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IMAGINING OUR END: SOUTH AFRICAN APOCALYPTIC FICTION

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

Department of English of

University of the Witwatersrand

by

Daniela Dina Pitt

2018

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

…

What we call the beginning is often the end.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding" (Part V) *Four Quartets.*

~

ABSTRACT

"End-time" narratives have created interest and appeal in a variety of contexts. They serve different purposes, whether to entertain in their depiction of catastrophic disasters, or to afford the opportunity for deeper, and more serious engagement, with preoccupations relating to anxieties in differing contexts, such as socio-political and environmental. This study explores how "End-time" narratives serve a more ethical discourse in a turbid political climate in South Africa, between 1972 to 2006. In this study, I offer close contextual readings of five South African novels that span the period from the apartheid era to post-democracy. The central concern in this study is the stylistic choice made by each of these writers in selecting apocalyptic rhetoric in a narrative which is set in a future, imagined South African space.

The five South African fictions selected for this study (*Promised Land* by Karel Schoeman, *July's People* by Nadine Gordimer, *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee, *The Mask of Freedom* by Peter Wilhelm and *Horrelpoot* by Eben Venter) each portrays a dystopic imaginary present, and offers the reader an "unveiling" of historical truth and thus a possibility of deferred eschatology. These novels form part of a body of South African literature that represents the critical self-consciousness of white writers as oppositional voices to the historical setting within South Africa from 1972 to 2006. I suggest that the apocalyptic in these texts is allegorical and that, by subverting its form, writers insinuate the limitations of the apocalyptic. In each instance, the anxiety surrounding eschatology opens up the urgent need for a new discourse and national narrative, offering a qualified hope for a feasible albeit, challenging future.

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~

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

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_____day of _____ 20_____in _____

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