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Imagining our end: South african apocalyptic fiction

Pitt, Daniela Dina

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CHAPTER 1: *Promised Land (Na Die Geliefde Land)*

"If you have to you can do almost anything" *(Promised Land* 217*).*

Karel Schoeman's *Na die Geliefde Land* (1972), translated into English six years later by Marion V. Friedman as *Promised Land* (1978), narrates the dystopian return to the Karoo of George Neethling, a young Afrikaner émigré who has returned from Geneva[1]. The text weaves a dark, gloomy tale of a post-revolutionary, post-apocalyptic South Africa. Regarded by Green as "an anxious literature", the novel is one of the first dystopian texts reactionary in its presentation of a post-apocalyptic, post-apartheid state and serves as an excellent entry into the versatility of apocalyptic rhetoric as a means to unveil choices for the possibility of a future [2]. The novel was prompted by historical events at the time, in particular a growing concern about the ossification of the right wing formation of the AWB[3] in 1973 (Titlestad 2015, 32). Set in an imagined future, it narrates a post-apocalyptic narrative that encompasses overwhelming fears prevalent amongst some whites at the time in which the novel was written, namely, that white privilege and cultural hegemony need to be protected at all costs, in order to prevent effacement. Further, the stark imagery reflects the assumption that any post-apartheid government of presumed black majority is incapable to govern and will spiral the country towards a political catastrophe and eschatological ruin. We understand that black majority rule has existed for approximately twenty years, even though we never encounter the majority other than during a short raid at Kommando Drift. White Afrikaner supremacy, which once dominated the political terrain of the country, has been replaced by the politics of reverse-apartheid. Repression and white disempowerment of their former hegemony has altered the life of a community of Afrikaners, who have become obsessed, holding onto whatever power they can, becoming an insular, ossified society.

Schoeman intensifies white fear even further by refraining from describing or naming the new political order other than using the exclusive pronoun "they"[4]. Details of the revolution, euphemistically referred to as "the troubles", remain intentionally scant, with the new military perceived only in terms of amorphous shadows, threatening

the attempted insurgency of the white minority. The small community, fearful, insecure and unwilling to embrace any political dispensation other than their own, live in an historical past, which glorifies Afrikaner Nationalism. George's return to an unfamiliar "overgrown road" (Schoeman 1972, 84) draws from him the admission that everything "in Africa is strange" (*Ibid.* 4). His brief journey, subsequent to the death of his mother Anna Neethling, is purposed to attend to his parents' affairs. His family farm, Rietvlei, now an abandoned heap of ruins, is to be sold as a final end to his connection to South Africa. In the *middest* and at a *saecula* moment of history, the dystopic present is confusing and muddled for him, an enmeshed world of repressed guilt and memories ruptured by the visible chaos and destruction.

The text, as a "future history", comments on both the present and the haunting past in a narrative that is future-oriented. The apocalyptic rhetoric and the hyperbolic dystopian experience in the text, use the eschatological lens to view the conditions that "are made to bear the weight of our anxieties" (Kermode 11). George finds himself an outsider; his first introduction adopts the mood of a military interrogation with the still unidentified Hattingh aptly referred to as "the interrogator" (Schoeman 1). George is "blinded by the sudden light" (*Ibid.* 1) and Hattingh's probing questions, "Who are you?...Where do you come from?"(*Ibid.* 1) lead George to conclude:

> This was an investigation…to see if he really was what he claimed to be and to ascertain if he could be trusted, and he wondered what password or proof of identity would satisfy the suspicious old farmer before him (*Ibid.* 2).

His relationship, alienated and distant from South Africa, is marked by speaking Afrikaans "like a foreigner" (*Ibid.* 2). George explains that he is "looking for the road to Rietvlei" (*Ibid.* 1), his disorientation visible in acknowledging that he has "missed a turn-off somewhere"(*Ibid.* 1). His entry into the farmhouse is uninviting: "the dim electric light" (*Ibid.* 2) reveals Hattingh's sons dressed in khaki clothing "offering resistance to his entry" (*Ibid.* 2). George senses "an uncomfortable silence" (*Ibid.* 2) as they sit down to a meagre meal of "dry porridge and a dish of stewed beans" (*Ibid.* 4). As an outsider granted entry into the anachronistic laager community, George comments that even though everything in Africa is now "strange" to him, he wants "to see it as it is" (*Ibid.* 4). The burden of his journey necessitates that he gain a greater understanding of this new world, now foreign and bizarre, which suggests a possible reunion with his ontological

roots. Lindfors (1994) suggests that he is required to explore his role both in and out of the community, and becomes both the observer and the observed . As observer, within his first encounter with the strained hospitality in the farmhouse, he notices two things that are jarring and unfamiliar. First, the gloom and obvious scarcity evidenced by the "chipped or cracked" tableware, even though "special plates with gold rims had been given to him as guest, relics of an old, lost dinner-service" (Schoeman 5). Second, a community trapped in its past history visible in the gallery of "pictures of national leaders and politicians whom he recognized from history books" (*Ibid.* 5). The central importance of past national heroes is further foregrounded when Mrs Hattingh, proudly recalls their names:

> Those she named had been people of substance in the old days or important in academic, legal and political circles, and most of them were known to him. He recalled introductions at parties and at dinners, whispered information given, the old, yellowing labels which each person wore as identification, like the tags on plants and young shrubs in a garden. 'Senator Lindeman…', 'Professor van den Heever…', 'She was a Miss du Plessis…' The titles usually meant nothing any more and the whole system of reference had collapsed long ago, but still they clung to their titles and the old, familiar framework, on the steep dark stairway of reality, as one might cling to a railing (*Ibid.* 11–12).

As an observer, he becomes privy to snippets of information about life before and after "the troubles". He learns from Mrs Hattingh that they were originally city dwellers, living a life of luxury and white privilege under Nationalist rule, while not understanding the political injustice this endorsed. The dystopian crisis is, in the context of the narrative, a retribution for the past injustices of apartheid visited specifically on this community. "I never expected that one day we'd live like this. It was forced on me," (*Ibid.* 16) she explains after having stated that after "the troubles" they "thought it safer to be on the farm" (*Ibid.* 15).

The retrogressive and moribund ambience on the Hattingh farm is not an isolated case. Small conclaves of Afrikaners have found refuge in secluded rural areas. The community of families survive on idealised memories, trappings of a past ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism, which uphold "the family land, an inheritance" (*Ibid.* 15). At Moedersgift, for example, Tant' Mimie, lives in a secluded, alienated world no different

to that of her ancestors. George learns that Bessie tutors in a pedagogical philosophy reminiscent of National Christian Education, while Raubenheimer, a self-proclaimed poet, writes second-rate patriotic propagandist poems, inculcating Afrikaner Nationalism in the young children.

If we consider the O'Leary taxonomy of the tragic and comic modes of apocalyptic rhetoric, the constituents of Afrikaners trapped in a life of the past, of dead Nationalist heroes and ideology, are trapped in the tragic mode. O'Leary suggests that apocalyptic rhetoric represents history "as a dramatization of good and evil" (O'Leary 6). In the comic mode, it has the potential to unveil the injustice of their ways and "to define and address", by locating the problems of evil in time, and thus look forward "to its imminent resolution" (O'Leary 6). However, the Afrikaner community, rather than engaging in the error of recalcitrant politics (O'Leary's "evil"), is engulfed by a fear of effacement, and thus is unable to reformulate a past into a meaningful future. For them the future holds a false hope of deferring eschatology. They are truncated from any possibility of engaging in the unveiling of the truth in the errors of their ways. This creates a dichotomy between an "us and them", between what is perceived as "good" and "evil". Their cultural dissonance challenges their confidence, seen in their sceptical acceptance that George should not be considered an outsider.

Promised Land positions the reader to witness events through the eyes and thoughts of a conflicted George. Details of characters, events both past and present, are revealed bit by bit, leaving the reader with a sense of unease of a dysfunctional and damaged country that, on the one hand, was once home for a young George and his family, and on the other hand, is the final, desperate stronghold for a retrogressive community who ludicrously idealise a lost world. The small constituents of Afrikaners encountered by George are self-driven into a past historical vacuum, their false sense of future defined by the limits of mythologised recreations of the past. Their identity is anchored by the past visibly portrayed in their life choices of the exceptionalism and isolation suggested by their out-moded *voortrekker*-type clothes, patriotic songs, dance and reminiscences "with voices growing ever more urgent as they recapitulated the facts…piling them up, layer upon layer, with almost desperate energy, as if they were busy building barricades of words and memories against the menace of reality" (*Ibid.* 161).

Unable to understand the present or engage in a South African future, George resorts to recollections of his youth, but even those prove fruitless in restoring a cohesive

past. While for George there are only "shards and debris of his memory" (*Ibid.* 3) from his childhood years on the farm, he appreciates that his mother on the other hand, had "a great longing" (*Ibid.* 38) for South Africa and in particular nurtured nostalgic mythologised recollections of a pastoral existence at Rietvlei. I suggest in this chapter that the apocalyptic rhetoric in *Promised Land* is allegorical, and that Schoeman employs the *plaasroman* as a subverted form to contest the dangers of myth-making and idealising Afrikaner heritage as they inhibit moving out of the apocalyptic crisis into a future. Further, I suggest that while events in the novel appear nihilistic and dystopic, Schoeman opens the space for a different discourse that has potential of a "perhaps if", suggesting a possible way forward into the future. Schoeman draws substantially on the traditional *plaasroman* as an allegorical means to challenge thinking about the future. The recollections of George's mother resonate with the idealised farm narrative of the Aangenaam valley in Pauline Smith's 1927 novel, *The Beadle.* These idealised descriptions serve to juxtapose the reality that confronts George of the destroyed Rietvlei farm. It is with George's "pilgrimage" (*Ibid.* 81) that the futility of myth-making is attested in it being reduced to a "sentimental, senseless journey" (*Ibid.* 18) of a return to a farm, for which his mother pined life-long. It spurs in him the longing "to try to recapture the dimly-recollected past, to try and find again the reality, and to resolve for himself all his conflicting feelings, among which were love and loyalty" (*Ibid.* 18). He acknowledges that his short three-day pilgrimage captures "the weight of the past and present, the things he remembered – things he thought he had long forgotten – the long journey…the inexorable nature of reality" (*Ibid.* 85).

Their present space, framed and defined by a petrified and unwavering former ideology is a *simulacrum* of a past anachronistic world. The chipped crockery on the table, is metonymic of a faded, broken ideology. Baudrillard reminds us that *simulacrum* replaces reality but can be perceived as real. Thus the Hattinghs and their *laager* community, cannot understand the consequences that their past world has on their current crisis. For them, unless they persistently hold onto their past and make it a present, it will evaporate. However reality requires the power of imagination to give it shape and form as it changes and evolves, empowering the ability to adapt and change. It is when imagination exhausts itself, Baudrillard suggests, that reality in turn evaporates. The *simulacrum* thus, while offering a temporary reprieve from present reality, intrudes upon it. The Afrikaner community receives false hope in their lifestyle as *simulacrum,* but in turn negates any possibility of engaging in the present. For them, past supersedes their

present and gives shape to it. Fearing eschatological effacement, they are unable to ignore, in Kermodian terms, the complexity of the quotidian, and move to the *saecula* end of a historical era.

As George is drawn into the *laager* community, he becomes aware that fear manifests itself as victimhood. The Hattinghs seldom travel after dark, as "that's the time they come, late at night, just before dawn" (Schoeman 219). George, as observer, once granted entry into the enclave, becomes the observed, with Hattingh feeding him morsels of information as a partisan preamble for dutiful support. Hattingh manipulatively details their difficult life, their stoic need to maintain their identity, narrated in order to win George's support:

> 'We've lost most of our land: they expropriated it, and we had to sell part of what was left for an experimental farm once – we'd had a difficult year. But there's more left than we can look after.' The cows knew the way home and had gone ahead.
>
> 'Does it pay to farm a place like this?'
>
> 'It's difficult, but what else must we do? Here we can at least enjoy some independence. We get enough to live on; we lead our own lives among our own people; we're more or less left in peace…' (*Ibid.* 30).

George soon discovers that the community is plotting a rebellion against the new government. At Kommando Drift, George is made aware of their subversive activity, perceived by them as "a sacred task" (*Ibid.* 163). Once again, as the observed, George is tutored as they attempt to invoke his sense of national duty:

> [We] must defend our heritage against all the dangers which threaten it, and we must stand shoulder to shoulder to encourage and support one another (*Ibid.* 163).

Gerhard Snyman, whose "eyes sparkled as he spoke like one inspired" (*Ibid.* 164) delivers a patriotic harangue; he is intent on coercing George into staying and joining the rebellion. As the evening evolves, the communal gathering develops into a make-shift political rally of sorts. Gerhard as well as two of Hattingh's sons (Hendrik and Johannes), are arrested and removed in a military raid at Kommando Drift with the understanding that they will never return. Kommando Drift becomes the emotional point of rupture for George. Prior to this, his cumulative experiences with the

community as well as witnessing at first hand the scorched remnants of Rietvlei, bring him to the realisation of the gulf between his mother's wistful memories of Rietvlei and the altered state of reality.

What is unveiled to him now is the truth, what O'Leary describes as the comic mode of apocalyptic rhetoric. Titlestad (2008) suggests that at Kommando Drift, the schism between the recollected past nostalgic longings of his mother and the dystopic present resolves as an understanding that he is alienated from South Africa and an outsider. He adds further that the burden of his traumatic journey leaves George disenchanted by the recalcitrance and obstinacy of white Afrikaners to engage in anything that differs from their historical past . George, cynical and pessimistic, returns to Switzerland having "realized afresh that he was an outsider faltering to find words for things these people accepted in silence" (Schoeman 208).

The novel's final sentence becomes the closure that "tomorrow morning he'd be home', an attestation that he has distanced himself from South Africa, and remains an outside observer(*Ibid.* 222). Thornton's "rolling apocalypse" is echoed in *Promised Land* with intertextual historical resonances (Thornton quoted by Steyn 25). As an allegory of the *Bittereinders*[5] and of *verkrampte* narrow-mindedness, it exposes through intertextual parallels, the obsessive mistrust, terror and anxiety as quotidian feelings of this obsolescent community. The determination and pious resilience of the Afrikaner community resonates strongly with the history of the *Bittereinders*. Like their historical counterparts, the Afrikaner community is prepared to fight up to the bitter end. They are unyielding, and have little regard for the consequences, prepared to accept capture as an overt sign of their martyrdom. Their "national consciousness", is driven by Calvinistic beliefs that their task has been mandated by God. Like the *Bittereinders,* their commando, aptly named Kommando Drift, is a meeting ground to plan guerrilla-like tactics. A previous attempt has left Rietvlei wrecked and razed, when police recognise that it is used as a makeshift military base for Afrikaner revolutionaries ready to plan an attack on the government. This is a sober reminder of the British "Scorched Earth Policy" (1899 - 1902), which rather than quelling rebellion, intensified its objectives even further.[6]

Derek Hook (2013), critical psychologist in psychosocial studies, discusses the impact of apartheid fifteen years after the transition to democracy, and offers insight on how the aftermath of the historical burden has impacted on South African society. His comments are pertinent to the study of *Promised Land,* particularly when we consider that the time setting of the novel is twenty years since the fall of apartheid. His discussion

centres on xenophobic attacks (2008) and the Marikana Massacre (2012), and he shows that these violent eruptions echo the failure of past historical engagement. He discusses how nostalgia for the past, drawn from Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* ("afterwardsness" or retroactive time), becomes a "temporal distortion" (Hook 4). He differentiates between temporality as a burden of history, and factual details of history:

> by 'temporality' I refer to the qualities of time, whereas with 'history' I refer to an amassed series of past (or on-going) events. In this sense, my concern here is with the temporality of a given history, rather than with the empirical and factual details of the history itself (Hook 4).

Linear temporality, for Hook, becomes psychosocial time with a repressed historical burden seen in repetition of events, fixation, regression or nostalgia for symbols of power. We think of the reclusive Afrikaners in *Promised Land,* who only perceive a linear temporality, and become fixated in a regressed nostalgia that prevents any forward thinking. If we consider Hook's suggestion, then I propose that the Afrikaners lack what he refers to as "Ethics of temporality", which are required in order to engage with past history and re-organise it into a "folding of times" with the present (Hook 204). They lack the perception to see the past as erroneous and unjust. In their obsession to retain the little power they have as a false safeguard to defer the end, they mythologise the past rather than understanding that the "past can be radicalised" in order to imagine a future (*Ibid.*) Titlestad suggests that "Progress and apocalypticism both conceive of time as linear and repress psychosocial dynamics of recovery, re-articulation and re-organization of the past in the present in order to (re)imagine a future" (Titlestad 2015, 39).

A sardonic rendition of a post-apocalyptic world, *Promised Land* is an striking text: it reflects deep-rooted white anxieties of the time (1972). Winner of the CNA award, it received instant critical acclaim. Lindfors (1994) suggests that it is possible that Gordimer and Coetzee may each have been influenced to some degree by Schoeman's arresting fiction. Even though at first, Schoeman was reticent about translating his novel into English (Visser as cited in Fletcher), the novel has been translated into Russian (by A.K. Slavinska in 1978), German (by Gisela Stege in 1993) and French (by Pierre-Marie Filkenstein in 2006). When, in 2003, the text was adapted to film under the directorship of Jason Xenopoulos, the transformation of the medium and the changed political

scenario in South Africa shifted the crisis to a post-apartheid environment. It invited new interpretations and popularised the already well-known novel. Lesley Marx draws on the parallels between the text and the film and presents an interesting argument that Schoeman's novel speaks to different audiences and that it draws on "its source material as a vehicle for commenting on post-apartheid South Africa and the world of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings"(Marx 21). Lindfors comments that at the time of publication, the novel had "attracted too much attention to be ignored" (Lindfors 54). Visser (as cited in Fletcher) views the text as a kind of extended political fable which subverts the political power of blacks and whites in the new (and imagined) post-apocalyptic South Africa. André Brink (1984), writing on apocalyptic fiction in South Africa comments that:

> What makes the novel particularly striking is Schoeman's portrayal of the Afrikaners as a pathetic group who, even after the Fall, cling desperately to obsolete customs, traditions, games: not even Apocalypse has taught them anything (Brink 1984, 193).

Titlestad (2008) comments that the ruptured present is discordant with a past that becomes the yearned and failed Utopia, as it represents everything that the present cannot hold. As time progresses, the nostalgic past is drawn further into the mythologised Utopia and distanced from the complexity of their history and the present. The Hattinghs believe that their compromised existence has resulted because of the *saecula* of political change since "the troubles"; yet, it is their inability to adapt and change that leads to their compromised existence. They blame external events for their suffering rather than reflecting and recognising that the way in which they position themselves in South Africa forms the epicentre of the apocalyptic crisis. The characters fail to recognise their complicity in whatever small or large measure because, for them, the past is the only reality to which to aspire. To accept ways of engaging with a new, multi-cultural existence would be deemed as absconding from their duty, summed up in Hattingh's words when he tells George that all they need is "courage and faith and tenacity" (Schoeman 1972, 183). Paradoxically, Hattingh fails to recognise that "courage", "faith" and "tenacity" are qualities that, when not positioned from white hegemony, can contribute to a future.

In exile, George and his parents have lived a life of privilege facilitated by the advantaged connections established through his father's diplomatic service in the apartheid government. Those whites who remained in South Africa, on the other hand, relegated to a life of oppression and hardship, were a mere "handful who decided to stick it out" living a brutalised, anachronistic and alienated existence, accepting a life of abject poverty and isolation(*Ibid.* 11). Along these dystopian lines, *Promised Land* refutes being branded oracular. Whilst presenting eschatological images of what Kermode alludes to as terror and decadence, it engages in a critique of the time in which the novel was written, warning of dangers of parochialism.

An obituary in the Cape Times (3 May 2017) two days after Schoeman's death, references an interview with Transfuge, where Schoeman had expressed his determination to show the dangers of a society that fears effacement, what he calls "oblivion" in their failure to reshape and remodel historical crisis:

> I think that any form of oblivion, in the sense of a blockage, of closing in, is potentially dangerous… What happens in an existence needs to be integrated into the personality ... 'verarbeitet,' reworked, digested (Cape Times 2017).

In his autobiography entitled *Die Laaste Afrikaanse Boek* (2002), Schoeman offers insight on his oeuvre. He considers *Promised Land* his most significant contribution to engaged literature protesting against the ideology that conditioned apartheid. "In a sense, this rare example of an engagement with the political climate in his work is also a departure within his own oeuvre" (A. Visagie, 2015, pers. comm., 12 April). Andre Brink, reviewing Schoeman's autobiography, concurs that Schoeman's writing, with the exception of *Promised Land* does not reflect a political conscience as a direct and forceful, message (Brink 2003)[7]. While Green considers the novel as a novel of "political reversal" (Green 245), Titlestad (2008) considers it a "cautionary prolepsis" suggesting that Schoeman presents a narrative that draws attention to and warns of the retributive actions of Afrikaner Nationalism and oppression; however, he argues, it may also be perceived by some perhaps as a "future projection", interrogating the present, reflecting the anachronistic and obsessive inflexibility of Afrikaner society of the 1970s (Titlestad 2008, 82). The subtleties in *Promised Land* allow the reader to infer what the writer suggests through the dystopic narrative and, more importantly, to extrapolate what has

not been said. In an interview with Erns Grundling (*Litnet* 2016), Schoeman speaks about the subtlety of his writing, what he refers to as "rhythms", which require nuanced inference:

> Ritme die belangrikste oorweging by skryf. " 'n Skrywer se rol is nie om betekenis toe te ken nie. Ritme is belangriker as betekenis. Hopelik het ek in 30 jaar bygedra om die Afrikanervolk te leer hóé om te lees. In my boeke gebeur daar niks nie, dalk het die lesers geleer om op hul tande te byt en deur die boeke te worstel. Want daar gebeur wel iets, tussen die lettergrepe, tussen die lyne" (Schoeman in an interview with Grundling 2016)[8]

The finer "rhythms" in Schoeman's writing support O'Leary's tragic taxonomy of the myopia of a community that is unwilling to recognize the folly of its ways and unable to distance itself from mythologized past. Green considers the dystopic narrative as a "political reversal" (Green 245). Perhaps one could suggest that if we consider O'Leary's tragic and comic modes, then the reader in his/her vicarious observations of events in the novel and tragic mode of its characters, will move to the recognition of the myopia of recalcitrant politics and the paralysis of fear of Afrikaner effacement, and as such move to the comic mode. In this way, the "rhythms" of the text work in a subtle multi-layered purpose as nuanced elements. The fully comic mode, allows the understanding to make effective choices, which have the potential to defer the End. Critics argue that the sophistication of the novel is such that it has alluded to and subverted the *plaasroman*, a revision of the traditional genre popularized in the 1920s and 1930s (Titlestad 2008; Coetzee 1996; Pordzik 2001; Lindfors 1994; Fletcher 1993). *Promised Land* "is a dystopian counterpoint to the 'plaasroman"'(Titlestad 2015, 35). Schoeman's form of the *plaasroman* is an allegory of Afrikaner conservatism, and, as counterpoint, exposes the folly and sentimentalization of Afrikaner Nationalism. The *plaasroman* is eschatological in form, as suggested in both *Promised Land* and, in Chapter 5 of this study, *Horrelpoot.* It delimits the grand narrative of Afrikaner ideology. In subverting the form, both Schoeman and Venter, I suggest, use the *plaasroman* to suggest an end-point of the death of Afrikaner Nationalism.

In his iconic study of the *plaasroman*, Coetzee explores how in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Afrikaans novel traditionally centered primarily upon the relationship with land, in particular the farm and *"platteland* (rural) society"

(Coetzee 1996, 1). In his discussion and study of Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883) and Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* (1927), Coetzee shows how each of these writers approaches the farm with a literary convention embedded in their own English tradition. In Schreiner's novel, the farm becomes an explorative lens of colonial South Africa and Afrikaner Nationalism as well as Calvinistic narrow-mindedness, and in microcosm, becomes a form where she is able to interrogate and critique values that its land (symbolically) and its inhabitants represent. Schreiner's farm is in decay, and the Karoo presented as arid, harsh and inhospitable:

> The farm by daylight was not as the farm by moonlight. The plain was a weary flat of loose red sand sparsely covered by dry karoo bushes, that cracked beneath the tread like tinder, and showed the red earth everywhere. Here and there a milk-bush lifted its pale-coloured rods, and in every direction the ants and beetles ran about in the blazing sand. The red walls of the farmhouse, the zinc roofs of the outbuildings, the stonewalls of the 'kraals', all reflected the fierce sunlight, till the eye ached and blenched. No tree or shrub was to be seen far or near. The two sunflowers that stood before the door, out-stared by the sun, drooped their brazen faces to the sand; and the little cicada-like insects cried aloud among the stones of the 'kopje' (Schreiner 32).

However, "Harmonie" in Smith's Little Karoo (*The Beadle*), is the nostalgic utopian celebration (Coetzee 1996). A close sense of community is established on the farm as it is "thus both a farm and a hub of the Aangenaam community"(Coetzee 1996, 5); the homestead represents intimate domesticity, a place of patriarchal capitalism and power and one that "ascribes to the principle of dutifulness" where "the institution of duties itself is the ultimate principle"(*Ibid.* 7). The homogeneity of the community is further entrenched by the valorization of its conservative and static nature and a general suspicion of outsiders who are perceived as a threat to the community. Of particular importance are Coetzee's observations about pastoralism in writings elsewhere other than South Africa. He relates and compares the function of the *plaasroman* to the German *Bauernroman,* prevalent between the two World Wars, climaxing between 1929-1938 with over 200 publications (Coetzee 1996). Socio-political factors, in particular the popularity of Oswald Spengler's *Kultuurpessimismus* and the growing Nazi nationalism, drew writers to explore nostalgic and idyllic mythologizing of pastoral narratives. Coetzee points to

the writers of the South African *plaasroman* who "see the crisis in the *platteland* more explicitly than [Pauline] Smith does as a conflict between peasant and capitalist modes of production" (Coetzee 1996, 14).

Nicole Devarenne (2009) comments that the *plaasroman* represents "South Africa's experience of colonial conflict, white supremacy, gender struggle and nationalism"[9] (Devarenne 627). The popularity of the *plaasroman* grew as "an ideological response" to the decline of problems resultant from economic and political impacts on agricultural farming and the consequential migration of Afrikaners to urban centres (Titlestad 2008, 224). The form becomes a nostalgic return for an idyllic environment where the community shares a symbiotic relationship with the land. Owing to its thematic call for utopianism and nostalgia, it has been considered and reconfigured as a genre at key historical moments, especially where genre and ideology are linked as a mythologised pastoral (lending credibility to Afrikaner Nationalism and identity). It has also been subverted, as Schoeman does so successfully in *Promised Land*, as a demythologised anti-pastoral (Devarenne 2009, Coetzee 1996). "Since the 1960s, leftist Afrikaans writers, concerned with the role of the early farm novel played in promoting white supremacy, have rewritten it in order to deconstruct its themes and tropes" (Devarenne 2009, 627). As examples, one thinks of Coetzee's writing (particularly *Disgrace*), Marlene Van Niekerk's *Agaat*, Gordimer's *The Conservationist* and Karel Schoeman's *This Life*, among others, which propose new directions of the *plaasroman* genre[10].

Schoeman's authoritative study *Olive Schreiner: A Woman in South Africa, 1855 – 1881* (1991), expresses his frustration at the iconic status conferred upon Schreiner by English-speaking South Africans "who after two centuries in the country have managed very little cultural identification with it" (Schoeman as quoted in Devarenne 628). For Schoeman, Schreiner should not be considered an English writer writing in South Africa, but rather a South African writer whose Groot Karoo breathes symbolic significance representative of the concerns as developed in the genre of the *plaasroman.* Thus, Schoeman sees the finer "rhythms" of Schreiner's Karoo transform into "a subjective Karoo, intensely experienced and depicted with equal intensity, which transcends the incidental limits of the actual landscape of the spirit and of the heart" (Schoeman as quoted in Devarenne 628).

Schoeman's ironic subversion of the *plaasroman* genre in *Promised Land* allows the rural locus of the farm and its austere and post-apocalyptic, dystopic surrounds to be

undermined as a pastoral refuge and idyll. The description of George approaching the farm reminds us of the harsh, symbolic descriptions of the Karoo farm in *The Story of an African Farm*. In an early description in the novel, Schoeman defamiliarises the farm as a mythical goal of return and thus frames it as a contested space:

> Now he could see the deserted yard, the outbuildings and sheds with rusted corrugated-iron roofs, a tractor and petrol drums. It was already late morning but in the house all was quiet and there was no-one outside. He walked aimlessly around the yard and past the outbuildings to a barbed-wire fence where he stopped to look at the land beyond the last sparse blue-gum trees: the prospect was bare, empty, desolate, the low line of the veld uninterrupted by hill or house. He stared at it, not quite taking in what he saw, and waited for some revelation, some explanation of his mother's love, her longing, her fidelity to which he had been witness all his life without himself ever being touched by it. But no revelation came: he found only solitude and silence, self-sufficient facts, as it were, before him (Schoeman 1972, 8).

The separate Afrikaner cultural identity regarded as a utopian stronghold by the community, here becomes an anachronistic and myopic perversion of the laager mentality. The farm and its promised land, paradoxically, become a temporary safety for the Afrikaner community, as a dystopic locus. The opening of *Promised Land* immediately evokes the importance of identity as a means of entry, "the password" required to acknowledge Afrikaner genealogy (Schoeman 1972, 3). Suspicious of outsiders who could threaten their safety, Hattingh offers George entry onto the farm purely based on the fact that he is "Anna Neethling's son...the daughter of Oom George and Tant Lottie"(*Ibid.* 3). The inflexible claim of the importance of Afrikaner heritage in the *plaasroman* here becomes ludicrous and obsolete in its principle, the absurdity of attempting to maintain an Afrikaner stronghold in a world where it no longer holds value.

Paul and Carla Hattingh remind the reader of Em, Lyndall and Waldo from Schreiner's novel. *The Story of an African Farm*, like *Promised Land*, explores the crisis of the enduring suffering of the spirit. While in Schreiner's text, the colonial world, as well as Calvinistic narrow-mindedness, render Em, Lyndall and Waldo victims of suffering, Schoeman's text shows the consequences of recalcitrant politics and a view fuelled by fear, on the younger generation. Johannes and Hendrik Hattingh, fearless in their

determination and obsession in organising a counter revolution, are prepared to die as martyrs for a cause which they see as just and sacred. They endorse the continued cycle of Afrikaner myth-making as "a shared sense of crisis" (Kermode 9, 16). They, like the young children who are being fed patriotic poems and songs by Raubenheimer, will continue to "live in crisis" as they are unwilling to reflect on their ways and that of their fathers (Kermode 26). Because they are rooted in the past, they cannot move from where they stand in the *middest* , from *chronos* to *kairos* and thus keep fuelling the mythology of Afrikaner Nationalism rather than engaging in any futurity. Stephen O'Leary's tragic mode may help us understand further that some of the younger generation are unable to move from a utopian rejoinder to the past, to the realistic present, and thus unable to engage in a feasible future. The tragic mode is cemented by emotional fear which in turn inhibits the ability to reflect on errors and move to the comic mode.

However, Carla and Paul Hattingh, like Waldo and Lyndall, are in contestation with their society, especially the choices imposed by their community, which they recognise as being the cause of their crisis. The parallel is drawn sensitively in an episode in *Promised Land*. George, climbing a ladder "leading to the loft" finds Paul who has withdrawn "from sorting potatoes in the storeroom" (2Schoeman 1972, 22- 23). In a later incident, George joins Carla and Paul in the loft where Carla reads a sentimentalised opening to a novel, which we understand to be a *plaasroman* of "a feebly-written story about unreal people" (*Ibid.* 118). Carla, however, picks up that the story "hovered on the edge of parody" and reads the extract with mocking exaggeration, angering Paul. In Schreiner's novel, Em tells Waldo that she had found a pile of books in the loft. Waldo discovers the books and "gloated over his treasure" (Schreiner 101). Even though he cannot understand the content of the books (as they deal with Political Economy), Waldo finds the experience to be "the still intensity of triumphant joy" as for the first time "the thoughts were his, they belonged to him" (Schreiner 101). What do these resonating incidents tells us? In both novels, the books are metonymic for a yearned escape from the quotidian. Waldo, who is sensitive and searching for truth, is drawn to the mysticism and wisdom in the promise of the leather-bound volume of Stuart Mill's *Political Economy*. For Paul, who is equally sensitive and perceived as the emasculation of Afrikaner patriarchy, the senstimentalised reading of the *plaasroman* in the refuge of the loft is a fearful alienation from the ways of his father and brothers. It is his only refuge as Carla explains:

> The attic is Paul's place, these are Paul's books, it's he who wants to lie here and dream of other things, other worlds (Schoeman 1972, 125).

Kermode reminds us that imagination is essential for any conceptualisation of futurity and to make sense of the here and now, while in *the middest*. Paul displays the sensitivity to understand that the present ways of his family are futile. He uses his imagination as a means to escape from the chaotic present, but as yet he cannot understand how to move beyond that. He feels overwhelmed. His entrapment in a world that he neither understands nor believes is reflected in his yearning for something different. Even though the world that Carla reads with irony is far removed from the quotidian he knows, he is drawn to the sentimentalised nuances they carry as myth. His impulse to escape his world holds the potential for O'Leary's comic mode; however, Paul's fear prevents him from moving beyond the present crisis. Schreiner's theme in *The Story of an African Farm* is the destruction of youthful dreams so pivotally articulated when Waldo watches a dung beetle whose labour at rolling the dung is destroyed by Doss, the dog. Schreiner's nihilistic suggestion of "a striving and a striving and an ending in nothing" echo the crisis that Waldo feels, and reminds us of the suffering that Paul experiences in his inability to move beyond the crisis (Schreiner 99). Schoeman's text interrogates the nihilism and the pessimistic mood prevalent in South Africa in the 1970s, and pushes the reader vicariously to feel the hyperbolic crisis and to make, perhaps, a different choice.

The pathos of Paul, as an Afrikaner of a new generation, is that he is paralyzed by the present – he cannot share the restrained political ideology of his brothers or his father. He appears rather to be apolitical, focussing on the emotions of his state of victimhood. He lacks the "courage and faith and tenacity" subscribed by his father, and is alienated from his family and community (Schoeman 1972, 183). He absconds from his duties on the farm, preferring to escape in the loft of the attic into his own world. Like Carla, he too is born on the farm but appears to have no interest in preserving his heritage. Despite his brothers' fervour for rebellion, Paul's paranoia is emotionally stifling and negates any possibility of political vision and hope. On the last night just prior to George returning to Switzerland, Paul, in a desperate measure, speaks "agitatedly" revealing his fear (*Ibid.* 210):

> "You saw what happened last night; I don't want it to happen to me – I don't want to end my life like Gerhard and the others, I don't want to become like Pa or Oom Wet or Fanie with his poems. Help me get away!" (*Ibid.* 210).

He remains the victim, incapable of seeing beyond the present, debilitated by growing fears, desperate to escape, viewing it as his only chance of survival. We are left with the final image of him clutching "the crumpled notes" George gives him, consumed by his own "terror" leaving little hope for survival (Schoeman 1972, 216). Carla shares Lyndall's quest for truth, to find a feasible means to survive in a challenged environment and world. She, like Lyndall, understands that the move away from the farm is an essential part of her growth even at the cost of knowing that there is no utopian dream of a better life. Unlike Paul, Carla is "not afraid" and it is her resilience and courage that drives her to leave the farm (Schoeman 1972, 211).

In omitting the key elements of the *plaasroman* in the engagement with land, its possession as the focus of Afrikaner mythology, Schoeman gestures towards a missing narrative, the need for a new narrative that needs to replace the old master narrative. Rather than having a comprehensive knowledge about the community, its labours and duties, and the domesticity of the farm, there seems to be tangential details of which knowledge is withheld. What is not said and what is not known become the points that are foregrounded for the reader. The missing narrative suggests the eschatology of the Afrikaans community in its obsession with mythologised notions of an Afrikaner Nationalism that is in danger of self erasure "from the map of South Africa" should it continue to negate an embracing philosophy (Pordzic 178). More importantly, the *plaasroman* is eschatological as it points to the end of Afrikaner Nationalism as projected in the genre itself. George in his observations on the farm, soon realises that details about the past and their present circumstances on the farm are scant. As pointed out by Pordzic, the strategy of withholding information intentionally subverts the understanding of a particular historical depth about the rupture of "the troubles" which resulted in loss of white supremacy. The reader, like George, is left disoriented by the "alien and incomprehensible present" (Schoeman 1972, 12).

The obfuscation in the text becomes an integrated part of Schoeman's style in *Promised Land* and suggests even further the idea that the utopian world presented in the *plaasroman* as damaged and unattainable. Coetzee makes an important observation in his discussion of the *plaasroman* genre in Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* by discussing the

importance of land husbandry. He explains "that the institution of duties is the ultimate principle -in other words, that the Aangenaam valley is an ideal community not necessarily because it follows God but because it follows its code of duties so religiously" (Coetzee 1996, 7). The prime duties would be obedience and charity and ensuring that the land is protected and laboured:

> At a mythic level, the farmer I am describing is forbidden to rape the land. Instead he must *husband* it, giving it devoted attention which will bring it to bear manifold, yet remain fertile for succeeding generations. In the logic of the myth, the sons who inherit the farm husband the same land; or to put it in another way, the generations of husband-farmers are the same (mythic) man (Coetzee 1996, 3)

Promised Land deconstructs the mythic level of the *plaasroman* and becomes a "demythologizing dystopia" where the aridity of the land becomes the "contested site of cultural codes" (Pordzic 179). Rather than building on Afrikaans cultural identity, the novel deconstructs this identity, and by so doing renders it to become tragically futile (*Ibid.*). Details in the dystopian present show that the past cannot be reconstructed as utopian in the present and hence the future. This is subtly woven into a short discussion early in the novel between Hattingh and George, where George is told that on the farm the family "can at least enjoy some independence…among [their] …own people" (Schoeman 1972, 31). A few lines later however, the past as an incomplete narrative is suggested in his detail regarding the family Bible:

> So little of the past has survived: the graves, the house, a few old portraits…Even our family Bible has disappeared. It was an eighteenth century Bible with a lock, a family heirloom, a valuable thing. When I was little I always longed to be big enough to pick it up. But it disappeared, everything disappeared, before our eyes you might say (*Ibid.* 31).

Schoeman's demythologising both of the *plaasroman* and of recollections of a past national, or personal history suggest perhaps that memory has the potential to be an indicator or effacer of cultural identity. In its attempt to remain stoically rooted in a past, unchanging history, the community ironically moves towards annihilation. Schoeman engages assiduously with the requirement to evolve different, perhaps even

unorthodox representations of cultural survival. The Pauls of society need not feel thwarted by terror, the Hattinghs need not hold onto a past with obsessive fervour. The message conveyed is rather that the community, thwarted by white fear and insecurity, is doomed to destruction if it maintains its current cultural fetish.

David Medalie in his paper entitled "The Uses of Nostalgia" (2010) points to the recurring motif of nostalgia in South African literature of apartheid or post-apartheid. It is important to consider Medalie's comments in light of the apocalyptic rhetoric in *Promised Land*: does it convey the idea that the past in apartheid is lost and should be lamented, or does nostalgia hinder any engagement with the future? Medalie differentiates between two different forms of nostalgia. The first, "unreflecting nostalgia", is aimed at idealising the past as a utopia and myth, much like the glorification of an Afrikaner cultural past. This form of nostalgia prevents any ethically conscious engagement with the present. The second, a "critical" or "evolved nostalgia" recognises the potential in memory to construct links to both the past and the present. This is transformative in an understanding of the past and how it impacts on the present. For the Hattinghs and their small Afrikaner community, the past with its feebly constructed utopia and scattered memorabilia, becomes their symbol of lost heritage and power. This serves no purpose other than feeding myth and stifling any future-oriented vision. The khaki outfits, discoloured photographs of former national heroes and chipped, unmatched crockery that is used for George's benefit, point to a time that has little bearing on the present.

Memories ensnare the present and distort the past. In its idyll, the past's complexities have been over- simplified and reduced as potential on which to reflect and to learn. Mrs Hattingh, at one moment, explains to George that her life prior to "the troubles" was filled with joy and a sense of freedom and security – "it was fun" she admits (Schoeman 1972, 16). She nostalgically remembers experiences and people so that "her face lit up at the recollection" (*Ibid.* 16). For her, memory validates her present sacrifices, as it becomes a time to cherish – an idyll. In her recollection, George draws parallels to the exiled in homes overseas, where their unreflecting nostalgia is visible: "the same recollections were called up, the same facts endlessly repeated, part of the investment on which exiles had to exist unfamiliar surroundings" (*Ibid.* 16 – 17). The past, framed by privileges of white supremacy, removed from a conscience of shared accountability for unjust actions, becomes the shared utopian experience of the community that reinforces cultural unity and offers temporary escape from the current

traumatic reality. As it is unreflecting, it prohibits engagement with present reality and past history. While the men dream of patriarchal power, the women recapitulate past events with the growing urgency of embellished memories, "piling them up, layer upon layer, with almost desperate energy, as if they were building barricades of words and memories against the menace of reality" (*Ibid.* 160). For the patriarchal Afrikaner men, the recollected experiences of the women spur patriotic fervour to do whatever is possible to return to those idealised trouble-free times. To do this, as attested by Gerhard, they must perform "a sacred task" to defend their "heritage against all the dangers which threaten it…to encourage and support one another" (*Ibid.* 163).

George's "dimly-remembered past" is a rendition of contesting emotions as critical or evolved nostalgia, for the memory of his mother (*Ibid.* 18). On the one hand, the memories nostalgically woven by his mother's pastoral idyll, drive him to return to Rietvlei to honour her wish and memory. As an outsider looking into Africa, he understands the danger of holding on to nostalgic memories in a political landscape that needs to embrace change. His evolved memory moves him to a folded experience for an understanding of a reality different to the present dystopia:

> If he were older and still remembered the country clearly, he would probably prefer memories to a confrontation with a new reality" (*Ibid.* 17).

His contesting emotions "to remember something which he thought of as 'Africa',… evoke in him mixed feelings of love, homesickness and curiosity" (*Ibid.* 18). George's evolved memories however, are interspersed with the repressed guilt of abandonment: the abandonment of his mother's land (and her longing to return) and the abandonment of a country shared with other exiles who have fled South Africa:

> The longing remained, pitiless, inescapable, and always, it had seemed to him in his youth when he observed the exiles, they had left their trunks half unpacked in readiness for return. In the entire structure of the lives they had built up in foreign parts only one thing had reality: the land they had once possessed and then lost. (*Ibid.* 87).

His journey to South Africa and in particular to Rietvlei, does not offer appeasement. It unveils to him the reminder that the past and present are irreconcilable and that the insularity of the community will secure their annihilation. It also suggests in

all its emotions that the past cannot be merely forgotten; rather, it needs to be engaged, reworked to be fully understood. Only then does the present here and now grow in clarity for a feasible future. It further compounds his sense of complicity and guilt awakened by Paul's pained response at the realisation that George has made a decision to leave; something that Paul has yearned to do, as the only way to deal with quotidian eschatology. Complicity and guilt are woven into George's haunting recurring dream where he imagines himself a child on a dune on a deserted beach. Freud reminds us that childhood fears as repressed unconscious thoughts are revealed during dreams. Unconscious fears surface during George's recurring dream which are specific, sensory and lingering – he hears the waves, feels the wind and hears the women calling. When he turns around he experiences anxiety at the realisation of abandonment, as he can no longer find the women who are caring for him. His dream is perturbing. He wakes up emotionally terrorised from his subconscious fears.

However, on his final night, where at first his "short confused dreams succeeded one another fitfully", the dream offers a new conclusion (*Ibid.* 206). His sense of abandonment and recurring fear is appeased as he notices that the beach is not deserted, but has a familiar building where the women "stood waiting for him to catch them up" (*Ibid.* 206). The haunting nightmare as leitmotif suggests the power of Medalie's evolved nostalgia. By engaging in subconscious fear and evolved nostalgic memories, George understands that if the possibility of South Africa embracing different cultures is the only hope, then perhaps " the sun would break through and put the clouds to flight" (*Ibid.* 207). As an outsider, George recognises this but knows that the reality of the community points in a different direction.

Carl Jung's theories on dreams may prove useful in encapsulating the poignancy of George's recurring nightmare. Jung himself believed that he had had apocalyptic dreams that foreshadowed events in the Second World War.[11] Jung suggests that dreams have the ability to go beyond individual repression to represent the collective or a universal unconscious. He identifies various archetypes that represent the collective unconscious, the most important one being the Earth Mother Archetype, with images of caves and the ocean which suggest compassion, humility and humanism. Additionally, he theorises that man's inherent wish is to move, through the collective unconscious, to a state in the future, thus deferring eschatology. If we consider these concepts, then one could suggest that George's dream is a visual representation of a collective unconscious. His fear, as collective white fear, makes him feel isolated and abandoned "under the

leaden sky" and leaves him "panting, desperate" (*Ibid.* 206). While at first the dream offers no reprieve, the final dream does offer comfort when, with "a cry of joy …the women walking away…[waited] for him to catch them up" (*Ibid.* 206). The women, as Earth Mother Archetype, open up a possibility for a future as an alternative to patriarchy and hegemony, which suggests an approach encompassing civic love, compassion and humility. The final dream becomes for George the realisation and confirmation, as in O'Leary comic mode, that perhaps then the " sun would break through and put the clouds to flight" (Schoeman 1972, 207). The cyclical progression of apocalypse, as suggested by Kermode, is echoed in his understanding that hope remains only a transitory possibility, as every day "of his visit he had expected it , and every day been disappointed" (Schoeman 1972, 207). George's decision to return to Geneva does not leave him unaffected by the crisis he has witnessed, as it leaves him "helpless in the face of the grief" for those he will leave behind (*Ibid.* 210). He understands that although a different choice would render a better life for the community to defer eschatology, they will remain resolute in their myopic ways, as they remain in O'Leary's tragic mode.

While the captured Hattingh boys were, in the community's eyes, the "hope for the future" as "they were everything that was young and strong and brave" among the Afrikaners, their hope has ended in their capture and presumed death (*Ibid.* 209). Even in the face of their capture, the setback for the Hattinghs and the community will be temporary. In turn, the three boys in their tragic disappearance and probable death will continue to fuel the myth of Afrikaner heroes who gave up their life for the good of the community. Paul, unable to act on his unwillingness to share in his brothers' vision, is left in "terror", desperately traumatised, articulating, "I'm afraid, afraid" (*Ibid.* 211). He still feels trapped *in the middest* , confused and desperate, trapped and damaged by the fear that envelops him, which is so poignantly visible in his plea to George: "Help me: I can't go on, not like this" (*Ibid.* 211.). He knows that he does not want to share in the world of his family and community, but as yet does not know how to change it. His fear of the present, lacking the courage to envisage a future of the new society, means that such a future is only an empty yearning for Paul. Unable to find solace in past nostalgic memories, he has nothing, and perhaps, like Schreiner's Waldo, he is left hoping for a better future. But the present exists only eschatologically for him as "a striving and a striving and an ending in nothing" (Schreiner 99). Neither the past nor the present can offer a solution for the better future. As a victim Paul uses fiction as an escape from the horror of the present. He lacks the vision and the courage of his sister. His father's farm

and his land are a daily reminder of a life in which he cannot share. Thoughts of Switzerland with "cows with bells around their necks" conversely become his utopian liberation but, like the novel his sister reads to him, it remains only part of his imagination, with the potential to become mythologised in concept (*Ibid.* 23). He feels trapped by the here and now, isolated and different. However, his imagination in all its potential to create vision and move beyond the present in a realistic manner is defeated, and thus it becomes his nemesis. His imagination ironically does not permit him to visualise any option other than exile.

The final message lies in the words uttered by Carla, who is able to reflect on her world and understand that irrespective of the complexity and challenges inherent in their world, they need to live on in the best possible way. Rather than fuelling a myth, she embraces reality and its difficulties knowing that to resist this is futile:

> When something becomes irrevocable, you have to recognize the fact and accept it. It doesn't help to kick and struggle, all your tears and all your prayers won't help. You must go on with your life, as well or as badly as you can. It's life that is unyielding, implacable, not me. The old world has disappeared and it will never, in all eternity, come back, even if we give our lives to try to regain it. We must learn to live in the new world (*Ibid.* 219).

Carla recognises the stagnation in mythologizing a past that can never be repeated. Refuting to abandon South Africa, she recognises the myopic standpoint of the community which has resulted in them becoming "less than people" (*Ibid.* 124). She, unlike Paul, does not allow fear to debilitate her decision to live in the present. Having viewed the chaos consequential upon her family's choices, she resists becoming like her parents, trapped in past memories and "patriotic songs and speeches and sacred covenants" (*Ibid.* 126 – 127). At a moving moment, she speaks in the ethical voice of Schoeman as she asserts that the present cannot be lived marooned in the past and that her parents should have taught her how to embrace change through forgetting the past, and to develop humility and patience, which necessitates clinging to the present at all costs as "that is what one needs to be able to live in this country"(*Ibid.* 127). She is perceptive and fearless in making choices to live in the present reality even though the world around her has collapsed. Her realistic standpoint is summed up when she confides to George that dreaming for her is "senseless" as "there aren't any dreams or

illusions any longer" (*Ibid.* 125). Her discussion with George indicates her ability to have reflected about her world, the folly of her parents' ways whom she "gives comfort" unconditionally (*Ibid.* 125). Rather than expressing a utopian wish for the future, Carla understands the limitations of myth-making, and that all that remains is reality, and to continue in the best way possible. Like Lyndall, who leaves the farm of her youth, Carla too needs to move into a new space, albeit a dystopic space , beyond the borders of the farm, a metonymic symbol of what she refutes. She asserts that memories create an entrapment that prevents a shared existence in a changed country as she comments:

> "And yet it is a good life," she said. "In spite of everything it can be good. And it's a lovely country, even though it does not appeal to you" (*Ibid.* 127).

The reference to Eugene Marais' poetry as intertext merits a comment here. Hailed as the first true Afrikaans poem (Swart 2003; Giliomee 2004), "Winternag" ["Winter Night"]) is a poignant metaphor, published in 1905, of the desolation of South Africa after the Anglo-Boer War. It becomes an antidote for the post-apocalyptic images of a present reality:

Winternag
O koud is die windjie
en skraal
En blink in die dof-lig
en kaal,
so wyd as die Heer se genade,
le die velde in sterlig en skade.
En hoog in die rande,
versprei in die brande,
is die grassaad aan roere
soos winkende hande.

O treurig die wysie
op die ooswind se maat,
soos die lied van 'n meisie
in haar liefde verlaat.
In elk' grashalm se vou
blink 'n druppel van dou,
en vinnig verbleek dit
tot ryp in die kou. [12]

Written in the tradition of Symbolist and late Romanticism, Marais describes bleak landscape as a metaphor of the suffering in a post-war South Africa. The onset of

winter in the damaged landscape is a tragic presentation of the consequences of the catastrophe of war. The poem suggests a paradox: on the one hand, the stark images of eschatology are profoundly developed through diction such as "bare"[13], "sere" and "burnt patches" while, on the other hand, images that suggest a feeble attempt of nature to continue on its cycle of seasonal rebirth are suggested by "stirring" and "gleams". The poem offers a presentation of eschatology and redemption by positioning itself between the possibility of cyclical redemptive rebirth and the impossibility of it seen in the eschatological images thrust into the poem, line after line, diminishing any true potential of rebirth. The wind, as the latent potential force that will initiate the change of season, is both "slight" and "cold", which is intensified with images of destruction as it becomes "grief-laden…Like the song of a maiden/Whose lover proves false". It lacks the energy to bring about change, but still perseveres meagerly against all odds , hence the seed-grass "Among the burnt patches" is "stirring". Hope cannot be denied and must be embraced in any small measure even if the dew drop, which "gleams bold" now, will be bleached by the "frost in the cold".

The poem laments, with chilling clarity, the consequences of war portrayed in a post-apocalyptic landscape. It is visionary in that it explores the dichotomy of the transformation in Kermodian terms of the cycle from terror, to decadence and hope of renovation, which end, transform and are concordant. It draws parallels to *Promised Land* as at one point, Carla reveals to George her innermost thoughts about South Africa and uses images that echo the imagery in Marais "Winternag"

> 'It's autumn now, in a few months it will be winter. You can't imagine how beautiful winter is here: the veld is bleached white, the sky is remote and pale. Everything is hushed, everything is waiting to begin afresh' (*Ibid.* 128).

The laconic, somber mood in the opening of Marais' poem points to feelings of what he called "Hesperian depression" as suggested in the landscape as pathetic fallacy. Christopher Heywood (2004) suggests that Marais' "Hesperian depression", the anxiety that overwhelms one at the onset of dusk and darkness, as fearful as it is at its beginning, may result in a sense of upliftment once it is understood to be transient - only to be repeated time and time again (Heywood 43). It does not present a utopian redemption to suffering, but rather a realistic understanding of the circularity of the apocalyptic, from

one crisis to another. In its eschatological conclusion, "Winternag" implies that dystopia and utopia are essentially two sides of the same coin, part of an ongoing repetitive cycle. The reality of eschatology in *Promised Land,* drives Carla to be "unyielding…severe…cruel" as a shield to hide her inner vulnerability (*Ibid.* 216) :

> 'How do you think it's possible to live here unless one's hard and relentless?' she asked but there was no harshness in her voice. Suddenly she bent her head and covered her hands with her face. (*Ibid.* 216)

George's assertion that "it's impossible to live this way" has an immediate riposte from Carla that "If you have to you can do almost anything" (*Ibid.* 217). Schoeman's message articulated by Carla, outlines the ambiguous nature of dystopia. The historical resonances to the *bittereinders*, the scorched earth policy and Marais' "Winternag" point to the recurring cycle of Thornton's "rolling apocalypse" as discussed in the Introduction of this study (*Op. Cit.*). Carla strives for an ethically responsible goodness, still unclear in her mind. In her practical rather than hyperbolic response to dystopia, she lives on "with all its varied resonances" (West- Pavlov 2015, 45). However, while we concur that perhaps Carla's diction (which echoes lines and images from "Winternag") can be seen as a recognition of the suffering of post-apocalyptic world and its recurring cycle, debunking myth-making, there is a suggestion that Marais' poem points to the cyclical nature of myth-making too. At one point George asks Carla how she can "bear to live like this?" to which she responds:

> 'Duty, love, habit – I don't know. It's how I grew up; these people are my people" (*Ibid.* 217).

Hook's psychosocial approach to reflecting on and engaging with history to be remodelled and reshaped suggests a positive outcome where a new national narrative and discourse can be appropriated. There is perhaps a second suggestion why the Marais intertext is relevant as an exploration of Carla's (and Schoeman's) vision. Sandra Swart, in her excellent paper based on Marais' presentation in the seminar series on Southern African History and Politics in 2000 and 2002 ("The Construction of Eugene Marais as an Afrikaner Hero") discusses the ambiguous and at times contrasting image of the poet. On the one hand, thanks to the hagiograph by the Nationalist press and the persistent

promotion as a national hero by Gustav Preller, Marais was hailed as the father of Afrikaans poetry (Swart 2004). On the other hand, Swart's discussion shows that Marais is considered by some intellectuals as "a dissident iconoclast, an Afrikaner rebel" (Swart 847). The controversial image of Marais seems to have grown from the socio-economic environment of the 1930s, and in particular the struggle for *taalstryd*, the recognition of Afrikaans as a language as a means to build an Afrikaans cultural identity. Swart shows that in the strained economic environment of the 1930s, middle class entrepreneurs wanted to create a cultural unity based on pride in a common history and language. As Swart points out:

> Marais is one of the most lionised writers in Afrikaans, but his categorisation within the canon is problematic. There are two schools of thought in his poetry. The first considers him a poet from the Language Movement stable. These critics place Marais firmly in the post-Boer War generation of poets, along with Jan FE Celiers. Totius and C Louis Leipoldt. The second school portrays him as a maverick genius, appearing at the turn of the century as a "lone star" in Afrikaans literary firmament (Swart 849).

According to Swart, "Winternag", remembered as the first Afrikaans poem, fosters the presentation of Marais as a "maverick Genius" (Swart 849). Polemically, Preller used Marais and the poem to promote nationalism; Marais becomes a *volksdigter* "producing poetry of and for the Afrikaans people…As DF Malherbe acknowledged, 'Winternag' was 'a powerful propaganda tool in the increasing struggle for recognition of the mother language'" (Swart 850)[14]. In the 1930s in the run up to the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, the mythologizing heroic image of Afrikanerdom through poetry writing, *voortrekker* dress "rooted in the heroic, rustic past" promoted a nostalgic yearning for past historical mythology of Afrikaner nationalism (Swart 851). These references are evoked as we read in *Promised Land* the outmoded *voortrekker* clothes worn, Raubenheimer's patriotic poetry parodied to expose the ludicrous nature of *volkdigter* propaganda[15]. Preller was proactively involved in promoting Marais as a *volkdigter* and "first Afrikaans poet", denying him a role as an "Afrikaner conscientious objector, refusing to be co-opted by the Afrikaner establishment" (Swart 851, 857)[16].

Swart seems to suggest that Marais' "Winternag", with its symbolic late Romanticism motifs seems to point to Marais as a maverick . Tangentially, this may draw a parallel to Carla, who, unlike Paul and the rest of her family, may be considered as a

young maverick, risking a contested and challenging choice to live on in an attempt to survive and to create a future. While in the *middest,* she acknowledges the chilling consequences to living in the past, feeding a myth which is a futile version of futurity. Her first choice, to leave, is a means to live on. She positions herself, as Marais' poem suggests, between the possibility and impossibility of change. Kermode reminds us that "novels imitate a world of potentiality"; by reflecting on the crisis, Carla convinces herself that she is moving the End from being *immanent* to *imminent.* (Kermode 138). However tangentially, Marais' poem may suggest something further if we consider particularly the "rhythms", the nuanced innuendoes in Schoeman's writing. The urgency to write a new narrative, to enter a new discourse, is being suggested. Marais' reputation as a *volksdigter* may suggest that there is the danger of new narrative becoming a new mythologised reality, which in turn will thwart a viable future, endorsing the cyclical nature of apocalypse. The novel presents a realistic reading of crisis, an offering to move beyond the crisis. It does however present an urgent message that to interrogate past history and present crisis is the only possibility in order to continue living in a changed world that is difficult, of which, in Carla's assumption, George understands "nothing at all (*Ibid.* 221).

The novel's title in Afrikaans, *Na Die Geliefde Land,* embodies the ambiguity of the attitude to nostalgia, memory, history and the present. The preposition "na' points to the community who feel bound to their promised land through a sacred alliance. Where the preposition initially suggests "after" the "promised land", insinuating that the pervading atmosphere in the novel becomes the prediction of life after the promised land has been lost in South Africa, a more nuanced understanding may also be inferred. If we consider that "na" could also mean "towards", Schoeman could be insinuating that rather than nostalgically drawing on experiences "towards" a past mythologised history, there is a possibility of sharing a new and different "promised land", that despite the apparently catastrophic changes, life continues even without the promise of an easy transformation.

END NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE:

[1] The Afrikaans title to the novel has been translated as *Promised Land* but misses the subtlety of "na" which translated means both "after" and "towards" (Titlestad, 2014).

[2] Michael Titlestad (2015) broadly separates South African apocalyptic literature into three periods: the years preceding 1948 (when the Nationalist party came to power); 1970s to 1990 (resistance against the apartheid regime) and 1994 onwards depicting the disillusionment in the new democracy depicted in the collapse of a post-apartheid government. *Promised Land* falls into the second period. See Introduction to this study.

[3] AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging) was the extreme rightwing resistant movement led by Eugene Terreblanche who, in the 1970s, aimed to create a Boer state principled on the old Boer republic (see "http://sahostoryonline.org").

[4] In the description on the military raid at Kommando Drift, Schoeman's description of the soldiers is metonymic, intentionally created to enhance the chaos of the attack. See pp. 204 -5.

[5] The *Bittereinders* were a faction of guerrilla fighters who fought against the British Empire to uphold Boer ideology in the second half of the Second Boer war (1899 – 1902) (Stapleton [ed]).

[6] For a detailed account of the *Bittereinders* and their retaliation to Britain's "Scorched Earth" Policy see Stapleton (ed) p. 98 -99.

[7] Brink's comments were made prior to the publication of Schoeman's *Hierdie Lewe (*1993), which was translated by Elese Silke as *This Life* (2015). Here, through four different Afrikaner generations, Schoeman returns to the political while drawing on the allegory of the *plaasroman.* By mythologising transgenerational Afrikaner dreams, he contests "democratic" politics in a post-apartheid South Africa. Where *Promised Land* concludes with George's disillusionment with South Africa, *This Life (Hierdie Lewe)* evokes an understanding of and engagement in past historical trauma as a means to achieve reconciliation for any sense of future. In both novels, his message centres on the subversion of the traditional *plaasroman*. "Both draw on elements from the established tradition of the plaasroman in Afrikaans, however, with the addition of aspects that were not present in the genre in the1920s and 1930s when the genre of the plaasroman was established. In a sense, it revisits and renews the tradition of the plaasroman" (A. Visagie, 2015, pers. comm., 12 April).

[8] For Schoeman rhythm in writing is the most important consideration. "A writer's role is not to give meaning. Rhythm is more important than meaning. Hopefully in 30 years I have contributed to teach the Afrikaner nation how to read. In my books nothing happens, maybe the readers learn to grit their teeth and wrestle through these books. Because eventually something does happen, between the syllables, between the lines"[my translation].

[9] See Devarenne, Nicole. "Nationalism and the Farm Novel in South Africa, 1883 – 2004." *Journal of Southern African Studies.*35:3(2009): 627-642.

[10] Titlestad (2008) asserts that it would be simplistic to consider the *plaasroman* purely as a form of restricted ideological tendency. He proposes that we should rather consider the manner in which the novels written in this genre overthrow the hierarchical links between property, land ownership and identity. Quoting Wasserman in "Terug Na die Plaas"(2006) he concurs that the novels of D. F .Malherbe, C. M. van den Heever, Jochem van Bruggen, Johannes van Melle, Mikro and Abraham Jonker rewrite ("herskrywing") the changing rapport between Afrikaans

ontology and the farm and thus "represent a significant barometer of the socio-historical development of Afrikanerdom"(Titlestad 62)

[11] See Yiassemides, Angeliki. *Time and Timelessness. Temporality in the Theory of Carl Jung*. Sussex: Routledge. 2014.

[12] Winternight –Eugene Marais (1905) Translated by J. W. Marchant

O cold is the **slight** wind
And sere
And gleaming in the dim light and bare
As vast as the mercy of God
Lie the planes in starlight and shade
And high on the ridges
Among the burnt patches
The seed grass is stirring
Like beckoning fingers.

O true grief-laden
On the east wind's pulse
Like the song of a maiden
Whose lover proves false
In each grass blade's fold
A dew drop gleams bold
But quickly it bleaches
To frost in the cold.

https://allpoetry.com/Winternag

[13] The references to "Winternag" have been made in English. For the English translation refer to the previous footnote.

[14] Writing in the aftermath of economic insecurity and depression of the 1930s, a sense of national pride and unity particularly for the upliftment of the Poor Whites was based on creating a unified ethnic identity and history. Under the leadership of Dr Diederichs a conscious move to create unity through the laudatory narratives of national and literary heroes became an instilled process of propaganda (Swart).

[15] The patriotic zeal and hyperbolic emotions evident in the poetry written and read by Raubenheimer is presented in the novel in a quasi-caricature mode similar perhaps to Bonaparte Blenkins in *Story of an African Farm*. The parody further draws on the subverting literature that focuses on drawing on the spirit of Afrikanerdom rather than the refinement of poetry. "Jan Celliers (1906)firmly believed that only 'literature steeped in the Afrikaner spirit and intelligible to Afrikaners … would hit the mark.' He urged writers and poets to come forward…Soon C Louis Leipoldt … began writing poems on the recent war and on South African veld in a language of spoken idiom and rhythm". (See Goliomee; pp 366 – 369).

[16] See Swart pp. 847 – 867 for a detailed analysis of the duality in the presentation of the role of Marais as an Afrikaner hero.