater" that would kill other birds to satisfy his/her hunger when carcasses are scarce (ibid.). Hector's poor public relations and selfish behaviour in the poem is therefore marabou-like.

Shrews" (*SWR* 28).[55] The same creativity and ingenuity, his being a voice of truth in a world full of lies, light in darkness, is highlighted by his reference to himself as a "firefly" in "When Release Began Like a Biblical Parable" (*SWR* 22).

In "Another Clan of Road-fated Shrews" the poet addresses his dead mother, telling her his reason for preferring exile to staying in Malawi. He believes that the people who ransacked his life are still around in the Malawian society and are busy trying to pose as good people ("those / Vipers now changing their skins shamelessly" [28]). He therefore thinks that having gone through the tough experience of detention (being "circumcised harshly" in the poem [ibid]), he should not surrender "to the sallow faces which / consigned [his] brittle bones to the reeking / Pit[, that is, detention, he] happily left behind" (ibid.). He then assures her that after all his and his family's suffering he "will not / Chameleon colour another life" (ibid.) – that is, he would not try to adapt to life in Malawi like he did before his detention. This comparison of himself to a chameleon begins in *Of Chameleons and Gods.* In the introductory section of this collection he tells us that his poetry is an attempt to "find a voice or voices as a way of preserving some sanity" (ix). He goes on to say that "[o]bviously where personal voices are too easily muffled, this is a difficult task; one is tempted like the chameleon, […] to bask in one's brilliant camouflage" (ibid.). Mapanje's oeuvre therefore can be seen as his attempt to bask, like the chameleon, in his own "brilliant camouflage" – his creative efforts to fight injustice in a cunning manner (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 229ff). He also refers to himself as

[55] The chameleon metaphor in Mapanje's poetry is a complex one. There are several myths that are thought to be the inspiration behind Mapanje's use of this metaphor. One such myth is that of the origin of life and death which is found in central and southern parts of Africa. This myth has it that Chameleon was once sent to find out from Chauta/God whether human beings shall die or not. God gave him the good message that man shall not die. But he procrastinated on the way back until Lizard was sent with the same question to God. But sadly he came back with a message of death to humanity after overtaking Chameleon on the way. This message was irreversible and has not been reversed since, as people still die today. Another version of the myth says chameleon was overtaken because of his slow, hesitant manner of walking. In his poetry Mapanje uses the chameleon as a metaphor for Banda, "the actual chameleon," or for himself "the poetic chameleon" (Mapanje, "The Chattering Wagtails" 54). When the chameleon is portrayed negatively it represents Banda and when it is portrayed positively it stands for the poet. Negative representations focus on its clumsiness, pretence and its failure to deliver a message of eternal life. Banda therefore becomes a chameleon for bringing sadness and death to Malawians instead of life and happiness as the people had expected during the struggle for independence. The positive representations, however, focus on the chameleon's ability to adapt to its environment which has its parallel in the poet's attempts to adapt to the hostile political environment of Banda's Malawi. Mapanje's poetic form also draws parallels with the chameleon's "hesitant movement" which denotes "circumspection, distrust and even scepticism" – the very "elements that contribute to identifying Mapanje's tone of voice [especially in *OCAG*] as being essentially ironic and ambiguous even to the point of equivocation" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 230-231).

a chameleon in "When Chameleon First Saw the City of Cork" (*LSB* 207-208) which details his experiences and impressions of the Irish city.

Further, Mapanje compares his creative efforts to "bringing light in darkness" by referring to himself as "firefly" in "When Release Began Like a Biblical Parable." In the poem he likens his disbelief in the possibility of his release when he was being driven from Mikuyu to Blantyre to that of Simon Peter in the biblical book of Acts (Chap. 12). Like Peter he too would not believe immediately that he was being released, wondering "And why should this firefly at the back of another Landrover / […] believe" (22). On the day Mapanje was released he was driven in a Landrover from Mikuyu in Zomba to Blantyre to be interviewed, perhaps at the Southern Region Police Headquarters. His experiences on the way to Blantyre, such as the dry landscape, and the Special Branch driver's chewing of boiled groundnuts on the way are also documented in "The Release: *Who Are You*, Imbongi?" (*CWMP* 71-72).

In "Guilty of Nipping Her Pumpkin Leaves" (*SWR*, 66-67) the poet refers to himself variously as a "pigeon," a "swallow," and a "turtle." All these birds are normally regarded as harmless creatures and one suspects that the poet seeks to emphasise his own innocence by invoking them.[56]

7.0 Conclusion

In his poetry Mapanje resists social injustice, especially the debasement of culture, abuse of power, despotism, oppression and exploitation of the masses by the hegemonic regime of Banda in Malawi. He resists the liberatory discourse of Banda and the ideology of Kamuzuism that depicted Banda as a saviour, the Father and Founder of the Malawi Nation, and a great leader who knew what was best for his country. Instead Mapanje offers a counter-discourse of Banda as a cruel, bloodthirsty and scheming old man who was not interested in the welfare of his people but in the consolidation of his hold on power through tyrannical means. Mapanje's vision in the poetry is human-centred and welfarist. He aspires for a Malawi society that is just and

[56] Besides, the reference to himself as a swallow (a bird well known for its migratory behaviour or its ability to fly long distances) is an appropriate metaphor for the poet as a migrant to faraway places. The "turtle" on the other hand is known for its long memory, especially its ability to return to the place of its birth to lay its eggs after an absence of many years. It therefore serves as the right animal to associate with Mapanje's ability to remember the debt he owed the woman vegetable seller after seven long years.

democratic, a society where the rich and powerful do not oppress and repress the weak and poor.

In his representation of animals Mapanje is greatly influenced by his society's attitude towards animals. Inspired by his admiration of the oral poets, Mapanje reaches out to Malawi's oral literature for models of animal representation. As is always the case in orature, Mapanje uses animals in his poetry as metaphors for human characters that he holds in contempt or seeks to satirise or censure. In most cases these are Malawian politicians – especially those of the First Republic.

However, this reaching back to old forms of animal representation or ancient techniques of satire and social commentary has its limitations. Some of the animal metaphors can be interpreted in two or more ways, leading to confusion in the message. The chameleon metaphor is a good example. While Mapanje uses it in some of his poems to show the ingenuity and craftiness of the writer, he uses the same metaphor for the cunning and deception of the elites in others. Besides, in Malawian oral culture the chameleon is associated with mourning; its big swivelling eyes are seen as having swollen from mourning its dead relatives. Like the chameleon with which he identifies himself, Mapanje's is mostly poetry of lamentation rather than of a call for the people to break the shackles of oppression. Further, by using animals with socially predetermined characters and associations Mapanje gives us metaphorical animals that are polarised as victims and victimisers (sparrows, chickens, and wagtails versus vultures, lions, vipers and scorpions). We rarely get to see characters that oscillate between the two poles as is often the case in human society where people's behaviour defies neat categorisation. One notes with disappointment too the glaring omission of the hare, the trickster in Malawian folktales, in Mapanje's poetry. Use of the complex character of the hare would have injected a more nuanced critical edge to the poetry and would have give the poetry room for suggestions of the ways in which the oppressed could dupe and defeat the mighty.

Moreover, by using small and harmless birds such as chickens and sparrows as metaphors for the oppressed and victimised in the Malawi society Mapanje casts the masses as pathetic, weak and helpless. They are impotent figures that one would not expect to initiate action to rid themselves of the lions, hyenas, leopards and crocodiles. They simply go through life lamenting their lot. No wonder the oppressors take advantage of them. Here one notices that a focus on the "rhetoric of animality"

and animal metaphors in Mapanje's poetry shows that the ineffectual nature of the resistance in the poetry is rooted in the poet's favourite technique of using animals to represent the oppressor and the oppressed in society.

Through Jack Mapanje's allegorical representations of animals he generally explores images of animals rather than flesh and blood animal subjects. His portrayal of some animals at times works to entrench the negative attitudes many Malawians have about them. Nevertheless, his poetry acts as a good entry point for my discussion on animal representation in southern African poetry. It is an ideal site for examining the relationships between animals, poetry and political resistance. The poetry provides us with a useful analysis of the ways in which resistance poets use allegory and ancient satiric techniques in which animals embody the vices and folly of humans to address contemporary social and political issues. As the discussion above shows, Mapanje's poetic animals act as mirrors that expose and ridicule the foibles of postcolonial Malawi's ruling elites and their minions. Mapanje's poetry is therefore essential for this study as it sheds light on the manner of animal representation in poetry aimed at critiquing or resisting political oppression and exploitation.

Chapter 3: Mythical, Cultic and Fabulous Animals and Socio-Political Change in the Epic[57] Poetry of Steve Chimombo

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter I analyse the representation of animals in the poetry of the Malawian poet Steve Chimombo in relation to the theme of socio-political change in Malawi. The chapter discusses how, like his Malawian counterpart Jack Mapanje, Steve Chimombo represents animals as metaphors for people he seeks to censure such as Malawi's former President Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) regime as well as other Malawian politicians who came to prominence during the transitional period in Malawian politics (1992-1994) from one party dictatorship of Dr. Banda and his MCP to multiparty democracy. In *Napolo Poems* (1987), for example, Napolo serves as a metaphor for Banda and his regime, while in *Epic of the Forest Creatures* (2005) the various animal characters have corresponding human characters in Malawian society of the day. These metaphors are aimed at highlighting the societal destruction and oppression of the Banda regime as well as satirising and lampooning various members of Malawian society by signalling their stupidity, selfishness and greed. Further, Chimombo uses mythical and cultic animals very much in line with the perceptions of Malawians who believe in them, to symbolise not only social change or cataclysm, death and destruction but also, paradoxically, creation, and rebirth and regeneration. Some of Chimombo's animals are actually embodiments of character traits such as cunning, greed, selfishness and martyrdom.

Furthermore, in the chapter I talk about Steve Chimombo's use of mythical animals for poetic expediency (to create a sense of belonging to his society and as a mask behind which to enact his subversion against the oppressive MCP regime) and fabulous animals to satirize politicians and their supporters during the political transition, rather than out of interest in the plight of animals. This manner of animal

[57] In his *The Epic*, Paul Merchant observes that two phrases, "'surpassing the dimensions of realism' and 'including history,' represent the two poles within which we place the experience described as 'epic'." He goes on to observe that "[t]he double relation of epic to history on the one hand and to every day reality on the other, emphasises clearly two of its most important functions" (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971, repr. 1977, p. 1). I think it is in this sense that Chimombo's poetry should be understood as epic. His *Napolo Poems*, *Python! Python!* and *Epic of the Forest Creatures* surpass "the dimensions of realism" as they border on the mythic and fabulous, they include aspects of Malawian history and also relate to "every day reality"' in various ways.

representation is consistent with Chimombo's social vision in the poetry. Like Mapanje, Chimombo is a humanist who envisions a moral, just and democratic society, free from oppression and exploitation. His artistic vision, located in the recurrent Napolo phenomenon, advocates the destruction of the oppressive regime and the institution of a better one in its place. He, however, fails to suggest how this can be done.

This chapter focuses on Chimombo's poems that appear in *Napolo Poems* (1987), *Python! Python!* (1992) and the long poems *A Referendum of the Forest Creature* (1993), *The Return of the Forest Creatures* (1994) and *The Election of the Forest Creatures* (1994). In 1994 Chimombo put together *Napolo Poems* and *Python! Python!* into one collection titled *Napolo and the Python: Selected Poetry* (*N & P*, 1994). As he observes in the preface, this was a justified venture considering that although they are somehow different in terms of time, space and subject matter, they also share similarities in that both of them deal with cataclysmic events, belong to the same symbolism of the snake, and have resonance in different parts of the country. For Chimombo, the title *Napolo and the Python*, therefore, should show "kinship and interrelatedness" between Napolo and the python (Chimombo, *N & P* x). In *Napolo and the Python: Selected Poetry*, which includes all the poems that appeared in *Napolo Poems* (1987) and in the epic poem *Python! Python!* (1992), "Napolo Poems" and "Python! Python!" appear as sections I and II respectively, while a third section carries poems Chimombo wrote in the intervening period between *Napolo Poems* and *Python! Python!* that is, between 1987 and 1992. In this chapter I make reference to this combined collection *Napolo and the Python: Selected Poetry*. Similarly, *Epic of the Forest Creatures* is a combination of the three long poems that appeared independently as *A Referendum of the Forest Creatures* (1993), *The Return of the Forest Creatures* (1994), and *The Election of the Forest Creatures* (1994). Chimombo justifies their combination as a way of making available all the three poems in one book for his customers. But there is unity of theme too as they all deal with the affairs of the forest creatures in the fabled forest of Nyakalambo. Here too the individual long poems appear as sections of *Epic of the Forest Creatures* (*EoFC*). It is to *Epic of the Forest Creatures* that I make reference in this chapter.

2.0 Steve Chimombo's Poetry

Steve Chimombo has been productive for over four decades. In his model of Malawian literature referred to in Chapter Two above, Anthony Nazombe considers him a member of the Blantyre generation of Malawian poets. There is a consensus among Chimombo's critics that his poetry is influenced by modernism and Malawi's oral literature – myths, folktales, and proverbs (Nazombe 1983, and Roscoe and Msiska 1992). These influences are manifest in the form and style of *Napolo Poems* while oral literature, in particular, is at the heart of *Python! Python!* and *Epic of the Forest Creatures*. Anthony Nazombe rightly observes that Steve Chimombo's resort to local myth in his poetry is "not for its own sake, but [i]s a means of interpreting personal and collective experiences in the present" (Nazombe, "The Role of Myth" 93). This observation is supported by Adrian Roscoe and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1992) who say Chimombo utilises "the semantic fluidity, symbolic resonance, and ready-made structures of oral texts […] to create poetry that arises from and illuminates his own condition as well as that of his society" (11).

With regard to myths,[58] Chimombo mainly uses four of them in his poetry (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 84, and "The Role of Myth" 94). These are: (i) the myth of Napolo, (ii) the legend of Mbona, (iii) the creation myth of Kaphirintiwa and (iv) the myth about the origin of death.

Napolo is a mythical, huge water snake believed to live in a subterranean lake in the heart of mountains (Chimombo 1987, Nazombe 1983, Edwards 1948, Msiska 1995 and Magalasi 2000) or hills, and sometimes in the lakes of Malawi. The periodic movements of this mythical monster from the mountains/hills to the lakes, or its mere shifts in position during the rainy season are associated with floods and great destruction of life and property. Napolo's shifts or movements to the lake cause the mountainside to burst and floods accompanied by rocks and trees to sweep down the slopes to the area below. Some people believed that the Zomba flood of 1946 came about because Napolo had changed position ("He had been sleeping on his back with

[58] There are several definitions and theories of myths (Nazombe 1983). My use of the term in this thesis refers to four of Henry Murray's six classes of myths, namely (a) aetiological myths, that is, narratives that explain the origin of things, (b) 'unusual event' myths; narratives that supposedly describe momentous occurrences, (c) interpretive myths; narratives that seek to explain the "superhuman agents responsible for recurrent natural processes," and (d) 'heroical historical' myths; narratives about the "life and exploits of a man-god or culture-hero" who in times past contributed in "some remarkable way to the foundation, survival, or development of his society" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 16-17).

his ears up; now he has stirred, or shifted, and caused the mountain side to burst" [Edwards 56]), while others believed that he had moved from Zomba mountain in the west to lake Chilwa (or Chirwa) in the east. The snake is said to return to its mountain abode from Malawi's lakes "through its subterranean route[s]" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 29) or through the air to the accompaniment of a cyclone or violent winds. Mufunanji Magalasi may be right after all to observe that Napolo "is simply a myth through which Malawians try to understand the landslides that usually start in hills and mountains after heavy rains and then sweep everything away on the path to lower lands: an incident which traditional wisdom connects to the ancestors and the gods" (81).

Chimombo's use of the Napolo myth is mainly with reference to the rainstorm which struck Zomba from Friday 13 to Sunday 15 December 1946, causing serious landslides on Zomba Mountain and sending floods, carrying boulders and large trees with them, down the slope to sweep away bridges, telegraph and telephone lines. Twenty-one people died in two villages that were destroyed by the landslides at the western foot of the mountain (Edwards 54). A colonial District Commissioner is also believed to have died in the deluge (Chimombo 1987). This event, which happened a year after Chimombo's birth and whose details he obtained as he grew up, influenced his decision "to exploit the story, using it as an instrument of divine wrath and as a vehicle for the theme of recurrence" (Nazombe "Malawian Poetry in English" 29) as well as a metaphor for violence and oppression. I should mention here, however, that Napolo's visitations did not start or end with the 1946 incident in Zomba. As recently as March 1991, Napolo struck from Michesi, a hill in Malawi's Phalombe District, where whole villages were swept away by flood water that carried huge rocks and uprooted trees. Many people lost their lives, many others were rendered homeless and property worth millions of Kwachas was destroyed (Morris 2000). This was the worst disaster to hit Malawi in recent times. The literary potential of Napolo for Chimombo cannot be overemphasised. Chimombo's encounter with this mythic hero was, as Roscoe and Msiska (1992) observe, "so important that [he] is now central to a complete poetic world and symbolic system that the poet has created" (11). Roscoe and Msiska go on to say, not without justification, that "Napolo has become for Chimombo what Ogun is for Wole Soyinka," and they see the "multivalent and multiform figure from Malawi" that is Napolo, "bear[ing] some likeness to the ambiguous god of Yorubaland" (ibid.).

Further, the importance of Napolo for Chimombo becomes even clearer when his Napolo poems are examined in the light of the context of writing. Chimombo produced these poems during the dictatorial reign of Dr. Banda when censorship of artistic productions was at its notorious best. Napolo therefore provided Chimombo with the appropriate mask behind which to voice his discontent with the Banda regime without provoking political reprisals. Roscoe and Msiska, whom I quote at length below, explain very clearly how Napolo functioned in this way. Casting Chimombo's searching question as "how best in modern times to survive with integrity, to practice and develop as a writer, and put one's talents at the service of society," they go on to observe that Chimombo

> needed material and mode that were plastic and malleable, readily figurative and symbolic, sufficiently stable to be swiftly understood, and yet unstable enough to be conveniently misconstrued. The Napolo phenomenon perfectly solved this dilemma, offering neat correlatives to realities bearing down on his modern world and his personal situation. It enabled him to explore the manifold contradictions of modern Malawi through mythic material which, created by the people, was part of their inner landscape and which had provided behavioural pattern, religious model, and moral criteria from time immemorial. For the would-be social commentator Napolo was the perfect poetic hero. To address a painful modernity via the discourse, symbols, and values of local tradition was an astute decision whose wisdom the Napolo poems repeatedly confirm (12).

A reading of *Napolo Poems* shows that Napolo assumes many guises. He is a metaphor for Banda and his regime (Msiska 74), an oracular voice and godhead, beside his mythic self as a subterranean water snake.

Another myth/legend that one encounters in Chimombo's poetry is that of Mbona. There are several versions of the Mbona myth (Rangeley 1953; Schoffeleers 1966, 1968; Nazombe 1983, 1987; and Chimombo 1994a) and it is not surprising that there is agreement among historians, as Nazombe tells us, that the "myth is not the story of one person or of one major event but that of two or more persons and two or more decisive events in Malawian oral history" (Nazombe, "Chimombo's Use" 38). The story according to Nazombe has to do with two major events that took place between the 16th and 19th century, namely "the migration of the Southern Chewa [people] and Lundu's rebellion against the Karonga overlords based in the Central Region of present day Malawi" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 84, and "Chimombo's Use" 38).

There is a consensus in most, if not all, of the versions that what triggered the migration of the Southern Chewa was a disagreement between leading groups in society over the administration of *mwavi*, the poison ordeal (Schoffeleers 1966 and 1968, Nazombe 1983 and 1987, Chimombo 1994, and Morris 2000). *Mwavi* was a poisonous concoction used by the Chewa to determine guilt or innocence by subjecting the accused person or people to it. It therefore functioned as a mechanism of social control, as it was believed that those practicing witchcraft and other perpetrators of evil would die after drinking this poison, while all morally upright people would vomit and live. In one version of the Mbona story, Mbona "acted as a priest on behalf of a group of chiefs," and at one point "objected to the ordeal as being human and fallible," thereby critiquing an important means of "social control at the disposal of the Chewa rulers" (Nazombe, "Chimombo's Use" 38-39). As would be expected, this act put his life at stake and he had to flee to avoid execution. The chiefs for whom he was the chief priest decided to follow him further southward bringing about what historians have called the Chipeta migrations – Chipeta being "the clan name of the rebellious chiefs" whose place of origin was "east of Kaphiri-Ntiwa [sic], the site of the original shrine of the High God" (ibid. 39).

Another version of Mbona held by the Mang'anja people of southern Malawi depicts Mbona as a famous chief who established himself and his followers near Malawi's southernmost district of Nsanje. It is believed that in commemoration of the occasion, he carved his tribal tattoos (facial marks) on some rocks. To this day these rocks are still known as Nemboza-aChipeta (or Nembo/Nnembo za-Chipeta), that is, Chipeta's tattoos. According to tradition, the chief was so famous that after his death he became the principal guardian spirit of the area and a shrine was dedicated to him at Khope Hill near the tattoos (Nazombe, "Chimombo's Use" 39, Schoffeleers, "Mbona" 286, 1968 and 1992). According to Rangeley, "these 'tribal marks' are no more than normal differential rock weathering" (14).

In his version of the legend in *Python! Python!*[59] Chimombo uses several, "often conflicting" (Chimombo, *N&P* 171) sources, (which include Rangeley 1953 and Schoffeleers 1966 and 1968) to reconstruct "a coherent storyline" (ibid. 174). Chimombo embellishes his dramatization of the Mbona story in *Python! Python!* with folklore (myths such as Napolo and Kaphirintiwa creation myths, folk tales and

[59] Apart from *Python! Python!* the Mbona legend is also the subject of Chimombo's play *The Rainmaker* (1978).

proverbs) and his own imaginative material. The Mbona we meet in Chimombo's epic was supposedly born without a father and while he was a young boy he used to perform miracles.[60] The boy is apprenticed to his rainmaker uncle, Mlauli, to learn the art of rain-calling through a ritual dance, *mgwetsa*. He excels in his lessons surpassing all the other apprentices.

When Mbona was a young man a severe drought hit Kaphirintiwa, his homeland. Mlauli, the old and trusted rainmaker, was called upon to perform the rain-calling ritual. But try as he might, no rain came. Lundu, chief of Kaphirintiwa, and the elders then asked Mbona to perform the ritual in case the spirits had abandoned Mlauli and settled on him. Mbona was reluctant at first but later he accepted. Before performing the ritual dance, however, he asked that all the young children be locked indoors and never come outside before the ceremony was over. Mbona's ritual dance proved a success: heavy rains fell accompanied by thunder and lightning. As the rain fell Mlauli's son by his youngest and favourite wife decided to leave the safety of the hut he was confined in and wandered outside where he was instantly struck by a bolt of lightening that left him charred beyond recognition. It did not take a lot of persuasion from Mlauli's favourite wife to set Mlauli, who was nursing humiliation for failing to bring rain and the loss of a son, on a path of revenge. He accused Mbona of practicing magic to foil Mlauli's attempts to bring rain. Mbona denied the accusation, observing that he had special powers that had enabled him to succeed where his mentor had failed. Mlauli then challenged him to a poison ordeal to prove his innocence. Chief Lundu agreed that the matter be settled by *mwavi*. But Mbona objected to this, citing *mwavi*'s fallibility as a reason for his refusal. Since "[r]efusal to take *mwavi* is regarded as admission of guilt" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 39), to preserve his life Mbona had to flee from Kaphirintiwa. He fled southwards from Kaphirintiwa with Mlauli in hot pursuit, over land, in the air and in water, all the while the rivals, Mbona and Mlauli, changing shape into various creatures and substances such as mist.

Tired of fleeing, Mbona stood his ground at Khulubvi, on the edge of the Ndindi marsh, in Malawi's extreme southern district of Nsanje. He challenged Mlauli to kill him but the old man failed to do so at first as Mbona could not be killed using ordinary weapons such as arrows, spears, pangas or daggers. Later Mlauli

[60] In this regard Mbona is seen to fulfil some of the aspects of the hero of tradition or an epic hero (see Raglan 1934 and Nazombe 1983).

remembered that Mbona could only be killed with a blade of grass. And sure enough, when Mlauli picked one, it "straightened to metal stiffness" (Chimombo, *N&P* 132) and with it he killed Mbona. As Mbona died his blood prophesied that he would be a spirit medium for his people, the Mang'anja – a link between the people and the High God in their prayers for rain. Mbona's blood further prophesied that his death marked the decline of the original rain shrine at Kaphirintiwa and the rise of a new, greater shrine at Nsanje. It went on to say Kaphirintiwa would be emptied of people who would trek to the south where, with Mlauli's supervision, they would build the new shrine whose first Salima (wife of the python serpent-spirit that Mbona would become) would be Mlauli's favourite wife. True enough, following Mbona's death, hunger and other calamities struck Kaphirintiwa forcing the Mang'anja to move southward following Mbona. This marked the decline of the rain shrine at Kaphirintiwa in the centre and the birth of a vibrant rain shrine at Nsanje in the south.

The spirit of Mbona is said to take the form of a python (*nsato*) which is believed to come to the shrine dedicated to him, "as the embodied form of Mbona," to play with his wife Salima "without biting her or causing harm" (Morris, *Animals and Ancestors* 215). This close association of Mbona with the python is the reason why Mbona is also referred to simply as the python, and, no doubt, the reason behind Chimombo's titling of the Mbona epic *Python! Python!*[61]

The Chewa creation myth of Kaphirintiwa, the third myth that Chimombo uses in his poetry, has it that the High God, Chiuta, descended from the sky in a shower of rain (Schoffeleers, "Symbolic and Social Aspects" 7; Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 85) onto a hill called Kaphirintiwa in Dzalanyama Range in the central region. He was accompanied by the first pair of human beings, a man and a woman, and all animals. The soft rock on which they landed hardened and their foot prints can still be seen there. Chiuta lived in harmony with man (used generically here) and the other animals until man discovered fire by accident. One day man was playing with two twirling sticks. The other animals warned him to stop but man would not listen. The fire that resulted from twirling the sticks caused a conflagration that in turn caused great panic among the animals. The goat and the dog fled to man for safety while the other animals fled away from him. God escaped to heaven on a thread that a

[61] The python is a snake that is closely associated with water, rain and rain-calling among the Chewa, and other Malawians. This is the reason why Mlauli, the rainmaker, is also referred to as the python.

spider spun for the purpose "pronouncing as he retreated that man would henceforth die and join him in the sky" (Nazombe "Malawian Poetry in English" 86).[62]

In his poetry, however, Chimombo does not attribute human beings' mortality to Chiuta's furry following the discovery of fire by man and its consequences. Instead he views it through the lens of another myth, the myth of the origin of death. This myth, like the Mbona story, has several versions as well. One version has it that the High God decided one day that humans on earth would be immortal. He sent chameleon to deliver this message to them. But chameleon delayed on the way. Later God sent lizard after having a rethink on the earlier message. God reversed his earlier decision and sent lizard with the message that humans would die. Lizard delivered the message earlier than chameleon whom he had overtaken on the way. When chameleon arrived to deliver his message, humans were already wrestling with the horror of death. His message provoked anger and hatred against the chameleon which still smoulders within humans to this day. To punish the chameleon for the costly delay the chameleon is often killed by stuffing tobacco into his mouth (Schoffeleers, "Mbona" 219-221). The lizard on the other hand is well liked for delivering his message quickly and obediently.

Another version has humans sending a chameleon to inquire from God whether humans would be mortal or immortal rather than God taking a decision without prompting. God gave chameleon the good message that man would not die. But chameleon procrastinated on the way back until lizard was sent with the same question to God when humans grew weary of waiting. But sadly lizard came back with a message of death to humanity after overtaking chameleon on the way. This message was irreversible and has not been reversed since, as people still die today. Yet another version, the version that we find in Chimombo's *Napolo Poems*, has three messengers sent by God to humans: a chameleon, a lizard, and a madman. While the lizard and chameleon carried the message of life and death respectively, like in the other versions, the madman carried an incomprehensible message (Msiska 75).

[62] In his "Malawian Poetry in English," Anthony Nazombe notes that "the Kaphirintiwa creation myth fits perfectly into the mould of 'the myth of the eternal return' as outlined by Mircea Eliade: the nostalgic allusion to a very distant epoch when men knew neither death nor suffering and the gods descended to earth and mingled with people; men too were free to mount to heaven." He further notes that "[t]he fire caused by man in the Chewa story corresponds to the ritual fault in the universal myth when communications between heaven and earth were interrupted, forcing the gods to withdraw to the highest heaven taking with them man's gift of immortality" (86).

The myths above are all found in *Napolo Poems*, *Python! Python!* and *Epic of the Forest Creatures* in varying degrees. The Napolo myth dominates in *Napolo Poems* while the Mbona legend or myth which Chimombo touches briefly in *Napolo Poems* finds clear expression in *Python! Python!* which focuses on the legend itself.

A common feature in the myths that Chimombo uses in his poetry is the issue of change, be it social, political or physical. Mbona's escape from Kaphirintiwa and eventual death at Nsanje triggered the migration of the Mang'anja from central Malawi to Nsanje in the south. A human's discovery of fire disturbs the peace in Nyakalambo and God is forced to escape to heaven, while Napolo's violent passage from his abode in the mountains to the lake alters the landscape creating rivers and other new physical features. Further, the chameleon's botched mission to deliver a message of immortality to humanity results in an irreversible message of death from the fleet-footed lizard. Through these myths, legends, and, in his later poetry, fables, Chimombo records the changes in his society from the pre-colonial period to the transition to democracy in 1993/4.[63] In this regard he proves the truth in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's observation that

> [a] writer responds, with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society. Thus the same writer will produce different types of work, sometimes contradictory in mood, sentiment, degree of optimism and even world-view. For the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by, history (*Homecoming* 47).

[63] As Nazombe clearly states, "at least two important […] events" led to "the dramatic social and political changes" that took place in Malawi in the 1990s. These events were

> the collapse of Communism in the Eastern bloc countries of Europe in 1989 and the publication early in March 1992 of the Malawian Catholic bishops' pastoral letter, *Living Our Faith*. The shift of focus among capitalist nations from fighting Communism to building and strengthening democracy in the world shocked their erstwhile Third World ideological allies, including the despotic Malawi Congress Party regime in Malawi ("Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 135).

Pressure applied on the Malawi government by the capitalist donor community; exiled Malawians, notably Chakufwa Chihana (a trade unionist who in a keynote address at a seminar on the future of Malawi attended by people opposed to Banda and the MCP in Lusaka on 20 March 1992 stressed the need to establish an "interim committee to mobilise national conference of democratic forces inside Malawi" (Schoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 160); the pastoral Letter of 1992 in which the catholic bishops exposed the evils of the Banda regime; and riots by students and civil servants calling for political change across the country forced Banda to call for a referendum to determine whether Malawians wanted one party rule to continue or the introduction of multiparty democracy. During the referendum which was held on 14 June 1993, Malawians voted overwhelmingly in favour of multiparty democracy, and in a general election that was held on 17 May the following year, Banda lost the presidency to Elson Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) Party.

In his poetry, Chimombo shows that he is a writer shaped by history, his country's history whose changes he, as a social critic, monitors and records using oral forms such as myths and fables. His *Epic of the Forest Creatures*, for example, is a fable[64] which is set in "the fabled forest of animals in ancient Kaphirintiwa" called Nyakalambo. In this idyllic land all animals live in peace and harmony except for the oppression and exploitation they receive from their leader Nkango, the lion, together with his wife and uncle. This greedy trio oppresses the other animals by killing, imprisoning and terrorising them using "the dreaded Linthumbu, soldier ants, Mimbulu, wild dogs, and Chiswe, the red-headed ants" (Chimombo, *EoFC* 2). Unable to tolerate the lion's tyrannical rule any further, Njovu, the elephant, leads the other animals such as Chipembere, the rhino, Mvuu, the hippo, and Njati, the buffalo, to oppose the oppression, repression and exploitation. This opposition fruitfully leads to a referendum and, later, an election which spell the downfall of lion, the tyrant.

In reality, however, *Epic of the Forest Creatures* is, as Nazombe observes, "a fable or allegory on Malawi. It is a thinly veiled account of the political, social and economic problems that precipitated the Malawi referendum of 14th June 1993" and election of 17th May 1994. Nazombe further observes that "[t]he Forest Republic in which it is set recalls Malawi's status since 1966, and such place names as Maravi, Ndirande, Dzeleka, Mwanza, Lilongwe, Sanjika and Nsanje serve to reinforce the parallel" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 141). In distinguishing A *Referendum of the Forest Creatures* (in a manner that applies to *Epic of the Forest Creatures* as a whole) from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Jika Nkolokosa sees *A Referendum of the Forest Creatures'* appeal as a fable as "less universal and […] its impact not as long lasting." For him, whereas *Animal Farm*, as a fable "forged in the furnace of Orwell's imagination, […] does not alter over the generations, there is a grim reality about *The* [sic] *Referendum* which answers to specific problems at a given place in time." The dimensions of Chimombo's poem, therefore, unlike Orwell's fable, "become confined as its scope is limited by the reality as the [Malawian] reader knows it" (9).

What is interesting for this chapter is the manner in which Chimombo represents animals in his poetry, be they mythical or real. From the myths found in

[64] A fable is understood here as a didactic story, "in prose or verse, that features animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature which are anthropomorphised" to illustrate a moral lesson (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fable [11.02.09]).

Chimombo's poetry that I have outlined above, one will notice that the snake is quite central in the poetry. The mythical water snake, Napolo, is at the heart of *Napolo Poems*, while the python (*thunga* or *nsato*) is another name, as well as the embodiment of the spirit, of the epic hero Mbona in *Python! Python!*

Unlike snake spirits such as *thunga*/*nsato* or python and Chikang'ombe which are associated with rain and life,[65] Napolo is a dangerous, destructive force. He is associated with destruction and loss of life.[66] Unsurprisingly, Brian Morris found no evidence of any shrines specifically dedicated to Napolo in Malawi (Morris, *Animals* 207). In fact there is none, and there has never been one. Nevertheless, Napolo's visitation does result in the re-creation of the landscape as new physical features come into being.

Further, unlike the python and Chikang'ombe, Napolo has never run short of commentators who exploit him in their artistic productions. Steve Chimombo, for example, has exploited, perhaps overexploited, the myth of Napolo both literally and figuratively in a number of his works which include *Napolo Poems* (1987), *The Wrath of Napolo* (2000), *Napolo ku Zomba* (2001), and *The Vipya Poem* (1996), among others. He even went a step further to name his third child after Napolo. His overexploitation of the myth prompted a very critical review from his former student Mdika Tembo, titled "Stuck in Napolo's Rut: Steve Chimombo's *The Wrath of Napolo*" (2002). In his piece Tembo suspects that one reason Chimombo's pieces are often bypassed by many readers or critics is because his "overacquaintance with the

[65] The python (*nsato*) or *thunga* and Chikang'ombe are some of the snakes associated with "constructive spiritual energies" (Wood 4) as they, especially the former, are most associated with the spirit world in territorial cults found in Malawi (Schoffeleers 1966 and 1968, Morris 2000). According to Father Boucher (1991) "*thunga* is a larger, more mystical version of the ordinary *nsato* [python]" (quoted in Morris, *Animals* 197). The python was conceived as the central cult object of the rain shrines that were found in Malawi, among the Chipeta, Chewa and Nyanja peoples years ago. This is basically because in the thought systems of the Chewa the python was, and perhaps still is, "closely identified mythologically (as well as empirically) with water, with rivers and deep pools, and thus with rainfall." This therefore makes the snake a "key symbol of mediation" between the Supreme Being, Chiuta (who is also closely identified with rainfall) and humans (ibid. 199). The Python also appears as an embodiment of the spirit of the legendary figure Mbona. Mbona's spirit in the form of a python was said to visit his wife Salima who was confined to his sacred hut at Khulubvi and acted as a medium between Mbona's spirit and the people. As for the Chikang'ombe, it was a spirit which was conceived to take "the form of a very large snake" among the Tumbuka of northern Malawi. This spirit, like the python among the Chewa, was believed to control the rains. Adverse thunderstorms and drought signalled its anger, and good amounts of rain for agriculture were a sign of the spirit's contentedness.

[66] I use the pronoun "he" for Napolo because mythical snakes in general are conceived as masculine forces in Malawi. Although there are female and male, even young Napolos, the Napolo that Chimombo deals with is certainly masculine as he also uses the pronoun "he" in reference to Napolo in his poetry (see "Derailment: A Delirium" [*N &P* 21-28]).

mythical-cum-historical subterranean serpent, Napolo, and the equally horrendous woes it is supposed to bring once roused to anger as told in some of his pieces have now stopped producing their intended effect on the people" (87). The "intended effect," I suspect, is that of arousing interest in the readership. However, years before Tembo's review was published, Anthony Nazombe had also shown discomfort with Chimombo's overexploitation of myth in his poetry, observing that "the mythical texture that forms the base of Chimombo's poetry is […] beginning to wear thin" and the author "would do well to explore other possibilities" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 154).

Some Malawian musicians, like Chimombo, have also found inspiration from the Napolo phenomenon and have composed songs about it. In a song called "Napolo" Paseli Brothers Band and Makasu Band sing about the destructive effects of Napolo, particularly focusing on the devastation caused by the 1946 Zomba Napolo who destroyed Mtiya village leaving many people dead (Chimombo, *Napolo ku Zomba* [2001]). In local parlance Napolo is also a metaphor for a major accident or an epidemic such as the HIV/AIDS scourge.

Chimombo's use of the subterranean snake Napolo has attracted other interesting critical observations from such critics as Adrian Roscoe, Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, Anthony Nazombe and Mufunanji Magalasi, among others. While none of these loses sight of the mythical nature of Napolo as a water snake, there is always a variation in focus on Chimombo's literary use of the snake. Anthony Nazombe focuses on the mythical aspects of Napolo.[67] He, nevertheless, comments on the symbolic manner in which Chimombo uses Napolo for Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his regime. Unlike Nazombe, Adrian Roscoe and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1992), Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1995), and Mufunanji Magalasi (2000) focus on the allegorical aspects of *Napolo Poems* where Napolo functions as a metaphor for an oppressive regime such as Hastings Banda's in Malawi. This comes as no surprise considering that the *Napolo Poems* easily lend themselves to these levels of reading: the mythical and the allegorical or a combination of both. Beside the above scholars, there are a number of other critics such as Matthews Mkandawire and Titilayo Dzabala, to mention but two, who have written about Chimombo's poetry. These too

[67] See his "Malawian Poetry in English from 1970 to the Present Day: A Study of Myth and Social Political Change in the Work of Steve Chimombo, Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula and Felix Mnthali" (1983).

have briefly commented on Chimombo's animal characters such as Napolo and Kalilombe. However, none of these have specifically focused on the animal beings themselves as a point of departure in the analysis of Chimombo's poetry. In most cases too these critics simply rehash the views of Anthony Nzombe in his groundbreaking study "Malawian Poetry in English" (1983) referred to above. Furthermore, the interest of Chimombo's critics has not gone beyond the symbolic role of the animals as vehicles through which Chimombo conveys a message that has humans and human society as the main beneficiaries. In this chapter my critical lenses are focused on the animals themselves, analysing the way Chimombo represents them in relation to the theme of socio-political change, to determine the implications of such representations for the lives of these fellow inhabitants of the planet earth.

3.0 Cataclysm, Death, and Destruction

In his poetry Chimombo seeks to show that independent Malawi was as Napolonic, that is, cataclysmic and destructive, as the colonial era. The issues of cataclysm, death, oppression and exploitation emerge in such poems as "1. Napolo" (in sections such as "The Apocalypse," "The Path," "The Messenger," and "The Message"), and "2. Napolo Metamorphosis: The Metamorphosis," among others in *Napolo Poems*; "Lament of the Prisons," "Lament of the Roads," "Lament of the Rivers," "Lament of the Living," and "Life after the Referendum," among others, in *Epic of the Forest Creatures*.

In "The Apocalypse" (*N & P* 3) Mlauli prophesies the coming of Napolo as apocalyptic and destructive. This comes as no surprise as he was a prophet among the Manga'nja, Chewa, Nyanja people at Msinja or Kaphirintiwa. But the fact that he is the one prophesying Napolo's visitation is significant in the sense that he (and Lundu in some versions) is the one who was the aggressor in the conflict that led to Mbona's flight from Kaphirintiwa to Nsanje. This later led to the migration of the Mang'anja to the south following Mbona (at least by Chimombo's version of the Mbona story in *Python! Python!*). Mlauli's rivalry with Mbona therefore triggered cataclysm at Kaphirintiwa that resulted in the alteration of the Chewa social and political fabric and in the poem too we encounter him prophesying doom and cataclysm that comes with Napolo (Banda). In the poem we read:

> Mlauli's tomb roared:
> 'Mphirimo! Mphirimo! Mphirimo!

Kudzabwera Napolo!'[68]

Mbona was checked in mid-leap,

Chilembwe turned over and went back to sleep (3).

Mbona's being "checked in mid-leap" could signal his surprise that the violence and enmity of old is about to be re-enacted. The roaring of Mlauli's tomb reminds him of their conflict many years back. However, Mbona's and Chilembwe's reaction to the announcement of Napolo's coming could also signal the fact that the advent of Napolo disturbs or upsets the ancestral peace of two martyr figures who opposed violence and oppression in their time. John Chilembwe was the leader of the 1915 uprising (which has come to be known as the Chilembwe Uprising) of Africans in Nyasaland, now Malawi, against the oppressive and exploitative colonialists. Chilembwe died at the hands of colonial forces who crushed the uprising. These two martyr figures, Mbona and Chilembwe, realise that Napolo will disturb the peace and harmony they fought for. Besides, the fact that these two who lived one or more centuries apart react to the message about Napolo also shows the timelessness of Napolo whose effects are felt by ancestors long laid to rest as well as future generations (Magalasi 81).

Following the announcement of Napolo's coming we also hear that

Mulanje, Zomba, and Nyika fled their places,

whimpered and hid their faces.

Shire curled round its course and bit its tail.

Lilongwe reared its head but it was too frail.

Songwe exploded and threw its seed

into the lake where it caught typhoid (3).

The reaction of the personified mountains (Mulanje and Zomba from the south, and Nyika from the north) and rivers (Shire from the south, Lilongwe from the centre, and Songwe from the north) shows that the impact of Napolo and the changes he triggers in society are felt throughout Malawi – from the south through to the north. No one is left untouched. Magalasi sees these characters as "scared and angry" in their reaction to the coming of Napolo (82). The truth, however, is that the mountains and rivers are scared rather than angry. The mention of mountains and rivers in the poem refers to the fact that Napolo is associated with hills/mountains and rivers/lakes and therefore

[68] "Up there in the hills! Up there in the hills! Up there in the hills! / Beware! Napolo is coming soon." Mufunanji Magalasi's translation in "Landscape and National Memory in Steve Chimombo's *Napolo Poems,*" *Transformation* 44 (2000): 82.

the mountains and rivers mentioned here fear that the announced Napolo will strike them. The flight of the mountains and the behaviour of the rivers did not deter Napolo from making his trip to the lake. We read in the poem that after heavy rains that followed on the heels of a drought ("The parched throat of the earth drank [the rain water] up" [3]) Napolo came:

> Napolo gnawed the womb of the earth,
> The earth groaned and aborted, showing its teeth,
> its teeth uprooted the trees on the banks,
> the banks where birds sang around the python's flanks (ibid.).

The above lines show how Chimombo deliberately shifts the pattern of the poem from the use of rhyme in the previous stanzas to anadiplosis (the repetition of a phrase at the end of one line and at the beginning of the next) to emphasise the dangerous and destructive nature of Napolo. In the above lines we notice that the advent of Napolo causes great destruction and suffering to the personified earth. Napolo "gnaw[s] the womb of the earth" causing it to groan, abort and show its teeth (in pain or anger) that eventually uproot trees on the river banks. The evocation of abortion here refers to the exposure of tree roots, rocks and other things that lay buried in the ground as the flood waters that accompany Napolo dig gullies in his path. In the poem Chimombo faithfully details the ravages caused by Napolo as was the case in Zomba in 1946.[69]

An interesting aspect of the poem is the way Chimombo combines myth and history. In the poem he interweaves the Napolo myth with the Mbona legend and also makes allusions to the Chilembwe Uprising as well as the historical floods of 1946 in Zomba. In this way he enlarges upon the Napolo myth to cover a variety of the religious, historical and social aspects of the Malawian people. Notice that the rain that brought Napolo came after a drought and the rains' coming is depicted as a result of the intervention of a rainmaker (the python around whose flanks birds sing – line 21).

Quite unsurprisingly this poem has been read, and rightly so for reasons that will become clear later, as referring to the coming of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda to

[69] In fact it was the Zomba Napolo of 1946 about whom Chimombo heard from his parents and informants while conducting research into the Napolo phenomenon, who inspired the Napolo poems. The Zomba Napolo of 1946 caused great destruction as already mentioned above (see Edwards 1948). While the whites (colonialists) believed that the destruction was caused by flush floods that resulted from heavy rains caused by a cyclone from the Indian ocean that had diverted from its course, the locals believed that it was Napolo's passage from Zomba mountain to lake Chirwa that caused the damage.

Malawi (Msiska 1995 and Magalasi 2000). Banda's coming to Malawi in 1958 was as cataclysmic as the advent of Napolo or the conflict between Mlauli and Mbona at Kaphirintiwa and his reign ended up being as destructive (both to life and property) as Napolo's visitation. Many people lost their lives in the struggle for independence while others were imprisoned. During his reign many people were murdered, others went into exile or disappeared without a trace, while others still were made to languish in detention without trial under the pretext of insuring state security. Further, like the mythical Napolo, the effects of Banda's dictatorial reign were felt throughout Malawi. To this effect, Anthony Nazombe observes that "as early as 1975 the sensitive poet was already seeking to express the events of his immediate political environment through an allegorical medium" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 93). Mpalive-Hangson Msiska rightly observes that "[b]y linking his own critique of the Banda regime to Mbona and Chilembwe, Chimombo invests it with the legitimacy of an ancient autochthonous anti-authoritarian practice" (74). He also shows his ability to use historical events that had an equally devastating effect on the Malawi society to comment on the present.

The death and cataclysm caused by Napolo is further referred to in "The Path" (*N & P* 3-4). In this second section of "1 Napolo" the poet-protagonist sets off to Kaphirintiwa, the cradle of humankind, to seek answers for Napolo's visitation. The poet-protagonist believes that there must be a message from God in Napolo's coming. It is this connection between God and Napolo that makes the poet-protagonist go to Kaphirintiwa of all places. Here Kaphirintiwa acts as "the nation's repositories of wisdom and truth […] or the Mosaic stone […] of Malawian history and culture" (Roscoe and Msiska 13). It was at Kaphirintiwa where God, the first human pair, and all animals landed from the sky. It was here too where God, humans and all animals lived in harmony in the fabled forest of Nyakalambo until a human discovered fire that triggered the first cataclysmic event on earth. God retreated to heaven on a spider's thread and the other animals with the exception of a few, fled from humans. The poet-protagonist believes therefore that if there are answers at all regarding the future of humanity plagued by Napolo, such answers are to be found at Kaphirintiwa. Before his departure, the poet-protagonist performs an idiosyncratic self-cleansing ritual:

> I washed my feet in the waters of Mulungusi
> and anointed myself with the blood

of those Napolo had left unburied.
I tied the loincloth around me in a tight knot:
it was a perilous climb up Kaphirintiwa (3-4).

The mention of Mulungusi (also Mulunguzi), a river in Zomba district, shows Chimombo's close reference in the poem to the 1946 Zomba deluge. After the rains that were reportedly record-breaking in these parts of Central Africa, (Edwards 60) there was flooding in the rivers on the eastern side of Zomba mountain such as Mulunguzi, Likangala, Naisi and Satemwa. The flood water destroyed bridges, uprooted trees and electricity poles, and destroyed many other things. As the poet-protagonist continues on his journey to Kaphirintiwa which evidently took place years after the 1946 Napolo, he wonders

And did Napolo pass here indeed?
The trembling earth under my feet?
The roaring waters around my ears?
The hurtling mountains? (4)

Such sceptical questioning can only come from someone who did not witness firsthand Napolo's appearance in Zomba. And such a one is none other than the poet himself who was only a year old in 1946 and only heard about the event from various sources. Anthony Nazombe makes a similar observation that "Chimombo is the man in the loincloth, the new diviner, seeking a novel meaning out of the age-old myth" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 105). In the poem, the poet muses further:

And did Napolo pass here indeed?
Was all that for this?
This ritual of bloodletting?
And that to a deranged god creating
These strange forms of death? (4).

The question "Was all that for this?" prompts us to ask "All that" what? "All that" may refer to the rainmaking ritual in "The Apocalypse" (alluded to by the mention of Mlauli, the python and the implied drought). The ritual results in the much-needed rain which unfortunately also brings Napolo. However, if we see Napolo in the poem as a metaphor for the Napolonic (Banda) era in Malawian politics, "all that" may refer to the celebration by Malawians, or the pomp and ceremony that accompanied Banda's return to Malawi. Dr. Banda's return to Malawi triggered jubilation throughout the country and ignited the hope in many that with one of their own as leader of the country, the oppression and exploitation they experienced at the hands of the British colonialists, such as the Thangata System whereby Africans were required

to work in European farms without pay, would be a thing of the past. But to their dismay, Banda and his minions proved to be as oppressive and exploitative as the colonialists. Many people disappeared mysteriously, others died in staged road accidents, and many others languished in detention camps and prisons such as Mikuyu, Dzeleka, and Nsanje without charge or trial during his reign of terror. By "This ritual of bloodletting" Chimombo could be referring to the Chilobwe murders of 1968-70, which I mentioned in the last chapter, to which he also explicitly refers in "The Forest Republic" (*EoFC* 4-7) when he says

> Local assassins were rampant in locations,
> Hacking, dismembering, drawing (*sic*) their victims,
> Draining their blood into bottles for export (5).

Further, Banda is the "deranged god" in "The Path" (deranged because he was quite old when he returned to Malawi in 1958) as we also see politicians being referred to as "our new gods" (9) in a thinly veiled attack on Banda's regime in "The Sons of Napolo" (8-9).

The message that the poet-protagonist sought from Kaphirintiwa is carried by three messengers, namely chameleon, lizard and "the man in the loincloth" in the poem "The Messengers" (4-5). In this poem Chimombo uses the myth of the origin of death. Here the poet's "quest for an explanation of the Napolo phenomenon" from Kaphirintiwa as we saw in "The Path" "is transposed into a universal search for the meaning of human destiny similar to that enacted at the beginning of history" (Msiska 75). The version of the myth that Chimombo uses here is the one that has three messengers (chameleon, lizard and a madman – "the man in the loincloth" in the poem). Chimombo, however, substitutes Napolo for God as the one giving the message to the messengers, perhaps because God's equivocation in this myth befits Napolo, the destructive force, and not the benevolent figure of the Christian God. Besides, this revision was also necessary as it suites Chimombo's scheme of thinking around Napolo in which he is associated with negative experiences such as death, suffering and exploitation, among others. Further, as Anthony Nazombe noticed, "the poet's substitution of Napolo for God in the tale foreshadows the […] total incorporation of the story of man's origin" into most of the Napolo poems ("Malawian Poetry in English" 99).

In Chimombo's three stanza poem, "The Messengers," Napolo gives a message of death to lizard and that of life to the chameleon like in the myth itself. But

the order in which the animals are given the message is reversed in the poem. Instead of the chameleon getting his message first before lizard, it is lizard who gets sent first with a message of death. This gives the slow walking chameleon who "stop[s] to consider / a joint in his leg and hesitates[s]," (4) absolutely no chance to overtake the fleet-footed lizard who "scuttle[s] in the undergrowth" (ibid.). This shows Napolo's determination to see to it that whatever happens, humans should get the irreversible message of death first. This also absolves the chameleon of blame for delaying the message of life considering that he was sent after the lizard who would arrive earlier than him anyway. This perhaps was Chimombo's way of trying to portray the chameleon as innocent and shift the blame to Napolo who messed things up.

In the third stanza Napolo says nothing to "the man in the loincloth" (5). While in the first and second stanzas the words "Napolo has spoken" were followed by "Death" and "Life" respectively, in the third stanza the words are followed by a blank space. Later we read

> The man in the loincloth came to us at dawn.
> We gathered round to hear the message,
> but did not understand.
> He spoke to us in a strange tongue
> and we greeted it with laughter.
> He turned his back on us;
> now we shall never know.
> And yet Napolo had spoken (5).

The blank space at the end of "Napolo has spoken" in the third stanza could mean that the madman got no message from Napolo or if a message was given to him at all, it was too cryptic for the intended audience. At a deeper level, however, "the man in the loincloth" could be Chimombo's other reference to Banda. The mention of "dawn" and "a strange tongue" strengthen this interpretation. In Chimombo's poetry, like in the poetry of Mapanje, Chipasula and Nazombe, the term "dawn" refers to the dawn of independence as well as the Malawi Congress Party's slogan "Kwacha!" (It is dawn!) which was, and still is, a rallying call at mass rallies or wherever Banda happened to address Malawians. The slogan was "symbolic of the passing of the historical time, and the emergence of a new nation with a vision for the future of which the Malawian people 'were proud'" (Chirwa 7). In the poems, however, the poets contest this view, believing that the dawn did not translate into something new and beautiful as the Malawian people had expected, and as the politicians wanted

everyone to believe it had. Further, throughout his reign Banda consistently addressed his country men and women in English ("a strange tongue") and an interpreter conveyed the message to the people in Chichewa. Notice that the issue of the foreign tongue comes up again in "The Sons of Napolo" (8-9) where the people dance ingoma while carrying shields "emblazoned with a motto / written in a foreign tongue" (9). Like the madman who turned his back on the people on being greeted with laughter, Banda turned against the people he had purportedly come to liberate from colonial bondage, oppressing, killing and exploiting them.

Nazombe sees the man in the loincloth here, like in "The Path," as Chimombo himself. For him, the introduction of a human messenger in the tale "points to the [poet's] own definition of his role in society as that of a seer" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 99). The "strange tongue" in which he speaks suggests, for Nazombe, "that there is a moral and spiritual distance separating the visionary from his society [for] [a]lready there are signs of his being both misunderstood and ridiculed" (ibid. 100). But this interpretation becomes problematic if we consider the fact that the use of the first personal plural pronouns "we" and "us" makes the narrator (poet-protagonist) one of the people awaiting the man in the loincloth's message. He cannot be both the messenger and a member of the audience. Unlike in "The Path" therefore, the man in the loincloth here is not Chimombo but one of the messengers, such as Msiska's madman or an equivocator like Banda.

The issue of oppression and exploitation of Malawians by Napolo (read Banda) comes up again in "The Message" (5-6) which is no message at all but the reminiscences of people who survived the Napolonic era. The poet here must have looked into the future to imagine what people would be saying after the Banda regime. The impression one gets on first reading the poem is that the speaker and his addressee are survivors of the real Napolo ("the apocalypse / that was Napolo" [6]) who told the story of their survival to others around a fire. But a careful reading of the poem reveals that the Napolo they survived was no ordinary Napolo but the regime of Banda. The story about having survived the ordinary Napolo need not be told "in whispers and behind locked doors" (5). We also notice that the two friends in the poem find it difficult to share news and only hope that, to quote the poem,

> […] after we have parted,
> we will know
> what it is we wanted to say

before you noticed the dullness in my eyes
and I, the emptiness of your mouth,
before the art of saying nothing
in a mountain of words
interrupted our conversation (5).

These lines capture the cloud of fear that hung above the country during the Banda regime, the kind of fear that made voicing of critical views about the regime dangerous, as more often than not, such views were met by harsh punishment from the government (Catholic Bishops of Malawi 1992). The Malawi Young Pioneers, Youth Leaguers and other informers were everywhere and betrayal by trusted friends and relatives was the order of the day. As a result, many Malawians skirted round political issues in their conversations to avoid political persecution. The fact that the poem is a critique of the Banda regime is further supported by the lines

In those days, my friend,
martyrs were left unburied,
heroes were coffined alive or fled.
Our tears remained unshed:
we did not know they had died,
No one told us who had gone (5-6).

In these lines Chimombo comes as close as possible to the reality that obtained during the Banda era. The tears that "remained unshed" here recall what usually happened at funerals of victims of the death squad such as the Mwanza Four (Aaron Gadama, Dick Matenje, Twaibu Sangala and David Chiwanga). When the bodies of the four politicians were delivered to their families, the families were warned against weeping or viewing the bodies of the so-called rebels (Chirambo, "The Sinking Cenotaph" 550).

Sentiments similar to the ones expressed in "The Message" are also to be found in *Epic of the Forest Creatures* as we shall see later. The fact that we also encounter in the poem "tears […] wrung / from a heart shattered / by the apocalypse / that was Napolo" (6) completes the picture we have been trying to establish all along that when Chimombo speaks of Napolo, he does so to make reference to, among other things, the mythical subterranean monster snake, and Banda and his MCP regime. The apocalypse that Mlauli announces earlier in the poem therefore is the apocalypse of the mythical Napolo and that of the Napolonic regime of Banda.

The poem "2 Napolo Metamorphosis," especially in the sections "The Metamorphosis" (6-7) and "The Sons of Napolo" (8-9), unabashedly details the transformation of Banda from the Messianic or Christ-like figure that he portrayed himself to be and was hyped up by his supporters, to a ruthless dictator. The metamorphosis could refer to the changing shapes of Napolo as a monstrous snake that returns after a long absence to wreak destruction, as the traditionalist view has it, on the one hand, and a human figure whose exploits are Napolonic on the other. Metamorphosis could also refer to the transformation of the human figure from a heroic position to a villainous one (Roscoe and Msiska 15). Nazombe sees the poem as being "about social and cultural change [whose] immediate context of change is the transition from a traditional and agrarian form of existence to a Western and industrial type of life." He goes on to say "[i]n historical terms this can be seen as the contrast between precolonial Malawi on the one hand and colonial and independent Malawi on the other" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 101). I, however, agree with Roscoe and Msiska who see it as a critique of "the wholesale bastardisation of traditional culture" (Roscoe and Msiska 15) led by Malawi's postcolonial leaders. In the poem "the ancient Ingoma dance" is now done in worsted wool, shoes and crimplene, while the dancers' shields bear mottos written in a foreign tongue. Further, Nyau steps are performed to the "rhythm of rock 'n' roll" (8-9). Yet these were the so-called traditional dances that were performed before Banda, which in truth were corrupt versions of the dances in their traditional setting.[70] As Msiska (1995) rightly observes, "the opposition between Western and African culture is used to satirise Banda's personal efforts at "cultural hybridity" (76). Banda, who liked to depict himself as the guardian of tradition, ironically led to the corruption of it lending weight to Lupenga Mphande's observation that Banda had no respect for tradition except where it suited him. For Mphande "Banda's aesthetics […] were fundamentally European, [a fact that] was perhaps best exemplified by his trademark three-piece Harrods of London suit, his Homburg hat, the English cane in his right hand – and in his left hand the famous fly whisk given him by Jomo Kenyatta" (Mphande 81). In Mphande's view, "Banda's appropriation of African traditions […] veiled a sinister reality: for it was one in which he gave a new twist to the oral tradition, and in which Malawian organic literature would be fundamentally subverted to serve his bent for Western interests"

[70] Jack Mapanje also critiques Banda's distortion of traditional dances in his poem "The New Platform Dances" (*OCAG*, 12-13)

(85). Besides, continues Mphande, "[b]y his own (in)voluntary demonstration […] Banda looked down upon his people's culture, associating African cultures, for the most part, with savage pathologies which had to be eradicated." It is not surprising therefore that, in spite of his "opportunistic appropriation of Chewa culture, he emphatically refused to speak the Chewa language publicly!" (88). The poem, particularly the section titled "The Sons of Napolo" also details the moral degeneration (which the poet calls "moral elephantiasis") in society which results in unbridled materialism, and the corruption of traditional and religious practices. This moral decrepitude actually takes place under "the chilling, pious eye / of the guardian of [the country's] traditions" (9) (Banda).

Like Napolo, however conceived (either as a mythical snake or as Banda), the events attributed to Mbona, the python, are equally cataclysmic as they lead to the destruction of the social fabric of the Chewa at Kaphitintiwa. In trying to justify the combination of *Napolo Poems* and *Python! Python!* into one collection titled *Napolo and the Python* (1994) Chimombo draws a mythological similarity between Napolo and the python which is the fact that "Napolo and Mbona belong to the same symbolism of the snake and rainmaking." While "Napolo is conceived of as a giant snake living under mountains or deep pools[,] Mbona is embodied in the python of the living world" (Preface, *N & P* viv). He also draws a parallel between the two at a "higher symbolic level," in the sense that they are both "cataclysmic in their manifestations" (ibid. x). While "the passage of Napolo causes rifts, chasms and other divisions in the terrain" that remain visible to future generations, "Mbona's rainmaking at the original shrine caused rifts in society" such that "Msinja was never the same again once his cohorts abandoned their homes and followed him to the south to erect a rival shrine." Seen in this way, therefore, both become "extensions of each other" (ibid.).

When Mlauli's rain dance fails to bring rain in *Python! Python!* Mbona is asked to perform the dance instead, in case the ancestral spirits have abandoned Mlauli (his mentor) and settled on him. Mbona reluctantly agrees and indeed his rain dance results in copious rain for the drought-stricken Msinja/Kaphirintiwa. Unfortunately, Mlauli's son by his youngest and favourite wife is struck and killed by a thunderbolt when he disobeys the injunction to remain indoors. This turn of events triggers the cataclysm associated with Mbona. Deeply humiliated by his failure to bring rain, and

saddened by the loss of a son, Mlauli is set on the path of revenge by his scheming wife who asks him

> How can you bear the humiliation
> of losing your place as python-priest
> and having your conqueror follow
> his victory home to kill your son too
> all in the same rain on the same day ("Mlauli's Son," *N & P* 71).

To Mlauli's wife, their son did not die as a result of his disobedience but it was part of Mbona's plan to humiliate Mlauli even further. Convinced by his wife to reclaim his position as python-priest of Msinja, and to avoid death as "the python / who gets too old or fails to make rain / takes poison to make way for the new one" (ibid. 77), he accuses Mbona of "tying" the rains and challenges him to a poison ordeal. The notion of "tying" the rains (*Kumanga mvula* in Chichewa) refers to the Malawian belief that people who practice magic or witchcraft can stop the onset of the rainy season or cause a dry spell.

With regard to cataclysm, Chimombo, using the words of Lundu, chief of the Mang'anja, indicates that social upheavals and disturbances have always existed since the first human pair, God and the other animals descended on Kaphirintiwa rock:

> It is not as if Kaphirintiwa was one peaceful cradle
> where kin lived with kin one long song of brotherhood.
> The rock of Kaphirintiwa should be read in two ways:
> Man in harmony with himself, spirit, animal and bird,
> all in the valley of Mwanalilenji, the land of no wants.
> And the rock of dissension, where brother breaks brother,
> where man incenses the creator and the creator flees
> back to his abode on the spider's thread ("The Exodus," *N & P* 137).

The above lines show Chimombo's vision of society not as one where conflicts do not occur, they shall always do as happened at Kaphirintiwa when God came to stay on earth, but where the conflicts, social upheavals and divisions are solved and harmony reigns again. Chimombo's is a dialectic vision of society where, like the periodic Napolo, conflicts (antithesis) occur only to be followed by periods of great calm and peace (synthesis, which later becomes the thesis).[71] In this regard then, Chimombo

[71] In reply to an interview question from a journalist, Ziwoya Gama, regarding the Zomba Napolo of 1985 that struck from Ntonya and Ulumba hills, chief Lambulira said that the following day after Napolo, a Saturday, the day broke beautifully. There was beautiful sunshine on a clear blue sky until noon, and people's hearts were filled with peace and calm as if nothing had happened (Chimombo, *Napolo ku Zomba* 49).

uses myths to, among other things, "express a cyclical view of history according to which decadence leads on to chaos unless arrested by an act out of time, a redemptive gesture, often self-sacrifice, by a heroic figure" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 155).

4.0 Moral Decay, Oppression and Exploitation

A different sort of animal plays a symbolic role in Chimombo's "Beggar Woman" (*N & P* 12-16). In this poem Chimombo uses lice as a metaphor for oppressors and exploiters of others. The beggar woman herself is in fact a metaphor for Africa in general, and Malawi, in particular. Lamenting the ravages of the lice, the beggar woman says

> They have coursed the great forests of my hair,
> created the well-beaten pathways of tiny feet,
> clawing and gorging their way through the tufts.
>
> The black ones claim my head,
> the light-skinned ones my body.
> The glinting patches, the bloody splotches,
> the skeletons are all signs of their progress (12).

The black lice here are native Malawians/Africans while "the light-skinned ones" are colonialists, both of whom have exploited Africa. The beggar woman does not take this exploitation lying down however; she fights to liberate herself as she tells us: "Single-handed I have fought titanic battles in my rags" (13). This reminds us of the struggles for independence in many African countries, some of which required taking up arms against the oppressor. But if the struggle for independence promised relief from suffering, independence itself brings more suffering to the beggar woman who further laments:

> I can no longer count the sighs and tear-drops
> on my bloodstained fingernails and *chirundu*,[72]
> nor can I weigh songs and laughter frozen in me
> by the scars and fresh wounds on my ragged soul;
> too much blood has flowed already to mingle
> with myriad lies and dismembered hopes;
> many lives have abandoned truckloads of promises (14).

The idea of weighing "songs and laughter" which states the impossible highlights the complexity of the beggar woman's situation which is also captured by the

[72] A wrapper or wrap-around worn by women.

characterisation of her soul as "ragged," that is, troubled. The phrases "dismembered hopes" and "abandoned truckloads of promises" also emphasise the woman's hopeless situation and her despair. The hopes and promises mentioned here are also the hopes that the people (Malawians) had about independence, and the promises of the leaders to the people during the struggle for freedom. But soon after independence was gained the people quickly became disillusioned as their hopes became "dismembered" and the promises are abandoned. Nevertheless the beggar woman (Malawi/Africa) is still hopeful that she will emerge victorious from her suffering which she likens to the consequences of Napolo. She declares:

> In the aftermath of Napolo,
> I emerge from the chaosis[73]
> and march down rainbathed pavements
> singing on the fingernails of the rainbow (16).

The pathetic fallacy in the phrase "singing on the fingernails of the rainbow" underscores the woman's celebration of the beauty of freedom. The lines above signal the beggar woman's enduring spirit, but also show the writer's unwavering hope that, in spite of the oppression and exploitation Malawians were going through during the Napolonic era, one day they would emerge from that dark era. For him the oppression would not endure forever, things would get better some day. And indeed the aftermath of Napolo Banda came in 1994 when Malawians ushered in a new regime of Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front (UDF) party in a presidential and parliamentary election. Chimombo's celebration of this political transformation that started with the referendum in 1993 and culminated in the elections of 1994 is all too clear in *Epic of the Forest Creatures*.

Steve Chimombo also deals with issues of oppression and exploitation in his fable *Epic of the Forest Creatures* – the thinly veiled expose of life in Malawi during the Banda era and during the transition to multiparty democracy. In a review of *A Referendum of the Forest Creatures* (1993) Jika Nkolokosa (1995) rightly observes that anyone vaguely familiar with Malawi just before the referendum will immediately recognise the human characters behind the animals that Chimombo picks "from the forest to play a role in the referendum, whether as a prime mover, a dissenter or a mere opportunist" (9). In the fable Chimombo uses Nkango, the lion, as

[73] Chimombo's coinage "to describe a state of disorder. By suffixing the letters "-is" to the word "chaos" Chimombo confers upon the word the additional sense of a disease or an epidemic" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 92).

a metaphor for Banda, and other carnivorous animals and harmful creatures such as hyena, jackal, wild dogs, crocodiles, soldier ants and red-headed ants as metaphors for Banda's supporters. On the contrary, herbivorous or nonpredatory animals such as elephants, hippos, buffaloes and rhinoceros ("A Referendum is Announced" [*EoFC* 12-15]) are metaphors for the Catholic bishops and other people who championed the cause of political change in Malawi. In this case Steve Chimombo, like Jack Mapanje, uses negative attributes that society attaches to carnivorous animals (violence and ruthlessness) to associate with the ruthlessness of Banda and his cohorts.

In the poem "Lament of the Prisons" (*EoFC* 7-8) Chimombo tackles the practices of detaining, torturing and killing people presumed to be rebels in prisons such as Dzeleka, Mikuyu and Nsanje – very notorious detention centres of the time. Notice that this reference to real place names removes the narrative from the fabled forest of Nyakalambo to the real world of Malawian politics. In this poem, like in some of Mapanje's poems, those who suffered imprisonment are either harmless or despicable insects (Nunkhadala, Kadziotche and Kafadala) or birds (Chelule), which shows that the system persecuted even harmless people who had nothing to do with political power. Here Steve Chimombo satirises the paranoia of Banda and his regime.

In "Lament of the Roads" (*EoFC* 8-9) Chimombo again tackles Malawi's recent history, especially the practice of "accidentalizing" those considered to be political opponents.[74] In the poem Sunche, "the long-nosed little mouse" "could not cross the Thondwe bridge" and "his mangled remains" were found there (8). This is a reference to Dunduzu Chisiza who died at Thondwe Bridge back in September 1962 in what is believed to have been a staged car accident (Mphande 90). Dunduzu Chisiza was the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress Party. In 1961 he published a pamphlet, *Africa – What Lies Ahead*, in which he warned against a future dictatorship (Shoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 1999). It is believed hat he was killed because he disagreed with Banda on policy and political/party issues (Power 1998). His harmlessness to the political system is underlined by the observation that "He was not a great traveller, really;" that "[he] just went from nowhere to here" (ibid.). In the poem Chimombo also makes reference to the murder of Aaron Gadama, Dick Matenje, Twaibu Sangala and David Chiwanga, prominent MCP politicians, in

[74] As Jack Mapanje explains in a note in *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993), the word "accidentalize" means "to kill and pretend it was an accident when everybody knows it was not (first used by the Writers (sic) Group, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, 1983/4)" (21).

Mwanza in May 1983. Their crime was to oppose a possible handover of power by Banda to John Tembo, one of the most powerful and influential members of the MCP and uncle to Banda's confidante and official hostess, Cecilia Kadzamira. Banda's MCP government claimed that the four politicians had died in a car accident while fleeing the country. In the poem these politicians are said to be "Sunche's friends" who "fell foul of the lion." Edging very close to historical fact these are said to have driven past Mphatamanga Gorge

> But could not cross Mwanza to nowhere
> They brought back three (sic) bodies,
> Disfigured, mutilated and dismembered (8-9).

We are also told in the poem, as it indeed happened in history, that people were barred from weeping or viewing the bodies of the deceased whom the government branded rebels. The bodies were also denied all cleansing rituals and were buried under the watchful eyes of members of the Malawi Young Pioneers and the Youth League.

In the preceding discussion I have attempted to show how Chimombo uses Napolo as a metaphor for Banda and his regime, and as an embodiment of evils such as cataclysm, death and moral decay. Where Napolo is used as a metaphor for Banda, Chimombo seeks to associate Napolo's ruthlessness with the oppression and exploitation that Banda imposed on many Malawians. Beside Napolo, Chimombo also uses the negative attributes of carnivorous animals such as a lion, hyena, jackal and crocodile to associate with the negative attributes of Banda and his cohorts. As for the python in *Python! Python!* (*N &P* 45-152) I have looked at it in the preceding section simply as a symbol of conflict and cataclysm. However, as I try to show in the next section, animals, be they mythical or not, are not always associated with negative experiences or events in Steve Chimombo's poetry. Even the predominantly dark and malevolent Napolo has his positive side.

5.0 Recurrence, Rebirth and Regeneration

In the poetry of Steve Chimombo, animals are also used as symbols of recurrence, and rebirth and regeneration. As the poet-protagonist in "The Path" wonders whether Napolo indeed did pass through the very ground he is treading on, and the rivers he sees on his way to Kaphirintiwa, he observes that

> The desolation of the shrines
> portends retribution

and revision (4).

Here Chimombo alludes to the moral degeneration in society which called for revival. This is unsurprising since Chimombo's artistic vision "advocates total destruction as a precondition for rebirth" (Nazombe, "Malawi Poetry in English 145-146). On his quest to discover the message behind Napolo's passage the poet-protagonist notices that the new generation has abandoned the ways of their forefathers and left the old rain shrines desolate. This is one of the poems in which the theme of "rejection of the past by the present," which according to Nazombe "pervades the poetry of Steve Chimombo," (ibid. 144) comes out clearly. This behaviour, according to the poet, will result in retribution/reckoning perhaps through another Napolo that will bring about renewal or "revision."

In "3 Napolo: In the Beginning" Chimombo credits Napolo with creative powers. Napolo is paradoxical in the sense that he does not only destroy but also brings about renewal to the face of the earth. In the poem, Napolo comes along with rains that people prayed for and wreaks havoc while also creating new physical features. We read in the poem that after the heavy rains that bring Napolo

> Zomba detonated its boulders
> and blasted a pathway
> down its slope.
> Mulungusi was born:
> Napolo had decreed it (11).

We can see therefore that from the chaos unleashed by Napolo something new and positive to human life emerges. Nazombe correctly observes that "[t]his suggests the re-creation of the earth in an atmosphere reminiscent of the scene immediately after the biblical Flood." Nazombe goes on to observe that Napolo emerges "from this and the other poems as an inscrutable being, capricious in the extreme, and as capable of creating as he is of destroying" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 105). The importance of rivers to the livelihood of people around the world does not need to be overemphasised.

Chimombo tackles the recurrent nature of Napolo in "By Napolo's Hole" (*N & P* 36) and in "By the Waters" (*N & P* 36-37). The people's awareness in "By Napolo's Hole" that "[…] Napolo's sojourn is nearly over, /[and] the submerged cataclysms about to begin, /[since] Napolo's revisitation hangs /like a crimson halo over the land" (36) prompts them to pray to God to detain him ("Keep him slumbering" [ibid.]). Napolo, as I mentioned above, is believed to constantly move

between his two dwelling places, the lake (Lake Chirwa in the case of the Zomba Napolo) and the mountain. Although no major destruction takes place when he shifts from the lake to the mountain (his departure from the lake being noticed by the decrease in water levels) he is at his most destructive when moving from the mountain to the lake. However, as is the case with the mysterious beasts in Mapanje's *Beasts of Nalunga* (2007), people have no way of knowing when exactly Napolo would strike. In the poem, though, the people seem to sense that Napolo's revisitation is near and they pray that he should remain in the mountain. In "By the Waters," Napolo is addressed directly with lavish praises and a goat is offered to him as a sacrifice so that he should not make the trip to the lake. The people's words of submission to Napolo are couched in such a way that Napolo should feel sorry for them and abandon the journey to the lake:

> We greet you
> in grief
> We salute you
> in sorrow
> We bow
> in pain (37).

The parallelism in these lines and the near-anaphoric form (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines or stanzas) of this section help the poet to achieve the intended sad and submissive tone of the supplicants. In reality, however, no prayers are said to Napolo and there is no shrine in the country dedicated to Napolo.

The fact that animals are embodiments or symbols of rebirth and regeneration in Chimombo's poetry comes out clearly in "Four Ways of Dying" (*N &P* 19-20). In this poem four animals (Crab, Mole, Chameleon and Kalilombe) give their responses to a call for a blood sacrifice as a redemptive gesture to arrest the chaos in society. The Crab and the Mole, like those they represent in Banda's Malawi, say that they prefer avoiding public matters and taking sides, perhaps as a result of fear for their lives. By the manner of his walk the Crab confuses direction, meaning and sense in his behaviour, while the Mole burrows into the ground to die, peacefully one would say, in a catacomb of his own making. Unlike these two animals the Chameleon uses great cunning to bring about societal transformation while the Kalilombe, the only willing martyr, sacrifices her own life so that societal redemption and rebirth can take place. The Chameleon's adopted strategy to bring about rebirth and regeneration in society

is to undermine a less popular and oppressive system from within through cunning and the use of his gift of camouflage. He tells the oppressors

> I'll match my colours with yours,
> snake my tongue out to your fears,
> bare my teeth to puncture your hopes,
> tread warily past your nightmares,
> curl my tail round your sanctuaries,
> clasp my pincer legs on your veins,
> to listen to your heartbeat (25-31).

The lines "I'll match my colours with yours" and "tread warily past your nightmares" (which describes the impossible in real life) suggest cunning, while the phrases "puncture your hopes" and "clasp my pincer legs on your veins" suggest callousness and violence. The Chameleon's biological gift of camouflage will enable him to appear as a supporter of the system when in fact he is busy undermining it. The "fears" and "nightmares" here could refer to the tyrannical leader's fear of rebellion or a coup. Roscoe and Msiska (1992) mistakenly see the Chameleon as being "no keener than the Crab on that self-sacrifice for the general good so admired in traditional societies." For them "total conformity is the Chameleon's game plan" (21). I, however, agree with Nazombe (1983) who thinks that in the poem "the poet invests the chameleon with great cunning, assigning him the role of a trickster figure along the lines of the hare, who aims to subdue the enemy not through brute strength but guile" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 117). And commenting on the conception of the chameleon among Malawians (as a carrier of a message of death and a mournful creature) Nazombe says "[i]t is as if Chimombo is saying that the animal [chameleon] has hitherto been unfairly treated in oral literature and its positive qualities must be brought out (ibid.). "[A]ware that there is moral turpitude in the land" the Chameleon's adopted strategy "is to feign sympathy for the prevailing attitudes, at the same time striving to alter them. Through his wiles, he is going to play the second self to the present tyrant, doing his best to heighten his victim's fears and self-doubt" (ibid.).

Unlike the Chameleon, the Kalilombe (which is a bigger species of chameleons) sacrifices her life for a new generation. For her, the rebirth and regeneration of a society have to come about through personal sacrifice. She "steps forward with courage and social conscience, prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice as a martyr for

[her] people" (Roscoe and Msiska 22). In reply to the demand for a blood sacrifice the Kalilombe says

> The gestation and questioning are over,
> I'm restless with impatient foetuses,
> belly-full with a profusion of conundrums.
> My pilgrimage takes me to the cradle,
> the *nsolo* tree, the lie-in of man's hopes,
> I grit my teeth, grab the slippery surface
> and hoist myself up the nation's trunk.
> On the topmost branch I have momentary
> possession of eternity whirling in the chaosis,
> with the deathsong floating from my lips,
> I fling myself down on Kaphirintiwa rock
> as multifarious forms of art and life
> issue out from the convulsions
> of the ruptured womb;
> and thus I die (20).

The expression "grab the slippery surface / and hoist myself up the nation's tree" (which depicts the nation as a life-giving tree and evokes the tree of life) together with the notion of flinging oneself "down on Kaphirintiwa rock" suggests hard work or great effort, determination and courage. On seeing the various problems that need solutions ("a profusion of conundrums" in the poem) in society, the Kalilombe undertakes the arduous task, underscored by "the slippery surface," of bringing about rebirth. When she finally rises above the evil prevailing in her society she foresees infirmity trapped in the chaos. This infuses her with a prophetic role that Chimombo exploits further in *Epic of the Forest Creatures* (2005). In the poem Chimombo uses the myth that the Kalilombe gives birth by flinging herself down from a tall tree so that her young can issue from her "ruptured womb." It is significant here that the Kalilombe climbs "the *nsolo* tree" under which the Lomwe and the Yao offered sacrifices to their ancestors. This highlights the Kalilombe's willingness to act as the ultimate sacrifice for the good of future generations.

In his reading of this poem, Anthony Nazombe rightly thinks that the various animals can be looked at as metaphors of politicians or writers. The Crab and the Mole are like politicians or writers who are not committed to change. The Crab represents a politician (Member of Parliament or cabinet minister) who, because of fear of losing his position or life, chooses to remain silent or "drift with the tide" even

when he knows that "the policies the government is pursuing are misguided" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 120). On the other hand, "The Mole is the politician who, disgusted with what he sees happening, either withdraws from public life or flees into exile. But then, beyond flirting with certain political ideologies, he makes no serious attempt to undermine the regime he left behind, his main preoccupations having become personal comfort and the good life" (ibid. 121). Unlike the two creatures above, the Chameleon is a politician who is opposed to the leadership but pretends to identify with the oppressive system while striving from within to undermine it. In Malawi's political landscape of the time of writing such a politician would be Albert Muwalo Nqumayo, the General Secretary of the Malawi Congress Party, who was arrested and hanged in 1976 for allegedly plotting to depose Banda. Anthony Nazombe suspects that Chimombo had this event in mind when he wrote the poem. The behaviour of the chameleon is also similar to that of Gwanda Chakuamba, another senior member of the MCP who was arrested and imprisoned for allegedly plotting to assassinate Banda. He was later released after serving thirteen years of his twenty-two years sentence (following the amnesty for political prisoners in the early 1990s) and became Banda's vice-president and running-mate during the 1994 general election.

As an individual in society the Kalilombe is "a person infused with millenarian ideas, somebody in the mould of John Chilembwe whose rebellion, though from the start doomed to failure, was gradually to force the authorities to reconsider their policies" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 121). The justification for such sacrificial behaviour being the belief that "while the body may die, the spirit or the principal ideas will live on to inspire future generations" (ibid.).

Further, if we look at the poem as an allegory of the role of the writer in a modern African state, "[t]he Crab's approach suggests circumspection, total avoidance of the issues, and even silence. The Chameleon's answer advocates boldness tempered with prudence. The writer must be seen to identify with the nation's aspirations but at the same time remain detached, that is, free to criticise in an allegorical or even more private mode" (ibid.). As a writer then, the Chameleon would be a writer like Chimombo himself who would appear to support the system while critiquing and exposing its evils through carefully chosen words and metaphors. As for the Mole, he strikes us as an idealist whose art "is conceived as a means of escape from the harsh realities of life, as a retreat to a self-sufficient and self-contained world

where the writer is free to create as he pleases" (ibid. 122). The Kalilombe's is the final stage to which a fully committed writer should aim at. With regard to the Kalilombe, Chimombo seems to say that "the most rewarding role the writer can play is to become integrated into the eternal process of spiritual renewal" (ibid. 123).

The Kalilombe's ability to foresee the future and her attribute of song (although the chameleon has this attribute too) seen above ("with the deathsong floating from my lips" [20]), and her bigger size than her cousin, the chameleon, necessitated Chimombo's choice of her as the narrator of the *Epic of the Forest Creatures*. In this narrative she is able to foresee what lies in wait for a country undergoing transformation from one party dictatorship to multi-party democracy and also sing the woes of the country. The mythical belief in the Kalilombe's death song and self-sacrifice makes Chimombo "consider her a model of African tragedy: singing on her last flight to death" (Preface, *EoFC* viii). Besides, the fact that the Kalilombe is a larger species than the chameleon makes her, according to Chimombo, "capable of containing fulsome tragedy and inspiring more substantial poetry" (ibid. vii). In my view, Chimombo chose the Kalilombe mainly because of her close association with rebirth and regeneration rather than the reasons he has given above, since the chameleon, in spite of his size, has so far proved more inspirational to Malawian poets than the Kalilombe. The attribute of foresight that Chimombo invests the Kalilombe with, brings her closer to his view of the poet as seer or visionary. Anthony Nazombe rightly observed an intimate connection between the Kalilombe and the writer in the text. In the "The Prologue" (*EoFC* 3) Chimombo states that "The Kalilombe's tongue used to sing / In impenetrable verbal thickets / At the height of universal woe or doom" (3). Unlike in the past, now, as he sings about the referendum of the forest creatures, his tongue has matured and sings more accessible songs. The evolution of the Kalilombe's style compares favourably with the development of Chimombo's own poetic craft: "[w]hereas at the height of political oppression in Malawi he deliberately wrote in a heavily mythical and therefore difficult mode, as the situation has improved, so too has his poetic style become increasingly narrative and ballad-like" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry of the Transition" 140). Writing during a period when hiding behind "verbal thickets," or the use of cryptic writing was no longer necessary, the chameleon's much cherished attribute of camouflage was no longer necessary. Something more than camouflage was needed and that is direct association with the rebirth and regeneration or socio-political change that Malawi was

undergoing at the time. And as we saw in "Four Ways of Dying" (*N & P* 19-20), no creature embodies this better than the Kalilombe.

I should mention here that the python too, like the Kalilombe, is a martyr figure. Mbona, for whose spirit the python is an embodiment or physical manifestation, lays down his life at Khulubvi so that he should found a new settlement and act as the guardian spirit for his people, the Mang'anja. While contemplating his impending death Mbona muses

> Hitherto, our founder fathers needed only to love a country,
> Perform the founding rituals, and settlement flourished.
> Now rainmakers have to shed their blood,
> To die for a new shrine.
> They die before they can enjoy the fruits of their foundations,
> The chants of the supplicants, the bleating goat and the cloth.
> Here I die, unknown, unwitnessed and inglorious
> In anticipation of the Kaphirintiwa of the south (*N & P* 128-129).

The python is also a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. When drought struck Kaphirintiwa, Lundu called upon the old python-priest Mlauli to dance *mgwetsa*, the rain-calling dance, so that rain could come and feed life. However, it was Mbona, Mlauli's apprentice who succeeded in bringing rain. Later when Mbona flees to the south where he is killed by Mlauli, drought strikes Msinja/Kaphirintiwa again and the Mang'anja have to trek south following Mbona, the new python who has powers to bring rain that regenerates the earth. As we saw above, the python is associated with rain and water among some tribes in Malawi; as such, it is a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. Besides, Mbona believes that after his death his body will "water the new shrine to live / forever and ever in the memory of [his] people" (*N & P* 128). And in the manner that signals kinship among all entities on earth or human beings' connectedness to all things on the planet, Chimombo dramatizes what happened as Mbona's death drew near as follows:

> The hills, valleys, forests
> and rivers stood still.
> The kite, eagle and vulture
> glided from the skies.
> The elephants, lions and leopards
> watched from the trees,
> and all lesser animals crouched
> or squatted on rocks and dust,

watching Mlauli draw near
to where Mbona waited (*N & P* 129).

Here animate and inanimate objects which are depicted as agentive are aware of the bloodshed that is about to take place and they wait to witness an act that will immortalise Mbona as a rainmaker. It is also important to note that the act that they are about to witness will result into something beneficial to them all. Mbona's transformation will be important for the sustenance of all life since the rain associated with him as the python shall feed the hills, valleys, birds, mammals and other forms of life.

6.0 Selfishness, Greed and Stupidity

In the poem "Four Ways of Dying" the Crab's answer when called upon to be a blood sacrifice for the good of society confronted by Napolo is to say

I crawl
In my shell sideways
backwards,
forwards;
Avoid
direct action on public matters,
confrontation,
commitment;
Meander
to confuse direction or purpose,
meaning,
sense;
Squat
to balance the issues
weigh,
consider (19).

The concrete poetic form (that is, the typographical arrangements of the words) of the extract above reflects the forwards and backwards movement of the crab echoed in the words "I crawl / In my shell sideways / backwards, / forwards." The Crab's cowardice, evoked by the verbs "crawl" and "squat" (which bring to mind the act of hiding), necessitates duplicity ("meander") to reject all responsibility towards his society. He avoids "direct action on public matters, / confrontation [and] / commitment" and has "become a past master of the art of evasion, of keeping his head below the parapet" (Roscoe and Msiska 21). The Crab is a private individual who has

nothing to do with what his society is going through. He also makes sure that no one should attach "meaning, / sense" or purpose to what he does. The Crab's behaviour here smacks of narcissism or selfishness. He does not care about anything or anybody but about his welfare alone. If we consider the Crab as a metaphor for some individuals in society as we did above, then these would be the kind of individuals who cannot be relied upon to bring about social transformation, people like Karanja in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* who believe that "every man [sic] in this world is alone, and fights alone, to live" or that "[t]he coward lived to see his mother while the brave was left dead on the battlefield" (146, 148). For such people self-sacrifice or martyrdom lacks meaning.

The Mole is no different from the Crab in the sense that he too avoids public matters and believes in the preservation of his life. But unlike the Crab who confuses "direction or purpose" through his manner of movement, the Mole prefers withdrawal from society:

> Wormlike I build in the entrails of the earth,
> fashion intricate passages and halls,
> tunnel Utopias and underground Edens,
> substitute surface with subterranean vision,
> level upon level of meaning of existence,
> as I sink downwards in my labyrinth,
> to die in a catacomb of my own making (20).

The Mole is a wishful thinker who tunnels "Utopias and underground Edens," and an escapist who substitutes "surface [public] with subterranean [private] vision." The Mole's "withdrawal is from reality to fantasy as is evident from the key verbs, 'fashion', tunnel' and 'substitute' and from 'utopias' and underground Edens" (Nazombe, "Malawian Poetry in English" 118). Unsurprisingly, his death in "a catacomb of [his] own making" is of no meaning to the wider society. Chimombo here relies on a detailed observation of the behaviours of these animals to associate with the behaviour of members of society who selfishly pursue their own agendas without any consideration for what their society is going through.

Kamba, the tortoise, and Mleme, the bat, are examples of greedy animal characters in *Epic of the Forest Creatures*. In the poem "A State Banquet" (*EoFC* 15-18) Kamba's ambition is to attend a banquet at the state house. He makes himself a "multicoloured card outfit" (16) for the occasion but is turned back at the gate with

the rebuke "This is not a Christmas party, my boy, / Nor a fancy dress ball for nitwits" (17). Kamba's ambitions are shattered and can only ludicrously lament:

> I know I'm cracked through and through
> But I didn't think anyone could see through,
> All these political cards' camouflage (17).

Kamba's case exemplifies the fate of all those who pretend to be what they are not. His scheme backfires because he lacked the authenticity the chameleon has with his natural camouflage which he employs for the welfare of society and not for the fulfilment of selfish ambitions.[75]

Mleme, the bat, is another greedy animal character in the epic. He attends banquets or meetings of the rebels and those of the lion's party. We hear that he was well liked by the lion, and the fact that he has fur and teeth like a mammal, yet also flies like a bird, makes him welcome (though with suspicion) in both camps. We are told that

> Mleme ate and ate in both camps
> He grew opulent and corpulent (18)

before falling out of the lions favour after it was discovered that he was "planning a coup / to overthrow and kill the leader [lion]" (ibid.). In Malawian politics of the 1970s and 80s Mleme here represents Gwanda Chakwamba. Chakuamba was arrested and sentenced to twenty-two years in prison for "'rebellious utterances', illegal possession of weapons and possession of forbidden publications" (Schoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 302). But during the struggle for political change pressure was brought to bear on the MCP to release all political prisoners. Chakuamba was released after serving thirteen years and after his release he joined the United Democratic Front (UDF) party. But his membership in the party was not to last "as the party's leadership was either unwilling or unable to offer him a position commensurate with

[75] The story of Kamba here shares similarities with Chinua Achebe's etiological tale in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which could have inspired the present one. In Achebe's story too the tortoise's greed makes him want to attend a party of all birds that was to take place in the sky. He gets feathers from some generous birds to enable him to fashion wings that would take him to the sky. But when they get to the party, tortoise, who assumes the name All of You, consumes the food which the hosts say is for all of you (meaning for all the guests, but tortoise says it is for him alone). Angered by tortoise's behaviour the birds withdraw their feathers one by one until tortoise is left with no wings to fly back to earth. Worse still, the bird who accepts to take a message to his wife asking her to take out of their house all the soft things for his crash-landing, twists it and tells the wife to take out all the hard objects for the husband to land on. Greedy tortoise drops on the hard objects and sustains a broken shell, resulting, as we read in the poem, in his being "cracked through and through." "[C]racked through and through" here also suggests dishonesty, cunning and untrustworthiness.

his skills and experience. Before long he let himself be wooed by the MCP" (ibid. 302-303). The fact that Mleme is Chakwamba is strengthened in "The Creatures of Multipatyism" (*EoFC* 25-28) when we hear that Mleme was "let out of detention too soon: / Only after a decade or so" (27). After his release he is said to fly into the light and back into the dark; that is, he joins the multipartyists whose symbol was a burning lamp – symbolising light – and later abandons them to join the one party advocates (Malawi Congress Party) whose symbol was a black cock, which in the poet's view is a symbol of darkness – the opposite of light. Chimombo here echoes Chakufwa Chihana who branded the MCP "a party of darkness and death" (Schoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 159).[76]

Mleme's behaviour in "The Creatures of Multipatyism" (*EoFC* 25-28) prompts the nation to brand him "a traitor, / Opportunist, sell-out, [and] turncoat" (27). In the Mkango Coalition Party he rises to several high positions, like he did among the multipartyists, until he becomes a presidential hopeful (see "Mkango Coalition Party" [*EoFC* 75-79). When Chakuamba joined the MCP he was appointed Secretary General of the party. Later, when Banda left Malawi in October 1993 for brain surgery at the Garden City Clinic in Johannesburg, the MCP appointed a Presidential Council to fill the power vacuum. Gwanda Chakuamba was the one who chaired the council until Banda resumed power. Further, on 11 October 1993 "Chakuamba was appointed minister of home affairs," a development that "gave him virtual control over the police, the prison services and […] the army" and made him appear as the "most powerful person in the country" (Schoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 315). To crown his meteoric rise to power "[a]t the MCP party congress of 12-13 February" 1994 where Dr. Banda was chosen as the party's presidential candidate during the forthcoming general election, Chakuamba was also chosen as Dr. Banda's vice-presidential running mate and virtual successor (ibid. 331). The fact that he was once a convict though, established a legal stumbling block to his presidential ambitions but later he was cleared by the courts to contest during the elections ("The Mleme Syndrome" [*EoFC* 82-85]).

[76] When Chihana returned to Malawi from exile on 6 April 1992 to establish what he called an "interim committee to mobilise national conference of democratic forces inside Malawi" (Schoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 160) he was arrested at the airport and later convicted on two charges of sedition. "He was sentenced to two concurrent terms of eighteen months and twenty-four months in prison with hard labour" (ibid. 264) but was released on 12 June 1993 after serving six months of his sentence.

Like Mleme (Chakuamba), the other presidential hopefuls such as Crab, Chakufwa Chihana, and Kaphulika, Bakili Muluzi, are equally greedy and self-seeking. Bakili Muluzi is a business man who once served as Secretary General of the MCP before voluntarily resigning from the party. During the struggle for political change in Malawi (1992-1994) he became one of the founders of the UDF party and later its presidential candidate in the 1994 general election which he won. In "Life after the Referendum" (*EoFC* 39-46) Crab is said to have been "famous for rally-hopping" (41), that is, he attended rallies of the multipartyists and those of the Malawi Congress Party. He later forms his own party which he calls Crab Alliance Party (Alliance for Democracy – Aford) (ibid. 41). But as we read in "Crab's Alliance Party" (*EoFC* 80-82) *Nkhanu* (Crab) was also "famous for his haughty manner" (80) and did not share his plans with his party officials. Worse still, the executive positions in his party were filled by his friends and he also seemed to favour the northern region of the country, where he came from. This is a picture of Chihana who "was known to have packed his previous union organisation, the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Conference (SATUCC) with men from his home district, or other parts of the north." Chihana was seen as doing a similar thing in Alliance for Democracy (Aford), a party for which he was a founder and presidential candidate during the 1994 general election. Worse still, Chihana appeared "to have inherited many of the worst characteristics of Banda's autocratic style of government. He had been shocking democrats by driving to his presidential-style rallies in huge motorcades, sweeping the ordinary people off the roads as his cavalcade drove to its meetings" (Schoffeleers, *In Search of Truth* 316). Unsurprisingly, soon after being elected Aford's presidential candidate in December 1993 "prominent party members were already calling for his resignation in January [1994, accusing him] of tribalism, dictatorial tendencies and lack of accountability" (ibid. 329). Chimombo's choice of a crab to represent Chihana was motivated by the manner of the Crab's walk which, as we saw in "Four Ways of Dying," "confuse[s] direction or purpose, / meaning, [and] / sense."

Chimombo's fable, *Epic of the Forest Creatures*, has a number of weaknesses worthy mentioning here. Place names such as Mikuyu, Dzeleka and Nsanje, among others, slogans such as Kwacha! in "The Contest," the lion's party which is called Mkango Coalition Party (MCP for short) are too revealing and remove the narrative from the fabulous setting to the real world of Malawian politics. Besides, the

symbolism used during the referendum in the fable is realistic. The multipartyists use light (a burning lamp) while the one party advocates use a black cock.

Furthermore, some of the sentiments expressed in the text lack artistic skill and sound trite or pedestrian. The poems titled "Revolt of the Dancers" (*EoFC* 48-50), "Revolt of the Non-Partisan" (*EoFC* 50-51), and "Revolt of the Multipartyists" (*EoFC* 52-53) read like a documentary of the evils of the MCP regime with little poetic insight or skill. The author's preoccupation in these poems with the Malawian people's determined opposition to Banda and the MCP, to use Nazombe's words, "borders perilously on the trivial" ("Malawian Poetry in English" 139). Besides, as Nkolokosa observes,

> [t]he poet's imagination can therefore be said to be rather minimal, in that he clothes the creatures of Nyakalambo in the workaday garbs of […] ordinary [Malawian] politicians, which requires less creative effort than having to imagine the world, people it with creatures of his fancy and let the drama unfold along a path no reader could predict first time with certainty (9).

Further, in the poem "The Fate of the Royal Family" (*EoFC* 53-57) Chimombo's comments on Banda's sickness and operation, while consistent with a denigrated nonhuman subject, the lion in the poem, strike one as offensive when the fabulous veil is lifted and the lion stands unmasked as Banda. These comments do nothing to add value to the poetic inspiration. Speculating on the cause of Banda's sickness, Chimombo writes

> The lion overdanced himself one day.
> He thought he could outdance his women.
> He did a jig, he did a jiggle, and lo,
> He had a fatal brain haemorrhage.
> The feet under him gave way.
> He collapsed where he stood.
> He did not even know how he got
> To the medicine man who opened him up (54).

The evocation of dancing here refers to the traditional dances performed before Banda during his many rallies, at the airport, at his palaces and other places, that prompted Emily Mkamanga to observe that "Banda will go down [in] history as an African president who never grew tired of watching traditional dances […] especially those that were performed by women" (39). On some occasions Banda briefly joined the dances. Chimombo goes on to comment on what he imagines happened during the operation

> They found excess fluid in his cranium.

The brains swam in too much muck.
It had to be drained for his survival.
Oh, how the gray matter ran out
In rivers down the wrinkled temples;
Globules of blood of detainees plopped out,
Limbs of hacked victims swam out too,
Tongues of muzzled writers were flotsam.
The lion was reduced to a vegetable (ibid.).

Here Chimombo's poetic imagination depicts Banda's brain before the operation as full of the body parts ("limbs" and "tongues") of the victims of his reign and therefore seems to suggest that it was Banda's despotism that led to his sickness. Granted that Banda was a dictator, but to write about his sickness and operation in this manner defies all codes of decency, satire or good poetry. This justifies Nkolokosa's observation that Chimombo "gets carried away in the euphoria of the day, his joy superseding that of his mythical creatures" (9). The verse itself is flat or plain and uninspired, lacking "artistic merit, […] wit and grandeur of expression" (Tembo 89). One notices here that the loosening of his poetic tongue following the ushering in of multiparty has cost the poet his skill and creativity. One can not help feeling that his cryptic Napolo poems, which according to Roscoe and Msiska "proceed[…] from struggle between the imperatives of restraint vital for survival and the urge to scream out protest and purge frustration" (28), were artistically far better than some of the poems in *The Epic of the Forest Creatures*.

7.0 Conclusion

Chimombo, like Mapanje is a social critic. Using mythic, cultic and fabulous animals he responds to the changes in his social and political environment. He subtly protests against the abuse, oppression and deception of the people by those in power. For him the changes from colonialism to independence and later to multiparty democracy is only a change of types of oppressors and exploiters – from versions of Napolo and Nkango, the lion, to the thieving Kaphiulika, the warthog; greedy Mleme, the bat; and deceitful Nkhanu, the Crab who are aspiring for the presidency during the transition period.

In his poetry Steve Chimombo uses animals, real or mythical, as metaphors for a tyrannical leader and his regime, as metaphors for other individuals in the poet's society, and as symbols of cataclysm, death and destruction, re/creation, and rebirth

and regeneration. The mythical Napolo, for example, serves as a metaphor for Dr. Banda and his regime. The narrative of this serpentine figure "allows him to inhabit subversively an otherwise dangerous political time and space" (Msiska 73). Apart from the obvious limits of effective communication with his audience occasioned by the cryptic nature of the Napolo poems especially, and the use of the English language in a society where levels of illiteracy are very high, the choice of Napolo as a metaphor for Banda has the unintended implication of depicting Banda as an invincible force. Just as humans are powerless against the real Napolo, they would equally be helpless against Napolo Banda. Unsurprisingly, the tough censorship of the period of writing notwithstanding, Chimombo's *Napolo Poems* suggest no course of action for the people to take in order to rid themselves of the monster.

The various animals in his fable, *Epic of the Forest Creatures*, correspond with human characters in the Malawi society of the time of writing. These metaphors are aimed at highlighting issues of oppression and exploitation and satirising the individual politicians. Here pessimism rather than hope for the emerging socio-political environment is the dominant mood as the presidential aspirants are all morally tainted figures. The herbivorous hippos, elephants and buffaloes whose opposition to the tyrannical lion leads to the referendum and impending elections, withdraw from the limelight leaving the stage for thieves and liars to jostle for political power.

Chimombo's attitude to animals in his poetry is essentially aesthetic: his animals are mythical and fabulous rather than living beings with flesh and blood. In his exposure of oppression and exploitation, tyranny, selfishness and greed his interests focus on the realm of human society and affairs (Fox 10). Be that as it may, Chimombo's poetry helps us to understand the ways in which a postcolonial poet represents fabulous and mythic animals to communicate his dialectic vision and to address questions of socio-political change/transformation and in/justice in his country. The poetry also provides further example of the ways in which African poets use allegorical forms in their response to social and political issues in the postcolony. As in the chapter on Mapanje's poetry above, this chapter offers a useful contrast with other animal poets discussed in this study who take a different trajectory in their manner of animal representation.

Chapter 4: Animals and Rural /City Landscapes in the Poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musaemura Zimunya

1.0 Introduction

This chapter offers an analysis of the ways in which animals are represented in the poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya in relation to the contrasting landscapes (both physical and moral) of rural and urban Zimbabwe, particularly the city of Harare. My focus in this chapter is on the way animals and animal imagery are mobilised to express the poets' conceptualisation and construction of the two landscapes. It discusses the contrasts they draw between the "natural" rural and traditional life and the "unnatural" colonial and urban life of Zimbabwe (Kaarsholm 5). In their poetry Zimunya and Hove show that they "feel attached to nature and [the] landscape" of their country and its people ([Veit-]Wild, *Patterns* 11). But, as I mentioned in the introductory chapter, a landscape is also a culturescape (Wylie, "Mind" 149) and as such the two poets' construction and response to the landscape provides a lens through which to understand rural and city cultures in Zimbabwe. Besides, "no animal, plant, bird or insect – co-inhabitants, even co-creators of that landscape – is inscripted (or even encrypted) without aesthetic or iconic import" (ibid.). Paying attention to the animals in the poetry reveals not only their symbolic import but also the attitudes of the poets to animals, in general, and specific animals, in particular.

A reading of Hove and Zimunya's poetry shows that social and political concerns are predominant in the poetry. Hove underscores this concern for human society and human affairs and struggles in his poetry when he says

> [a]s a sensitive point of the community, the writer cannot withdraw from the concerns of the dispossessed peasant, the malnourished child lying in the squatter camp, the peasant worker's hungry and growling stomach. This is the crowd that appeals to the writer for him to listen. So to write is to listen to that clamour of fury of the people in their daily struggles for a decent livelihood in dignity and freedom (qtd. by Ngara 118).

Here Hove typifies the concern with socio-political issues that was deemed by many Zimbabwean scholars as the necessary preoccupation of Zimbabwean poetry soon after independence. In a poem by Carlos Chombo (Thomas Bvuma) that acts as a prelude to the collection *And Now the Poets Speak* (1981) and reads like a manifesto

for Zimbabwean poetry, the author spells out what the real Zimbabwean, and indeed African, poetry ought to be. Chombo writes:

> The Real Poetry
> Is sweat scouring
> The baked valley of the peasant's back
> Down to the starved gorge of his buttocks
> […]
> Not a private paradise
> Nor an individual inferno
>
> But the pain and pleasure
> Of People in Struggle (1).

For Chombo, and indeed for many Zimbabwean scholars who shared his views at the time, real poetry is, and should be, about public rather than private issues; it should be about the pain and suffering of peasants, as well as their struggles for freedom and self-determination – clearly a very circumscribed view of poetry. In line with Chombo's call, both Hove and Zimunya embrace a reformist vision for their society, hoping to see a society where tradition and morality are conserved and followed and humankind is less cruel to one another. They seek "to arouse a social conscience and a general awareness about the trend of politics and history in this country" ([Veit-]Wild, *Patterns* 8). Like their Malawian counterparts, the vision of the two Zimbabwean poets is human-centred. It is perhaps understandable that in a context of poverty and human exploitation and want such as found in colonial and post-colonial Africa, writers should focus more on human liberation, freedom and justice. However, this ignores the fact that oppressions are interlocked or interconnected: patriarchy, speciesism, racism and classism, among others, inform and reinforce one another. The need for writers to broaden the scope of their vision to include justice and fairness for the earth and its non-human creatures cannot be overemphasised.

Nevertheless, animals are often part of human society, including poor people's lives, and they do appear regularly in the poetry. Their presence in the poetry reveals aspects, at times unwitting, of both poetic intention and aporias, and the authors' attitude towards nature and animals. Besides, in most cases where they appear, animals highlight people's embeddedness in their ecology, and expose the relationship between people, land, flora and fauna. The use of the animals and description of the landscape, especially in the pastoral poems, also reveals the poets'

ecological awareness and their displeasure about the abuse and destruction of nature, including trees and animals, while the rural and urban landscapes work as metaphorical maps of their childhood and adulthood experiences, real or imagined, and of their attempts at self-exploration and discovery.

In human culture and imagination the "contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life," such as the one we encounter in Zimunya and Hove's poetry, "reaches back into classical times" (Williams 9). Raymond Williams rightly observes that "[o]n the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light." He goes on to say that "[p]owerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation" (9). In their pastoral poems, that is, poems about the country, Zimunya and Hove focus on the positive aspects of rural life, its "innocence, and simple virtue" (especially in pre-colonial times). Rural life and landscape are depicted as beautiful, innocent and serene. This picture is only spoiled by smudges of hardship and poverty rather than the backwardness of, and limitations imposed by, the traditional way of life. The major spoiler of this idyllic life for the poets is colonialism that leads to fragmentation of family life and destruction of the land, its plants and creatures.

In their poems dealing with urban Zimbabwe on the other hand Zimunya and Hove dwell on the "worldliness and ambition" of the city, its corrupt, evil and decadent nature. In the poetry, therefore, the city emerges as a wasteland, a place of death, as its positive associations are suppressed. The animal that Zimunya uses symbolically to represent the squalor of the city and to tackle human foibles in this environment is the domestic dog. Unlike in the rural poems where animals mostly show people's integration within the ecology, here the dog's use reveals a speciesist attitude where the dog is denigrated and vilified. It is a speciesist attitude that motivates the use of the dog to represent eroticism, lust, prostitution and moral decay, for, as Joan Dunayer observes, "[v]iewed through speciesism, a nonhuman animal acquires a negative image" (12). But why is the dog the animal chosen to play this symbolic role? And why are the aforementioned the prevalent associations of the city in the poetry? I will attempt to address these questions later.

In my discussion of Zimunya and Hove's poetry I start with the poems that deal with rural Zimbabwe before those that deal with the city. I have selected the

poems for discussion in this chapter from Hove and Zimunya's individual collections of poetry. These include *Up in Arms* (*UIA* 1982) and *Red Hills of Home (RHH* 1985) by Hove and *Thought-Tracks* (*TT* 1982) and *Country Dawns and City Lights* (*CDCL* 1985) by Zimunya. Although the focus of this discussion is on animal representation, I have included in my discussion poems where animals are absent because these poems help to highlight the poets' perceptions of the two landscapes, the city and the country, in Zimbabwe, the theme against which representation of animals in this chapter is explored.

2.0 Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya's Poetry

Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya belong to the second generation of Zimbabwean writers. This is a generation of writers who were born between 1940 and 1959 (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 7). The poems of these two major Zimbabwean poets have appeared in individual collections, magazines and anthologies both in Zimbabwe and beyond. Both writers are also multilingual and have written poetry in English and in Shona. Musa Zimunya has been writing poetry since the late 1960s while Hove started writing in the 1970s. The two writers mainly began to cement their stronghold on the Zimbabwean poetic scene after independence in 1980 with the publication of the first post-independence Zimbabwean poetry anthology, *And Now the Poets Speak* (1981), compiled and edited by Musa Zimunya and Mudereri Kadhani. Their position as poets of note in postcolonial Zimbabwe was ensured, however, with the publication of their individual collections of poetry in 1982: *Thought-Tracks* (*TT*) and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* (*KJOP*) for Zimunya and *Up in Arms* (*UIA*) for Hove.

Four more collections of poetry, namely *Swimming in a Flood of Tears* (with poems by Lyamba wa Kabika (1983), *Red Hills of Home* (*RHH*, 1985), *Blind Moon* (*BM*, 2004), and *Rainbows in the Dust* (*RD*, 1997), and works of fiction and nonfiction were to follow for Hove, while Zimunya also went on to publish three more collections, namely *Country Dawns and City Lights* (*CDCL*, 1985), *Perfect Poise* (1993) and *Selected Poems* (1995) as well as a collection of short stories, *Night Shift and Other Stories* (1993), among other works.

Although the Zimbabwean literary scene is characterised by eclecticism and lack of homogeneity with regard to approaches, styles and outlook, a majority of Zimbabwean writers share common themes (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 2; Muponde, *Zimbabwean Literature* 2). And so, like their counterparts, Hove and Zimunya deal

with the violence and suffering unleashed on the black majority in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) by settler colonialism from the 1890s to independence in 1980. They tackle land dispossession, which often involved the violent removal of people from their fertile ancestral and therefore spiritually sacred land to the agriculturally unproductive areas of the country; the poverty and suffering resulting from this injustice; the oppression and exploitation of the people on farms and mines where they provided cheap labour for the white owners; the devastation the guerrilla war of liberation in the 1960s and 70s caused the rural peasantry; and, after independence, the disillusionment and despair of the majority poor following the self-serving behaviour of the government and failure of the realisation of the hopes of independence. Experiences of colonialism by indigenes of Zimbabwe and the wounds and pain inflicted by the revolutionary war of independence come through mainly in collections such as *And Now the Poets Speak*, *Thought-Tracks* and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* by Zimunya, and *Up in Arms, Swimming in a Flood of Tears*, and *Red Hills of Home* by Hove. In their later works such as Hove's *Blind Moon* and *Rainbows in the Dust*, and Zimunya's *Country Dawns and City Lights* the poets engage with the postcolonial condition in Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Apart from recording the colonial experience and the failure of the promises of independence, the poets also look inward to take stock of what they had lost in their way of life as a result of the colonial encounter (Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 24) and the introduction of new ways of living in the urban centres of the country. This is especially clear in Zimunya's *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* and *Country Dawns and City Lights.*

Beside the above issues Hove (in a number of poems in his earlier collections) and Zimunya (especially in *Country Dawns and City Lights*) also reveal their conceptions of rural and city life in Zimbabwe in their poetry. In some of their poems the old agrarian way of life contrasts with the new atomistic modern way of life in the city such as Harare. In their poetry the rural and city/urban landscapes/spaces are conceived as sharply divided, with rural spaces being "seen as more 'authentic' than urban" spaces (Primorac and Muponde xiv). For Zimunya the city is a place of immorality, anarchy, suffering and death, while rural Zimbabwe – although less appealing because of its superstitions and poverty – is more tolerable as a home. Unlike Zimunya, Hove questions the possibility of either place acting as home for an oppressed and exploited Zimbabwean bruised by the ravages of colonialism and neo-colonialism. He, however, reserves a tender spot (what Muponde calls "a romantic

streak") for life in the country before the destructive colonial encounter (Muponde, *Zimbabwean Literature* 52).

In the hands of Hove and Zimunya poetry functions as a project of cultural self-rediscovery by a previously denigrated and oppressed people. It also "fulfils the function of social conscience" (Primorac and Muponde xix) as the two poets act as spokespersons for fellow Zimbabweans, especially the oppressed. In this way the poetry acts as the "voice of the people" (Hove in [Veit-]Wild's *Patterns* 38) as it articulates people's past suffering, and their hopes, pain, frustration and despair before and after independence.

Although critics have commented on the various thematic concerns outlined above, including the rural/city binary (Ngara 1990, Muponde 2000, Muchemwa 2008) in the poetry of Hove and Zimunya, with the exception of Muponde (2000), not much has been done on the significance of animals in the poetry. And although there is notable variation in the specific animals and animal imagery the two poets use and the manner in which they use them in their poetry, a focus on the animals in Hove and Zimunya's poetry reveals the poets' relationship with animals and nature as well as their conception of, and attitudes to, the two cultural spaces – urban and rural Zimbabwe. In his poetry Hove uses the migratory bird as a metaphor for the migrant to the city. Birds in general also act as a symbol of freedom in Hove's poetry (see "When the Sky is Clear" [*BM* 1] and "Birds" [*BM* 3]). The bird's possession of "the power of flight" is a "powerful symbol of freedom" (Lutwack 153) in literature and it comes as no surprise that Hove considers the bird an appropriate metaphor for freedom in his poetry.

In characterising the migrant as a bird Hove underscores the freedom of the migrant. But it is the sort of freedom that only lasts until he arrives in the city where struggles for survival lead to death or loss of freedom. In the poem "Lost Bird" (*RHH* 36-37) a migratory bird fails to navigate the airspace of the city and falls to his death. In the poem

> The bird dragged his breast over the city
> compressed by smog.
> His wings wagged, his heart beat
> As he missed his airy path
> over the smoke laden city (36)

The bird's dragging of "his breast over the city" and the wagging of his wings suggests struggle as he fights to navigate the city's airspace, but to no avail. Smog or smoke (a symbol of squalor and pollution or corruption) from the factories and chimneys in the city's industrial area where, as speculation has it, the bird died, militate against the migratory bird's ability to survive in the city. The city here symbolises death. The migrant bird flies to the city to his death or entrapment/bondage in a factory which will suck his energy as a labourer till his death or, if he is lucky, until he is cast aside as a spent force. Unlike Hove, Zimunya uses the figure of the domestic dog to portray the murky and evil side of Harare. In using the dog in this way Zimunya highlights the ambivalence that surrounds both the city and the dog in human culture and imagination. In Zimunya's poetry, like in Hove's, the Zimbabwean city of the 1980s signals curtailment of freedom as the migrant (once a bird in Hove) metamorphoses into a mangy dog, a sickly and despicable creature which in this case symbolises squalor and moral decrepitude. Hove and Zimunya make multiple associations of the country with freedom and decency and the city with entrapment, squalor and death.

3.0 Rural Zimbabwe: Sweet Home That Was

In their poetry Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya make a mental journey to the lost world of pre-colonial Zimbabwe or their childhood to shape memories of their rural life and childhood and evoke the beauty of the rural landscape. Here the seasons, forests, birds and their songs are all woven into the fabric of rural life, spirituality and belief systems of the people. But memories of rural beauty (pastoral) sit side by side with memories of suffering of the peasantry due to inclement weather or prolonged drought (as nature is not always benevolent) and painful rural existence and poverty as well as suffering loosed upon the people by colonialism. For both authors, too, rural life and the beauty of the landscape are constantly vanishing due to the ravages of colonial injustice. The land is being scarred by the bulldozer; hills and mountains are being denuded as the axe goes to work, tearing down trees; and sacred caves are desecrated by people from far off lands – in short, home is fast becoming home no more.[77]

[77] However, in some ways these accounts of colonial injustice and African victimhood fall within what Achille Mbembe calls a Marxist and nationalist (or Marxist-nationalist) current of thought in Africa which he characterises as "a mechanistic and reified vision of history" where "[c]ausality is attributed

Both Zimunya and Hove emphasise what they see as the beauty and revitalising nature of the rural world. Broadly speaking, rural Zimbabwe in Zimunya's poetry is, in Muponde's words, "about the beautiful and fragile, children, flowers, love and freedom. It is a grand canvas depicting pastoral innocence and serenity. It is an animated landscape that explodes with colour and sound" (Muponde, *Zimbabwean Literature* 11). Unlike Zimunya, Hove does not dwell much on the beauty and idyllic nature of rural life but exposes the transitions taking place in the countryside and the pain, suffering and dislocation of rural life occasioned by colonialism. He does, however, offer glimpses of the ecologically sound relationship of rural people and their environment in some of his poems.

In the poem "Mazes that Yawn" (*UIA* 43-44) Chenjerai Hove protests against civilization, especially when civilization means altering the landscape by erecting huge buildings, paving roads and avenues, and professional life that entails obeying timetables. For Hove such a civilization is antithetical to life as it deadens the soul and even leads to physical death. In an interview with Flora [Veit]-Wild, Hove observes that "[i]n my poems [in] *Up in [A]rms* I question a lot of what we do in the name of civilization […]" (*Patterns* 41). "Mazes that Yawn" is an example of one such poems. In the poem Hove protests:

> Don't civilize me with walls,
> forests of lines, lanes and edges
> or in roofed mazes that yawn
> for my sudden death (43).

The "walls" here are a metonymy for the buildings of the city while the "forests of lines, lanes and edges" refer to the road network crisscrossing the city landscape. The "roofed mazes that yawn / for my sudden death" could, apart from office buildings, also refer to factories which suck the individual's labour until he becomes useless, or metaphorically (even physically) dies. Unlike the stifling life and space of the city the

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to entities that are fictive and wholly invisible, but are nevertheless said to determine, ultimately, the [African] subject's life and work" (243). For him, this point of view sees "the history of Africa" as reducible "to a series of subjugations, narrativized in a seamless continuity [and] African experience of the world [as] determined, a priori, by a set of forces – [slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism] – whose function is to prevent the blooming of African uniqueness, of that part of the African historical self that is irreducible to any other" (ibid.). In Mbembe's view this "paranoid reading of history" (252) which leads to the invention of "a narrative of liberation built around the dual temporality of a glorious – albeit fallen – past (tradition) and a redeemed future (nationalism)" (249-250) obscures Africa's responsibility "for the catastrophes that [befell and] are befalling it" (243).

poet-protagonist prefers life in the country. In the poem he undertakes a mental journey back to the unspoiled rural past, to the green forests, trees and grass that fan or revitalise the soul. He declares:

> Out I wade to forests, green,
> where trees airy, grasses free,
> my soul is fanned (43)

The emphasis on "green" here, as in the first line of the third stanza, highlights the fact that unlike the city with its stifling walls, "forests of lines," and "mazes," the country is full of life which the green represents. Here the trees and the grass fan and revitalise the soul. Further, in the green forests of home (the country)

> the jungle squirrel calls
> answering the go-away mystery
> upon a rough unhewed bush.
> The hornbill muses in dance,
> pricked by unknown drives that last.
> The eagle dives, the forest lives
> and blood stirs to wrestle with death.
> The owl, disturbed, unnerved, wings by
> with streams in pursuit
> to punch with beaked hate
> that long fed master (43).

The vitality of life in the country is here represented by the activity of the animals and birds in the green forest. Packed in this section, as in other parts of the poem, are suggestive images and metaphors that characterise most of Hove's poetry. However, the imagery also has the negative effect of obscuring meaning in the poems. [Veit]-Wild complains to this effect when she observes that "[m]any of [Hove's] poems about the war [of liberation, for example,] are not always easy to approach in detail because Hove tends to overload them with an accumulation of metaphors and paradoxical images" (*Patterns* 8). In reaction to this criticism Hove maintains that "[p]oetry, any poetry, has to be overloaded with meaning, to make words burst with meaning, with human experience" (ibid. 39). But overloading a poem with images can also have the unintended effect of stifling meaning, of making the words fail to "burst with meaning." With regard to the metaphors in the quotation above, it is difficult to say unequivocally what Hove means by them but one can, nevertheless, attempt to unravel their meaning.

In the poem extract above we hear that "the jungle squirrel calls / answering the go-away mystery." The "go-away mystery" could be Hove's interpretation of a particular bird song. As Leonard Lutwack observes, "[a]ll bird song is open to a variety of human interpretations" (12). For example, in a poem titled "Reading under a Village Tree" Jack Mapanje interprets the coos of a turtle-dove as saying "*nguku, nguku-mcheche / nguluche kutanjira / ndame kuwa-sala* (chickens, chickens four / If I fly away I am trapped. / If I stay here I die of hunger) (*Expression* 15, italics in original. Except for the first line, translation by Mapanje). The "go-away mystery" in Hove's poem could therefore be a reference to a bird song which Hove interprets as saying "go-away." The fact that the bush in which the squirrel calls is said to be "a rough unhewed bush" underlines the fact that it is untouched or untampered with by destructive humans. It is a vibrant ecosystem harbouring various thriving life-forms. The hornbill's musing "in dance" may be a reference to the bird's gait while walking on the ground, a gait or manner of walking which to poetic eyes is akin to dancing, while the "unknown drives that last" may refer to the bird's primordial desires that have endured the test of time and have guided the life of the species of these birds over the years. Further, the expression "The eagle dives, the forest lives / and blood stirs to wrestle with death" underlines the ecological harmony in the forests or in this idyllic rural setting, where birds go about their daily business and plants and animals unite to ensure the continuity and vitality (symbolised by blood) of life undisturbed by humans.

In the poem the people living in the country attach meaning to bird calls as we hear that "When the dove mourns maybe granny is dead" (43). This underlines Obiechina's observation that rural people "recognize bird-songs and build them into the consciousness as a way of telling the time or interpreting reality, since the songs of some birds are ominous" (Obiechina 43). The dove's song for the poet-protagonist is certainly ominous as, apart from predicting death, it could also be a sign that a snake is in the vicinity waiting to inflict "fanged death" (43), that is, death by its poison fangs, on its prey. Thus the life of humans in rural Zimbabwe is integrated with the lives of animals and their behaviour. The people derive meanings from animal behaviour, meanings which are later woven into their linguistic repertoire. Animal behaviour and even their very names serve as a metaphorical resource when, as we saw in the chapter on Mapanje's poetry, they are associated with the behaviour and attributes of some individuals in human society. Dogs' names, for example, as

Levison Tatira shows, are used among the Shona people of Zimbabwe to express grievances that cannot be discussed, rebuke, insult, or correct morally deviant behaviour relating to witchcraft, marital problems, bad neighbourliness, and other social issues (Tatira 2004). In the same vain, the Zimbabwean writer Lawrence Vambe, tells us that among his people (the Shona), "the majority of [dogs' names] were given with some mischievous intent." He goes on to say that "[i]t was the custom that if you disliked a neighbour you gave your dog a name descriptive of him and his peculiarities, and in that way you provided yourself with a constant outlet for expressing your petty hates, prejudices, even oaths against that person by means of the mute, if innocent dog" (*An Ill-Fated People* 1). This shows how animals are integrated into language and other modes of communication among the Shona.

Hove contrasts the freedom, beauty and fulfilling rural life with city and professional life which is detrimental to life and unecological as people are haunted by timetables and deadlines that lead to a quick death. And even when they die humans are disposed of in coffins thereby denying the earth of essential manure for the continuity of life. The contrasting versions of death, and therefore life, in the city and the country here highlight the fact that rural life is ecologically sound as opposed to city life. Hove seems to say that in life and in death the life of a city dweller is not conducive to ecological diversity or biodiversity. From what we gather in the poem by being coffined the dead in the city are denied what André Brink's Professor Phil Bruwer in *A Dry White Season* regards "[o]ne of the most satisfying things [he] can think of"; that is "[t]o turn slowly into compost, to become humus, to fatten worms and nourish plants, keeping the whole cycle of life going" after death (188). In the poem this nourishing of plants and keeping "the whole cycle of life going" is captured metonymically as manuring "this season's leaf" (44).

The idyllic picture of country life here, although the poem does not say so, is probably of pre-colonial Zimbabwe, since in most of his poems that deal with the country Hove often laments the loss and destruction by colonialism of what used to be home. In avoiding to identify the idyllic and harmonious picture of rural life here with pre-colonial Africa it seems Hove seeks to offer a wider vision of that historical period, a vision that is different from the reductionist "paranoid reading of history" (Mbembe 252) that characterises the anti-colonial vision of Africa. And indeed Hove's wider vision of pre-colonial African societies comes through in the poem "Country Life" (*UIA* 69-71) which, although it offers glimpses of integrated pre-

colonial country life, it does not depict that rural past as full of glory, purity and harmony but as a period with its own contrasts and ambiguities.

In "Country Life," the last poem in the collection *Up in Arms*, Hove again makes a mental journey to the pre-colonial past to offer his reconstruction of life in the country. He writes:

> Our hut puffs streaks of hope
> in smoke that waves.
> Inside, granny lies skeletal on the mat,
> while her snuff-box dangles in flashes of hope.
> Her walking-stick waits
> on stand-by
> like the crafty workman.
> Chicks may peck at her scars
> and the wince tells floods of tales:
> unless Takura comes to the rescue,
> the hen calls for the whole invasion (69).

What we encounter in the above lines is an ironic and sceptical version of hope. While we may be tempted to believe that hope rather than despair governs the people's lives in this rural setting: hope that food might result from the smoke in the hut and, for the granny, hope for another day, the imagery that Hove uses to characterise the hope contests such reading. In the poem we are told that the "hut puffs streaks of hope / in smoke that waves." The association of hope with smoke here evokes destruction of that hope by fire. The hope here is therefore lost hope, hope that no longer exists since it has been destroyed. We also read in the poem that the "skeletal" granny's "snuff-box dangles in flashes of hope." Here at least, unlike where it emerges "in smoke that waves," the hope is there but it is not sustained or sustainable as it is only seen in flashes following the dangling of the snuff-box. Captured here then is not necessarily a hopeless situation but one with minimal hope. The figure of the "skeletal" granny who lies on the mat and is harassed by chicks that peck at her scars underscores the negligible nature of the hope here as we realise that death is almost around the corner for the helpless granny. The figure of the old woman here also highlights the poverty and suffering in this rural setting.

In the second stanza Hove writes:

> Outside, a path to the field
> where little Tendai treads in bright song,
> head flat aside

as the fields yawn in dismay
with the laziness of elders
who trudge along to the journey's end (69).

Here the "bright song" of the young ("little Tendai") contrasts with the image of "elders / who trudge along to the journey's end," that is, to the grave. The reality of death amidst the people is exaggerated here by the hyperbole of the personified fields yawning "in dismay." Hove seems to say in this stanza that while there maybe hope for life for those of the younger generation, such hope is nonexistent for the elders who slowly but inevitably head to the grave.

In the poem we also get a picture of a mother working happily in the field ("pulls the hoe in deep song" [69]) and unafraid of what might befall her baby lying under a shade ("lizards may lick if they will, / or ants drag if they may, /or birds drop their dung" [69]). But underneath this seemingly harmonious co-existence between humans and nature something sinister is lurking as we are later told that "all is in mutinous harmony" (69). Nevertheless, unity and physical closeness between people and the earth exists in the country as we hear that further out in the hills Farai joyfully grazes cattle where the familiar "smell of torn grass, veined leaves and fingered herbs" signal the unity between humans and "the black soil of home" (70). While the grass in the quotation above may have been torn by the grazing cattle, the images of "veined leaves and fingered herbs" remain slippery. Like in "Mazes that Yawn" in "Country Life" too human life is integrated with the land. The integration between humans and the land/soil is also signalled through dance which forms a major part of recreation in the country. During the dance

Bare soles patter the soil
to cement the relationship,
a slap of union in man and home (70).

The "Bare soles" here, as opposed to shod feet, ensure close physical contact with the soil to confirm the bond between humans and the earth (home) from which, according to the biblical story of creation, humans were made.

However, although in the poem Hove shows rural people's contact or closeness with nature, he does not offer a romanticised idyllic and pure picture of rural life. Rather he offers an ambiguous picture that includes ugliness, suffering and death. Besides, we are told in the poem that the young watching the elders dancing in the arena, "stare in disbelief / growing sky-bound / with decaying wishes" (70). The "decaying wishes" here signal loss of hope and a life of challenges ahead. Although

we are not told why the wishes of the young decay, the image of the "decaying wishes" shows that life in pre-colonial Africa also had patches of bleakness, a fact that complicates the picture of a harmonious and glorious pre-colonial Africa found in some versions of anti-colonial discourse.

In another poem, "Season's Dance" (*RHH* 56), Hove shows rural people's awareness of the rhythms of the seasons and their cultural understanding of the behaviour of birds. In the poem the sight of a lone bird up in the sky signals for the people a change of seasons. The bird acts as a harbinger for the rains and children sing and dance in celebration since rains ensure success in agriculture. Birds have for long been regarded as predictors of good and bad things, luck and misfortune, in many African societies. They are time and season indicators, but they are also forecasters of thunder and death (Biyela 2009). For the poet the children's dance harnesses the bird and child together, bird and child are interconnected in the web of life. Hove writes:

> A dance of the season follows
> harnessing bird and child together.
> Yesterday, winter passed by
> without much dialogue with us.
> Then the dry season came
> sending yellow leaves after the winter gone.
> But then there was no explanation
> of the seasons withdrawal.

The expressions Hove uses in the poem sound rather strained and unconvincing. One wonders in what way a season dialogues "with us" and why there should be an explanation for a "season's withdrawal." One feels then that although the poem records a happy and memorable occasion, the celebration of a season, the prosaic style of the poem and the unrhythmical and strained lines and expression render Hove's tone flat and uninspiring.

Unlike Hove, Musa Zimunya's poems about the country are unashamedly pastoral. Zimunya grew up in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe where rolling hills and mountains covered with rich grasslands and forests, and mountains such as Nyanga to the north, Bvumba near Mutare, and Chimanimani to the south, offer great scenic beauty. When asked by [Veit-]Wild whether there was a connection between his celebration of "the beauty of Zimbabwe's landscape and nature" in his poetry and the place where he was "born and brought up," Zimunya answers in the affirmative

and goes on to say "I was born at the foot of the Vumba mountains in Zimunya communal land which is very near Mutare. It is a very dramatic landscape. And in those days there was still a lot of bush and forest – now it is no longer the case, the whole countryside has been denuded of vegetation – but in those days it was very, very beautiful" (*Patterns* 56). In his poetry Zimunya shows how this natural beauty has influenced his poetic sensibility. In "I Like Them" (*TT* 4) Zimunya writes nostalgically about the hills and mountains of his home:

> I like the northern mountain of my home
> crouching like a monstrous lion—
> with a brown bald head
> that shines with summer's water patches
> and upon whose muzzle
> stands a huge rhino-horn of stone—
> always ready to pounce upon the western (4).

While the northern mountain (Nyanga) is menacing and fearful despite its beauty, although the "brown bald head" that shines after the rains in summer exposes its vulnerability, the western mountains are compared to a Chevrolet "tearing its way towards the south." The invocation of the lion and the rhino (through the reference to the rhino-horn), some of the dangerous wild animals, here is meant to highlight the menacing appearance of the northern mountains which look like they are "ready to pounce upon the western" mountains. However, the image of the lion "with a brown bald head" and "a huge rhino-horn" upon his muzzle also triggers contempt and amusement as well as bewilderment, for lions neither have "bald heads" nor horns. The rolling and undulating features of the eastern mountains on the other hand evoke their description as waves on the sea. The landscape here is beautiful and memorable. Not surprisingly the poet-protagonist's being is entangled with these geographical features whose liking he confesses. For the poet-protagonist it seems that the mountains' beauty and his interest in them lie in their poeticisation ("their encompassing pretence"), not in what they really are. Although this is somehow reductive, the poetic glance of the poet here animates and charges them with life and mobility. The visual imagery of the mountains in the poem helps us to imagine their beauty and grandeur.

"Valley of Mawewe" (*TT* 93-96) is another poem that shows the poet's appreciation of the scenic beauty and ecological harmony in the valley of the poem's

title before the ravages of colonialism ("before the wagon came with plunder" [93]). In the pre-colonial valley of Mawewe birds welcome daybreak with a burst of song that echoes throughout the valley, while baboons do so by barks and snarls. However, this pristine environment is threatened with destruction by greedy and selfish colonialists prospecting for gold who see the land as a source of self enrichment. A rock-rabbit that spies a "gold-digger with blood in his saxon eyes" (94) chatters in protest at the intrusion. Here animals and humans are both potential victims of the greedy and violent (blood-eyed) intruder.[78]

Zimunya captures the Edenic quality of life for the human residents of Mawewe when he writes:

> As day came, Mawewe, was the joy of Zimbabwe
> and the earth flourished and exalted creation;
> the cows mooed unto the mountains and bellowing
> bulls
> rebellowed;
> there were heard bleating sheep and crowing cocks
> and the bones of the hills and the mountains
> and the suns in the leaves lived in Mawewe (94).

On reading these lines one immediately becomes aware of the fact that the suggestiveness and combination of metaphors one encounters in Hove's poetry are missing here. Instead we are confronted by a poem that sounds clichéd and uninspiring. This is perhaps because unlike Hove who tries to ensure that his poetry should be "overloaded with meaning" and his words should "burst with meaning" ([Veit-]Wild, *Patterns* 39), Zimunya aims at simplicity and readability. In reply to a question on his poetic style from [Veit-]Wild Zimunya says "[i]n *Country Dawns and City Lights* I attempted to exploit something like street conversations and also some folkloric devices. Why? Because I found that most African poets have a problem: Unreadibility. I have been a culprit in that regard myself. People love a poem but they don't know what it means" (*Patterns* 64). However, the above lines from the much earlier collection *Thought-Tracks* show that Zumunya started to avoid "unreadability" or obscurity earlier in his career. But, as can be seen from the poem "Valley of Mawewe," the simplicity compromises quality of the form and style of Zimunya's poetry.

[78] In his *An Ill-Fated People* Lawrence Vambe remembers some gold prospectors who came into his village to ask for directions, food or beer, as "[u]nwashed, unshaven, unkempt and often […] ill-clothed" men whom the villagers despised or pitied (211).

The above quotation from "Valley of Mawewe" shows that beside livestock, Mawewe was also rich in foodstuffs such as melons, cucumbers, pumpkins, pears, maize and millet. The Shona people's pre-colonial way of life as successful agriculturalists is referred to here. In reading this poem and other pre-colonial-based poems one should, however, remember that the picture offered here is a sanitised and romantic version of what pre-colonial Mawewe actually was. The life of the Shona was not always Edenic as we are made to believe here. Harsh climatic conditions made life difficult for the people as droughts triggered famine and suffering among the people (Rakodi 3). Nevertheless, these mishaps did not lead to the violent disruption of cultural and spiritual life of the Shona and other peoples of Zimbabwe as did colonialism. Zimunya makes it clear in the poem that the pristine beauty and harmony of Mawewe is destroyed by the colonial encounter and the revolutionary struggle that followed when he reiterates that "I sing of an age before the torch and the bulldozer / and I sing of the life lost in the napalm" (95). The bulldozer stands out in the poem as a symbol of the ecologically unfriendly agricultural methods of the colonialists who ripped and tore great tracts of land to open up commercial farms. Colonial destruction did not stop with the land alone which, unlike for the Shona or Ndebele, held no sacred memories for the newcomer. The arrogant colonialist who held no respect for the spiritual values of the natives also went ahead to interfere with spiritual values as we are told:

> Thus, when Rhodes came to Matopo, he made home in
> the rock
> with a blast of the dynamite where the native made
> their shrine
> and the Gods had a view of the world (95).

Rhodes' making "home in / the rock" is a reference to his decision to have his remains buried in the Matopo hills after his death, thereby interfering with the spiritual values of the Ndebele and Shona who held, and still hold, "the hills and caves of the Matopo region as scared" (Sheehan 8). Besides the shrines, the people's philosophies and beliefs in omens are rendered outmoded. The bateleur-eagle's position as a minion of death is no longer respected after the coming of the white man. On reading the poem one notices that while lamenting the colonial scourge on the people's way of life and on the landscape, the poem "Valley of Mawewe" also depicts the beauty of the Zimbabwean landscape in pre-colonial times.

Apart from the beauty of the landscape we catch a glimpse of recollections of "the simple joys of the poet's early childhood" (Mutswairo 105) in rural Zimbabwe in Zimunya's poetry. Happy memories of a sweet and carefree childhood are the subject of Zimunya's "Children's Rain Song" (*TT* 3). In the poem children fling away their clothes, hope and dance in the rain, singing:

> Rain fall fall
> we will eat berries
> rain fall for all
> we will eat mealies
> we will eat cucumbers
> rain fall fall (3).

Here Zimunya betrays nostalgia for the childhood he shall never enjoy again. This poem shows how country people's livelihood is interwoven and connected with the seasons. If rain does not come it means the food items the children mention will not be available. Here the children are celebrating the rain for its utilitarian value. As agriculturalists inhabiting a drought-prone country the coming of the rain was cause for celebration for the Shona (Mutswairo 105). But the poem is also tinged with the poet's nostalgia and a sense of loss. Watching the children sing and dance in the rain reminds the poet of the childhood he has lost with age:

> Children in the rain
> they don't feel the pain
> of longing all the time
> to streak through the years
> and dance in the rain again (3)

Zimunya's "Rain and Fire" (*KJOP* 7) also celebrates the rain which brings joy and happiness to children and adults alike in the rural areas. It also shows the beneficent role of the rain to the agricultural endeavours of the people. The poet observes:

> Rain suckles the earth
> where seedlings grow and grow green
> and the mealies and groundnuts and the millet
> will soon be ready (7)

The poet later writes nostalgically of how pumpkins would steam in the pot and how the people would roast corn. Like "Children's Rain Song" this poem reads like a song, relying on repetition for its rhythm.

4.0 Rural Poverty and Suffering

Memories of country life are not always beautiful or pleasant in Hove and Zimunya's poetry. The poets are well aware of the challenges and suffering that rural life entails. The rain that is celebrated in "Children's Rain Song" and "Rain and Fire" is also an architect of suffering for the people. It is a mixed blessing. The failure of the rain to fall spells doom for the people as Hove indicates in his short poem "To Father At Home" (*UIA* 64) where the fate of the people if the rain does not fall is captured with a calmness that does not belie the sadness in it or weight of the message:

> If it doesn't fall
> then, father,
> it's we
> Who have to fall (4)

Hove plays with the word "fall" in this poem. While the word means rain, that is "if it doesn't rain," in the first line, in the last line it means death. Besides spelling doom by its failure to rain, when it rains it also has negative implications on the lives of the people (as we shall see later in the poetry of Zimunya) revealing the ugly and painful side of rural existence. Hove also shows the hardships associated with rural life in the poem "You Will Forget" (*RHH* 3). The poem catalogues the challenges of life in the country – particularly for women – which someone who stays "in comfort too long" is likely to forget: the weight of a water pot on a bald head, the weight of bundles of grass on a sinewy neck, and the pain of childbirth without a nurse, among other things. The suffering and pain of rural life here is shown to affect women more than men possibly because the men might have migrated to the towns and mines leaving women to fend for themselves and their children in the new capitalist economy of the coloniser. This comes through in the stanza where Hove tells us that "if you stay in comfort too long"

> You will forget
> the weight of three bundles of thatch grass
> on the sinewy neck of the woman
> whose baby cries on her back
> for a blade of grass in its eyes

And later when he says

> You will forget
> the wailing in the valley

of women losing a husband in the mines.

Like Hove, Zimunya also touches on the hardships of rural existence. In "Cattle in the Rain" (*TT* 5-6) we come face to face with the suffering rain brings to a herdboy herding cattle while it is raining. Cattle held, and still hold, great symbolic capital among the Shona. A number of Zimbabwean writers Veit-Wild interviewed reported having herded cattle as children (Veit-Wild 1993). But the significance of cattle among the Shona is brought out forcefully by Lawrence Vambe, whom I quote at length, when he says

> [c]attle were as important to my people [the VaShawasha of the Zezuru group of Shona people] as the white man's bank account. All day the drama of the inextricable relationship between men and cattle was constantly being played out in one form or another, so that one soon learned that cattle represented a man's or a woman's security, livelihood and almost their entire purpose for living. The whole social, psychological and tribal standing of a man depended on the number of cattle he possessed. They bought him a wife or wives; they earned him respect and admiration, and since the arrival of the white man, cattle, like maize and rukweza [finger millet,] had considerable cash value with which one could buy clothes, food and in a way power as well.

Vambe goes on to say that

> [t]he drive to possess cattle, like money in white societies, seemed to be the root of all good and all evil in the tribe. Cattle caused men to be good, generous and kind toward their fellow men, if they considered they had enough of them, or to be hard and vicious, if their interests were at risk. In short, they constituted one of the most powerful motivating forces in the individual members of the tribe; they were at the bottom of most tribal disputes, rituals and almost every form of friendly or hostile communication between men and men, women and men, or women and women (Vambe, *An Ill-Fated People* 2-3).

In the poem "Cattle in the Rain" the poet, who is prompted by the sight of rain, muses:

> Nothing has no end,
> it is true.
> This rain used to sock (sic) us in the pastures
> and the cattle would not stop to graze,
> they would not be driven to the kraal,
> it made me cry and curse sometimes
> and I used to wish I were born differently (5).

The poet-protagonist here remembers the coldness and discomfort the rain used to bring for him as he herded cattle out in the bush. Beside the rain, some of the painful experiences include being stung by wasps, covering oneself with a smelling jute sack

to keep the rain out, and having "wet thorns snap[…] at random in your benumbed feet" (5). The poet also suspects that the behaviour of the cattle was calculated to exacerbate his suffering. Gatooma, the ox, features as the perpetrator of more suffering for the herdboy:

> This ox, tail high,
> in two sniffs and a cajole
> all meant to humiliate
> would crash through the thin bush
> leaving me running weakly
> sobbing at each step (5)

The anthropomorphised cattle here emerge as calculating and insensitive to the plight of the suffering boy. However, the cattle in the poem are tangential and are used as a mere template against which the suffering of the hapless herdboy is depicted.

Similar suffering is also noticeable in "The Herdboy" (*TT* 8-9). Here too

> A boy tires himself driving a restive herd to the kraal,
> sheltered in a coned sack smelling of wet nights
> and the rain drenches him down to the unpatched
> bottom
> and his shoeless feet dabble through the water (8).

The "wet nights" in the expression "a coned sack smelling of wet nights" refers to the fact that the sack smelled of urine. This means that the sack was used as bedding by young members of the family. The expression "unpatched / bottom" on the other hand refers to the boy's torn pants which exposed his buttocks. The above expressions together with the "shoeless feet" of the boy suggest abject rural poverty. In the poem the boy's suffering continues after successfully driving the cattle into the kraal as he has to accomplish another task:

> Now he struggles to drive the calf out of the pen
> in the brown pool of sludgy cattle dung
> for tomorrow the family want milk.
> The mire sucks his feet and the cows splash it into his
> face:
> all is done, my legs wear stockings of muck (8).

The third person point of view that the poet uses to tell the story in the first three stanzas and the first four lines of the fourth stanza (through the use of third person singular pronouns he/himself/him) gives the impression that the events in the poem happened to someone else. But this impression changes when we suddenly encounter

the first person possessive pronoun "my" in the last line of the fourth stanza. Here we realise that the poet is implicated in the experiences in the poem. The first person pronoun here tells us that the struggling herdboy in the poem is the poet himself, relating his painful memories of childhood. In the first three stanzas then the poet uses "the technique of literary self-effacement as a strategy for excluding his own physical and emotional reaction" (Uledi-Kamanga 43) to the painful memories of his childhood. Like Zimunya in "The Herdboy," another Zimbabwean writer, Ndabaningi Sithole, considers herding cattle a task full of hardships. In an "Autobiographical Introduction" to *African Nationalism* (1959) he writes: "From 7 onwards my life was spent among bellowing bulls, lowing oxen, bleating sheep and goats, baaing lambs. Herding was one of those irksome drudgeries. Like all other boys I disliked it. I envied men because they had done their stint. I longed to grow into a man quickly and be done with it" (qtd. by Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 36).

Apart from the hardships that came with herding cattle and inclement weather, colonialism and colonial capitalism are another cause of rural suffering and poverty in Hove and Zimunya's poetry. In the eponymous "Red Hills of Home" (*RHH* 1-2) Chenjerai Hove captures the disintegration of social life and ecological communion in the country as a result of the colonial encounter. In the first stanza the speaker tells of how his father grew up in the rural country,

> [..] tuning his heart
> to the sound of the owl from the moist green hills
> [while] beyond, the eagle swam in the air
> [and] mother-ant dragged an unknown victim to a known hole
> printed on the familiar unreceding earth (1).

The expression "tuning his heart / to the sound of the owl" here refers to his consciousness or awareness or recognition of the animals and nature around him, building their songs into his "consciousness as a way of […] interpreting reality" (Obiechina 43). The description of the hills as "moist" and "green" in the expression "moist green hills" highlights the fact that the hills are a healthy ecosystem conducive to life that thrives in their midst. The eagle is said to swim in the air to suggest the smoothness of her movements as she glides in the sky and the harmoniousness of the scene being described. This harmoniousness is however interrupted/ruptured by the mention of "mother-ant drag[ing] an unknown victim" in the next line. The verb "drag" suggests the heavy weight of the victim and struggle as the victim resists being

taken into the ant's hole. Here nature emerges as violent and cruel. The expression "familiar unreceding earth" underlines the earth's enduring physical presence, its permanence and reliability as the anchor of all life.

In the poem extract above, as Muponde rightly observes, "[t]here is spiritual communion between man and insect, and man and bird, quietly living in their own ways and governed by their own laws." However, Muponde misses an essential point when he says "[t]here is no disruption of the vital process of life in this idyllic ecological intercourse" (*Zimbabwean Literature* 53). The ant's act of dragging a victim belies the idyllic nature of the "ecological intercourse" in this context. Here Hove seems to suggest that violence and exploitation of one animal by another is an essential aspect of life.

When we get to the second stanza we learn that the father had died seven years before, "underground," which suggests that he died in a mine. Hove then proceeds to contrast two periods, then (the days of the father) and now (the speaker's own time) when he writes:

> Now the featherless eagle, like roast meat,
> recites the misery of the dusty sky.
> Mother-ant never surfaces
> for father is enough meat, underground.
> The green hills of home died,
> Red hills cut the sky
> and the nearby sooty homes of peasants
> live under the teeth of the roaring bulldozer (1).

The phrase "for father is enough meat, underground" reveals that in the poet-protagonist's imagination, the ant never "surfaces" because she is feasting on the remains of his dead father who is buried underground. From the quotation above we notice that the ecological intercourse that characterised the days of the father is no longer there now as the eagle that once "swam in the air" is featherless, "like roast meat," and "recites the misery of the dusty sky." The eagle has metamorphosed into a strange creature that prophesies doom for the people. The sky is dusty either because of agricultural activities in the white-owned farms or because of the dust rising from the dry and overcrowded reserves (Machingaidze 1991) where Africans found themselves following the land dispossession drive by the settler colonialists. Regarding land dispossession in colonial Zimbabwe Alexander Kanengoni observes that

> [b]etween the Rudd Concession of 1888 and the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 lay a plethora of legal and statutory instruments that had one overriding intention, to consolidate the white man's grip on the land. The black person was systematically marginalised, pushed further and further from the fertile lands in the centre of the country to the arid and barren soils along the borders. These acts included the Land Apportionment Act of 1931 [sic], the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 and the Land Tenure act 1969 (48).[79]

In the poem, the now (the speakers day), unlike the days of the father, is characterised by "Red hills cut[ting] the sky," following the death or disappearance of "The green hills" from the landscape. The hills change from green to red as they are denuded following the clearing of vegetation and exposure of the red soil that characterises the hills around the area where Hove was born.[80] The hills' jutting out, their rising into the sky, is compared to cutting/pricking the sky while the peasant's homes are described as "sooty" to emphasise their ugliness and unappealing appearance. The reference to the "teeth" of the bulldozer suggests the predatory and menacing nature of the bulldozer which devours or destroys the homes of the peasants as they are evicted from land appropriated by the colonialist.

We also read in the poem that dying along with "The green hills of home" "are the songs / of the seasons that father once sang" (1). As we saw in Hove's "Seasons Dance" (*RHH* 56), people, especially children, in rural Zimbabwe celebrated or welcomed the seasons with joyful songs. But in this poem Hove suggests that with the

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[79] The Rudd Concession of 1888 was a written mining agreement secured through deceit and dishonesty by Charles Rudd (a business associate of Cecil John Rhodes) from Lobengula, King of Matebeleland on October 30, 1888 (Vambe, *An Ill-Fated People* chap. 6). The agreement led to the eventual takeover by whites of the land that was later named Rhodesia. The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 is an agreement the warring parties in Zimbabwe signed in London on 21 December 1979 to end the war of liberation and pave way for the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 was aimed at formalising "separation by law, land between blacks and whites [following] the deliberations and recommendations of the Morris Carter Commission of 1925" (Land Issue- Fact Sheet np.) The act "divided the whole country into Native Reserves, Purchase areas and European areas, allocating the fertile lands to the Europeans and the poor areas to the reserves" (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 23). The Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 "meant to enforce private ownership of land, destocking and conservation practices on black small holders" (Land Issue-Fact Sheet np.) "in the interest of capitalist economic development, particularly of the white minority" (Machingaidze 588). The Land Tenure Act of 1969, according to Denis Nkala, "was aimed at applying land use to effect conservation in the [Communal Areas]" or reserves. Enforcement of this act "was the primary means to achieve conservation" (64).

[80] Chenjarai Hove was born in 1954 near Zvishavane, a mining town in Zimbabwe's Midlands Province. "Zvishavane is a Shona name, which is said to be derived from 'zvikomo zvishava,' which means 'red hills.' The precise meaning of Zvishavane is said to be 'reddish or "reddened" hills,' referring to the many surrounding low hills that are characterized by red soil." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zvishavane,_Zimbabwe)

advent of colonialism such songs die as misery and suffering increase. Further, like in Zimunya's "Valley of Mawewe" where the natives' sacred caves are dynamited and desecrated by Rhodes and his people, here too "the sacred hill bleeds / robbed even of her decent name" (2). The bleeding of the hill is a metaphorical reference both to the red soil, that invites the description "red hills," and the abuse of the environment through agricultural activity. The hill's decent name refers to the hallowed reputation the hills and the land had in the eyes of the locals, a reputation that the new-comers completely ignore. Even worse, we hear in the poem that burying the dead in this fast disappearing home is no longer safe as a bulldozer comes "to scatter these malnourished bones" (2). The land policies of the colonialists which uprooted people from their ancestral homes into the reserves and desecrated the graves of the natives' ancestors through agriculture, is what Hove alludes to here. The cannibalistic colonialists ("whose mouths eat man," which refers to their cruelty and insensitivity) emerge as evil and greedy, while the bulldozer acts as a symbol of the colonialists' land-grabbing, violence and ecological destruction. When we get to the last stanza the rural home is no longer what it used to be. Exile for the villagers looms in the air, exile to the reserves or to the mines to cheaply sell their labour to colonial capitalism:

> Red hills, and the smell of exile
> Exile breathing over our shoulder
> In a race that already looks desperate.
> Red hills, and the pulse of exile
> Telling us this is home no more (2).

Exile here is personified as a fiend who breathes over the people's shoulders, reminding them of the impending exile, and signalling its inevitability. This inevitability of exile adds to the desperation of the black people who have already lost their freedom and land.

The disruption and destruction of peasant agriculture, like the imposition of taxes on the black population, was a carefully orchestrated measure to induce men to seek work in the mines and white farms (Bourdillon 103, Rakodi 4). The migration and land dispossession are a form of exile in the poem. In this narrative of loss, where constant reference to the colour red, like the bloody hands on the collection's cover, is suggestive of bloodshed and violence, Hove dismisses the idea of the country as home after the colonial violence and dispossession. The old ways of life are disappearing while suffering and woe hang in the air. The harmony that existed between humans,

animals and their land is all but destroyed. In this poem Hove touches on one of the major themes of Zimbabwean literature, that of land (see Muponde 2004). As a people who see the land not simply as property or an economic asset but as something that binds the people together as it "links past and present, the dead and the living, the chief and his people," the colonial dispossession of land was a big blow to the Shona (Bourdillon 88-89).

In his "No Songs" (*TT* 10-11) Zimunya laments his people's loss of tradition mainly as a result of the colonial encounter which introduces new ways of seeing the world. For the poet the people's alienation from their spiritual ways of life, from their ancestors, shrines, sacred caves and gods of rain, could be the cause of the drought that now afflicts the land. In this drought-hit landscape an eerie silence descends on the land as we read:

> No songs of cicadas—
> only a sighing silence
> where, once,
> as I walked below the yellow leaves
> of fresh foliage,
> a spray of urine
> moistened my face
> and a shrill symphony
> waned into my ears (10).

For the poet-protagonist the "urine" here is not a bad thing but a positive symbol of thriving life. The lines above symbolically express the existential despair caused by the drought, real or metaphorical, triggered by the people's abandonment of spiritual ways following the colonial encounter. While the depiction of the country here may to some extent reflect the material situation during a drought, to claim that the colonial encounter and the drought that followed the people's alienation from their gods rendered the country lifeless would be exaggerating the consequences of the two events.

The poem is a call to self-rediscovery, to return to the old religious ways of the ancestors. Lamenting the people's loss of the ecological ways of the ancestors the poet-protagonist wonders:

> Where shall we find the way back?
> Opaque darkness guards our exit
> we have groped and groped until

> our eyes were almost blind and
> it was hard to rediscover.

Hopelessness and pessimism for the possibility of rediscovery characterise the poet-protagonist's feelings here as highlighted by the "Opaque darkness" guarding the only possible exit for the people and their near-blindness and therefore difficulty in finding the way back. Besides, the poet-protagonist believes that by the time the people will realise how far they have strayed and seek to retrace their footsteps it will be too late, "the lion tongue of death will be licking / the last gush of blood from our souls" (11) – that is, the people will almost be dead, culturally.

In their poems here Hove and Zimunya show that colonialism did not only rob the people of their much priced land, it also led to a spiritual death and exile, to the loss of culture and old ways of seeing and imagining the world. For both poets the beauty of the rural area (of the countryside) and the people's freedom is being spoilt by the new economic ways such as mining and commercial agriculture (and their associated colonial violence, intolerance, racism and disrespect of black workers) which lead to appropriation and carving of the land into farms where Africans became trespassers, the clearing of vast tracts of land and the denudation of hills and mountains. In his *An Ill-Fated People* Vambe tells us that when Europeans bought (from the colonial establishment) the land that formerly belonged to the Africans they put restrictions on the local Africans' freedom of movement, much to the latter's resentment, as they "erected barriers, such as fencing wire, gates and regulations to deter African or animal trespassers, in some cases employing power-drunk native patrolmen to keep out intruders" (213). The agricultural and mining activities of the whites contributed to environmental degradation in Zimbabwe. In contrasting African from European land use in Zimbabwe Denis Nkala observes that

> [t]he small-scale agricultural activity, mining and quarrying by the local population did not threaten the environment in the past. The traditional resource use was conservation oriented. In agriculture, indigenous methods used to rely on growing a mixture of crops, including legumes that replenished nitrogen in the soil. Livestock were kept to provide manure. Tree populations were left in the field, thus providing a blanket for moisture conservation. The cultivation methods with minimum tilling helped to maintain soil structure and fertility. [But a]fter the takeover of the land and the introduction of settler land-use procedures, environmental damage increased considerably (63).

Sam Moyo and Prosper Matondi also observe that "in the white settler farming areas, there was an increase in soil degradation because of poor land husbandry by settler

farmers," a development that "created localised erosion and other forms of degradation on white settler lands" (65-66). For the poets what will be left for the pristine landscape are memories of its former glory in the minds of those privileged enough to have seen it in its grandeur.

The effects of colonialism and the ensuing drought on the land inevitably affect animals and the development of human-animal relationships. In Hove's "Red Hills of Home" the ecological harmony between humans and animals is interfered with and instead of humans tuning their hearts "to the sound of the owl from the moist green hills" they smell exile, as what used to be home is transformed by colonial capitalism into an alien and oppressive landscape. In Zimunya's "No Songs" the people's alienation from the ways of their ancestors triggers a drought that affects animal life. In the relentless heat of the drought and the resultant famine birds are rendered silent and inactive, preferring not to whistle, flutter or flap "amid the brown fingers of trees / without leaves" (10), that is, dry branches. Locust-hunting rooks, a constant feature in the blue sky in the time of plenty, disappear from the landscape in this time of famine.

The poem "Let Me Go" (*CDCL* 27) is Zimunya's attempt to experience the beauty of the pristine, unspoilt landscape of his home and preserve its memory before it is completely wiped out. The poet begs:

> Let me go to the eastern mountains, my fellow citizen,
> for I hear strange news of things afoot
> of villages flourishing where once forests stood
> and fields where once cattle grazed and watered
> that I may breathe the last of ancient sunsets (27).

In the poem the beautiful landscape of the poet's eastern highlands is being destroyed. Forests are being cleared to pave way for human settlement, old places of worship are being desecrated, and the poet quests to experience the former glory and beauty of the landscape before it is completely wiped out; to kneel again "And worship the gods of my forefathers / before the saw and the axe make bald heads of hills / laying naked the spirits of the land as never before" and reducing the mountains to mere skeletons. Here the poet's desire to go back to the rural country is inspired by the fear of forgetting the beauty of the mountains and "the world of [his] boyhood once." But the journey back home is also a quest for rejuvenation and revitalisation from nature as the poet also wishes to be "reborn in a baptism of the last ancient sunset."

Robert Muponde argues that while Hove rejects the rural home as it "is not home at all but an aftermath of an invisible war" Zimunya "still holds that there is something of value in the rural home despite the deep cracks and disruptions occasioned by colonialism"(*Zimbabwean Literature* 55). Contrary to this view, as the above poem shows, Zimunya is aware that the value of the rural home is fast disappearing through the transformations that render it unliveable and unlovable. For Zimunya, his home in the east will soon cease to be the home that once was. In this poem too Zimunya shows his ecological sensibility as he despairs about the destruction of forests and the denudation of the beautiful mountains of his home. Nevertheless, the picture of the persona here is of an impotent and helpless individual who instead of acting against the destruction of the pristine land, only wishes to see the mountains, hills and valleys in their majestic beauty once more before the agents of destruction fully succeed.

Having looked at the way Hove and Zimunya use animals, animal and landscape imagery to express their conceptualisation and construction of rural landscape, I now wish to look at how these poets use animals (especially the dog in Zimunya's poetry) and animal imagery to conceptualise and construct the city landscape in Zimbabwe. However, before analysing the selected poems in which the poets explore "cityness" we need to pause briefly to take a look at the attitudes that have gathered around the domestic dog and the city.

5.0 The Dog and the City: Victims of Ambivalence

Cities have engaged the imagination of many people both in Africa and beyond since their very beginning. While some people see the city as paradise, a place of hope and fulfilment, freedom and opportunity, others view it as a version of hell on earth, an emblem of cultural decay and a nexus of corruption, perversion, greed, destruction and death. Ambivalence and contradictory views therefore surround the ways in which the city has been perceived and imagined in literature and culture over the years, since the days of Babylon, Troy, Carthage and Sodom and Gomorrah (Pike 6-7). In Western literature contradictory perceptions of the city abound (Williams 1975, Pike 1981, Lees 1985, Preston and Simpson-Housley 1994, Lehan 1998). While some writers focus on the alienation, oppression, and greed, among other evils, in the city, others dwell on the opportunities and freedom the city can offer. And yet others show the ambiguity of the city which "may be a location both threatening and

alluring, menacing and exciting" (Preston and Simpson-Housley 4). Among many Christians the city is the paragon of evil mainly because in biblical and other literature by "early Christian writers" the city (for example Babylon, Nineveh, and Sodom and Gomorrah) is "regularly excoriated as a symbol of man's estrangement from God and as the theater [sic] of man's spiritual degeneration" (Lees 6). One such writer is Saint Augustine, the Catholic theologian of the Middle Ages, who in contrasting the city of man with the city of God in his book, *The City of God*, "depicted the city of man as the scene of supreme sin and folly" (ibid. 7).

Cities such as London, Paris and New York, among many others, have been "celebrated and condemned, reprobated and praised, loved and hated by writers who discerned in them the worst and the best that life had to offer" (ibid. 6). Charles Dickens saw the city (London especially) both as "lure and trap: a lure to those who are called to it as if by a magnet, because only the city offers the means of realizing a heightened conception of self; a trap in its workings, which lead to human destruction," desolation and death (Lehan 39-40, Lees 37, see also Welsh 1971). Although London inspired his writings in the sense that the city provided the setting and the material or subject matter for most of his writings he, as Lees observes, understood the city in general and London in particular "in terms of what he […] called 'the attraction of repulsion'" (Lees 37). Apart from Dickens, some of the notable critics of the city of London in Victorian times are Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Robert Mudie, and William Blake. According to Lees, John Ruskin once referred to London as "that great foul city of London there, – rattling, growling, smoking, stinking, – a ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore" (qtd. by Lees 38). With regard to Mudie, whose censorious view of London was signalled in the title of his book, *London and the Londoners: Or a Second Judgement of Babylon the Great*, Lees observes that his "denunciation of the capital was as biblical in its thrust and tone as if it had been written by a clergyman" (33). The experiences of the Romantic writer William Blake in the city, "the misery [he] observed and the loneliness [he] felt while walking among [his] fellow urbanites," resulted in his association of the city with a "sense of gloomy foreboding and alienation" (ibid. 9). Blake evokes this misery and gloom in his poem "London" which partly reads:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street,
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,

And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear (102).

Although some writers excoriated and condemned the city (of London) others loved it. Some of the "least ambivalent city lovers" amongst the men of letters in Victorian times, according to Lees, were James Boswell and Samuel Johnson. Boswell, Lees writes, "thrilled to London's pulsating variety, which he compared 'to a museum, a garden, to endless musical combinations'. The streets, crowds, and sights of the city intoxicated him, infusing him with energy he could feel nowhere else and providing him with a theatre [sic] in which to discover and display his own personality." As for Johnson, whom Lees refers to as "the lover of London *par excellence*," he "prized the capital not only for the diversity of its pleasures but also for […] chasten[ing] the ambition and humbl[ing] the pride of all men who had an inflated sense of their own importance, and […] offer[ing] companionship and a sense of community to Johnson himself, who was haunted by a fear of solitude" (Lees 8, italics in original).

Like London, the French capital Paris had and still has her own critics and supporters as well. One well known French writer and philosopher who was also a critic of Paris was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who, in his book *Emile*, branded Paris a "city of noise, of smoke, and of mud'." Rousseau saw Paris as a "'moloch'[81] that fed greedily on blood supplied by the provinces and corrupted those whom it did not kill" (ibid. 9). Other French writers such as Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, and Charles Baudelaire also held critical or censorious views of Paris. Unlike these writers, Emile Zola who, although he "gave his readers abundant evidence not only of poverty but also of selfishness and corruption in the French capital," "repeatedly evoked memories of the city's role as an agent of praiseworthy changes in the past" and was hopeful of the city's continued contribution to civilization in the future (ibid. 211-12).

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[81] Moloch (also Molech, Molekh, Molek, or Moloc) "is the name of an ancient Semitic god." However "[i]n modern English usage, "Moloch" can refer derivatively to any person or thing which demands or requires costly sacrifices" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moloch).

In America the writer Edgar Allan Poe saw cities, be they of ancient civilisation or those of his day, as "inseparable from the inevitability of death" (Lehan 171).

Unlike the city critics, most of the writers who defended the city or spoke in favour of it in the nineteenth century "recognized the close links among the city, industry, and commerce, and they welcomed the expansion of all three as the harbinger of a better life for the great bulk of [a] nation's inhabitants" (Lees 40). For such writers, as for many other writers today, the city "functioned […] as a source not only of material progress but also of mental and aesthetic progress" (ibid. 201). To the city defenders something good was to be found even in the overcrowding in the city as they believed that "[t]he intellectual stimulation that individuals derived from living in proximity to one another provided the key to the city's beneficence in general." As one such defender, Robert Vaughan, declared "[t]he picturesque ... may be with the country', […] but the intellectual ... must be with the town" for "[o]nly through association could 'the aptitudes of the human mind' attain their full potential" (qtd. by Lees 45).

For many people in Africa, writers and ordinary people alike, (like those in Western Europe or America) the city is a place of suffering, struggle and evil. It is a place of "witness to the growing loss of shared conventions and values, with consequent weakening of the social fabric" (Pike 100). In the city morality is suspended and the struggle for survival guides all human endeavours. For many others still, the city is a place of opportunities where the brave realise their dreams of a good life and reinvent themselves. It is a place of hopes and dreams of a good life, a factor that motivates people to migrate from the rural areas to the city (Barnes and Win 1992). Like elsewhere in the world, in Africa, the pull of the city rests in its "prospect of economic advancement" (Lees 2).

Considering the question why the city (Nairobi) is so central in Kenyan popular literature J. Roger Kurtz makes the valid observation that "the city is the venue for fundamental conflicts and contradictions on all levels of the social formation: economic, political, legal, religious and cultural," issues that are the concerns of the Kenyan writers. The city is therefore a "site and symbol of these conflicts […]." ("Post-marked Nairobi" 103). Unsurprisingly, variation, ambiguity and contradictoriness attend the ways in which Kenyan writers read and write the city. For some writers such as Leonard Kibera the city is a wasteland, an inhospitable place of darkness, "depression and death," (Kurtz, *Urban Obsessions* 91) while for others it

is a place of hope, life, adventure; a home away from home, despite its hostile and forbidding aspects. Writers of popular fiction such Charles Mangua and David Maillu, according to Kurtz, "alternately celebrate the opportunities amid the bright lights of the city or excoriate its corrupt, parasitical nature," while others such as Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye "record the ways that ordinary Nairobians manage to find hope and home in this often hostile urban environment" (ibid. 5).

To highlight the city's seductive and destructive nature the Kenyan writer David Maillu, portrays the city as female (Kurtz, "Post-marked Nairobi" 107). According to Kurtz, in Maillu's epic novel *Broken Drum* the city emerges as a "seductress, who traps and degrades the African male." Here the city is gendered female as its characteristics are seen to be similar to the socially constructed negative image of femininity: "Like the city, women are only concerned with appearances and money. Like the city, they are parasites. Like the city, they are prostitutes" (ibid. 107-108).[82]

Contrary to Maillu's sexist views above, other Kenyan writers, especially women writers such as Muthoni Likimani, Asenath Bole Odaga and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, among others, show that "the city can also offer women positive alternatives to the patriarchal social organization of rural areas" (Kurtz, *Urban Obsessions* 75). In their works

> they also suggest that the city, because it disrupts traditional social patterns, and despite its customary nature as a male environment, can be a place where women are able to create some measure of personal emancipation[; a place where they] can free themselves from dependence on fathers, husbands or other men – particularly if they can find employment[; and] a complex enough place to allow some maneuvering [sic] room for women" (ibid. 137).

These writers offer a corrective reading to the masculinist and sexist perception of the city by male writers who depict urban space as female and immoral. Contrary to the characterisation of the city "as a place of loneliness, corruption, and despair" in male authored works, for the female writers the city "offers women […] the opportunity to

[82] The works of other male Kenyan writers such as Charles Mangua and Meja Mwangi also show a similar stereotypical representation of women, especially urban women, as prostitutes, liars and cheats (Nelson 1996). Interestingly, according to Nici Nelson, "[r]ural women are represented [in Kenyan popular novels in English] as wives and mothers" and "[i]n none of these novels is there a negative description of a rural mother". Unlike the corrupt urban woman, the rural mother is "independent, strong, supportive and holds the rural home together" (154-155). There is therefore nostalgia in these "city novels" for the oppressive hierarchical patriarchal order of the rural areas that relegated women to the subservient role of wifehood and motherhood.

overcome the loneliness, passivity, and betrayal that […] plague[s] them" in the rural areas (ibid. 154).

The image of the city is no less bleak and contradictory in the West African novel. Emmanuel Obiechina tells us that most of the West African urban novels, such as those set in Lagos, bring to the readers' awareness

> the constant noise of traffic, the honking of cars, the loud-speakers blaring out "high life" tunes from record shops or advertising articles from commercial vans; of the hawkers crying their wares along the streets; of the unstable crowds massing wherever there is an incident, holding up traffic and adding to the hubbub; of the crowded slums side by side with ultra-modern office blocks; at night, of the radiant street lamps, the desperate gaiety of night-club life and the sordid activities in the dingy, ill-lit areas inhabited by the underworld, the pimps and the prostitutes. (149)

Captured in these novels therefore is the vibrancy and allure of city life as well as its challenges and disappointments. The quotation above also highlights what Georg Simmel refers to as the "*intensification of nervous stimulation*" that constitutes "[t]he psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality" (409-410, italics in original). Simmel observes that the city is characterised by "rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions." He goes on to say that "[w]ith each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life" (410). For Simmel the "*intensification of nervous stimulation*" leads to a heightened consciousness and sophistication of the urban dweller as opposed to someone living in the country. The noise – "the honking of cars, the loud-speakers blaring out 'high life' tunes," "the hawkers crying their wares along the streets" – "the radiant street lamps" and "ill-lit areas inhabited by the underworld" in the quote from Obiechina above contribute to the "nervous stimulation" that leads to heightened consciousness and sophistication of those living in their midst.

Unlike the figure of the flaneur (which suggests strolling, loafing, and sauntering) of the Western city, the figures we encounter most in African writing (although not in the poetry discussed here as the reader will notice) are of people who struggle to make a living against all odds.

Like Lagos or Nairobi, Johannesburg, the biggest city in Southern Africa, has received a similar ambivalent representation in literature. In her analysis of some texts

that depict Johannesburg, Sarah Nuttall finds in these texts "an intricate entanglement of éclat and sombreness, light and dark, comprehension and bewilderment, polis and necropolis, desegregation and resegragation" (33). Thus the city is both viewed positively and negatively. And this negativity is captured by Lesego Rampolokeng (2004) who sees Johannesburg as a place of "Deceptions and lies [where]/ Dreams come […] to die" (qtd. by Nuttall, *Entanglement* 35). The fact that dreams come to die in the city reveals the frustrations and sense of alienation of the migrants who come to the city as a place of promise and hope only to be met by suffering and frustration. Some of these frustrated people turn to crime for survival.

One wonders, why is there so much ambiguity and contradictoriness in perceptions, imaginations, readings and writings of the city? It is difficult to provide a hard and fast answer to such a question. But one thing is clear: the root of the contradictoriness and ambivalence is the experiential aspect of the urban space, the various ways in which people experience the city. As Preston and Simpson-Housley rightly observe "[t]he city is an aggregation or accumulation, not just in demographic, economic or planning terms, but also in terms of feeling and emotion. Cities thus become more than their built environment, more than a set of class or economic relationships; they are also an experience to be lived, suffered, undergone[,]" an experience full of "challenges, opportunities, stresses and frustrations" (1-2). The city is a place where a lot of people from different backgrounds congregate. In a place like that conflicts and contradiction of beliefs, world views, interests and behaviour in the struggle for survival are bound to be more pronounced and conspicuous as opposed to the rural areas. It is partly because of the conspicuous clash of interests and worldviews and the differences in ways of experiencing the urban space that the city becomes a site for the projection of fears of social and political change or a scapegoat for social ills affecting society at particular moments in history, in which case writers often "suggest that [cities] are degrading the moral and cultural life of the country" (Kurtz, *Urban Obsessions* 85).

Like the city, the domestic dog is a victim of ambivalence and contradictoriness in the way it is perceived, imagined and represented. For some people the dog is the epitome of friendliness, loyalty and companionship. In Britain and North America, for example, the dog which is greatly admired and loved is regarded as "Man's best friend." It is unsurprising therefore that it is anthropomorphised and treated like a human child. For others, the dog is a filthy, ugly

and vicious creature that attacks harmless people without provocation and spreads fatal diseases, a creature whose presence in society they have no choice but to endure. However, even among those who regard it as a friend, a hunting partner or companion, equivocal feelings about the dog are the norm and the creature is often treated with contempt and brutality. In some cases the dog's other admirable qualities have not stopped it from being a victim of the pot (Serpell, "From Paragon" 249-250). Ambivalence therefore attends the life of the dog from the day of its birth to its grave, be it underground or on the earth's surface.[83]

Symbolically dogs have also proved useful to the fertile human imagination. Their names have been used among the Shona, for example, as a means of communication with an unlikeable neighbour (Tatira 2004). In myth, sometimes even in those belonging to the same community, the dog is both a traitor and a saviour.[84] In other myths, cultural beliefs and legends the dog is revered as a conductor of spirits to the next world (Serpall, 1995b, De Vidas 2002) and guardian of the gate to the next world, or denigrated and associated with death and evil. In the bible the dog is associated with evil, moral degeneration and wicked people who will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven, such people as fornicators, murderers and idolaters, among others (Sax 2001).

It is not surprising therefore that in many traditions the epithet 'dog' is a marker of contempt and mistrust (Sax 90) which at once presents the creature and the

[83] In societies where the dog earns respect and affection as a hunting partner or where it is believed to be a spiritual guide to its dead master to the underworld (Serpell, "From Paragon" 248, De Vidas 2002), it is also treated as a pariah, often insulted, abused and tormented by the owners. In western society where dogs are pampered and spoiled, "much of the dog's normal behavioural repertoire, its gluttony, sexual promiscuity, olfactory preoccupations, toilet habits, and occasional naked hostility towards strangers and visitors, can be a source of anguish and embarrassment [sic] to many owners" (Serpell, "From Paragon" 252) – the anthropomorphism notwithstanding. Besides, the dog's famous loyalty and fawning eagerness to please are also a source of ambivalent feelings towards it. While this behaviour endears it to its owners, sometimes it triggers ridicule for it as it is seen as sycophantic, servile and obsequious. It is not surprising, therefore, that dramatists such as William Shakespeare have used the dog as a symbol of the human flatterer and fawner in their works (Lewis 1).

[84] Among the Beng of Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) for example, the dog is held responsible for death that confronts humanity. Sent along with Cat to deliver a message to Sky that humans wanted reincarnation after death, Dog procrastinated along the way, eating bones that he stumbled upon, leaving Cat to go ahead of him. Cat who hadn't understood the message well distorted it when he delivered it to Sky which resulted in the irreversible death that humans suffer to this day. But among the Beng, Dog rather than Cat is blamed for the mix up in the message and held responsible for the death of humans. Yet in another Beng myth the first human pair hatched from an egg that Dog found and protected in an enclosure. Later when animals connived to kill the humans who were hunting and killing them, Dog warned humans of the impending attack and they managed to defend themselves and defeated the animals, dispersing them around the world. In this myth the dog is an ally, rather than a traitor, a creator rather than a destroyer. However, the contradictory nature of the dog's roles in these myths could explain the ambivalent manner with which the dog is perceived and treated in Beng society (Gottlieb 1986).

person thus designated "as a symbol of the pariah, the degraded outcast of human society" (Serpell 250). More often than not in allegorical use it is the dog's less attractive characteristics that are referred to. Being called a dog, therefore, like being called an animal, is demeaning and belittling. It means one is less than human; one is at the base of humanity. The epithet dog, as Ndebele shows in his essay "The Year of the Dog: A Journey of the Imagination" "is a pervasive metaphor regularly used [in South Africa] to justify righteous brutality" (253). Ndebele uses the call by an African National Congress (ANC) Youth League spokesperson, Zizi Kodwa, to beat Jacob Zuma's critics or detractors during his (Zuma's) rape trial in 2006 as a point of departure in an imaginative journey where he exposes the use of the dog as a symbol of abuse and calls for better treatment of the creature. In his incitement of violence outside the court where Zuma was being tried Kodwa, using the symbol of the dog, "called for 'the dogs to be beaten until their owners and handlers [that is, supporters] emerge'" (251). Ndebele then argues that in the South African society, and indeed in many other societies, "the word 'dog' is never far away in the imagining of violence and abuse" and the expression "'*Nja-mgodoyi*!', starving dog, is an insult that lays the ground for the beating of someone" (253).

Steve Baker observes that "casting of a hated or despised human into the role or image of an animal is […] a very frequent and effective means of stereotyping them, of objectifying them, and rendering them inferior" (113). Ndebele's dealing with the dog in his essay, however, goes beyond mere "stereotyping[,] objectifying […], and rendering [such people] inferior" to show that this tendency also justifies their abuse, oppression and exploitation, on racial, class, or political grounds, among others. Besides, unlike the epithet "animal", "dog" carries with it associations of filthy and disgusting behaviour, promiscuity, sycophancy, obsequiousness, stupidity, and immorality, among others.

It is some of these negative attributes and associations of the dog that Musa Zimunya draws from when he uses the mangy dog as a metaphor in his poems about the city in *Country Dawns and City Lights*. The city, like the dog, suggests for some people squalor, moral degeneration and death. The use of the dog as a metaphor for the city therefore exploits this symbolic similarity between the two entities. The association of the dog and the city also has to do with the imagined "predatoriness[…] in the city organism" (Preston and Simpson-Housley 10), which swallows up people from the country and destroys them, and the alleged corrupt nature of the city which

compares with that of the dog. Like the dog, the city is an epitome of greed, and like the dog the city is vicious and antithetical to life. Further, like the dog, the city is associated with prostitution and promiscuity. It is not uncommon to hear people say men are dogs. This statement is meant to highlight the sexist and stereotypical view of men as promiscuous. Promiscuity as a common denominator between the dog and the city necessitates the symbolic use of the dog in the moralist reading of the city in Zimunya's poetry. As we shall see later, figures of sexual promiscuity feature predominantly in Zimunya's poetry about the city. In using the dog as symbol of promiscuity in the city Zimunya also shows how the line between "human' and "animal" is often crafted along the boundary of sexual permissiveness. In J. M Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* Wunderlich and John Bernard share the view that what sets animals apart from humans is their unclean habits which include sexual permissiveness and their lack of shame. Wunderlich observes that "[a]nimals don't hide their excretions, they perform sex in the open. They have no sense of shame, we say: that is what makes them different from us. But the basic idea remains uncleanness. Animals have unclean habits, so they are excluded. Shame makes human beings of us, shame of uncleanness" (40). Sexuality and the idea of shame have also been used in racial classifications of humans. In colonialist and racist discourses the nakedness and alleged sexual licentiousness of blacks (Brantlinger 194-196, Gilman 1985), especially black women whose alleged "animallike sexual appetite went so far as to lead [them] to copulate with apes" (Gilman 212), was considered a marker of their savagery and beastliness, a marker that situated them outside the bounds of humanity.

The question arises: Why does the dog provoke such a degree of ambivalence? One reason would be the closeness of the dog to humans, thus providing us an easy target for our frustrations. De Vidas may have a point in thinking that it is by virtue of the dog's physical and social proximity to humans that its anti/inhuman behaviour provokes antipathy against the creature (542). Secondly, as Elemendorf and Kroeber observed supported by Serpell, the abusive treatment of the dog is a human defence mechanism against the imagined risk of the dog blurring the jealously guarded psychological barriers that separate humans from animals/dogs (254). In the poetry of Zimunya and Hove the positive aspects of the city are suppressed and only its hostile associations emerge. In carrying the burden of a metaphor for the ways of the city, the dog emerges wholly caricatured as a pariah, both filthy and a paragon of evil.

6.0 The City as a Wasteland in Hove and Zimunya

[T]he city is like the throat of a crocodile; it swallows both the dirty and the clean (Hove, *Bones* 13)

In what follows I wish to examine a series of contexts for the "city as wasteland" trope explored above and also hinted at by the epigrammatic quote from Hove's *Bones* (1988). Hove and Zimunya's poetry shows that unlike the country, there are no roots in the city, no memories and no happy moments remembered. In the city all is engulfed in a dark cloud of despair and suffering. For these poets, the country is beautiful, the city is ugly; the country is life-giving and sustaining, the city is destructive; the country holds memories of ancestors and sacred caves, the city is Godless and evil. The city is a place of struggle, indifference, loss of purpose and loss of meaning of life; a place of existential despair (Park np).

The contextual background of this negative perception and portrayal of the city by members of the second generation of Zimbabwean writers to which Hove and Zimunya belong lies in a number of factors. To begin with, "Zimbabwe's urban system, including Harare, is […] a colonial invention" (Rakodi 5) intended for the benefit of whites. Black people were admitted into the city as a source of cheap contracted labour and were expected to return to their rural homelands at the end of their contracts. From the earliest days of urbanisation in Zimbabwe therefore the black person was made to feel as an alien in an urban environment, a place he was not supposed to regard as home. The need for cheap labour and racial segregation with regard to residential areas in the city meant that black people had to be "systematically herded into the sordid depths" of black residential areas such as Harare or Mbare Location, among others, "which existed purely for the convenience and profit of the white man." In these locations the black people's "moral and physical fibre was rapidly undermined" and "the old bonds of tribal and family cohesion, loyalty, discipline and other things which had kept the […] people together in the past" disintegrated (Vambe, *From Rhodesia* 88, *An Ill-Fated People* 199).[85] In the black locations the migrant labourers succumbed to "a regimented existence, in which each person's movements, income, opinions and even visitors, and of course

[85] After independence Zimbabwe's colonial city of Salisbury was renamed Harare after the oldest black location in the city.

drink, interested the big white brother," that is, whites (Vambe, *From Rhodesia* 184). Amongst the measures taken by the colonial authorities to regulate relations between blacks and whites in the city were "[c]hecking African 'passes' by the police, a night curfew, banning of Africans using sidewalks, rigorous traffic controls over 'native scorchers' (African cyclists) and 'ricksha boys', and regulating a new 'etiquette of race relations' (removing the hat before any Europeans, taking off shoes at government offices, etc.)" (Yoshikuni 15). The pass system, according to Tsuneo Yoshikuni, helped to regulate African labour market in favour of the white employers (33). Further, the police in colonial Harare (Salisbury at the time) also frequently raided black locations, thereby keeping "the African population in a permanent state of fear and suspicion" (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 27). Thus from the beginning black people associated the city with violence, perpetrated by the colonial police and the black people themselves (as a result of the tough conditions under which they lived), moral decay and fragmentation of the social fabric. This in spite of the fact that they also found it an exciting place that promised happiness and the good things in life, which is why they flocked there in the first place.

In contrasting the manner of writing of the first and second generations of Zimbabwean writers, Veit-Wild observes that "the writers of Generation 2 developed the urge to write out of negative sentiments: feeling dejected, lost, torn between different sets of values." She goes on to say "[w]hereas the older authors wrote out of hope, the younger ones wrote out of suffering; whereas the first generation's approach was didactic, the second generation wrote, to some extent, for therapeutic reasons." For her this is basically because "[f]or the [second] generation […] the turmoil of migration, urbanisation and rapid social change became the very stuff of life, formed their daily experience from early childhood on and thus shaped their feeling, thinking and writing" (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 155-156).

As children of the 1950s, Hove and Zimunya, like other members of their generation, were witness to "the disintegration of the family through a greatly increased mobility of the African population" into the mines and city at the time (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 156). The boom in trade, commerce and industry experienced by Southern Rhodesia after the Second World War and the loss of rural livelihood following the deprivation of their land under the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, resulted in the disintegration of many sections of African society in Southern Rhodesia. The pain and suffering that accompanied this mobility, the racist policies

the Africans encountered in the towns and cities, and the "materialism and brutalised human relationships, pervasive control and violent oppression by the colonial power" (ibid. 164) engendered feelings of fear and hatred for the oppressor and his creation, the city. Stories of woe, more than of newfound joy and happiness, must have travelled from the city to the rural areas to cement negative attitudes to the city. Later, as adults in post-independence Harare, Zimunya and Hove must have witnessed first hand the decadence, atomism, indifference and the physical and spiritual struggle to survive in the city. The huge volume of stories of woe as compared to the scanty ones of success has resulted in failure, suffering and squalor in the city being reflected more in the poetry than success and happiness. For these poets, the city is a monster which, from the epigram above, swallows and destroys both good and bad people and provokes fear and a sense of insecurity as it destabilises the moral and social values of the rural areas.

In their poems Hove and Zimunya depict the city as a jungle – an iron jungle, that is, a place of great hardships ("Imported Differences" [*UIA* 40-42], "Ask Grandpa" [*TT* 26]). In "Ask Grandpa" the speaker urges the addressee to ask Grandpa "who knows / why cities are jungles / too rough for you" (26). The idea of a city as a jungle suggests hard life, struggle and suffering where only the brave and strong, like epic heroes, emerge victorious. Most of Zimunya's poems about the city, except for "Ask Grandpa," are found in *Country Dawns and City Lights*, particularly in the second section of the collection called "City Lights," the longest section of the volume. This section boasts of thirty-eight poems, fifteen poems more than the first section dealing with country life called "Country Dawns."

Flora [Veit-]Wild is of the view that Zimunya's poems that "describe in many details the glistening but superficial attractions of life in the big city: the misery of the prostitutes hidden under layers of make-up; the pursuit of money; senseless murders; the nightly rendezvous in the delivery lanes; the mangy dogs searching the dustbins for dumped babies" are "an attempt to create […] a Pop Art in a verbal way" (*Patterns* 9). For Michael Chapman, on the other hand, in *Country Dawns and City Lights* "Zimunya offers Eliotesque city sketches of European urban disillusionment that owe little to the "sights, sounds and atmosphere of a medium-sized African city like Harare" (*Southern* 304). While for [Veit-]Wild Zimunya fails to sustain the Pop Art effect in the collection due to his moralising propensity in some of the poems, for Chapman these are Zimunya's worst poems as they appear out of context in the small

African city. Zimunya himself refers to his city poems as "a kind of popularisation of those images which make a city" ([Veit-]Wild, *Patterns* 9). But anarchy, lawlessness, and insensitivity to the plight of fellow human beings are not the only images of the city. However, as I mentioned above, for this generation of writers the city appeared more sinister than lovely. It epitomised, evil, suffering and death, rather than tranquillity, life and happiness.

In a poem titled "The City's Beauty" (*CDCL* 34) Zimunya exposes the lure and attraction of the city as artificial, fake and short-lived like "the lick of an ice-cream," "the melting of chewing gum / or the coolness of beer / or the groan of a prostitute" (34). Sooner or later the reality of the pain and struggle associated with life in the city hits migrants from the rural areas. In the title poem of the second section of Zimunya's *CDCL*, "City Lights" (45-49), images of death are set side by side with popular perceptions of the city: clean boys and girls and abundance of good things such as toothpaste, sugar, Fanta and Coke. But whatever conceptions the rural dweller might have of the city, for the poet "It's a world contest of ugliness" where the dead are eaten by dogs (48). Like Zimunya, for Hove the city is a place of suffering, alienation and death ("Skyscraper" [*RHH* 22-23] and "Lost Bird" [*RHH* 36-37]).

6.1 Existential Struggle in the City

As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, in his poetry Chenjerai Hove characterises the migrant to the city as a migratory bird. As he explains in a footnote for the poem "Lost Birds" (*RHH*, 36-37), "[t]he migratory bird is the harbinger of the rainy season in Shona" (36). The migratory bird's behaviour of following the seasons or taking "flight in obedience to the season's call" ("Migratory Bird I" [*RHH* 41]) is compared to the migrant from the country who fails to resist the lure of the city's Fanta and Coca-Cola. In the poem "Migratory Bird II" (*RHH* 42) the persona asks in consternation: "Why so do we migrate?" and later "why did I migrate?" as he feels alienated and uncomfortable in this environment where the streets vomit him and "new-born lovers / drag each other's hearts ashore to their destiny" (42). The sense of loss of meaning of life for the speaker is underlined by his realisation that

> My seasons breathe their last, then limp:
> And I shall never sing
> The season's flow again
> Till my people rescue me

With yesterday's echoes (42).

These lines reveal how the city interferes with or disrupts the rural people's relationship with time. Instead of the familiar "life-cycle" of the country which includes celebrating the seasons ("sing[ing] / The seasons flow" in the poem) the city introduces a temporality of "interruption" and "inexplicability" that leads to a loss of sequence of events known in the country. The migrant to the city finds him/herself disconnected from nature more generally, and from the elements, cosmic powers, and the lives of animals, in particular. In the countryside, as Obiechina observes, "[s]unshine, rainfall, clouds, forests, bushes, trees, streams, brooks, winds, rocks, hills, mountains, valleys, plains are part of the perennial human quest for livelihood, economic survival and, in some cases, religious and mystical security." As such these natural elements are "intimately woven into the traditional consciousness [where nature] is an ever-present reality constantly within view" (Obiechina 43). In the city this connectedness to, and dependence on, nature is interrupted as the agricultural economy of the country is replaced by industrial economy.

Commenting on time in rural West Africa in ways that apply to most of rural Africa, Emmanuel Obiechina observes that

> apart from being reckoned by such events as the first and second cock-crow, sunrise, sunset, overhead sun, or the length of shadows, [time] is also reckoned by meal-times, […] time of return from the farm and so on. These factors are not arbitrary. For instance, the use of meal-periods does not imply that all eat their meals at exactly the same time, but that everyone has a reasonably accurate idea what time is meant (123).

People in the country also "use the seasons, the rhythm of agricultural work and the fixed festivals to demarcate the year by cycle. The seasons are clearly marked" (Obiechina 124) and the people know or anticipate the type of work or activities to engage in during a particular season. Vambe tells us that the "day-to-day life" of his Shona people

> was in the main governed by the seasons, each season having a definite meaning and functional significance. The rainy season [ran] from November to March and was for ploughing, sowing and weeding, April to May for harvesting, June to July for thrashing, combined with beer-drinking and August to about the middle of October for spirit dances, hunting, fishing, travel and communication with their neighbours (*An Ill-Fated People* 55).

In rural Africa, therefore, "[t]he fixed nature of the seasons, the rhythm of agricultural work, and the distribution of festivals give important temporal signposts" (Obiechina 125). Significantly too, the names for the subdivisions of the four main diurnal time

segments among the Shona of the Zezuru group are "denoted by some chore or some phenomenon that is found in the culture or physical environment," (Pfukwe 61) especially the behaviour of animals.[86] Some of the subdivisions have names such as *runyanhiriri* (1-3 am) which in "Shona tradition […] is the time when the *nhiriri* – wild cats roam around homesteads raiding fowl runs"; *marirangwe* (2-3 am) which is "[t]he time when leopards (*ingwe*) cough"; *mashambanzou* (3-4 am) which is "[t]he time when elephants go bathing"; *mazambambira* (7-9 am) which is "[t]ime for the rockrabbits (*mbira*) to bask (*kuzambira*) in the sun"; and *rufuramhembwe* (3-5 pm) which is "late afternoon when *mhembwe* – the impala and other browsers, come out to graze *(kufura*)" (ibid. 62-63, italics in original). These time names show the people's indigenous knowledge of their environment, their closeness to the lives of animals and the integration of these lives into the people's language and knowledge systems.

Unlike in the country where the moon, the sun, the stars, the seasons, and the behaviour of animals act as markers of time, in the city "[p]eople's lives are […] controlled by the clock." The strict nature of "[t]he tempo of life" in the city as "many things mak[e] demands on the time of the [city dweller]" requires a lot of physical and mental mobility and punctuality from him/her. Life then becomes an inexplicable "nightmare rush to keep up with things – with one's profession, with social engagements, with trade union and political meetings, with funerals," and many other things, and consequently time becomes a "master and the townsman its slave" (Obiechina 136). The significance of clock time to the urban dweller is highlighted by Georg Simmel when he observes that "[i]f all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by one hour, all economic life and communication of the city would be disrupted for long time (413). This underlines the fact that the urban dweller is disconnected from nature and from the lives of animals, and so, like the "caged city dwellers" in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, urban Zimbabweans, as the poem "Migratory Bird II" (*RHH* 42) shows, "live out of harmony with the seasons" (Saunders 32). This disconnectedness from nature, in general, and animals, in particular, is what prompts the migrant in the poem to lament: "My seasons breathe their last, then limp: / And I shall never sing / The season's flow

[86] The main diurnal time segments among the Shona, according to Charles Pfukwe are: *mangwanani* – morning [3 am – 11 am], *masikati* – afternoon [11 am – 5 pm], *Mauro/Manheru* – evening [sunset to bedtime], and *usiku* – night [9 pm-3/4 am].

again." The speaker's life here has lost all purpose and he hopes that a return to the values of the past might rejuvenate and rescue him from the quagmire of despair.

Despair and alienation is also the subject of Hove's "Delirium in the Street" (*RHH* 8). The poet-protagonist here engages in soul searching and wonders if there is more that his life can still offer: "Could there be more in the clouds / than the rain that falls? / Or more in the day / than the footsteps to the full moon?" (8) These searching questions highlight the disconnectedness of the urban resident from nature. As I mentioned above, in the rural areas natural elements such as clouds, sunshine, rainfall and wind are not only "part of the perennial human quest for livelihood [and] economic survival" but also part of a "human quest" for "religious and mystical security" (Obiechina 43). In the city these cultural meanings of nature are lost making the speaker wonder if, in the city, there could "be more in the clouds / than the rain that falls[…]." Although it is not clear what Hove means by "the footsteps to the full moon," the mention of the moon here reminds us that in the city the moon which is often "obliterated by the street lights" (Obiechina 49) fails to play the role it plays for the country folk, that of telling time and the seasons, among others.

In the poem the city itself is not conducive to a meaningful life as conversation is only in fragments and "Pavements [are] littered with broken engagements / [like] Empty bits of wrapping paper" (8). Eliotsque hopelessness and despair that one encounters in *The Waste Land* pervades the poem which reveals the impermanence ("broken engagements") and meaninglessness ("Empty bits of wrapping paper") of human bonds in the city; things that make the speaker in his delirious state to ask, "why did I come here?"

In "Mr Bezuidehout's Dogs" (*TT* 65) Musa Zimunya captures a migrant's challenging quest for a job. In spite of a sign warning of vicious dogs and the fact that Mr Bezuidehout has no job to offer, desperation forces the job-seeker to try his luck at the white man's, judging from his name, only to be confronted by vicious dogs at the gate. The job-seeker's hopes are dashed one more time. For the disappointed job-seeker the dogs are as racist as their master as

> […] they howl and bark at everything black,
> including shadows, just like RF backbenchers
> during the nth reading of the Land Apportionment
> Act (1933) of the Situpa Bill (65).

The dogs here, as often happens in societies that are rife with inequality and injustice, are implicated in the racist policies of their owners. The use of dogs by the powerful to harass powerless and oppressed people has resulted in the reinforcement of negative attitudes towards dogs in many societies.

6.2 The City and Moral Decay

One thing that stands out in the poetry of Zimunya regarding the city is immorality or the loss and suspension of social values, a development which is underscored by the use of the metaphor of the dog. From what we gather in the poetry Zimunya finds the dog an ideal animal to illustrate the moral degeneration or even absence of morality in the city for three of its behavioural aspects, namely its eating habits, its closeness to humans, and its alleged promiscuity. For some people a dog is unclean because it eats filth and carrion, including bodies of humans (Sax 88). For others the dog is a source of embarrassment for what is viewed as its promiscuous behaviour. The dog's closeness to humans and yet acting in ways that are inhuman reduces it to a whipping boy or a scapegoat, even in societies where it's commendable role in a hunt is acknowledged and respected. It is the above attributes and associations of the dog that make it a suitable animal to carry the weight of Zimunya's moral censure for urban life.

In his poem "The Dog" (*CDCL* 4) which at first reads like a dictionary definition of the creature, Zimunya mentions some of the dog's behavioural traits:

> It does not live in the jungle;
> it is a friend of man. But it will
> follow you to the bush
> if you do not feed it enough.

The dog's following of its owner to the bush alludes to its proclivity for eating excrement. The poem also acknowledges the dog's role as a companion in a hunt and a guardian of the home. In the last two stanzas of the poem, however, the speaker mentions the fate of a mangy dog that ate his family's chicken in the village. This dog is trapped and later lies "stinking in the hot sun / his teeth bared in a grin of death" before Uncle Tembo drags it "to a wood-covered pit" and sets fire on the wood, triggering explosions that "were heard afar" (4). This poem shows that in spite of its admirable service to man, chickens in the speaker's village are valued more than the mangy dog that pays the ultimate price of death for eating the highly valued birds. In

this poem the poet-protagonist reports the fate of the mangy dog coldly, betraying no emotion over the death of the dog. He does not care one way or the other as to what befalls the mangy dog. With an attitude like this towards what in the Western world is considered man's best friend, it is not surprising that the dog assumes the role of a metaphor for evil and decadence in Zimunya's city poems. Through the metaphor of the dog Zimunya exposes eroticism and promiscuity as well as violence and lack of respect for the sacredness of human life in the city.

The poem "My Dog" (*CDCL* 41) touches on the imagined eroticism and concupiscence of the dog. The lady owner of the dog in the poem complains that her dog is naughty as "it has the dastardly habit of smelling [her] washline." The dog's erotic behaviour even stops the owner from wearing her miniskirt. It is difficult to imagine the possibility of the dog violating the woman, but it is not always the case that human fears and prejudices have rational justification.

The place in the city where all evil unfolds and thrives is a backstreet called Delivery Lane or simply The Lane. This is one of the alleyways in Harare frequented by the poor, the helpless and mangy dogs. In his *Shebeen Tales* (1994) Hove tells us: "The alleyway is not a thing of the past. The real Harare is a city of alleyways. For every bright street, lit day and night, […] there is, right behind, in the shadows, the alleyway, the byway which seems immune from municipal by-laws, tucked away like the shadow of a dead man" (63). A poem named after the lane ("The Lane" [*CDCL* 52]) explicitly identifies it as a place where all hell breaks loose after dark as we read:

> The lane is a place of flesh
> Dog flesh, human flesh
> Female flesh male flesh
> Human blood and infant flesh
> Blood of the mangy's penis
> The red raw of the bitch's vagina
> When darkness comes (52).

The biblical allusion to evil through the use of the term "flesh" that Zimunya uses here signals his moral censure of the ways of the lane and the people who frequent it after dark while the scatological language signals the poet's moral outrage. Like in other poems in the "City Lights" section, the men and women here are referred to as mangy dogs and bitches, respectively, to exclude them from the heavily protected category of "human" because of their animal-like behaviour. Besides, the use of the term "flesh" underlines the loss of subjectivity for the humans and the dogs who have

become objects. Here then the city represents loss of subjectivity, reducing humans to "flesh," an object, and leading to loss of rationality. The human, like the dog, becomes soulless, since by metamorphosing into a dog s/he loses one of the attributes of humanity – possession of a soul – and becomes mere "flesh." In using the term "flesh" rather than "body" as a way of drawing the human and the animal together under the sign of "cityness," Zimunya highlights the city's corrupting influence on some of its inhabitants.

Beside the human mangys and bitches, stray dogs – simply referred to as mangy dogs – exist in the city and frequent The (Delivery) Lane which, as we learn from "City Voices in Delivery Lane" (*CDCL* 62-63) is a neglected part of the city. In this area refuse and bins are never in short supply, which is why stray dogs are attracted to it while humans of suspect morals find it ideal for their purposes. In "City Voices in Delivery Lane" the poet calls this part of the city "the buttock of the city / where mangy dog sniffs bins / and raises his hind legs for a dripping jet" or "the backside of the city / [where] the walls have been rusting and peeling since 1927" despite its being "the inside of town" (62). The delivery lane is therefore a squalid place, an eyesore to decent humans, where dogs and humans coalesce/fuse into one hateful figure of a mangy dog. It is here where the girl who migrates to the city loses her innocence as the mangy dogs (men) who at first watch and sniff her "timidly from a distance" pounce on her ("Pilgrim" [*CDCL* 55]). It is also here where cheating husbands catch STIs ("Python" [*CDCL* 71]). Zimunya's portrait of Harare as a place where prostitution is rife may strike us as heavily exaggerated but evidence has shown that, like in other cities of the world, prostitution has always been a problem in Harare (see Yoshikuni 15-18). Interviews by Terri Barnes and Everjoyce Win with an older generation of women living in Harare revealed how some women survived in the city through prostitution. One interviewee revealed seeing men standing in a queue as they waited for their turn to have sex with a prostitute in the 1950s (Barnes and Win 123). In his *The Ill-Fated People* and *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (especially chapter 14) Lawrence Vambe also mentions prostitution, which he regards as one of the "first and most loathsome importations of European civilization into Africa" (*An Ill-Fated People* 199), as one of the evils of Salisbury (Harare). The police in independent Zimbabwe have on several occasions (1982, 1983, 1986 and 1990) also arrested hundreds of women in Harare, accusing them of prostitution (Barnes and Win 126).

Apart from prostitution, violence and complete disregard for human life are some of the problems of the city. Delivery Lane has its fair share of these. In Delivery Lane people "get cleaned out" (robbed) of their monthly earning when they pass through it, only to be left "With a broken jaw / and toothless pain – / cleaned out of all words" ("Wonder" [*CDCL* 68]). The expression "cleaned out of all words" suggests (in a slightly clumsy poetic formulation) that the victims are left speechless after the ordeal, as if their words/voices too have been stolen. The clumsiness and flatness of the language here seems to suggest that the poet is not fully invested in his material; he fails to find a language and make it his own. Further, the lane's bins become preferred receptacles of unwanted babies as we learn in "The Philosopher" (*CDCL* 59) and "Mangy Dogs of Delivery Lane" (*CDCL* 64).

Despite the sad human situation in the city implied in the poem, "The Philosopher" is a humorous, if inauspicious poem in which a mangy dog complains to another of having lost "a tender thing," a human baby that he found in a bin. Ascribing speech to animals in literature is a popular and old device for humour and satire. The mangy dog in the poem blames God who he refers to as a true devil for conspiring against his success. The dog here believes that God

> Whispered to the mangy tribe
> who came and chased me and exposed me to the streets
> where humans seeing the infant in my mouth
> gave me greater chase (59).

The dog later loses his juicy find and goes hungry. For the mangy dog's interlocutor (the philosopher of the title who is later referred to as Socrates), however, "neither God nor the Devil has any affection / for the mangy race" who he believes it is their lot "To clean up the streets / and starve when the bones / have been picked dry and clean" (59), a situation that leads to their slow death. While Zimunya here may appear to sympathise with the dogs, the subject matter in the poem is such that we are made to sympathise more with the abandoned infant than the scavenging dogs. The poet here, therefore, emerges as someone who is not fully in control of his material. Although myths about dogs nursing human children exist, the intentions of the dog in this poem are to make a meal out of the hapless child as he complains that he is "hungry again" because of his loss of the baby.[87] The emphasis on the mangy

[87] Boria Sax tells us that dogs "were held in special reverence in Persia" because legend has it that Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, "was left out to die at birth but was suckled by a dog" (88).

appearance and diseased state ("fat tick[…]" and "purple tumour on his paw") of the dog here and in other poems emphasises the dog's association with degeneration and disease in the city and it is these attributes that make the dogs useful as symbols of the monstrousness and corruption of the city.

The mangy dog's lament for his loss and the accompanying humour continues in "The Mangy Dogs of Delivery Lane" (*CDCL* 64). Here the dog wishes he had behaved differently when confronted by the other dogs who wanted to snatch the meal from him. He regrets:

> If only I had held my own
> and not been forced by mad fury
> to run right into the crowded streets
> where men heard the baby in my grip cry
>
> And I dropped the thing like hot coal
> and ran the race of a wild hyena
> because I knew then that the humans wield death
> as many a scraggling mangy of Delivery Lane will tell you!

The phrase "humans wield death" seems to critique human exploitation and abuse of other animals – pointing to the well known human tendency to kill other animals for various reasons. The dog, although caricatured as human, emerges in these poems as a hateful and greedy creature which, in spite of its closeness to humans, would not hesitate to feast on an infant dumped in a bin. Beyond the dogs the poems show the moral squalor and inhumanity and perhaps desperate financial circumstances of the people in the city who shed parental responsibility by dumping babies to continue with business as usual. The city here is antithetical to life, it is a wilderness where death prowls and stalks the helpless and unwary. Ironically, it is this very city that is branded as ugly that acts as a magnet for the act of writing, seducing the writer, in the words of Stephen Watson, perhaps more than any other space "ever created" (Watson 6).

While the city remains unidentified in the other poems in Zimunya's *Country Dawns and City Lights*, the last poem in the collection titled "O Harare!" (*CDCL* 73) leads one to conclude that the squalor and moral decay exposed in the preceding poems takes place in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital and largest city. In this poem Zimunya dispenses with dog imagery (yet retains the same set of metaphors) and censures the city for its immorality – its cheating wives and husbands, and its

prostitution and corruption of the youth, especially girls who fall prey to sugar-daddies. The city lures young girls to their destruction as the poet laments:

> O Harare! your lipstick and beauty soap and perm salons
> have courted the little girl now she blushes and touches,
> kisses and turns endlessly before the mirror,
> returns to it from her cooking and books
> before she escapes into the night through the window.

One notices here that the city is blamed for all that is bad and evil. Whatever positive qualities it may have are ignored. One suspects that this excoriation of the city is inspired by fear, fear of the city's monstrousness as it swallows and corrupts the migrants from the rural areas, metamorphosing them into mangy dogs, thereby destabilising the rural hierarchy of animal and human. It is fear shaped also by lack of resources. This fear and excoriation of the city, as I will show in due course, also has something to do with its colonial legacy. But in depicting migrants and inhabitants of the city's "underground" as undesirable hateful elements (mangy dogs), Zimunya perpetuates the colonial perception of migrant blacks as unwelcome spoilers of the cityscape (in spite of the fact that their labour was indispensable to the colonialists). Zimunya's metaphorical perception of the migrants who inhabit the alleys and other interstices of the city as diseased mangy dogs who do not belong to the city resonates with the views of Zimbabwe's ruling elites who in 2005 forcefully evicted some of them from the city in the controversial Operation Murambatsvina.

Given the immorality and squalor exposed in Zimunya's poetry the state of man in Harare is best summed by Muponde when he observes that in the city "[m]an has metamorphosed into something subhuman, into scum, into something feline, predatory, a thing of the lower depth, a marauding beast" (*Zimbabwean Literature* 22). But the question begs: Why compare the immoral/fallen city humans to mangy dogs, canines and marauding beasts as Zimunya does in his poetry? The answer to this question possibly lies in the writer's attitude to nature, in general, and animals, in particular. In our anthropocentric and hierarchical thinking animals are lower than humans and therefore of no moral interest whatsoever. Comparing someone to animals is therefore a way of making him/her feel less human and worthless and trying to inspire him/her to go on a quest in search of humanity. But the animals thus used remain vilified, ridiculed and abused by humans. Using the dog like Zimunya does shows that he unconsciously endorses the subordinate role of the dog in human

society as well as its abuse. At the same time he reinforces the negative associations of, and attitudes to, the dog.

Through sheer repetition and single-mindedness Zimunya successfully exposes the negative side of the city in his poetry. This negative perception and depiction of the city seems to trace its origin to the city's colonial legacy. As a colonial invention it represented for this generation of writers all that was evil about colonialism, its racist policies, domination and exploitation of the colonised, and therefore the codes of invisibility into which black bodies were forcefully written. As Frantz Fanon observes in *The Wretched of the Earth* "colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it." Fanon goes on to say that

> [w]hen we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality (169).

The colonial encounter in Zimbabwe, like elsewhere in Africa, led to the distortion of the country's pre-colonial past (Vambe 1972) and presented the colonised with a picture of the past that evoked shame and reduced the African to an inferior status. It is unsurprising that after colonialism African scholars, including Zimunya, called for a journey of rediscovery, of retrieval of the distorted past (Introduction, *TT* 1982). In this process of cultural retrieval and corrective reading of history, the colonial brainchild, the city, is rejected and demonised "as a symbol of an alien culture introduced by the Western presence" (Zhuwarara, Introduction iv) leading to the depiction of a skewed picture of urban space as we only see the unpleasant side alone. The city's buildings, its shapes and colours, its sounds and aromatic smells are suppressed. The people, who also remain misty or shadowy, are painted with the same brush strokes as bad. Yet, even during the colonial period, life in the city, as Vambe tells us, "was at once miserable and intensely exciting" (*From Rhodesia* 184). Besides, the city is a mixture of both good and bad experiences as well as good and bad people. A more impartial poetic rendering of the city would go a long way in painting a conceivable picture of Harare. Besides, mere exposure of evil alone does not make for good poetry.

Further, Zimunya's perception of immigrants and the urban poor perpetuates the views of the colonialists who regarded Africans as undesirable aliens in the city. Lawrence Vambe has this to say about the attitudes of whites towards black people in the urban areas of Southern Rhodesia: "In Rhodesian towns it seems the African is considered as a form of pollution, a menace, a hazard, to the [white] urban dweller. Of course he is accepted everywhere as a source of labour, but once he steps outside the factory gates, or residence of his white master he assumes a totally different aspect" (*From Rhodesia* 146). Like the African in the colonial towns, the mangy dog (and the black urban poor person he represents) is "a form of pollution, a menace, a hazard" in the postcolonial Harare of Zimunya's poetry. One notices then that Zimunya's views about the urban poor resonate with those of the ruling elites who in the year 2005 undertook to clean the cities and towns of Zimbabwe of undesirable squatters in an infamous operation called Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Drive Out Trash or Operation Drive Out Rubbish), which has been criticised by many people and organisations including the UN for its abuse of human rights, cruelty and exploitation of the poor (Report 2005, COHRE 2007). During the operation which was carried out by the police and the army many people were harassed, their goods and property destroyed or stolen and thousands were left homeless. It is striking that the government's behaviour here was like a response to Zimunya's exposure of the existence of mangy dogs (in the language of the government, squatters, trash or rubbish) in the city in his poetry. The idea of cleaning the city of trash or rubbish associated with the operation points to the colonial attitude to poor blacks in the city as a peril. It is also revealing that the operation, according to a report by the UN fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe, was "based on a set of colonial-era laws and policies that were used as a tool of segregation and social exclusion" (Report 7-8). And so, as in colonial times, the poor in Harare were, and still are, seen by the postcolonial government as a peril, a menace, a disease, or a form of pollution (mangy dogs). In this case the alleyways inhabited by the poor (the dogs) in the poetry become a metaphor for the squatter camps and black locations in the city.[88]

[88] Justifications for the Operation given by the government include "arresting disorderly or chaotic urbanization, including its health consequences; stopping illegal, parallel market transactions, especially foreign currency dealing and hoarding of consumer commodities in short supply; and reversing environmental damage caused by inappropriate urban agricultural practices" (Report 20).

Moreover, the treatment of the dog as an animal in the poetry also reveals the poet's disconnection, at the imaginative level, from the lives of animals in the city. While in the rural area the dog is "a friend of man" ("A Dog," *CDCL* 4), in the city the dog (especially the free-roaming mongrel) is a pariah, unwelcome and unwanted. Zimunya seems to say that the city is no space for the dog – the dog in the city is a dog out of place. While in the city the dog is undesirable and a menace, Vambe's words in *An Ill-Fated People* show the importance of dogs amongst the rural Shona in the 1920s. About dogs in his home village Vambe says

> [a]lmost as soon as you began to be able to absorb facts and to recognize human and animal forms you saw dogs everywhere. There was an infinity of dogs, little, big, tame or vicious, dogs whose physical condition largely depended on what they could sniff and scavenge out of the village garbage heap rather than on the generosity and animal-loving nature of their masters (1).

Although the dogs were treated cruelly by the villagers, their sheer numbers show how much they were valued as companions in a hunt and for guarding homes. They still serve these utilitarian functions in rural Zimbabwe to this day.

In quality, the poems about the city discussed above, like some of the rural poems, are less satisfactory. The poems lack the technical sophistication that one would expect from such a seasoned poet. In rhythm and syntactic structure the poems read like prose chopped at random to form lines of verse. It is for this reason perhaps that Michael Chapman considers Zimunya's poems about the city as his worst poems. Zimunya himself has indicated that in *Country Dawns and City Lights* he "attempted to exploit something like street conversations and also some folkloric devices" to escape the problem of "unreadability" or obscurity that he fell pray to once ([Veit]-Wild, *Pattern* 64). Clearly, through the use of oral forms and simple style, Zimunya's aim was to make his poems accessible to the peasants in Zimbabwe. But in trying to avoid "unreadability" he compromises the quality of his poems in this collection. This is despite the fact that, it is possible to view the "choppiness" of the city poems in part as suggesting the disruptiveness and chaotic nature of the city itself.

7.0 Conclusion

In their poetry Zimunya and Hove show a concern for nature: the seasons, the forest and its creatures. Both Zimunya and Hove acknowledge the beauty and revitalising nature of the rural world. However, memories of country life are not

always beautiful or pleasant in Hove and Zimunya's poetry. The poets are well aware of the challenges and suffering that rural life entails. Further, Zimunya and Hove expose and lament the destruction of the land and the transitions taking place in the countryside, as well as the pain, suffering and dislocation of rural life occasioned by colonialism. In the poetry animals are used allegorically and function as a backdrop to the human issues and problems the poets address. Nevertheless, their use reveals some important aspects of the poetry.

In the rural poems animals reveal the ambiguity of the poets' rural vision. While in some poems the animals highlight the people's embeddedness in their ecology, the relationship between the people, land, flora and fauna, in others they reveal a disconnection between human and animal lives (as a result of colonialism and urbanisation) as well as the ugliness and hardships of rural existence. In their poems dealing with urban Zimbabwe where Zimunya and Hove dwell on worldliness and ambition of the city, its corrupt, evil and decadent nature, the dog is used symbolically by Zimunya to represent this squalor and to tackle human foibles. But the dog also reveals the ambiguity and irony that accompany Zimunya's imagination of Harare. While he depicts it as an ugly place full of evil and suffering, the fact that he portrays the mangy dogs and their human counterparts (the urban poor) as a menace and peril reveals that he ironically sees the city as a space reserved for the orderly and decent life of elites. Furthermore, unlike in the rural poems where animals mostly show the people's integration in their environment (a fact also highlighted by the tendency of the Shona people to use phenomena in the physical environment or animal behaviour to name time), the use of the dog in the city poems reveals a speciesist attitude, a disconnection with the lives of animals, and the vilification of the dog and animals in general. The poet and his society's negative and ambivalent attitude to the dog motivates the use of the dog to represent eroticism, lust, and prostitution and moral decadence.

With regard to rural and urban landscapes the poetry of Zimunya and Hove depicts the city as a direct opposite to the country. While the country is depicted as beautiful and desirable, the city is ugly and dangerous. In some poems about the country, however, Hove reveals a broader vision of pre-colonial Africa, a vision which does not see pre-colonial societies only as idyllic and alluring but encompassing suffering as well. In the city human beings lose their humanity and act like dogs. The picture of the city that emerges in the poetry is therefore one-

dimensional and is unsatisfactory and unconvincing as the intricacies and paradoxes of city life are conspicuously absent. Zimunya's city residents, for instance, are shadowy individuals that are inarticulate, devoid of deep subjectivity, and moral reflection. They are subject to poverty and suffering, and are always products of their biological makeup and immediate environment.

In quality, the city poems by Zimunya are simple and straight forward while some of the pastoral ones are clichéd and uninspiring. Some of the poems by Hove show technical sophistication and engaging technique, although in some cases this obscures the meaning. In rhythm and syntactic structure most of the poems, especially those by Zimunya that deal with the city, read like versified prose. The poetry's weaknesses, however, do not diminish the relevance of the issues the two poets raise about their Zimbabwean society.

Chapter 5: Natural Heritage, Stewardship, and Identity: Zimbabwe's Wildlife in the Poetry of Bart Wolffe

1.0 Introduction

The poet, playwright, novelist, short story writer and journalist Bart Wolffe was born in Salisbury (now Harare), Zimbabwe in 1952. He left his home country to go into exile in England, Germany and England again in 2002 as a result of President Robert Mugabe's increasingly authoritarian leadership and curtailment of freedom of expression in Zimbabwe. Wolffe is a prolific writer who has written a number of plays, some of which have been performed in nine countries, short stories, novels and poems. Some of his published collections of poetry are *Changing Skins* (1988), *…of coffee cups and cigarettes* (2005), *Who's for Fish?* (2005), *The Crusoe Morality* (2005), *The Stones of SomeWhere* (2010) and *Dust of Eden* (2007). The issues in his poetry range across displacement from Africa, the pain of exile, and loss of family and identity (*The Stones of SomeWhere*), the wildlife and haunting beauty of Africa (*Changing Skins*), journeys, places, experiences and relationships (*Who's for Fish?*), loneliness and regret (*The Crusoe Morality*), and love and nostalgia for home (*Dust of Eden*).

This chapter is a critical analysis of the nature and animal poems of Bart Wolffe. The textual focus of the chapter is Wolffe's *Changing Skins* which was first published in 1988, long before Robert Mugabe's despotism became too pronounced, before the violent land repossession against white farmers or third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe began, and before Wolffe went into exile.[89] *Changing Skins* is one of Wolffe's earliest collections of poetry. Although he has written other poems and published collections such as *The Stones of SomeWhere* and *Dust of Eden*, among others, *Changing Skins* is the only poetry collection that is focused on nature and Zimbabwe's wildlife. Some of the poems in *Changing Skins* are reprinted in *Dust of Eden*. While a few animal or nature poems do appear in the other collections, the majority of these are about the political situation in postcolonial Zimbabwe, human suffering, nostalgia and the poet's exile in the United Kingdom. However, where

[89] "Chimurenga" means war or revolution. The struggle for land reform that started around the year 2000 in Zimbabwe is the third Chimurenga as it comes after the second Chimurenga, that is, Zimbabwe's liberation war (1966-1979), which in turn followed the first Chimurenga – the 1896-1897 Ndebele-Shona revolt against colonial rule.

necessary, I also analyse poems from the other collections, especially from *The Stones of SomeWhere*, in the chapter.

Wolffe's poetry in *Changing Skins*, which he calls "a heritage-based anthology of poetry" (*Bastard of the Colony* 66), like John Clare's poetry, "is primarily a celebration and affirmation of life" in all its natural forms, that is, plants and animals. It is also a celebration of the soil, the seasons and the weather. Beyond that, "it is also, inescapably, a song of sorrow and mourning, of loss, deracination and disenchantment" (Summerfield 13). Vivid realism runs through the poetry following Wolffe's descriptions of the Zimbabwean landscape and his relationship with it, the description of the country's geographical features and the use of place names in the poetry. In this chapter I want to examine how Wolffe's nature/animal poetry acts as a celebration of his "retreat from society into nature" (Johanne Clare 165). For Wolffe nature is a sanctuary, more welcoming and accommodating than the violent and harsh human society. In the chapter I also talk about Wolffe's use of nature to construct his identity and belonging and as a means of self-definition. I also talk about the ways in which Wolffe's description of the landscape and "his relationship with the land" and its animals in the poetry is "a means of inscribing himself into the landscape [to] claim[…] a white Zimbabwean identity" (Harris 111); of how "[i]n the words he throws out to the landscape [and] in the echoes he listens for, [Wolffe] seek[s] a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than that of visitor, stranger, transient" (Coetzee, Introduction 8). In this chapter I am also interested in discussing how, in the process of celebrating his retreat into nature and inscribing his identity onto Zimbabwean landscape and geography, Wolffe reveals an ecological vision and disrupts the colonizing gaze of his predecessors.

2.0 The Nature Poetry of Bart Wolffe

Bart Wolffe is a lover of nature and outdoor life. One of his hobbies is collecting plant specimens from the wild to constitute what he calls "[m]y travelling garden" ("Miti Kadiki" np). In his work Wolffe mentions his explorations of the mountains, hills and forests of Zimbabwe and his experiences with nature (especially as a child). The works, especially the ones he has written while in exile, show that his longing and nostalgia for the lost paradisiacal world of his childhood has more to do with his disconnection or displacement from the Zimbabwean world of nature than any other form of loss. In *The African in Me* (henceforth *The African*) (2010) which

offers accounts of his ventures into the wild and encounters with wildlife in Zimbabwe he writes:

> My young stride knew not its feet were clay. Rather, I climbed the rocks with ease, the trees and branches, too, were explorations of youth. A bird's nest in the branches, chasing the lizards over the backs of boulders and lying, like them, on the warm stone, King of the castle, atop the granite in the sun, dreaming of openended (sic) days and the far-away call of distant doves. […]
>
> In the Chimanimani mountains, I meandered along the liana-clad streams, naked and unafraid, no-one to witness or watch my return to Eden, I bathed in the waterfalls that fell into the chilling pools and avoided the snakes that swam there like ripples of sunlight on the backs of the water.
>
> I slept in caves, days spent climbing the high places with sleeping bag upon my back, taking in the sweeping mountain vistas in an untrodden land where the eland antelope roamed the gorse and wild heath (33).

As I will show later, Wolffe's claim of being a white African in the title *The African in Me* is not unproblematic for in some ways Wolffe's writings qualify as what J. M. Coetzee calls white writing, that is, the kind of writing "generated by the concerns of people [who] are no longer European [and are] not yet African" (Coetzee, Introduction 12) – this in spite of the fact that Wolffe was born and spent a greater part of his life in Zimbabwe. Evidence in Wolffe's exile writing shows that his love of nature and outdoor life was born out of childhood torment and an ongoing identity crisis, both at a personal level and in relation to race – that is, as a white person in Zimbabwe. Three works that Wolffe has written in exile, namely *Flotsam* (2009), *The African*, and *Bastard of the Colony* (henceforth *Bastard*) (2006) are critical in shedding light on Wolffe's personal life, his childhood experiences in Zimbabwe, and his experiences in exile. While *Flotsam* can be described as a memoir, *Bastard* can best be described as an autobiography and *The African* falls somewhere between memoir and autobiography. Distinguishing an autobiography from a memoir Sarah Nuttall says "[w]hereas autobiography is writing from a beginning towards a destination, memoir has often to do with a portion (usually an obsessive or troubled one) of a life – a pathological experience, or an experience of victimhood. This is frequently accompanied by a pressure on the ending to stage a recovery" ("Telling 'free' Stories?" 80). Nuttall's words here best describe *Flotsam* where Wolffe narrates his experiences in exile, his observations and later his determination to accept and make the best of his situation. After convincing himself that he can no longer return to Zimbabwe Wolffe stages a recovery by resolving to try and make England his home.

Flotsam reveals that Wolffe views exile in England (its cold weather, and the atomism and materialism of its people) with a sense of despair, alienation, anguish, and frustration. As an exile London is for Wolffe a land of betrayal like Zimbabwe, it is no-man's land where "[t]he dream called Freedom is far away" and where "God does not answer prayers […]." And doubting the very existence of a benevolent God he muses: "[i]f, indeed, there was a God who was anything other than the damner of the failed, the lost, the sick and mad and dying, scraping with the last resources of their broken guts to survive" (*Flotsam* 9). Later he proclaims: "I just cannot find myself at home here" (ibid. 26).

Wolffe's despair and anguish in exile provoke suicidal thoughts as he writes: "[s]o tired, so damn fucking tired, tired to the very marrow of the bone. Want to quit the show. To walk out the picture. [… .] Just step out into the road in front of the bus, step off the platform in front of the train. There must be another way home" (ibid. 17). Home here is metaphor for peace, freedom and tranquillity, and in these suicidal moments the writer sees death as an answer to these. Wolffe also finds the loneliness and political correctness in London frustrating. He complains: "[d]amn, there is no refuge anywhere, no haven of quiet. Orphans with no sanctuary. Exiles try to occupy the country of their minds, to live inside their thoughts and end up talking to themselves or the pages of private journals" (ibid. 21). He goes on:

> [f]ucking political correctness ensures there is nowhere to smoke in winter but in the dog-rain and the blast. The smokers huddle together trying to crack a smile, a joke. Suckers on the hostile outside sucking on emptiness. […] Too many lives are wasted believing in a better, sunnier, happier, wealthier etcetera tomorrow. Too many empty, wasted dreams. Help of the helpless is a fiction (ibid.. 22).

And later: "[t]here is no rest, no respite, nor refuge. Sanctuary and healing for the soul cannot be found. Neither hospital nor drug to cure life's pain. Joy cannot be traced in down-turned faces, grimace and grim visage a mask about our anonymity" (ibid. 23). The frustrations of exile, the loneliness and despair provoke longing for Zimbabwe:

> [s]moking on the balcony with the snowflakes drifting in like evanescent moths, I am reminded of the beetles that come with the rains in their thousands in Zimbabwe. I would sit on the verandah and let them attach themselves to me, tangling in my hair, feeling the intimacy of their fragile limbs like little fingers exploring my skin. We called them Rose beetles. It was an affair of the heart.
>
> The cicadas and the crickets and the songs that were sung. Now, only the slow silence seeping. The mute bandages of this numbing damage that has no reason. The white effrontery of snow. Black Africa is so very far away (*Bastard* 89).

In the unwelcoming and alienating land of exile the act of writing becomes a way of trying to discover and define one's subjectivity as Wolffe says "I write because I need to find a way to release my voice, to know my place in time and space. I write in order to relate, at least to my long-absent self. To try and remember who I am and from where I came" (*Flotsam* 26). Later, however, as is characteristic of memoir, Wolffe stages his own recovery as he resolves to try and make the most of his exile status. He tells us: "I am tired, tired to the bone, to the soul. I cannot go back. I must continue to float, as best I can, on the tide of time towards a hoped-for shore, a homecoming somehow" (ibid. 27). And later still he says: "[i]t is the end of an awful year, and with 2009 on its way, perhaps, just perhaps, a resolution will be to find a home, a new home, with a welcoming family somewhere, where a log fire burns in the hearth, a room of my own where I can smoke should I choose […]" (ibid. 29).

Unlike memoir "the writing of the self" in an autobiography "seeks 'to explain and justify as well as to inform [and is] often confessional" (McArthur qtd. by Harris 108). Wolffe's *Bastard* fits this understanding of an autobiography as Wolffe here tells his life story in a confessional manner. *The African*, a "collection of essays and reflections of [the author's] life in Africa" (Wolffe, *The African* 2) falls somewhat mid-way between a memoir and an autobiography. Here Wolffe narrates his experiences with nature in Africa and assures would-be African tourists that they would not regret their trip to, and experience in, Africa.

In *Bastard* we learn that Wolffe was born of an affair between his mother, Juliette Ackerman, and a father he never knows. He was later, in his own words, "gratefully adopted by George Elias and Elizabeth Paisley Wolffe" (*Bastard* 9). As it turned out the adoptive family was a dysfunctional one which was doomed from the very start. The father, George Elias Wolffe, had been disinherited by his Jewish Bulawayo family for marrying a woman whom the poet calls "my gentle, gentile 'goyim' mother, a Scot" (ibid). Elizabeth was barren and, perhaps in an attempt to drown her sorrow, ended up becoming an alcoholic and a drug addict who at one time attempted suicide and was saved in time by her adopted son. She was to spend some time in a psychiatric unit in Bulawayo later. The elder Wolffe who was a specialist gynaecologist and child practitioner was mostly an absent father who spent most of his time at the hospital and clinics attending to his patients. He was later to sexually abuse his adopted son as Wolffe confesses: "[o]nce, my father even touched me where it is most private, but I forgave him for that, as I know that he suffered from lack of

affection from my mother who slept in another room" (ibid. 15). The troubled marriage of his adoptive parents coupled with the circumstances of his birth further complicated and deepened Wolffe's identity problems as he observes: "[e]xiles from the beginning, we all were. That was something we had in common" (ibid. 9). Later he tells us "[w]e were always a family of exiles, outsiders. My father's semitic past never evaded him and my mother's alcoholism and drug abuse made us unwelcome in the neighbourhood" (ibid. 10).

Rejected by the morally self-righteous white community in Zimbabwe, the young Wolffe finds acceptance amongst the black workers who he naively regards as family as he writes: "Isaac, the house servant, Patrick, my father's chauffeur and local playboy of the district and the cook called Martin with his strange herbal mixtures in hidden bottles in the summer house, these were the only family that I knew" (ibid. 17). He also feels a sense of belonging to the black community: "[t]hese were days of the impossible being possible. Freedom abounded. There was even real joy and hope of belonging. The Zvinyau dancers from Malawi would welcome me to their rituals with Gavin [pet monitor], a water spirit, their ancestor from the great lake in the North, perched on my shoulder" (ibid. 19, see also *Flotsam* 25). This reveals the extent of young Wolffe's ignorance of racial problems in colonial Zimbabwe where blacks were second-class citizens and could not be regarded as family by any right thinking and patriotic Rhodesian. Besides, in claiming a sense of belonging to the black community by referring to the "Zvinyau [mask] dancers from Malawi" it does not occur to the young and even grown up Wolffe that he allied himself with, and was accepted by, fellow aliens, migrant labourers from the north of Zimbabwe. Wolffe's racial blindness, however, disappears with age as we discover in the narrative that the grown up Wolffe has friends almost exclusively amongst fellow whites.

For Wolffe, the circumstances of his birth and his experiences in the adoptive family are the root of his identity dilemmas that continue to plague him as he tells us: "[c]onventional answers from churches, politicians, establishments and corporations had never really suited or provided individual solutions to my on-going dilemmas or questions about who I was, the resultant bastard of the colonies, where my home and future lay..." (*Bastard* 73). As a grown up, however, Wolffe was not necessarily averse to exploiting his uncertain identity for his benefit. On meeting a Jewish woman in a club in Zimbabwe once, Wolffe reached for his adoptive father's Jewish

background to claim Jewish ancestry so as to establish common ground with the woman before asking her to dance with him. He confesses:

> [i]t was not quite honest because I did not really know who I was, where I was coming from or where I was going to. I was a true mixed-up bastard of the colonies who was doing his best to ride the wave of change from part of the British Empire's legacy of Southern Rhodesia in the Federation days, to Ian Smith's self-proclaimed UDI, Unilateral Declaration of Independence and Rhodesia of the 60's to when it became a compromise with Bishop Abel Muzorerwa [sic] in what was called Zimbabwe Rhodesia, under a white-black coalition and finally in 1980 and majority rule, Zimbabwe proper (ibid. 57).

Apart from his illegitimate birth and adoption, Wolffe's sense of alienation was exacerbated when his new-found family sent him to boarding school at the age of eight. In boarding school (which he regards as incarceration), both in primary (at Eagle School in the Vhumba mountains in the east of Zimbabwe) and high school (at Peterhouse, near Marondera) Wolffe suffered bullying, physically and verbally, from fellow pupils. This made him turn to nature as a sanctuary or retreat from the violence of human society. He writes:

> The school snake park at Peterhouse became my haven from the rest of the institutional madness. At first, I was afraid of the creatures, snakes, that is. I knew I did not want to be proved a coward and so decided that herpetology was my ticket, my passport to courage and acceptance to compensate for my lack of sporting and social prowess. Naturally, it only alienated me further, making me more the freak of Nature in the eyes of the other boys.
>
> The thing that made up for the on-going cruelty of boarding school was simply this. I could escape. Whenever there was a free moment, the bush called me to its arms. Every leaf of every tree was a friend that whispered to me. The rocks were warm as a mother's arms. The snakes and lizards distracted me from human reality (ibid. 30).

It is no surprise then that in his writings nature signifies refuge, tranquillity and harmony, and that in his exile writings he turns to nature as a means of inscribing his identity onto the Zimbabwean landscape and to claim Zimbabwe as his homeland.

In characterising himself as "bastard of the colony" Wolffe refers to both his illegitimate birth and rejection by his mother who gave him up for adoption and to the rejection of his claim of white Zimbabwean identity by Mugabe's government. With regard to the latter rejection Wolffe complains somewhat fallaciously, as he confuses Zimbabwe with the rest of Africa: "*Africa expelled me like a thorn from its side, a foreign body in the flesh which only the pus could rid itself of. Ethnic cleansing, I was simply not indigenous enough. I was an imported tree, an exotic breed in a foreign*

park, an ethnic white. To be cut down for firewood only. A legacy of a colonial history (*Flotsam* 13, italics in original). We notice here that Mugabe's anti-white rhetoric and the violence against white farmers in the country brought into sharp focus the contestedness of Wolffe's Zimbabwean identity as a white person, a development that further complicates and pushes Wolffe's identity problems beyond the individual level to a racial one.

As a reaction to his rejection by the country of his birth, in his exile writings Wolffe, like other white Zimbabwean memoir writers in recent times, uses "nostalgic representations of white childhood in Zimbabwe" to inscribe the legitimacy and authenticity" of his identity onto the Zimbabwean landscape (Harris 108). He critiques and censures Mugabe whom he calls a rabid beast (as his cruelty renders him inhuman), a dying or ageing "tyrant leader of Zimbabwe" (*Flotsam* 22) and a "destroyer of any living freedom" (ibid. 30) for making him abandon his sunny childhood paradise or Eden.

However, Wolffe's claim to a Zimbabwean identity is not without contradictions and ambiguities. While lamenting his suffering in exile in *Flotsam* he, in typical sour grapes scenario, says

> *[a]t least I have a bed and food in the belly.* Better than starving back in Africa where minorities are unwelcome. Especially Zimbabwe where being a writer is forbidden fruit and twelve million-plus souls are threatened with starvation right now, where the government doesn't give a damn. Mugabe's government. His Government of National Unity is a joke. It will always be the tyrant's world. Which is why the stranger has no home (17-18, italics in original).

Here, Wolffe, like many western commentators on the affairs of the African continent, refers to Africa as a country "where minorities are unwelcome" or as one place that can be understood regardless of the point of entry; ignoring the fact that "Africa is not a homogeneous entity that can be talked of as 'a thing', neither are the 'Africans'" (Pilossof 631-632).[90] He sometimes sees Africa in colonialist terms (notice that he also uncritically uses colonialist language by calling Africa "the dark continent" [*Bastard* 77]) as a continent full of problems and suffering where owning a bed and having food in one's belly are great achievements. This is a clear

[90] In his poetry and in his prose writings Wolffe uses Zimbabwe and Africa interchangeably. "Africa" in these writings, as in recent memoirs by white Zimbabweans (published since 1996), "is not something that is explored or questioned in any form" (Pilossof 631). Where necessary, I refer to Africa/Zimbabwe in the chapter as in his reference to Africa in some cases Wolffe may be referring to his "home country," Zimbabwe.

misrepresentation of Africa by someone who claims to be African. Besides, in the last sentence quoted above he characterises himself as a stranger in Zimbabwe even when he has all along been claiming, and continues to claim, that country as home. Further, in his decision to go into exile in England he refers to that country as "his little England." He writes: "[i]t is time for this bastard to return to *his* little England despite not even being entitled to British citizenship. I want to be in a place where it is not a curse to believe in democracy, tolerance, basic human rights, rule of law, where it is not criminal to possess a degree of intelligence that dares to challenge something rotten in the status quo"(ibid. 83, my emphasis). Wolffe's use of the possessive pronoun "his" (referring to himself in the third person) here indicates that he lays claim to England as home which he here presents "in the language of possession" (Harris 106). This contradicts his claim of a white African/Zimbabwean identity in his work and even in the title of one of his books, *The African in Me*. The above points reveal that Wolffe is a white writer, "an inveterate straddler" (Kissack and Titlestad xii) who is "no longer European, not yet African" (Coetzee, Introduction 12) and is free to claim either national identity when it suits him. In saying this I do not mean to undermine Wolffe's very real and touching nostalgia for Africa/Zimbabwe, his despair and sense of displacement and loss in his exile writings, particularly in *Flotsam*.

It is interesting to note that Wolffe's work, especially his autobiographical writing, is similar in many ways to recent memoirs by white Zimbabweans as analysed by Ashleigh Harris in her essay "Writing Home: Inscriptions of Whiteness/Descriptions of Belonging in White Zimbabwean Memoir-Autobiography" (2009) and Rory Pilossof in his essay "The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Land, Race and Belonging in the Memoirs of White Zimbabweans" (2009). I will only mention three similarities here. One of these similarities is the deracialisation, dehistorisation and depoliticisation of memory of childhood. Here the memoirs nostalgically construct a depoliticised past "without 'racial tensions'" thereby ignoring the "profound racial tensions throughout Zimbabwe's history" (Harris 106). The black war veterans and their accomplices who occupy white-owned farms are dismissed as ignorant, illiterate people with "no knowledge of the world outside the borders of their daily lives" (*Bastard* 6) and are "presented as gullible fools swayed by Mugabe's rhetoric or rent-a-crowd youths with no genuine interest in land or farming." The writers here fail to acknowledge the centrality of the land question in

Zimbabwean politics and to "admit that white farmers attracted a great deal of hostility because of the isolated lives they led, their wealth and often because of their real or perceived racial prejudices" (Pilossof 626). Instead these writers blame "black racism" and "state propaganda" (*Bastard* 6) as the force behind the farm invasions. Like the narrator in Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996) who "does not only see himself as belonging to a white Rhodesian community, but also naively sees himself as a part of a black community" (Harris 109) Wolffe refers to his father's black workers as "the only family that [he] knew" as a child in Zimbabwe (*Bastard* 17).

The second similarity is the idealisation and romaticisation of memory, childhood, and the Zimbabwean landscape in these narratives. In the narratives one encounters "an overly romanticised vision of the farm setting and of life [in Zimbabwe] before the land invasions started" (Pilossof 629). The Zimbabwean landscape and its creatures is variously referred to as a "little piece of heaven" (ibid), paradise and the Garden of Eden. For these writers nature represents "a deep and intense emotional point of connection with" Zimbabwe and one gets the impression that they "connect more with the landscape or nature of the country, more than they ever do with the (black) people found there" (ibid. 629-630). This holds true for Wolffe whose "connections and happy memories" of Zimbabwe in *Flotsam* and *The African* mostly "revolve around the land and nature" (ibid. 629).

The third similarity is the use of "nostalgic representations of white childhood in Zimbabwe" to inscribe legitimacy and authenticity to a white Zimbabwean identity (Harris 108). Alexandra Fuller and Peter Godwin do this in their memoirs *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* and *Mukiwa*, respectively. And so does Wolffe in *Flotsam*, *Bastard*, and *The African* (and in his poetry in *Changing Skins*). As Harris rightly observes

> [n]ostalgia for a Zimbabwean childhood allows the writer[s] to imagine a space of political and racial innocence and naïveté; a prelapserian state of unquestioned belonging as a white child in Zimbabwe or Rhodesia. Nostalgia demarcates the space, both temporal and geographical, that delineates 'home' in [their] texts. Thus, while the individual's relationship with the past through memory is ostensibly personal, in [the] texts it is that memory which is crucially implicated in the inscription of the self into/onto Zimbabwe's land and history (Harris 108).

Amongst his published poetic works before and after departure into exile, it is in *Changing Skins* where Wolffe focuses on nature and animals in Zimbabwe. In this

collection Wolffe exposes "the wonders and wilderness of Africa, it[s] creatures and its colours, its thunderstorms, its drought, its blood songs and beauty" ("Changing Skins" np). It is here where we see nature come to life as creatures, big and small, diurnal and nocturnal, walk, crawl, hop and fly, while plants spring up, sway in the wind, blossom and die. It is in *Changing Skins* where we hear the wind howl and roar through the vegetation and infrastructure, the rains pour down onto parched earth, filling the air with damp smells of wet soil characteristic of rainy seasons; while in a drought, we feel the sun strike the earth and the naked rocks with a vengeance. In his poems Wolffe shows the interconnectedness of all things and also celebrates difference and diversity. He laments our alienation from nature which we relegate to the periphery as we are lured by the trappings of capital and modernity and their promises of a comfortable life. He also laments the loss of connection and appreciation of the rich wildlife heritage by new generations of (black) Zimbabweans who destroy and abuse other creatures on their headlong journey towards progress. But, as I attempt to show later, this criticism of black Zimbabweans, in particular, and Africans, in general, for ignoring conservation issues[91] is blind to the socio-political and economic problems that afflict Africans and lead to environmental degradation.

Surprisingly, Wolffe's poetry has not received the critical attention it deserves in Zimbabwe or beyond. This, as I said in Chapter One above, appears to be a result of the perceived binary between the two literary "traditions," white and black. While black poets are committed to the fears, hopes and aspirations of the poor, white poets are accused of having "created a whole genre of tropical safari poetry which left gaping moral blank spaces about the down-trodden and suffering humanity in their midst" (Zimunya qtd. by Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 21). White writers are also seen as "lacking in talent, broadness of vision and generosity of spirit" (Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 22), characteristics that allegedly render their poetry mediocre, self-indulgent, and sentimental. The charge of sentimentalism is with regard to contemporary white Zimbabwean poets' concern with nature, plants and animals, as with their counterparts of the colonial era. Zhuwarara tells us that white Zimbabwean poets are considered to have produced "a wealth of poetry about suburban gardens and the rather ever blossoming jacaranda tree, as well as sonnets about sonnets.... The

[91] Sometimes expressed by statements such as "African adults are beyond repair, they don't care about conservation, we must focus on the black children" (Anonymous informant qtd. by Cock 56).

jacaranda sentimentality sometimes spills over into the general, local flora and fauna'' (Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 22).

Bart Wolffe's concern with nature and Zimbabwe's wildlife means that he is painted with the same brush strokes, in particular the sweeping charge of sentimentalism. Yet it does not occur to critics like Zimunya to accept and appreciate "plurality, inclusiveness and the breaking of boundaries" (Primorac and Muponde xviii) that enables readers to get acquainted with different versions of Zimbabwe. The dearth of critical attention to Wolffe's poetry is unfortunate given that he has a substantial body of published work that includes fiction, poetry and drama, and that he is no stranger to the literary landscape of Zimbabwe as he was at one point involved with the Zimbabwe Writer's Union (see *Bastard* 59). Wolffe himself comments that his poetry has been seen as unworthy of serious critical attention because it is considered romantic. Wolffe says:

> I have never been considered worth being recognised as a poet in Africa by the publishing fraternity. My work has been seen as romantic rather than having a social and political imperative. I would disagree. My crime was to be a white writer in Zimbabwe. Therefore, I was not qualified to speak for Africa (Email exchange).

That Wolffe is very concerned about, and feels betrayed by, this lack of critical attention to his books is also clear in the poem "Absences" (*The Stones of SomeWhere* 73-74) where he writes:

> My books, it seems
> Dust-repositories for my dreams
> Are empty of response.
>
> Not once
> Nor one has found its place
> With those I counted on my hand
> As intimate enough to care
> For what I had to say (73).

But given the dearth of ecologically-oriented criticism of Zimbabwean poetry, in particular, and African literature, in general, this lack of critical debate on Wolffe, some of whose works are more ecologically-oriented (as they deal substantially with animals and nature rather than questions of human struggle for survival in an inhospitable world), is understandable though not excusable. In this chapter I examine the poetry of Wolffe in relation to issues of identity, stewardship (custodianship) and heritage with regard to Zimbabwean wildlife and landscape.

3.0 Nature, Landscape and Identity in Wolffe's Poetry

> I grew at one with the African landscape. I loved the land deeply - and its peoples. It afforded me the space to be solitary and to think (Email exchange).

In some of his poems Bart Wolffe uses the natural environment to construct his identity and as a means of self-definition, that is, of trying to make sense of himself. Further, through his description of the landscape and "his relationship with the land" and its creatures in his poetry Wolffe inscribes himself into the landscape and claims a white Zimbabwean identity (Harris 111). The view of identity espoused here is a constructivist one, one that emphasises the multiplicity and malleability of identity. This view does not see identity as primordial, fixed and organic, but as subject to reconfiguration, change and "shift across time and place, for individuals, groups, and whole societies" (Croucher 38). Wolffe's experiences in the wild in Zimbabwe allow him to reconfigure and construct an identity in relation to the natural environment. As Francki Burger observes "[i]dentity is as much in the experience (sights, smells, etc.) as in the physical appearance of a city or landscape. An attachment or rootedness to a place is formed through experiencing the same kinds of objects and activities in places, or because people are taught to perceive certain features in the same way by their cultural group." He goes on to say that "[t]hrough daily rituals and routines within a place, we learn how to decode its signs, and acquire its 'meaning, assurance and significance' to our lives" (21). This is true of Wolffe and his interactions with nature in Zimbabwe.

Scholars have for a long time recognised the fact that "experience or relationship with particular nonhuman places and beings" helps in shaping identity (Holmes 31). Although, as Susan Clayton observes, psychologists have tended to "overlook the impact of nonsocial (or at least nonhuman) objects in defining identity […] there are clearly many people for whom an important aspect of their identity lies in ties to the natural world: connections to specific natural objects such as pets, trees, mountain formations, or particular geographic locations" (Clayton 45). For such people environmental experience helps in "the growth and maintenance of [their] individuality or uniqueness; self-definition and self-worth through assertion, work, and achievement" (Holmes 34).

For Wolffe the importance of the natural environment for the construction of his identity and for his self-definition and self-worth cannot be overemphasised. The bullying he suffered at school and his sense of alienation and isolation from other white families in the neighbourhood at home may have affected his self-confidence. His low self-esteem may also have been exacerbated by his incompetence in sports (see *Bastard* 2006). His excursions into the wild and experiences with nature, his ability to handle dangerous animals such as snakes and his ability to survive in the wild helped to maintain his individuality and improve his self-worth and sense of achievement.

For Wolffe therefore "[t]he natural environment […] provide[s] a particularly good source of self-definition, based on an identity formed through interaction with the natural world and on self-knowledge obtained in an environmental context" (Clayton 51). Through his identification and connection with the environment and the land (as the epigrammatic quote from his email above shows) Wolffe forges an environmental identity, that is, "a sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity, that affects the ways in which we perceive and act toward the world; a belief that the environment is important to us and an important part of who we are" (ibid. 45-46).

We first come across Wolffe's identification with the earth and construction of an environmental identity in the poem "Natural Regressions" (*CS* 4). In the poem Wolffe salutes nature as a benefactor and caring mother who sustains life, thereby claiming an intimate relationship or connection with nature – a connection similar to that of a mother and her child. In the poem we encounter the poet-protagonist standing in a rocky place, possibly somewhere in the hills and mountains of Zimbabwe. Before him is a flaking tree around which is old man's beard that looks like "a pauper's blanket." A lizard basks in the sun while grasping a stone with rudimentary fingers close by. Although (as the apt simile of the "pauper's blanket" and the flaking tree show) nature seems to be regressing here, the poet-protagonist is well aware of the earth's regenerative and life-giving power. The last half of the poem constitutes the poet-protagonist's acknowledgement and gratitude to Mother Nature:

> - So you clothe me
> With whatever shape the rough, solid stuff
> Called earth and truth shall give us,
> You, my seasoning mother, patient,

Piecing me together, patching
Cracked rock, old root,
Knitting with your inching lichen
On my soul such dwelling

The idea of nature clothing the poet-protagonist refers to the various ways that nature provides for humans – food, water and shelter, among other things. The various changes of the seasons, hinted at by the reference to the earth as "my seasoning mother," that also change the appearance of the land are like different clothes the earth provides for all creatures. The poet-protagonist also makes a claim to a close relationship with nature by possessively referring to her as "my […] mother." One is tempted to say that nature here stands in as a figure of the loving and caring mother the poet never had.

The reference to nature "piecing [him] together" alludes to the poet's sense of fragmentation/brokenness or incompleteness as a result of his identity dilemmas. He credits nature with powers of healing, of making him complete and whole. Unlike the judgemental and morally self-righteous social environment, the natural environment fulfils the poet-protagonist's desire for complete and full subjectivity. The expression "Knitting with inching lichen / On my soul such dwelling" reveals how nature embraces him and provides a home or a comfort zone for him. Rejected and alienated by fellow humans, nature accepts and cares for him. Beyond his personal problems and identity quest, in this poem Wolffe also shows humanity's indebtedness to Mother Nature ("seasoning mother" in the poem) who provides for us in various ways.[92] The regenerative powers of the earth are signalled by mention of its ability to piece things together and patch "Cracked rock [and] old root." For the poet-protagonist the earth is our sole benefactor, providing for us all the basics of survival. The earth dresses us all, living and non-living things – the lichen on the rocks and on the trees are all clothes from nature, sacred and enduring, unlike all other things we regard as progressive and fashionable. Wolffe shows in this poem that our alienation from nature as we seek to control and transcend it is delusory as all our efforts would never outlive nature which outlives "all alibis of fashion." Wolffe's acknowledgement of the earth as a dwelling, as a home we should all respect and acknowledge, explains

[92] We should bear in mind that feminists are unhappy, and rightly so, with this and similar comparison and equating of nature to womanhood and femininity or vice versa as this tendency only perpetuates the exploitation and abuse of both nature and women.

his celebration of all aspects of nature in his poetry and his lamentation for the loss of aspects of it through our unecological ways of living.

The illustration accompanying this poem shows a place in the wild in Zimbabwe with balancing rocks which are a "prominent symbol of the country" (Muponde, "History as Witchcraft" 7). Besides indicating the context of the poems, or the actual place that gave the inspiration for the poems, the balancing rocks here function as a means through which Wolffe claims allegiance to Zimbabwe as his home and inscribes his identity onto the Zimbabwean landscape.

Wolffe also inscribes his identity on the landscape and constructs an identity of a child or lover of nature through his explorations of the wilderness in Zimbabwe as a child. In "Domboshawa Kopje" (*CS* 13) the poet-protagonist and his childhood friends explore the small hill of the poem's title and "live in" nature. Regarding these excursions, Wolffe says in *Flotsam*: "*I wandered, as a child, the wide ways across the bushveld, ready to be startled at every step by a sense of discovery, the sudden swishing surge of a large snake, perhaps a python, crossing my path, the sight of a guinea fowl crashing up into crazy flight in the long grass with a raucous chatter of announcement"* (25, italics in original). In the poem the children see the wild as a "playground" which reveals their fearlessness and sense of freedom in nature. Wolffe writes:

> It has been waiting like a bobijaan [sic] skull,
> Blanched, bleached and baked
> Under the burning African sun
> For popeyed piccanins to moll over, puzzle over,
> Running round in bushveld playground fun.

In the poem we encounter a rare occasion when Wolffe uses local words such as the misspelt "bobijaan" (bobbejaan) for baboon, piccanin (a variant of piccaninny), and "kopje" (small hill) perhaps with the intention of giving the poem a local flavour. However, in using the words "bobbejaan" and "piccanin" he seems to ignore their offensive nature and their foreignness, as colonial terms of abuse, to black people. Nevertheless, in using the term "piccanin" to refer to himself and his friends Wolffe sheds off his whiteness and identifies himself as a black African child. Here we see Wolffe's attempts at self-definition and reconstruction of racial identity. The image of a baboon's skull whose whiteness and dryness is emphasised by the alliterative words "Blanched, bleached and baked" evokes the dry and greyish look of the granite rocks

of the kopje. In depicting the kopje as waiting in the sun for his and his friends' explorations, Wolffe claims entitlement or the right to explore the wild as a son of the soil.

The children's explorations of the landscape also provide insights about nature and wildlife as we read in the third and fourth stanzas:

> Fingers find the knack to explore the bony cracks
> Filled with sprouting seeds of greenery and weeds,
> Errant ants meandering
> Over a mountain of dry stone.
>
> Beetles found their house
> In otherwise old and useless bone.
> - So lizards and dassies do,
> In their granite home;
> Domboshawa's sleeping giant's dome.

The children's exploration of "the bony cracks," like their footprints across the landscape, is also a way of inscribing themselves onto the landscape. The expression "bony cracks" is a continuation of the metaphorical depiction of the kopje as a baboon's skull. While on the kopje the children observe plants growing from cracks of rocks and various animals who find the cracks and the rocks a convenient place to establish their homes. The reference to the ants as "Errant" perhaps signals the fact that the ants misbehaved by biting the curious children. Apart from adding emphasis to the poet's descriptions, the alliteration in this poem, as is the case in other poems discussed in this chapter, and the rhyming of "home" and "dome" give the poem a lyrical quality.

The poet-protagonist's explorations and attempts to create an environmental identity do not always result in pleasant experiences as in "Domboshawa Kopje." In "Skull" (*CS* 14) three ten-year olds discover a human skull in a cave out in the hills. Wolffe tells us:

> - WE were the ones, clambering over hills in search of treasure,
> We found you, old pirate, amongst the dassie droppings
> And even in the frail faith of all ten years we knew
> Someday our visions would separate from our skulls
> And all the secrets of the dust become revealed.

The "treasure" mentioned in the poem that the children seek is not wealth but knowledge about the world of nature around them. The act of "clambering over hills"

gives the poet-protagonist and his friends a sense of accomplishment and a sense of self-worth. In referring to the skull as "old pirate" the speaker identifies himself with the person whose skull now lay "amongst the dassie droppings" and depicts him as another seeker of treasure of one form or another when he was alive. The idea of the children's visions separating from their skulls "And all the secrets of the dust becom[ing] revealed" refers to the children's realisation that one day they shall be disabused of their innocence and truth about life and death become clear to them.

The discovery of the skull, unlike of the beetles, lizards, ants, and dassies in the last poem, provokes terror in the children as we read:

> Three children did not speak but shivered as they walked
> Although cicadas sang through forested avenues of sun
> And though they did not talk but stammered to a run
> Cold thoughts stalked strangely all around
> Right up to the gates of the school's familiar ground.

The shivering, stammering and the "Cold thoughts" highlight the children's terror as they ran back to the school grounds. The cicadas' songs which on a different occasion would have been beautiful and difficult to ignore fail to draw the attention of the fearful children. The "forested avenues of sun" could be a reference to the small passages the children use in exploring the forest upon which the sun fell on this occasion. These narrow passages ("avenues") the children leave as they explore the forest are also a means with which they inscribe their identity on the landscape.

One of the lessons Wolffe learns through his observations of nature is the equal vulnerability of all life, both human and non-human, a fact that renders racial, class, gender, and species pride, among others, redundant. We come across the vulnerability of all life to the elements in the poem "This Burning Earth" (*CS* 26). The poem is a record of the dry season or a drought; a time when the sun strikes the earth with a vengeance and life is brought to its knees in recognition of the sun's power. In the heat of the sun silence rules as animals seek shelter and grass is reduced to tinder. The poet writes:

> I stand in this whispering desert
> Separate from the burning earth
> But not the sky.
> Underfoot, the skeletal grass rustles
> Like roasting cobs of maize.

The line “I stand in this whispering desert” inscribes the poet onto the particular environment identified by the pronoun “this,” an environment that is being scorched by the sun. While it is difficult to say for certain why the poet-protagonist sees himself as “Separate from the burning earth / But not the sky,” one suspects that the poet here distances himself from the cruel human environment on the earth, also implied in the phrase “burning earth,” and identifies himself with the sky and its associated freedom. The word “burning” mainly refers to the heat of the sun during the drought which is the subject of the poem. But it can also refer to the social and political problems within the social environment on earth. As such, although the poet-protagonist is physically on earth, he prefers to imagine himself roaming free in the expanse of the sky. The sky promises freedom while the earth seems to offer confinement.

Although the term “skeletal” does not add much to the meaning and experience in the poem considering that grass is small anyway, the comparison of the rustling sound of the grass to the sound of “roasting cobs of maize” powerfully captures the dryness of the grass. The poet’s use of words such as “whispering desert” emphasises the dry, silent, and hot atmosphere and the fact that creatures are subdued. The rustling grass, mention of the “thin-leafed silence,” the “dry dove” and “heat wave” all show the relentlessness of the sun. But, although “All is rust and rustle,” stillness and silence, there is beauty in the desert landscape which Wolffe describes as “Tawny dull and beautiful.” Interestingly the impact of the unforgiving heat of the sun reduces all creatures to an equal footing as we hear that

> Pride is numbed
> All are equal
> Beneath the desert day.

Given that the poet does not specify which or whose “Pride is numbed” we can assume that he is referring to all kinds of pride – racial, class, status, and species, among others. Here Wolffe punctures the bubble of human pride and sense of superiority over other animals. Humans and animals suffer the consequences of the blazing sun. The realisation that all beings, no matter their station in life, are at the mercy of nature helps improve his self-esteem and confidence in a world where he feels alienated. Further, natural events, like the drought in the case of this poem, enable him to reflect on the similarities rather than the differences all beings share.

In *Changing Skins* we also learn that for the poet-protagonist who is wrestling with identity issues nature provides a sense of meaning or purpose to his life. It is in the world of nature where he sees the delightful side of life. This comes through in the poem "Revelation" (*CS* 21). As the title suggests the poem is about the poet-protagonist's discovery of the value or meaning of his life though his encounter with other forms of life such as plants. In the poem we read:

> When sunlight first flicked its whiplash in my eyes
> And life bounced back on the stab of leaves,
> Green blades thrusting in my sight,
> The buckled beat of bronze buds in the breeze,
> I felt the thrust of purpose through the dust
> In a thousand points and stabbing shapes
> Pronouncing words in swords of sap
> And colours punched in pollen bowls
> Of summer flowers suspended in the air,
> Exploding stars of reds and golds and white
> And knew that life sang drumbeats of delight
> To every step I walked upon the world

The poet's consciousness of thriving life around him makes him realise that his own life has meaning, that like the plants and flowers (although this is only a projection of his own feelings onto the plants) he also needed to be happy. In this poem too nature provides the poet with self-confidence and helps the poet to put his feet firmly on the ground. The idea of the sunlight flicking "its whiplash in [the poet's] eyes" emphasises how the light from the sun jolts/rouses him to the beauty of life around him. This idea is further emphasised in the poem through the image of a sword or the act of stabbing through the use of such words as "stab," "thrusting," "thrust," "points," "stabbing," and "sword." As elsewhere in his poetry Wolffe here maintains rhythm through careful use of alliteration which especially bangs and bounces in the line "The buckled beat of bronze buds in the breeze." The word "Exploding" in the line "Exploding stars of reds and golds and white" best captures the iridescence of the summer flowers that surround the poet on this occasion.

In addition to providing assurance for the insecure poet-protagonist, nature also acts as a symbol of hope for him. In the poem "Four Teak Seeds" (*CS* 23) the poet-protagonist identifies himself with the seeds of the Zambezi teak tree and believes that like the teak seeds that he plays with which have the potential to grow

into big trees, he too has the potential to become an important or valuable person. Wolffe writes:

> Four teak seeds, my rosary.
> From palm to palm I pass them,
> Pray them, play them.
> Theirs is the inward tree
> To spring sky tall, touching.
> Theirs are the roots' deep search
> Through bone and flesh and earth.
> Two in one hand, two in the other,
> I cross my arms and feel their future
> Embrace me.

In the poem the poet-protagonist plays with the seeds but also uses them as prayer aids as indicated by his reference to them as his "rosary" and by the line "Pray them, play them." The use of parallelism here and in the line "Two in one hand, two in the other" enables us to visualise the poet-protagonist playing with the seeds and reveals Wolffe's ability to combine serious contemplation and playfulness in the same poem. The lines "I cross my arms and feel their future / Embrace me" suggest that the poet-protagonist sees himself as part of the natural world, his future connected with that of the seeds and trees they will eventually become and other aspects of nature. Here he reveals his vision of the connectedness of all life, the fact that, as Rachel Carson observes, "in nature nothing exists alone" (51). In the poem the poet-protagonist also says this about the seeds: "They warm, they promise, these small hopes." This reveals how contemplation of the seeds' potential brings happiness into his heart and how they act as a symbol of hope for his own bright future.

Wolffe's identification with nature, construction and claiming of an African identity also come through in the poem "Christmas Calls Me Back" (*CS* 29). The poem is a reconstruction of the poet's first memories of Christmas as a child. He remembers climbing a tree whose name he cannot remember on a wet Christmas morning and later wistfully tells us:

> In my African Eden;
> I, swaddled in a love of rain,
> In the swathe of branches, mountains,
> Home of the tall tree wet with promise
> Wind in my limbs, dew in my hair [.]

The Edenic nature of Africa, which the poet-protagonist possessively claims as his, has to do with the beauty of nature, the rain, the trees and the mountains he mentions in the poem. As a child of nature the wet weather does not cause him discomfort but rather provides pleasure and fun. The tree is here "wet with promise" for continuity of life also brought and promised by the rain. The claim of an African identity through the claim of ownership of Africa in the expression "my African Eden" is also an act of inscription of identity onto Africa and a rejection of the identity of a foreigner. The invocation of Africa as his family, his parents, through the expression "swaddled in the love of" is, given his early childhood history, also an attempt to find love or the warmth of an embrace.

Apart from exploration of the land (and the marks left on the landscape in the process) and identification with nature and the land, Wolffe, like white Zimbabwean memoir writers in recent times, also inscribes his identity onto the African/Zimbabwean landscape, history and geography through nostalgia, especially in his poems written in exile. In these poems, like in some of the ones discussed above, we notice Wolffe seeking a dialogue with Africa and trying to shed, unsuccessfully, the identity of a stranger, visitor or the politically-loaded identity of a settler. I say unsuccessfully because in spite of his engagement with the Zimbabwean landscape and his relationship with it, some of Wolffe's poems, as I will show later, reveal that his quest for an African identity remains elusive and ambiguous.

In *Changing Skins* Wolffe's insertion of his own subject position onto Zimbabwe begins in the poem "Zimbabwe: House of Stone" (*CS* 3). This poem, the first in the collection *Changing Skins*, lays the contextual foundation of the poetry in *Changing Skins* as its positioning at the opening of the collection bespeaks of the contextual focus of the poetry. As the Zimbabwe bird (symbol of Zimbabwean nationhood and cultural heritage) on the collection's cover and in the illustration at the bottom of the poem suggests, the poetry in this collection is centred on or is inspired by the poet's life experiences in Zimbabwe in particular, and Africa in general. In this short one stanza poem with four lines the poet declares:

> Its rocks shall stand a monument to man
> To remind them time and again,
> Though seasons pass and people go
> The stones live on forever

The immediate references in the poem are the ruins of Great Zimbabwe which appear in the illustration at the bottom of the poem. In the forefront of the ruins is a tree and a Zimbabwe bird. Great Zimbabwe or "house of stone" is an intense political symbol in Zimbabwe since the colonial period, for both the colonialists and African nationalists, mainly because of its contested origin. For the colonialists "the exotic /foreign origin theories," that is, theories that Great Zimbabwe was built by non-Africans, "inspired and provided historical and moral legitimacy for the colonisation of [the land that] became Rhodesia in 1890," while the now widely held view that Great Zimbabwe is the work of Africans, specifically the Rozvi people, ancestors of the Shona, led to its use by African nationalists "as an example of past African achievement" (Fontein 10). Great Zimbabwe proves for Zimbabwean nationalists that, in the words of Chinua Achebe, "their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" ("The Novelist" 72). During the struggle for liberation Great Zimbabwe was evoked by the guerrilla fighters as a rallying symbol for unity amongst blacks in the country. Wolffe's take on the ruins seems to say all the struggles for national/political identity and power are futile. The fate of all humans, white or black, is the same. Our life, all of us, is transient and the very stones that are the site of our petty battles shall outlive us. In a way then Wolffe is calling for unity of all humans under the umbrella of a common fate of life's transience. He is also somehow claiming belonging to Zimbabwe as he seems to say "We all belong here and the politicisation of the rocks by both black and white Zimbabweans is a futile exercise. Leave the stones alone, our fate is the same, let us live in harmony."

The ancient ruins in the poem and illustration testify to the permanence of nature as opposed to transient human life and culture. The people credited with building the stone walls of Zimbabwe are long dead but the walls and their rocks are still standing today. The stones here are a metonymy for the country, Zimbabwe (a fact supported by the bird which symbolises Zimbabwean nationhood) and nature (a fact complemented by the tree in the illustration). Wolffe expresses similar views about the transience of human life and permanence of nature in *The African* when he says

> [o]f all creatures great and small, African lizards from the deserts to the jungle, from the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro to the open savannah of Masai Mara, from the banks of the Nile to the waters of the Zambezi, remind us that only we, the children of men, are the

> passing parade of fashion. Theirs is a legacy of stone and unchanged centuries. Theirs is ancient testimony to the open spaces beneath the sun. They will still be here as they were before we first came to inherit the earth, they will be here when we have passed and gone (21).

However, Wolffe's idea of the unchanging nature of animal lives in the quotation above belies the reality of species extinction, renewal or change over time. In a subtle critique of the despotic leader of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, Wolffe says "[p]eople come and go. The mighty ruins of Great Zimbabwe bear testimony to this fact. The lizards remain to bear witness to it all. That is Nature's great hope and plan, when tyrants have come and gone" (32).

Here Wolffe exposes the folly of seeking to impose authority over nature, of erecting cultural and political structures that are oppressive to others oblivious of the impermanence or transience of our lives. The poem calls for self-reflection on the worth of our lives in relation to the earth and other living things, both human and nonhuman. But, while nature may appear superior to humans by its very permanence, in Wolffe's thought (as I will show later) it only endures to serve humans for the future in whose hands it falls as heritage. Nature for Wolffe does not exist for its own sake. It does so to serve humans. Besides the permanence of nature, the view that the animals "will still be here as they were before we first came to inherit the earth, [that] they will be here when we have passed and gone" makes a mockery of the truism that countless species are becoming extinct every year because of our unecological life styles and abuse of nature.

In the poems Wolffe has written while in exile he uses nostalgia and memory as means of writing himself onto the lost Edenic and paradisiacal world of childhood and of home. It is true that nostalgia for lost childhood is also a subject of some poems in *Changing Skins* such as "Independence and Yesterday" (*CS* 70), "African Lullaby" (*CS* 72), and "A Prayer for a Child" (*CS* 73). But in these poems the nostalgia is for the lost childhood, not about a lost home as well since the poet is still in Zimbabwe.

Unlike in these poems, in the poems Wolffe has written in exile "the nostalgia for childhood becomes intertwined with a nostalgia for the Zimbabwean landscape" and the memory of that childhood becomes "implicated in the inscription of the self into/onto Zimbabwe's land and history" (Harris 111, 108). Ashleigh Harris has this to say about recent memoirs by White Zimbabweans: "[i]t would appear that the

narration of one's childhood experiences in a place that denies one's belonging, and offers no recourse to the discourses of reconciliation and redemption through which to articulate white identity, becomes a means to inscribe one's self into the historical, political, and geographical landscape of Zimbabwe" (109). These words apply to Wolffe's nostalgic poetry and poetry of displacement written in exile.

In contrasting London from Africa/Zimbabwe in the poem "No-Man's Land" (*The Stones of SomeWhere* [*SOS*] 5-6) Wolffe relies on the lack of the familiar animals, the moon and stars in London as he laments:

> For no horizon beckons the low of his boyhood cattle
> Beneath the blanket stars and other-way moon.
> No frog familiars nor fruit bat songs
> Fulfil these dead walls where wild buffalo-horns bellow
> Their electrical blaze of London or beyond (5).

The line "For no horizon beckons the low of his boyhood cattle" underlines his sense of alienation, loss and unbelonging in London or England, the no-man's land of the title, and reveals his nostalgia for his childhood. The "other-way moon" refers to a moon he remembers as heading in a different direction back in Zimbabwe as opposed to the one he now sees in exile. The last stanza of the poem underlines the poet-protagonist's longing and nostalgia for home through the varied repetition of the phrase "How he wishes":

> Understand how simply he wishes,
> How he wishes without words,
> Without his own tongue even,
> How he only wishes he could go home
> But there is no now return to the life-joy stolen
> And he knows no here belonging
> Neither beckoning back (5-6).

Here Wolffe unambiguously claims a Zimbabwean identity by referring to that country as "home." The expression "Without his own tongue" refers to his loss of familiar references in the new country, a fact that renders him almost dumb.

The poet-protagonist's sense of alienation in exile comes forcefully in the second stanza of the poem "The Emigrant's Lament" (*SOS* 7), partly through the regretful tone:

> But I am no-one, no-name known
> Whose skin, now thin is an empty thing,
> I am a ghost from whom life has gone

I, a stranger, who does not belong…

The thin skin in the poem is a synecdoche for his body that is no longer as healthy as it was before his exile, before his life lost all meaning. This existential meaninglessness of his life is emphasised by his characterisation of himself as "a ghost from whom life has gone."

In the exile poems discussed above Wolffe's nostalgia and longing for Africa and "for a Zimbabwean childhood allows [him] to imagine a space of political and racial innocence and naïveté; a prelapserian state of unquestioned belonging as a white child in Zimbabwe or Rhodesia." In these poems "[n]ostalgia demarcates the space, both temporal and geographical, that delineates 'home'" (Harris 108). However, Wolffe's claim to a Zimbabwean identity is fraught with contradictions. In some of his poems in *Changing Skins* Wolffe depicts himself and other whites in Zimbabwe as strangers, although he also depicts himself as someone whose quest for racial identity and belonging in Zimbabwe has failed to bear fruits. In other poems Wolffe's views about Africa echo the views of colonialists, tourists and visitors and complicate his identity as an African.

In the poem "I Grow Tired" (*CS* 81) the poet-protagonist confesses that he is tired of searching for his tribe or seeking belonging to his race and would prefer to "lie down / Beneath [the] African moon [he] know[s] so well." The poems first stanza reads:

Like an old bull elephant I grow tired
Of endless searching for my tribe.
Now in dignity, I want to lie down
Beneath that African moon I know so well.

The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defines tribe as "racial group (esp. in a primitive or nomadic culture) united by language, religion, customs etc and living as a community under one or more chiefs." It is safe to assume therefore that by using the term tribe in the poem Wolffe refers to his racial group, fellow whites. In the poem the poet does not succeed in his quest to belong to his racial group which remains elusive and strange to him. Instead he feels a sense of belonging to nature, symbolised by the African moon, which he "know[s] so well." Wolffe could also be using the word "tribe" in a looser way here as a metaphor for "my place" or "a community to which to belong." As such, his failure to belong to a "tribe" could also mean his

failure to find his like-minded people in the Zimbabwean society regarding issues of race or the environment.

However, when we understand tribe according to its dictionary meaning, that is, to mean a racial group, we notice that elsewhere Wolffe has no problems identifying himself with whites and depicting himself and his fellow whites in Zimbabwe as strangers. In the poem "Days in Paradise" (*CS* 86) which tackles a wide range of issues such as post-colonial disillusionment, the haunting beauty of Africa, and the delicate nature of sexual relationships, the poet-protagonist calls himself and other whites

> We who are mutants and exiles, aliens
> In a further land of foreign trees,
> We [who] uproot our hauntings from the soil we know [.]

The word "mutants" here signals the attempts by settlers in Zimbabwean to fit into the new environment and to see themselves as different from their counterparts in the mother country. Paradoxically, it is to the mother country that they cast their backward glance to retrieve their "hauntings," that is, a sense of continuity of culture, religion and modes of knowing, among others. The mutants' habit of uprooting "hauntings from the soil [they] know," that is, from the mother country, reminds us of the tendency in Rhodesian poetry, and in white writing more generally, of applying "European metaphor to Africa in an effort to make it yield its essence" (Coetzee, *White Writing* 169).

In characterising himself as a mutant, exile and alien, Wolffe shows that although he attempts to identify himself as Zimbabwean he is aware of the complexity of this project. The above lines can also be read as a critique of Zimbabwean whites' perpetual backward glance to the mother country or failure to cut links with it and fully integrate themselves within the new environment. But this reading pales in significance when one realises that Wolffe, unconsciously perhaps, also characterises himself as a stranger in the short poems "We Who Love Africa" (*CS* 91) and "To Love Africa" (*Dust of Eden* 46). In the former Wolffe writes

> We, who love Africa, will never forget
> The heartbeat of her drums at night…

Wolffe's vision of Africa here is similar to that of tourists or visitors to Africa for whom the "drums at night" is the essence or soul ("heartbeat") of the continent. Africa is a large theatre in which to engage in all sorts of aesthetic pleasures. The

memory of the drums, and not the drummers, and the beauty of the land and the animals, and not the people who live on that land, represents a deep emotional connection with Africa. In using the first pronoun plural "we" Wolffe implicates himself in the tourist and colonial vision in the above lines. For an African, the sounds are part of his/her daily life and their memory has nothing whatsoever to do with his/her love, or lack of it, of the continent. The "we" in the poem therefore does not necessarily refer to Africans but to non-Africans, those who train an outsider's gaze onto Africa.

Wolffe expresses a similar tourist/colonialist vision of Africa in the poem "To Love Africa" where he says

> To love Africa, to never forget
> The heartbeat of her drums at night –

Wolffe's vision in these poems distances him from the Africa he embraces as home in many of his poems and has the effect of making one feel that although he may be one with Africa in the other poems, he is not of Africa.

4.0 Celebration of Life and Retreat into Nature: Tranquillity, Beauty, Diversity

> The voices of the birds and the distance of vehicles in my former African paradise spoke of space and horizon, a gentler way, once upon a time. Yesterday. I could breathe freely then in my African paradise (*The African* 5).

In using nature to construct his identity and belonging Wolffe does not only celebrate life, its beauty and diversity, but also his own retreat into nature. In the epigrammatic quote above he also, in addition to inscribing himself onto Africa by claiming possession of Africa as his paradise and commenting on the gentleness of the wild (in opposition to human society as he knew it as a child), mentions how the African landscape represented freedom for him, a place where he "could breathe freely." It is a well known fact that humans benefit in various ways, psychologically, spiritually, and physically, from the natural environment, some of which include physical fitness, self-confidence, calm and healing of the soul. Some of the anthropocentric or self-interest arguments for wilderness preservation rely on these therapeutic aspects of nature (see Nelson 2003). For Wolffe nature provided a sanctuary from cruel human society. For him the natural environment was more understanding and accommodating than humans; it never pressured him with demands

and was never judgemental. Susan Clayton rightly observes that "[n]ature can provide increased understanding of our own abilities and influence in part because it does not change very much in response to a person's behavior; only our own position in nature changes." While our behaviour, our appearance and status, the way our behaviour is perceived and interpreted by others, and a host of other forces unknown to us can influence the way other people respond to us in a social environment, the situation is different in a natural environment where one may have a clear idea of "what can be controlled and what cannot." For example, weather changes have nothing to do with a person's behaviour or appearance and the responses of animals to one's presence and the motives behind them (self-protection, hunger etc) can at times "be straightforward and the impetus for their behavior clear." As such, Clayton notes, "[t]he link between [a person's] behavior and its consequences may be clearer in a natural than in a social environment" (49-50). It is not surprising therefore that for many people nature serves as a retreat, a sanctuary from the hassles of the social environment.

Clayton also observes that "[t]he natural environment […] may be able to encourage a strong and positive sense of self" by promoting qualities that "seem to be desired parts of everyone's identity[, namely] autonomy, or self-direction; relatedness, or connection; and competence." Clayton believes that the natural environment can enhance an individual's perception of autonomy since "there are fewer commands or requests from others that limit behavioral choices." The natural environment can also contribute to an individual's sense of belonging or spiritual connection to the earth or the world and it can promote one's sense of competence through "the feeling of self-sufficiency" that can come from mastery of "survival skills through living off the land, climbing a steep mountain, or staring down one's fear of the dark" (50-51, see also Hunter and Sanderson 213). Most of these observations hold true for Wolffe and his interaction with the natural environment in Zimbabwe.

In some of his poems, which are often a result of personal observations and an encounter with animals, Wolffe also celebrates and affirms natural life such as the seasons, and plant and animal life in their various forms. As a lover of outdoor life who climbed hills in Zimbabwe and slept in caves as a youth, Wolffe observed the life around him and the changes of the seasons and records these in his poetry. In doing so he celebrates his own retreat into the world of nature, fosters his environmental identity and belonging. Retreat, which for Wolffe promises security, peace and tranquillity, also enables him to experience nature (its sights, smells, sounds etc),

"acquire its 'meaning, assurance and significance'" (Burger 21), and develop a sense of belonging to it.

The poem "My Release" (*CS* 60) shows how the poet himself finds calm or "release" in the company of other natural forms of life, beetles and pets in this case. In the poem the poet sits on his veranda at night listening to the "familiar, yet strange" sounds of the night and "gazing / Into the night light's horizon" of early summer. He tells us:

> Among the late dead leaves
> Seen from the light of my veranda
> As I sit and sound the night,
> Its noises, familiar, yet strange,

The "familiar, yet strange" noises include the croaking of frogs, songs of crickets and nightjars and other noises which, although familiar or well known to him, may have sounded strange on each occasion he heard them depending on their intensity or his alertness and mood.

Wolffe's sensitivity to the weather and seasonal changes in Zimbabwe reveal his closeness to, and affinity with, the natural world, his continued identification with the natural environment that provides anchorage to his life as opposed to the disturbing and alienating social world. The poem "The Coming of the Rains" (*CS* 35) provides careful observations of the weather changes soon before the onset of the rainy season in Zimbabwe. Soon before the rains come Wolffe observes that

> There is a madness that infests the leaves with ether.
> It is the wind that drives the wild horses of the trees
> To plume and spume before the onrushing sea storm grey
> When sky cascades an end to drought's cracked mouths,
> Caked earth that smiles skeletal with thirst.

The "madness" here refers to the force of the wind that makes the shaking trees look like wild horses. The internally rhyming words "plume" and "spume" successfully invite us to visualise the trees as they are tossed about in the wind. With the word "plume" Wolffe enables us to imagine that at one moment the tree leaves appear like well smoothed feathers of a bird that has preened itself, only to look ruffled like froth or foam the next moment, as suggested by the word "spume." The word "spume" here is also consistent with the image of the rain as "onrushing" waves of a stormy sea that leave spume on the shore. The coming of rain in the poem rejuvenates the drought-stricken earth; it brings life to despairing and thirsty nature threatened by death as

suggested by the expression “drought’s cracked mouths” and the word “skeletal.” Wolffe’s comparison of the drought-stricken earth to a thin (“skeletal”) person whose cracked lips break into a smile at the sight of sustenance enables us to appreciate nature’s joy at the return of the rains.

Wolffe’s encounters of and experiences with wildlife in Zimbabwe strengthen his environmental belonging and ecological vision, that is, the extent to which he sees human life as entangled with nature.

“Hwange Morning” (*CS* 6) celebrates the abundant and diverse forms of wildlife that greet the arrival of morning/dawn in Hwange National Park, the largest park in Zimbabwe. In the poem the picture of the park that Wolffe paints is Edenic. Plants, birds and mammals welcome the day in their various ways.

> The webbed acacia sketched its morning filigree
> Against the sun’s low light
> And at its feet the tall grass prayed its cloud in gold.
> Overhead, the eagle scanned terrain;
> The francolin on the stone lay low and whispering
> In the morning glow broody as a hen.

Evocative visual and aural images from such words as “filigree,” “gold” and “whispering” evoke a beautiful and a calm morning atmosphere in the park. In the poem creatures, big and small, buffaloes, oxpeckers, elephants and even plants, welcome the day in Hwange National park with some activity. The poem reveals the poet-protagonist’s identification with the harmonious and gentle world of nature as opposed to violent human society. The diversity of life and Edenic quality of the park is further captured in the third and last stanza of the poem through the metonymic reference to the life forms:

> Slowly, the day rose in shape and form
> On hoof, on wing and thorn
> Life proclaimed itself a miracle
> On the neck of he giraffe
> Out of the void pre-dawn

That mammals (“hoof”), birds (“wing”) and plants (“thorn”) should occupy this space on a globe drifting in space, breathing the same air and treading on the same earth, drinking the same water is in itself a miracle. The rise of day here also signals hope and new beginning of an appreciation of our heritage. However, read today after the years of dictatorial leadership in Zimbabwe, the poem seems to give a distorted

picture of the ubiquity of wildlife in that country. Reports indicate decimation of animals in Zimbabwe in recent years following the collapse of the country's economy (Wadhams 2007).

The poet's identification with animals and the world of nature which in turn shows his retreat and distancing of himself from human society also comes through in the poems "Swallows" (p. 52) and "Watching the Weaver Birds Feeding" (p. 53). The tone in "Swallows" is praising and admiring as the poet-protagonist tells us

> Caught upon the crest of an unseen wave
> The surfers of the blue
> Swoop and dive
> The way a child would fly a plane.

Here Wolffe compares the birds to a surfer on the waves of a blue sea. The comparison here is apt as the swallows appear to surf on an invisible wave across the sky. The poem's illustration depicts three swallows in flight in an attempt to capture the sentiments of the poem. The perceived freedom of the birds as highlighted by their description as "surfers of the blue" who "Swoop and dive" contrasts with the poet-protagonist's own sense of entrapment in human society. The comparison of the swallows' manner of flying to the way "a child would fly a plane" invites us to visualise and imagine the manner in which the birds "Swoop and dive" in the sky as similar to the way a plane flown by a child would. However, the imagery is less successful because given the size of a plane, even if it were to be flown by child, it would not "Swoop and dive" at the same frequency and unpredictable speed as swallows do.

Watching the birds fly the poet's "heart flutter[s] high," that is, stirs with excitement, and wishes it could join them in their happiness and freedom:

> And in the centre of my very being
> Felt my heart flutter high
> And chase their dance across the sky.

The "heart" here is a metonymic reference to himself as it is he who wishes to he could join the birds in their freedom. In the poem Wolffe confirms Leonard Lutwack's observation that "[t]he ability of birds to fly has inspired both scientists and poets, scientists esteeming flight a physical triumph of the first order and poets seeing in flight a powerful symbol of the transcendence they wish to achieve in their writing" (45-46). For Wolffe the swallows' flight is a form of dance, some kind of

fun. But whether the swallows really enjoy "Taking the heart of insects [that is, feeding] as they fly" is another question all together.

5.0 Nature as Heritage: Ecological Vision in Wolffe's poetry

Wolffe sees nature as our heritage which has been given to us (possibly by God) to please and entertain us; heritage we must accept, respect and care for. The idea of nature as an inheritance or legacy from past generations, however, reduces nature to a storehouse of resources for our exploitation and runs counter to Wolffe's ecological vision that sees connectedness within difference. In the introduction to *Changing Skins* Wolffe observes that "[w]e wear our environment like a mask. As fashion replaces nature, our faces achieve the rigidity of plastic moulded in the mills" (*SC* 1). The simile here compares the way we value nature to the way we value a mask as something for a special occasion and for its instrumental value. We recognise the importance of nature that clothes us – in all its variety and splendour – for its instrumental value and not in itself. Thus for Wolffe the view of modern man as man out and beyond nature – as a man of culture – is mistaken and lamentable. Wolffe believes that nature outlives culture and outlives us all. Humans, like fashions, come and go but nature endures and "outlives all alibis of fashion" (*CS* 1). He goes on to say that "[t]he day the natural order is rejected out of hand or hoof, we destroy our heritage, our future by alienating ourselves from life in all its variety and individuality" (*CS* 2). Here he encourages acceptance, respect and care for nature, especially wildlife. Further, in the introduction to *Changing Skins* Wolffe indicts the new generation of Zimbabweans for flouting and ignoring the traditions and superstitions of their ancestors through which they retained "kinship with the seasons" (*CS* 1) and the earth. It is Wolffe's belief that the Zimbabweans of yesteryears held nature as sacred and were closer to the earth as they acknowledged the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. On the contrary, modern-day Zimbabweans are hooked by temporal things that are fashionable today and useless tomorrow. This alienation from nature is, for Wolffe, a sad development as indigenous knowledges disappear and humans lose touch with their natural heritage. Wolffe therefore calls for a return to the "root values" of the ancestors, to a state of reverence, respect and attunement with nature. Given these sentiments above, it is no surprise that in most of his nature poems, in general, and animal poems, in particular, Wolffe attempts to reconnect with nature, to embrace and accept our heritage.

Commenting on the use of nature in literature he says: "[t]here is nothing wrong, sentimental or outmoded because we draw on fur and feather for some poetic fever. In fact, it is a re-affirmation with our original kinship to the land we have inhabited, our inheritance inclusive of all the great themes of sowing and reaping, fruitfulness, harvest, land and air and water" (*CS* 1). He goes on to say "[t]hrough the semiotic, semi-religious language of poetry, we reach out to touch the symbols of mystery" (*CS* 2). Wolffe's views of the symbolic importance of literary use of nature/animals as an affirmation of our kinship with the land contradicts Randy Malamud's ecocritical position which sees this tendency as a form of exploitation of nature or animals (18). For Wolffe "[p]oetry is an attempt to distil the elixir of the human voice into a language that is worth keeping. […]. It may lament and it may celebrate but its inherent 'religious' quality is one of worship with the only means available to its instrument, the poet" (Email exchange). The object of this poetic worship is nature or creation and its creator. Ecological sensibility for Wolffe therefore entails the realisation that destruction of creation is akin to usurpation of the creator, for destruction of creation is like "desecrating the temple that is the heritage of nature" (ibid.). Wolffe's celebration of nature, life and diversity therefore is his own form of worship of, and respect for, creation.

The view of nature as heritage and the religious dimension that Wolffe introduces in the above quotations raise questions about his views of humankind's place in nature. While eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, among others, recognise the interconnectedness of all life and all of nature, Christianity has been blamed for contributing to the current ecological crisis. According to Lynn White, "[t]he victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of [Western] culture" (18). He goes on to say that "[b]y destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (19). For White, the biblical creation story instilled the belief that "God planned all of this [creation] explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purpose" (18).

However, although "[i]n the Judaeo-Christian tradition, humankind's place in the universe is regarded as separate from and above that of nature and all that is non-human" (Cock 28) there is today a divergence of opinion in Christianity regarding the place and role of humans in nature. While some conservative believers and

theologians believe that the biblical story of creation gives humans dominion and unbridled use of nature, others, especially within the present milieu of ecological crisis, see mankind's role in nature as that of stewardship which involves care and responsibility (Butkus 2002). According to Butkus, the dominion that humans are advised to exercise over other creatures in Genesis (Chapter 1 verses 26-28) "does not mean to exploit or destroy but to exercise care and responsibility for God's domain particularly in the interest of those who are poor and marginalised" (20). He believes that the biblical creation story does not call on humans to be oppressors but stewards or caretakers for the things of God. As stewards therefore, "we are commanded to respect and care for the richness and diversity of life and promote the flourishing of human and non-human forms of life." This for Butkus "corresponds to the scientific insights that life is a biotic community of interdependence and that everything is interconnected" (22).

Although Butkus's position, and that of other theologians who think like him, shows a departure from "orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature" (White 5) this position does not break free from the binary and hierarchical logic that is at the centre of different forms of oppression (Best 2007). By seeing humans as bearing a God-given role of stewardship, of having been appointed by God to be "caretakers and stewards" of creation (Butkus 18), the new theological position does not depose man from his throne of authority over nature. He still remains at the pinnacle of creation as a superior overseer.

The poem "Neighbouring Universes" (*CS* 51) is a contemplative poem about our relationship with other animals triggered by watching birds fly in the distance. As the title suggests the poet-protagonist sees the birds as belonging to a different but neighbouring universe/cosmos to that of humans. The neighbourliness here signals kinship. On seeing the birds flying in the distance the poet-protagonist observes:

> They have their own cosmos,
> Those birds that wheel over there,
> Above the grey tower in the sun
> Which proves the difference, that I in poem
> Am not your tribe also (51).

The poem begins by affirming separation and difference but, as we shall see later, the poet-protagonist acknowledges the kinship between living things. For him the world of the birds, which he later identifies as crows, is not his world. This highlights the

separateness of creatures; creatures which, although interrelated, are not necessarily the same. The line "Their world is not mine" alludes to the persona's perception of the world of the birds as one of freedom which contrasts with his own (the human world) which he associates with confinement or bondage. His sense of entrapment in the cruel and oppressive human world provokes his admiration of what he perceives as the free world of the birds. But just as the speaker in the poem is separate from the birds, as a poet Wolffe also evokes difference between himself and the reader when he says: "I in a poem / Am not your tribe also." This evokes the idea of writing as possession where the writer possessed by his muse is closer to the object of his imagination than he is to the human race. The word "tribe" in the poem refers to humanity rather than a racial group. In writing a poem the poet seems to assume the figure of a shaman who psychologically/mentally leaves the world of humans to enter into a spiritual and creative realm of the imagination. Further Wolffe also seems to say that in writing he assumes the role of God as a creator, the very "God-like aspect" of art and artists that in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view brings them into conflict with the state in Africa (*Penpoints* 1998).

The crows' separateness from the poet-protagonist is further underscored when he imagines their flight as "writing their black words across a blue page" while he writes his "blue words on a cloud of white" that is, on a white paper. The black words of the birds refer to the birds' colour while the blue refers to the colour of the cloudless sky. The poet here imagines the birds' flight as writing their words across the sky. Further, the fact that he writes about the birds underscores his separateness from them as he tells us

> If I were one of them,
> Then I would not write such absences
> Joined by observances in these eyelines here.

The word "absences" seems to refer to the poet-protagonist's sense of alienation or isolation in the social environment as well as his sense of fragmentation or brokenness that he also refers to in "Natural Regression" as discussed earlier. Writing "absences" could also refer to the act of representation which does not present the thing represented physically but merely makes reference to it as a mental image. Thus Wolffe is aware that his writing does not capture physical presence but mere images or absence as the crows are not physically present in the poem.

However, despite his acknowledgement of his separateness from the crows, the poet suspects kinship with them, a kinship which he sees as filial: “Perhaps we are brothers. // More like cousins.” The claim of kinship here shows that Wolffe could have been influenced by the science of evolutionary biology and ecology which sees life as constituting an intricate web “whose interwoven strands lead from microbes to [humans]” (Carson 69).

Wolffe’s views of the interconnectedness of life and all things in nature can also be read from the images on the covers of *Changing Skin.* The covers of *Changing Skins* were designed by Gregory Budd but the artistic concept originated from the poet (Wolffe, Email exchange). Budd understood Wolffe’s ideas of interconnectedness and interdependence in life and the need to acknowledge, respect, and tolerate differences in society and nature. He picked up on these ideas and came up with a complex image on the covers of the collection that speaks to these ideas, particularly the idea of interconnectedness. For example, on the front cover of *Changing Skins* the reader is confronted by the face of a fearsome complex creature whose lower jaw conjoins with (fades into or springs from) a trunk of a sturdy tree. The creature appears to be a member of the feline family. The fact that the creature’s face fades into or springs from a tree trunk is suggestive of the continuity or interconnectedness of life. The tree is also suggestive of the evolutionary tree of life (Roughgarden 2006) which shows that Wolffe may have been influenced somehow by evolutionary biology and palaeontology.

However, although Wolffe sees life as interconnected and interdependent, a fact that for him “proves the beautiful complexity life has offered us to entertain and learn and keep us fascinated,” he is also of the view that “variety and difference is the stuff of life we should be celebrating” because monoculturalism or zenophobic tendencies only lead to “wholesale destruction of forests, lands, peoples, individuals, so on” (Email exchange). For Wolffe therefore interconnectedness does not preclude separateness and difference amongst living things. In acknowledging difference/separateness Wolffe reveals what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as space-consciousness, that is “the recognition that the more-than-human world is ‘ultimately unknowable’ [or] a recognition of human limitations [that] leads to ‘an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature’” (Louw, “Reading *Space*” 104).

Wolffe's awareness of the differences or separateness of creatures from one another, in spite of the interconnectedness and interdependence of things is also clear in "Cool Places" (*SC* 34). The poem is about the excitement of frogs and their continued singing at night after the rains when the earth is cool. For the poet this singing could be hiding something dark and sinister as the second stanza suggests:

> His throat
> Is far away
> And a dark pool
> Is in him.

Notions of "far away" and "a dark pool" seem to be projections of the poet-protagonist's own feelings, his sadness and sense of isolation from, and unbelonging to, his society. The frog's "throat" being "far away" alludes to the poet-protagonist's own thoughts wandering away from his immediate social context to contemplate things that his society cannot offer him. The expression "dark pool" on the other hand could refer to the frogs' sadness in spite of their singing," sadness that the poet-protagonist shares as a result of his identity dilemmas and sense of alienation. The phrase also suggests something evil and sinister that we may not be privy to as the third and final stanza indicates:

> Will we ever know
> The midnight halls
> Of these choristers
> And their cool calls
> Caught in the moonpond
> After the rainsong?

Here Wolffe hints at the difference or separateness of other creatures. Although we are familiar with frogs and their behaviour, we belong to different worlds and may never know what the frogs sing about in the night. Here Wolffe shows humility by acknowledging the limitations of the human capacity to "know" the world around us.

The poem "Bumble Bee" (*CS* 46) also touches on the idea of difference or separateness of creatures but it also seems to cast a reflective light on the uniqueness of humanity. The bumble bee of the poem's title comes before the poet-protagonist on a sunny Sunday like a visitation by a ghost ("Casual spectre" in the poem):

> He came upon my sight,
> Casual spectre,
> Gained attention
> Without the asking.

The bumble bee is also referred to as a "harbinger" or messenger. The message is about how the bees, and indeed other animals, do not care about human spirituality or observe the things humans consider sacred. The poet imagines the bee telling him

> 'Yesssss,
> The sun shines today,
> On this your Sunday.
> I work on,
> Know not the meaning of your sabbath."

This again takes us to the view expressed by Wolffe in "Neighbouring Universes" that animals have their own cosmos. The bees are not subject to human observances, hopes and fears. The imagined voice of the bumble bee prompts the poet-protagonist to reflect upon his own place in the larger scheme of things. He looks at his "tawny arm" that was "Golden beneath the layered sun / Of sullen, warmest Africa" and he must have been confronted by his own insignificance as he realised that the bee, which he later refers to as "My globe-bearing, minute messenger" plays a far more crucial role in propelling life on earth forward (as suggested by the word "globe-bearing"), working day in day out, pollinating flowers and ensuring that life goes on. The characterisation of Africa as "sullen," that is, dark and gloomy, seems to be a projection of the poet-protagonist's own mood. Rather than Africa being gloomy, it is in fact he who is so, as a result of his own personal conflicts and problems.

Further, as an ecologically-conscious poet Wolffe also laments the abuse and exploitation of nature by humans in his poetry. An example of a poem where Wolffe critiques human abuse of other animals is "Pinning Tags" (*CS* 47). In this poem the poet reflects on the life cycle of a butterfly whose caterpillar changes into a cocoon to emerge as an adult butterfly later. The caterpillar itself devours plants. But the adult butterfly turns into a plaything for humans who pin it with tags and give it a label of their choosing, possibly in scientific studies:

> Such is the mercy of Allah
> Who lets us formulate our butterfly
> Upon a pin
> With the label of our choosing.

The reference to the Muslim name Allah for God, like the mention of Buddha and Christ in the poem, shows how Wolffe was influenced by different religions in his thinking. One of the attributes of the Muslim God is mercifulness which Wolffe evokes in the lines above.

6.0 Nature as a Threat and Spectacle: Limits of Wolffe's Ecological Vision

Although in using animals as metaphorical references for his own situation in Zimbabwe Wolffe celebrates the lives of animals, constructs and celebrates his environmental identity and belonging, and reveals an ecological vision of interconnectedness with nature, his language in some of his poems such as "Tortoise" (*CS* 58) and "Crow" (*CS* 50) betrays a negative attitude towards animals. In "Tortoise" where he shows his appreciation of life as a miracle he describes the creature in a manner that makes us imagine it as ugly and unlikeable when he says

> Each one a little atlas
> His cross upon his back
> Short-sighted tortoise
> With his parrot's beak.
> Nature's total miracle
> And freak.

The atlas image refers to the chequered appearance of the tortoise shell that makes it appear as a series of maps, while the notion of carrying a cross refers to the tortoise shell as a problem, a heavy weight the creature is doomed to carry throughout his life. The idea of carrying a cross upon one's back creates the image of the creature as a sinner. In Christian parlance carrying one's cross refers to carrying one's sins and problems. The attribution of a "parrot's beak" to the tortoises ineffectually compares the shape of the tortoise's beak to that of a parrot; ineffectual because it is not, in my view, an apt comparison. The tortoise's mouth does not really resemble a parrot's beak. Reference to the tortoise as short-sighted and a freak also depicts the creature negatively. In fact the conflation of the words "miracle" and "freak" in the poem shows ambiguity in the manner in which the poet-protagonist perceives the tortoise which for him represents remarkableness and abnormality. However, it is important to note that in this poem too Wolffe seems to show influences of evolutionary biology as he makes reference to the early appearance of reptiles on earth when he depicts them as "Mobile stones / Who over aeons / Have gathered no moss."

In "Crow" (*CS* 50) Wolffe uses apostrophe to express his admiration for the bird. He depicts the bird as happy and carefree as a drunken sailor at sea. The poet-protagonist's attention is drawn to the bird by its harsh cry which he refers to as "bawdy eloquence" like that of "A windswept sailor discovering / A song of rum and sea." For the poet, the bird seems to "Celebrate life from a cool coal eye." The coal here refers to the black colour of the crow's eyes. This perceived freedom of the bird

induces the person to admit: “God, I envy your day of life.” Here the words of Lutwack come to mind again when he observes that “[b]irds are the envy of humankind because they appear to exist happily and effortlessly in a state of mixed animal and spiritual being that humans long to attain; they are perfectly adapted to the harsh conditions of life in nature and yet seem to enjoy a kind of freedom from necessity” (xi). The poet’s imagined carefree and happy life of the crows triggers his admiration of their life.

The language the poet chooses to use to describe the bird, however, falsifies this admiration. The bird is credited with “bawdy eloquence,” is said to “Squawk down on a discarded crust,” is called a “Revelling tramp of the black tuxedo / And a stained bib,” all in reference to its scavenging lifestyle. It gushes “rust from a raucous throat” and when it flies off the balcony it is said to “hiccup of the edge / To tumble onto the air / High as a kite.” Later it is said to discover its “own importance / And the swank of [its] bulk” and is finally referred to as a “strutting overload” and a “vain-glorying demonhood.” While one may say some of these expressions simply extend the drunken sailor metaphor in the poem, references to the bird as a tramp, “strutting overload” and a “vain-glorying demonhood” have nothing to do with that metaphor. These and other descriptions of the bird reveal Wolffe’s acquired negative attitudes towards the socially constructed image of the crow, a bird he supposedly admires. This poem demonstrates the difficulty of keeping our attitudes in check when writing about socially condemned animals, as in his negative portrayal of the crow Wolffe alludes to the alleged failure of the bird to report back to Noah after he had sent it to find out if the flood waters had finally dried out from the land.

Furthermore, although Wolffe romanticises and celebrates nature (which for him represents calm, tranquillity and security, things that he sees as lacking in human society) in some of his poems, in others he shows that he is aware of nature’s and animals’ wildness and violence. In these poems Wolffe shows the violence and danger inherent in wild Africa and in nature.

The poem “Hawk Strike” (*SC* 54) shows the violence and ruthlessness associated with predation. The poem is a description of a hawk’s attack and feeding on a mouse which is metonymically referred to by the mention of fur.” Wolffe writes:

> Hunger implodes on soft fur’s innocence
> Rapacious as a razor jagged at the jugular
> With ravening pitch and stab of claw and beak

In hawk's stoop plucking fruit's flesh
While warm and wet, to tear apart, randomly,
The petals of a madly reddening flower.

Here Wolffe contrasts the mouse's innocence with the violence and ruthlessness of the predator bent on satisfying his hunger. Words such as "pitch," "stab," "plucking," and "tear" underscore the violent nature of the act of feeding for the hawk. Violence is also emphasised by the sharp claws of the bird suggested by the word "razor" and the alliteration in the phrase "jagged at the jugular." For the poet-protagonist, the motivation for the hawk's predatory behaviour is hunger. This contrasts with human motives for killing, motives such as greed which have nothing to do with survival. The use of "flesh" underlines how in the claws of the predatory bird the mouse is reduced from a living creature, a being, to an object as a meal, while the phrase "madly reddening flower" is an evocative comparison of the mouse's bleeding to a flower that changes its colour to red (the colour of blood).

The second stanza describes the force of the hawk's strike when he swoops down on his prey. Here Wolffe equates the hawk's strike to the force of liquid steel or a blue bolt shot into the body of the mouse intent on terminating the beat of the mouse's heart. Afterwards the mouse is torn apart in the act of feeding on the hawk's perch which Wolffe compares to an alter of stone. The force and strength of the hawk is captured by the illustration which shows a giant hawk with strong legs and fearsome claws on a branch of a tree. The hawk's mouth is open and looks like it is calling. The illustration reminds one of Ted Hughes's hawk in "Hawk Roosting" who declares

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat (qtd by Gifford and Roberts 67-68)

In fact, Hughes's poem may have influenced Wolffe's. The violent feeding of Wolffe's hawk could have been inspired by the claim by Hughes's hawk that "My manners are tearing off heads –" while the brutal strike on the prey that Wolffe compares to the force of liquid steel that terminates the beat of the prey's heart shares similarities with "For the one path of my flight is direct / Through the bones of the living" from Hughes's hawk.

Upon reading Wolffe's poetry in *Changing Skins*, one also realises that through his call for responsibility and care towards nature – which he characterises as

our inheritance – Wolffe, like the modern day theologians, sees our role in nature as that of caretakers or stewards. But, as I mentioned earlier, the notion of stewardship, in spite of its sanitisation by thinkers like Butkus, still maintains mankind's position as Lord over nature. Similarly, in spite of his acknowledgement of interconnectedness and interdependence of entities, Wolffe still sees humans as superior and characterises nature as a treasure trove given to us humans to "entertain and learn and keep us fascinated" (Email exchange). It is not very surprising therefore that in spite of his critique of human abuse of nature as we saw in "Pinning Tags," in *The African* Wolffe encourages would-be tourists to Africa to collect what they possibly can as memorabilia: feathers, leaves, studies of butterfly wings or beetles, "snake skins found on your trekking," among others (16). Portraying Africa as a treasure trove awaiting the exploitation of the acquisitive visitor he advises the would-be tourists: "Africa is a treasure chest that awaits your visit and from a photograph of the smallest creatures to the tallest peak of Kilimanjaro, from a stone to a view of the open plains, the choice is yours as to how your memories are made" (ibid.). Here Wolffe, inadvertently perhaps, shadows a history of plunder that has seen the theft of African resources to the rich capitals of the western world from the pre-colonial period through the years of colonialism to the present. The view of Africa as "a treasure chest" evokes the colonial (and neo-colonial) vision of Africa, exemplified by the ruthless greed in King Leopold's Congo (Hochschild 2006), which reduces Africa to a source of raw materials for the capitals of Europe.

The fact that Wolffe has written fewer poems that protest against the abuse of nature perhaps says something about his instrumental attitude to nature. In some of his poems nature serves an instrumental role as it functions as a means for the construction of his identity and represents a deep emotional point of connection with his homeland. Nature also provides the space for healing and self-definition, the space for the discovery of his selfhood and subjectivity. In these poems nature is therefore mostly coloured by the poet-protagonist's emotions. While this shows our connectedness to nature, enthusiastic identification with nature also reveals an act of instrumentalisation. Besides, in celebrating his retreat into the world of nature Wolffe gives the impression of wildlife in Africa/Zimbabwe as timeless, ubiquitous and unchanging, contrary to the reality of the ecological destruction currently going on in Zimbabwe and other African countries.

The fact that *Changing Skins* has been hijacked by the tourist industry (which does not always act in the best interest of wildlife) because the collection "beckons the reader [to Africa] better than any travel brochure could" (Grundy qtd. by Wolffe, "Changing Skins" np) demonstrates how the text constructs nature as a commodity for the consumption of the affluent and privilege western visitor, and Africa as a site for aesthetic consumption of that nature, as a place where nature is unspoiled by human activity or, as he puts it in *Flotsam*, a place where life is "*unsprung, unbound and free, full of vigour and beauty*" (25, italics in original). The idea of continued ubiquity of wildlife in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe, in particular, comes out forcefully in *The African*. Furthermore, Wolffe's views in *The African* (like in some sections of *Flotsam*, *Bastard*, *Persona Non Grata* (2006), *Rarer than Diamonds* (2006), and in some of the exile poems) betray a mythical view of Africa as timeless and unchanging, one that ignores the human inhabitants of the exoticised African landscape and their struggles to survive. To substantiate these claims, I wish to follow closely what Wolffe says in *The African* in what remains of this chapter. Although it is advisable to understand the poetry of a particular author in its own terms without reducing it to the poet's statements elsewhere, it is also true that works by the same author do sometimes complement each other.

The African is targeted at a Western audience, especially would-be tourists to Africa who the author persuasively encourages to "[g]o and make contact with the very touchstones of Nature, the way it was and will remain, unchanging, while we care for the glory of Creation" (7). In *The African* Wolffe also constructs his audience by adopting a conversational narrative style where he directly addresses his readers to whom he gives advice ("There are things that you should firstly consider" [13]), suggestions ("Take a walk around a traditional African arts and crafts market" [25]), and warnings ("Beware the biggest lizards of them all" [21]). To better capture their curiosity about Africa Wolffe uses a number of strategies. The first one is to depict Africa as paradise or Eden. Commenting on his exile and loss of his good life in Africa he says: "[t]he voices of the birds and the distance of vehicles in my former African paradise spoke of space and horizon, a gentler way, once upon a time. Yesterday. I could breathe freely then in my African paradise. But this fairy tale ended badly" (*The African* 5). Notice the suggestion of ownership here by the use of the first person possessive pronoun "my" which, as in the poetry, is the poet's means of inscribing his "self" on the Zimbabwean landscape. Later he blames Mugabe's

misrule for spoiling "what was once a paradise on earth" (ibid. 6) through his orchestration of violence against his political rivals and against white farmers leading to the destruction of the country's economy, and through his intolerance of dissenting views and persecution of critics and journalists, among other things (*The African* 39-41). Consequently, a country that was once the "'bread basket' of the south" of Africa has now been reduced to "the begging bowl of the region" (*Bastard* 81). But we would do well to remember that even before the economic crisis in Zimbabwe from the late 1990s to the present, black writers had been complaining about the failed promises of independence and the abject poverty of the peasants who suffered during the struggle for independence. Wolffe's words here, however, show that before the economic situation worsened Zimbabwe was for him and other equally privileged whites and black middle class people, a paradise on earth.

Another strategy that Wolffe uses to woo visitors to Africa is to depict the continent as static and unchanging; forever rural. To this effect Wolffe writes:

> [p]erhaps the modern industrial revolution and the production line have given us the clashing discords of modern society. Not so, the traditional ways of the mother continent, Africa. Everything turns as slowly as the seasons, where modern man has not corrupted the land, where the traditions hold as strongly as a rounded gourd, a beer pot passed in a circle between elders discussing the meaning of life beneath the 'Indaba Tree' while taking time out to philosophize and ponder rather than trying to catch up with the latest world events and news (ibid. 10).

It does not require expertise on the affairs of Africa to notice Wolffe's deliberate distortion of the reality of today's Africa. And it is sometimes hard to believe that such writing is from someone who spent most of his life in Africa. One suspects that Wolffe's view of nature as heritage makes him "freeze" the landscape, "freeze" African history and culture. Commenting on heritage people, that is, people who preserve and conserve heritage, Bender says

> [m]ore often than not, those involved in the conservation, preservation and mummification of the landscape create normative landscapes, as though there was only one way of telling and experiencing. They attempt to "freeze" the landscape as a palimpsest of past activity. But, of course, the very act of freezing is itself a way of appropriating the land. For the Heritage people freezing time and space allows the landscape or monuments in it to be packaged, presented and turned into museum exhibits (Bender qtd. by Fontein 79).

The third strategy that Wolffe uses is to depict Africa as teeming with wildlife, almost devoid of human inhabitants. He enthuses:

> [f]rom Cape to Cairo, the abundance of bird and beast, of scenery and art, is fantastic. Perhaps more importantly, if you are a born Westerner it is as exotic as aborigine boomerangs or didgeridoos to a New Yorker or Eskimo igloos to a Berber warrior of the Tunisian desert. Your visit to Africa or South America is an opportunity to collect memories that will last the test of time (*The African* 13).

This in spite of the fact that countless species are disappearing every year and some of them due to the activities of tourists who come to Africa to exploit what they believe is abundant wildlife. Steven Best tells us that one of the countries hard hit by extinction of species is South Africa which is also the "biggest wildlife trader on the continent" ("The Killing Fields" np). After advertising the exotic aspects of Africa, in spite of her bad leaders such as Robert Mugabe (according to his victims and their sympathisers), Wolffe assures and appeals to his audience:

> [y]et Africa is there, waiting for those who can visit and travel. From the plains of Masai Mara to the tallest mountaintop of Kilimanjaro, from the desert sands of Namibia to the pyramids of Egypt, from the Indian Ocean's lullaby to the jungles of the Congo, Africa is a feast in every sense. Go and make contact with the very touchstones of Nature, the way it was and will remain, unchanging, while we care for the glory of Creation. Travel with those who know, not just the well-tarred roads, but also the secret ways and dust paths of the true wilderness. The African experience is a less-travelled road that waits you and welcomes you to reach out and touch the untamed (*The African* 7).

He goes on:

> Africa is not just for the landscape camera nor the "Big Five", as they are called. A good lens will capture so much secrecy and so much treasure that will dazzle and bejewel your photo albums for years to come. There is such richness, such a plethora of form and colour, such a vast variety of trees and birds and beasts as to believe this was Eden once (ibid. 4-5).

While his poetry in *Changing Skins* may appear to show a concern for wildlife and nature, the appeal to tourists in *The African* betrays a tendency to see nature as a shrine for conspicuous consumption for the affluent western visitor. In fact Wolffe is not entirely against the abuse of animals for human pleasure, rather he is against poaching (an evil associated with Africans) as the following advice demonstrates:

> [t]here are things that you should firstly consider, however. If the souvenir of your choice is an animal byproduct such as a skin or a skull, what are the legalities of importing such an object into your country, for example. It might not only be a legal breach, but if it is a result of poaching or the killing of rare wildlife, it is a moral imperative for you to think twice about it (ibid. 13).

Appealing to tourists as Wolffe does may not be in the interest of environmentalism or ecology. Jacklyn Cock characterises ecotourism as consumerist environmentalism which "transforms nature into entertainment [and] is marked by the passive consumption of consumer goods and services relating to nature" (64). She goes on to say that "[m]uch of this 'consumerist environmentalism' turns nature into a commodity to be bought and sold. Nature becomes a site of intense consumerism" (65). Like Cock, Steven Best is of the view that

> [d]espite its immense advantages, ecotourism is problematic on moral and political levels because it does not break with commodification logic and the instrumentalist mindset that sees [animals] in terms of extrinsic rather than intrinsic value, and alone it is an inadequate reform measure that fails to engage the root causes of interlocking systems of domination, exploitation, and oppression ("The Killing Fields" np).

The extent to which ecotourism in Africa benefits the poor and powerless in society is subject to debate given that much of it, like heritage sites (Ndoro 2001, Fontein 2006) "is aimed at the wealthy, and encounters with nature are packaged as an exotic experience." Consequently, some of the most beautiful parts of Africa where the tourist industry has assumed control are now inaccessible to the vast majority of Africans because of the prohibitive prices of visiting and staying at such places (Cock 62).

Wolffe also exhibits the weaknesses of many ecopoets or environmentally-conscious poets. That is, their failure to see and tackle the interlocking nature of forms of oppression. "[T]here is no social justice without ecological justice" (Huggan and Tiffin 35). Conversely, there is no ecological justice without social justice. In accusing black Zimbabweans of ignoring nature, although justified, he fails to see the root of modern Zimbabweans' alienation from nature. He easily falls into the category of many white conservationists who hastily castigate Africans as poachers and people who are uninterested in the welfare of animals. This fails to appreciate the survival challenges facing many Africans, some of which challenges trace their roots to European presence in Africa. This condemnation of Africans also ignores the privileged position of many whites in Africa. As the minority whites enjoy "the highest standard of living in Africa, on par with many western nations, the black majority [are] marginalized and impoverished in every area such as income, housing, and schools" (Best, "The Killing Fields" np). And so when it comes to conservation "to those […] fortunate enough to eat regularly and keep warm in winter, [animals]

are a source of entertainment[, but to] the desperate, they may be a source of food (Cock 56).

As a son of a country doctor (gynaecologist) Wolffe was privileged enough to explore the Zimbabwean countryside, catch snakes, tame monitor lizards and sleep in caves as a child. Not so the poor black child. Wolffe could afford to feed his tame African monitors out of his hand, a chicken wing, roast chicken, or a boiled egg (*The African* 19, *Bastard* 19), but to his poor black counterparts these are delicacies not to be thrown to a monitor lizard, however friendly. This, however, is not to say that black children, and black people in general, do not love and respond deeply to nature and to their environment.

The picture of Africa as Eden or paradise full of wild creatures that Wolffe paints in *The African* and other writings, and the deliberate removal of humans (Africans) from the landscape presents a heavily romanticised view of the continent. This belies the suffering of the people (some of which is caused by conflicts between conservationism and the people's survival means) and the plight of many species in Africa which are at the brink of extinction partly because of consumerist environmentalism.

In all fairness in *The African* and elsewhere (for example in the poem "No Name" in the *Stones of Somewhere* [18-19] which prophesies vengeance and the downfall of Mugabe while detailing his evil ways) Wolffe does lament the misrule, injustice and suffering of black people in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, one still gets the feeling that this protest against Mugabe's tyranny is in so far as it interferes with tourism and the poet's own enjoyment of the African wild. He writes in *The African*:

> [a]nd only when the current regime is gone shall the glories of Victoria Falls, the towering mountains of the East – Chimanimani, where the celebration of the arts took place in a yearly festival, the river boat rides on the mighty Zambezi and the tourists round the sunsets on Lake Kariba, only when the sanity returns shall the lucrative tourist trade revive and the glories be shared (41).

In failing to make connections between forms of oppression, suffering and abuse, Wolffe and many other nature writers (unlike ecofeminists) fail to see the interconnectedness of human, animal and nature exploitation. In his essay "The Killing Fields of South Africa: Eco-Wars, Species Apartheid, and Total Liberation" Steven Best persuasively argues for the need for animal rights, environmental advocates and human rights advocates to work hand in hand in engaging forms of

oppression. For him environmental advocates or human rights advocates who are single-issue oriented and resist to "work in alliances with other social movements, and [are] pro-capitalist in their political views undercut and can never achieve their goals and objectives" (np). For Best, "[h]uman and animal liberation movements are inseparable, such that none can be free until all are free." Best goes on to observe that "[h]uman, animal, and earth exploitation are tightly interconnected, such that no one form of exploitation can be abolished without uprooting the others." By way of example of the connection between human exploitation and nature or environmental exploitation Best mentions that "in conditions where people are desperately poor they are more likely to adopt instrumental views of nature, poach animals, and chop down trees in order to survive." He goes on to tell us that "[r]acism, sexism, and speciesism share a fundamental logic of oppression and are constituted out of similar and overlapping social, institutional, and technological modes of control." They are "ideologies of objectification, devaluation, and exclusion. Each belief system is grounded in the *conceptual structure* of a dualist logic, an *institutional structure* that mobilizes laws and social relations for domination, and a *technological structure* that mobilizes a battery of things (such as chains and cages) to advance exploitative goals" (np, italics in original).

A binary logic that establishes a "rigid dichotomy […] between different groups – whites/blacks, men/women, and humans/nonhumans – that denies their commonality and shared interests" informs the conceptual structure behind racism, sexism and speciesism, producing a hierarchy that "privileges one group as superior and denigrates the other as inferior." It is this very interconnected and interrelated nature of forms of oppression that necessitates an engagement with issues of "poverty usually rooted in European imperialism, American neo-imperialism, and the predatory nature of contemporary transnational corporations and banking structures," class domination, economic inequality, political corruption, and the hierarchical organization of society at all levels – from local and national to global relations – "for a struggle for animal rights and liberation to be effective" (ibid.).

It is these progressive views from Best and ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood and Carol Adams, to mention but two, that we do not see in Wolffe and most other ecologically-conscious writers and socially-oriented writers such as Mapanje who are mono-issue and do not expose the entangled nature of oppression. Having said all this, we cannot reduce Wolffe's poetry to the invocations of his prose.

Yet, as I have tried to show, in certain respects, the prose points to blindness and aporias in the poetic vision.

7.0 Conclusion

The preceding discussion has attempted to show that Bart Wolffe uses the natural environment in Zimbabwe to construct his identity and as a means of self-definition, that is, of trying to make sense of himself. Wolffe's description of the landscape and experiences in the wild in Zimbabwe, and his nostalgic memory of his life and childhood in that country, are a means of inscribing himself into/onto the Zimbabwean landscape and history. The chapter has also attempted to show that in *Changing Skins* nature provides a sense of meaning or purpose for the poet's life. It is in the world of nature where he sees the delightful side of life and where he finds security, peace and calm. His search for a lost sense of belonging also has a political aspect to it (as a "white African"), but also relates to a disrupted and emotionally compromised childhood. This explains his close identification with nature and the land, and the reason why nature emerges in the poetry as an emotional point of connection between Wolffe and the Zimbabwean landscape. Further, in using nature to construct his identity and belonging Wolffe both celebrates life, its beauty and diversity, and his own retreat into nature with its benefits of peace and tranquillity.

Some of the poems discussed in this chapter also reveal Wolffe's ecological vision that recognises the interconnectedness of all things in the world and decries our alienation from, and destruction of, nature, in general, and animals, in particular. This ecological vision also exhibits space-consciousness that recognises the differences or separateness of creatures from one another. The poems also reveal the ways in which ecological consiousness is entwined with historical and politcal contexts and personal experiences.

However, Wolffe's claim to a Zimbabwean identity is fraught with contradictions as in some of his poems in *Changing Skins* he depicts himself and other whites in Zimbabwe as strangers, and himself as someone whose quest for racial identity and belonging in Zimbabwe has been futile. Besides, in other poems Wolffe's views about Africa echo the views of colonialists, tourists and visitors and complicate his identity as an African.

Wolffe's ecological vision is not without contradictions either. Through his call for responsibility and care towards nature which he characterises as our

inheritance Wolffe in *Changing Skins*, like the modern day theologians, sees our role in nature as that of caretakers or stewards. Wolffe, therefore, like these theologians who see mankind's role in nature as that of a steward, sees humans as superior to nature and characterises nature as a treasure trove given to us humans to "entertain and learn and keep us fascinated" (Email exchange).

In general Bart Wolffe's poetry differs from Rhodesian poetry in style, vision and sensibility. I say in general because there are slippages in some poems that echo a colonial vision that depicted Africa as "violent, capricious, [and] unpredictable" (Brettell 5). Unlike in Rhodesian literature where the natural environment was viewed as a threat that needed to be tamed, domesticated and controlled by whites, and where "blacks [were] hostile presences on the periphery of civilised space" (Chapman, *Southern African Literatures* 159, see also Zhuwarara, *An Introduction* 22) in Wolffe's poetry the landscape is accommodating and offers peace and tranquillity to the individual. It is human society instead that is violent and harsh.

In quality, the poetry is much better than that of most other white Zimbabwean poets which provoked N. H. Brettell to observe: "[i]t would be doing no service to the contributors to pretend that the achievement reaches the top flights of poetry. It could be said that (to anticipate the reviewer) much of it would not be printed anywhere else" (5); and Douglas Livingstone who was once "invited to edit an issue of [a] Rhodesian Poetry magazine – a Quarterly" to despairingly say: "I was dismayed at some of the rubbish submitted for publication. Do these folk, I wondered, honestly wish this to appear in print with their names attached?" (6). The form of Wolffe's poetry shows that it is a result of "hard *constant work"* (ibid., italics in original). Although most of it is blank verse, the poetry is well crafted showing careful stanzaic organisation, rhythm and alliteration, and occasional rhyme, among other aspects of style. In fact the high quality of Wolffe's writing makes one wonder why he is not recognised as a Zimbabwean writer either on the web-based Zimbabwean – Poetry International Web which provides a list of Zimbabwean poets, black and white, or in Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe's *The Companion to African Literatures* (2000).

In sensibility the poetry is recognisably Zimbabwean in the sense that it is anchored in the Zimbabwean soil and landscape, and one cannot help but agree with the truth of the poet's claim in the poem "Archetypes" (*CS* 18-19) where he says

> My hand is an instinct.
> It delves into the damp earth

Turning a perfume of words
Sweet with humus (19).

Dan Wylie observes that "[a] poetic aesthetic does not arise unmediated from the landscape itself, but out of precursor aesthetics." In the case of Zimbabwe such precursor ethics include "indigenous [African] oral modes" and "written English ones" which can be combined in an attempt "to forge new hybrids appropriate to the uniqueness of [the Zimbabwean] experience" ("Mind" 151). In his poetry Wolffe mainly sticks to written English modes of mediation and makes little effort to use the local argot.

Chapter 6: Predation, Animal Suffering and Death in the Poetry of Douglas Livingstone

1.0 Introduction

Until his death in 1996, Douglas Livingstone was considered one of the best living South African poets. His first collection of poetry, *The Skull in the Mud*, came out in 1960, and he continued to write and publish poetry for three decades, winning many awards and accolades along the way.

Born of Scottish parents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, on 5th January 1932, Douglas Livingstone arrived in Durban, South Africa, at the age of ten with his mother, sister and two cousins as a war refugee. His father, an officer in the colonial police in Malaysia, who was a prisoner of war to the Japanese at the time, would join the family later and take the other members of the family back to Malaysia, leaving Douglas Livingstone behind. Livingstone did his schooling in Natal and gained a Senior Certificate in 1949. He later worked as a night-shift bench chemist at Crookes Brothers Sugar Mill at Renishaw in Natal before moving to Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe) where he worked as an assayer in the government Metallurgical Laboratories and later as a technologist at the Pasteur Institute where he also trained as a bacteriologist. He gained a Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology in 1956 and in 1958 he qualified as a bacteriologist with the Southern Rhodesian Medical Council. In the same year (1958) Douglas Livingstone was appointed Senior Technician in Charge in the Bacteriological Department of the Lusaka General Hospital in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and a year later he became Officer in Charge at the Pathological Diagnostic Laboratories at Broken Hill (now Kabwe, Zambia).

Livingstone returned to Durban in 1964 to join the National Institute for Water Research of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as a scientist working on bacteriological aspects of marine pollution. He worked for CSIR for the next twenty-eight years until his retirement in 1992 but was retained as a consultant until his death from cancer on February 19, 1996. Livingstone was also a recipient of a DLitt, *honoris causa* from the University of Natal in 1982 and in 1989 he earned a PhD in Biological Science at the University of Natal for his study published by CSIR

in 1990 under the title *Microbial Studies on Seawater Quality Off Durban: 1964-1988*.[93]

All Douglas Livingstone's training, the above reveals, was as a scientist. However, his scientific training did not kill his love for words and poetry, which he traced back to his childhood days. His discovery of the Romantic poets, especially Shelley, Byron and Keats at Kearsney College in Natal further fanned his love for poetry, and writing poetry was to become one of his major preoccupations in life. Asked about "the apparent paradox that he is a scientist who is also a poet" (Chapman, *Douglas* 10) Livingstone replied that "[s]cience is man's search for truth, art is man's interpretation of it. Poetry probably combines the two" (qtd. by Chapman, ibid., see also Fazzini 142). It is perhaps in part because of the influence of his scientific training and work, which also relates to his subject matter, that critics have come to regard him as an ecological poet.

This chapter focuses on Livingstone's animal poems, which are scattered across his collections of poetry. The animal poems are particularly interesting, as opposed to the non-animal poems, because they reveal how Livingstone's ideas about our relationships with animals and nature progress from markedly dualistic and hierarchical ones in his earlier poems to compassionate and respectful ones in his subsequent poetry. Similarly, his ecological ideas seem to develop from anthropocentricism towards ecocentricism. The chapter therefore attempts to answer the question, what sort of ecological poet is Douglas Livingstone? Or, reformulated, what ecological and ecophilosophical ideas inform his environmental consciousness?

The textual focus of the chapter is Livingstone's animal poems which appear in *A Ruthless Fidelity: Collected Poems of Douglas Livingstone* (*RF*, 2004). This is a collection of all published poems by Livingstone, either in magazines, anthologies, or in the collections he published while alive, as well as a selection of his unpublished poems. The editors and compilers, Malcolm Hacksley and Don Maclennan, selected the previously unpublished poems that appear in *A Ruthless Fidelity* from Livingstone's immense volume of manuscripts. In *A Ruthless Fidelity* the poems are arranged in three sections. Section one contains all the poems that appear in Livingstone's ten published collections which are: *The Skull in the Mud* (*SM*, 1960),

[93] For more biographical information on Douglas Livingstone see "Chronology" in Malcolm Hacksley and Don Maclennan, eds, *A Ruthless Fidelity* (2004) and Michael Chapman, *Douglas Livingstone: A Study of His Poetry* (1981), pp.10-14.

Sjambok and Other Poems from Africa (*Sjmbok*, 1964), *Poems* (by Thomas Kinsella, Douglas Livingstone and Anne Sexton) (1968), *Eyes Closed Against the Sun* (*ECAS*, 1970), *The Sea My Winding Sheet and Other Poems* (1971), *A Rosary of Bone* (1975), *The Anvil's Undertone* (*AU*, 1978), *Selected Poems* (1984), *A Littoral Zone* (*LZ*, 1991), and *Giovanni Jocopo Meditates* (*on the High-IQ Haiku*) (1995). Section two carries poems that appeared in periodicals of various types but were never included in the collections. These poems appear in chronological order. The last section, section three, has a selection of Livingstone's unpublished poems arranged alphabetically by title.

2.0 Douglas Livingstone's Poetry

Douglas Livingstone's writerly persona is very much aware of his natural surroundings. In his poetry, the land, trees, animals, stars and the moon reveal this consciousness or awareness of the landscape and natural environment. However, this does not mean that he always feels a sense of communality with animals, who are the focus of this chapter, for example, or that he extends a caring attitude towards them. Thomas Lask, as quoted by Michael Chapman, has remarked that Livingstone's Africa is "neither the 'pastoral retreat' of earlier South African veld singers nor a 'hunter's paradise', […] but 'a stark animal-infested land: threatening, ominous, unlovely'" (Chapman, *Douglas* 51). The image of the human self in Africa that emerges within this depiction of the land and animals is therefore not an integrated one but an atomistic, alienated self in a hostile landscape.

Douglas Livingstone's use of the African fauna and flora has received favourable comments/reviews from a number of critics. *The Times Literary Supplement* (1964) observed that in Livingstone's poetry the African fauna and flora come "dangerously and aptly alive" (qtd. by Chapman, ibid. 10). Chapman himself is of the view that "Livingstone's animal poems are characterized by a strong sense of the 'real'" as opposed to the fabulous (ibid. 27). Chapman further tells us that "[c]ritics have in fact been particularly impressed by Livingstone's descriptions of African wild life." He cites the examples of Thomas Lask who is of the view that "it is the land and its denizens that give *Sjambok* its unique cachet and flavour" and Guy Butler who thinks that Livingstone's "place among poets of his generation has been secured by his brilliant animal poems" (ibid. 46).

In his use or depiction of animals in his poetry Livingstone continues a tradition noticeable in the poetry of poets such as Ted Hughes, David Herbert (D.H) Lawrence, and Roy Campbell, among others. In comparing the animal poems of Douglas Livingstone and those of D. H Lawrence, Michael Chapman discovered that, among other things, both Livingstone and Lawrence "vividly perceive[…] animals as creatures in their own right with a legitimate world of their own." He further noticed that "[w]hereas Livingstone generally dramatizes the apprehended incident, Lawrence dramatizes the way the mind encounters and apprehends." In this case Lawrence evokes "religious awe of the world that man lives in" while in his *Sjambok*, for example, "Livingstone presents not so much the mystery of the godhead in animals as the dull crack of their bones, the tearing of their flesh." Further, while Lawrence "usually introduces the poet's interpretive voice, Livingstone in his best animal poems allows the human comment and the more complex mood to come obliquely through strikingly presented externals, as well as through the unanalysed juxtaposition of animal and human reactions" (ibid. 48).

Chapman compares Campbell and Livingstone by looking at the two poets' depictions of the African zebra. Chapman discovers that while in Campbell's "The Zebras" "descriptions […] reflect an essentially heroic attitude to life" and the zebras "symbolise creativity and beauty" (ibid. 50-51), in Livingstone's poem "Zebra" the animals are far from being majestic as they gallop "aimlessly and destructively across a forlorn landscape […]." According to Chapman, Livingstone "concentrates on the uglier, more disillusioning aspects of the Africa experience" (ibid. 51), a fact that makes his poetry share similarities with that of William Plomer who is described as "the poet of 'African disenchantment'" as he is known to present "a threatening, tawny African landscape" (ibid. 52).

Although in his representation of animals Douglas Livingstone was, in some of his poems, clearly influenced by Hughes especially in his acknowledgement of "the predatory [and] destructive character of nature, of which man is a part" (Gifford and Roberts 14), "the interdependence of creation and destruction" (ibid. 63), and the fact that his imaginative process in some poems "is triggered by the observation of something in 'external' nature" (ibid. 62) – usually an animal for Hughes, and a toy animal for Livingstone – his representation of animals and his poetic practice is markedly different from that of Hughes. While Hughes is "'a poet of the will to live' […] who celebrates demonic force and evil" and endows some of his animals with

consciousness, Livingstone is "a poet of the instinct to survive" whose animals "do not possess consciousness" (Chapman, *Douglas* 46-47). Livingstone's animal poems derive their peculiar strength, as Chapman observes, from their "fidelity to the observed incident which is concrete and vivid" (ibid. 47). This is because Hughes is influenced my modernism and New Critical formalism, especially in his earlier poetry, while Livingstone combines his modernist persuasions with realist and romantic aspects.

Contrasting antimodernist and modernist writing Leonard M. Scigaj says

> [t]he *antimodern* writer […] adopts a metonymic mode that emphasizes contiguous space-time; historicity; mimetic cause/effect and temporal sequence; an aversion to formal experiment; a prosaic, conversational language; and content discovered in the "real" world. The *modernist* writer […] adopts a metaphoric mode to locate meaningful similarities in apparently disparate experience and dissimilar objects, using symbol, motif, myth, metaphor, ambiguity, paradox, and elaborate devices of formal organization developed from these techniques, for the purpose of forging a new unity that redeems a purposeless history (17).

Although Douglas Livingstone is not necessarily an antimodernist writer, his poetic mode "emphasizes contiguous space-time; historicity; mimetic cause/effect and temporal sequence; […] and content discovered in the 'real' world." In his study of nine volumes of Hughes's adult poetry from 1957 through 1983 Scigaj noticed "an early New Critical formalism […], a sixties mythic surrealism […], and an often mystic landscape poetry from the mid-seventies" to the early eighties" (xiv). As a result of his adoption of the modernist form Hughes's animal poems, unlike Livingstone's, do not "provide the reader with everyday landscapes and the empirically observed action of mimetic realism" (ibid.). On the contrary they create a world of fantasy that, in *Crow* for instance, "includes [...] magical spells, shapechanging battles, [and] anthropomorphized spirits and demons," among other things. In his animal poems Hughes, unlike Livingstone also "adopts a metaphoric mode to locate meaningful similarities in apparently disparate experience and dissimilar objects, using symbol, motif, myth, metaphor, ambiguity, [and] paradox."

In his representation of animals Livingstone epitomises Kate Soper's three modes of animal representation: realistic, allegorical and compassionate. But he also goes beyond Soper to adopt a humorous mode of animal representation. In some of Livingstone's animal poems animals appear as metaphors of human beings. In these poems, the poet uses animals to make a statement about humanity and human forms

of behaviour, and the subject of the poems therefore is not the animals themselves but human attributes or behaviour. In others he employs irony and humour to mock and ridicule the animals that are the subjects of these poems in ways that entrench popularly held negative conceptions of them. Further, in some animal poems Livingstone paints a bleak and dreary picture of the world, or Africa in particular, where animals struggle to survive. In this Darwinian depiction of life, Livingstone represents the animals as destructive, cruel and evil, while nature in general emerges as passionate and "red in tooth and claw." Yet in others of his animal poems, Livingstone shows compassion for suffering animals or exposes human beings' cruelty to nonhuman animals in ways which prompt his readers to reflect upon the unecological manner they relate to nature. In these poems too, where Livingstone protests against the abuse and exploitation of animals, he shows his ecological consciousness or sensitivity to the plight of fellow inhabitants of the earth.

There is a consensus among Livingstone's critics on two points. The first point is that Livingstone is a difficult poet, and the second one is that he is an ecological or an environmentally-conscious poet (Woodward 2003, Chapman 1981, Stevens 2004). With regard to the first point, Mariss Stevens observes, rightly I think, that although Livingstone's poetry is difficult, its "hard-nosed scientific fact and rich metaphor […] require[ing] rigour and scientific research on the part of the reader" (27), it is not inaccessible. To claim to fully understand and be able to explicate the poetry can, as she seems to be aware, be terribly misleading. Nevertheless, engaging with the poetry of this poet who compared being savaged by critics to being bitten by a dead sheep (Fazzini 141) and analysing it is an enriching experience. I should mention here, however, that only a few of the animal poems analysed in this chapter exhibit occasional inaccessibility.

A reading of the poetry shows how carefully Livingstone crafted his poems, employing disciplined stanzaic form, rhythm, occasional rhyme and other technical features. Livingstone was doubtless very careful and meticulous in the manner in which he worked his poetry (Hope 12-13). Hacksley and Maclennan tell us that "his working manuscripts show that he would not allow spontaneity out of school [that is, uncontrolled] until it had been subjected to a careful discipline" (*RF*, Introduction, np). Livingstone is also known to have bought and destroyed the copies he could find of his first collection, *The Skull in the Mud*, because he was embarrassed by the "appalling nature" of the poems that comprised the collection (Chapman, *Douglas* 15,

Hacksley and Maclennan, np). This behaviour is hardly surprising coming from a poet who in 1966 advised Rhodesian poets that "[p]oetry implies hard *constant work*. […] It takes skill and much practice. It requires, too, the harshest self-criticism" ("Preface" 5, italics in original).

With regard to the second point of consensus Mariss Stevens, reading Livingstone's poetry from an ecocritical perspective, argues that the message that comes out of A *Littoral Zone* especially is that "humankind faces certain extinction unless it can (miraculously) learn to co-exist with one another and the rest of the natural world" (2). The choice open to mankind is therefore 'symbiosis or death' (Livingstone, *LZ* 61). For Stevens, "Livingstone's poetry continually reminds us of this ecological position and implicitly admonishes us for our anthropocentricism" (2). Stevens further contends that "Livingstone, particularly in *A Littoral Zone*, seeks to remind his human readers that our survival as a species depends on our understanding that the Earth is our greater home and that we need to both find and know our place within it" (4). According to her, "the predominant theme in [Livingstone's] ecologically-oriented poetry is one of ecological despair" which is countered with "a tentative thread of hope" as he sees "possible resolution" of this grim state of affairs "in human capacity to attain compassion and wisdom through the judicious use of science, creativity, the power of art and the power of love" (ii).

Wendy Woodward echoes Stevens' sentiments in her article "'Frail shared seconds': Encounters between Humans and Other Animals in the Poetry of Douglas Livingstone" (2003). In her article Woodward focuses on some of Livingstone's animal poems and is of the view that Livingstone's "engagement with these living forms is a potential indication of ecological awareness" (45). She goes further to say "[m]any of Livingstone's poems about animal deaths […] express ecological protest" (49), a tendency that makes him, in the words of Stevens, "an (errant) ecological campaigner" (Stevens 6). However, for Woodward the question of "how far Livingstone's ecological consciousness of animals extends […] is open to debate" (50). In her view, while some of Livingstone's poems "demonstrate an authorial self-consciousness about environmental issues" which qualifies them as environmental literature, "Livingstone's poetry does not always view other animals as having 'intrinsic value'. Many of his poems construct animals as 'mirrors to humanity' […] and as humans *manqués* in such a way that embellishes the narcissism of the speaking self, and reduces the animals to object status" (50, italics in original).

Although my focus on the animal poems and the manner of animal representation in Douglas Livingstone's poetry shares some similarities with Wendy Woodward's article mentioned above, unlike Woodward, my interest in Livingstone's animal poetry extends to the questions of predation, landscape and humour in relation to animals in addition to animal suffering and death. I am also interested in Livingstone's ecological vision in relation to the political context of his writing. Livingstone largely avoided political issues plaguing the South Africa of the day in his poetry, preferring to work within a non-political framework (Chapman, *Douglas* 10). In his poetry he sought to repair the often turbulent relationship between humans and nature, and addressed our sense of alienation from and exploitation of nature. Some of his poems warn us that unless we mend our abusive ways against the environment we are headed for an ecocatastrophe (Stevens 2). Livingstone's ecological vision is therefore to see a world in which compassion, communality, symbiosis and attunement are at the heart of human relationships with nature. Livingstone's vision upholds compassion for fellow existents, particularly animals, and a symbiotic relationship with the biotic world as measures against ecocatastrophe. It is this vision that influences his compassionate depiction of animals in his later poetry.

It is a curious fact that a major South African poet writing during the troubled period in South African history skirted around racial injustice and oppression and called on his readers not to be abusive to the environment instead. This is not to say the issues he dealt with are negligible. Environmental issues affect every one regardless of culture, race, class or gender. But surely, given the context of writing, one would be justified to expect political issues to emerge in his poetry. Why then did Livingstone avoid working within a political framework? What was his target audience? Were the black majority suffering under the yoke of apartheid part of his target audience? What is the impact of this avoidance of social and political issues on his ecological vision?

In my analysis of the animal poems I have put them in three categories which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since some of the poems defy any fixed categorisation. These categories are necessary as they enable me to be focused in my examination of the poems. The first category is that of poems in which Livingstone employs humour, mockery and ridicule in his description of animals. In these poems animals are mainly depicted as ugly and stupid. The second category is of poems that

deal with animals' struggle to survive, their suffering and death. This set of poems mainly reveals Livingstone's Darwinist conception of life while critiquing pastoralism and revealing his colonialist perception of the African landscape. The trope of pastoral which has a privileged position in ecocriticism comes into question here. And, finally, the third category is of poems in which Livingstone reveals his ecological protest and seems to depict animals with compassion and respect. This categorisation helps us appreciate the varied nature of Livingstone's animal representation and the inconsistency in his ecological consciousness and vision. In the conclusion I wish to examine the limits of Livingstone's ecological thought. Merely declaring that Livingstone, or any other poet for that matter, is an ecological poet, as is often the case in most ecocritical writing, is not enough. We need to understand the ecophilosophical views that inform a writer's conceptions of nature.

3.0 Humour, Dualism and Hierarchy

In an interview with David Robbins published in 1987 Douglas Livingstone said he wrote poetry for an audience of one: "an ideal person who is ironical, witty, [and] civilized, but not too civilized" (50). Whether he found such an ideal person amongst his readers is difficult to tell but what is clear is that Livingstone himself combines irony, witticism and a great sense of humour in some of his poems and he expected his readers to share these attributes with him. However, in some of these poems Livingstone uses irony, humour and witticism to mock and ridicule the animals that are the subjects of these poems in ways that entrench or support anthropocentric, negative conceptions of them. The humour is at the expense of the animals who emerge as ugly, stupid and unprepossessing. Livingstone's mockery and ridicule of some animals emerges in "She-Jackal" (*RF* 38), "Vulture" (*RF* 41-42), "Zebra" (*RF* 43), and "Conversation with a Giraffe at Dusk in the Zoo" (*RF* 95). In some poems though, such as "The Clocks" (*RF* 40) and "Giovanni Jocopo Meditates (on Among the Twitchers) (*RF* 400), the humour and irony is at the expense of humans whose behaviour invites mockery and ridicule.

"She-Jackal" dramatises an encounter between a man and a she-jackal out in the wild. The man, an adventurer, outdoor man or hunter, lies under a pine tree on a hillside slope at sunset sipping beer and watching purple hills in the distance when he notices the jackal that is described as "a shamelessly feminine curved / Africa," for as R. Graham observes, the she-jackal in the poem "embodies for the poet the hostility,

and exotic shabbiness of Africa" (203). The third stanza of the poem gives details on the appearance of the jackal and the encounter:

> Evilly panting and smiling, a jackal
> stood near: razor ribs, warty shrivelled dugs,
> hourglass loins and lean wire legs quivering;
> the plump feeding ticks studding her bare flanks.
> They looked at each other, obviously
> disliking what they saw, both warily
> tensed, although she retained her polished smile;
> he measuring jumps from her and his stick.

Here Livingstone succeeds in describing the creature graphically and forcefully using objects from human technology – razor, hourglass and wire. The hyperboles of the "razor ribs" and "lean wire legs" emphasise the fact that the jackal was very thin. The hourglass shape of the loins however evokes the socially constructed figure of an attractive woman for whom the she-jackal is but a metaphor. But regardless of her shapely loins the jackal/woman is sickly and dangerously infested by parasites. The jackal's miserable condition though does not stop the speaker from ascribing evil and sinister motives to it for we are told that when the adventurer sees it, it is "Evilly panting and smiling" which suggests cunning and slyness (Uther 134), and when man and jackal warily face each other the jackal still retains "her polished smile." It is difficult to imagine a jackal smiling; I suspect that Livingstone here refers to grimacing which came across as a deceptive smile. The descriptions here apply more to the woman that the jackal also represents. This gives the impression of the jackal as a temptress. The jackal's femininity and smile seem to pose a threat to the adventurer who, thinking of how to defend himself, measures "jumps from her and his stick."

The man's dislike for the jackal is emphasised by the unspoken curses that come to his mind in the fourth stanza:

> So, you mangy chewer of carrion,
> he thought it directly and impolitely,
> camp follower of filthy offal-thieves,
> what the hell are you drooling over, bitch?
> this meat is alive with a nearly full
> tin of chemical malt in its right hand.

Later the persona flings the beer can at the jackal, "hard / and inaccurately," prompting it to leave.

Michael Chapman is of the view that "by exploiting clichés about masculinity," that is, the outdoor life and beer cans, Livingstone presents a version of a less heroic white hunter who attempts to counter the threat to his manhood "not by the aggressive action of the gun, but by the 'aggressive' action of a ridiculous kind" – hurling a beer can inaccurately at the jackal (*Douglas* 60-61). Chapman further observes that "She-Jackal" "debunks with daring rather than subtlety what has been called the South African justificatory myth of pastoralism and the virtue of innocence: that is, the tendency of successive generations of South African writers to romanticize pre-industrialism" (ibid. 61). For the poet-protagonist the African landscape is hostile and ominous rather than idyllic and peaceful. Besides, the outdoor man in the poem is of limited sensibility who "does not discover a godhead in animals" but sees a 'brassy' scavenger in the jackal (ibid. 60).

While the poem can be read as Livingstone's critique or expose of our disconnectedness from other animals who we view with a derogatory attitude, the choice of the jackal, given the negative attitude with which jackals were, and still are, perceived in South Africa (as vermin), especially amongst farmers (Beinart 2003, Carruthers 1995), shows that Livingstone was also influenced by such attitudes. The poem in turn, through descriptions such as "mangy chewer of carrion," "camp follower of filthy offal-thieves" (in reference to the she-jackal's scavenging habits), and the unjustified "excessive reference to degenerate womanhood and decaying meat" (Chapman, *Douglas* 61) entrenches such attitudes. Livingstone's choice of words and tone in the poem show his poetic persona's disrespect and inferiorisation of animals and reveal the persona's dualistic perception of animals at this stage of Livingstone's writing.[94] Granted, jackals evoke feelings of malice in many, if not all, cultural contexts, partly because of their own propensity for killing livestock, for example. An ecological sensibility, however, also requires that we should acknowledge their positive role of cleaning the environment of dead carcasses as scavengers, and the fact that they are part and parcel of biodiversity.

Another poem that entrenches negative attitudes towards animals that are perceived as greedy, ugly or simply as vermin is "Vulture" (*RF* 41-42). The vulture is a bird that is associated with death, greed, and filthy eating habits. While greed and ugliness exist, and naming them may not necessarily be a sign of a negative attitude,

[94] This poem appeared in *Sjambok and Other Poems from Africa* (1964), one of the earliest collections by Livingstone.

exclusive focus on these negative attributes and failure to acknowledge the positive role played by denigrated creatures, such as scavengers, on the environment depicts them as undeserving conservation. The negative attributes associated with the vulture come out in Livingstone's poem which shows an observer's eye following a vulture as it glides in the sky and later swoops down to settle for a meal:

On ragged black sails
he soars hovering over
everything and death;
a blight in the eye
of the stunning sun.

An acquisitive droop
of beak, head and neck
dangles, dully angling,
a sentient pendulum
next to his keeled chest .

The expression "ragged black sails" suggests that the bird is worn out and tested by the darkness ("black") and pain of life. The evocation of "sails" compares the rough and testing side of life/existence to the stormy and buffeting winds at sea. But the expression also underlines the ugly appearance of the vulture as he flies in the sky by comparing his wings to torn black sails of a ship at sea. The word "black" also symbolises the bird's association with death or evil. Livingstone also emphasises the vulture's ugliness by describing him as "a blight in the eye / of the stunning sun." The ugly vulture, in contrast to the beautiful ("stunning") sun is a blemish, a disease even, on the landscape. The word "stunning" in reference to the sun could also be an allusion to the sweltering heat of the sun that stuns/dazes many creatures. Further, the description of the vulture as having "An acquisitive droop / of beak, head and neck," and the use of the word "angling" underscores the vultures supposed greed that leads to his scavenging proclivity. As he watches the bird flying, the persona imagines it searching the ground for food:

His eyes peer, piously
bloodless and hooded,
far sighted, blighting
grasses, trees, hill-passes,
stones, streams, bleached bones

with the tacky rags
of flesh adherent (41).

Here Livingstone employs hyperbole to highlight the evil and ugly nature of the vulture. The vulture is said to "peer" at the ground "piously," that is, religiously or dutifully while his "far sighted" eyes are "bloodless and hooded," meaning that they are cold and calculating. These eyes are also described as destructive to the landscape as they are said to be "blighting / grasses, trees, hill-passes, / stones, [and] streams" while looking for carcasses with remains of flesh/meat ("bleached bones / / with the tacky rags / of flesh adherent"). Livingstone's imaginative skills and great powers of description come to the fore in this poem. He brings the vulture sharply before our eyes as readers. But the creature comes before us ugly and full of negative associations. This does not relieve the bird of his negative perception in the human imagination but intensifies it. Livingstone later describes the vulture as "the hyena of skies" (41) thereby bringing the negative image of the hyena (Gottlieb 477) to bear on the equally negative image of the vulture. The dark portrayal of the vulture continues when he lands on the ground to feed:

He squats once fearfully.
Flushed with unhealthy plush
and pregustatory
satisfaction, head back,
he jumps lumpishly up.

Slack neck with the pecked
skin thinly shaking, he
sidles aside, then stumps
his deliberate banker's
gait to the stinking meal (42).

By referring to the vulture's perching as squatting "fearfully" Livingstone highlights the apprehensive manner with which the bird perches on the ground, afraid that predators or other scavengers might take advantage of him. In the above lines the vulture's greed also emerges through the description of his appearance as "Flushed [excited] with unhealthy plush / and pregustatory / satisfaction," while his ugliness is again highlighted by mention of his loose ("slack") and marked ("pecked") neck-skin that shakes "thinly," that is, almost imperceptibly. The word "plush" underscores the lavishness or profusion of the vulture's excitement at the sight of food, even before tasting it, a fact emphasised by the word "pregustatory." The vulture's movement on

the ground is awkward, as he is said to jump "lumpishly up," that is, clumsily or stupidly and his initial approach to the meal is furtive and nervous (he "sidles aside"). But this nervousness and fear soon disappear as, adopting the proud and confident manner of a banker's walk ("deliberate banker's / gait"), he finally gets to the meal that the poet-protagonist judgmentally describes as "stinking." There is no irony or hidden meaning in these descriptions where the bird is mocked and ridiculed. This poem is unabashedly prejudiced in its depictions of the vulture as ugly, devilish and greedy. Powerful and sharp as Livingstone's descriptions of the vulture might be (Chapman 49-50) they are only effective in portraying the bird as malevolent and unlovely and therefore push it outside the borders of human concern and compassion. Ecologically the vulture, like other scavengers, plays a vital role in clearing and cleaning the environment by consuming dead animals that might otherwise pose a health or environmental hazard. But such a vital role is suppressed in the poem in favour of the prejudice surrounding the bird. It is instructive to remember that conservation and ecological-consciousness are selective and do not regard animals equitably. Some animals are more equal than others. Sadly, animals and birds that are seen as ugly and destructive are often ignored and left to their own devices. Only those that are exoticised, seen as charming, or fall within the conceptual boundaries of "charismatic megafauna" are considered worthy of respect and protection. Livingstone reveals this attitude in this poem especially when we realise that the description of the vulture in this poem contrasts sharply with the way another bird, a stork, is described in "Lake Morning in Autumn" (*RF* 17).

This lonely stork arrives one wet and chilly autumn morning at a lake several weeks earlier than the usual time of the storks' migration to this haunt. Unlike the ungainly vulture, Livingstone describes the stork beautifully and compassionately. To his persona's eyes the stork looked

> […] too tired to arrange
>
> his wind-buffeted plumage, [as he]
> perched swaying a little,
> neck flattened, ruminative,
>
> beak on chest, contemplative eye
> filmy with star vistas and hollow
> black migratory leagues, […] (17)

Unlike the vulture's "ragged black sails" which are part of the bird's ugly nature, the rough appearance of the stork's "wind-buffeted" feathers is attributed to his inability to preen himself on account of his tiredness. Again in contrast to the ugly and greedy vulture whose gaze blights the landscape, the stork is calm, thoughtful and dignified, his mind's eye covered by beautiful scenes from his migratory route in the sky. The vulture is ugly and unprepossessing. Unlike the stork who is "ruminative" with his beak on his chest and his "contemplative eye / filmy with star vistas and hollow / black migratory leagues," the vulture's "[…] eyes peer, piously / bloodless and hooded." In flight, the stork is a beauty to watch:

> Stretching his wings he clubbed
> the air; slowly, regally, so very tired,
>
> aiming his beak he carefully climbed
> inclining to his invisible tunnel of sky,
> his feet trailing a long, long time (17).

The healthy wings of the stork, in contrast to the vulture's ragged-looking ones, heavily beat the air (as underlined by the evocation of clubbing) with the aura of royalty, as opposed to devilry. There is a sense of orderliness in the stork's flight too as he is said to fly through an "invisible tunnel of sky." Livingstone's description of the two birds in these poems is informed by popular conceptions and attitudes to them. The vulture is a symbol of death and all that is bad and ugly in life while the stork is a symbol of beauty and the brighter side of life. And by uncritically representing such attitudes in his poetry Douglas Livingstone reinforces them.

"Zebra" (*RF* 43) is another poem in which Livingstone describes animals in a manner that makes them and the African landscape come across as ugly and bleak. Livingstone begins the poem with a picture of the dry African bushveld through which the herd of zebra gallops:

> Where the grass spikes lank and
> loamless, where the wind
> scoops earth and thankless
> pennypinching water-holes
> nastily eye the sky
> through brass-green lenses,
> they run striped and breezy
> uprooting showery tufts
> with uplifted yellow teeth;

rebellious they are, unbridled (43).

In this poem Livingstone adopts an anti-pastoral critique or "a poetics of undermining, in which pastoral conventions are deployed or alluded to, in order to suggest or declare the limitations of those conventions, or their downright falsity" (Allison np). Rather than an idyllic landscape with lush green grass, "shady trees, perfumed by spring flowers, animated by a gentle breeze, and enlivened by a bubbling spring or stream" (Metzger xii) the grass in this poem is "lank" (limp) and the soil is infertile ("loamless"), dry and dusty as we hear that "the wind / scoops earth." The "water-holes" are mean ("pennypinching") and emphasise the bleakness of the landscape as they are described as "nastily ey[ing] the sky." The appearance and behaviour of the zebras ("uplifted yellow teeth" and "rebellious") also emphasise the disharmony and threatening nature of the landscape. In the poem "the herd gallops aimlessly and destructively across a forlorn landscape" with "tawny yellow[..] and green [..]" colours (Chapman, *Douglas* 51).

Contrary to the depictions of them as majestic and lovely in animal documentaries on Television channels such as National Geographic and Animal Planet, for example, the zebras in the poem are far from majestic. Instead they are "destructive" and "claw-stained," "Their whippy tails are burr-stuck," their "hooves are wreathed in dung," and they are convict-flanked," that is, their stripes make them look like they are dressed in striped uniforms of convicts. In the poem Livingstone "concentrates on the uglier [and] more disillusioning aspects of the African experience" and, for Chapman, what is interesting about the poem is that "it almost indicates a deliberate reaction against [Roy] Campbell's approach to animal subject matter" (ibid. 51). In a similarly titled poem Campbell's zebras emerge as majestic and dignified (ibid. 50) in a romantic pastoral scenery:

The zebras draw the dawn across the plains

Wading knee-deep among the scarlet flowers (Campbell 37).

They snort "rosy plumes / That smoulder round their feet in drifting fumes" and, unlike Livingstone's miserable herd, Campbell's happy one whose stallion (described as an "Engine of beauty") rolls "his mare among the trampled lilies."

When looked at from an ecological perspective Livingstone's zebra poem indicates the poet-protagonist's alienation from nature which he sees as ugly and hostile giving one the impression that control and domination of the destructive and "claw-stained" zebras would be justified. The poet-protagonist's attitude to the zebras

in this poem is also closer to a darker version of what African life, and life more generally, is constituted by.

Unlike in the above poems where animals are mocked and ridiculed in a seemingly serious tone, "Conversation with a Giraffe at Dusk in the Zoo" (*RF* 95) is a light-hearted humorous poem in which the speaker pokes fun at a male giraffe. What takes place in the poem is not a conversation as such, as the title would make us believe, but the speaker mocking the giraffe whom he calls "lofty," in reference to the giraffe's height and supposed pride and sense of superiority:

> Your dignity fools no one;
> you get engagingly awkward
> when you separate and collapse
> yourself to drink;
> and have you seen
> yourself cantering? (95)

The evocation of separation and fall ("collapse") here refers to the giraffe's awkward posture while drinking, a task he accomplishes by stretching his forelegs sideways and stretching his neck forward to reach the water. In the next stanza the speaker admits that he could be ugly too from the perspective of the giraffe:

> Alright, alright, I know
> I'm ugly standing still,
> squat-necked, so high.

But still he thinks the giraffe should not take pride in his height for birds fly higher than he stands anyway. This friendly jesting (as the playful tone indicates), however, is not free from the human tendency of instrumentalising animals. The speaker confesses his wish to "toboggan down [the giraffe's] neck" or to "swing" on his tail. Here the tendency to consider animals as a resource also comes through. The fact that the giraffe is in a zoo, caged possibly for human amusement as is the case in the poem, further removes the poem from those that can be considered ecological.

In some of his poems Douglas Livingstone's humorous jabs are aimed at human beings rather than animals. This is clear in "Giovanni Jocopo Meditates (on Among the Twitchers)" (*RF* 400). In this poem Livingstone's mask or doppelganger, Giovanni Jocopo, imagines himself among twitchers – birdwatchers or birders – who delight in spotting and accumulating bird species on their lists. The humorous punch of the poem lies in the fictitious and therefore, imagined names of the birds which expose the bird watcher's ignorance about birds, as well as the vulgar names the birds

reserve for the twitchers. In the poem the bird watchers do not agree on a single name for the birds they have spotted as they argue

> 'Hey, that's a Waxbilled Rum-Tum Squat!'
> 'No, that's a Grump or Grey Garotte!'
> 'Perhaps a Randy Red-Eyed Vrot!'
>
> '& there's the Square-Egged Painful Hatcher!'
> 'Hell, No: the Pointe-Road Zipped Flycatcher!'
> 'Or Clapper-Clawed Subsistence Scratcher!'

The exclamations in the poem show the twitcher's excitement upon spotting their "quarry" while the alliteration and rhyme scheme (all last words in each line of a stanza rhyme) gives the poem its rhythm and lyrical quality. The poem is intended to be performed as in the second section we have the bird's reply where they in turn call the birders names such as

> '[…] a Lesser-Knotted Wanker!'
> 'A Brown Bush-Hatted Spindle-Shanker!'
> 'A Midnight Game-Park Hanky-Panker!'
>
> 'The Greater Slack-Jawed Vacuole!'
> 'The Leica-Laden Glory-Hole!" [and]
> "The Canon-Clumsied Casserole!'

This poem confirms, through the allusions to, and evocation of, sexual behaviour ("Hanky-Panker", "Glory-Hole"); sexually transmitted infections, such as syphilis, through the use of "Shanker; rottenness ("Vrot"); execution devices ("Garotte"); and private parts and other features of the human anatomy ("Tit," rectum, scrotum), Livingstone's description of Giovanni Jocopo in an interview with Marco Fazzini as "an unmitigated scoundrel and adventurer of excessively low morals, but a very lively and entertaining character nevertheless" (Fazzini 138).[95] This is clearer in the third section where the birds and twitchers are supposed to speak together and where the vulgarity that started in the second section continues:

> 'Look, there's a Tit, or Camisole!'
> 'A Purpled-Pendant Pranticole!'
> 'A Rufous-Rectumed Oriole!'
> 'The Swollen-Scrotumed Rigmarole!'

[95] Douglas Livingstone's "official version" about Giovanni Jocopo in the interview is that Jocopo was a pen name for G J Casanova, author of poems in coarse Latin which came into Livingstone's possession in the 1970s (Fazzini 138). Obviously this was one of Livingstone's jokes.

This satirical poem, apart from showing Livingstone's love for wordplay (forming double-barrelled words and using words from science ["Vacuole"], cookery ["Casserole"], Spanish and Afrikaans), dramatises an imagined situation where the observed animals who are observed and named by humans without their consent, or even knowledge, respond and name their namers in return. The satire and saucy humour in the poem is at the expense of humans rather than the birds. One also realises that the poem is just a lot of gabbled nonsense put together for its humorous aspects as the word "Rigmarole" suggests. The poem is therefore Livingstone's joke at the expense of the reader.

"The Clocks," in the words of Michael Chapman, is "a gentle, closely observed poem about an old lady who, determined to ignore the passing years, does not wind the clocks in the sitting-room, and lives surrounded by the bric-a-brac of a colonial past" (23). However, her "fastidiousness and her attempts to preserve an outdated, gracious way of life" could do nothing to stop time's inexorable destruction. And when she dies one morning her cat,

> The great ginger tom eventually moved in
> next-door to escape the fuss, where the neighbours were
> kindly and the milk almost as regular (40).

The cat's moving in with the neighbours here seems wiser than the eccentric behaviour of the woman who refuses to accept the reality of the passage of time and the inevitability of death.

In the poems discussed above there are few, if any, that show Livingstone's ecological sensibility. Rather, the poems show his negative attitudes towards some animals and his anthropocentricism, dualism and alienation from nature, in general, and animals, in particular. It seems the poet's darker views of nature and the world also shade into negative stereotypes of certain animals, despite the inventiveness of the language he uses to describe them.

4.0 Existential Struggle, Suffering and Death

In some of his animal poems Douglas Livingstone, like Ted Hughes, depicts the "predatory [and] destructive character of nature, of which man is a part" (Gifford and Roberts 14), and highlights ideas of existential struggle, suffering and death in a cruel and messy world. In these poems Livingstone's preoccupation is to show animals in their primordial struggles for "survival in a tough, often violent world"

(Chapman, *Douglas* 54). In such a bleak world the animals themselves emerge as destructive and cruel. In this regard Livingstone seems to exemplify the Darwinian evolutionary ideas of natural selection, particularly the idea of "survival of the fittest," and adaptation – where a creature becomes better suited or able to live in its habitat/s by, for instance, having the suitable physical features and learning behaviour that would enable it to find food, avoid predators and attract mates. Livingstone here also emphasizes the human/nature divide by depicting animals, in particular, as ruthless, terrifying killing machines (although he does not necessarily view humans as incapable of killing).

Further, in these poems Livingstone also seems to critique the pastoral tradition, which is a key concern for ecocritics,[96] by presenting an Africa that is "neither the 'pastoral retreat' of earlier South African veld singers nor a 'hunter's paradise', in the tradition of Campbell, but 'a stark animal-infested land [that is] threatening, ominous, [and] unlovely" (Chapman, *Douglas* 51). Livingstone does not describe the veldt with an implicit or explicit contrast (Garrard 33) to urban South Africa, that is, make a "spatial distinction of town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant) [, or] make a temporal distinction of past (idyllic) and present ("fallen") (Garrard 35) as is the case in classical pastoral. We also do not see Garrard's "three orientations of pastoral in terms of time" namely, the elegy, which "looks back to a vanished past with a sense of nostalgia;" the idyll, which "celebrates a bountiful present;" and the utopia, which "looks forward to a redeemed future" (37). It is therefore difficult to talk of Livingstone's animal poems as representing "a symbolic loss of Edenic innocence" or depicting humans "after the Fall" (Chapman, *Douglas* 57) as if Livingstone gives a hint (which he does not) of nostalgia for a vanished, beautiful past anywhere in his poetry. In Livingstone's poetry in general there is no hint of a beautiful vanished past or a ready made utopian future awaiting our discovery but of a present in varied forms of ugliness and beauty. This is why I am uncomfortable with Mariss Stevens' choice of words when she says Livingstone is, "in Bate's words, a true poet because he 'hold[s] fast' to the *pastoral* dream of nature" (Stevens 33, italics mine) especially when pastoral evokes ideas of

[96] Although the trope of pastoral is "deeply problematic for environmentalis[ts]" and ecocritics because of its infinite malleability "for differing political ends" and its potential harmfulness "in its tensions and evasions" with regard to our relationship with nature (Garrard 33), ecocritics, in spite of their great suspiciousness of pastoral, have been "unwilling to dispense entirely with the implicit critique of contemporary society it may offer" (ibid. 55).

peacefulness and bounty. Although he hopes for a day when human beings shall embrace ecological consciousness and realise the need for what Stevens calls "ecological equilibrium," Douglas Livingstone's vision in some of his poems is anything but peaceful. What some of Livingstone's poems, especially those discussed in this section, do is epitomise the idea of nature as "red in tooth and claw" and, by focussing "on the uglier, more disillusioning aspects of the African experience" (Chapman, *Douglas* 51), Livingstone depicts the African landscape as malevolent and ominous. In this way, as I mentioned earlier, Livingstone also reveals aspects of anti-pastoral critique where he offers a corrective reading of the African landscape not as a an "idyllic landscape, […] as a setting for song [and] an atmosphere of *otium* [peace]" (Alpers 22, italics in original) but as a dangerous place of death and alienation from capricious, rather than harmonious, nature.

In the poem "Pteranodon" (*RF* 28), we get a picture of an Africa that is threatening and inscrutable where the most unlikely creatures pose a danger to the lives of the unwary. In the poem, a Pteranodon, the creature of the title, a toothless flying reptile with a bony chest believed to be extinct, resurfaces, attacks and carries a seven year old boy herding cattle, paradoxically described as a "thin healthy head," (28) out in the veld. Livingstone captures the senseless violence of the attack when he tells us that no one but the small herd of five cattle was around

> to see the two dozen
> feet of dusty leather
> wingspread, hear the wet
> crush of long toothed jaws closing,
> the snap of the vertebrae,
> and nothing, nothing at all
> the flight away
> with the broken rabbit boy
> one limb slow waving (28).

Livingstone shows his modernist influences here by engaging his imagination and creating an African wilderness inhabited by the most dangerous and unlikely creatures. In the poem he reconfigures or recasts the Pteranodon in his imagination and endows it with "long toothed jaws" capable of crushing the vertebrae of the seven year old whose helplessness invites the apt metaphorical description of him as a "broken rabbit boy" in the poem. The boy's helplessness and lack of resistance in the claws of the evil creature is also emphasised by the emphasis on nothingness through

repetition in the line “and nothing, nothing at all.” In the final analysis, this poem is one of several by Livingstone in which he highlights the irrational and senseless violence in nature and the African landscape or where he depicts nature as “red in tooth and claw.” The poem also highlights the tough life that the people lead in this area where a seven year old boy herds cattle across the valley and dies a painful lonely death. If we assume the boy’s identity to be that of a black South African, Livingstone’s “anti-pastoral mode” in the poem “subverts the imperialistic values on which colonialism is based” by exposing “the ugly reality of dispossessed indigenous people hidden by the Edenic pastoral idyll” in relation to the African landscape (Louw, “Landscape” 39). The horror of the boy’s fate in the poem shatters the idyll.

Another poem that emphasises or highlights the ominous and unlovely nature of the African landscape and experience is “Veld and Vlei Poem” (RF 216). Like in “Pteranodon” (*RF* 28), it is a herdboy who is at the centre of the events in this poem, but unlike the former, it is a snake that poses a danger to his life. In this poem a “fat” viper lies in wait for a hapless herdboy seeking shelter from a storm under a ledge of a kopje. We read:

> Up from the vlei, over the veld,
> a herdboy trots for the kopje,
> bare feet thudding on tufts,
> soles sensory, cold-shouldering thorns;
> head down, breaks into full pelt
> – bare skin starting to tremble –
> up the small bill for vantage,
> hand over hand over edges;
> linked by flickering tongues of lightning
> silent thunderheads assemble.

Sensory soles and thorns suggest bare feet, and taken together with the “bare skin” that starts “to tremble” (with skin functioning here as a synecdoche for the herdboy) they suggest the boy’s poverty and suffering as well as the poverty and suffering of his family or guardians. The ominous nature of the landscape is highlighted by the fact that it is at a prospective place of shelter, a place that offers hope for relief from more suffering, where a snake waits “spring-loaded for puncture,” that is, coiled like a spring ready to strike. The herdboy’s struggle to survive in a harsh world by herding cattle is here further complicated by the obstacles he has to surmount, such as dangerous snakes in the case of this poem. This poem, like many others by

Livingstone, debunks the myth of a landscape where people live in harmony with nature. The South African wilderness is far from an idyllic place in the poem. It is a landscape with danger, violence and death from dangerous creatures.

A snake is also a symbol of the threatening nature of the African landscape in the poem "The Killers" (*RF* 56-57). In the poem the poet-protagonist encounters "a seven feet […] / […] black-necked cobra […]" (56) while fishing in a river. The snake probably comes to the river to drink and is at first unaware of the poet-protagonist's presence. But later the snake senses the presence of the human and angrily starts looking for him. Luckily the cobra does not see him and when it calms down the poet-protagonist finds his opening, he jumps past it, gets his shotgun and kills it. In the poem Livingstone shows a keen eye for detail in the manner in which he represents the cobra's behaviour both before and after she becomes aware of the persona. When the cobra is unaware of the poet-protagonists presence

> Her chin hangs a flat inch above the ground
> The rest of her following her first track,
> her joints lazily curving like a train
> on a mountain rail, her long muscles slack.
> She stops, tongue flickering at a small sound (56).

In these lines Livingstone creates realistic, rich and vividly evocative visual images of the snake as she slithers towards the river through the metaphor of a train "on a mountain rail." This comparison of the snake to a train enables us to visualise her shape and length. When she senses his presence we hear that "Schadenfreude of cobras makes her hood grow" (56) and later

> Rage whips this lash so tightly close until
> it lands good yards away. A black snake boils
> around me, hunting me, raising the dust.
> And the sweat popping and ballooning soils
> me where I sit, hating, so still, so still (56)

Again Livingstone's descriptions here enable us to visualise the snake's behaviour as she hunts the poet-protagonist who sits still (emphasised by the repetition in "so still, so still") to avoid being spotted, hating the snake all the while. The reference to the snake as boiling refers to her anger as she hunts the poet-protagonist while the "popping" and "ballooning" sweat that "soils" the persona is the spit/venom from the spitting cobra. The difficulty of the situation for the poet-protagonist is reflected in the complex rhyme scheme of the poem where lines are rhymed both within and across

stanzas with the first and last lines within each stanza always rhyming. This poem presents an archetypal conflict between the inhabitants of the earth that defies human understanding. The snake in the poem exhibits primordial energies that are at once fearful and difficult to understand as she gets into a rage without apparent provocation. It is this lack of understanding between the two animals that makes the human being in the poem attribute human feelings ("schadenfreude"), the only ones he knows, to the snake. And it is this suspected "schadenfreude" in the snake which triggers feelings of intense hatred in the human leading to the killing of the cobra. The difficulty or even lack of interspecies communication, that only a few human beings, especially shamans, seem to have, also worsens the confrontation as it is virtually impossible for the poet-protagonist to tell the snake to leave as he confesses: "I don't now how to say Bug off in talk / that cobras understand […]." (57).

It seems to me that this poem dramatises some of those moments of conflict between humans and other animals where the ecological message of "live and let live" does not hold. The poem's title also reveals this much – both the snake and the human are capable killers driven by the instinct to survive (a typical case of the hunter being hunted) where the one who first makes the right move emerges the victor. The poem reveals the poet-protagonist's disharmonious relationship with nature and the landscape. The way Livingstone uses the word "understood" in the final two lines of the poem where the persona declares "I had to shoot; I mean / that now her limp grey life lies understood," gives the impression that understanding here means mastery, control or domination. It is only after it is dead that the poet-protagonist understands the cobra's life. The poem therefore can be read as a critique of the ways in which humans distance themselves from other animals, only appreciating the lives of other animals when they are under control, preferably dead. Read this way, the poem is "ecological." And indeed Mariss Stevens sees it as "a poem which examines the tension of humankind being both part of and apart from nature." For her, "[h]umankind in a state of ecological equilibrium would, for example, have a deeper understanding of the life of the snake" (101).

On the other hand, this poem, like the other three discussed above, paints a tawny, disillusioned picture of the African landscape where malignant creatures confront the human inhabitants, who in this case stand apart from malevolent nature.

In the poems "Leviathan" (*RF* 37) and "The Hungry Heart" (*RF* 50) Douglas Livingstone offers us pictures of predation or of animals feeding on other animals.

Here, as was the case in "Veld and Vlei Poem" and in "The Killers," Livingstone represents the animals in a naturalistic manner and presents the facts coldly without comment or adornment. This, however, does not mean that he is not emotionally involved in the unfolding events.

Although the title of the poem "Leviathan" refers to a whale, the events in the poem detail the poet-protagonist's observation of a puff-adder that Livingstone describes as "khaki [and] / fatter than a stocking of pus" or simply "obese" "except for its short thin tail" (37) swallowing a "dozing lizard." The idea of a woman's stocking filled with pus evokes horror and disgust in the reader and reveals the poet-protagonist's own sense of horror and disgust at the sight of the snake. Like the puff-adder, the lizard is described judgementally as a "Scaly little monster / with delicate hands and feet," yet "stupidly sluggish in the sun" who ends up being "Enveloped by a slack / wormy yellow bowel" (37). The connection between the leviathan of the title and the events in the poem comes later when the sight of the snake swallowing the lizard unsettles the poet-protagonist who remembers the fate of Jonah in the biblical book of the same name. Livingstone, who seems to pity the "scaly little monster," likens the fate of the lizard to that of Jonah who was swallowed by a whale and taken to the shores of Nineveh when he attempted to escape from his mission to bring the word of God to the inhabitants of that city. The poet-protagonist exclaims:

> O Jonah, to tumble to
> those sickly deadly depths,
> slick walled, implacably black.

The "O" signals his sympathy for the lizard and his lamentation over the disharmony in the world of nature. Although the poet desists from explicitly passing judgement on the behaviour of the puff-adder, his choice of words and his presentation of the creatures shows that Livingstone assumes a hierarchical relationship with them and sees them as inferior to humans because of their predation. The puff-adders bowels are called "wormy" and "yellow" and, like those of the whale, are said to be "sickly deadly depths, / Slick walled, [and] implacably black" which emphasises the creatures' otherness, ruthlessness and cruelty.

From the poems discussed above it is clear that the snake is a favourite symbol of evil in Douglas Livingstone's poetry. But while in the above poems it invariably appears as a symbol of evil, a later poem titled "*Traffic Interlude*: Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Snake" (*RF* 269-271), which is modelled on Wallace Stevens'

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird," is a reflection on the various ways in which humans relate to snakes, as enemies to be killed, as a symbol of evil and humanity's loss of Edenic bliss, and as a symbol of divinity in some religions, among others. The poem explores the ambivalent ways in which humans relate to one of the most hated living creatures. This ambivalence is evident in Livingstone's poems analysed so far where it mostly emerges as malevolent and a symbol of evil.

In the poem "The Hungry Heart" (*RF* 50) the poet observes a pied kingfisher fishing. The poet tells us that the bird "hovers like my heart, over / the plump river" (50), before smashing the river surface and emerging with a silver fish which she beats to death before making a meal of it. On spotting a fish in the water we hear that the bird

> Catapults down smashing
> the surface and up, flashing
> wetly, a silver
>
> Writhing in his beak, settles
> on a branch and beats to death
> the food's last movement.

The word "catapult" signals the speed with which the bird propels herself into the water after its prey while her beating "to death / the food's last moment" refers to the bird's stopping the fish's struggles through killing. The poet compares the hovering of the bird above the river with the rapid beating of his heart with anticipation, and he personifies the river by referring to it as "plump" to indicate the fact that it was nearly full. Michael Chapman rightly credits Livingstone with "truth of observation" which is often a strength in his poetry, although he also feels that this "does at times militate against a poem achieving infinite layers of suggestion" (*Douglas* 47). The "infinite layers of suggestion," I suspect, refer to the various ways in which a poem about animals renders itself applicable to human situations and reality. However, the success of an animal poem does not have to be judged based on whether it alludes to degrees of human nuance or complexity. Chapman further observes that Livingstone "may be described as a poet of the instinct to survive" for as we see in this poem "the kingfisher kills instinctually and unemotionally" (ibid.). The poet does not wholly leave emotions out of the poem or the observed event however. His heart hovers or beats faster with anticipation and the bird is said to be "spinning out the bleak / murderous moment" as it hunts for fish. Here Livingstone

falls into the trap of the human tendency to judge or weigh the behaviour of animals on the human morality scale, a scale which more often than not finds them wanting, leading to the bedevilling and perception of them as morally corrupt, violent or incomplete humans.

"A Bamboo Day" (*RF* 101-102) is another poem that deals with predation and shows animals in acts geared towards their survival in a world where the ability to find food and water determines winners from losers. In the poem Livingstone depicts a predator-prey relationship amongst animals during an eighteen months long drought. In the sweltering heat of an early morning sun

> Slim brown-eyed buck stand balancing
> their too heavy horns and sprung hindquarters
> delicately on the fulcrum
> of their forward hooves. Giraffe, their heads swimming,
> stand tall to eat the shade or watch,
> blinking, for the outflanking, knife-toed leopards.
>
> The cats, no respecters of truces,
> who cut and thrust about the trampled pool
> using drought the common enemy
> as a time for killing and killing like
> any other, are holed up somewhere
> digesting, leaving shattered carcasses (101).

The giraffe's eating of "the shade" refers to the eating of tree leaves that provide shade in the sweltering heat. While the animals (herbivores) such as zebras, bucks and giraffes gather around a waterhole, the predators, lions and leopards, use the drought to their advantage to find food and the killing is so much that there is enough food for even scavengers such as vultures and jackals as we hear that "A quick shriek of vultures squabbling with jackals / over meat, dies: there is enough" (101). But as the drought seems to have reached its peak there is a promise of a rainstorm in the distant horizon, although this is too late for some of the animals amongst whom is a sickly lion stretched on the ground and abandoned by the others as the rain approaches.

This poem, like many others by Livingstone, paints a "harsh view of existence" or depicts the existential struggles for survival and the suffering among animals which gives the impression of "nature as uncaring" (Stevens 67). It also associates the African landscape with death. It seems, then, that Livingstone is not interested in presenting a pastoral, harmonious image of nature but rather that of

nature as violent and ruthless in which various animals compete to survive. To his credit, Livingstone does not offer judgement in "A Bamboo Day" and seems to view what happens as a normal rule of life. For him both humans and animals are killers as we hear in the poem that the cats use the "drought[,] the common enemy / as a time for killing and killing like any other" (101).

Death and killing as well as existential struggle are also the subject of "To a Dead Elephant" (*RF* 29) and "Gentling a Wildcat" (*RF* 97-98). "To a Dead Elephant" depicts "a cruel and helpless relationship between" human and nonhuman animals, "contrast[ing] stages of innocence and experience in the life of rural Africans" (Chapman, *Douglas* 48). In the poem we read:

> Old Python Nose with the wind-rolling ears:
> *Hau*! I remember it well when you came,
> thin, small, grey, twinkle-eyed, stumbling and lame,
> to me, a lone boy with none of the fears
> that stalked the elders. Friend, I had no tears
> for both our young losses; but all the same
> you robbed me of those sweet potatoes!
> Fame
> walked with us, both motherless, those coupled years.

The elephant's helplessness is emphasised by its appearance and manner of walking in the line "thin, small, grey, twinkle-eyed, stumbling and lame." In the opening octave of this sonnet the speaker remembers his innocent childhood days when he met a lonely and lame young elephant with which he immediately identified and befriended, as both are said to have had some losses – probably the loss of their parents. At the time the speaker had not yet been corrupted by the tales of the elders that instil fear of wild animals. The closing sestet brings us to the present where the speaker encounters the rotting carcass of the once tame elephant and laments:

> Why did you leave me to the elders' lies?
> Both men, we meet again, but not my will
> wrought this antheap with flies and hamstrung thighs.

The speaker here regrets the lost years when having fallen victim to what he calls "elders' lies," perhaps stories from elders about the hopelessness of a relationship with an elephant, he distanced himself from the friendly elephant. But at the time he realises his mistake it is too late, the elephant is an "antheap with flies and hamstrung thighs" (29), that is, dead. In the poem Livingstone seems to lay the blame for the failure of a non-hierarchical relationship between humans and other animals on elders

who instil fear of, and disrespect for, wild animals in children. Here we can see traces or elements of a compassionate attitude to animals or what we may consider an ecological protest against the manner in which children are brought up to fear animals.

This element of compassion for the "earth other" that barely shows its head in "To a Dead Elephant" is also manifested in the poem "Gentling a Wildcat," although the poem is mainly about existential struggle, violence and death in nature. In the poem the poet-protagonist who decides to take a walk in the evening from a hotel encounters a wildcat that has been attacked by a jackal while giving birth. The wildcat is in great physical suffering as "a victim of the inexorable, though nonetheless cruel, law of nature which proclaims that only the fittest survive" (Chapman, *Douglas* 85). Livingstone's rendering of the encounter is distressing. The cat lay under "a ragged heap of leaves"

> […] open from chin to loins;
> lower viscera missing; truncated tubes
> and bitten-off things protruding.
>
> Little blood there was, but a mess of
> damaged lungs; straining to hold its breath
> for quiet; claws fixed curved and jutting,
> jammed open in a stench of jackal meat;
> it tried to raise its head hating the mystery, death (97).

A stanza later we also hear that

> Closely, in a bowl of unmoving roots,
> an untouched carcass, unlicked, swaddled and wrapped
> in trappings of birth, the first of a litter stretched.
> Rooted out in mid-confinement: a time
> when jackals have courage enough for wildcat (97).

Douglas Livingstone is quoted as having said the poem was a result of a real event he witnessed while travelling through the Transkei. One night he left his small hotel and walked into the bush where he encountered the "tremendously traumatised wildcat" which he stroked and tried to ease into death (Chapman, *Douglas* 84-85). The poem highlights the ironies in nature where creation and destruction are inseparable parts of life. Chapman argues that the poem "presents a vision of harmony amid destruction" and observes that "[t]he simplicity of the language, the easy rhythmical movements, and the muted rhymes are appropriate to a mood of gentleness

and harmony" (ibid. 85-86). Although there is gentleness on the part of the human in trying to ease the cat into death, it is difficult to conceive of harmony as Chapman does between a healthy, fully grown man and a fatally wounded wildcat in the throes of death. Rather these stylistic features add to the clarity of the speaker's observation and his compassion for the suffering wildcat. What emerges most clearly from the poem is the cruelty and violence in nature and the poet's compassion for the dying wildcat as he tells us

> So I sat and gentled her with my hand,
> not moving much but saying things, using my voice;
> and she became gentle, affording herself
> the influent luxury of breathing –
> untrammelled, bubbly, safe in its noise.
>
> Later, calmed, despite her tides of pain,
> she let me ease her claws, the ends of the battle,
> pulling off the trapped and rancid flesh.
> Her miniature limbs of iron relaxed.
> She died with hardly a rattle (98).

The words "luxury," "bubbly," "safe" are ironic under the circumstances. They are dissonant with the situation described in the poem. The notion of the cat letting him "ease her claws" also ironically attributes agency and choice to the wounded cat. In this poem, the poet does something unusual in human-animal relationships. While the preferred thing to do by many humans would have been to walk away from the tormented creature, he is touched by the wildcat's suffering and decides to keep it company during its last painful moments of life. Whether this was a necessary or even a welcome thing to do from the perspective of the wildcat is a very difficult question to tackle as we can only grasp reality from our human perspective. I agree with Chapman when he makes the observation that "[b]y investing the brute facts of death with emotional significance, [Livingstone] suggests that it is important for modern 'scientific' [humans] to retain [their] capacity for wonder, above all for sympathy" (*Douglas* 86-87). Mariss Stevens also shares this view when she says "Gentling a Wildcat" is obversely ecological in that to tame or gentle a frenzied wildcat in its death throes shows Livingstone's remarkable, almost unbelievable, atunement with nature" (ibid. 89).

5.0 Ecological Protest, Compassion and Respect

As we saw in "Gentling a Wildcat" above, in some of his poems Douglas Livingstone tries to problematise the way we relate with other animals. In such poems the mode of representation is compassionate, that is, Livingstone uses the poems "as a way of mediating upon or bringing us to think about our treatment of animals" (Soper 307), and he combines ecological protest with a respectful attitude towards animals. These poems are the ones that have mainly earned him the appellation of "ecological poet."

In "The King" (*RF* 52) Livingstone depicts an old lion in a game park. Contrary to popular depictions of lions as regal and dignified both in appearance and behaviour, Livingstone's lion is old and weak and has lost his aura of respectability. Livingstone's reference to him as the king therefore smacks of irony. In the first stanza of the poem we hear that

> Old Tawny's mane is moth-
> eaten now, a balding monk's tonsure,
> and his fluid thigh muscles flop
> slack as an exhausted boxer's (52).

These lines highlight the lion's loss of youthfulness, strength and sophistication. His mane, the pride of a lion, is "moth-eaten" and looks like a "a balding monk's tonsure," that is, the mane is falling and exposing bald patches on the lion's head, while his 'thigh muscles' have lost their strength. The use of a metaphor and simile in this stanza enables us to visualize the unprepossessing appearance of the lion and his weakness underscored by the reference to his thigh muscles as "slack" (loose) and their comparison to those of "an exhausted" boxer. More weaknesses are revealed in the second stanza of this four stanza poem where we hear that the lion "creaks a little and is / just a fraction under fast" for "he's lame," although as the third stanza makes it clear, he can still catch game.

The lion's humiliation, however, is compounded by the behaviour of humans who, year in year out, continue to hunt and haunt him with box cameras. We are told in the last stanza of the poem that

> Each year, panting heavily, [the lion]
> manages with aged urbanity
> to smile full-faced and yellowly
> at a thousand box cameras.

Here Livingstone shows that our tendency to derive pleasure from watching animals and photographing them in parks, even in Zoos, is always at the expense of the animals' dignity (Cataldi 2002) and happiness. The lion in the poem pants heavily, either with exhaustion or sadness, and only manages "to smile full-faced and yellowly." The pathetic fallacy of the lion smiling "yellowly," that is fearfully, here emphasises the humiliation of the lion who, constructed as a resource by humans, is hunted and photographed by a thousand cameras every year. In this poem, especially given its sympathetic tone ("Old Tawny's mane is moth- / eaten now"), Livingstone critiques the abuse of animals for human entertainment and pleasure, a practice that seems to be inspired by Cartesian philosophy which sees animals as machines without feelings. Old Tawny is objectified or "thingified" as his feelings do not matter to those who haunt the game park every year.

The poem "The Accessory" (*RF* 423) also critiques the tendency of humans to derive aesthetic pleasure from the misfortunes of animals and also censures game management practices that lead to the suffering and death of some animals. "The Accessory" is an ironic, tongue-in-cheek, conversational poem triggered by the sight of the skin of a waterbuck in a Mercedes Benz car. The poet imagines that the waterbuck, which he describes as "a creature / not that common," was a victim of a previous game drive during which time a chopper and nets are used to herd the animals into a line at a gallop leading to the collapse and death of some of them resulting from "a burst heart or spleen," or "blown lungs." The speaker in the poem is a game ranger whose self-righteous views on this method of game management ironically reveal his anthropocentrism, lack of ecological consciousness, and warped views about conservation. The speaker thinks that the waterbuck's skin "makes a rather unique feature" in the car and that "this piece of skin still / proves we're conservation-conscious: / we waste not." He goes on

> […] Well, I mean, we do strive
> to be humane. The auction helps to spread
> the game around. Most survive just fine.
> Despite the chopper & the nets, few end up dead,
> when herded at a gallop into line.

At the end of the poem the speaker seems to congratulate himself over the fact that the previous "run produced only this one / casualty" whose skin "helps to protect the Merc's plastic / dashboard from the unforgiving sun."

The poem reveals that most wildlife conservationist discourse and practice is human-centred and motivated by self-interest, is ecologically misinformed, and is insensitive to the plight of animals. The speaker in the poem thinks that conservation-consciousness entails wise use of animal products, while humane behaviour towards animals means being able to distribute animal products amongst humans. Here is a typical case of an anthropocentric, "wise use" conservationist argument that sees animals as an available resource that humans should use carefully and wisely. The animals here have no intrinsic value but instrumental value that humans ascribe to them. The speaker in the poem downplays the effects of the game-drive, especially the use of a helicopter and nets, on the animals but highlights the positive effect of the use of the waterbuck's skin on the Mercedes' dashboard. This shows that the wildlife conservation discourse and practice have less to do with the welfare of the animals themselves but more to do with human benefits from animals.

The exploitation, abuse and use of animals as a resource are also clear in poems such as "Beach Terminal" (*RF* 288), "Carnivores at Station 22" (*RF* 306), "Bad Run at King's Rest" (*RF* 289), and "A Piece of Earth" (*RF* 215). "Beach Terminal" is an example of the ways humans have exploited animals for profit or for selfish ends. The poem details Livingstone's feelings about a closed old dilapidated whaling station on the Durban coast which he came by while collecting water samples for microbial analysis of water pollution. Livingstone's distaste for the behaviour of the whalers is emphasised by the descriptive terms he reserves for them such as "butchers" and "hackers." In his reconstruction of the scenes when the factory was operational we hear in the poem that "the whole factory bustled / with butchers, profit-motive suspect." Livingstone goes on to imagine that in those days

> Bearded hackers, swift with fist and oath,
> flensed, slashed, tore with hand-held power saws,
> long knives and tongs, staggered on spiked boots,
> slipped and swore – a thick-skinned breed, thick-necked.

From these descriptions it is clear that Livingstone portrays the people he imagines worked at the whaling station as ruthless killers with uncouth manners. They were ruthless and violent ("thick-skinned" and "thick-necked") people who lacked kindness or compassion for the animals whose carcasses they hacked, "slashed" and "tore" and for fellow human beings, reminding us of the observation that cruelty to animals often leads to cruelty to fellow human beings. Although the factory is closed we gather

from the poem that it shall remain for the poet a "bad prospect" and "blood-flecked," a symbol of death and the exploitative and abusive relationship that humans have with other animals. The poem highlights the tendency to use nature in general, and animals in particular, not to satisfy basic human needs but the insatiable acquisitive desires. The poem therefore protests against the destruction and exploitation of other animals for selfish ends.

"Carnivores at Station 22" also reveals the exploitative way in which humans relate to other animals as a resource. In the autobiographical poem, the poet relates his experiences one day at a bay on the Durban coast favoured by fishermen. On that particular day Livingstone came upon a beached dolphin on that part of the beach and he spent a lot of time vainly trying to push the dolphin back into the sea. His yelling and beckoning for the bland-faced men who were probably "fishing for families" elicited no response from them and he had to give up his efforts as we read:

> Her blowhole barely fluttered.
> Strapped to a schedule, I had to give her up.
> Winded, eyes stinging from the salt
> I offered up a curse to *Homo Sap* (306, italics in original).

The poet's sense of loss of hope for the creature, and disappointment in fellow humans, is memorably captured in the third stanza with the visual image of "the tide ebbing with [his] receding hopes." Livingstone curses humans ("*Homo Sap*") in anger against their disconnection from other animals who they see as possessing only instrumental value. The results of this "instrumentalisation" of nature, especially other animals in the case of the poem, are revealed immediately after the poet gives up trying to save the dolphin. In the seventh and final stanza we hear

> As I left, the fishermen stirred: stashing
> rods, moving in the ugly minuet
> of deliberate premeditation,
> one drawing a long and rusted bayonet.

The fishermen, unlike Livingstone, do not view the dolphin with compassion and as worthy of human support, but as a source of food or as a bait. Thus the fishermen lack the ecological consciousness that motivates the poet to assist the beached creature. One can argue here that the poet momentarily ignores his all too clear awareness in some of the poems discussed earlier of the "the predatory nature of animals, including [humans]" (Stevens 153) who in this case were simply exhibiting their true character.

Although the poem successfully shows the poet's compassion for the dolphin, its success as an ecological poem is rather limited. In the first stanza the poet describes the fishermen sitting on the peaks of the "basalt outcrops" that are part of the bay as "poised like birds of prey" and their act of fishing with hooks as "stab[bing] sea and sky with bamboo beaks." This comparison of the fishermen with birds of prey also shows the poet's negative attitudes towards such birds whose manner of hunting for fish is judged as violent or ruthless through the use of the word "stab." Further, the poem shows the poet's selective compassion for animals that are harmless or are deemed friendly to humans. The dolphin seems to have attracted the poet's compassion because dolphins have a smile "for men" (humans) and because "these are the only carnivores on earth / that have never attacked man," or to use Duncan Brown's phrase, because of "the biological contract between species" (Brown 99). The poet therefore judges or values the dolphin instrumentally, like the very people whose behaviour he seeks to censure in the poem. The fishermen's attitude towards the dolphin is no different from their attitude towards the fish they hope to catch. Yet Livingstone is silent on the fate of the fish. This reveals the tendency in environmental/ecological or conservation movements to value or cherish some animal species more than others leading to conservationists' complicity to the decimation of the devalued or demonised species. Besides, in judging the behaviour of the fishermen (who may well be impoverished and needy people) who instrumentally view the dolphin as food he seems to rise on the high moral ground ecologically and belittles human struggles for survival.

Douglas Livingstone's compassion for suffering or helpless animals is also clear in "Bad Run at King's Rest" which also shows human insensitivity to, and abuse of, animals. In this poem Livingstone euthanizes a tortured loggerhead turtle he also came by while working on the Durban coast. The beached turtle whose shell had been split by "an errant propeller-blade" was being tortured by a group of urchins who ran away when they saw the poet approaching. But when Livingstone arrived on the scene the creature was beyond salvation:

> Its flippers [were] bloody where some lout's
> hacking had ripped nails for medicines
> or trophies. Both its eyes stabbed or pecked out.
>
> It raised its beak to scream or pant,

the exhalations making no sound.

Compassion for the suffering creature prompts the poet to put it out of its misery through mercy killing or euthanasia, and so "asking for pardon" he cut its "leathery throat." The poet's respect for the turtle is also revealed by the act of asking pardon from it before the act of killing in the manner of hunter-gatherers (Ingold 1994) who kill to survive and not out of greed and profiteering. The poet's killing of the turtle is not out of malice but is a compassionate act meant to shorten the suffering of the animal that would have died anyway. It is clear in the poem that Livingstone is critical of the abuse of animals by humans exemplified by the behaviour of the urchins towards the hapless turtle.

This criticism of human abuse and exploitation of animals that leads to the great yet unnecessary suffering of nonhuman animals also comes through in "A Piece of Earth" (*RF* 215). This poem is about a blue duiker that undergoes great physical suffering in a poacher's trap for three days. Livingstone convincingly and touchingly paints the duiker's suffering and torturous efforts to free its trapped "left hindleg":

He has been snared three days
of sleepless terror; throat scorched with thirst,
tongue thick from rust, dust and blood,
one tiny horn broken from his first
fight with the iron in the earth's skin.
The footloose poacher, long gone
for weeks, has moved on,
will not be returning.

At lengthening intervals
the hare-sized buck gathers himself
for bounding, mouth wide and whistling,
to tow the piece of earth with him.
The wire bites tighter.
Blood flows, clots, runs, congeals
until metal wholly rings on bone.
The earth remains unmoving.

"[E]arth's skin" here refers to the soil. The duiker's open and "whistling" mouth captures the extreme exhaustion of the creature while his bounding "to tow the piece of earth with him" emphasises his desire to be free from the snare. The mention of the earth that "remains unmoving" refers to the snare lodged into it that refuses to give, while the line "Blood flows, clots, runs, congeals" emphasises the duiker's physical

suffering, or the torture he is going through. Later, however, the buck frees himself but at the cost of part of his hind leg. But having escaped death from the trap, the poet hints at the unlikelihood of his survival in the "hyena-patrolled terrain" through which he has to stumble in search of water.

The poem shows Livingstone's compassion towards, and his identification with, the suffering creature. In this poem, like in "Bad Run at King's Rest," his compassion is aroused not only by asking the question whether animals can think, but also whether they can suffer, after Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer. The animals in these poems, like human beings, are sentient and suffer as much as a human being in their situation would. Worse still, the suffering of these animals would be avoidable if humans were considerate to, or identified with, other animals; if humans did not see themselves as separate from, or outside the rest of nature.

In "A Piece of Earth" Livingstone highlights the ruthlessness of humans to other animals especially through the reference to the fact that the poacher, who would have relieved the buck from its present torment through killing, "has moved on" and "will not be returning" to inspect the traps. This also shows human carelessness and disregard for the plight of other animals, especially through actions to which we do not hold ourselves accountable but lead to a lot of unnecessary suffering to other animals. I will argue that in these poems Livingstone reveals a transpersonal ecological self that is expansive, or "extends beyond (or that is *trans*-) [his] egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self" (Fox197). He identifies with the animals ontologically, that is, he exhibits an experience of commonality with the animals brought about through deep-seated realization of the fact that they are fellow beings or existents, and cosmologically, meaning that he experiences commonality with the animals as a result of the deep-seated realization of the fact that he and the animals are "aspects of a single unfolding reality" (Fox 252).

Wendy Woodward is right in her observation that the poem "excoriates the practice of poaching by representing the suffering of the trapped animal himself" ("Frail shared seconds" 49). But more than that (as I have noted above) Livingstone decries human carelessness and unaccountability to actions that cause untold suffering to other creatures. Again, true to Woodward's observation, "Livingstone's poems about animal deaths" such as the ones discussed above, "express ecological protest" (ibid.). However, as in the case of the fishermen in "Carnivores at Station 22," one cannot help wondering here on the class – or even racial – identity of the poacher and

why he poaches. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, white conservationist discourse in Africa blamed Africans (hunters) for the decline of wildlife on the continent. Jane Carruthers tells us that "[i]n published accounts of early white travellers and settlers, Africans are usually portrayed as intruders in and ravagers of an environment which deserved European custodianship" (*The Krugar* 90). The socio-economic challenges that induce(d) Africans to poach were/are often left unanalysed. By simply demonising the poacher Livingstone loses the opportunity to make an informed connection between human oppression and economic exploitation and animal exploitation through poaching.

As opposed to the abusive and exploitative human-animal relationships in the above poems, Douglas Livingstone favours a harmonious and respectful relationship between humans and other animals such as the one the San had with other animals as alluded to in "The Sleep of My Lions" *(RF* 96). He also favours mutuality between humans and other animals as exemplified in "A Visitor at Station 21" (*RF* 304-305), but warns against risky behaviour or daring acts towards potentially dangerous animals in the name of mutuality and love which result in human death in "The Zoo Affair" (*RF* 212).

The poem "The Sleep of My Lions" is a light-hearted criticism of modern civilization" (Chapman, *Douglas* 83) which at the same time laments human beings' alienation from other animals and yearns "for ecological atunement or symbiotic existence on Earth" (Stevens 66). This alienation is here exemplified by the use of barbed wire and brick fences, hunting rifles and other symbols of human progress such as telephones and diesel-operating machines which make humans feel they are apart from, and superior to nature in general and other animals in particular.

Starting with a Latin "invocation to the oceans of the world" the poet-protagonist prays that the sea, which Stevens considers the "Creative Principle" (65), should save him from civilization with its alienating consequences. Stevens rightly sees the poem as "an impassioned plea for ecological grace" (65) "to live in harmony with the Earth, despite the violations of civilization" (66). Although it is not clear from the tortuous syntax what exactly Livingstone means in the second stanza when he says

> Leave me my magics
> and tribes;
> to the quagga, the dodo,

the sleep of my lions [,]

the mention of the extinct animals (quagga and dodo) reveals Livingstone's displeasure with the alienating and destructive consequences of civilization to other species. In the last stanza of this incantatory poem the poet-protagonist prays to the "Creative Principle" for the return of the days of the San, alluded to by the reference to the "stick-insect gods, and impala," when humans lived ecologically and symbiotically with other animals. This poem shows that Livingstone envisions a future when humans shall learn to live in ecological atunement and symbiotic relationship with nature.

We get a glimpse of the results of this ecological atunement or harmonious relationship with other animals in particular in "A Visitor at Station 21" where the speaker shares a few seconds with what he calls "a delicate duiker" (304) who "licks salt from [his] wrist" (305). Livingstone depicts this event as charged with mystery as he refers to it as a "holy event" (304).[97] This seven stanza poem whose cryptic italicized sections list philosophers/thinkers of the western world while alluding to the ideas associated with them (Kant, Hume, Nietzsche, and Pascal, among others) shows the inadequacy of these philosophical ideas or debates (see Stevens 180-184) to the understanding of the place of humans in the larger scheme of things or in relation to other animals. About the duiker the poet writes:

> She walks, in quick trust, decidedly
> up beside me. Her leaf-stained tongue flicks
> out, licks salt from my wrist. One rust-fringed
> brown eye rolls worriedly at the surf.
> These frail shared seconds halt the debate.
> She turns, steps unhurriedly away (305).

In her analysis of the poem, Stevens observes that the poem "examines the effects of a dualistic world view where the splitting of reason and imagination result in confusion and, arguably, leads ultimately to ecological destructiveness" (181). She goes further to say the poem "shows that the great thinkers of the world have led humankind to an intellectually sophisticated but spiritually empty modern position because humanity has severed itself from the power of imagination" (183). It seems to me that rather than imagination as such, Livingstone credits the emotional experience

[97] Dirk Klopper refers to the encounter as a "sacred moment[…] of mutuality between man and beast" (qtd. by Stevens 126).

of the encounter with the duiker, the mystical experience that was awakened in him by the duiker's licking of his arm, as the source of real understanding of our biological nature and the nature of other animals. As Etienne Terblanche observes, the duiker here has "surpassed the apparently entrenched opposite words of self and other, trust and distrust," among others (174). It is the "frail shared seconds" between the human and the duiker that "halt the [philosophical/intellectual] debate" about who we are and the place of other animals in the world. In the poem, therefore, Livingstone, like John A. Livingston in his *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation* (1981) seems to say that philosophical or intellectual arguments for ecological living are never going to help mend the severed relationship between humans and animals (Livingston 99) but "*individual human experience*" of animals is what can make the difference (ibid. 100, italics in original). Instead of maintaining the intellect/emotion duality in our experience of the world and the things around us there should be a mutuality between the two leading to our "*emotional acceptance*" of the fact that we are biological beings, "with all that that implies" (ibid. 103, italics in original).

However, when this mystical emotional experience of animals is not schooled by caution and good sense it can lead to tragic consequences for the human as is the case in "The Zoo Affair" (*RF* 212). In the poem a visitor to a zoo is so captivated by the sight of a Bengali tiger that, much to the displeasure of the zoo keepers, he throws all caution to the wind and rushes to the tiger's cage hoping to scratch the animal's "tortoise-shelled and round furry ears." The metaphorical reference to the tiger's ears as "tortoise-shelled" compares the markings on the creature's ears to the appearance of a tortoise shell's colour pattern of brown and black. Although he fails to fulfil his wish on this occasion as he is ordered back by the "Angry [zoo] keepers and others," his religious awe or even erotic love (notice the use of the word "affair" in the title, mention of love and reference to the cage as a shrine in the poem) for the tiger only grows stronger. One night he breaks into the zoo and enters the tiger's cage to his death:

> They found him on the floor early next morning, his head
> a split and viscid watermelon; loosely the wet tufts
> of combed brains spilled, his smile quiet through the red;
> beside him, for warmth, the cosy sprawl of his love (212).

In this poem Livingstone advises caution, care and good sense in interactions with potentially dangerous animals. Livingstone seems to be saying that ecological

sensibility or symbiotic relationships with animals do not entail regarding animals as fellow human beings but respecting their individuality and extending a compassionate attitude to them and desisting from acts that may cause unnecessary suffering and death to them.

A number of poems discussed in this section reveal Douglas Livingstone's ecological consciousness and sensitivity by, implicitly one might say, protesting against the abusive and exploitative manner in which humans relate to animals, in particular, and nature, in general.

6.0 Conclusion: A Critique of Douglas Livingstone's Ecological Views

The above discussion of Livingstone's poetry has shown that in addition to the allegorical depiction of animals already discussed in the first three chapters of this thesis, Livingstone also represents animals using three extra modes: humorous, naturalistic, and compassionate. Where animals are represented humorously they mainly emerge as ridiculous and ugly and evoke laughter and mockery. In such poems Livingstone shows and entrenches a conventional, often negative attitude to the animals. In cases where animals are represented realistically they emerge as brutal and cruel. These poems also depict the existential struggle, suffering, and death of animals in a chaotic and uncaring nature or in a tawny and unlovely African landscape. In poems where Livingstone uses the compassionate mode of animal representation he represents the animals in ways that induce us to reflect on the manner in which we relate to them. In these poems Livingstone protests against the abusive and exploitative ways in which we relate to animals and extends empathy/compassion and respect to suffering and dying animals. It is in these poems where we identify Livingstone as an ecologically-conscious poet who envisions a meaningful symbiotic relationship to the earth, in general, and animals, in particular.

However, although he was writing during the troubled period in South African history Livingstone skirted around racial injustice and oppression in his poetry. This seems to be a result of his poetic theory which sees politics as the preserve of politicians, and a subject which a wise poet should avoid. In his advice to Rhodesian poets Livingstone considers politics an "(emotional) reef lurking in wait for the unwary sailor-poet" and goes on to say "[p]olitics combined with great art died with Goya. Even Auden and Picasso, in our present age, have been badly hulled. Politicians would not dream of teaching poets their craft. Let poets (I beg) return the

compliment" ("Preface" 5-6). One suspects then that Livingstone's avoidance of politics in his poetry is his own way of returning the compliment to politicians (that is, adoption of a policy of non-interference in politics). But by ignoring the political experiences of the oppressed majority poor blacks in Apartheid South Africa of his day he, like Wolffe as we saw in the last chapter, fails to see the connectedness of oppression. Steven Best cogently observes that "[h]uman, animal, and earth exploitation are tightly interconnected, such that no one form of exploitation can be abolished without uprooting the others." To illustrate the connectedness of human exploitation and nature or environmental exploitation Best says that "in conditions where people are desperately poor they are more likely to adopt instrumental views of nature, poach animals, and chop down trees in order to survive" ("The Killing Fields" np). Livingstone's ecological advocacy and message in the poetry is therefore undercut by his failure to also address the plight of the majority blacks who faced social, political and economic exclusion in their own country through the machinations of a racist minority apartheid regime.

It is interesting to note that that Livingstone's animal poems as discussed in this chapter show a progression of the poet's thinking from a glaring anthropocentrism in the earlier poems by a youthful Livingstone, especially the ones that appeared in *Sjambok*, to an ecocentric position in *A Littoral Zone* by the more mature and aging Livingstone. Granted, there are poems in the earlier collections such as "A Piece of Earth" and "Gentling a Wildcat"[98] that show an ecocentric attitude but these are sandwiched between others that show inferiorisation of animals such "She-Jackal," "Zebra," and "Vulture" (all from *Sjambok*), among others. In these poems too one of Livingstone's themes, as R. Graham observes, "is fear of the land and the White man's retreat. He is always being threatened: to be carried off by some Pteranadon; […] or made to move out of a [s]he-Jackal's place in the sun; or swallowed by Leviathan;" or bitten by a snake. And so, although he "is possessed by the land," by its flora and fauna, "he cannot possess it" (203). The questions then remain: what sort of ecological poet is Douglas Livingstone? How much is Livingstone's compassionate depiction of animals in *A Littoral Zone*, especially, the result of an old man realising his own vulnerability like other creatures?

[98] From *The Anvil's Undertone* (1978) and *Eyes Closed against the Sun* (1970) respectively.

While the extent of Livingstone's ecological consciousness is debatable (Woodward, "Frail shared seconds" 50) Mariss Stevens is categorical in stating that to consider Livingstone a deep ecologist would be only partly accurate. She is of the view that despite "his reverence for nature" that one encounters in his poetry, Livingstone "is too gritty and ecologically pragmatic to be labelled deeply ecological." For her Livingstone is "a Romantic materialist who uses the best of the Romantic tradition – an appreciative awe of nature and a belief that the human imagination is crucial – and combines this with an acute scientific awareness […]" (4). Whether Stevens' association of deep ecology with ecological impracticability is justified is beyond the scope of this chapter. Noteworthy is the fact that by introducing romanticism she draws the debate away from ecological or ecophilosophical assumptions, the very premises that inform our judgement when we consider a writer ecological. To consider someone an ecological poet is to assume that his poetry goes beyond the conventions of romanticism through its recognition of interconnectedness and interdependence in nature and its devotion to the land and its creatures (Bryson 5-6). Does Stevens imply that we cannot locate Livingstone within a gradation of ecophilsophical positions?

For Woodward, Douglas Livingstone's ecological consciousness is debatable because while some of his poems "demonstrate an authorial self-consciousness about environmental issues" he does not always view other animals as having intrinsic value. Besides, in many of his poems animals appear or are constructed as "mirrors to humanity" (Woodward, "Frail shared seconds" 50). The problem, in my view, is not really depicting animals as "mirrors to humanity." Writers and story tellers have used animals in this way since time immemorial. To say this tendency is disrespectful to animals and must stop is to be unnecessarily prescriptive about literature. Perhaps Wolffe is right in his observation that "[t]here is nothing wrong, sentimental or outmoded because we draw on fur and feather for some poetic fever," that is, in literary use of animals, as this re-affirms "our original kinship" with nature, in general, and animals, in particular (*Changing Skins* 1). Rather, the problem in Livingstone's poetry, as my analysis of some of his poetry above shows, is the inferiorization and ridicule of animals and the perception of nature as alien and "red in tooth and claw." While in some poems animals simply mirror humanity and have nothing remotely ecological to say, some poems perpetuate the inferiorisation of nature and animals. Yet others still communicate his ecological awareness and despair

and seem to be informed by ecocentric or even transpersonal ecological views. There is, therefore, some inconsistency in the manner in which Livingstone represents animals revealing the fluctuating nature of his ecological consciousness. This slipperiness of Livingstone's ecological views complicates the debate on the extent of his ecological consciousness with regard to animals, in particular, and nature, in general.

Perhaps a shift from the animal poems to his statements in interviews might help clarify Livingstone's ecological position. While his ecological awareness was mainly implied in the poetry, it comes out clearly in his interviews and articles as the quotations below demonstrate. In an interview with Marco Fazzini Livingstone observed:

> [w]e are supposed to have much bigger brains than dinosaurs, yet we are polluting our own nest, threatening our living planet towards destruction.
>
> I am not a paid-up member of the Greens, but about 30 years ago I decided to devote my few skills to our Mother, the earth, and to making a few poems to entertain, tease, challenge my readers into having some care, some concern , some identification with this beautiful planet (Fazzini 140).

Apart from the poetry, some of the skills he mentions here refer to his scientific work in microbial analysis of water quality on the Durban coast. In the same interview referred to above Livingstone observed that as humans "we are […] just another life-form despite [the] lofty choices available to us." He then went on to quote his article in *London Magazine* where he made the following observation:

> I still fear the Earth's fate less than humanity's. If the globe is a living cell – and all the evidence so far points to this – it will survive no matter what, no matter who or what has to go. If you threaten a cell, even a non-sentient one, it will retreat if it can, or fight back. It seems to me the planet is beginning to fight back with weapons ranging from the biological to the geomorphological, from viruses to vulcanism. Messing with the air and waters and issuing intractable wastes will not kill this particular blue cell hanging in space with the only life so far detected in the known universe: somebody is going to get stonked, and the Earth will survive in a modified form, with modified life-forms. The only personal contribution is perhaps to live as simply as possible, despite being trapped in the urban flypaper ("The Other Job III," *London Magazine*, Vol 29, Nos 7/8, qtd. in Fazzini 139-140).

He later reiterated his point in the quote above by saying "I think I am optimistic about the planet and its inherent life-force but pessimistic about man – the ultimate polluter through his greed and numbers" (Fazzini 142).

In another interview Livingstone had this to say: "I am not at all convinced that humanity alone has the complete title deeds to the earth, or to the minds and hearts and souls of all other humans – i.e. that Collective man is the overlord to all men and everything else" (Thompson, E. *Crux* [October 1986] qtd. in Duncan Brown 101).

In the above quotations one can identify both ecocentric and anthropocentric ideas. To begin with, although Mariss Stevens considers Livingstone's job as a scientist working on bacteriological aspects of marine pollution (what Livingstone refers to as "devot[ing] my few skills to our Mother, the earth" in the quotation above), as ecological, the job perhaps had more to do with the water quality and welfare of bathers on the Durban beaches (Stevens 35) than with the earth. It seems to me that the CSIR agenda has more to do with the improvement of "quality of life" of humans and "socio-economic growth" than with ecological living.[99] Viewed this way, Livingstone's 30 year work seems to have been motivated by self-interest, that is, the welfare of humans who regard the earth as their empire. Furthermore, Livingstone's emphasis on the fate of unecological humanity rather than that of the earth that will survive "no matter what, no matter who or what has to go" in the *London Magazine* quote also smacks of anthropocentricism or self-interest. John Livingston identifies three groups of arguments in environmentalism that belong to what he calls the self-interest family of conservation arguments, and these are: the "Wise Use" argument, the "quality of life" arguments, and the "ecocatastrophe" or Doomsday argument.[100]

The core of the self-interest group of arguments is, according to Livingston, expressed in the following statements:

> [i]f we can't be good, at least we can be prudent. You do not strangle your own support system. If for no other reason than our own welfare, our own selfishness, we should try to entertain at least the possibility of some slight merit in a conservation-oriented [or ecological] approach to living. […]. [I]f we cannot appreciate the nature and quality of

[99] See http://www.csir.co.za/about_us.html.

[100] These arguments are informed by instrumental value theory. The "Wise Use," also known as resource conservation, arguments see nature as a human asset, a renewable resource, which if treated wisely and intelligently, can "benefit today's users and those of future generations" (Livingston 34). The "quality of life," or human welfare ecology, arguments stress the instrumental values (physical, psychological, social, aesthetic, and spiritual) that humans can enjoy "if they allow presently existing members or aspects of the nonhuman world to follow their own characteristic patterns" (Fox 154). And finally the "ecocatastrophe" argument adopts "the scare strategy" (Livingston 41). It paints a gloomy and doomed future for humankind if we do not abandon our irresponsible and destructive behaviour towards nature and adopt an ecological way of living.

> our acts and anticipate at least some of their consequences, then we have no right to describe ourselves as intelligent, or even sane (24).

John Livingston further says "[t]he guts of the self-interest family of arguments is that they are entirely and exclusively man-oriented, anthropocentric [as opposed to bio/ecocentric]. Whether it is directed to individual, group, nation, or species, the appeal is to the human being and the human interest" (42). From this perspective Douglas Livingstone's statements quoted earlier fall within the self-interest family of arguments. His pessimism about humankind fits the mould of the "ecocatastrophe" or Doomsday argument while his attempts to "heal the earth" through his scientific work fall within the "quality of life" or human welfare ecology group of arguments. Besides, Livingstone's ecological views in the statements above fit the mould of what the philosopher Joseph Grange calls dividend ecology. For him dividend ecology carries the simple message: "if we continue to destroy our environment, we will perish. Its motive force is fear, being largely a negative movement that seeks to restrain our greed and diminish the aggression with which we attack nature." He goes on to say "[t]his way of understanding ecology can do little in the long run, for it only serves to reinforce the basic mode of consciousness that brought on our environmental disaster. . . ." (qtd. by Fox 33). The message in what Grange calls dividend ecology is similar to the overall ecological message that Stevens identifies in Livingstone's *A Littoral Zone*: "symbiosis or death" (2).

Based on this evidence then, the answer to the question, what sort of ecologist is Douglas Livingstone? would be that he is an anthropocentric ecologist, one who espouses a human-centred outlook of the world. But this would be giving a half-truth about Livingstone's ecological thinking. Some of his poems and statements in interviews reveal ecocentric ecological views, at least as it is understood by theorist of environmentalism Timothy O'Riordan. For O'Riordan

> Ecocentrism preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care; it argues for low impact technology (but is not antitechnological); it decries bigness and impersonality in all forms (but especially in the city); and demands a code of behaviour that seeks permanence and stability based on ecological principles of diversity and homeostasis (qtd. by Fox 29).

This shows that Livingstone's ideas fluctuate between anthropocentrism and eccentrism. We cannot regard them as wholly anthropocentric or ecocentric without being parochial. To be fair and reasonable we have to consider them falling midway between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. What Livingstone's case shows here is

the difficulty in packaging our ecological views in neat categories given the fact that, more often that not, our attitudes to animals and nature are ambivalent. The fact that Livingstone's ecocentric ideas come out more clearly in poetry published later in his life reveals how his ecological views developed and matured with age.

Chapter 7: Chromosome Cousins and Familiar Strangers: Relational Selfhood and Sense of Belonging to the Cosmos in Chris Mann's Ecopoetry

1.0 Introduction

Chris[topher Zithulele] Mann, one of South Africa's most prolific poets, is a South African of English, Dutch and Irish descent who was born in 1948 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Apart from writing and performing poetry once or twice a year in various places such as the National Arts Festival, at schools, universities and conferences around the country as part of his quest to promote poetry in the public domain, Mann has been involved in teaching, rural development and poverty alleviation projects, and founding and participating in religious and community organisations. Currently he is based at the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University in Grahamstown where he is an Honorary Professor of Poetry. Mann is also a recipient of several awards for his poetry; these include The Newdigate Prize for Poetry at Oxford, the Olive Schreiner Prize for South African Poetry in English, the Eastern Cape Premier's Award for Literature, and the English Academy of SA Thomas Pringle Award for Poetry 2007.

In this chapter I examine Mann's animal poems, and the accompanying illustrations and scientific notes by Julia Skeen and Adrian Craig respectively, in his collection *Lifelines* (2006). I attempt to determine the insights the book offers into our relationships with other animals and how it might influence our behaviour towards them (Meeker 4). I argue that in his poetry Mann avoids parochial proselytising and didacticism with regard to our relationships with animals and instead reveals the complex ways that we relate to them, either as kin, foes or prey. I also argue in the chapter that *Lifelines* explores relational selfhood with respect to the ways we interact with animals. That is, the ecological self that emerges from the text is not one that is hyperindividuated or hyperseparated from animals but one that is entangled with them, one that is in a symbiotic web with animals. Furthermore, the animal ethics position that emerges from the poetry, especially, is not one that opposes killing *per se* but one that objects to killing animals to promote trivial human interests.

In the chapter I use the concepts of (inter)connectedness and difference (or separation) as ecocritical frameworks for my analysis of Mann's animal poetry and *Lifelines* in general. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the

question of connectedness of all entities on earth is central in ecophilosophical or ecological approaches to environmentalism, such as Arne Naess's deep ecology and Warwick Fox's transpersonal ecology. As ecocentric approaches to environmentalism deep ecology and transpersonal ecology are grounded in the cosmos and recognise the moral standing of the whole environment: both its inanimate and animate elements. They value the nonhuman world, or aspects of it, not for its instrumental value for humans, but for its own sake (Eckersley 26). These orientations are rooted in a holistic, as opposed to a mechanistic, metaphysics, and are informed by the ecophilosophical approaches of intrinsic value theory. Transpersonal ecology in particular is both cosmological and psychological as it holds a view of the world/cosmos that acknowledges the connectedness of all entities on the planet – as "leaves on the tree of life" (Fox 161) and encourages "a psychological identification with all phenomena" (Eckersley 62). It seeks to cultivate a sense or experience of self that extends beyond one's egoistic, biographical, or personal sense of self to include all beings. This is in line with Chris Mann's aim in *Lifelines* which is to "encourage the reader to feel that animals [are] not so much objects to be observed, ignored or consumed as chromosome cousins, fellow creatures in an interlinked web of necessary bio-diversity" (Levey and Mann 228).

However, the rationalist-inspired, and therefore universalistic ecolophilosophical approaches to environmentalism such as deep ecology and transpersonal ecology are limited because they are "highly ethnocentric[101] and cannot account adequately for the views of many indigenous peoples" (such as the San, Native Americans, and Australian Aborigines, among others, whose worldviews and attitudes to nature differ from those of Europeans ["After the Fall" 2006-7]) about nature or the environment (Plumwood 183). Moreover, the notion of identification in deep and transpersonal ecology reveals an account of the self that is indistinguishable from nature, a self that discards and transcends personal emotions and attachments (Plumwood 1993). In short, the idea of identification suggests absorption/incorporation of nature and denial of its separateness and independence since the boundaries between the self and nature are cancelled. This cancellation of

[101] For many Europeans the rationalist mode of thinking is superior to the thinking or ways of knowing of other peoples who are regarded as primitive, uncivilized and savages. Principles or conclusions arrived at through the exercising of Western rationalism are therefore supposed to hold true for all societies and all people. For such Europeans the West is the paragon of civilization, culture and technology and therefore a measure of all other cultures and civilizations.

boundaries and difference is symptomatic of the arrogance of a "master consciousness characteristic of colonialism, sexism and speciesism; a consciousness which presumes to violate boundaries and claims to subsume, penetrate and exhaust the other" (Plumwood 178).

As an alternative to the rationalist and universalistic ethical and ecophilosophical views of self and nature (that is, views of the self which, by virtue of having been arrived at through rational means, are supposed to be superior to others) Val Plumwood suggests the view of the self as "self-in-relationship," or a relational self, and that we pay more attention to some other less universalistic, virtue-based, moral concepts such as sensitivity, sympathy, care, compassion, and responsibility, among others (173)[102] in our relationship with nature. It is these virtue-based concepts that are central in the animal poetry of Mann. It is important to note, however, that the above virtue-based concepts are not necessarily less problematic in resolving ambiguities and contradictions in our relationship with animals. The very fluidity of these concepts means that people who view animals only as a resource to be exploited, such as sport hunters, speak of respect, admiration and reverence (Gunn 74) for their quarry. Use of these concepts in relation to animals therefore does not necessarily reveal an ecological sensibility.

2.0 Chris Mann's Poetry

Chris Mann's poems have appeared in various books, newspapers, journals, textbooks, magazines, and anthologies in South Africa and beyond. He has also published several collections of poetry over the years among which are *First Poems* (1979), *New Shades* (1982), *Kites* (1992), *The Horn of Plenty* (1997), *South Africans* (1996), *Heartlands* (2002), and *Lifelines* (2006). In this chapter my focus is on *Lifelines*. This is a collaborative work by Chris Mann, poet; Adrian Craig, biologist; and Julia Skeen, an artist. In the book

> [p]oems by Chris Mann based on encounters with forty animals, ranging from the aardvark and bees to the peregrine falcon and zebra, are embedded in images by Julia Skeen on each right-hand page […]. The poems are informed by recent discoveries in science, while the images evoke the animals in their habitat with frequent references to

[102] Although these moral concepts may appear to be culture- and gender-coded, Plumwood is of the view that any human being from any culture can and should embrace them in trying to reorient his/her relationship with nature.

> fossil and cosmic time. On the left-hand page is a ghost image of the animals and scientific notes about each by Adrian Craig, a zoologist" (Levey and Mann 218).

Mann refers to the text as "a holistic work of environmental art" (Mann, "The Poetry" np, see also Levey and Mann 218) perhaps because we do not only encounter the subjective poetic or imaginative rendering of Mann's encounter with the various animals in the collection, but in many instances the objective, factual or scientific information about the specific animals provided by Craig and the graphic/vivid images of the animals as portrayed by the artist, Skeen. The book therefore brings together science, literature and art into dialogue to underscore the text's ecological message. Meihuizen rightly observes that as "a type of multi-media conceptual piece" *Lifelines* enables us to "imbibe from it information from three sources of stimulation almost simultaneously, [that is, from] the prose information on the left page, the poem on the right, and the fainter image of the background artwork on the left [which is also] provided in full strength on the right" (Meihuizen 139).

A reading of *Lifelines* shows that Mann's poetry is the original text for which the prose and art work act as footnotes or commentaries. It is the poetry that influences Craig's choice of what to include in the scientific notes and, later, both poetry and scientific notes influence Skeen's art work. In fact the order in which the authors' names appear on the cover of *Lifelines*, starting with Mann and ending with Skeen, reflects the order in which their respective contributions to the book were made. There is therefore an interesting case of intertextuality in *Lifelines* where the poetry which is evidently influenced by science in turn influences the scientific information that accompanies it and later the two work together to influence the illustrations.

In his scientific notes Craig provides the animal's scientific name, genus, species and translations of the name in Afrikaans, seSotho, isiXhosa and isiZulu, "when the translated word is in widespread current usage or listed in reference works available to the authors" (*Lifelines* ii). In most cases he also provides the anatomical or physical features of the animal in question, its feeding and reproductive habits, its distribution, its known predators, and the ways in which humans relate to it culturally or economically. The prose may be scientific and factual but it is "relaxed in style" (Meihuizen 139) as Craig sometimes ventures into myth and literature.

Commenting on the art work Nick Meihuizen rightly observes that

> [t]he fine line-drawings of Julia Skeen trace connections in lifelines through cross-sections of aeons of accretions of life-forms on earth. She patterns together, in crocket-shaped-border designs which offset the poems, the tiny details of animate, once-animate and inanimate life, with, in heraldic array, grasses, trees, shrubs, and strata of skeletons and fossils. […]. The tracing of life blends into cosmic pattern, archetypal decoration […]. Sometimes other figures emerge from this pattern, a bit like those picture-puzzles in comics where you have to work out how many figures are embedded in a landscape, in order to show connections between life-forms" (ibid.).

A proper appraisal of *Lifelines* requires paying attention to the different modes of communication in the book to determine the extent to which these modes influence one another and how they work together to communicate their message. Besides acting as a commentary on the poetry, the largely objective scientific information and the imaginative powers of poetry and art collaborate to highlight the ecological vision and reinforce the ecological message in *Lifelines*. One of the strategies that the artist uses to substantiate the poetry's message of the close relationship between humans and non-human animals is, as Mann reveals, to show "the animals in the book looking out and at the reader" (Levey and Mann 228).

A number of other cultural artefacts also accompany *Lifelines* such as an installation which was launched at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2007, a DVD of the music and images from the installation, a CD of the songs and a multimedia show. To date there have been many performances of the multimedia show in various places such as universities, schools, churches, literary and science festivals and conferences both in and outside South Africa. During the performances, as was the case at a Literature and Ecology Colloquium I attended at Mtunzini, Durban, in 2007, "[t]exts from the book are embedded in a sequence of digital images" which are then "projected onto a large screen behind the poet who introduces the poems, reads them aloud and performs original songs" (Levey and Mann 218). Through performance of the poetry Mann draws the attention of the audience to both the pictures on the screen and his songs about the animals. In this way, true to Mann's own observation, he "calls many of the human being's senses and capacities (affective, intellectual, even spiritual) into play […] not as an escape from daily reality, but as an explication" (Levey and Mann 234). Through his performance of the poems Mann also combines entertainment and education about ecological ways of living, although there is no guarantee that engaging the audience in this way can make them change their attitudes to nature or reconfigure their sense of belonging.

Lifelines is Mann's only collection that focuses on human-animal relationships. The text marks the furthest step in the evolution of his poetry in response to new developments in science and environmental politics in South Africa. Related to *Lifelines* in terms of concern with ecology and nature are collections such as *Heartlands* (2002), "a series of poems-of-place" (Levey and Mann 222), and *The Horn of Plenty* (Mann and Skeen 1997), an artistic and poetic celebration of fruits and vegetables. *Lifelines* is therefore the only text amongst Mann's collections most relevant for this study which deals with the representation of animals. While there are one or two animal poems in Mann's earlier collections which are mainly concerned with social and political issues, *Lifelines* is a collection that is focused on animals, both prehistoric and contemporary.

In *Lifelines* Mann is influenced by discoveries in evolutionary biology, palaeontology, and astronomy, cosmology, and palaeo-microbiology; disciplines which reveal the links between nature and the cosmos. A bibliography of the books that influenced some of the poems appears at the end of the collection. The impact of these influences comes out clearly in Mann's acceptance speech of the English Academy of SA Thomas Pringle Award for Poetry 2007 at Rhodes University on 24 April 2008. In his speech titled "The Poetry of Belonging" Mann observed that we belong first in the cosmos, "in the biosphere of a tiny planet," to a species, and to our parents (np). This intimately connected network of belonging therefore necessitates that we should not feel disconnected, alienated and bereft, homeless, footloose, exiled and alone and lonely. In his speech Mann deplores what he calls our "illusion of separation, from the cosmos, from the biosphere, from each other and also from our own selves." For him "[s]uch illusions, generated by carefully constructed theories of understanding though they may be, can lead to that gnawing sense of unbelonging, of disconnection, of perpetual suspicion, inner agitation and grim and lonely hyper-individuation that is characteristic of numerous sensitive and thoughtful people in our era." However, Mann is of the view that "[w]e reduce our sense of separation, of unbelonging, when we humble our anthropocentric hubris and accept that the habitat in which our life has emerged in the cosmos is sacred" (np). Here Mann introduces his religious/non-secular worldview which runs through his poems in *Lifelines*. In his interview with Levey, he reveals that he "saw the bio-sphere as sacred and felt a restless urge to write a book [*Lifelines*] that would show how we could live with the reality of natural selection as well as re-consecrate our attitude to nature" (Levey and

Mann 224). Asked by Levey if he thought that the "work would appeal to anyone who would prefer not to read religious themes into (or out of) nature" and whether one should "bring God (however defined) into a poetic/artistic response to nature at all," Mann's reply is to say that he hopes that the poetry would appeal to those with a secular, non-religious view of the world, even if that appeal is only for its aesthetic value. He goes on to say that "[t]he current preference for, if not hegemony of, secular literature found in the western academy should not exclude writing by people of faith" (Mann and Levey 229-230).

Mann's religious perspective on environmentalism is similar to that of O. P. Dwivedi who calls for the introduction of a spiritual dimension in conservation and environmental protection. For him a spiritual "dimension, if introduced in the process of environmental policy planning, administration, education, and law, could help create a self-consciously moral society which would put conservation and respect for God's creation first, and relegate individualism, materialism, and our modern desire to dominate nature in a subordinate place" (310). Dwivedi believes that "environmental education will remain incomplete until it includes cultural values and religious imperatives" (311). He rightly notes that "the role of our cultural and spiritual heritages in environmental protection and sustainable development was ignored by international bodies, national governments, policy planners, and even environmentalist [for] fear that bringing religion into the environmental movement will threaten objectivity, scientific investigation, professionalism, or democratic values" (310). In their use of a holistic approach, combining poetry, art and science, in *Lifelines* Mann, Skeen and Craig show their awareness of the need for different worldviews to work together in trying to resolve the environmental crisis. A religious or scientific approach alone is not enough. In any case, both science (technology) and religion have been blamed for contributing to the environmental crisis. As we saw in the introductory chapter, religion has been blamed by some scholars for contributing to the environmental crisis as it did not stop people from viewing nature as a resource or an enemy to be vanquished. However, in enjoining his readers to belong to the cosmos and curb environmental degradation, Mann, as I will show in due course, ignores socio-cultural, economic and political differences between groups of people that lead to different constructions of belonging and therefore different interactions with nature.

The idea of belonging to the cosmos is important in Mann's ecological consciousness and vision. Mann's ecological vision acknowledges connectedness, kinship and interdependence in life. For Mann, as for Carol Lee Hinders, a culture of belonging involves an ''intimate connection with the land to which one belongs, [an] empathetic relationship to animals, self-restraint, […] honesty, generosity, egalitarianism, mutuality, affinity for alternative modes of knowing, playfulness, and openness to Spirit," among other characteristics (qtd. by Hooks 45). Rather than forms of belonging based on ethnicity, gender and nationhood, for example, in *Lifelines* Mann focuses on what I term earth-citizenship or belonging to the world. Further, his view of belonging is constructivist or social constructionist which sees identity or belonging as multiple and malleable rather than primordialist or essentialist, a view that "treats identity as fixed and organic [or as] something pregiven, predetermined, or 'natural'" (Croucher 36). This is reflected in his belief that through humility and acceptance of the sacred nature of our habitat in the cosmos, we reduce our sense of alienation and increase our sense of belonging to the cosmos which shows his belief that we can reorient or reorganise our identity and sense of belonging.

Commendable though Mann's call to reduce anthropocentrism and hubris and belong to the earth/world is, it gives the impression that such a step is easy to take. In reality, however, the politics of belonging which "refer to the processes of individuals, groups, societies, and polities defining, negotiating, promoting, rejecting, violating, and transcending the boundaries of identities and belonging […]are highly contextual" in the sense that they are "heavily influenced by contexts and circumstances – political, economic, social, and cultural" (Croucher 41). As such, failure to analyse and understand the political, social and cultural circumstances of people in a particular society leads to failure "to explain [or acknowledge] the emergence, variation in, and reconfiguration of different identity/belonging formations" (ibid. 39) in that society. The emergence, and reconfiguration of different identity/belonging formations" of poor black South Africans are not the same as those of rich, privileged white and black South Africans considering that "[e]conomic interests and circumstances, shaped by states, also affect belonging" (ibid. 42). The privileged few may feel a sense of belonging to their habitat in South Africa, for example, while the excluded majority poor will focus on acts of survival. What this means then is that it is arrogant and insensitive to accuse people of being unecological

in their way of life without taking proper consideration of their socio-economic and political circumstances. This fact points to the connectedness of human, animal, and earth exploitation "such that no one form of exploitation can be abolished without uprooting the others" (Best, "The Killing Fields" np.).

The influence of science on Mann's thinking has resulted in his attempts in *Lifelines* to reveal "how the lifelines of animals and the biosphere of the planet are inseparable from the genesis of the cosmos as a whole" ("Chris Mann LIFELINES" np) and from each other. In the poetry, therefore, Mann, in collaboration with Skeen and Craig, seeks to sensitize his readers on biodiversity and the need to guard and conserve it (Louw, "Familiar Strangers" 1). It is important to note, however, that some scholars have cautioned that the biodiversity discourse which is mainly championed by Euro-American scholars may turn into an imperialist discourse that ignores the struggles and challenges of the poor in Third World countries (Lundblad 2001, see also Guha 2008 and 1997). Although there is no doubt that Mann, as an individual and as a writer, is committed to making a difference in society, I will examine in my discussion of his work the danger of allowing the biodiversity discourse to obscure his awareness of social injustice and the survival struggles of individual animals.

Mann's ecological commitment in his poetry through his quest to sensitise his readers on biodiversity, qualifies the poetry as ecopoetry. Although the term ecopoetry (or green poetry as other scholars call it) is defined variously by different scholars,[103] Scott Bryson's definition captures crucial aspects in other definitions. Bryson defines the term ecopoetry as "a subset of nature poetry that, while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues, thus resulting in a version of nature poetry generally marked by three primary[/overarching] characteristics," namely 1) ecocentrism, 2) a humble appreciation of wildness, and 3) a skepticism toward hyperrationality and its resultant overreliance on technology (Bryson 7). The

[103] Gifford assigns the term *green poetry* to "those recent nature poems which engage directly with environmental issues" while Scigaj is of the view that ecopoetry may be defined as "poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems." Lawrence Buell on the other hand "sets down overarching characteristics for 'environmentally oriented works' in general" (poetry included), and the characteristics include "the presence of the nonhuman as more than mere backdrop, the expansion of human interest beyond humanity, a sense of human accountability to the environment and of the environment as a process rather than a constant or given (Bryson 5).

ecocentric perspective is central as it "recognizes the interdependent nature of the world" thereby inspiring in humans "a devotion to specific places and to the land itself, along with those creatures that share it with humankind," while "a skepticism concerning hyperrationality […] usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe" (Bryson 5-6).

Although ecopoets "recognize the limits of language" considering that a description of an entity or an experience is not the entity or the experience itself, as the act of describing can only attempt to approximate the thing described, they strive to refer "us in an epiphanic moment to our interdependency and relatedness to the richer planet whose operations created and sustain us" (Gilcrest 19). As an ecopoet Mann works to direct our gaze "beyond the printed page toward firsthand experiences that approximate the poet's intense involvement in the authentic experience that lies behind his originary language" (Scigaj qtd. by Gilcrest 18). In relation to this attempt to direct the readers gaze beyond the printed page Mann makes the following observation in reference to *Lifelines*:

> In *Lifelines*, for example, I tried instead to be true to the range of emotions that the encounters with animals aroused in me. A number of these left me and, I would hope, the reader eschewing any didactic and narrow interpretation of a Creator, for example the unpalatable discovery, conveyed in a number of poems, that ongoing sacrifice is built into the biosphere. How can there be a loving 'God' in a world of ferocious insects ('Mosquitoes') and destructive herbivores ('Rhinoceros')? (Levey and Mann 230).

In his animal poems Mann aspires to ecological ways of living with earth others. Most of Mann's poems in *Lifelines* are "spontaneous overflows of affirmation for life," the life of the Other (Elizabeth Lawrence qtd. by Malamud 59). To bring a sense of immediacy of the experience to the reader and to underscore affection, closeness to, or fellowship and kinship with, the imagined or encountered animal Mann uses apostrophe[104] as a literary device, great clarity of observation, and detailed descriptions of the animals to good effect in most of his poems in *Lifelines*. The encounter also increases the sense of wonder and mystery about the world and the place of humans in the larger scheme of things while the poetic form enables Mann to express his feelings aroused by the encounter easily and simply. Feelings, as Grace Clement observes, "play a central role in human relationships to animals" which is

[104] A figure of speech in which someone absent, dead or imaginary, or something nonhuman, inanimate or abstract is addressed as if it were alive and present and was able to reply.

why "the ethic of care regards [them] as morally relevant and informative" (445) in human-animal relationships. The encounter with the animal is also related to Mann's sense of belonging. As Francki Burger observes "[b]eing familiar with a place, being able to 'read' and interpret its signs, serves as a marker for a common identity, a place where we can belong within a community" of living things (21). Besides, true to the remarks of cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan "'[w]hen space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place.' Only through the accumulation of experiences do we attain a certain sense of belonging" (qtd. by Burger 21). Mann's encounter with the animals in their habitat shows his efforts to belong, to make sense of his environment. The same can be said of Skeen's efforts to depict the animals in their habitat and Craig's scientific notes on them, although these modes of engaging with animals can also be modes of possession and control of animals and nature (Ryan 209). Furthermore, propinquity is highlighted by the informality, conversationalism and spontaneity of the monologue, as well as the use of typically South African expressions such as "howzit," "jeez" and "ag" which suggest shared space and experience (Meihuizen 2007).

However, one can argue that the use of the apostrophe, conversationalism and familiarity humanises nonhuman animals. Mann can therefore be accused of anthropomorphism as he also puts thoughts in the heads of some of his animal subjects. But, as Erica Fudge rightly observes, "[i]n a sense, without anthropomorphism we are unable to comprehend and represent the presence of an animal." Fudge wonders, "[i]f I cannot say that a dog is sad, what can I say that it is?" For her

> without [anthropomorphism] the only relation we can have with animals is a very distant, and perhaps mechanistic one. As well as this, anthropomorphism might actually serve an ethical function: if we don't believe that in some way we can communicate with and understand animals, what is to make us stop and think as we experiment upon them, eat them, put them in cages? (76)

As humans "we can only see what we see; [and] we can only describe what our language allows us to describe" (Fudge 132). Like Fudge, Marc Bekoff, as quoted by Wendy Woodward, is of the view that anthropomorphism is an "inevitable 'sin'" given the fact that we can only communicate our perception of the way an animal is feeling using human language. But Woodward is right to caution too that while

anthropomorphism is a necessity, "it must also be done carefully, consciously, empathetically, and biocentrically" (Woodward, *The Animal Gaze* 15).

3.0 Some Themes in *Lifelines*

The ecopoetic and "ecoartistic" project in *Lifelines* raises a number of issues concerning our relationship with animals. While in depicting animals poetically and artistically, and in providing scientific information about them, Mann, Skeen and Craig render animal lives visible and invite us to think about these lives and review our attitudes to them, the poetry, especially, criticises exploitative and abusive relationship with animals and suggests new ways of relating to them. One of the issues *Lifelines* raises is the question of kinship (similarity) and difference (separateness) between humans and animals. We share physiological and behavioural similarities with animals. But we have differences of varying significance, too, in each of these aspects. Consequently, in our dealings with animals we either incorporate or co-opt them into the human sphere if they act more like us (in which case we identify them as incomplete humans), or radically exclude them from that sphere (in which case we regard them as complete others) (Malamud 3). When we incorporate them into our sphere we see them as cute and fun to be with although they still remain inferior to us. When we radically exclude them, we often view them in the Cartesian sense as machines which can be exploited in every way imaginable. Their difference from us is the very source of their oppression and abuse. However, whether incorporated or excluded, the relationship between us and them remains "codified in social culture as hierarchical and fundamentally impermeable: we are in here, they are out there" (ibid.). In his poetry Mann seems to have been influenced by Patrick Murphy's "model for the relationship between humans and nonhumans." Murphy states that "[e]cology and ecocriticism indicate that it is time to move towards a relational model of 'anotherness' and the conceptualization of difference in terms of 'I' and 'another'" (qtd. by Louw, "Reading *Space*" 108). While semantically, "other" has the sense of difference, opposition and alienation, "another" carries with it a suggestion of "sameness", of being on the same side and a more participatory relationship (Louw, ibid.).

The second theme is that of humility, respect for, and admiration of the animal "another." In Mann's poetry the differences between humans and animals, and the unknowability and mysterious nature of the animal other evoke respect and

admiration rather than instrumentalism. In his poetry Mann attributes agency and autonomy to animals who in some ways surpass people in skills and other aspects. This is not to say that Mann thinks animals are more skilful than humans. Humans obviously surpass animals in many ways and skills. What Mann is doing is to acknowledge that in some aspects animals are more skilled than humans.[105] Humans rarely associate creativity and skill with animals, basically because they are always viewed as inferior. On the contrary, in Mann's poetry animals' skills and abilities are acknowledged and admired. In acknowledging difference/separateness Mann, like Wolffe, reveals Tuanian space-consciousness. He recognises the unknowability of the more-than-human world and acknowledges the limitations of human knowledge.

The third theme that emerges from *Lifelines* is that of interdependence and conflict in nature. All living things, humans, animals and plants depend on one another as much as they do on the elements – water, air, soil, and sunshine – to stay alive. A symbiotic web of relationships in nature is therefore a major characteristic of life. Animals kill each other for food and the remains of dead animals and plants provide nutrients for growing plants. We, humans, have relied on and benefited from animals and other living things for survival since time immemorial. This network of interdependence in nature influences Mann to view the death of some animals to provide food for others positively, and not negatively, as a sacrifice. In his encounters with animals Mann made what he calls the "unpalatable discovery" that "ongoing sacrifice is built into the biosphere" (Levey and Mann 230). This ongoing sacrifice exemplifies what we may refer to as the irrevocable law of nature which holds that "some must die so that others can live." However, as I will attempt to show later, in viewing animal death in this way, Mann seems to betray a controversial ecological attitude that does not value individual lives of animals but the continuity of life or ecological well-being. He reduces individual animal lives to mere cogs in the machine of biodiversity and life.

But this interdependence, coupled with competition for basic necessities for survival also breed conflicts. Predation, for example, between humans and animals or between animals results in ruthlessness and violent deaths. Humans and animals have killed each other throughout history, not only for sustenance, but also for self

[105] Even René Descartes did not dispute the fact that "there are many animals which exhibit more dexterity than we do in some of their actions" (62) or that animals "do many things better than we do" (64) although this did not stop the French philosopher from thinking that animals are unfeeling machines.

protection or as a result of the struggle for limited resources such as food and water. In his poetry Mann explores this troubled relationship between humans and animals.

The fourth and last theme for my purpose here is that of human abuse of nature. This refers to the destructive and abusive tendencies of humans that lead to the unnecessary suffering, death and extermination of several animal species. Granted, some of our actions that lead to the suffering or death of other creatures are inevitable as they concern our own attempts to survive, for example in agriculture. But some actions that lead to animal suffering and death are purely for what Bart Wolffe calls "infertile pleasure" ("Elephants" 57), such as the need for animal trophies or out of sheer cruelty. It is actions like these that Mann finds morally objectionable. Below I discuss some of the poems that engage with the themes above. In the last section of the chapter I offer some reflections on the question of animals as moral subjects in Chris Mann's poetry.

3.1 Animals: Kin and "Another"

Mann gestures towards the relationship or kinship between humans and other animals in the poem "Chameleon" (13). In this poem the poet-protagonist addresses a chameleon whom he calls a "dainty dinosaur" or "my dragon-myth in miniature" because as the biologist, Adrian Craig observes "chameleons resemble tiny dragons" (12). "[D]ragon-myth" may also refer to the creature's role in myth and legend in Africa that Craig refers to in the scientific notes when he says "[o]ld legends in Africa tell of a creator who sent a messenger to pronounce human being mortal, then relented and sent the chameleon to repeal the death sentence. But the slow-footed chameleon arrived too late and the fate of humans was already sealed…" (ibid.). As we saw in Steve Chimombo and Jack Mapanje's poetry, African poets have exploited the chameleon's mythical associations in their poetry to comment on political events in their countries. In the poem, written in a form of friendly banter/chatter, the poet-protagonist greets the chameleon familiarly as he encounters him walking on a branch of a tree. Skeen's illustration for this poem shows a side view of a watchful and apprehensive chameleon crouching on a branch of a tree above the poem rather than walking as the poet-protagonist encountered him. The only visible eye of the creature seems to be watching the reader carefully. One suspects that the artist intended to portray the fear that exploitative humans evoke in other creatures. At the bottom of

the picture are the "strata of skeletons and fossils" (Meihuizen 139) that are a characteristic feature of almost all the illustrations.

The chameleon's manner of walking is captured in the words "slowly swaying, step by step" and the branch is said to be "an alleyway // of air-rocked, earth-rooted, / sap-feasted, photon-lavished leaves" – highlighting the connectedness of life and the elements where leaves convert carbon dioxide and sunlight into food through the process of photosynthesis. This connectedness is also suggested by the double-barrelled words "air-rocked," "earth-rooted," "sap-feasted," and "photon-lavished." The persona is happy to see the chameleon who he again refers to as "chromosome cousin." Here the poet-protagonist claims close relationship with the reptile, a relationship that has been exposed by biologists and palaeontologists. Observation and scholarly research has shown that like many nonhuman animals humans are "primates, mammals, vertebrates, chordates and metazoans. [… .] [W]hatever in addition [humans] may be, [they are] animal[s]. They have something in common with all animals, from the very smallest to the largest of them," and human development cannot be fully understood without reference to these animals (*Life before Man* 6).

There is therefore, in the words of Robert Trivers, "no objective basis on which to elevate one species above another." All creatures "evolved over some three billion years by a process known as natural selection" (v). For Trivers, attributes such as consciousness, language, and intellect, which for philosophers such as Kant, Descartes, and Aquinas, among others, distinguish humans from animals are subjective and inconsequential. What is important is that we all belong to one evolutionary tree.

When, later in the poem, the chameleon flees from the poet-protagonist we hear him plead:

> Ag no, don't flee, don't rush away
> and hide from me like all the rest.

The South Africanism "Ag" shows the casualness of the speaker which underlines the closeness and friendliness between the speaker and the chameleon. Speaking in ways that address fellow humans rather than the chameleon whose perspective of us we have no means of knowing, the speaker then wonders

> Am I to you an ape-shape-come-lately,
> A branch-slashing, bush-ashing beast?

Here human beings' destructiveness and cruelty that make animals flee from them is hinted at. The alliteration in "branch-slashing" and "bush-ashing" as well as the shushing sounds of the affricates highlights this harshness and violence of humans. The line "Am I to you an ape-shape-come-lately[?]" underscores the primordial nature of reptiles and points to the fact that humans appeared on earth through their evolutionary process later than reptiles and other creatures who had been around for (hundreds) of millions of years before man emerged. The Geologic Time Chart indicates that reptiles appeared three hundred million years or more before creatures that would become ancestors to humans (*Life before Man* 26). Later, speaking in ways that remind one of the association of the swollen-looking eyes of a chameleon with sorrow (in Malawi, for example) the poet-protagonist wonders why the chameleon has a "hung-dog head," a "mopping mouth" and a "Hamlet gloom."[106] In the poem the chameleon's gloom seems to be attributed to the destructiveness of humans as the poet-protagonist later declares

> God knows how much I wish we'd learn
> never, never, never to trash the lavish tree
>
> and fend and blend among the leaves
> like you my bronze-green alter-lion, like you.

The alliteration and internal rhyme here help to create the regretful/remorseful tone while the regularity of the alliteration serves to emphasise the speaker's wish. In this poem, like many others by Mann, the simplicity of the language belies the careful choice and combination of words and lines. Again, like the mention of "chromosome cousin" earlier, another link to our kinship to the chameleon in particular and the connectedness of all life, in general, is highlighted when the poet-protagonist observes: "Out of stardust your eyes were made. And mine." Here Mann refers to the "building blocks of life" from exploding stars that disperse through space and find their way into the bodies of living things. Cosmologists believe that after the "Big Bang," that is, the start of the expansion of the earlier universe, elements such as "hydrogen and helium from the early Universe is burnt within the interiors of stars into heavier, biological, elements like carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and phosphorous.

[106] Hamlet is a miserable young man in a Shakespearean play of the same name who learns that the man who is married to his mother is his uncle and the murderer of his real father. The uncle killed his brother, Hamlet's father, to inherit the throne. Upon learning this Hamlet becomes troubled and gloomy. He plans to kill the usurper to avenge his father's death but procrastinates. His procrastination leads to more tragedy.

When the stars reach the ends of their lives they explode and disperse these building blocks of life through space. There, these elements condense into grains and planets. Ultimately, they find their way into our bodies" through "a long slow business [that] takes billions of years" (Barrow 120).

Like in "Chameleon" we also encounter reference to a reptile as a cousin to underscore the relatedness of life in the poem "Lizard" (45). The poem is the poet-protagonist's memory of seeing a lizard, whom he later endearingly calls "my bird-nerved cousin," while relaxing with a book in the shade. The poet-protagonist's careful observation of the lizard is revealed in the following lines:

> You were dwarfed by a red hibiscus.
> I could just make out your fingers,
> the brown-gold lustre of your skin,
>
> and the tiny *plip-plip, plip-plip*
> flickering your flank as you breathed.
> I remembered a locust's spined legs
>
> jerking in the pincers of your jaw,
> the rival you stalked like a leopard.
> (Italics in original)

In her illustration for this poem Skeen echoes the first line in the quotation above and Craig's prose text. The drawing captures the hibiscus mentioned in the poem and two or three (if one considers one of them a lizard) lizards of different species, one to the right and two to the left. The lizard on the top left corner is partially hidden by hibiscus. While the legless snake-like creature to the bottom left might be Skeen's attempt to depict the legless species of lizards which Craig says are blunt-tailed, the long winding tail of this one shows that she is a snake rather than a lizard. One wonders then whether Skeen's aim here was to show the resemblance and relationship between lizards and snakes who, according to Craig "are near-relatives" as they have anatomical features "that they share with no other animals," (44) rather than depict a legless lizard.

The fact that Mann talks of fingers rather than toes or claws in the poem reveals his attempts to show the similarities that humans share with other animals. The comparison of the lizard's act of stalking the locust, referred to as the lizard's rival in the poem, to a leopard enables us to visualise the lizard's movements and

shows the reptile's determination and skill in hunting. Further, the reference to the locust as the lizard's rival seems to point to the struggle for existence in a world which seems to run on the principle of "eat or be eaten." In the poem Mann also shows his love for evocative words and word sounds and suggestive alliterative words as exemplified by the phrase "the tiny *plip-plip, plip-plip* / flickering your flank" which draw attention to the lizard's rapid breathing and reveal the poet's attention to detail. Besides creating visual images the "r" and "j" sounds in the word "flickering" and the alliterative words "jerking" and "jaw" give this part of the poem an abrasive texture that puts the carnivorous behaviour of the lizard in sharp focus.

Later in the poem Mann refers to the lizard as a Pharaoh and alludes to the creature's primordial nature:

> You were a Pharaoh in your domain,
>
> a thirst of reptile blood for the sun,
> an alpha-in-omega of a gene-strand
> hundreds of millions of years alive.
>
> Do you encrypt images of sponges
> and trilobites? Of what first quivered
> when earth was as dead as the moon?

The reference to the lizard as Pharaoh highlights his ruthlessness and authoritarian ways of protecting his territory which compares with the Egyptian kings of old while the reference to it as "a thirst of reptile blood for the sun" hints at the cold blooded nature of the lizard and other reptiles. Mann refers to the lizard as one end of the branch of the tree of life by calling it "an alpha-in-omega of a gene-strand" that has existed for hundreds of millions of years. The fact that the lizard traces its ancestry and existence to millions of years before humans appeared on the scene is underscored in the poem by the fact that we hear the poet-protagonist acknowledging the lizard's superiority over him in terms of what the creature might know of life on earth when he wonders whether the lizard encrypts images "Of what first quivered / When earth was as dead as the moon[…]." It is noteworthy here too that the texture of the poem is smoothed out by the significant presence of "s" sounds consistent with the poet's wistful tone of admiration.

In "Cape Robins" (11)[107] Mann highlights the kinship and close neighbourly relationship between humans and other co-inhabitants of the earth. In this poem the poet-protagonist talks of his relationship with the birds, Cape robins, that live in his neighbourhood. The birds sing both at dusk and dawn. The first stanza starts with beautiful images of break of day and end of day:

> Before the dawn's faint grey had flushed the bush
> and gleamed its hooks and fruits,
> before the dusk had snuffed them out and brought its dangers near,
> the robins pegged their boundaries out in song.

Here Mann refers to the birds' tendency to, as Craig tells us, "begin their attractive song before dawn while it is still dark, and often sing in the evening after sunset" (10). The illustration for this poem depicts a dusky forest scene with a quarter moon and stars visible to the upper left. In the bottom foreground two birds, one to the left and another to the right stand on dead tree branches inquisitively looking at the reader. The birds are not singing but the artist's intentions of inviting us to see and think of them is clear. The fact that the birds are said to peg "their boundaries out" shows that they are agentive and autonomous. They decide where to live and at what time. The poet later tells us:

> That we should share the same small patch of earth,
> yet stay familiar strangers,
> that they should hear our coaxing human talk, yet fly from us,
> is as our different pasts and roles ordained.

Here Mann signals at the similarities and differences, or closeness and apartness between humans and other creatures. The fact that we "share the same small patch of earth" with other creatures such as the Cape robins in the poem, and that they "hear our coaxing human talk" points to our closeness or relatedness to the other inhabitants of the earth. However, the fact that we "stay familiar strangers" and that other animals flee from us underscores our separateness and the fact that the evolutionary process took us in different directions with different preoccupations ("our different pasts and roles ordained"). The regularity of alliteration in the line "That we should share the

[107] This poem appears as "Privacies" in Mann's collection *New Shades* (1982) page 21. The title "Privacies" seems to have been influenced by John Clare whose robins in the poem "The Robin's Nest" "live in 'woodland of privacy'" (Johanne Clare 179) as we gather from the poems final five lines

> The nest is hid close at its mossy root
> Composed of moss and grass and lined with hair
> And five brun-coloured eggs snug sheltered there
> And bye and bye a happy brood will be
> The tennants [sic] of this woodland privacy (Clare 155).

same small patch of earth" highlights the poet's calm and reasoned acceptance of the way things are. In addition to showing his awareness of the fact that "[a]ll life belongs to one huge family tree" with different branches as plants and mammals and their sub-branches (Roughgarden 13), Mann also shows in the poem that although humans and nonhumans inhabit the same environment, interspecies communication is impossible and animals remain largely unknowable. Humans can only imagine what animals think and feel or how they perceive the world around them. The silence and unknowability of animals raises difficult questions for the discourse of animal rights and its notion of equality between humans and animals. Since animals cannot participate in the debate about their rights or claim equality with humans, the animal rights discourse only mirrors human attitudes to nature and offers a window into our "sympathetic imagination" (Coetzee 1999) that enables us to ascribe attributes to animals who do not know or at least do not seem to care what values we assign to them. The fact that other animals flee from us, or "fly from us" in the case of the Cape robins, underlines the difficulty or impossibility of community with wild animals whose first instinct on seeing humans is to flee or hide. This, however, does not justify abuse or cruelty to animals. Mann suggests tolerance and acceptance of who animals are.

Although in the poem Mann seems to exhibit the human yearning for communication with other animals (Fudge 8) who hear our "coaxing human talk" yet flee from us, he is also aware that the nonhuman animals' behaviour is as it should be ("is as our different pasts and roles ordained"). Having observed that "[m]uch of our time is spent thinking about animals as failed or nearly-humans: can they use sign language? are they intelligent? can they make judgement?" Erica Fudge opines that "[i]t would seem logical, perhaps, to begin to try and think about them as animals" (158) with a different way of inhabiting and perceiving the world. Chris Mann seems to have heeded Fudge's suggestion. In his poetry Mann suggests that the separation or differences that humans share with other animals should not necessarily be viewed negatively or should not lead to inferiorisation of the Other but to a view of the self-in-relation and acknowledgement of the Other's autonomy and agency.

In her critique of mainstream environmental ethics and deep/ecocentric and transpersonal ecology Val Plumwood takes issue with these ecophilosophical approaches' distortion or denial of difference. According to her moral extensionism and right-based environmental theories "rely implicitly upon rationalist-inspired

accounts of [a universal] self," a self that ontologically and cosmologically identifies with all entities on earth. This tendency of universalisation of the human self is for her "a technique for cancelling difference, for including the other in the moral sphere by treating it as another master, as the egoistic self in an extended guise" (Plumwood 170). Plumwood further observes that in focusing exclusively on "identification, interconnectedness, sameness and the overcoming of separation, [and] treating nature as a dimension of self," many ecophilosophical approaches privilege incorporation of nature into the self leading to the loss of the "essential tension between self and other." This erasure of nature as other gives the impression that these theories do not see themselves as "concerned with relations between diverse interacting elements, self and other, humans and nature, but basically only with one element, the self." In these approaches "the self as isolated subject incorporates or internalises outside objects in nature, assimilating them to self (or Self)" (ibid. 175). Plumwood rightly objects to this "loss of the essential tension between different and alike" which she sees as characteristic of domination and instrumentalisation frameworks where relational selfhood is ignored since "the entire dynamic of interaction takes place within the self, rather than between the self and the external other" (ibid.). Chris Mann seems aware of Plumwood's thinking as he too abhors the privileging of instrumental reason ("The Poetry") which leads to absorption and control in favour of separateness of entities and a relational identity. In "Cape Robins" Mann accepts and respects the fact that the robins live their lives in ways that are different from humans and this does not make them superior or inferior; rather, the difference between the two species shows the variegated nature of life.

The phrase "familiar strangers" in "Cape Robins" underlines the closeness and distance between humans and nonhumans which therefore means that radical separation or hyperseparation is a mistake. We are not completely divorced from other existents on earth in spite of the differences that we share. At the same time seeking complete incorporation of the other into the self as the ecophilosophical approaches Plumwood critiques above attempt to do is a mistaken view of the world because "our different pasts and roles ordained" our separation or apartness and it is this "distance that [should, paradoxically,] keep[…] us near." Mann seems to tell us that the differences we have with other animals should not be seen as something that makes animals inferior and humans superior. Rather it should inspire humility and tolerance in according each their full range of attributes, such as furtiveness, cruelty,

and skill, among others, without turning these into sources of exploitation and abuse. In the last stanza Mann writes

> This listening to another creature's speech,
> Our kind or theirs, this care for privacies
> That nest inside another's weave of language
> Ensures our beings blend; our distance keeps us near.

Mann takes bold steps in relation to the kind of claims he makes about animals here. The act of listening that Mann attributes to the robins, and by extension to other animals, assigns agency and the ability to think to animals contrary to Cartesian philosophy where animals are mere machines that cannot think. Agentive decisions to do something, for instance listen to something, and the ability to care for privacies/secrets of other creatures, requires the capacity to think and make decisions. Here too Mann attributes speech/language to other animals violating one of the strongly held beliefs about humans and animals, that is, the view that language is the preserve of humans and language is what separates humans from nonhumans.[108] Erica Fudge tells us that

> [w]here the Greeks could use the same term to refer to language and reason, Descartes argued that language was evidence of reason, and that because animals could not speak it proved 'not merely that the beasts have less reason than men [sic], but that they have no reason at all.' Not noise, not the ability to communicate, but the ability to communicate through language is what distinguishes human from animal" (118).

Although the fact that animals cannot speak like humans has been seen by some people as a mark of their inferiority, not many people think that their own failure to speak "dog" or "cat" is a sign of their own inferiority. Humans have attempted to teach chimpanzees and other animals to speak and to understand human speech but the results have always been a matter of dispute. The failure or near success of such experiments has been seen as a sign of nonhuman animals' inferiority. In "Cape Robins" Mann takes a shot at Descartes by suggesting that animals are capable of communicating through language (speech), only that theirs is of a different kind. The fact that with regard to human and animal language, Mann talks only about a difference in kind ("another's weave of language") punctures the bubble of human arrogance and shows that animals too have their own kind of speech or manner of communication which humans are not privy to such as the "'signaling' [sic]

[108] Notice that in "Dove" (*Lifelines* 21) Mann talks of a dove murmuring while the poet-protagonist lies asleep. Murmuring here implies the possession of language and the ability to speak.

communication system" (Fromkin and Rodman 21) of various small creatures, or the calls of monkeys, birds, and other animals. Besides, by ascribing the capacity to listen to the robins Mann depicts the birds as "active rather than passive participant[s] in [their] world" (Fudge 68). The paradoxical expression "our distance keeps us near" highlights interconnectedness or relatedness of the species in spite of the observable differences in appearance and behaviour – we are separate but not hyperseparated. Birds and other animals are Other or "another" but they are our kin too as "our beings blend," that is to say ontologically we are all existents, inhabitants of the same earth. Our beings also blend in the sense that, as we saw in "Chameleon," we all share the same building blocks of life.

In the poem "Jellyfish" (41) Chris Mann tackles another aspect that unites all life in a close relationship, that is, the belief that all life originated from the sea. In the poem the poet-protagonist admires the jellyfish he encountered once while swimming in the sea for her form and continued life in the water when the poet-protagonist, and indeed all human beings, can no longer live in water. Mann successfully uses a variety of images from architecture, navigation, garments, geography, and meteorology to describe the jellyfish. This is consistent with the casual attitude he adopts in the poem. When the poet-protagonist sees the creature for the first time he calls it a "rubbery, translucent dome" but later he sees her as a "sea-craft" lolling and floating between him and his habitat, land. Mann further refers to the jellyfish as possessing a "frill-skirted bulge," that is to say the bulge/dome mentioned earlier seemed to be attached to a skirt with frills. This detail is well captured in the illustration which shows the mushroom-like figure of the jellyfish to the left of the poem floating in water. Although the black and white colours of the drawing make it difficult to make out the water, the unmistakable water plants at the bottom of the image make it clear that the creature is in its aquatic environment. The bottom part of what looks like a giant mushroom stem has rough, frilly edges at the end. With the compound word "frill-skirted" Mann manages to say in one word something that would have required a whole sentence to explain. And in ways that compares the network of radial canals that form the creature's distribution system to the famous water canals of Venice and the creature's manner of laying eggs to a drizzle Mann writes:

> Your gelled interior took shape,
> the ghostly Venice of its canals.
> Imagining your waft of fibrils

ingesting their plankton gruel
and drizzling invisible eggs
I marvelled at your delicacies.

In the poem Mann uses evocative visual images that bring to life the shape and appearance of the creature he is describing. The expression "Ghostly Venice" emphasises the mysterious nature of the creature with its "radial canals," a creature which, as Craig tells us, lacks gills but absorbs oxygen from the "surrounding water" "with individual cells," has no anus, but digests food "in a stomach chamber lined by specialised cells" (40). "[W]aft of fibrils" on the other hand emphasises the thread-like fibrous appearance of the jellyfish that invites her comparison to a wafting cloth. The idea of drizzling invisible eggs is again inspired by Craig's observation that "jelly fish shed eggs and sperm into the water at particular times, co-ordinated without the sexes ever meeting for courtship" (40). However, to compare the creature's act of shedding eggs to a rain drizzle sounds exaggerated. The term "delicacies" in the line "I marvelled at your delicacies" serves a dual purpose here. It points to the food the jellyfish ingests but also to the frail nature, or delicate appearance of the creature that makes the poet-protagonist marvel at the mysterious nature of life. Mann concludes the poem by hinting at the relatedness/unity of all life or the fact that all life belongs to one family tree by virtue of having begun in the sea in the lines

You lived and breathed the sea.
My gills had branched into lungs.

The end stopped lines Mann chose to employ here state the bald fact without nostalgia or hesitation. Aquatic and terrestrial animals are all related, it is only that the evolutionary process took them in different directions. Evolutionary biologists believe that millions of years ago microscopic forms of life developed in the sea and over time these developed into highly specialised creatures. Some of these gained mobility by propelling themselves or merely floating and became sponges, jellyfish and worms[109] while others remained rooted to undersea slopes and became coral (*Life before Man* 28).

"Owl" (57) emphasises the fact that humans and animals (owls) inhabit the same space in a largely mysterious and fearsome universe. As such, humans and

[109] The worm's early appearance on earth and human beings', and indeed all life's, origin from the sea are indicated in a poem of the same name (*Lifelines* 79).

animals share kinship and a neighbourly relationship as both are surrounded by the same features of the universe and their fate may somehow be linked. The poem also highlights the separateness of the bird from humans by evoking the impossibility of communication between the speaking human and the owl. In the poem, the poet-protagonist exhibits a yearning to know the owl's perspective on the mysterious nature of the universe. But the reality of the impossibility of transpecies communication leaves us wondering what the bird would have said if only it could speak to him. In the poem the poet-protagonist wonders whether the owl marvels like he does about the beauty and order of the universe.

Tell me, night-hawk,
who-whooing
from that black untidy splotch of a pine,

do you also shiver
with the beautiful
and dangerous love of the stars?

As in the poem Skeen draws what looks like a night scene showing pine trees on both sides of the embedded poem and a wood owl, whose face is turned to look at the reader, roosting on a tree branch to the right against a starry background. The owl's small size and her roosting close to the trunk of the tree is the artist's attempt to stay faithful to the behaviour of this type of owls who according to Craig "nest in tree holes and may roost there by day, or in the branches of tress, close to the trunk" (56). In the quoted lines of the poem above the poet-protagonist refers to the owl as "night-hawk" perhaps in reference to the nocturnal feeding habit of the bird – which is capable of locating its prey in the dark by the use of it sharp sense of hearing. For the poet-protagonist the stars are beautiful when one watches them at night but "dangerous" because they are actually balls of fire, a fact alluded to in the third and fourth stanzas:

Imagine the infernos
the heart-throttling cold,
the bone-bursting vacuum above our heads.

Imagine the whirl-holes,
the gusts of fire-dust,
the light years of loneliness in space.

Here Mann alludes to the mysterious nature of the as yet immeasurable vast universe

with its various bodies, stars, worlds and galaxies and their elements as well as the mysteries of life on earth. This is a good example of Mann's poems whose simplicity may give one the impression that what one is reading "is not quite poetry" (Meihuizen 140), but the parallelism and anaphora (the repetition of the word "Imagine" at the beginning of the two stanzas) reveal Mann's careful crafting of the lines to achieve his intended rhythm.

In the poem Mann treats the owl of the poem's title as a fellow inhabitant of a place in the universe, as someone whose fate is no different from that of her human counterpart. The owl is a subject, a relative who inhabits the same life world as the poet-protagonist. But given that the owl cannot give us her perspective of things, this claim of kinship and the thoughts the speaker attributes to her remain a projection. The bird will not, and will never, answer him and therefore, the fears and marvel expressed in the poem remain human fears and human perspectives of the universe. Construing the owl's song as a question the bird perpetually asks about our identity and destiny in an incomprehensible world the poet-protagonist calls back to the bird, wondering

Who-who are we,
I call back to you,
That we can breathe in such a wilderness

And sing?

Here instead of the arrogance of a mechanistic world view or an attitude of mastery of the world the poet-protagonist is humbled by the realisation of how puny his life is in a universe that defies human understanding and feels privileged that he is part of the life world. But, as I mentioned above, the speaker's questions, his interpretation of the bird's call, and the very silence of, or lack of a reply from, the owl, brings in sharp focus the futility of the poem's message, that is, the yearning (and inability) to get the bird's perspective of the world around her.

3.2 Space-consciousness and Admiration

A reading of Chris Mann's poetry also shows that Mann acknowledges the mysterious nature of animal lives and accepts the fact that some aspects of those lives shall always remain unknowable to humans. We would do well to remember, however, that the difference between humans and animals has been a source of

oppression and exploitation of animals. Because they are considered to have no intelligence, consciousness or autonomy, and language they are said to deserve no moral consideration, except as an act of generosity to fellow humans, and in extreme cases they are seen as machines or mere automata. Mann seems aware of this though, and in celebrating difference he intends to reverse the view that the possession of some attributes is a mark of superiority while lack of such attributes is a marker of inferiority. Mann shows in some of his poems that human knowledge is limited and is incapable of grasping fully the mysteries of animal lives. He also shows that animals, like humans, have their own special skills. This difference in skills does not mean that the one is superior and the other inferior, but that the range of attributes varies from one species to another, and even amongst individuals of the same species. This is in line with his theory of belonging, his humility and space-consciousness.

For Mann belonging "is different from a mindless assimilation, a drowning in the Other. [It] implies that we are both alive and conscious that we are alive" ("The Poetry" np). In his poetry the difference, the separateness of animals from humans, evokes humility, admiration, and praise. However, although he acknowledges conflicts between humans and animals, as I will show later, Mann does not address/tackle the full range of feelings that encounters with animals evoke. In his interview with David Levey, Mann mentions attempting to capture poetically in *Lifelines* the emotions that his encounters with animals aroused. But in the book we rarely come across poems where animals evoke feelings of anger, fear, hatred, abhorrence and disgust. It is of note that he rarely attributes negative attributes or characteristics to animals. Nevertheless, Mann's model of a relational selfhood and construction of space-consciousness and humility seem to suggest tolerance and understanding rather than violence and abuse in our relations with animals even when the animals behave badly or evoke disgust.

In Mann's poetry the skills of animals, their creativity and abilities to survive in a harsh world are recognised and admired. With regard to animal skill and intelligence Erica Fudge laments that all the evidence of animal skill that constantly surrounds us "is often in places where our category 'intelligence' does not operate: the homing instinct [of pigeons] is termed an instinct, not intelligent behaviour. It is as if the pigeon has no choice but to go home, whereas we can choose to get lost." Fudge goes on to say that

> [t]his skill in animals may not be classed as intelligence, but it is often something that we

> are happy to use. When police and customs officers rely on dogs to sniff out drugs two things are revealed: first, we are, as humans, incapable of finding the drugs on our own (we fail), and second, the dog has better sense of smell than us (it succeeds). We do not, however, then go on to shift the ground of the debate about the nature of the reasoning mind to take on this canine success. We simply regard the dog's skill as being a natural capacity, not a form of intelligence at all. If we shifted the concept of intelligence to take in ability to scent, and ability to get home with no map, we might find that we are no longer at the top of the pile" (140).

Fudge also seems to have a valid reason why "the ground of the debate about the nature of the reasoning mind" is not shifted to take on the successes of nonhuman animals, and that is the unfortunate fact that "[i]t is easier to assume human difference than to have to reassess the possibility of animal capacity" (123). But what puts humans "at the top of the pile" is not intelligence alone. Fudge here ignores the question of power; the fact that humans more easily kill animals than the other way round. Similarly, in emphasising kinship and animal skill, Mann ignores the fact that animals have less power than humans, and that in the words of Elizabeth Costello's son, John Bernard, in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, the general attitude "towards the animals we eat," and even towards the ones we do not eat, is contempt. "We treat them badly because we despise them; we despise them because they don't fight back" (58). Apart from the attributes renowned philosophers have denied animals (intelligence, consciousness, and language, among others), another reason why they are seen as inferior is because they lack power, not strength (as some of them are undoubtedly stronger than humans). Given the unequal power relations between humans and animals, one cannot help wondering, on what basis then should humans respect animals? For Mann the concept of humility and acknowledgement of animals' unique skills and capacities would be the source of such respect. Mann suggests that in order to belong we should humble ourselves before earth others and adopt the ecological principle of live and let live.

In "Antlion" (5) the poet-protagonist is struck by the abilities of the insect to stay without food for a long time and by the creativity involved in making the sandpits for trapping ants. The poet-protagonist who encounters the antlion out in the dry veldt carefully examines the sandpit:

> The sand was poised. Precisely.
> A touch, and a stope collapsed,
> chocking the floor with its scree.

The use of the word “stope” (a steplike part of a mine where minerals are being extracted) shows that Mann compares the antlion’s sandpit to a mine. But unlike a conventional mine, the creature does not use its sandpit to extract ore but to trap insects for food. The evocation of chocking depicts the sand (which, in line with the image of the collapsing “stope,” the poet describes as “scree”, that is, detritus, rubble or debris), from the side of the sandpit that falls to the bottom following the collapse of the “stope” as sadistic and detrimental to the life of the antlion that lies waiting at the bottom. The skill with which the antlion constructs the sandpit makes the poet-protagonist wonder how the antlion manages this feat:

When did you suss out physics?
Each grain was deftly perched
in a subtle, invisible matrix
of pressure, friction and gravity.
Unschooled, miles from Euclid,
you’d spade out a perfect cone.

The reference to the Greek Mathematician, Euclid, the Father of Geometry, underlines the antlion’s skill and mastery of geometric patterns in constructing the sandpit, despite having not learnt or come into contact with humans credited with great mastery of geometry (“miles from Euclid”). Craig’s scientific notes also underscore the skill with which the insect constructs the sandpit when he tells us that “[t]he conical shape of an antlion’s pit and the angle of its sides depend on the physics of gravity and sand-grain size, with no escape for an ant once it has tumbled over the age” (4). Notice that the coarse texture of the section of the poem quoted above, from words such as “grain,” “matrix,” “friction,” and “gravity,” evokes the sand which is the material with which the antlion constructs the sandpit. The insect’s skills and abilities to stay without food triggers admiration in the persona as he confesses:

I sat and gawked at your skills.
How you could slug out a year
without a snack in a famine.

Later when an ant falls into the sandpit and is caught by the antlion the poet-protagonist accepts this as the normal scheme of things where animals survive on each other. He regards the ant as a sacrifice. We shall see much of this view of sacrifice in nature in the next section. For the poet-protagonist the ant in the poem sacrifices its life to “feed the lifelines of earth.” There is also a claim of kinship between humans and other animals in the poem where the poet observes that the

antlion and humans are fleshed by the same dust that arose from a blasted sun long ago. Mann writes:

I felt I watched, within your yard,
the workings of a cosmic rhythm,

the energy crunch, the transfer
that blasted a sun's mantling fire
into the dust that fleshes us both.

Here Mann refers to the scientific view, already mentioned above, that the building blocks of life are made in the stars and find their way into the bodies of living things when the stars explode and disperse these elements into space. The words "crunch" and "blasted" refer to the disintegration or explosion of the star, referred to as sun in the poem, while the word "mantling" evokes the image of the star as a little ball enveloped or covered, as if with a mantle or cloak, by fire. The expression "fleshes us both" refers to the fact that the dust from the exploding star forms part of the bodies of both the antlion and the poet-protagonist.

In a manner that suggests the significance of an encounter with other creatures in revealing the mysteries in nature and the world around us Mann says

The poetry of nature, I thought,
bubbles up in the awe of discovery.
science is the aquifer of the well.

It is in the discovery of the intricacy of the life around us that we begin to appreciate the creativity/art (poetry) in nature while science, which the poet compares to a water-bearing rock to an empty well ("the aquifer of the well" in the poem), provides answers to some of our questions. Words such as "gawk" and "awe" emphasise the poet-protagonist's sense of wonder and admiration of the insect which otherwise goes unnoticed or is regarded unworthy of attention by most humans.

Like "Antlion" the poem "Bees" (7) also shows the poet's appreciation of the skills of the insects. The poet-protagonist admires the bees of the title for their skill in making honeycombs and for their unity demonstrated by the traffic that flickered in and out of the hive before his eyes. Unlike humans, bees 'knew' long before humans how to construct some patterns and geometric figures as we read:

Before we'd scratched
geometry in the sand
or baked the first mud brick
of Jericho's walls

you'd waxed a hexagon
into honeying towns.

The reference to the biblical walls of Jericho here helps to emphasise the fact that the bees were able to do what humans could not do even in biblical times. Here the bees are seen as surpassing man and indeed showing that humans must have learnt a lot from animals. Similarity rather than difference between human societies and a bee hive is drawn by the use of the geographical term "towns" to describe the hive. The comparison is justified in the sense that hives, like towns, are highly populated spaces. The geographical term "towns" also alters our perception of the bee hive and makes us imagine the bees as capable of practicing the organisation in a municipal town, ensuring things such as leadership, and security, among others.

In the poem the poet-protagonist spends time lying and observing the bees, trying to understand them. In her illustration Skeen picks up on this vantage point and shows bees engaged in various activities: flying, building honeycombs and getting nectar from a flower. Between the two columns of the poem a human lies on his back on an alter-like block of honeycomb cells looking at the flying bees above him, echoing the poem's lines "I lay like Gulliver / beneath your flight-path, / bewildered by the traffic flickering in and out of your hive […]." Some of the characteristics of Lemuel Gulliver, Jonathan Swift's protagonist and narrator in *Gulliver's Travels* (2002) are curiosity and reclusiveness. In comparing himself to Gulliver, then, the poet-protagonist sees his own curiosity, as he lay watching the bees with wonder ("bewildered"), as similar to the curiosity that inspired Gulliver's travels. Again, the reference to Gulliver shows that the poet-protagonist sees himself as a recluse who shuns human company and prefers to lie in the bush watching bees and attempting to understand them. Skeen's depiction of a human lying on the honeycomb cells also seems to signal our dependence on bees for as Craig tells us "[r]ecords from Egypt and China show that people around the world have been beekeepers for more than 7000 years and honey-hunters for even longer" (6). The behaviour of the insects makes the poet-protagonist wonder whether things in nature happened by chance or by design as he asks:

Did the dance-codes of bees,
you made me ask,
the algorithms of science,
the spirals of the stars
explode from space-time nowhere,

by chance?

Here Mann avoids proselytising and imposing his own convictions about the nature of the world on his readers, deciding to leave the question open. In the end his attempts to understand the bees only result in a "knowing unknowing." The strength of the paradox here lies in the fact that while we see them everyday, while we know them, that is, what they look like, we can not fully understand them or grasp what they essentially are as they are autonomous Others, separate from us, living a life of their own. As humans we can not hope to fully grasp every aspect of their lives and any attempts to colonise or incorporate them can only lead to the discovery of more mysteries about them. This realisation of the unknowableness of the bees, a realisation that comes to the poet while contemplating the bees as a "soft pale grub of a thought / [that] nudged from its crib, / uncrumpling a gleam of wings," leads to Mann's profound observation that

True science
[…]
Begins and ends
In mystery.
(Italics in original)

In line with the subject of the poem (bees/insects) Mann compares the birth of this idea in his mind to an insect's life-cycle or to the birth/emergence (notice the reference to a "soft pale grub" (larva) and "crib") of an insect from a cocoon ("uncrumpling a gleam of wings"). Mann's views about science in the statement above indicate the difficulty, even impossibility, for science to provide answers to all questions about the world. Science is born out of mystery, that is, the human quest to answer questions that boggle the mind. But the more it attempts to demystify certain issues the more mysteries arise, hence the view (which Mann emphasises through the use of italics) that science "*Begins and ends / In mystery*." This realisation proves the truth in the view that there is a lot we do not know and will never know about the world. With regard to the universe as a whole John Barrow observes that "astronomy can only tell us about the structure of the *visible* universe. We can know nothing of what lies beyond our horizon. So, while we might be able to say whether our visible universe has certain properties, we can say nothing about the properties of the Universe as a whole […]" as the Universe is both bigger than we can know and bigger than we can ever know (Barrow 160, 189).

This acknowledgement of the fact that science will not give us all the answers

about the life world or about our place in the larger scheme of things is a mark of humility characteristic of Mann's poetry, a significant departure from an instrumental attitude and an attitude of domination and mastery of nature and the physical world.

Wonder, admiration and respect also come through in the beautiful and memorable poem "Heron" (37). In the poem Mann describes a heron that flies over an unnamed town to a feeding ground at dawn and back to her roosting place at dusk using a metaphor of a boat and images and terminology from water navigation. Mann writes:

> Each dawn you quietly paddle
> the long-beaked hull of your boat
> above the Atlantis of this town.
>
> The streets and houses are still
> as if they lay in a hundred fathoms.
> The air is my empyrean, your sea.

The bird's manner of flying, the up and down beating of her wings, is here compared to paddling a vessel while the bird's body is compared to the body of a ship. In referring to "Atlantis" (a legendary island believed to have existed in the Atlantic Ocean and to have sunk beneath the sea) in the phrase "above the Atlantis of this town" Mann depicts the town as lying under water or beneath a sea. In his imagination, the "empyrean," that is, the sky, heaven or atmosphere, beneath which the city lies, is a sea for the heron ("The air is my empyrean, your sea"). Mann extends the idea of the city as lying beneath a sea when he emphasises the stillness of the streets and houses of the town at dawn through the simile "[a]s if they lay in a hundred fathoms." In the poem Mann successfully manages to make the reader imagine the heron anew as a boat through his consistent use of boat and sea imagery and terminology from sea navigation. For instance, the bird's arrival at the feeding ground is described as "beach[ing] in a wetland of plenty" and her feeding as "load[ing] the hold of [her] gizzard / with meat, crustaceans and fish" before "silently row[ing her] vessel home." The bird's arrival at her roost is again described in the poem as docking at her quay. Further, the air which is the persona's empyrean (sky) is the heron's sea. The smooth flow of the lines and the gentle tone in the poem are indicative of the speaker's admiration of, and respect for, the bird. In her illustration, however, Skeen departs slightly from the poem which depicts the heron flying. Instead the image shows the bird standing regally on a tree stump on the bank of a

body of water, looking calm and dignified. Nevertheless, by having it stand by the water's edge the illustration still echoes the poem's mention of the bird beaching "in a wetland of plenty." Adrian Craig also feels free to refer to literature when he observes that "Shakespeare wrote disparagingly of one who could not 'tell a hawk from a handsaw [heron]'" (36).

In a manner that shows that we can only talk about animals using human language, in the case of this poem, the language of technology (as the bird is compared to a ship), which inevitably leads to anthropomorphism, the poet wonders

How can I figure you but in speech?

In semblances such as lone wader
or wings grey from which you glide
untouched and always your self?

Here Mann alludes to the necessity of anthropomorphism as a medium through which we relate to and represent nonhumans. Mann's anthropomorphism here and elsewhere in his animal poems is benign, done consciously, empathetically and biocentrically.

In the last two stanzas of the poem Mann combines secular and Christian history to create a less successful but ambitious comparison of himself as he stands watching the flying heron to a shade[110] (spirit) of a shaman standing in a deserted street of an underwater Aegean (prehistoric Hellenic) city, unaware that on the water surface above him a ship carrying the apostle Paul is sailing to Greece. He writes:

I feel like the shade of a shaman

who stands in the emptied streets
of a sunken Aegean civilization
and hears faint sounds of commotion

and does not know that above him
a ship is travelling across the sea
with St Paul on his way to Greece.

Here Mann complicates the otherwise beautiful and coherent boat/sea imagery of the earlier stanzas by stretching the imagination further to associate Aegean civilization and Paul's travels with the immediate experience of the flying bird. Nevertheless, the image of the heron that emerges from the poem is a dignified and admirable one. In

[110] The reference to the "shade" shows the influence on Mann of the belief in ancestral spirits held by many societies around the world including the Zulu and Xhosa speaking people of South Africa (See Mann, "Engaging the Cosmic Dust" [2003]).

some way, however, the poem is more about the poet-protagonist than the bird. The poet-protagonist's viewing of the bird, like the other animals he encounters, enables him to access his humanity and spirituality. The bird evokes memories of the biblical stories of St. Paul's sea travels that have nothing to do with the bird (which biblically is inferior to humans [Matthew 6: 26]) but a lot to do with humans who in the bible are promised the kingdom of heaven. Besides, like the other poems in *Lifelines*, the encounter with the bird here sharpens Mann's poetic sensibility and enables him to engage his creative and poetic skills to compose the poem. We could say, therefore, that Mann profits from his encounters with animals, in which case the animals are both the subjects of the poems and, paradoxically, objects used to open a window for the poet's reflection about his spirituality and creativity.

Admiration and lavish praises also characterise the poem "Humming Bird" (39) in which the bird's navigation skills are admired and highlighted. The bird here, like the heron above, stands apart as Other, different from humans, but a respectable Other capable of navigating by the sun and the stars even on cloudy days and nights. In the poem the poet-protagonist who has read about the migratory behaviour of the humming birds imagines the birds crossing the ocean, "flying from a north to a south America / Across the Gulf of Mexico's orbed blue" as he stands on his stoep somewhere in Africa. Signalling the hummingbird's swiftness in flight and her relentlessness Mann writes:

> Your speck of an aircraft yaws in the wind.
> Behind you, Florida's long green coastline
> sinks like a memory of spring below the sea.
>
> You're a mite, a seethe, an eagle of desire
> for the meats, the nectars of a destination
> that instinct keeps hungering you towards.
>
> You whirr onwards, as stars tipple out,
> As the sea glooms beneath your odyssey,
> Your Theresa of Avila's arrowing prayer.

Echoing these lines Skeen depicts one bird to the right flying during a cloudy and starry night over a body of water and another one to the left flying during the day, evidenced by the sun's rays that are visible in the distance. In doing so Skeen also follows the poem and the prose text's message about the bird navigating by the stars

(even on a cloudy night or day) and the sun. But while the bird to the right gives the impression of determination to fly a long distance the one to the left looks like a kingfisher interested in what lies beneath the water rather than the promise of nectars in far off lands.

The aircraft metaphor in the poem enables us to visualise the swift flight of the hummingbird. Mann also refers to this swiftness as "whirring." The term "whirr" also refers to the swift beating of the humming bird's wings in flight – up to 300 times a minute (Craig, *Lifelines* 38). The bird's determination (which for the poet is inspired by her mental prayer like St. Theresa of Avila[111]) to reach her destination in spite of the obstacles on the way, such as clouds that obscure her navigational aids or celestial cues – the sun and the stars (Barnard 166-167) – invites its comparison to the eagle. This comparison also acts as a panegyric to the small bird that achieves great migratory feats every year. However, the view that the bird is driven by instinct shows that Mann fails to completely break free from human attitudes that see animal behaviour as a result of instinct or natural capacity rather than intelligence (Fudge 140). Finally, in a typical Mannian metaphorical construct the poet-protagonist compares the bird's plumage to a priestly garment:

> I cherish you then, your creaturing of hope,
> Your sacerdotal plumage of emerald green
> Buttoned at the throat by a blood-red jewel.

Although this comparison anthropomorphises the bird as we now see her clad in human attire ("Buttoned at the throat by a blood-red jewel"), it is benign anthropomorphism that helps us imagine the bird as smart and dignified. But, like "Heron" above, the imagination of the bird here is far from a selfless affair as it also enables the poet to access his spirituality through the comparison of the bird's plumage to a priestly garment and the reference to the Spanish Saint Theresa (Teresa) of Avila who is well known for her writings on mental prayer. Despite the good intentions of Mann to inspire readers to think about animal lives and biodiversity, the poetry does not escape the tendency of most literary representations that Malamud critiques of sustaining the "conceit of the subject animal's availability, boundless pliability, and unproblematic implication in whatever text at hand happens to require a

[111] A Roman Catholic saint, nun, writer of the Counter Reformation, and theologian of contemplative life through mental prayer. Mental prayer is a form of prayer recommended in the Catholic Church whereby one loves God through dialogue, meditating on God's words, and contemplation of his face. It is regarded as a time of silence focused on God.

quack-quack here or an oink-oink there" (18).

The poem "Seahorse" (67) depicts the creature's curious appearance and strange way of life to emphasise its uniqueness from humans. In rendering the seahorse visible poetically and artistically the authors of *Lifelines* invite us to contemplate and appreciate these creatures' lives and respect their very uniqueness and difference rather than denigrate and inferiorise them. The poet-protagonist who first saw the creature in an aquarium, "behind a thick glass," describes in detail the behaviour and appearance of the male sea-horse, which is the subject of the poem. The poet-protagonist refers to the creature as a "horse-head" on account of the similarity between the seahorse's head and that of an ordinary horse after which the creature is named. It is this same horse-like head that makes the poet-protagonist remember the mythical stallion Pegasus, a winged stallion in Greek myth that was sired by Poseidon in his role as horse god, upon seeing the seahorse. The fish's strange appearance, swivelling chameleon-like eyes ("Your eye-glance was all chameleon"), horse-like head, a tail, and a "short-stubby fin on [the] back," also reminds the poet-protagonist about the epic poetry of the Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso (or simply Ovid), such as the *Metamorphoses*, derived from Greek mythology in which human beings transform into new beings such as trees, rocks, animals and flowers, among others. The fact that the seahorse looks like a combination of several creatures in one body makes it appear as if it is in a state of transformation. Ovid is also a relevant figure in the poem as he wrote about love and seduction. In the poem "Seahorse" Mann also writes about the seduction dance of the seahorses. When the female seahorse, whom Mann refers to as a "sea-mare," a "partner" or "spouse for life" for the male seahorse appears from the reed, Mann describes the love dance of the creatures beautifully thus:

> Your daily wedding dance began.
>
> She glided down an isle of pillars,
> entwined her curl of a tail in yours
> and rose slowly, twirling with you
>
> within a watery tabernacle of life.

Her attention to detail ensures that Skeen does not miss this seductive dance in her illustration which depicts three seahorses in their aquatic environment, one to the right and two to the left. The ones to the left have their tails coiled together in a courtship

dance. The one to the right seems to be watching the pair to the left. At the bottom left we see a human head with wavy grass-like hair (perhaps an evocation of Ovid's metamorphosis), while a partially visible head of a horse, the seahorse's terrestrial namesake, lies in the grass to the right. Tall sea grass separates the two columns of the poem.

The love dance for Mann is also an enactment of the creatures' sense of belonging to each other. For him the seahorses enact separation at night when they rest "attached to different stems of sea-grass in the lagoon" and belonging during the day when "they swim towards each other [in the morning], curl their tails together and in a kind of ritual dance twirl upwards towards the light" ("The Poetry" np). The phrase "spouse for life" refers to the alleged monogamous relationship of seahorses. But Adrian Craig observes that "[m]ost of our knowledge of seahorses depends on observations in aquaria and we do not know how long a partnership endures in the wild weeds" (*Lifelines* 66). In the poem Mann does not leave out a curious aspect of a seahorse's life style, namely male pregnancy. It is said that during copulation the female deposits her eggs in the male's brood pouch ("a kangaroo womb" in the poem) and the male carries them until they hatch and feeds the young ones until maturity via a placental connection to his blood stream. The male pregnancy makes Mann wonder: "[w]ere you creation's perfect male?" considering that male parents are generally less responsible towards their offspring, giving them very little attention, if any, as compared to their female counterparts. In the poem the seahorse is praised and admired rather than denigrated. Rather than dismiss the creatures' love life as undeserving to be called love the poet can only confess ignorance by wondering whether the female seahorse knew emotions and felt what "we," humans, "suppose is love."

In the poem the life of seahorses has become a site of fantasy for an ideal human love relationship. Reacting to the question "what it is we see when we look at images of animal courtship and coupling?" Cynthia Chris concurs with Elizabeth Grosz who "suggests that we hope to see a bit of ourselves." For Grosz animals "provide models and formulae by which [we] come[…] to represent [our] own desires, needs and excitements" (qtd. by Chris 122). Unsurprisingly, as is evident in the poem, "[p]art of the human fascination with images of animals is voyeuristic, deriving from curiosity about sexual activity, theirs and ours" (Chris 122). In the poem Mann deliberately contextualises the seahorses' behaviour "in [a] narrative[…]

that allegorize[s such behaviour] as lessons in [human] sex roles and parenting" (ibid. 124).

3.3 Benefactors and Foes: Interdependence and Conflict in Nature

A number of Chris Mann's poems show the centrality of interdependence in nature by depicting the death of some creatures not as evil but as a necessary condition for the continuity of life. Some creatures die to provide space for their offspring while the death of others provides the ultimate sacrifice on the alter of life, as it were, as they provide the much needed food for the development and survival of others. This emphasises/shows the interconnectedness of life that Fox compares to "leaves on the tree of life" (Fox 161). But the idea of death of an animal as sacrifice to lifelines is not unproblermatic as it raises questions such as a sacrifice from whose perspective? and whether the individual animal is harmed by death or not. Some scholars think animals, like humans, are harmed by death. Frederike Kaldewaij is one of the scholars who argue against the view held by Peter Singer, Michael Leahy, and Ruth Cigman, among others, that "animals are not harmed by death as they cannot have desires regarding their future existence" since such desires "involve sophisticated beliefs and concepts, such as the concept of one's own mortality" (59). Following Thomas Nagel, Kaldewaij argues that both "[h]uman beings and conscious animals are harmed by death because they are deprived of goods *that they would have valued, enjoyed, found desirable*" (60, italics in original). This means, therefore, that although other forms of life may benefit from the death of another, for the dead animal the death is a loss, or harm. Besides, to call an animal's death a sacrifice is to sanitise the ugly reality of death and to reveal a dangerously anthropocentric perspective of the world that belittles and rationalises the death of other creatures. A sacrifice is something that is offered willingly or voluntarily. But no one is to say that animals die willingly to ensure the continuity of life. Some of them die of disease, old age or under violent, stressful, and cruel circumstances following lengthy battles with predators determined to turn them into dinner. Whether the animal dies from disease or at the claws, teeth or venom of a predator, the death is often an unwelcome occurrence, resisted until the last breath.

In the poem "Blesbuck" (9) the poet-protagonist encounters a skeleton of a blesbuck which he calls "a blesbuck's ruined cathedral" in the bushveld. He squats on his heels and strokes "the transparent of the pelvic arch, / the skulls buttresses and

dome" and later he tells us:

I marvelled at evolution's urge, to fodder the earth with plants
And bone an animal from genes.
I rejoiced in evolution's desire, to architect within my cranium,
Language, reasoning and belief.

The architectural imagery in the poem (ruined cathedral, arch, buttresses) is consistent with the pathetic fallacy or personification of evolution in the lines quoted above and it helps to make us imagine evolution as a builder who takes time to create the various creatures and their attributes such as language, reasoning and belief in the case of humans. Here the poet-protagonist celebrates the generosity of creation/evolution which gave him language to speak about the world around him, reasoning to analyse and sift through issues and belief to accept predestination or a divine purpose or design.

As the poet-protagonist continues to contemplate the dead blesbuck and the mystery of life, he sees "in the thorns / a blesbuck ewe suckling her splay-legged calf." Skeen's art work allows the reader to see this. Her drawing here shows one blesbuck, probably a male, to the right looking behind him and a mother suckling an ewe in the background to the left. The animals are depicted in their habitat in the forest. However, since fossils are a characteristic feature of the bottom part of all images, it is difficult to tell whether the bones on the ground are those referred to in the poem.

The sight of new life fills the poet-protagonist with hope and a happy feeling that the blesbuck's death has a purpose in the cosmic scheme of things, as "[q]uietly, in the dim-lit sanctum lobed in the nave of [the poet-protagonist's] cortex, / the alter-candles flickered alight." The religious imagery too, "ruined cathedral" and "alter-candles," are consistent with the poet-protagonist's belief in the preordained purpose or role of all life. One of Mann's strength in his poetry is consistent and careful choice of coherent images. The reference to the blesbuck's skeleton as a "ruined cathedral" helps to highlight the creature's death and the pilled-up shape of the bones. Further the fact that the "alter lights fliker[…] alight" in the dim-lit recesses of the poet-protagonist's mind upon seeing a blesbuck ewe suckling its calf emphasises his happiness and the resuscitation of his hope for the continuity of life. Here Mann employs the stock images of dimness of light or darkness to symbolise death, evil or loss of hope and light to represent life and hopefulness. However, Mann sounds as if

the dead blesbuck's life is replaceable by the suckling ewe. In reality, however, no life is replaceable. When death takes away a life, that life is gone for ever, never to be replaced. Even if members of the dead animal's species continue to thrive as is the case in the poem, the blesbuck's death remains a regrettable loss.

While death creates space for offspring or new members of a family or species in "Blesbuck," in "Maggots" (47) Mann seeks to show that the death of a creature leads to regeneration/renewal or beginning of new life, as well as continuity of the cycle of life. In the poem the poet-protagonist unearths a decomposing/rotting rat from under kikuyu grass and notices maggots swarming "in the intestines." The decomposing, maggot-infested carcass of the rat is well depicted by Skeen who, apart from the maggots, also shows two flies, from whose eggs the maggots are hatched, standing on the carcass. The maggots themselves look like grains of rice, but the presence of the adult flies helps to give the impression that they are maggots. Mann's commendable abilities of vivid description also appear here in his depiction of the maggots' appearance and movements as "pale, pudgy, like muscled nozzles, / like a litter of mouth-eyed pups humping and burrowing the maw." Mann here compares the maggots to blind puppies who, nevertheless, can locate their mothers teats by searching using their mouths, hence "mouth-eyed pups." The maggots' manner of feeding also does not escape Mann's observant eye as he tells us:

> Toothless, they spewed a subtle spit that foamed their meat into broth
> They were the Greeks' sarcophagi, the listening that eats up sorrow.

In spite of the stench from the rotting carcass of the rat the poet-protagonist is fascinated by the ways of life and a fundamental truth occurs to him: "The carrion nurseried renewal. Its cleaners were spawned by decay." The death of the rat spells a new beginning for other creatures, such as flies who lay their eggs on dead animals for their larvae to feed on. For Mann then, this spells the law of nature that some must die so that others can live. The maggots "eat up sorrow," that is to say they find sustenance from the misfortunes of others. "[E]at up sorrow" could also refer to the curious fact provided by Craig that "maggots may […] play a useful role in removing putrified flesh [and that] they are sometimes introduced deliberately for this purpose [as] they cauterise more precisely, and with less incidental damage, than a surgeon's instruments" (46). However, like in "Blesbuck" above, Mann rationalises the death of the mouse in a way that would be offensive if applied to a human death. Mann's views on animal death here smack of speciesism as he shows disregard or lack of

concern for loss of individual animal lives. He belittles animal death as he seems to say that as long as the death of the animal leads to the continuity of life in general then it is okay/welcome, since the whole (biodiversity) is better than the individual. This manner of thinking would not go down well with animal rightists for whom the loss or suffering of any individual animal is regrettable. Mann also views the death of some animals as a necessary, or even inevitable, sacrifice for the continued life of others in poems such as "Moth" (51) and "Zebra" (81). In "Moth," as in many of his poems in *Lifelines*, Mann addresses the moth telling her how he had admired her beauty when he saw her under a microscope. He describes her admiringly and with praises:

> You were a hologram that flew,
> a soft catalyst of life, smearing
> the pollens that fertilise renewal.

Later in the poem the poet-protagonist registers his distress upon seeing a wasp, whom he also describes with admiration as "an art-work of photons" and a machine equipped to kill, astride the moth's thorax. The wasp later airlifts the apparently dead moth possibly to her nest, a fact that further distresses the poet-protagonist who wishes that animals did not feed on each other. Commenting (in a way that shows that the poems preceded the scientific notes) on the poet-protagonist's observation of the wasp carrying the moth Craig says "wasps do not hunt adult moths, but the predatory robber flies […] include some remarkable wasp-mimics, and this was surely what the observer in the poem witnessed" (50). Skeen's illustration here also shows that she is influenced both by the poem and the scientific notes. Her illustration shows aloes which seem to frame the embedded poem on both sides. To the right of the poem is a moth on what looks like a leaf with eggs behind it. This echoes Craig's observation that "[m]oths place their eggs on appropriate food plants, protected by shells, which are sculpted into patterns that we can sense by touch" (50). Flying above the moth is a wasp mentioned in the poem with a moth in its clutches. The fate of the moth, however, leads to the poet-protagonist's realisation that life on earth is built on death since dead creatures are a sacrifice to others. To this effect Mann writes:

> Your carcase earthed my imaginings.
> 'Moths live Christ's mystery,' I thought.
> 'You incarnate, coz, how every mouse
>
> and microbe of energy's live matrix

creates and sacrifices to the whole.'

Here Mann makes a seemingly heretical claim that the moth, and indeed other creatures (mice and others), is a Christ incarnate since like Jesus Christ they sacrifice their lives so that other creatures can live. The phrase "Moths live Christ's mystery," underlines the moths' supposed Christ-like sacrifice to the web of life. Just as Christians believe that Jesus Christ died to save mankind from eternal damnation and hell fire so too some creatures die, unwilling though the death might be, to ensure the continuity of life on earth. But, as I hinted above, this line of thinking is easier to entertain because we are referring to animal death. It would be a different matter if the death the poet contemplates here was that of a human. The line "Your carcase earthed my imaginings" underlines the fact that the sight of the dead moth, like the encounters with other animals in the poetry, enables the poet to access his creativity and spirituality. The moth here is both the subject of the poem as well as an object, a means through which the poet engages with his artistry and constructs his poetry. This proves true Elizabeth Grosz's observation that animals "provide models and formulae" by which we come "to represent [our] own desires, needs and excitements" (qtd. by Chris 122).

The poem "Zebra" is also about the poet-protagonist's encounter with the reality and necessity of death in the wild. In the poem the poet-protagonist encounters out in the wild the carcass of a zebra whose killers, a pride of lions, roam nearby. Mann vividly describes the violence that characterised the killing when he writes

The black and white stripes around your neck
Were smeared with mud where you'd writhed.
The pouch of your belly had already been ripped.

The words "writhed" and "ripped" point to the violent death of the zebra. But, in spite of the violence that the lions perpetrated on the zebra and his horror at the death, the poet does not vilify or demonise the lions whose behaviour first make him feel "appalled, and then dispassionate, in turns." Like Hughes, Mann here seems determined to "acknowledge the predatory, destructive character of nature […] and not to moralize about it" (Gifford and Roberts 14). The lions' killing of the zebra does not make them less of a kin to the zebra since as we saw above Mann accepts the evolutionary view of the relatedness of all life on earth. The reality of death and killing in life does not negate this relatedness of life. The zebra's death, the poet realises, is simply a means through which life, especially in the wilds of Africa,

propels itself as the poet later acknowledges:

This was Africa, the Eden of the brainstem

the inescapable waterhole, as primal and frank
as a mottled hyena sidling through the bush,
the reddened muzzle, the snarl of a lion.

The image accompanying this poem shows that Skeen's illustration follows the poem closely. Here Skeen depicts a dead Zebra in the wild with a lioness and two cubs standing over it to the left of the poem, while to the right we see the head, neck and foreleg of an approaching hyena, one of the great scavengers in the wild. Skeen successfully captures the timid approach of the hyena with the slightly lowered head as well as the snarl of the lioness. In the background are two zebras grazing and a third standing apart from the others (the dead zebra's "dapper kin" according to the poem). These appear to be going about business as usual. This is an echo of Craig's observation that "after a kill [Zebras] seem to recognise that the predators are no longer in hunting mode and show only mild curiosity at the fate of one of their fellows" (80).

The poet's realisation of the reality of death in the African wild makes him wonder about the mystery of life, about its source or purpose, whether it is the evolutionists who believe in the family tree of life and species change over time who are the ones who can provide the answers to the mystery or the creationists who believe in God as the creator of all things and master designer of all the workings of the known universe.

The poet's musings about the mystery of life are further complicated by the apparent lack of malice in the lions' killing of the zebra. But this encounter too offers a valuable lesson to the poet who begins to see the dead zebra less as a victim but more as sacrifice to life. Mann writes:

Lying wide-eyed in the reeds, you tutored me more.
Into the vlei-side rite I focussed on from the car
a sprawl of cubs came tumbling, tawny, playful,

as innocent of malice as the tortoise in the scrub,
the warthog wallowing in a mud-hole by the road.
With flattened ears, they ate into your sacrifice.

To the now-enlightened poet-protagonist the lion's feeding on the zebra is a form of a rite/ritual for whose sacrifice is the zebra, a ritual enacted throughout life by various

actors using various sacrificial creatures.

As in the other poems in this section, Mann's ecologism inspires the apparent disregard of the death of the individual animal, the zebra, here. Mann is more interested in the biodiversity or continuity of life as a whole; oblivious of the fact that biodiversity is impossible without individual lives. In her critique of ecology Elizabeth Costello views it "as yet one more instance of humans arrogating superiority over animals [which] allows us as humans to behave towards individual animals as if we have an idea of what is good for them, an idea that is drawn from our study of species behaviour and the life of ecosystems" (Vital 300). For her "[a]nimals are not believers in ecology" (Coetzee 54) and, therefore, an individual animal's death is an ultimate loss regardless of how the ecology benefits from such death. In response to such criticism of ecology Anthony Vital observes that "ecologists do not necessarily 'manage' [animals] out of a perverse desire to manage for managing's sake; they do so driven (most likely) by an awareness that the pervasive intrusiveness of extraordinarily complex modern societies calls for a response similarly complex and co-ordinated – if animals are not to suffer more than they already have." For him "[h]umans with a mind to assisting the members of other species cannot check in with individuals to ascertain their preferences [but] have to act with the best-informed guess" (304). Besides, Vital continues,

> [e]cology does not simply 'tell us to live side by side with other creatures' (after all, the most inwardlooking suburban dwellers 'live side by side'); it provides a vision of kinship with other living and non-living beings that are part of the material systems that make possible our embodiment. In this respect, ecology provides an objective understanding that can enhance the joy of 'full being', that can enrich the 'opened heart' by undergirding intellectually a feeling of comradeship. From that feeling of comradeship, from a feeling of mutual indebtedness, can flow a sense of moral obligation, one which might serve to prompt action in a politics that seeks the well-being of all our extended kin (non-human as well as human) (305).

Nevertheless, in attempting to manage animals and ecosystems, for instance through culling of animals in parks and reserves, ecologists paradoxically sanction the destruction of animals. By sanctioning the sacrifice of individual animal lives at the alter of ecology, ecologists belittle those lives and reveals a speciesist attitude. For instance, it is well known that human death is beneficial for the human ecology as well as for the continued survival of other creatures. But one wonders whether Mann would regard human death as a sacrifice to life and therefore tolerable or acceptable.

Why is it then that it is easy to refer to animal death as sacrifice but not so with regard to human death? Although *Lifelines* is aimed at helping us review our attitudes and relationships with animals, a dualistic and hierarchical attitude to animals runs beneath the work's surface; a dualism that sees humans as superior and animals inferior that makes it easy to rationalise their death as a sacrifice.

In "Peregrine Falcon" (59) Mann further demonstrates the necessity of death in the continuity of life by describing the blood-bespattered haunt of a creature that survives through killing other animals for food and imagining the creature itself in action. The creature in question is the peregrine falcon of the title. This poem also warns against morally judging other creatures' ways of life rather than respecting and accepting them as realities of life.

In the poem the poet-protagonist encounters the bird's kill on a ledge in the hills/mountains and catches a glimpse of her in the distance. Skeen allows us to view this through her illustration which shows a side view of one peregrine perched on a wood on the ground to the left (hooked beak and claws clearly visible), looking calm and composed, and another flying above a wide expanse of landscape with a prey in her claws. The poet-protagonist imagines how the peregrine falcon must have killed the rock pigeon whose carcass lay on the ledge, which the poet calls an abattoir, using strong violent words such as bunching, hurtled, explosion, scrunch, flapping and jerking to describe the killing act (Louw, "Familiar Strangers" 5). Skeen's drawing, however, does not fully succeed in capturing the power and ruthlessness referred to here as the bird she depicts flying appears to have a rather careless hold on her prey. The peregrine seems to hold onto the tail feathers of the prey and her claws are fully visible when they should have sunk into the prey. It is unclear whether Skeen intended to show the prey slipping from the peregrine's clutches - a very unlikely occurrence for such a formidable and powerful hunter.

The poet's realisation of the necessity of death for the continuity of life ("life-in-death art") is strengthened by his observation of other creatures who come to feast on the pigeon's carcass such as an ant and a mite, and later a maggot-fly enters the wound (which the poet calls a crib) inflicted by the peregrine falcon to lay its eggs. By referring to the wound as a crib Mann wishes to say that while the wound may have led to the death of the rock pigeon, it is also a source of beginning for others such as flies, thereby revealing, like Hughes, his recognition of "the interdependence of creation and destruction" (Gifford and Roberts 63). The poet realises that death and

killing were not only confined to a few individual creatures but pervaded the whole animal and plant kingdom as he writes:

> I turned and gazed, out over miles of bush,
> awed that the plants, the hunger of animals
> made such a simmering green Canaan of death.

The combination of green (for life), Canaan (Promised Land for the Jews) and death in the phrase "a simmering green Canaan of death" seems to highlight the fact that it is death that brings more to our world.

Mann's reflections on the role of carnivorous animals like the peregrine falcon in the food chain induces love for such creatures rather than condemnation as he writes with reference to the peregrine falcon:

> I began to love you then. You sky-wrote to me
> what you signal my species, when you migrate
> and float round the earth: *Leave me to my life.*
> (italics in original).

Mann's imagined message from the peregrine falcon to humans ("*Leave me to my life*") here underlines his attitude to other creatures. For him every creature has its own means of survival and none of these survival mechanisms is either good or bad.

Although Chris Mann highlights interdependence in nature in a good number of his poems, he is not oblivious to the fact that the symbiotic relationship in nature is fraught with violence and conflicts. Humans for instance have always competed with other animals for food, water and space. These conflicts have in some instances resulted in the death of both humans and nonhumans, particularly the latter. An example of a poem where Mann shows his awareness of human-animal conflict is "Spider" (73).

In "Spider" arachnophobia and the need for self-protection in humans as in other animals, leads to a seemingly needless killing of a spider. The spider's only crime here is to encroach on the space of humans. The spider's threatening or fearful appearance is captured in her description as a "murk, a haired phobia / spidering on over the threshold." The use of the experimental verb "spidering" here captures the sinister and threatening nature of the spider better than the term "crawling" would have done. In his scientific notes Craig comments on the widespread rejection and fear of spiders and on the role of the creature in human culture such as in James Bond's film *Dr. No*. Later, in a rare case of direct appeal to the reader, Craig enjoins

us to "think of spiders as allies in a world that might otherwise be overrun by insects, many of which are damaging rather than beneficial to our planetary ambitions" (72).

In the poem the poet-protagonist responds to the frightened announcement of the spider's presence by grabbing a book and beating the spider to a "smear." The ridiculous nature of his response dawns on the poet-protagonist who later warns would-be detractors:

> Don't laugh. Your turn soon
> to face a predator, its eyes
> intent on you and glittering,
> attacking you out of the dark.

The speaker fallaciously compares the threat from the spider to one posed by a large predator, such as a lion to whom the glittering eyes seem to refer, attacking from the dark. Nevertheless the poem succeeds in demonstrating moments of conflict of interest between species. The instinct for survival in both humans and nonhumans has led to unnecessary suffering or even death to creatures seen to be posing a threat on the lives of others. Besides, the fact that there are unequal power relations between humans and animals means that animals mostly end up as victims of death at the hands of humans even in situations where killing is not necessary. The fact that humans can easily kill animals has led to many unnecessary deaths of animals.

3.4 Human Predation and Abuse of Animals

In some of his poems in *Lifelines* Chris Mann indicts humans for their maltreatment and abuse of nature and animals. This comes as no surprise in a poetry project that highlights the kinship and interdependence of living things, particularly between humans and other animals. Although he shows elsewhere in *Lifelines* that it is impossible to completely avoid harming other creatures in our day to day activities, such as in agriculture, [112] and the inevitability of conflicts for survival in nature, in

[112] For instance in the poem "Mouse" (*Lifelines* 53). This poem demonstrates the inevitability of destruction of killing of other creatures in our daily activities. In the poem a tractor driver who is taking a midday break from tilling a field sees a mother mouse rescuing her litter when their nest is destroyed by the vehicle. He notices the mother mouse "limping around a furrow's clod," "a rounded nursery of grass upended in a chaos of stalks" and the infant mice wriggling in the sun. The mouse's behaviour prompts the poet-protagonist to make the observation that while questions of what or how of the universe can be solved or tackled by observation (using tools such as Hubble's telescope) and by means of mathematical calculations ("Einstein's scribbled sums"), questions of why (of the purpose of life) cannot be answered by science. For him "the why of life on this aired speck" [earth] / […] / writes its suffering and its hope in eyes like yours, mother mouse." That is to say if there is a purpose to life at all, it can be deduced from the struggles and suffering of animals for survival. In the poem, the mouse's struggle and determination in the face of adversity gives hope to life by ensuring its continuity.

some poems he also depicts humans as senseless killers who kill or abuse other animals for the fun of it or just because they can. This tendency exposes the domineering attitude and arrogance of many human beings. The motive behind Mann's exposure of the unecological ways of the lives of many humans and their abuse of nature, however, is to suggest alternative attitudes towards nature, such attitudes as of compassion, care, sensitivity and respect.

"Eastern Cape Rocky" (27) is a conversational poem whose casual and playful tone does not belie the serious issues it tackles. The poem starts with the sight of one of the fish floating belly up, dead. The poet-protagonist observes that "it is not that uplifting / watching a species gasp to its end." The wry understatement of the phrase "it is not uplifting" underscores the poet-protagonist's despair at the sight of the dead fish. For him if the death of this type of fish continues unchecked, it might lead to the extinction ("gasp to its end") of the species. The second stanza introduces the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest or self-preservation when the speaker suspects that perhaps it is the fish's predators, the otters or the fish-eagle, described as "that feathery hit-artist" who are behind the fish's death for the rule of survival says "Eat or be eaten. Adapt or exit." Further, in the poem we hear that "farmers plough / the river banks under, to plant more crops. / To pay higher bonds, fuel-costs / and school-fees." The plight of the fish is formidable as excuses and accusations emerge from the farmers, among other people, who destroy the river banks and in turn the river itself and its aquatic life. The farmers blame banks for increasing the lending rates forcing them (farmers) to plant more crops to manage their credit. In a situation like this there seems to be no hope in sight for the salvation of the Eastern Cape Rocky.

Mann also shows in the poem that introduction of new plant species too leads to the destruction of the Eastern Cape Rocky's environment. He singles out water hyacinth which he calls "the green stuff smothering your pool, / a floating sundeck" as one of the environmentally hazardous plants. He conjectures that the plant, native to tropical South America, must have been brought to South Africa by an early traveller. Botanists and gardeners are known to carry plants with them on their travels and the beautiful flowers of the water hyacinth must have caught the attention of one such traveller. Mann then goes on to blame the customs officials at Rio de Janeiro and

Durban airports for not being watchful enough to prevent the spread of the destructive weed in South Africa. Humans here are indicted for fouling their own nests until someone "rubs their noses in it," that is, forces them to concede. As in the poem, Craig well understands the "threats to the Eastern Cape rocky's existence" among which are "alien plants that choke and deoxygenate the streams and run-off from cultivated fields adding silt and chemical supplements to the brew" (26).

The friendly chit-chat that reminds one of the poem "Cut-Worm" continues to the end of "Eastern Cape Rocky" where the poet-protagonist offers impossible advice:

Please turn meaty, pal. Or purple.
Right now you are too thin for catfood
too drab to be a pet-shop freak

In a direct commentary to these lines Craig observes that "[u]nfortunately *Sandelia bainsii* [Eastern Cape rocky] is not a charismatic animal like an elephant or a cheetah and is of no economic value as food, or as an ornamental aquarium fish. Its champions are the dedicated few who see its demise as a loss to the diversity of the world that sustains us" (26). Essentially the poet and the scientist assume that people destroy the fish because they are useless to them. If they had use, as catfood or as pets, perhaps they would be treated with respect. As things stand, only a few people such as "[t]he man with the gumboots and nets," hailed as a hero, a dreamer, who seeks to educate his fellow humans about conservation, cares about the fish. The abuse of the fish for its lack of use shows or reveals an instrumental attitude where species are valued according to whether they are useful to humans or not. The poet however holds out the behaviour of the man in gumboots as an example of an ecological way of life.

Issues of exploitaion, domination and abuse of other animals also come through in "Kudu" (43). In the poem the poet-protagonist encounters a stuffed head of a kudu on display as a trophy in a bar. The poet's language and tone in talking about the kudu's head in the poem reveals his sadness and condemnation of the behaviour of his fellow humans. Mann writes:

Your head and the long straight curls of your horns,
all the tall-shouldered, tail whisking life-art of you

had been sundered in the bush and put on display,
between a dartboard and an ad for whisky in a pub.

The expression "life-art" evokes the beauty or aesthetic qualities of the kudu while

alive, the sort of beauty that no longer exists when the animal is dead. The word "sundered" underlines the violence and insensitivity of the killers of the kudu for such trivial aesthetic pleasures as looking at the head of a long dead fellow being. The act of displaying the kudu's head "[b]etween a dartboard and an ad for whisky in a pub" is here depicted as sacrilegious or profane on the kudu which deserves reverence and respect as an earth other. But the aesthetic tastes of unecological humans here override the interests of the kudu to live.

For the sensitive and ecologically aware poet-protagonist the stare of the stuffed head triggers sympathy in him and he walks across and runs his hand around the kudu's neck. This gesture shows an acknowledgement of an earth other – a sense of fellowship with a fellow inhabitant of the earth who is now dead. We later learn in the poem that the dead kudu reminds the poet-protagonist of live kudus he saw one thunder-resounding dusk in the veld where the athletic animals leaped over a fence. These were disdainful of the efforts of humans to enclose them behind a fence. But the dead kudu is no longer party to these acts of athleticism and defiance that her kind is known for. In his notes Craig also comments on the kudu's athleticism telling us: "[w]onderful athletes, they can clear a standard farm fence effortlessly from a standing start and protecting a vegetable garden from their nightly visits necessitates a fence height beyond any high-jumper" (42). Skeen's illustration for the poem also emphasises the kudu's athleticism and the bulls "corkscrew horns" which Craig says "are favourites with trophy hunters" (ibid.). In the background of her drawing we see a big kudu bull jumping a wire fence and in the foreground we see the prominent head of a bull with its corkscrew horns to the left, and a hornless head of a female to the right.

As the poem comes to a close it is the eyes of the stuffed head of the kudu that remain vivid in the mind of the poet-protagonist who reports:

> Your eyes were staring across the green baize table
> as I stood in the door. They are still staring at me now.

The kudu's stare or gaze here, despite coming from a dead animal, is, as Wendy Woodward would argue, no ordinary gaze but a more substantive and significant one.

> It is a gaze, initiated by the animal, meditative in its quietness and stillness [more so that it comes from a lifeless head] and which compels a response on the part of the human, as it contradicts any assumed superiority of the human over the nonhuman animal. It is the gaze of a being who actively claims his or her own subjectivity, looking at another who takes her human subjectivity as a given" (*The Animal Gaze* 1).

The gaze of the kudu in the poem serves as a reminder to the poet-protagonist about the animal's subjectivity and the fate of nonhuman animals at the hands of abusive humans. In the poem Mann seems to suggest sensitivity and compassion as attributes of an ecological way of life.

In "Porcupine" (61) Mann critiques human beings' insatiable desire for more land for agriculture that turns other animals into refugees. In the poem the only thing that shows the poet-protagonist that the porcupines are around are quills and eaten cabbage-heads. Mann emphasises the injustice done to the porcupine by the land grabbers by referring to him as "the indigenous clansman / despoiled of his land." In the poem Mann acknowledges the long existence of the porcupines on earth and laments the unecological ways of modern humans which might harass these animals to extinction.

In this poem Mann touches a conundrum that most ecophilosophical theories seem to ignore. That is the explosion of human population around the world and the concomitant ever increasing human encroachment into the dwellings of other animals. As long as human population increases at its present rate all battles of conservation of flora and fauna in most parts of the world are waged in vain. It is no secret that the more human population increases the more land will be needed for settlement and agriculture and therefore the more animals will be driven from their natural habitants onto the path of extinction. A lasting solution for the conservation of nature is control of the growth of human population, but this seems a tall order to humanity. Mann seems to realise this and does not go beyond critiquing human hunger for more land in "Porcupine."

Mann further laments human insensitivity towards, and abuse and destruction of, other animals in the poem "Tortoise" (75). The poem reveals the privileging of civilization by humans where "nature and animals [are] relegated to the status of subaltern" (Malamud 4) as we see human inventions such as cars emerge as agents of destruction for other creatures. In the poem the poet-protagonist who is driving to the sea, sees a tortoise on the road ahead and stops to rescue the animal. But already there were many animals killed on the road as the poet-protagonist tells us somewhat sentimentally:

> The road was a corridor of carnage.
> Snake, skunk, a hawk, a feather up
> lay spattered flat, grilling on the tar.

The phrase “feather up” evokes the image of the dead hawk with feathers waving in the wind. The poet-protagonist had hoped to prevent another death by picking up the tortoise from the road and pushing it through the wire fence on the side of the road to safety. And in ways that acknowledge the ancient lineage/lifeline of reptiles, more ancient than that of humans, the person admits to the tortoise: “Your kin had plodded the same shale, / Had chewed the same scrub when mine // Were tiny-handed, scuttling shrews.” According to evolutionary biologists, reptiles appeared during the Carboniferous Period of the Palaeozoic era (270 – 350 million years ago), while the “progenitors of man and his ape and monkey cousins,” the prosimians, who scampered around the forest, nibbling at hard fruits and nuts and resembled modern tree shrews in appearance and habits, only came onto the scene during the Palaeocene Epoch of the Cainozoic Era (60-70 million years ago) (*Life before Man* 26).

Before the poet-protagonist can whisk the tortoise to safety, a truck wheezes past crushing the poor creature. The poet-protagonist’s tender care, concern and compassion for other animals are exposed by his sad tone and reaction to this development:

I staggered in the backwash of dust,
then harried across to pick you up.
The nave of your shell was shattered.
Your blood trickled over my hands.

The end-stopped lines here emphasise the emotions of sadness and pity for the injured tortoise. In this poem, human inventions, roads and cars, prove destructive and deadly to other animals. Although he does not say so in so many words, Mann advises care, compassion and respect to the lives of other animals in this poem. Craig’s commentary emphasises the proneness of tortoises to die as road kill as ‘[d]rivers seldom try to avoid wildlife unless the animals are large enough to damage a vehicle severely” (74). Unlike the poem, Skeen’s artistic depiction of the reptile shows one that has managed to cross a road and is approaching a wire fence. However, if the fence is an electric one then her life is as threatened as when she was crossing road.

4.0 Animals as Moral Subjects: Some Reflections

A project like Mann’s in *Lifelines* raises a number of questions. Why would Mann write about animals rather than about the social and political problems plaguing his post-apartheid South African society? Would demonstrating the kinship between

humans and animals help improve our treatment of animals given that we are also cruel to fellow humans? Doesn't claiming kinship between humans and animals imply that killing animals is morally objectionable as to do so would be to commit murder? Does Mann consider animals moral patients/beneficiaries? If so what attributes of animals does he consider significant to make them moral subjects? We need to ask these and related questions if we are to make sense of what we sometimes hastily and uncritically consider ecological writing or ecopoetry. Protest writing on behalf of fellow humans (racial, class and sexist hurdles not withstanding) is not the same as protest writing on behalf of nature or animals.

We need to dig deeper into the ethical assumptions that a writer makes to understand his/her conceptions of nature and animals. Merely saying that a writer shows ecological sensibility or represents nature compassionately in his/her writing, as is often the case in many ecocritical essays, betrays a shallowness of critical analysis. Engaging with the philosophical questions that the work raises will enable us avoid being reduced to mere cheerleaders or praise singers for writers who on the superficial level appear to show a biocentric attitude (Wylie, "Elephants and Compassion" 80).

With regard to the possible charge against Mann of abdicating his duty to his society, I think that at this age and era when human irresponsible behaviour towards the environment has led to serious ecological woes and looming catastrophes, writing about animals or nature is no less important than writing about poverty, hunger, racism, homophobia, etc. In the end it is we, humans, who either stand to benefit from lessons drawn from literary works or shall end up paying the ultimate price for our unecological lifestyles. In his poetry Mann is concerned with our unecological ways, our exploitation of nature, and seeks to conscientize his readers about biodiversity. Nevertheless, like his counterparts, Mann does not seem to recognise the connectedness of forms of oppression and takes for granted that every human being, regardless of socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, would construct his/her belonging to the cosmos in the same way. But the question of belonging is more complex as it is tied up with contexts (social, cultural, economic) that influence constructions of identity and belonging. The poor, oppressed and marginalised in society would construct their sense of belonging differently from the affluent and privileged, often in unecological ways geared towards survival. This shows that ecological problems cannot be meaningfully tackled independently from human rights

problems and vice versa. As for our being cruel to fellow humans who are much closer to us than the animal relative, the continued presence of human-perpetrated evil in the world has not stopped some people from speaking against it. We can only hope that in a small way messages about our kinship with the biotic world will have their intended effect.

Further, although regarding animals as kin carries with it the possibility of a murder charge if one kills an animal for food or in self defence, Mann's sophisticated handling of our relationship with animals in *Lifelines* anticipates and invalidates such a charge. Although Mann sees humans and animals as related or similar, he also realises that they share fundamental differences. Killing an animal is not exactly the same as killing a human. Although the two are related Mann does not view humans and animals as equal. For him the

> infinite worth of each unique life, however small, insignificant, or humble, depend[s] not on its being equal to [humans or other creatures] but, instead, on its making a peculiar contribution to the wholeness constituted by almost endless differences of diversely individualised beings" (Kroeber 57).

Moreover, Mann's recognition of interdependence in life and a symbiotic relationship in nature means that he, as he shows in "Zebra" and "Peregrine Falcon," does not view predation either by humans or animals as something negative but positively as a sacrifice. He, therefore, is not against killing *per se*, but against wanton killing of animals. The poem "Kudu" is a good example. While killing the kudu for food may not be morally objectionable (although he does not say so), to kill it with the intention of showing off that one has killed an animal by displaying it in a bar and leaving the carcass to rot in the bush, is immoral because one destroys a life to achieve a trivial benefit. Analogously, killing a fellow human being is not morally unjustifiable at all times. But many of us would consider mounting the head of one's enemy on the wall of a living room, or drinking from it on special occasions as Okonkwo does in *Things Fall Apart*, a prima facie wrong. Humans and animals may be unequal, but Mann thinks that we should respect their dignity (Cataldi 2002). Displaying the heads of dead animals to show how many we have killed is a mark of disrespect for the animal's dignity. I wish to argue here that for Mann, the question is not whether animals are sentient (Singer 1975) or have rights as subjects of life (Regan 1983); whether they have emotions, reason, consciousness or autonomy. Rather, it is whether, insignificant though they might be, they, as individual beings,

contribute to the wholeness or continuity of the 'lifelines' on earth. If they do, they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and with sympathy, care, love and responsibility. In *Lifelines* Mann envisions a sustainable lifestyle for us with regard to the way we relate with earth others; a way of life that promotes relational selfhood, as opposed to hyperindividuation and dominion.

In expressing these ideas in *Lifelines* Mann uses poetry of good quality. He employs disciplined stainzaic form as well as allusive and suggestive words and phrases that evoke a wide range of ecophilosophical issues. His seemingly simple language may fool one into thinking that what one is reading is not poetry, but on closer examination one discovers that Mann uses alliteration, occasional internal rhyme, anaphora, parallelism and other poetic devices to achieve his intended tone, mood, rhythm and emphasis. Mann also uses apostrophe, clarity of observation and detailed descriptions of the animals in the poetry to bring a sense of immediacy of the experience of his encounter with the animals to the reader and to underscore affection, closeness to, or fellowship and kinship with, the imagined or encountered animal. He therefore comes across as a poet who is in control of his material and, true to his observation in an interview with David Levey, even if his reader disagrees with his ideas, s/he would still find the poetry appealing because of its aesthetic aspects (Mann and Levey 229-230).

5.0 Conclusion

The chapter argues that Chris Mann's poetry examines relational selfhood with respect to the ways in which humans interact with nonhuman animals. That is, the ecological self that emerges from the poetry is not one that is hyper-individuated, a self separated from nature or animals, but one that is entangled with nature, one that is in a symbiotic web with nature. The chapter has also shown that in his depiction of animals Mann does not gloss over the differences between animals and humans. In this way he reveals his construction of space-consciousness and humility in nature and also avoids the pitfalls of deep ecology or transpersonal ecology and is more in line with an ethics of virtue. Deep ecology and transpersonal ecology, as Plumwood observes, analyse the problem of instrumentalism or abuse of nature as "one of separation and difference (for which the cure is taken to be merger or holism), rather than as one of dualism and hyperseparation." Consequently, these ecophilosophical approaches tend to "interpret relational selfhood […] in ways which stress connection

and merger and deny difference (either of selves or of interests)." However, Plumwood rightly argues that "an adequate account of the ecological self must be able to recognise both the otherness of nature and its continuity with the human self" (160). This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that this recognition of "the otherness of nature and its continuity with the human self" is the central aim of *Lifelines*. The different modes of communication in the book (art, scientific texts and poetry) work together to communicate and reinforce this message. However, given the silence of the animals who are the objects of human artistic, poetic and scientific gazes show the extent to which ecology and environmentalism are a projection of a human point of view or perspective of nature. As a project, therefore, *Lifelines,* like taxidermy and animal photography during the era of colonisation, somehow exposes the human effort to "capture and to reproduce 'wild' animals" (Ryan 205) or is a manifestation of the human "desire to posses and control nature" (ibid. 209) by freezing the complex lives of these beings, reducing them to a few facts on paper, and displaying them to "audiences eager for glimpses of exotic wildness and knowledge of natural history" (ibid. 206).

Further, Mann's poetry shows that the ecological self is a self-in-relationship and not a self up-and-above nature and animals. The poetry shows that although human and nonhuman animals share fundamental differences they are related as they share some aspects of their genetic compositions. This scientifically proven kinship renders incorporation outmoded and radical exclusion or hyperseparation typical of Cartesianism senseless. In Mann's poetry this shared genetic composition, which underscores kinships between/amongst species, emerges as a source of community, mutuality and coexistence between humans and other animals while the differences evoke respect, awe and admiration rather than instrumentalism. The ecological self in Mann can therefore be "viewed as a type of relational self, one which includes the goal of the flourishing of earth others and the earth community among its own primary ends, and hence respects or cares for these others for their own sake" (Plumwood 154).

Nevertheless, Mann is not blind to the conflicts amongst living things for survival or the destructive and abusive behaviour of humans towards other animals and nature in general. While he deplores the unecological ways of humans, Mann regards the other conflicts and struggles between/amongst species as the normal order of life on earth. Viewed from an environmental ethics point of view Mann's animal

poetry eschews the rationalist and universalistic moral theories of Regan and Singer for example, and values relational selfhood and virtue-based moral concepts such as respect, sympathy, care, love and responsibility in our dealings with animals.

Mann's skilful choice of words and phrases in his poetry enables him to successfully allude to or explore a number of ecological issues such as our kinship with animals, evolutionary biology and the fact that we are descended from other life forms, the skilfulness of animals that shows that they are not inferior to humans, and human abuse of other animals, in ways that show the need for the adoption or construction of relational selfhood and deplore hyper-individuation. The use of the poetic form also enables Mann to express these ideas as well as his feelings aroused by his encounter with his poetic animals simply and easily. His use of apostrophe as a poetic device and the depiction of his encounter with the animals in their natural environment in the poetry also fosters the need for a sense of belonging, for it is "through the accumulation of experiences [that] we attain a certain sense of belonging" (Tuan qtd. by Burger 21). The encounter also enables Mann to bring out the full horror of human abuse of animals in a poem such as "Kudu" for example. Further, the informality of his language, conversationalism and spontaneity of the monologue in the poems highlight propinquity and the idea of kinship between humans and animals. To an extent, therefore, Mann succeeds in communicating his ecological message through his chosen medium of poetry.

However, Mann's views about animal death as a sacrifice are somewhat controversial. He seems to belittle the value of individual animal lives in favour of the continuity of life as a whole. But, as I have argued above, although other forms of life may benefit from the death of another, for the dead animal the death is a loss, or harm. Besides, to call an animal's death a sacrifice is to sanitise the ugly reality of death and to reveal a dangerously anthropocentric perspective of the world that belittles and rationalises the death of other creatures. Further, although Mann's call in his poetry for us to reduce anthropocentrism and hubris and belong to the earth/world is commendable, it gives the impression that such a step is easy to take. In reality, however, the politics of belonging "are highly contextual" as they are "heavily influenced by contexts and circumstances – political, economic, social, and cultural" (Croucher 41). Mann seems to take for granted that the emergence and reconfigurations of identity/belonging for poor black South Africans will be the same as those of rich, privileged white and black South Africans irrespective of

“[e]conomic interests and circumstances and political influence. The reality, however, is that while the privileged few may feel a sense of belonging to their habitat in South Africa, for example, the excluded majority poor will focus on acts of survival leading to, in some cases, the destruction of biodiversity. This shows that of human, animal, and earth exploitation are intimately connected “such that no one form of exploitation can be abolished without uprooting the others” (Best, “The Killing Fields” np.).

Conclusion

In this study I analysed and examined the manner in which animals are represented in selected poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. I discussed various modes of animal representation and the ideological influences on the poets' manner of animal representation. I also discussed the kinds of poetic forms employed in the representation of animals and examined the manner in which the environmental crisis is seeping into contemporary southern African poetry. Further, I determined the extent to which the values expressed in the poems are consistent with, or different from, current ecological orthodoxies and the ways in which the metaphors generated in relation to animals influence the way we treat them. I also determined the motivation for, and investigated the significance of, using particular animals within particular historical/political and cultural contexts and identified the writers' attitudes to animals and the relationship that such attitudes produce between humans and nature. I argued that the poets' social vision influences their animal representation and that their failure to see or address the connection between forms of abuse (nature and human) undercuts their liberationist quests in the poetry.

I showed in my study that animals are represented in various ways (even in the work of the same poet) in poetry from southern Africa. Through my examination of the representation of animals in the selected poetic texts the study revealed the poets' conception of the political and social landscapes in their countries and the manner in which some of them use animals to construct their identity, resist oppression, imagine rural and urban landscapes, and conceive notions of heritage and belonging to the cosmos.

In the introductory chapter I signalled the thrust of the arguments in the thesis and mapped the area of investigation. I sketched the eco/philosophical context of the study, justified it, and gave an outline of its objectives and scope, and reviewed the literature on ecocriticism in African literature. In Chapter Two, I analysed the representation of animals in the poetry of the Malawian poet, Jack Mapanje. I argued that Mapanje's representation of animals is closely connected to his resistance of social injustice, especially the debasement of culture, abuse of power, despotism, oppression and exploitation of the masses by the hegemonic regime of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda in Malawi. I also contended that Mapanje uses animals allegorically to carry his criticism and bitter message for the vainglorious oppressors. As such animals

in Mapanje's poetry function as metaphors for human characters that he holds in contempt or seeks to satirise or censure. Further, I observed in this chapter that Mapanje's handling of animal metaphors is not without problems, however. Some of the animal metaphors can be interpreted in two or more ways, leading to confusion in the message. Besides, by using small and harmless birds such as chickens and sparrows as metaphors for the oppressed and victimised in the Malawi society Mapanje casts the masses for whom he speaks, as pathetic, weak and helpless. The oppressed emerge as impotent figures that one would not expect to initiate action to rid themselves of the lions, hyenas, leopards and crocodiles (that is, oppressors). A focus on the representation of animals in Mapanje's poetry reveals that if the poetry at all fails in its resistance to oppression, such failure may be rooted in the poet's at times unselfconscious use of particular animal representations to depict the oppressor and the oppressed in society.

I examined animal representation in the epic poetry of Steve Chimombo, the focus of Chapter Three, against the theme of socio-political change in Malawi. I observed that Steve Chimombo uses mythic, cultic and fabulous animals to respond to the changes in his social and political environment. Like Mapanje he subtly protests against the abuse, oppression and deception of the people by those in power. For him the change from colonialism to independence and later to multiparty democracy is only a change of types of oppressors and exploiters.

In his poetry Chimombo uses animals, real or mythical, as metaphors for a tyrannical leader (the Malawian despot, Banda) and his regime, as metaphors for other individuals in the poet's society, and, in line with his dialectic vision, as symbols of cataclysm, death and destruction, re/creation, and rebirth and regeneration. The mythical Napolo, for example, serves as a metaphor for Dr. Banda and his regime. The choice of Napolo as a metaphor for Banda, however, has the unintended consequence of depicting Banda as an invincible force. Just as humans are powerless against the real Napolo, they would equally be helpless against Napolo Banda. Unsurprisingly, the tough censorship of the period of writing notwithstanding, Chimombo's *Napolo Poems* suggest no course of action for the people to take in order to rid themselves of the monstrous regime.

I argued that in his poetry Chimombo's attitude to animals is essentially aesthetic. The animals we encounter in Chimombo's poetry (especially those that are "real"), as is the case in Mapanje's poetry, are mere abstractions which Chimombo

appropriates and exploits to serve a poetic purpose of critiquing and satirising human behaviour.

In the next two chapters, Chapters Four and Five, I focused my critical gaze on Zimbabwean poetry in English. In Chapter Four I analysed animal and nature representation in the poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya. I showed that an ecocritical reading of Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya's poetry reveals that the two Zimbabwean poets' use of animals and nature is critical in unravelling their conceptions and construction of urban and rural landscapes in Zimbabwe. I argued that ecologically, the two poets' use of animals highlights people's embeddedness in their ecology, and exposes the relationship between people, land, flora and fauna. The use of the animals and description of the landscape, also reveals the poets' ecological awareness and their displeasure about the abuse and destruction of nature, including trees and animals, while the rural and urban landscapes work as metaphorical maps of their childhood and adulthood experiences, real or imagined, and of their attempts at self-exploration and discovery.

In their poems dealing with urban Zimbabwe Zimunya and Hove dwell on worldliness and ambition of the city, its corrupt, evil and decadent nature. The dog functions symbolically to represent this squalor and to tackle human foibles. Unlike in the rural poems where animals mostly show the people's integration within the ecology, here the use of the dog to represent eroticism, lust, prostitution and moral decadence reveals that Zimunya unconsciously endorses the subordinate role of the dog in as well as its abuse in African society, in particular, and human society, in general. At the same time he reinforces the negative associations of, and ambivalent attitudes to, the dog. However, contrary to the negative perceptions and associations of the dog that we encounter in Zimunya's poetry, in the poet's Shona culture dogs' names play an essential role in subtle communication of grievances between or amongst neighbours (Tatira 2004). Besides, in depicting migrants and inhabitants of the city's "underground" as undesirable hateful elements (mangy dogs), Zimunya perpetuates the colonial perception of migrant blacks as unwelcome spoilers of the cityscape. His views about the urban poor also resonate with those of the ruling elites who in the year 2005 undertook to clean the cities and towns of Zimbabwe of undesirable inhabitants.

An attempt to draw similarities among the four poets above showed that Mapanje, Chimombo, Hove and Zimunya's representation of animals is informed by,

and is consistent with, their humanistic vision. The poetry of these four poets "attempts to create a congenial society for [humans] to live in" (Okhakhu 293). These poets envision a moral, just and democratic society, free from oppression and exploitation. In their focus on the problematics of neo- or post-colonial history, on the exposure and critique of oppression and exploitation, tyranny, selfishness and greed, these poets share in common the preoccupations of many other African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, and Ayi Kwei Armah, among many others. As Achebe observed years ago, "[a]n African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant – like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames" ("The African Writer" 137).

These poets, in the words of Tanure Ojaide and Joseph Obi, "find themselves in a historical vortex to which they respond." They therefore act as "watchdogs of their societies whose values they often guard. So they reflect the existential conditions of their people." Like other African writers, these poets "are deeply rooted and are products of their individual environments" (Ojaide and Obi viii).

Furthermore, like other third generation African poets, that is, African poets born in the 1940s and 1950s, Mapanje, Chimombo, Hove and Zimunya "see themselves as agents of change, directing their efforts sometimes at local socio-political and economic issues, raving against the social ills of corruption, injustice, and economic mismanagement in their countries" (Ojaide 143). However, in this age of environmental crisis a writer's commitment should not be judged by his/her concern with human society and human affairs alone. The plight of our planet earth and its creatures are equally a burning issue for the modern writer.

Given that our ecological sensibility or our consciousness, understanding and construction of animals and nature are mediated/informed by historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts, and personal experiences, these poets use animals and nature to address social and political problems that affect or impinge on them. Independent of human imagination and consciousness animals and nature are devoid of meaning and symbolic associations. In their poetry, the four poets invest meanings in animals and nature, meanings which have a bearing on the ways in which we relate with these entities, to make sense of their existential positionality. However, the poets' seemingly exclusive focus on human welfare and justice obscures the now well acknowledged fact in liberationist discourse that human and nature oppression are

closely interconnected and both need to be addressed if total and meaningful liberation is to be achieved.

The fifth chapter of my study dwelt on the representation of animals, in particular, and nature, in general, in the poetry of another Zimbabwean poet, Bart Wolffe. In the chapter I examined how Wolffe's nature/animal poetry, especially in *Changing Skins*, acts as a celebration of his "retreat from society into nature" (Johanne Clare 165). I argued that for Wolffe nature is a sanctuary, more welcoming and accommodating than the violent and harsh human society and he uses nature to construct his identity and belonging and as a means of self-definition. I also discussed in the chapter the ways in which Wolffe uses nature to inscribe his subject position onto the Zimbabwean landscape and showed that in the process of celebrating his retreat into nature and inscribing his identity onto Zimbabwean landscape and geography, Wolffe reveals an ecological vision and disrupts the colonizing gaze of his predecessors. But, the chapter also showed, Wolffe's ecological vision is limited by his anthropocentric views and his reduction of nature to a resource and spectacle as well as his portrayal of the Zimbabwe landscape as devoid of suffering and struggling humanity.

Livingstone's and Mann's poetry as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven respectively shows how the two poets address ecological concerns in their individual ways. Chapter Six examined Douglas Livingstone's depiction of animals and discovered that although in some of his poems animals emerge as ridiculous, ugly, brutal and cruel, in others Douglas Livingstone protests against the abusive and exploitative ways in which we relate to animals and extends empathy/compassion and respect to suffering and dying animals. It is in these poems where we identify Livingstone as an ecologically-conscious poet who envisions a meaningful symbiotic relationship to the earth, in general, and animals, in particular. Another interesting discovery made in the chapter was that Livingstone's animal poems show a progression of the poet's thinking from a glaring anthropocentrism in the earlier poems by a youthful Livingstone, especially the ones that appeared in *Sjambok,* to an ecocentric position in *A Littoral Zone* by the more mature and aging Livingstone. However, in choosing to work within a largely non-political framework Douglas Livingstone, like Bart Wolffe, loses the opportunity to interrogate the connection between nature and human exploitation.

In Chapter Seven I focused on the themes of kinship, relational selfhood, and belonging in the poetry of Chris Mann. I argued that in his ecopoetry Mann exposes the complex ways in which humans relate to other animals. The poetry explores relational selfhood with respect to the ways in which humans interact with nonhuman animals. I also argued that the ecological self that emerges from the poetry is not one that is hyper-individuated, a self separated from nature or animals, but one that is entangled with nature, one that is in a symbiotic web with nature. In the poetry Mann constructs space-consciousness and humility through his recognition of "the otherness of nature and its continuity with the human self" (Plumwood 160).

Further, I mentioned in the chapter that Mann's poetry brings to the fore a call for belonging to the cosmos and highlights the fact that although human and nonhuman animals share fundamental differences, they are related as they share some aspects of their genetic compositions. This scientifically proven kinship renders incorporation outmoded and radical exclusion or hyperseparation typical of Cartesianism senseless. However, regarding the notion of belonging to the cosmos that we encounter strongly in Mann's *Lifelines*, the emergence, and reconfiguration of different identity/belonging formations that could explain the way people of different social, cultural and economic backgrounds respond to the call to care and respect the earth and the creatures in it are not analysed.

With regard to the seven poets above I observed in my study that located within their poetry is an ecological vision and consciousness whose quality and consistence with modern environmental orthodoxy varies from one poet to another. Some of these poets, as the study showed, acknowledge the interconnectedness and kinship of all things, advocate a sense of belonging to the cosmos and community with animal others, decry our alienation from, and destruction of, nature, in general, and animals, in particular. They see a world in which compassion, communality, symbiosis and attunement are at the heart of human relationships with animals and the biotic world. This ecological vision influences their compassionate depiction of animals and nature in their poetry. Others invest meanings in animals and nature and use them to engage with socio-cultural, political and personal issues in various ways.

Among the things that inspired my study was the conviction that ecocritical and zoocritical practices should engage with environmental/ecological problems along with social and political problems affecting the societies of the writers under study, given that these problems are inseparable and also inform and reinforce one another.

However, my study revealed that the selected poets fail to appreciate the inseparability and interconnectedness of human, animal, and earth exploitation. The poets focus in varying degrees on either human exploitation and suffering or animal/nature suffering and abuse, thereby obscuring the connection between human and animal/nature exploitation. Many social and ecological problems stem from animal exploitation. Similarly, there are many social and ecological problems that are rooted in human exploitation. As such efforts to save animals are inseparably entangled with questions of democratization of society, equitable distribution of resources, social justice, equality, and human rights. In the same vein, efforts to end human oppression, exploitation, and injustice are also interwoven with questions of resource distribution and utilization, and animal welfare and liberation. What this entails as regards the findings of my study is that although interesting ecocritical and zoocritical work is being produced in Southern Africa, there is an urgent need for the writers to appreciate and explore the inseparability and interconnectedness of human, animal, and earth exploitation. Beside the connectedness of forms of oppression, the study also revealed that there are entanglements, intersections and linkages between ecological consciousness and a variety of ideological, historical, political, and cultural issues as well as the lived experiences or existential positionality of the individual poets.

In conclusion my study showed that studying animal representation in southern African poetry opens up a window through which to view and appreciate the poets' conception, construction and handling of a variety of culturally, politically, philosophically, and ecologically significant ideas about human relationships and human-animal/nature relationships. Analysing animal representation in southern African poetry also exposes the contested and constructed nature of animals as a metaphoric and formal resource for engaging and grappling with human- and ecology-centred issues in the region. It also exposes the multiple ways of being environmentally aware and the contestedness of ecological sensibility. My study, therefore, suggests two major things that need consideration in further ecocritical debates and endeavours in Africa. First, given the complex connectedness of ecological consciousness to personal, social, economic, political, and historical contexts, there is need for ecocritical and zoocritical debates to take into account a writer's existential positionality (which is crucial in his/her construction of knowledge and reality) in attempting to understand his/her ecological consciousness. In other

words, ecocritical and zoocritical practices in African literature should not be blind to the contexts under which particular literary forms, in this case poetry, are produced to appreciate why animals/nature are represented the way they are in the literature. This would help literary critics to avoid universalising some forms of ecological consciousness and flattening differences between/among writers whose work is judged either as ecological or unecological. Second, there is need for ecocritical and zoocritical debates in Africa to take seriously the degree of a writer's awareness and exposure of the interconnectedness of forms of oppression and exploitation in determining the strengths and limits of that writer's liberationist views and efforts.

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