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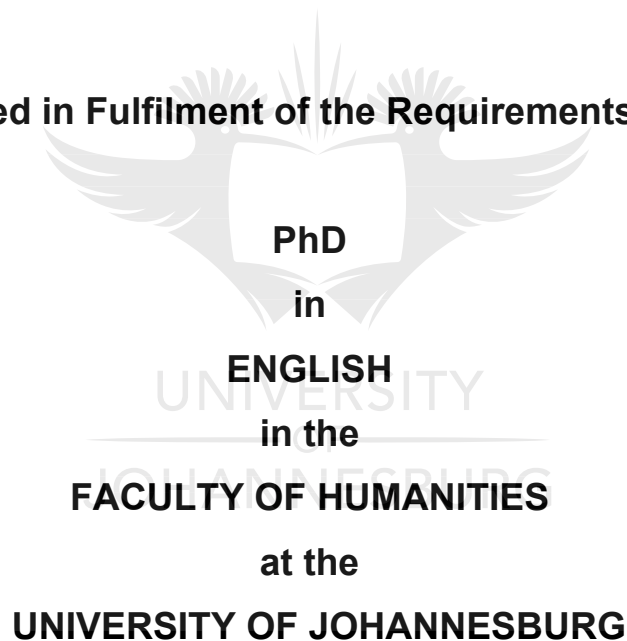
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**The Great Africanised Family of Humankind:
Securing and Undoing the Human Through Africa in
Literature and Film**

**By
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Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree



**Supervisor: Prof. Sikhumbuzo Mngadi
November 2018**

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the thesis submitted herewith for the degree PhD in English to the University of Johannesburg is my own independent work and where secondary sources have been used, these have been acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Modern Language Association (MLA), 8th edition. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any degree at any other university.

Nora-Lee Wales
November 2018



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Abstract

The Poisonwood Bible (Barbara Kingsolver, 1998), *Amaryllis in Blueberry* (Christina Meldrum, 2011), *The Garden of Burning Sand* (Corban Addison, 2013) and *The Constant Gardener* (dir. Fernando Mereilles, 2005) can be characterised as critical of the West's political and humanitarian interventions in Africa. They are also, however, instances of that pervasive but much-maligned genre of literature and film: texts ostensibly about Africa but written by Westerners and reflective of Western lives and norms. Recognising the problems of representations of Africa and Africans, this study, nevertheless, also attempts to take the sincerity of these texts seriously. Though three of the texts offer criticisms of colonialism, imperialism and neo-imperialism, such criticisms are not their true impetus. In fact, the absence of such criticisms in Addison's novel throws into relief the fact that the central concern in all four texts is the division between Africa and the West in so far as it represents human disunity. In other words, a crisis of human community underpins each of these texts. Their solution to this disunity is deceptively simple: human unity based on and legitimised by an essential human sameness. Africa plays a special role in making what is a grey, abstract universalist humanism expressible: it provides 'colour' and 'texture' but also, as the origin of the species, it provides a singular, stable origin which, in turn, offers the transcendence of difference. The threat that Africa's contradictory position—provider of difference, guarantor of human sameness—poses to these texts' projections of a universally inclusive human community are sublimated by their idealisation of Africa. The crucial difference that Africa provides is that of a heightened and essential humanity, not a denigrated one. I argue that these texts' idealisations of Africa betray an ontological anxiety within Western subjecthood, that there is a crisis of humanism rather than only a tiresome reiteration of problematic tropes. By taking the sincerity of these texts seriously, therefore, I attempt to move beyond the Us/Them paradigm that has dominated literary analyses of texts about Africa but written by Westerners, without ignoring or dismissing the representational inequities that persist.

Introduction

The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is,
because man is disunited with himself.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836: 91)

Of all the sciences, biology is the most lawless; there are few rules to begin with, and even fewer rules that are universal. Living beings must, of course, obey the fundamental rules of physics and chemistry, but life often exists on the margins and interstices of these laws, bending them to their near-breaking limit.

—Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The Gene: An Intimate History* (2016: 409)

There is at the centre of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (2000), Christina Meldrum's *Amaryllis in Blueberry* (2011), Corban Addison's *The Garden of Burning Sand* (2013) and Fernando Mereilles' *The Constant Gardener* (2005) a crisis of belonging. Each of these texts is, broadly speaking, about the western individual's or family's attempt to do right by Africa. In other words, these four texts are on the surface about the need for and/or the failings of humanitarian intervention in Africa. Unsurprisingly, there is much to criticise in these texts for their reiteration of stereotypes of African poverty and helplessness and the erasure of the specificities and complexities of the continent's histories, cultures and peoples. Attendant to those stereotypes, is the foregrounding of the agency of and narratives about Western characters, a term which in these texts is predominantly and problematically still synonymous with 'white'. However, these four texts are also sincere in their criticisms of the West. Importantly, the specificities of these criticisms vary and include condemnations of the West's interference in Africa both past and present as well the charge that the West is failing to intervene, failing to fulfil its commitment to Africa. Because their sincerity includes both accusations of illegitimate paternalism as well as presumptions of the need for a 'positive paternalism', that sincerity cannot be taken at face value. But neither should it be dismissed as little more than another instance of the seemingly inevitable reduction and exclusion of Africa by the West. If the sincerity of these texts is taken seriously, it becomes apparent that underneath the simplifications and erasures associated with these texts' humanitarianism and the image of Africa they employ there is a more fundamental anxiety: what does it mean to be human and what does it mean, therefore, to be human together?

Rather than read these texts primarily as examples of the problems of humanitarianism and western images of Africa, I read them as reflections of a crisis of community. Humanitarianism and the particular image of Africa in these texts are a means of securing the human and a universally inclusive human community defined by compassion and egalitarianism; but they are also obstacles to achieving human unity because they are discourses informed by a problematic Romanticism, an attachment to blood and soil understood as the markers and guarantors of being and belonging. Addison, Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles work to imaginatively bring into being a diverse human family originating in Africa; theirs is a kind of “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 2006) through which they attempt to transcend the very tension that structures such a form of being and belonging. It is this tension and the various forms it takes that is the overall focus of this thesis. The broad strokes of this blood and soil cosmopolitanism and the tensions that structure it are outlined using three examples—three vignettes—below.

1.1. Vignette: The DNA Journey

A number of the contours of, and tensions within, this egalitarian, blood and soil, world citizenship are at work in a 2016 video advert for an online travel company, Momondo. In the advert, titled “The DNA Journey”, a number of individuals undergo a genetic ancestry test (GAT) to determine “who [they] really are” (Momondo, “The DNA Journey”). Initially these individuals identify themselves along rigid national, ethno-cultural and racial lines. Each assertion of individual identity and, consequently, of group belonging is initially formulated in two ways: first, in its opposition to another national or ethnic identity; secondly, by way of genealogical affirmation, such that individual-national identity is a product of genealogical certainty. For instance, a man who identifies as English does so in opposition to the Germans, against whom his grandfather fought in the Second World War. When asked what the GAT results will reveal, one woman is confident that it will say that she is French and that her grandparents are French and so on. Another man responds that he is “100% Bengali”, while a third is certain that he is “solid Iraqi”. One of the interviewer-researchers then explains to the participants “how DNA works”, stating that their DNA comprises 50% from their father and 50% from their mother and that this is also true for each of their parents, “and back and back and back”. He concludes by stating that “all those little bits of your ancestors [...] filter down to make you, you”. Next, there is a brief moment of nervous anticipation as each participant stares at their unopened envelope which contains the ‘truth of who they really are’.

When their GAT results are revealed all are shocked and moved to discover that they are, as individuals, more diverse than they initially thought and more connected to individuals and identities they previously thought of as Other. For instance, a woman who identified as Kurdish and stated that she hates the Turkish government is shown to be partly from the Caucasus, an area subsequently narrowed down to modern-day Turkey. The French woman goes so far as to claim that “there would be no such thing as extremism in the world if people knew their heritage” (“The DNA Journey”). In what is a near-seamless transition from abstract universals to immediate and affecting particularities, the interviewer-researcher says that “we’re all kind of cousins...in a broad sense” and then reveals that the Kurdish woman is a direct cousin of the man who self-identified as “solid Iraqi”. This revelation signals the emotional climax of the advert as Kurdish and Iraqi cousins embrace joyously as if to melt away a century of ethno-nationalist conflict. The narrative arc of the advert moves from assertions of stable national, ethno-cultural and racial identities—identities which the advert makes clear are the cause of division—to an assertion of a stable unitary identity formulated in familial terms.

The motivations and implications of this advert’s attempt to overcome the causes of division and forge global belonging using genetics bear noting here. First, it should be remembered that as an advert the main motivation is that of increased business and profit. This advert forms part of a competition campaign in which entrants stand a chance to win a DNA kit, “with the hope of [subsequently] winning their very own DNA Journey” (*The DNA Journey: How It Was Made*). Of all the contrivances in the advert,¹ the most important in terms of the profit-motive is that of individualised diversity as a reason to travel the world using, of course, Momondo to book all flights and accommodation. Following the emotional climax, the second interviewer-researcher asks the Kurdish woman and Iraqi man if they would like to travel to all the countries to which they have been genetically linked.² Their enthusiastic affirmation marks the second climax of the advert, now as a means of generating profit. The significance of individual diversity is reduced to that of individualistic consumption: the invitation on the competition webpage to “travel and explore your diversity” (“The DNA Journey Competition”) suggests that genetic diversity, like tourist destinations, is little more than a product or experience to be consumed. Furthermore, this form of “happy

¹ These contrivances are arguably not unusual for an advertisement and Momondo goes into the details of how the advert was made in an effort to dispel notions that the advert was scripted (*The DNA Journey: How It Was Made*; see also Rahaman 2016). Nevertheless it is important to remember that “The DNA Journey”, like any advert, walks a blurry line between the artificial and the real.

² This sequence indicates that the primary motive—profit—is conveyed using the more emotionally powerful notion of human unity.

hybridity” (Lo 2000)—an appropriation of difference under the auspices of celebrating it—relies on the reiteration of national borders; in the invitation to travel to other countries, the existence of those countries as separate and Other (that is, exotic) is reaffirmed.

The advert’s contrived formulation of diversity is, therefore, notable for the tension it sets up in relation to itself in so far as it is also an advert for the transcendence of national divisions in the name of global unity; the former is the primary message of the advert whereas the latter is the means of delivery. This is a tension between the scientific (DNA) and the socio-political (nation) and the significance of family to both. DNA is the means of bringing about global unity but does so in a way that enacts an erasure of the socio-political even as it relies on socio-political structures of belonging. That is to say, in its attempt to transcend the divisions sown by Romantic ‘blood and soil’ formulations of belonging, it reifies that Romanticism. DNA and ancestry are represented visually in the video using saliva and maps, respectively. The combined effect is an expansion of the circle of belonging without the loss of intimacy; belonging manifests both corporeally and territorially. This makes for a sense of community that foregrounds itself as literal rather than “imagined” (B. Anderson 1983), or put differently, one that is natural rather than socio-political. As Panofsky and Donovan state, “the flattening of genetics onto color coded world maps provides a symbiotic set of meanings, where GAT results conflate contemporary national borders with race and biology” (39). The method for testing ancestry used in this video is important. The explanation of “how DNA works” obscures the fact that there are two ways of testing and interpreting ancestry. The method described by the interviewer-researcher is based on recombining autosomal DNA and “compares variation across an individual’s genome to variation within a set of pre-defined reference populations” (Panofsky and Donovan 7). When this method is used, ancestry is understood not through lineage but through the percentage of similarity between the individual and those pre-defined reference populations which, importantly, “might be defined racially/continentally, ethnically, in terms of *modern* nation states” (Panofsky and Donovan 7, emphasis added). In this case, therefore, ancestry is not only conceptualised nationally but also, necessarily, ahistorically.

This tension between the scientific and the socio-political, or post-national species being and nationalist belonging, is masked by the invocation of family, which—in this advert, the campaign discussed next, and in the four texts on which I focus—functions as a transitional concept. Because family functions metonymically in relation to both nation and species and speaks as much to an emotional connection as a biological one, the disjuncture between universal species-being and nationalist belonging is obscured. Furthermore, the

genealogical certainty that characterises divisive national identity and belonging at the beginning of the advert works, by the end, to confer natural, that is scientific, legitimacy onto the projection of transnational familial unity. In other words, the disjuncture between a universal humanity and the dividing particularities of nations is both maintained and erased using family which, in its association with DNA, is construed as a purely natural form of belonging rather than one that is also constructed and functions culturally. The upshot of this advert is that ‘We are all Human’, an ethos which is validated both by the positivity of its liberalism and the authority of genetics.

1.2. Vignette: I am African

The workings of the Romantic blood and soil cosmopolitanism found in Addison, Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles’ texts are not only based on the universalist notion that ‘We are all Human’ but in the particularisation thereof: ‘We are all African’. The usefulness of Africa for projecting global unity as well as the problems that arise through that utilisation are present in a 2006 humanitarian campaign advert by the Keep A Child Alive Foundation which seeks to make anti-retroviral medication available to African “children and their families” (Keep A Child Alive). As with the “The DNA Journey”, this campaign works through the positivity of its liberalism and the authority of genetics but, in addition to the individualistic feel-good science of the previous advert, this second advert is driven by a sense of altruism. One’s sense of who one is and to whom one is connected is linked not only to self-discovery but also to saving a life and, indeed, the species. Problematically, this advert also relies on and reifies the very thing it purports to overcome: the division between the West and Africa.

Titled “I am African”, the advert features a series of black and white photographs of European and American celebrities adorned with ‘ethnic’ jewellery (most often beadwork) and a digital brushstroke of brightly coloured paint on their faces in what the campaign website describes as a “modern take [on] African tribal make-up” (Keep A Child Alive, “I Am African”). The purpose of this aesthetic is to connect Europe and America to Africa by claiming a share in African-ness. Carol Magee comments on this African-esque aesthetic, pointing out that it does not reflect any specific African cultural practice but rather serves to “evoke notions of difference” (“Introduction”)³ which undercut the connection. As Magee summarises, “Africa and Africans are positioned as representing those things that the West,

³ As required by MLA referencing guidelines, citations from e-books are based on the chapter or section title rather than page numbers as pagination varies on devices. All e-books are identified as such in the Bibliography.

in its view of itself, is not. Despite its intention to highlight European and American ties to Africa, the Keep A Child Alive advertising campaign's visual elements emphasize difference" ("Introduction"). Magee's brief discussion of this campaign is useful for pointing out the problematic visuals as well as noting that "counterimages" (Magee "Introduction"), responding satirically to the self-serving aspects of celebrity philanthropy circulated on the internet, are an indication of resistance to the appropriation of a people through an invention of its culture (and indeed the invention of it as *an it*.)

My interest in this advert is also, however, in difference: the kinds of difference at work and how notions of difference and sameness co-construct the messages of this campaign through the naturalised ideal of family, evoked throughout the text that accompanies the visuals. Difference is not only evoked visually nor does its evocation simply undermine the campaign; in fact, it is precisely the tension between difference and sameness which is at work here, as it is in the four texts on which I focus in Chapters Two to Five. In the body of the 'About' section of the advert's text, differences between Africans and the Western 'we' are emphasised:

Most Africans cannot afford the lifesaving antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) that have transformed AIDS in the West to a treatable and manageable disease. We take [ARVs] for granted here in the West but to an African family they are tragically out of reach because of cost, even by some governments (Keep A Child Alive, "I Am African")

These differences in terms of access to ARVs, which are caused by political, social and historical forces, are crucial in so far as this is a call for humanitarian intervention. To help those in need is the *raison d'être* of Keep a Child Alive and so alongside the superficiality of celebrity-backed philanthropy is a signalling of historical and ongoing socio-political injustices. But what motivates the Western 'we'—or what *should* motivate them this campaign indicates—is not the righting of structural injustices but rather bio-genetic sameness, the fact that "[e]ach and every one of us contains DNA that can be traced back to our African ancestors" (Keep A Child Alive, "I Am African"). On the one hand, the naturalness and stability of human unity, formulated in familial terms, is made the answer to complex and shifting systemic problems rooted in political, social and historical inequalities. On the other hand, the interplay of difference (both that of inequality and the racialised aesthetic) and sameness marks human unity as a point of anxiety. The basis for action—we are all genetically African, which is to say, united by our shared origin—becomes, by the end of the text, indistinguishable from the underlying ideological end-goal of the campaign. 'We' are encouraged to donate in order to "help save the life of a child, a mother, a father, a

family, 'our human family', our first family" (Keep A Child Alive, "I Am African"). In other words, a failure to donate is by this point less a failure to save the lives of African "children and their families, by combating the physical, social and economic impacts of HIV" (Keep A Child Alive) than it is a failure to affirm human unity and sameness; in fact, the very word 'African' no longer appears in the final paragraph.

This advert's initial foregrounding of African-ness, "Africanity", or "Africanism" (Mayer 2002; Mudimbe 1988, 1994) has its roots in earlier colonialist, imperialist and racist traditions but also in liberal humanist ones which take an anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and anti-colonialist stance. The latter traditions are of particular importance here because of the good intentions of the four texts on which I focus; good intentions which often obscure the troubling assumptions and implications at the root of their own (re)inventions of Africa. The power of these good intentions is at work in both "The DNA Journey" and "I am African" campaigns, the latter operating through what appears to be a more specified altruism but both ultimately proposing a vision of human unity that is simultaneously vague and emotionally powerful. The ostensible specificity and certainty of the good intentions of "I am African" are generated through its humanitarianism, its focus on Africa as a means of providing a stable origin for human unity and, finally, the scientific facticity of that origin. The impetus for humanitarian intervention as a means of saving the species is based on the confirmation of the Out of Africa theory, as the repeated references to our shared origins in the 'About' and 'How' sections of the website, respectively, indicate: "Each and every one of us contains DNA that can be traced back to our African ancestors" and "[t]he campaign speaks to the African ancestry we all share" (Keep A Child Alive, "I Am African"). In the course of this chapter, I will outline the doubled-nature of the contexts of humanitarianism and the Out of Africa theory; that is to say, the ways in which these two modes of inventing Africa enable and disable the projects Kingsolver, Addison, Meldrum and Mereilles set for themselves. However, before doing so it is necessary to situate those contexts within an earlier moment—that of the anthropological—which precedes the confirmation of the Out of Africa theory using genetics and the particular strand of humanitarianism at work in these texts.

1.3. Vignette: Jahn's and Maquet's Africanity

The third example which serves to distil and highlight the tensions at work in the four texts on which I will focus is drawn from two mid-twentieth century anthropologists: Janheinz Jahn and Jacques Maquet. I include commentary on their works, *Muntu: the new African culture* (1961) and *Africanity: the cultural unity of black Africa* (1972) respectively, in order to

demonstrate that the Romanticisation of Africa *vis-à-vis* community is not new; recent developments in genetics have simply added scientific legitimacy to an enduring image of the continent. Secondly, the similarities and differences within their work point to the existence of varied, intertwining and sometimes contradictory strands of Africinity which continue to inform (mis)understandings of the continent. Writing in the years marked by the many African nationalist independence movements (but, tellingly, with no mention thereof), Jahn and Maquet attempt to do right by Africa by subverting racially denigrating colonialist stereotypes that have shaped the discourse on the continent, its cultures and peoples. What is problematic about their well-intentioned attempts is the point from which they start their projects—a unified Africa as origin—and that on which they end—projections of a unified human community.

Though they employ different strategies, both Jahn and Maquet choose to focus on sameness in their reformulations of Africa. For Jahn sameness can be defined as an internal cultural unity expressed through what he calls “neo-African culture” (16), which importantly is a new cultural form and not merely a hybrid.⁴ A second important feature of “neo-African culture” is that it is produced by modern Africans—the author and artist—who, like their European counterparts, are complex and neither “angels nor devils but people” (Jahn 20). The modern African is Jahn’s counter to the “‘real’ African” who populates the colonial archive: the primitive, bush African who “can neither read nor write, goes naked, lives carefree and happy from day to day and tells fairy stories about the crocodile and elephant” (Jahn 20). Thirdly, Jahn justifies his formulation of neo-African culture in opposition to traditional ones by redefining the nature of history itself. He declares that “[a]ll history is saga and myth” (17).⁵ Consequently, he counters the claim that “there has never been a traditional African culture as a whole, but only a plurality of different ‘primitive’ cultures” with the argument that “the question of whether or not a plurality is understood as a unity is to a great extent one of interpretation” (Jahn 17).

In general, Jahn’s view of history is unproblematic and echoes those of, for instance, Hayden White (1973) in his assertion that history is a product of the choices and techniques

⁴ Jahn is using and departing from Bronislaw Malinowski’s functional theory of cultural change (developed in *The Dynamics of Cultural Change*, 1945-7) in two ways. First, following Malinowski, he argues that African culture is not fixed but rather, like all cultures, is subject to change. Second, whereas Malinowski regards the products of cross- and inter-cultural transformations to be monstrous hybrids, Jahn regards them more positively as neo-cultures which are a combination of “a tradition seen rationally” and “those European elements which modern times demand” (16).

⁵ Jahn bases this argument on Egon Friedell’s formulation, in *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (1946), of history as legend.

that characterise fictional narratives. Indeed, V.Y. Mudimbe describes Jahn's reading of the nature of history as "basically right" and as a challenge to the valorization of "historical genres into human history [...and] the articulation of history as an absolute order of both power and knowledge" (*Invention* 195, 192). Where his formulation is problematic and of particular relevance is in his valorization of a similarly reductive vision of Africa, its cultures and peoples. Jahn adheres to the dichotomy of primitivism and civilisation and merely reverses the direction thereof in its association with Africa: Africa is, like Europe, civilised because it is judged using the same limited point of reference that is applied to Europe. This is due to his narrow view of who produces neo-African culture and, therefore, who and what constitutes Africa. Noting his tendency for rigid dichotomies, Mudimbe agrees with Jahn's rejection of the "myth of the 'man' in the bush" but argues for "a wider authority" that is not restricted to an elitist status quo and which includes "the experience of forms of wisdom that are not part of the structures of political power and scientific knowledge" (*Invention* x–xi). More importantly for my purposes, in his projection of a single neo-African culture as a challenge to past associations with primitiveness, Jahn conflates plurality with primitiveness and, in turn, wholeness with sameness. His response to the blatant racism that often characterised anthropological studies of Africa results in a more subtle harm, what Mudimbe calls the "romantic violence" (*Invention* 195) of Jahn's project. This is not racism per se but it is a way of thinking that remains caught up in a racialised discourse. It is a well-intentioned line of thought that, nevertheless, remains racially structured and is drawn from assumptions that serve to reduce Africa with the aim of making it useful.

Maquet's strand of Africanity similarly homogenises Africa but, in its insistence on the need for distance alongside that of internal cultural unity, more obviously exposes the contradictions upon which his invention of Africa rests. Maquet asserts that at the centre of Africanity lies a "common quality" that is "felt most strongly by foreigners and by Africans who, after some time away from Africa, visit some region of [the continent]" (3). He further argues that an African in one region of the continent is unlikely to perceive the similarities they share with another African in a different region; rather they will only be aware of the differences. This tension between perceived plurality and unity is resolved when he later states that "Africanity is this unique cultural face that *Africa presents* to the world" (Maquet 8, emphasis added). On the one hand, Maquet (seemingly inadvertently) points to not only the constructed-nature of African cultural unity but that it is a construct imposed on Africa and Africans from elsewhere. On the other hand, he insists on Africanity being an act of self-presentation. Consequently, his personification of an Africa in which Africans are the actors

of their culture is tellingly at odds with his earlier depiction of African people seemingly unaware of the internal lines of connection within their own purportedly singular culture. His justification for this privileging of distance and sameness over proximity and difference is the product of both an imposition and an internalisation recast as inherent. This justification is also rooted in the overlapping movements of Negritude and Pan-Africanism, respectively the “intellectual” and “political stand[s]” (8) of his project. Maquet creates an Africa and then reads that Africa back as if it were a reality he is merely describing. For all his efforts to subvert colonialist denigrations, Maquet becomes another of the many “‘inventors’ of Africa and her culture” (Mudimbe, *Invention* 37).

What is of interest here is not simply the act of invention, nor the turn to “positive’ stereotype” (Bhabha, *Location* 107), but the uses to which that invention and that stereotype are put: the cultural unity of Africa, as drawn up by Jahn and Maquet, provides a basis upon which a single humanity with a single world culture may be realised. This represents what Mudimbe, drawing on Paul Ricœur, terms a “zero-degree discourse”, that is “a primary, popular interpretation of founding events of the culture and its historical becoming” (*Idea* xiii). In a move which confirms that he unshackled history from the structures of power and knowledge only to put it in the service of a different, more insidious power structure, Jahn argues that “the conception of the tradition as it appears in the light of neo-African culture is [...] the one true one, since it is the one which will from now on determine the future of Africa” (17). As he explains in the concluding pages of *Muntu*, the future of Africa is that of contribution: not the forced material ‘contributions’—natural and human resources—of colonisation but rather that of a more abstract nature, a more meaningful existence:

To this appeal [for more meaning] we find an answer in African culture, which has Kuntu to offer, while European culture helps Africa to acquire the things of which it stands in need. If western culture reflects on itself, it cannot, precisely in view of the machine age, wish for the destruction of African Kuntu. On the contrary, in a world where ends are sought without regard to means or—at the opposite extreme—no end is sought at all, nothing would be more valuable than a revived style in which sense and meaning are once more fully expressed. [...] The enlivenment of existence which is expressed in the creative attitude of Kuntu and which makes possible a new designation of the meaning of the world, may be the contribution of Africa to the world culture of the future. (237–8)

In a similar expression of “romantic violence” (Mudimbe, *Invention* 195), Maquet concludes *Africanity* by ascribing to Africa a special ability to improve human relations:

We have already suggested the remarkable harmony and balance that traditional Africa achieved in the organization of human relationships.

By various means, Africans have succeeded in reducing tensions and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups more effectively, it seems, than the peoples of the West. The field of human relations is one of the domains in which we believe, and hope, Africinity will make valuable contributions to the common heritage of humanity. (131)

In both extracts the problems of a partial reading and/or extreme reinterpretation of history, albeit well-intentioned, become clear when that new history is put into service of something greater. Maquet, in his “rehabilitation of the African past [and] rediscovery of the goodness in things African” (Muoneke 61), falls into the trap that adherents of certain versions of Negritude and Pan-Africanism did and sometimes still do, as evidenced by “I Am African”: they “beatified and glamorized not only the past but also the present” (Muoneke 61). A glaring and troubling feature of Jahn’s reinterpreted history when made the basis of a united, more human humanity is that the many forced material contributions Africa has made to the enrichment of European culture and society are elided. His opposition of the material and metaphysical or spiritual allows him to denounce colonialism without irony because it allows him to remain blind to his own problematic means which, in his case, seem to be justified by the ends. In fact, the greater crime, according to Jahn, is to have no end at all: the *telos* of a single, unified humanity trumps, by ideological necessity, a human community that is perhaps less unified but more inclusive of difference. Difference troubles both Jahn and Maquet’s projections of human unity based on a “common heritage” as their opposition of Europe/‘we’ and Africa/Africans suggests. The persistence of the opposition between Europe and Africa results in cultural difference being re-invoked and reified (after having been re-invented), thus denying the unity which both seek. Unless, of course, that difference can be incorporated and neutralised such that European culture(s) and African culture(s)—and by extension, the peoples of each—are reduced to and fixed as natural complements rather than articulated participants in a global complex with parts that are interconnected and overlapping but also contradictory and shifting.

1.4. Points of Intervention

The Poisonwood Bible, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, *The Garden of Burning Sand* and *The Constant Gardener* are—like the three examples outlined above—political, humanitarian and anthropological interventions. The political intervention of each of these texts, though varying in degree, may be summarised as either a response to colonial and neo-imperialist injustice and/or advocacy by the West on behalf of Africa, and are thus projects rooted in the specifics of historical and continuing inequities. Meldrum and Addison explicitly frame

their novels, in the paratexts of each, as politically oriented (Addison, “The Story”; Gallery Books 2011). Similarly, Mereilles’ film is set up, in the DVD extras, as politically engaged and this is a point that is reflected in critical commentary on both the film and the novel (Angell 2005; Katz 2006; Lenzer 2005; Robbins 2006). Kingsolver has described her novel as a political allegory, a claim which critics and reviewers have accepted and explored (Koza 2003; Strehle 2008) or complicated and refuted (Peck 2002; Siegel 1999). I want to hold these claims of ‘political-ness’ up to the light not to expose them as lies or misrepresentations but, rather, to examine more closely the ways in the texts’ political interventions overlap, intersect with, and are worked against by those interventions that are humanitarian and anthropological. When reading responses to the texts which have received critical attention (*The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Constant Gardener*) a sense of a contradiction emerges because these texts work towards a political end by way of a seemingly apolitical humanism (see for instance Bromberg 1999; Charles 1998; Peck 2002). But, as I will argue, the underlying criticism within each of these four texts is not predominantly the suffering and oppression inflicted on, nor the impoverishment and dehumanisation of, the victims of colonialism and neo-imperialism. Fundamentally, the problem with which these texts are concerned is that of the division between Africa and the West, framed as human disunity. In other words, these texts are concerned with a failure and recuperation of community, which is both deeply political and humanistic. A second argument in this thesis is that a neat opposition between the political and the apolitical—see Joseph (2012), Klawans (2005), Peck (2002), and Ott (2002)—fails to consider the deeply political consequences of any apparent turn away from what might be conceived of narrowly as ‘political’. What I argue for is an opening up of what is meant by this term, not in the name of ‘anything goes’ but, rather, in the name of attempting to rethink the possibilities of political-ness in a global landscape that is ever shifting.

The solution to human disunity in these texts is deceptively simple: human unity based on and legitimised by an essential human sameness. In the contexts of the confirmation of the Out of Africa theory and international humanitarianism, this solution is rooted in good intentions—that is, advocacy and a challenge to negative stereotypes—and a sense of scientific truth, giving it a virtuous lustre, a critique of which feels discomfiting. Central to these good intentions is the utopian vision of a universally-inclusive human community. However, as the three examples above indicate, “the best of intentions [...] did not have the best of results” (Magee “Introduction”). These problematic results arise because in the formulation of a homogeneous, united and universally-inclusive humanity the opposites of

each—difference, disunity, exclusion—are dismissed but remain in play and troublingly so. In other words, rather than remaining cognisant of, and working through, the tension between inclusion and exclusion, sameness and difference, disunity and unity, these texts simply privilege the most reassuring option in each pair.

The three organising principles of this vision of human unity—good intentions, a utopian community, the universality of the human—are simultaneously productive and limiting; each is an instance of the *pharmakon*, as Jacques Derrida describes it in *Dissemination* (1981), in so far as they are both a remedy and a poison, the means to an all-inclusive human unity and that which denies the possibility of its existence in those terms. The first *pharmakon*, that of good intentions, runs along two lines: first, the humanitarian project is often guilty of reinforcing the hierarchies of power which underpin the injustices they seek to address; secondly, the challenge to negative stereotypes takes the form of positive stereotypes which, like their opposite, are “an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference, constitutes a problem for the representations of the subject in signification of psychic and social relations” (Bhabha, *Location* 107). This denial of the play of difference has implications for the second *pharmakon*: community. These texts’ efforts at universal inclusion by privileging human sameness do not solve the problem of attendant acts of exclusion and of difference. Difference is, on the one hand, reified and then incorporated, with the result being the severing of the connection between Africa and the West at the moment that the connection is claimed; on the other hand but often at the same time, difference itself is excluded by being dismissed. What is meant by difference in each case will be delineated along three lines in the paragraphs immediately following this one but, for now, the point is that the singular focus on sameness in order to include universally only serves to draw attention to difference and mask renewed exclusions. The third *pharmakon* is the assumption of the universality of the category of ‘the human’ which signals the privileging of Nature over Culture, which are in turn made to stand for idealised sameness and troublesome difference, respectively. Derrida identifies two problems with favouring only the most reassuring of the oppositional poles: one, “[i]t cancels out the resources of ambiguity” and two, it “makes more difficult, if not impossible, an understanding of the context” (*Dissemination* 97). Chapter One will proceed by way of recuperating the doubled, sometimes multiple, contexts and the ambiguities at work in these texts by Addison, Mereilles, Meldrum and Kingsolver with the aim of exploring both the possibilities and limitations of their political-communal projects.

Difference—how to conceive of it and what to do with it—is what vexes the project of community in these four texts. But, in order to make sense of their failures and successes in dealing with difference, it is necessary to note the kinds of difference at play because the first problem with this community-in-sameness is the wholesale demonization of difference. The first kind is that which necessitates the humanitarian intervention: the socio-political inequalities between the West and Africa which are rooted in history. Difference as inequality is the ‘obvious evil’ that must be vanquished and as such is denounced by these texts without much controversy. This is not to say that the texts’ imaginings of *how* this inequality is to be solved is without problems but rather that the need for this inequality to be addressed is widely and easily accepted as a good and necessary thing. The problem of *how* forms the central point of my discussion of humanitarianism in the next chapter. The second kind of difference is that to which Magee gestures in her critique of “I am African” as simultaneously claiming and denying connection. It is a “double representation” in which there are

on the one hand, signs of an epistemological order which, silently but imperatively, indicate processes of integrating and differentiating figures within the normative sameness; on the other hand, the excellence of an exotic picture that creates a cultural distance, thanks to an accumulation of accidental differences, namely nakedness, blackness, curly hair, bracelets, and strings of pearls. (Mudimbe, *Invention* 8–9)

The exemplar of this double representation in Mudimbe’s discussion is Hans Burgkmair’s sixteenth-century painting, *Exotic Tribe*, and the normative sameness into which a reduced and neutralized difference is assimilated is that of whiteness (Mudimbe, *Invention* 8). For Mudimbe, this is the more brazen representation while the “second representation that unites through similitude and eventually articulates distinctions and separations” is “the more discreet one” (Mudimbe, *Invention* 9). The liberal humanism of Addison, Kingsolver, Merillees and Meldrum’s twentieth- and twenty-first century texts is, however, built less around normative whiteness and more fundamentally around a *human* norm which entails an explicit counter-racialization. While the double-ness of this representation remains—as seen in the renewed opposition of Africa and Europe by Jahn and Maquet, the ethno-racial aesthetic of “I am African”, and the ambivalence of national borders in “The DNA Journey”—it is now black Africa, and not whiteness, that is the repository of an idealised humanity. The construction of this peculiarly Africanised humanity will be further outlined in the next chapter.

Difference is further vexing in its relation to Humanity or ‘the human’, which is not only discreet but made to appear as a self-evident, fixed, sovereign, and transcendental category

of universal belonging. In the four texts under study Humanity is an absolute truth, promising absolute unity. The third kind of difference then is that which, in derridean terms, 'haunts' the particular notion of Humanity within the four texts under study. In the context of the championing of universal rights and the celebration-cum-assertion of human sameness on the basis of science, I add to Mudimbe's "double representation" Edouard Glissant's conceptualisation of "transparency and opacity" (111). Transparency in this instance is "a lukewarm humanism, both colorless and reassuring" (Glissant 111), which is the vehicle for the totality that is Humanity. The Africanisation of humanity referred to above is an attempt at colouring this humanism in so far as it breathes the life of cultural specificity into it. The colourlessness of the humanism at work in the three examples and four texts is an understanding of it as objective, uncoloured by bias, because it is a humanism that is scientific as well as unquestionably laudable. But, as Glissant argues, within this transparency is an "increasing opacity [...] with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing" (111). In the final pages of *The Idea of Africa*, Mudimbe offers a reminder of the need to "accept the rigor of conceiving difference seriously" (211). Glissant argues for "not merely the right to difference but, carrying this further, [...] also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity" (190). Community that not only acknowledges this right to opacity but is constructed in and through that right is one from which "the principle of unity" (Glissant 192) has been subtracted. It is to such a rigorous conception and defence of difference and opacity—taken seriously as a right—that I turn in Chapter One where rather than dismiss the science that is made to declare humanity transparently unified, I outline the ways in which that same science points "to the exultant divergence of humanities" (Glissant 190).

The Poisonwood Bible, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, *The Garden of Burning Sand* and *The Constant Gardener* are also, and perhaps more fundamentally, literary and cinematic, that is to say, textual interventions. Kathryn Mathers, in a critique of Nikolas Kristof's particular brand of 'Third World' reporting, makes the point that "the act of writing about [Africans]" is often equated with "an actual intervention" (Mathers 15). There are, indeed, similarities between Kristof's journalism and these four works of fiction. The collapse of textual representation and 'real world' advocacy into each other, already suggested by the semantic overlap of the terms 'representation' and 'advocacy', is present and even heightened. This is particularly true in Addison's novel where a fictional narrative centred on Western advocacy becomes a direct call to action by the author. The vision that Addison offers relies

on a relationship between Americans and Africans which Mathers describes, in reference to Kristof's journalism, as "naturalized, individualized and apolitical" (22).

But this is also a relationship defined by physical, cultural and representational distances which the author, in all four instances, works to overcome. This effort can be understood in the context of "the humanitarian narrative" (Laqueur 177) that emerged in the eighteenth-century and on which I comment further in Chapter One. This narrative is characterised by a "reliance on detail as the sign of truth" (Laqueur 177), a centring on the physical body in pain as the site of solidarity between sufferer and helper and a causal relationship between the possibility and the moral imperative of humanitarian action. Laqueur makes the point that, vested in claims of truth and solidarity as well as the moral imperative to act, "the novelist and the humanitarian [...] has the authority to expose for scrutiny the subjective consciousness of others and to do so more effectively than they could themselves" (Laqueur 185). In the four texts I discuss, the author and key western characters function as representational intermediaries whose intercessions are framed as authoritative and objective because they are merely descriptive of the 'real' – the 'real' being African-ness itself. This authoritative and objective description is conveyed by foregrounding the author's (or the director's, producer's and actors') physical presence in Africa at some point in time. The slippage between representation and advocacy and the insistence on the 'realness' of the stories due to the presence of the authors in the 'real' Africa seems to me to be an attempt by these texts to escape (to a degree) their status as fiction—that is, to mask over their own textual in(ter)ventions in the name of achieving a 'political-ness' that is transparent and actionable, paving the way in some cases for the imposition of the moral imperative to 'simply' act.

To read these texts too narrowly as political and humanitarian runs the risk of a reductive either/or debate: the texts are either political or apolitical; they either help humanity or harm humanity; they either posit a false Africa or a real Africa, *etcetera*. To do so also fails to grapple with one of the more fundamental concerns in these three novels and one film: community. I proceed from the notion that attending to literature (the writing and reading thereof) and cinema (the filming and watching thereof) as fiction, that is as narrative or textual in(ter)vention, allows for an understanding of a community conceived of politically and ethically (Middeke 2016). Finally by way of return to my earlier point, such an approach also allows for a rethinking of community that takes difference and opacity seriously. "The literary text", Glissant states, "plays the contradictory role of a producer of opacity" (115) because even as it realises the absolute in language, it renders it opaque. Similarly, Martin

Middeke asserts that even realist texts “cannot do away with all contingency involved in their readings” (257). To make sense of these four texts as *texts* is, therefore, fundamental to my attempt to recuperate and work through, without cancelling, “the resources of ambiguity” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 97) out of which a human community may be reimagined.

1.5. Methodology and Chapter Outlines

In an effort to understand what these three novels and one film mean as individual texts and as instances of particular genres, the discussion in Chapters Two to Five proceeds primarily from textual analysis and includes theory in such a way as to clarify and complement what the texts themselves express. Driven as it is by the specifics of the four texts, the theoretical approach is discursive and draws on a range of disciplines. There are three overarching and interlocking frameworks within which the specific foci of Chapters Two to Five are situated: humanitarianism, the image of Africa, and family as species-being. These frameworks are outlined in their specific relation to the four texts in Chapter One.

Chapter Two focuses on the use of allegory, symbolism and myth in Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* and Meldrum’s *Amaryllis in Blueberry*. There I argue that these two texts attempt to recuperate African histories using allegory, but that their turn to myth and symbolism in the projection of human unity undermines the specificity of the histories they recuperate. In Chapter Three, I discuss the child-figure in *The Poisonwood Bible* and Addison’s novel, *The Garden of Burning Sand*. Initially and productively formulated as a liminal and disruptive force, the child-figure is ultimately made to secure human unity through its transformation into or reformulation as the prototypical human being and, therefore, the fixed and absolute origin of human community.

Belonging and community are approached as being questions of form as well as aesthetics in Chapter Four where I discuss Mereilles’s film adaptation of John le Carré’s novel, *The Constant Gardener*. Like the other three texts, Mereilles’ film works toward transcending the division between Africa and the West. However, when the film is read as an adaptation less of le Carré’s novel and more of the genre of Africa films and when adaptation is understood as non-identical repetition—that is, “repetition without replication” (Hutcheon 2006; Bortolotti and Hutcheon 2007)—an anxious ambivalence with regards to a transcendent human unity emerges. At the same time, the desire for unity premised on sameness remains present in the paratexts of the film and the framing of the director as translator of the ‘Third World’. In Chapter Five, I return to *The Poisonwood Bible*, particularly the last chapters narrated by Adah Price, and trace the undoing of self and family as

guarantors of being and belonging. The challenge to the sovereignty of individual being and familial belonging takes place alongside Adah's reformulation of Africa as the origin of humankind. Not only the site of the origin of the species but also of that which simultaneously constitutes and threatens humanity, Africa signals in these chapters of Kingsolver's novel a rethinking of the possibility of human unity, not as a utopia but as a contingent and ever-emerging community experienced in and through dis-ease.



Chapter One

Frameworks

“[...] the basic idea of a perfectible mobile world, produces the inverted image of an unchanging humanity, characterized by an indefinite repetition of its identity.”

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957: 141)

1. Good Intentions: the humanitarian context

Humanitarianism remains to a large degree a sacred cow but, as Michael Barnett points out, “[it] is a creature of the world it seeks to civilize” (9). Each of the three ages he observes—Imperial Humanitarianism, Neo-Humanitarianism, and Liberal Humanitarianism—is “defined by the relationship between the forces of destruction (violence), production (economy), and protection (compassion)” (10). Through an examination of these forces alongside the capacity of humanitarians to positively transform the world, Barnett offers a history of humanitarianism that “reject[s] an overly romantic and an overly cynical reading” (6). This history is rooted in five tensions on which my outline of the humanitarian context for the four texts draws. First, there is not a single humanitarianism with a clear and fixed point of origin but rather many humanitarianisms. Walker and Maxwell define humanitarianism similarly, calling it an “ecosystem” (1) of often contradictory organisations, ideologies and interests. Second, “[h]umanitarian ethics are simultaneously universal”, in so far as the values of a community are assumed by that community to be timeless, “and circumstantial [because] to intervene to stop suffering and confer dignity [...] is rooted in contemporary notions of humanity and victimhood” (Barnett 11). Thirdly, because of its paternalistic nature, humanitarianism “is defined by the paradox of emancipation and domination” (11) and, fourth, it “both undermines and advances moral progress” (12). Finally, “[h]umanitarianism is about meeting the needs of others and meeting our own needs” (14). The good intentions of the four texts under study can be understood as the result of privileging the most reassuring poles—universality, emancipation, the advancement of moral progress, the needs of others—in what are actually dialectical tensions. In what follows, I work to define the humanitarianism of these four texts. Secondly, I situate this humanitarianism at the point of intersection between the exercise of selfless compassion and the reiteration of domination, both of which re-centre the self in the name of solidarity with the suffering Other. Finally, I contextualise and interrogate constructions of humanitarian solidarity by outlining

eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Anglo-American understandings and uses of ‘the human’ which continue to inform the four late twentieth- and early twenty-first century literary and cinematic constructions of the human.

1.1. Humanitarianisms

In light of the heterogeneous nature of humanitarianism(s), I will begin by drawing three broad distinctions with regards to the kind of humanitarianism at issue in Addison, Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles’ texts. Amanda Claybaugh makes the point in relation to the heterogeneity of reform movements, that reform is “best defined in terms of what it is not” (21) and it is from such a point of negation that I proceed. First, unlike the Keep a Child Alive “I am African” campaign, these texts do not use celebrity culture as a platform. Therefore, the influence and implications of individual celebrities and the culture as a whole on global humanitarian efforts—already the subject of a number of studies (see for instance Chouliaraki 2013; Daley 2013; Kapoor 2013; Richey 2016; Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos, and Huliaras 2011)—falls outside the scope of this thesis.¹ Rather than the cynicism and irony that pervades the reception of celebrity activism, Addison, Kingsolver, Meirelles and Meldrum offer a story told “through the lens of western heroics” enacted through an ordinary “nice person with good intentions” (Mathers 25, 26). This is ‘everyday humanitarianism’ which is set apart from the self-serving flash of celebrity culture by its sincerity. Furthermore, this sincere humanitarianism must be understood in its opposition to the forms of intervention these texts critique. Unlike “I am African”, these four texts raise, to varying degrees and with varying self-awareness, questions about the nature and legitimacy of intervention. On the one hand, they criticise intervention; on the other, they are themselves instances thereof. The nature of the former is, to be sure, that of interference, illegitimacy and harm: the CIA’s neo-imperialist involvement in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and consequent thwarting of Congo’s independence (*The Poisonwood Bible*); the British government and international pharmaceutical companies’ exploitation of HIV-infected Kenyans (*The Constant Gardener*); the Transatlantic Slave Trade and colonialism (*Amaryllis in Blueberry*); neo-colonialism in the form of missionaries (*The Poisonwood Bible*) or medical-missionaries (*Amaryllis in Blueberry*); the rape of a child and the politically-

¹ An exception to this is my analysis, in chapter three, of the uses of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in Addison’s novel. However, while his international fame makes him a celebrity figure of sorts, it is rather his status as an ‘eminent African’ and his association with *ubuntu* and national reconciliation which makes him amenable to Addison’s particular purpose. Addison’s use of Tutu is not as celebrity so much as a representative of a transcendentalist, Africanist humanism.

motivated protection of the rapist (*The Garden of Burning Sand*). The spectrum of self-awareness within these texts positions Meldrum's and particularly Addison's novels towards one end where they operate largely under the assumption of their own necessity and goodness, failing to acknowledge that "any act of intervention, no matter how well intended, is also an act of control" (Barnett 12). In fact, Addison's novel works from the notion that the west *not* intervening is fundamentally a failure to fulfil or achieve its humanity. In his novel, justice is opposed to inaction and the opportunity for a more complex understanding of the possibility of injustice accompanying action—conceived in and of itself as virtuously compassionate—is lost. Mereilles' film hints at an awareness of the duality of intervention and a careful reading of it reveals an anxious ambivalence which renders its own interventionist project impossible. In the final chapters narrated by Adah, *The Poisonwood Bible* gestures towards the possibility of a more ethical intervention not despite an anxious ambivalence but rather one located within it. Adah's self-reflexive intervention is contrasted with her sister, Leah's, self-assured cancelling out of ambivalence in which the distinction between good and bad interventions is maintained.

Despite some important similarities, the 'everyday humanitarianism' of these texts is not exactly that of the "White Savior Industrial Complex" (340) that Teju Cole describes in his response to *Invisible Children's* viral campaign, Kony 2012. That campaign, an example of very effective (as in, 'viral') but short-lived and controversy-riddled 'slacktivism', represents a kind of humanitarian intervention that is not only physically distanced from the site of need but which, because of its integration with social media, has an everyday-ness that slips into a glib banality. Kony 2012 did not have the self-serving flash of celebrity culture in the traditional sense but rather the self-serving blink of convenience. Cole implies that the source of this complex is the white savior's myopic arrogance when he asserts that "some humility [...] and respect" (346) towards the persons of concern as well as "constellational thinking" (349) about their situations is required to counter the damage done by "well-meaning American[s]" (346). Cole is particularly concerned with the way in which the myopic arrogance of both the campaign and those who took up its challenge to "make [Joseph Kony] famous" (*Invisible Children*) fail to acknowledge or recognise the complicity of harmful American foreign policy in the very crisis highlighted.

The four texts of my focus are invested in a tradition of humanitarianism that values presence and the suffering of self in the name of alleviating the suffering of others. Furthermore, with the exception of *The Garden of Burning Sand* in which America is only complicit if it does not intervene, the texts I examine point to or work to explicitly lay bare the

problematic tangles of global *realpolitik*, that is, politics concerned with both the practical outcomes of policy and the protection of national interests. While these texts might not always acknowledge the problems of their own interventions, their openly critical positions *vis-à-vis* the west, colonialism, and neo-imperialism sets them apart from campaigns such as Kony 2012. Their myopia is not simply the product of arrogance but rather also that of sincerity and where the hubris of Kony 2012 makes of its ambition to save Uganda a dangerous folly, the sincerity of these four texts is the basis of their ambitious attempts to transcend the *realpolitik* that is the impetus of their production. Where Kony 2012 offers a distraction from western complicity, making Joseph Kony a problem of Africa's making, these four texts confront the global divisions caused by the west (even if, as in the case of Addison's novel, the west's complicity is not acknowledged, only the division itself) and then seek to transcend that division. Theirs is a sincere humanitarianism that is both quotidian and transcendentalist. What is common to both forms of 'everyday humanitarianism' is the paradox that underpins the "White Savior Industrial Complex": to save is often to cause great harm to those ostensibly being saved. This is the problem of "what to do" (Chouliaraki 12) which drives both contemporary and earlier forms of humanitarianism and to which I turn in my discussion of humanitarian discourse and practice below.

The second distinction that needs to be drawn is between humanitarianism and human rights because, while they may share characteristics and often intersect in general and in the four texts I discuss, they are not the same thing. Whereas human rights raises the question of legal personhood and "relies on a discourse of rights" (Barnett 16), humanitarianism relies on "a discourse of needs" and is often "a matter of faith" (Barnett 16, 18). An example of the former in the context of literature is Joseph R. Slaughter's study of the *Bildungsroman* and human rights legislation in *Human Rights Inc. (2007)* where what is at issue is the way in which the person or individual is constructed as a legal entity through narrative. More generally, responses to claims to and violations of human rights are structured around the individual (T. Evans 1998) whereas the humanitarianism of these texts has a decidedly communal focus. While there are elements of plot that revolve around human rights, particularly in *The Garden of Burning Sand* and *The Constant Gardener*, my concern is how these four texts construct a community that is essentially human. The individual at the basis of this community is not primarily a legal subject but rather a metaphysical one. For instance, while the violation and protection of children's rights drives the plot of Addison's novel, representing a litmus test for Zambia's judicial system, I argue that the child's more significant role in Addison's and Kingsolver's novels is humanistic in its

sentimentality: the child inspires, and is the lynchpin of, the (re)unification of humanity as a family. The issue is not legal personhood but solidarity and this is humanitarianism as an act that both assumes and produces that solidarity. This raises the question of “why we should act” (Chouliaraki 27), a question which these texts answer by invoking ‘the human’, to be discussed later.

Finally, the humanitarianism at issue here is that of reform rather than that of charity. This distinction is one that speaks to these four texts as narrative *representations* of humanitarianism as well as instances of literary and cinematic humanitarianism. Claybaugh makes the distinction thus: “While charity takes place between donor and recipient, reform takes place within an individual’s own heart and mind. For this reason, its central locus is the scene of reading. And so while the defining act of charity is the giving of material aid, the defining act of reform is the production and circulation of texts” (25). Importantly, however, these are not mere representations of given humanitarian interventions but rather “active interventions into social and political life” (Claybaugh 36). Humanitarian reform and these texts, like Slaughter’s formulation of human rights and the novel, are “mutually enabling fictions” (Slaughter 4) through which society is remade as it is represented. In other words, the sincerity or “earnestness” (Claybaugh 31) which characterises reformist texts is social and political as much as it is moral (Claybaugh 36). Addison’s novel is the most patent example of the blurring of lines between representing the world and remaking it because of the “Author’s note” and call to action that closes the novel. Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles are less direct but no less implicated in a tradition of authors writing against the cruelties and injustices of their time, a tradition which can be traced back from Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dickens to Voltaire and Montesquieu (Pinker, *Better Angels* 176, 210). This is the tradition of “the novel of purpose” (Claybaugh 34)—or the “humanitarian narrative” (Laqueur 177)—that emerges in the eighteenth century as a means of improving the reader. In the nineteenth century this term is revived but its meaning altered in that the improvement of the reader gains broader reformist implications: “transforming readers was a necessary step to transforming the world” (Claybaugh 34).

Steven Pinker attributes what he calls the “Humanitarian Revolution” of the eighteenth century to an increase in literacy and the beginnings of the mass publication and distribution of literature. He regards the humanitarian reforms and the literature of empathy of this period in an entirely positive light as part of the general decrease in violence which has brought us to “the most peaceable era in our species’ existence” (*Better Angels* xxi). There are two problems with Pinker’s formulation. The direction of influence is linear and does not

acknowledge that which might influence and shape literature. For Pinker, increased literacy breeds greater empathy which, in turn, leads to a decrease in physical violence between individuals as well as between the state and its people. Furthermore, Pinker's definition of violence is limited to physical and institutional instances thereof, such as state-sanctioned torture; consequently, representational violence is unaccounted for. Paying closer attention to the various ways in which a reader of reformist literature may respond to the depiction of the suffering of others, Karen Halttunen argues for literature's complicity in producing the "modern pornography of pain taking shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (304). While Halttunen argues that this pornography of pain "was not merely a seamy sideline to humanitarian reform literature but rather an integral aspect of the humanitarian sensibility" (304), she shows that reformist literature's complicity is not the result of cynicism but rather that of the difficulties of representation. With reference to reformers and authors such as Stowe, Halttunen weighs up the difficulties in representing extreme suffering well enough to inspire sympathy, transformation and action without sensationalising the pain of others through excessive telling (which may also result in the reader eventually becoming desensitised) or, conversely, "highlight[ing] its prurient nature" (329) through the suggestive omission of gory details. By recognising that reform literature may affect readers in various, often problematic or counter-productive ways and that reformists write with such difficulties of reception in mind, Halttunen points out the circularity of the influence of literature and reform, avoiding the idealisation of literature while remaining cognisant of the good intentions of those who write it.

Pinker and Halttunen, though they differ with regards to the merits of reformist literature, both treat the authors to which they refer as being committed to reform itself. But an author's reason for using reformist themes or formal techniques may be strategic rather than a sign of their commitment to actual reform (Claybaugh 47–51). The "literary uses of social reform" include the implementation—by authors such as Dickens, Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Stoddard and Walt Whitman—of "new tropes and modes of characterisation and, in particular, new plots" (Claybaugh 47) developed by reformist writers. The convergence of reform and the novel became such that even those who disavowed reform itself found its themes and writing techniques amenable to establishing a literary career and maintaining a reputable identity as an author at a time when the morality of novels was put into question. In a reversal that confirms the circularity of influence, Slaughter illustrates how narrative techniques, such as those of the *Bildungsroman*, offer a means of constructing individuals as rights-bearing persons.

This brief historical account of reformist literature and literature that uses reform provides a basis for making sense of the vagaries of humanitarianism in the four texts by Addison, Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles. Addison's novel is, or at least *presents* itself as, committed to intervention as a means of reform but Meldrum, Kingsolver and Mereilles take more critical positions, resulting in particular criticisms of political and humanitarian interventions and/or a deep ambivalence towards intervention in general. The criticisms in and ambivalences of the latter group make sense in the context of changing attitudes within and towards humanitarianism in the twentieth century. These contemporary shifts (outlined below) can be understood in light of the historical relationship between literature and reform. Taken together, Slaughter, Halttunen, and Claybaugh draw attention to the myriad ways in which reform and literature shape each other. My narrower point infers from theirs the following corollary: perceptions of humanitarian causes, discourses and practices shape how we read and understand humanitarian-focused literature and film. Secondly, Claybaugh's point about the strategic usefulness of reform for literature provides context for what is my broader point about the good intentions of all four texts: humanitarianism is a means to an end, not the end in and of itself. Whether truly committed to humanitarian reform or not, all four texts make use of the theme of transformation so pivotal to humanitarian reform and their use thereof exceeds humanitarianism by preceding the actuality of humanitarianism. In short, these texts are committed to that which comes before humanitarian action: universal human solidarity.

1.2. Humanitarian Discourse and Practice: the problem of what to do

Following on from the above, the four texts can be read in light of the shifts and tensions which characterise international humanitarianism from its multiple points of origin in the Enlightenment, through to its significant transformations during and after the Cold War and into the twenty-first century. What Barnett calls Neo-Humanitarianism and Liberal Humanitarianism mark an important, albeit not absolute, shift from traditional "uplift-the-downtrodden" (Hochschild 236) models of intervention to forms that were explicitly and directly influenced by external forces such as the market (1980s), politics (1990s) and media (2000s) (Chouliaraki 11–12; Walker and Maxwell 57–59, 72). These tensions are not only the result of external influences but are also often sites where the disjuncture between the discourses of humanitarianism and its practices take shape. While the discourse of the 1980s sought to reframe humanitarianism as a partnership and its beneficiaries as participants rather than helpless victims (Walker and Maxwell 59), the growing influence of

the market and the attendant importance of the profitability of interventions meant that, in practice, humanitarian action reinforced unequal economic and political structures (Chouliaraki 17). Furthermore, the 1980s was, on the one hand, the decade when humanitarian disasters such as the Ethiopian famine became globally televised events with celebrity-filled interventions such as the Band Aid and Live Aid concerts raising the cultural capital of intervention (Walker and Maxwell 59). On the other hand, it was during this decade that aid became a “cause célèbre among millions of people” (Walker and Maxwell 57), leading to the “New Humanitarianism” (Walker and Maxwell 72) of the 1990s which saw growing scepticism towards humanitarianism in recognition of its political motivations and implications (Chouliaraki 20–24). Two tensions are pertinent when making sense of the humanitarian context for this project: first, those between humanitarian eras and, second, those within the humanitarianism of the 1990s and early 2000s, that is to say, the moment of these four texts’ production.

The “White Savior Industrial Complex” is an exercise in (if not always intentionally of) power, the outcomes of which are economic and political even when the motivations are not explicitly so. It is also the means of exercising an ideological power of the nationalist and moralistic kind. This matrix, constituted by the political, economic, nationalist and moralistic, is also found, albeit changed, in the complex’s historical antecedents: colonialism and imperialism. The tensions between and indeed within humanitarian eras, therefore, can be thought of as that between continuation and change. An early example of the “White Savior Industrial Complex” is that of the Congo Reform Association, founded by Roger Casement and headed by Edward D. Morel. Both men, the former an Irish diplomat and human rights investigator and the latter a British journalist and anti-slavery campaigner, worked tirelessly and with significant success to push for political reform and garner public condemnation of the cruelties being inflicted on Africans in King Leopold’s Congo.² Those atrocities, it is important to remember, were themselves committed under the auspices, however cynically, of “the greatest humanitarian work of [that] time” (Hochschild 56). Casement and Morel’s humanitarian work was, nevertheless, caught up in nationalist and moralistic imperialism, with Morel being most comfortable in the tradition of “evangelical imperialism” which by teaching “the simpler peoples the benefits of Steam, Free Trade and Revealed Religion” would establish “a Moral Empire” (Hochschild 235–236). Thus, Morel continued the work of

² Casement’s report on the atrocities committed in Congo as well as the interviews he gave to the London press were fundamental to political reforms and the public’s growing awareness of, and outcry against, King Leopold’s greed and violence (Hochschild 224–231).

his “humanitarian political ancestors” who “never saw themselves as being in conflict with the imperial project—as long as it was *British* imperialism” (Hochschild 235, emphasis added). Not only was he a supporter of colonialism when ‘done right’, which is to say for the moral ‘betterment’ of the natives, but his focus on Congo and King Leopold meant he could “ignore his [own] country’s use of forced labor—wide, though far less murderous—in its African colonies” (Hochschild 233). These efforts to intervene on behalf of Congo in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries serves as a reminder that humanitarianism is not only sometimes an “ideological smokescreen” (Davies 5), as in the case of Leopold, but also and more subtly the expression of an emotionally powerful and well-intentioned impulse which may succeed in condemning the atrocious act—even doing something to effect change—but often fail to recognise the terrible system of which it is a constitutive part.

This problem of the unjust outcomes of good intentions persists in “late modern humanitarianism” (Chouliaraki 16) where the competition for funding within “an economy of scarcity” (Chouliaraki 17) reproduces the relations of economic and political power between the wealthy West and the poor global South. It is important to remember that a connection exists between humanitarianism and capitalism; that there is “an ‘isomorphism between modes of thought common to economic life and to judgements of moral responsibility’ that binds the world of the market to that of conscience” (Thomas Haskell qtd in Laqueur 201). Similarly, colonial- and imperial-era politics persist in the form of neo-colonial power dynamics such as those Mahmood Mamdani (*Saviours and Survivors* 2009) identifies in the case of the 2003 Darfur conflict: the international humanitarian community, acting on behalf of vulnerable peoples in Sudan, posed a threat to the sovereignty of a weak African state. Such power dynamics may be internalised when, for example, “the new regimes of the decolonized South perpetuate the structures of western domination, whilst safeguarding the ‘grotesque’ power of the local sovereigns” (Chouliaraki 24; see also Mbembe, *Postcolony* 2001). Three of the four texts I study are explicitly aware and critical of this particular matrix of political, economic, nationalist and moral interventionism. So, while in *The Garden of Burning Sand* America’s relationship to Africa is never situated within this multi-faceted context, in *The Poisonwood Bible* the inequalities brought about by Belgian colonialism, American neo-imperialism and the internalisation of disjunctive power structures in Mobutu’s Zaire are treated as interconnected and made objects of criticism. Alongside *The Poisonwood Bible*’s critiques of humanitarianism itself, there is a brief but significant gesture towards the dehumanising effects of wilful charity and contextually-blind altruism in *Amaryllis in Blueberry*. In *The Constant Gardener* the medication distributed by way of humanitarian

intervention and meant to save vulnerable Kenyans is what is killing them, thereby showing humanitarianism to be inextricably bound up with, rather than in strict opposition to, the politically and economically motivated machinations of greedy corporations and feckless governments.

These critiques of humanitarian intervention by texts which are simultaneously and sincerely centred on the necessity for such interventions should be read in light of the changes in perceptions of humanitarianism in the 1990s and 2000s. Kingsolver, Meldrum, Addison and Mereilles' texts are products of a time in which humanitarian relief, traditionally thought of as politically neutral, became increasingly viewed and criticised as a morality with political implications, regardless of motivations.³ This is the context of an attenuation, on the one hand, in humanitarian and human rights discourse in the realm of global politics following the September 11 attacks and subsequent 'War on Terror' (Walker and Maxwell 74) and, on the other, the continued growth of humanitarianism as an industry, particularly in relation to Africa (Daley 2013; see also Chouliaraki 16–17). Chouliaraki situates this shift within the "postmodernist celebration of the death of meta-narratives" (25) which, following the development and influence of digital technologies and social media in the first decade of the new century, signalled a new form of humanitarianism. The twenty-first century activist is now an "ironic spectator" caught between a "detached knowingness, a self-conscious-suspicion vis-à-vis all claims to truth" and the ever-present "spectacle of vulnerable others [...that] continues to raise the question of 'what to do'" (Chouliaraki 12).

Despite the critiques of humanitarianism referred to in the previous paragraph, the four texts of my focus are not straightforward instances of this new, ironic humanitarianism. They may question and even forswear some of the grand narratives that underpin (neo)colonialism and (neo)imperialism, but they have not abandoned all hope of 'Truth'. In contrast to the ironic spectator, the question of "why we should act" (Chouliaraki 27) remains central to these texts. It is worth noting that the event which marks a turning point in the recognition of not only the limitations of humanitarianism but also its complicity in prolonging suffering—that is, the man-made famine in Biafra in the late 1960s—also marks the beginning of a renewed approach to humanitarianism motivated by a sense of solidarity

³ As Walker and Maxwell point out, one of the bases for modern humanitarianism, the Red Cross, was founded on the principles of acting impartially and remaining politically neutral (22). Yet, as Lillie Chouliaraki argues echoing Barnett cited earlier, the critiques of the political interests of aid agencies in the post-Cold War context "points to the fact that there can be no pure humanitarianism, in that all choices to save lives are ultimately political choices about which suffering is worth alleviating and who is to blame for it" (24). The politically-charged nature of humanitarianism is reflected in its intertwining with various anti-slavery and abolitionist movements which were by necessity political in effect, if not always in motivation.

with those in crisis (Walker and Maxwell 2009). It is, therefore, not anomalous that despite their critiques of the grand narratives of colonial racism, neo-imperialism and even humanitarianism, these texts are invested in the grand narrative of “solidarity as salvation” (Chouliaraki 22), which are rooted in the universalisms that are humanity and human unity. Unlike the universalisms of the postmodernist tradition Chouliaraki describes, the universalism of ‘the human’ is treated in these texts with a profound sincerity.

1.3. The Problem of Why We Should Act: assertions and anxieties of humanism in the Anglo-American world

Many twentieth-century theorists and philosophers have argued that humanity or ‘the human’ as a category is, first, meaningless because it is “too weak a force in itself to generate sufficient solidarity (Bruce Robbins qtd in Feldman and Ticktin 13; see also Chandler 2009). Second, it is paradoxical because it marks an absence or lack made apparent by the need to supplement or even substitute the human as bearer of inalienable rights with more specific categories, such as ‘the citizen’ (Arendt 291–296). Or, third, in decline because “man is”, as Michel Foucault declares, “an invention of recent date [a]nd one perhaps nearing its end” (*The Order* 422). ‘The human’, nevertheless, remains potent for humanitarianism which has its philosophical roots in the shift from the human conceived of as a biological object to that of an ethical subject and “a category of universal solidarity” (Feldman and Ticktin 4; see also Laqueur 1989). Foucault’s, Louis Althusser’s and Claude Levi-Strauss’ respective declarations regarding the “death of man” (Foucault, *The Order* 373; see also Soper 12; and Davies 57–80) and the derogation of humanism to a “dirty word” (Han-Pile 118; see also Davies 61) seems to have done little to deflate the belief in the value of humanity and the need for its preservation. It remains, as Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin argue, “one of the few categories that is meaningful across political, religious, and social divides” (1). Cognisant of the deployment of the human in the colonial context and contra-Robbins (above), they proceed from the notion that “humanity is sometimes too strong to permit other ways of imagining connection to proliferate” (13). The persistence of the human, a category both enabling and disabling in the four texts examined here, is the focus of this section.

The enabling persistence of ‘the human’ in light of twentieth-century suspicion towards, and denunciations of, humanity as a category must be understood in terms of the Anglo-American tradition within which these four texts are situated. This speaks to a broad

distinction between continental theorists, such as Foucault and Althusser, and those working within the Anglo-American tradition. Kate Soper notes that there is

a very striking asymmetry not only between the standard usage of the 'humanist' label in this country [America] and its meaning in French philosophy today, but also between the negative charge it has come to acquire in the latter and the almost wholly positive content it has retained through an entire tradition of usage dating back to the Renaissance and still adhered to by those untouched by recent developments in French intellectual life. (10, emphasis added)

The sincerity of the deployment of 'the human' in the four texts under study suggests that that category has been formulated in terms animated by the Anglo-American humanist tradition that has its roots in the Renaissance, acquiring particular force in the Enlightenment.⁴ This includes notions of a "core humanity or common essential features in terms of which human beings can be defined and understood" and the belief that history is "a product of human thought and action" (Soper 11–12).

Such an understanding of the human—essential and also capable of producing and driving history—underpins the "humanitarian narrative" that Laqueur describes as emerging in the eighteenth-century. He argues that the most important function of this narrative, in terms of "the actual politics of reform", is that it "exposes the lineaments of causality and of human agency" (178). Distinguishing between tragedy and the "humanitarian narrative", Laqueur argues that the latter "describes particular suffering and offers a model for precise social action" (178), whereas the former is characterised as universal and irremediable. Citing Dickens' *Oliver Twist* as an example of this narrative, Laqueur notes that in "the matrix of detailed cause and effect, specific wrong and specific action [...] an analytic of suffering exposes the means for its relief" (Laqueur 178). Claybaugh's distinction between charity and reform runs along similar lines: the former "seeks to assuage a suffering that is understood to be inevitable, the result of accident or God's will" (21), whereas the latter is a response to suffering understood in terms of cause and effect and is, therefore, reparable. Addison's novel is an example of this matrix of cause and effect in a twenty-first century text which plots out a means of intervention that is "represented as possible, effective, and therefore morally imperative" (Laqueur 178). The other three texts, while less clear about the specifics

⁴ As Kay Anderson (2007) points out, Enlightenment thought (and by implication Renaissance thought) cannot be demarcated absolutely from earlier periods. Therefore, the particular shifts in Enlightenment conceptions of 'the human' may, in some cases, be seen more fruitfully as a secularisation rather than the refutation of biblical and classical anthropologies (K. Anderson 36–38). These layered continuities are particularly apparent in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Amaryllis in Blueberry* and the implications thereof are explored as part of my discussion in chapter two.

of any course of action because they are more aware of the problem of what to do, nevertheless also frame suffering as particular and the result of specific human failures or institutional harm. The *possibility of effective* action that triggers the intervention is itself triggered by the Enlightenment formulation of the individual human as intrinsically capable of ameliorative action that has an appreciable effect.

What drives this humanist reform, therefore, is the possibility of transformation: transformation of the structures that caused suffering but also, more fundamentally, of individuals. Individual transformation is doubled: first, it is conceived of as both material and spiritual. The challenge to the inevitability of suffering, it is worth noting, was not exclusively the result of secular Enlightenment thinking but rather also that of the “evangelical revivals that began in the late eighteenth century and continued through much of the nineteenth” (Claybaugh 21–22). The intellectual project of the Enlightenment in which social and political systems “might be improved or even perfected” (Claybaugh 22) was popularised in the Anglo-American world by the evangelicalism of the time. Evangelicals replaced “the idea of predestination with an idea of salvation open to all [...making] it possible to imagine reclaiming persons from their sufferings on earth as they would be redeemed from their sins in heaven” (Claybaugh 22). The second aspect of individual transformation is that it pertains to the beneficiaries of reform as well as the reformers themselves. Claybaugh argues that

Reformers were only secondarily interested in providing charitable aid to the poor or the enslaved; they were primarily interested in changing the structures that made poverty or slavery possible. But structural change took place, for nineteenth-century reformers, one individual at a time. This was true not only of the persons reformers were seeking to aid but also of the reformers themselves. (24)

The transformation of the individual reformer is a two-step process (Claybaugh 24): he/she must, first, recognise the structural conditions of the poor or enslaved as *an unacceptable wrong* which requires, in the second but anterior, that the reformer see the sufferer as like him/herself; that is to say, a “common bond between those who suffer and those who would help” (Laqueur 177) must be recognised. These three aspects of humanitarian transformation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offer historical context for the good intentions of the four texts of my focus, providing some understanding of the forces at work.

The conflation of material and spiritual salvation by evangelical revivalists as described by Claybaugh above suggests the privileging of the sufferer’s transformation: if spiritual salvation is equal to and, indeed, concomitant with deliverance from the physical,

earthly suffering of poverty and enslavement, then it is the persons who receive relief who stand to benefit most. But as it is the more fundamental transformation of the reformer which occasions the ameliorative action itself, it is in fact the reformer's transformation that holds greater importance. As suggested by Claybaugh's discussion of novels by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Gaskell, transformation is conceived of primarily as an emotive response by a reader and potential reformer which radiates outwards: "Feeling right is powerful," Claybaugh explains paraphrasing Stowe, "because our feelings diffuse from us in a circle of sympathy, altering those around us in turn" (24). But if reform originates in the act of reading about the suffering of others, as Claybaugh argues, then rather than a unidirectional diffusion of feeling and transformation, what is at work is a transformation feedback loop where the reader-reformer, like the sufferer, is the recipient of that which brings about spiritual transformation. In a late twentieth and early twenty-first century context where humanitarian good intentions are framed as a partnership, beneficiaries are described as 'participants', and the market plays an increasingly important role (see section 3.2 above), this transformation feedback mechanism is presented in the four texts not as an unidirectional diffusion of feeling where the spiritual and material are conflated but rather as a transaction in which the material is exchanged for the transcendental: the west provides humanitarian relief and in return receives not only the comfort of "feeling right" but, more fundamentally, an affirmation of human-ness. (This affirmation is inextricable from the fact that in these four texts the target of humanitarian intervention is Africa, the origin of humankind. This is a point which I develop in section 4 below.)

The productive and troubling tension that structures this exchange is that while the intervention is characterised as a partnership, suggesting equality, it relies on and may reinforce material and representational inequality: the very reason for intervening is that the West has what Africa ostensibly lacks, an intervention which relies on the stereotype of needy, suffering Africa. To rebalance the scales, Africa is represented as giving to the West something that it needs: confirmation of its human-ness. These texts are engaged in what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "drama of reciprocity" (79). This describes a "human-centered, interactive narrative" in which reciprocity is "present sometimes as a reality achieved, but always as a goal of desire, a value" (Pratt 78). The difficulty for achieving this reality is that the "drama of reciprocity" is occasioned by acts of appropriation which are presented as mutual but which in fact are deeply unequal and self-serving (Pratt 78–79). The transformation of the humanitarian is not the precursor to a change in the beneficiary's conditions, thereby ending the inequality that necessitates the intervention itself, but rather

the humanitarian's transformation is the ultimate goal of the intervention-cum-transaction and the need for intervention is endlessly renewed.

Even more fundamental to the humanitarian narrative because it is what underpins transformation is solidarity, the recognition of a common bond between sufferer and helper. Human solidarity is at the centre of these four texts' projects: it is both the legitimisation of these projects and an implacable source of anxiety. The continuing need for, that is to say, justification of intervention is not only a marker of the need to reproduce inequality in order to solve it; it also betrays an ontological anxiety about the nature of humanity itself that goes beyond the dialectic stereotyping of self and 'Other'. If human-ness is affirmed for the West in its transaction with Africa then the necessary continuation of that exchange signals the troubling of western human-ness. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes colonial stereotype as "a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as *anxious as it is assertive*, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself" (Bhabha 100, emphasis added). If we are to take the good intentions of these texts seriously—as I argue we should—then the continuation of material inequality is not their goal nor is it the cause of the problem and, therefore, should not be the ultimate target of this critique; rather material inequality is a symptom and an unintended, albeit problematic, consequence of these texts' desire to establish a common bond—universal humanity—on the basis of an essential, absolute sameness.

In so far as humanitarianism seeks to positively change the material conditions of those who suffer, the human—as formulated in the Anglo-American tradition—is the basis upon and through which the possibility, necessity, effectiveness and moral imperative of action, any action, is built. In short, 'the human' is the answer to the question of why we should act on behalf of others: we should do so as an expression of our individual and collective human-ness. 'The human' persists not despite the uncertainty within its formulation but rather *because* of the protean nature of its conceptual existence. Its usefulness, particularly for humanitarianism, lies less in the "definition it lends [humanist] thought and more in its ability to "win approval for [that thought]" (Soper 10), to justify and legitimise any endeavour performed in the name of humanity. But, as the context outlined above reveals and as the four texts under study betray, any expression of human-ness, individual or collective, is haunted by the necessity of producing it. In other words, any expression of human-ness entails a decision as to what constitutes human-ness. Consequently there is an anxiety that runs through each of the texts that has implications

for their projections of human unity based on universal sameness: human-ness is both innate and a potentiality that needs to be realised; it is *the* common denominator, an “anthropological minimum” (Feldman and Ticktin 3) but also a category—both universal and exclusionary—in which a position must be repeatedly secured. My discussion aims to make sense of these four texts’ production and deployment of human-ness by paying attention to the anxiety that underpins, and is also masked by, the approval conferred on them by their own “almost wholly positive” (Soper 10) humanism. This is a discussion rooted in two contextual points, namely, the Romanticism of Africa as the origin of humanity and interrogations of the human as a category of sameness. These two points will be outlined and developed in the sections below.

2. Originating Africa

The second overarching context in which Addison, Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles’ texts are to be situated and through which I read them is that of origins, particularly Africa as the origin of the species. Africa is an important component—in fact, it is at the centre—of the particular ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ found in these four texts because it offers a single origin of the species, the basis upon which a unified humanity is built. The universalist notion that ‘We are all Human’ is particularised into ‘We are all African’, an ethos validated by the positivity of its liberalism and the authority of science. Though its origins can be traced back at least to Pan-Africanism and Négritude—movements to which I will return in more detail below—I want to begin by outlining more contemporary and widespread uses of this non-racialist, *cosmopolitan* expression of shared African-ness, one which signals an appropriation and adaptation, understood as “repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 4), of the Pan-Africanist sentiment and its underlying mythologies. The claim that ‘We are all African’ has gained global prominence, becoming a rallying cry for non-racialism based on human sameness (rather than shared skin colour) which has been used with varying intentions and to varying effect.⁵ The statement when used in service of universalism draws on and is

⁵ In addition to the “I am African” campaign discussed above, a 2005 poster in aid of raising awareness of the Darfur conflict used the phrase “We are all African” as a statement of solidarity and unity (Ozler 2006). In 2014 Richard Dawkins—evolutionary biologist, controversial advocate for atheism and author of the concept of ‘memes’ as cultural analogues of genes—tweeted a picture of himself wearing a t-shirt with the phrase printed on it. Curiously, in a tweet in which a “political moral” is framed as optional, Dawkins adds the instruction to “shun racism” because of this single origin (“Know Your Meme”, no page). Meryl Streep, when asked about the lack of diversity in film in 2016, responded by asserting that “[t]here is a core humanity that travels right through every culture” and that “we’re all African really” (Lee, no page). The brief furor this comment generated and rejections of Streep’s apparently apolitical response to racial inequality suggests that this claim is not always treated with credulity. More sustained attempts to grapple with the significance of our single origin in the twenty-first century may be found in publications such as *Everyone is African* (Fairbanks 2015)—which

legitimised by the Out of Africa (OOA) theory which asserts that modern humans evolved in and emerged from East Africa. Already suggested by the fossil record, the theory was confirmed in the 1980s using genetics, particularly the study of mitochondrial DNA (Cann, Stoneking, and Wilson 1987; Lemonick and Garcia 1987; Lewin 1987; Seager 1980; Tierney 1988). This form of DNA (MtDNA) allows lineage to be traced through the analysis of mutations that “are passed intact across generations” from mothers to their children, making the human mitochondrial genome “an ideal timekeeper” (Mukherjee 335). Unlike autosomal DNA which describes ancestry ahistorically (see section 2.1.), MtDNA allows for ancestry to be conceptualised geographically *and* temporally because it provides “a view of how, where and when modern humans arose” (Cann, Stoneking, and Wilson 36). In 1987, the lineage of *Homo sapiens* was narrowed down to a single woman, living in Africa sometime between 120 000 and 580 000 years ago; she is called Mitochondrial Eve (Lemonick and Garcia 1987; Lewin 1987; Seager 1990).

The biological implications of the OOA theory are threefold: *Homo sapiens* constitutes a single species, originating from a single geographical area; therefore, race is meaningless. More accurately, “race is not a genetic concept” and, more to the point for those concerned with racial purity, MtDNA indicates that “no population (even those selected for homogeneity) is genetically pure” (Panofsky and Donovan 37–8; see also Cann, Stoneking, and Wilson 1987; Cavalli-Sforza 2000; Mukherjee 2016). If the “objective of colonial discourse is”, as Bhabha states, “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on *the basis of racial origin*, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (“Difference” 156 emphasis added), then a single biogeographical origin that guarantees a single race would appear to refute, once and for all, the racism that served to justify colonial conquest. Not only a boon for non-racialism in that it is a response to the colonialist assertion of Africa’s innate non- or sub-humanity, the confirmation that Africa is the birthplace of the species as we know it also functions as a form of Afro-optimism. Importantly—and particularly so for texts that reiterate the tropes of humanitarianism—this is Afro-optimism that does not speak in the hard languages of economics and geo-politics but rather in that more abstract language of universal solidarity.

argues broadly against race on the basis of science—and *We are all Africans* (Obeng 2008), which takes a narrower focus and challenges religious doctrine, such as the Hamitic origins of Africans, found in Christian-Judeo-Islamic writings. In a transnational melding of the political and the popular, a 2016 Pan-African pop album, *Timhamba*, features a song “We are all African” performed by South African artist, Mzee, and featuring German ska-punk band, *Rafiki*.

I call this Africa-rooted universal solidarity ‘Africanised cosmopolitanism’ and outline it in greater detail below.

Accounts of nineteenth-century travel writing remind us that such a marriage of the political and scientific in the context of Africa is not new (Mudimbe 1988; Pratt 1992). In fact, as Mudimbe argues, the nineteenth-century marks a continuation of an epistemological tradition dating back to the Baroque period with the novelty in those Victorian expedition reports “resid[ing] in the fact that the discourse on ‘savages’ is, for the first time, a discourse in which an explicit political power presumes the authority of a scientific knowledge and vice versa” (*Invention* 16). As the discussion of humanitarianism above already indicates, the four texts on which I focus mark a continuation of nineteenth century emancipatory sentiment, with many of its attendant problems. The often celebratory confirmation of a single origin using genetics—the confirmation of the main thrust of Charles Darwin’s monogenism, if not all the details nor its various (mis)applications—means that the novelty now resides in the fact that the politicisation of scientific knowledge and the scientific-legitimisation of a political will have as their impetus the sincere and liberal-minded unification of the species. In other words, this time science supports a positive image of Africa. However, moving beyond the “ready recognition of images as positive or negative”, the question remains what are the “*processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible)” (Bhabha, *Location* 67) through the use of a positively articulated stereotypical discourse where Africa is the origin of our shared humanity? The particular positive invention of Africa at work in these texts—its antecedents and echoes—as well as the attendant problems or limitations of unity assured through Africa-rooted species-being will be outlined below. In section 3, I consider a more enabling framework for conceptualising species-being as a basis for community.

The reason for situating the four texts under study within the context of the confirmation of the Out of Africa theory is not because they are concerned with it directly. Rather these texts are concerned, more generally, with ancestry and origins as a way of addressing division and as a means of answering questions of ontology and relationality, the answers to which are inextricably bound up with Africa. In short, to turn to Africa is to (re)connect with the matrilineal (*The Garden of Burning Sand* and *Amaryllis in Blueberry*), discover or confront the patrilineal (*Amaryllis in Blueberry* and *The Poisonwood Bible*); it is to seek factual and ontological truth (*The Constant Gardener*), and it is to return to and reimagine the mythical and biological origins of humanity and, consequently, the possibilities of relation (*The Poisonwood Bible*). To situate these texts alongside, if not strictly within, the

OOA theory, therefore, provides a framework for understanding and interrogating these constructions of Africa and family because they parallel the socio-political implications of the OOA theory. As the “I am African” campaign already suggests, this scientific refutation of polygenesis and racial “innatism” (K. Anderson 2007) using genetics appears productive in calls for social and political unity that is global in scope and non-racial in outlook. This unity is produced, in the four texts, by two means: first, Africa represents a universal homeland which is simultaneously material or ‘real’ and symbolic as well as particular and universal; second, the family as a natural form of belonging is—contra-Anderson (1983)—not only metaphorical or “imagined” but also a form of genealogy that is observable and demonstrable. Attendant to this is that Africa as the origin of humanity—the fact that not only are we all human, we are all *African*—means that the scientific basis for racism is seemingly discredited but also, importantly, that which has in the imperialist tradition been denigrated as the sign of non- or sub-humanity is now elevated to that of humanity *par excellence*. The processes of subjectification made possible through what is in many respects merely the reversal of a negative, imperialist representation are, as I will argue below, the most significant stumbling blocks in the four texts and their project of re-thinking the possibilities for a human community.

A second reason for reading these texts alongside the OOA theory is that to do so opens up a path for a thorough and, hopefully, more productive analysis by paying attention to the ambiguities that jostle these texts’ certainties. This requires an exploration of the positive images of Africa alongside the more recognisable negative images. There is a significant body of work charting and challenging negative portrayals of the continent—some of which I refer to below—and I acknowledge and, in general terms, agree with these arguments at various points throughout this thesis. However, by placing greater focus on the positive image of Africa offered in the four texts, I hope to achieve three interconnected goals. First, these four texts differ in a number of respects, most pertinent here being the extent to which they vary as critiques of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-imperialism. However, what ties them together, providing a consistent thematic and conceptual thread, is their liberal humanism, which relies on a positive recuperation of the image of Africa. Secondly, in addition to working with the points of conceptual coherence *across* these texts, I am also interested in the struggles *within* them—that is, their efforts to do right by Africa, their failures to do so, but also, importantly, the shifts (whether only potential or actualised) towards something more promising and more productive than the hard divisions between the West and Africa which appear to obstinately dominate in representations of the continent

in film, literature, and the media in general. This hard division is also present in analyses of those representations, which brings me to my third goal: an attempt to move beyond the critical impasse which Mbembe identifies:

Modern African reflection on identity is essentially a matter of liturgical construction and incantation rather than historical criticism. It is a liturgical construction insofar as the discourse that is supposed to account for it can be reduced to three rituals so constantly repeated as to become inaudible. Year after year—a Sisyphean task if ever there was one—the first ritual contradicts and refutes western definitions of Africa and Africans by pointing out the falsehood and bad faith they presuppose. The second denounces what the West has done (and continues to do) to Africa in the name of these definitions. The third provides so-called proofs which by disqualifying the West's fictional representations of Africa and refuting its claim to have a monopoly on the expression of the human in general, are supposed to open a space in which Africans can finally narrate their own fables in a voice that cannot be imitated because it is authentically their own. (“African Modes” 2–3)

In light of the fact that Mbembe is referring to modes of *African self-representation*, it may be objected that my focus is on those injurious “western definitions” and as such the critical impasse of which Mbembe writes is not relevant to this project or, if the impasse is relevant, it is simply the inevitable outcome of an intractable problem. It is, however, exactly the fixity of the distinction between African and Western modes of writing that I wish to problematize by treating the texts and the traditions on which they draw as “contact zones” (Pratt 1992). Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4). Recognising the persistence of representational inequities, I consider the ways in which contact zones, as *textual* spaces, may account for the acts of exchange—or rather appropriation and adaptation—present in these texts.

2.1. Centring Africa: africanised cosmopolitanism and its echoes

There are three initial characteristics of Africanised cosmopolitanism worth highlighting here. First, it speaks to a diasporic experience. All four texts entail what Hall describes as a response to “a narrative of displacement” within the diaspora: an “endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’, to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” (“Cultural Identity” 236). It must be noted that where the return is often symbolic in the contexts Hall describes, it is literal in these four texts owing to their humanitarian narratives which privilege physical presence at the site of need. While the origins to which Hall refers (“Cultural Identity”

1990; “Negotiating” 1995) are largely cultural and racial, with slavery and imperialism being the cause of that loss, in the four texts the loss is metaphysical. Furthermore, slavery, colonialism, and neo-imperialism are symbolic of human division in general as much as—if not more so—than the cause of a particular loss experienced by specific groups of people. Culture is, nevertheless, still important as it is through the recuperation of ‘African culture’ that the reunion of humanity is made possible. The second characteristic of Africanised cosmopolitanism is the desire for human unity by means of universal inclusion. In an apparent fulfilment of the underlying but historically undermined and unequally applied Enlightenment declaration of human universality, these texts work towards righting the exclusion of black Africans from the category of humanity by casting Africa as the incarnation of human-ness. Importantly, the inclusion of Africans is secondary in terms of these texts’ broader projects in so far as that inclusion lays the groundwork for the reconciliation of the various families in these texts and consequently the constitution of the ‘Great Family of Humankind’. Finally, the Africa on offer in these texts is presented and intended to be read as ‘authentically African’. This ‘African authenticity’ gains its greatest force and encounters its most sustained obstacles in the texts’ deployment of notions of an African culture, the African Personality and *ubuntu* as the basis for a recuperated human unity.

Drawing on these three initial defining aspects of Africanised cosmopolitanism, it is clear that this is a recuperation of Africa inspired and influenced by Pan-Africanism and Négritude. Indeed, the ethos which underpins the particular liberal-humanism of these texts—We are all African—appears to draw a straight and uninterrupted line to Kwame Nkrumah’s assertion of a shared Africanism (Mazrui 89; see also Carmichael 1970). But Nkrumah, though a Pan-Africanist, was “an avowed opponent of Négritude” (Thompson 216; see also Mazrui, “On the Concept”). Moreover, Pan-Africanism and Négritude describe a broad range of conceptions of Africa—drawing variously on race, culture, Marxism, socialism and nationalism—and any line drawn from the turn of the millennium back to mid-twentieth-century versions of this sentiment or its nineteenth-century precursors will be anything but straight and uninterrupted (Irele 2007). For instance, there are in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Constant Gardener* echoes of African-American repatriation movements of the eighteenth-century and, in the nineteenth-century, returns to the continent in order to be, in Hall’s words above, “one with the mother again”: Ruth May Price and Tessa Quayle, like Edward Wilmot Blyden and W.E.B. Du Bois, die and are buried in Africa and this physical connection to the soil confirms their metaphysical connection to the continent and their belonging to the human—or for Blyden and Du Bois, the black African (Janis 33)—

race. But Ruth May and Tessa are white Westerners and, as Appiah demonstrates, Blyden and Du Bois's Pan-Africanism, inherited from Alexander Crummell, rests on a belief in racial solidarity and the notion that Africa is for black Africans. Even using a broad definition of these two movements, particularly Négritude, as expressions of "black cultural nationalism" and an "affirmation of a black personality" (Irele 204) suggests a fundamental incompatibility between them and Africanised cosmopolitanism because of the latter's vision of non-racial or post-racial universal unity where white Western agency may, nevertheless, still be privileged. However, as Peter Thompson posits, it is exactly the "elasticity of its definitions" that means that Négritude offers "something for everyone—supporter or opponent" (212). This elasticity—which also characterises *ubuntu*, as discussed in Chapter Three—allows these texts to draw on and/or participate in the discourse of Négritude and, by substituting 'black race' with 'human race', project a non-racial, humanist (but still culturally-inflected) cosmopolitanism.

Before situating Africanised cosmopolitanism within its more particular iterations of Pan-Africanism and Négritude, it is important to distinguish these texts' centring of Africa from similar African-centred *-isms*, which also have their roots in Pan-Africanism and Négritude but which, for the reasons I will outline below, do not offer the convenience of an already defined discourse through which to read the four texts on which I focus. The first distinction that needs to be made is that between Africanised cosmopolitanism and Afro-optimism understood as the recognition of the "remarkable economic and political renewal" on the continent which has seen "many African governments [...] increasingly guided by democratic values and institutions" (Gordon and Wolpe 49). First, not only does the Africa in these four texts not suggest "an end to Afro-pessimism", as the subtitle of David Gordon and Howard Wolpe's article declares, but in their adherence to the need for humanitarian intervention they do not counter the entrenched notion that Africa and Africans are incapable of escaping material poverty and political corruption without well-meaning Westerners intervening. The co-existence of Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism in these texts is less reflective of an effort to offer an honest but fair appraisal of the state of the continent and more indicative of the romanticisation of Africa as uniquely spiritual. In other words, the co-existence of Afro-optimism and Afro-pessimism in these texts signals a continuation of an image of the continent as having "wealth-in-people" rather than (and "in contrast to Europe's) 'wealth-in-things'" (Geschiere 23; see also Shaw 2000). Second, the Africa that is centred in the four texts does not function primarily as an economic and political entity but rather as a geographical and cultural entity with profound symbolic value.

Africa as a geo-cultural symbol echoes Afrocentrist conceptions of the continent and the significance of past civilisations for contemporary identity formation; for Africanised cosmopolitanism and proponents of Afrocentrism, the continent represents certain possibilities of being informed by what Africa ostensibly is or was. Similar to Afrocentrists such as Cheik Anta Diop, St Clair Drake and Martin Bernal, Africanised cosmopolitanism includes a “negative critique of European colonial arrogance and its latter day legacies” through a recuperation of an African civilisation and tradition, with both offering “an impassioned corrective to Euro-American and European disparagement” (Howe 4). However, the positive “unanimism” (Houtondji 1996) of each relies on different historical and scientific means and is put to opposite ends. Whereas Stephen Howe’s critique of Afrocentrist solidarity dismisses Afrocentrism’s recuperation of African history as “mystical pseudo-history” (7) and its theories of “magic melanin” (265–74) as “a body of racial pseudo-science” (2), Africa as the origin of the species and the biological refutation of race enjoy the status of being legitimate and widely-accepted empirical facts. Moreover, the result of Afrocentrism’s “racially charged fantasies of origin” (Howe 7) is racial separatism and the explicit and often intentional hardening of the division between the West and Africa. In contrast, Africanised cosmopolitanism sees in a shared African origin the means of transcending race and establishing universal solidarity. Consequently, claims to the social and political solidarity of the human race based on a shared biological origin cannot be simply dismissed as based on either pseudo-science or pseudo-history but, rather, need to be examined with nuance and complexity in mind, tracing both the limitations and possibilities of an alliance between the social, political and scientific.

In so far as it works towards a global relation that is expressed through the particularity of Africa—a relation which is the driving force of these texts’ liberal humanism—Africanised cosmopolitanism echoes aspects of Afropolitanism. Broadly defined as “cosmopolitanism with African roots” (Gehrmann 61), Afropolitanism, like Africanised cosmopolitanism, celebrates open-ness and mobility without relinquishing a connection to place (Moynagh 2015; C. Eze, “We, Afropolitans” 2016). Afropolitanism is commonly theorised along two, often contradictory, lines: on the one hand, as a cultural phenomenon the origins of which are attributed to Taiye Selassie and, on the other, as a critical intellectual intervention with regards to Africa’s position within globalised modernity associated with Achille Mbembe (Ede 2016; Coetzee 2016; Moynagh 2015).⁶ There are points of overlap between

⁶ This split attribution is arguably reductive and even misleading, as Carli Coetzee (2016) notes; nevertheless, for simplicity’s sake, I will retain these designations (Selassie’s cultural or “non-academic” (Marzagora 172)

Afropolitanism and Africanised cosmopolitanism, both in terms of what they offer and criticisms of such offerings. Afropolitanism, especially as a cultural phenomenon, is criticised for being either apolitical or individualistic in its politics (Ede 2016) as well as superficial, consumerist and liable to be co-opted by the West (Dabiri 2016; Musila, “Part-Time Africans” 2016). Afropolitanism offers a counter to formulations of the continent as essentially traditional (C. Eze, “Rethinking” 2014; Gehrman 2016; Moynagh 2015) and describes the African metropole and the upwardly mobile urbanite. As such it can be “useful as a tool of identity politics for diasporic middle-class Africa”, if not for those “permanently Africa-based Africans” (Gehrman 64) many of whom are poor and/or experience life beyond the reach of metropolitan centres. Critiques, such as those by Emma Dabiri and Grace Musila, stress this question of who counts as an Afropolitan and, as Maureen Moynagh notes, “there is an uneasy tension between those who understand Afropolitan to mean primarily those with connections to Europe or the US, and Mbembe, who is clearly more interested in Afropolitans resident on the continent” (283). But even in Mbembe’s formulation, there is the exclusion of those Africans who reside primarily on the continent but whose connection to cities like Nairobi, Lagos or Johannesburg—the “centre of Afropolitanism par excellence” (Mbembe, “Afropolitanism” 29)—as well as the mobility those cities promise remains attenuated (Marzagora 173). Nevertheless, Mbembe’s formulation of Afropolitanism challenges the essentialism and binaries often reiterated by cultural Afropolitanism and instead is characterised by hybridity as contamination and restlessness (C. Eze, “Rethinking” 2014; Gehrman 2016) and in this echoes the less reductive moments (few and far between as they may be) in the four novels discussed below.

At their most reductive and problematic, the four texts on which I focus reflect many of the aspects of cultural Afropolitanism criticised above. However, in their more interesting moments these texts reflect aspects of a critical Afropolitanism. My reason for not situating these texts primarily in relation to Afropolitanism, however, boils down to the fact that whereas Afropolitanism is fundamentally opposed to a vision of Africa captured through the lens of traditionalism, Africanised cosmopolitanism still trades in an older, traditionalist strain of Africanity. Both offer a more positive image of the continent but the positive image in the four texts is that of communal, traditional Africa regardless of whether the setting is a village in the late twentieth-century (*The Poisonwood Bible*, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*), or urban, twenty-first century Lusaka or Nairobi (*The Garden of Burning Sand*, *The Constant*

Afropolitanism versus Mbembe’s critical or “academic” Afropolitanism) when a distinction between the two forms needs to be made.

Gardener). Musila makes the point that in both name and content Afropolitanism reasserts the notion that Africans are somehow not part of the wider world because of the “need to qualify one’s cosmopolitanism” (“Part-Time Africans” 112). Taking her cue, I term what these four texts offer *Africanised* cosmopolitanism as a way of signalling a double qualification that makes room for a description of what the texts offer as well as a critical response to that offering. In other words, the term reflects the continuing distinction in these texts between Africa and what is regarded as being cosmopolitan—that is, what they represent as the tension between the particular and the universal—and indicates that the basis for that distinction is constituted by the texts’ particular idealised invention of Africa rather than a reflection of the shifting and complex realities of the continent itself.

2.2. We are all African: africanised cosmopolitanism and Négritude

These four texts may be described as participants in the Pan-Africanist and Negritude traditions in so far as the geographical facticity of Africa and a particular formulation of African culture and personhood, respectively, underpin their hope for universal unity. It is to the formulation of African culture and personhood that I turn first. Africanised cosmopolitanism echoes Leopold Senghor’s definition of Negritude as “a humanism of the twentieth century” (196) and as a combination of cultural nationalism and cosmopolitanism (Jeffers 2009). This humanism is based on a positive racialism and is invested with what Senghor (echoing Placide Tempels and John Mbiti) regards as particular “*cultural values of the black world*” (Senghor 196, italics in original): a unique “unity”, “balance” or “harmony” within African civilisation which results from a process of “dialogue and reciprocity” (199) between the community and the person in black society (see also Kaphagawani 2000; and Menkiti 1984). Because of these cultural values, Senghor claims that “[t]he African has always and everywhere presented a concept of the world which is diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe” (197). This opposition is not, however, antagonistic but rather complementary. The “idea of Negritude”, Didier Kaphagawani notes, “is all about binding opposites together in an aesthetic interplay of complementarity that brings the universe to its fulfilment” (73). The romanticism of Negritude is, much like eighteenth-century Romanticism in Europe, a critical response to the Enlightenment, particularly its “discourses of man and reason” (E. C. Eze 42). However, Negritude does not signal a departure from Enlightenment values as much as the reversal of its value-judgements, as when Senghor declares that “Emotion is Negro, and reason Greek”. This statement though intended as an example of the ‘positive’ complementarity of Africa and Europe nevertheless “recapitulates

a strain of irrationality in modern African thought” (E. C. Eze 41). The amalgamation of Romantic sentiment and Enlightenment thought is also evident in Senghor’s contention that the “duality of matter and energy” (197)—a theory proven by discoveries in the physical sciences at the end of the nineteenth century—provided a scientific basis for the transcendence of “the traditional dichotomies with a new dialectic” (197) in which, for instance, (African) spirit and (European) matter become spirit-matter. The resulting cultural and ontological synthesis or *métissage*, a theme developed in Senghor’s later essays such as *Liberté III* (Jeffers 2009; Thompson 2007), is evident in the four texts’ representation of Africa as a cultural entity, diametrically opposed and simultaneously complementary to the West: where the West can provide humanitarian relief because of its ‘wealth-in-things’, Africa provides humanity because of its ‘wealth-in-people’ or, if that conjures too strongly the theft of people from the continent, its ‘wealth-in-personhood’. For these four texts, as for Negritude, the central unit of belonging is that of the family from which larger units emerge in a “polycentric [...] network” (Irele 207).

The importance of genetics to formulations of family in the four texts (outlined in section 3 below) as opposed to the revolution in physics for Senghor’s formulation of complementary duality marks a notable difference between Senghor’s Negritude and Africanised Cosmopolitanism. There are more fundamental differences which indicate that it would be a mistake to read these texts as a straightforward application of Senghor’s vision for two reasons. The first is that “even a well-meaning multiculturalism get an uneven grip on Negritude” (Thompson 212). Multiculturalism, Thompson notes, may be “enacted by inserting discrete and distinctly non-American cultures” (212) into American discourse, resulting in the kind of exoticism of which, Thompson contends, Senghor was critical. The second reason is that of the time that has passed since, and the philosophical and ideological space that has been traversed and re-tread in response to, Senghor’s articulation of Negritude. Therefore, as much as these four texts written at the turn of the millennium reflect “a multicultural embrace of Negritude” (Thompson 212), equally present are the tensions that arise from the various objections to such a vision and its particulars.

The first well-known objection to Senghor’s Negritude is that his formulation suffers from a romantic, racial essentialism. His emphasis on harmony, rhythm and vital force as quintessentially African qualities has resulted in the charge that “Senghorian *Negritude* is [or can be made] the epitome of racial essentialism” (Jeffers 60). This is perhaps most famously reflected in Jean-Paul Sartre’s call for Africans to return to a “primordial simplicity of existence” (29) and his description of the writhing, “possessed” African poet who, with his

“supposedly special spermatic Negro qualities” (E. C. Eze 154–5), is without comparison in the ‘rational’ European world. Frantz Fanon pillories such ‘uniquely African’ qualities as the projection of “magical black culture” (*Black Skin* “Chapter 5”). In contrast, Chike Jeffers contends that Senghor’s emphasis on these African qualities is suggestive of relational personhood or a “*dynamic* conception of being” (57, italics in original) when the latter’s myth of Negritude is understood as “*prescriptive*” (62, italics in original)—that is, as stressing cultural cultivation rather than the preservation of an essentialist cultural nationalism. It is, however, important to remain cognisant of the fact that “relational models of personhood have often been part of dominant Western representations of ‘backwardness’ and recur in images of ‘rural idiocy’ and of ‘the primitive’” (Shaw 29). Senghor’s reproduction of ahistorical Eurocentric stereotypes not only fixes in time and place what are continually shifting conceptions of self within and across the continent and its cultures over time (Shaw 2000), it also undercuts Negritude’s primary critical claim of challenging Eurocentric politics and aesthetics. Es’kia Mphahlele notes the various political realities and struggles faced by African countries and concludes that “[o]n the political plane, all these different meanings we attach to freedom make nonsense of *the African Personality*” (21, emphasis added). This is, on the surface, similar to Fanon’s contention that “every culture is first and foremost national” and that consequently Negritude’s primary limitation is its failure to “take account of the formation of the historical character of man” (*Wretched* “Chapter IV”). However, where Mphahlele indicates that the expression of “*an African Personality*” (22, emphasis added) may be productive as long as it is not absolute—that is, if the artist remains cognisant of the disjuncture between his individuality and the African traditions upon which he draws—Fanon and Lewis Nkosi are critical and wary, respectively, of the fetishization of fragmentation. This is what the latter terms a “sometimes too joyous affirmation” of an African image and identity that “has been fragmented almost beyond recognition” (159; see also Fanon, *Wretched* “On National Culture”).

The second objection—that Senghor’s assimilationist Manichaeism reproduces European modes of thought and, therefore, concedes too much to Europe—is at the heart of the debate between Wole Soyinka and Kwame Anthony Appiah. Critical of the details of Negritude rather than its dualistic structure, Soyinka objects that it not only “accepts the dialectical power structure of European ideological confrontations but borrows from the very components of its racist syllogism” (*Myth* 127). ‘Negritudinists’ have, therefore, reproduced what Mudimbe calls the “essential [nineteenth-century] paradigm of European invention of Africa: Us/Them” (*Idea* 71). But Soyinka’s use of Yoruba cosmology in the service of

coherence and unity—that is, “complementarity” (Soyinka, *Myth* xii)—does little to dismantle the myth of an African world which stands in contrast and remains inscrutable to the West (Appiah, *Father’s House* 74–84). Critical of racialism, Soyinka’s mythologisation as well as nationalism’s exclusionary romanticism (*Father’s House* 48–60), Appiah advocates for identity to be understood as “historically and geographically relative” (*Father’s House* 180). In recognition of the many *shared* problems on the African continent, he nevertheless asserts that “another Pan-Africanism—the project of a continental fraternity and sorority, *not* the project of a racialised Negro nationalism [...] can be a progressive force” (*Father’s House* 180). Responses to *In My Father’s House* and to Appiah’s later work, *Cosmopolitanism*, note and criticise, however, that he retains a European sense of African culture (Jazeel 2007; Nzegwu 1996; Witt 2006).

Though “[t]here is”, as Peter Thompson notes in 2007, “a lack of consensus about the movement” (210), recuperations of Negritude—much like the objections outlined above—follow two trajectories which are in tension with each other⁷: there is, on the one hand, a tendency towards restoring the coherence and unity of the African subject and, on the other, an acknowledgement that Negritude is characterised by a productive ambivalence. Unease about the implications for Africa of the debunking of race as a genetic category raises the question of “what would be left as the bond that unites peoples hitherto subsumed under those combined categories [of geography and genealogy]?” (Owomoyela 172; see also Marzagora 2016). Neither foregrounding race nor relinquishing it, Oyekan Owomoyelo proposes that a shared culture and geographical space, which for him are the “results [of] common descent” (172), provide the basis for the coherence of the African self and the unity of the African community. Similarly, Soyinka has revisited his early criticisms of Negritude and, in what is again more a modification in detail than a fundamental change in argument, sees possibilities in “the pulse of [Negritude’s] dialectic that springs from the black particular to the solidarity of the universal” (“Re-Positioning”; see also Soyinka, *Of Africa* 2012). In contrast, rather than a singular entity—Negritude as the expression of *the black particular*—Kwaku Asante-Darko defines it as “a single multidimensional organism” (154), containing “aggressive”, “conciliatory” and “inventive” facets, the first of which, he argues, has been disproportionately emphasised by critics. Demonstrating greater tolerance for the uncertainty that accompanies such multiplicity, Simon Gikandi (2000) and Michael Janis

⁷ The parallels between initial objections and subsequent recuperations suggest that there is more similarity between opponents and proponents of Negritude than is commonly acknowledged (Asante-Darko 2000; Thompson 2007).

(2008) foreground the ambiguity of Negritude as a modernist movement—that is, Negritude as “both the symptom and critique of modernity” (Gikandi 35)—as well as its transitional and intercultural character. For Janis, resistance is, therefore, not made possible by an essential African modernism but rather through the “complex play of aesthetic forms and the politics of modernity” (5–6) found in all modernisms.

Situated—or perhaps “stuck” (140) as Emmanuel Eze contends—in the interstices of the shift from Eurocentrism to Pan-Africanism and that from scientific racialism (both negative and ‘positive’) to the promise of a post-racial society, Négritude, objections to, and recuperations of Négritude raise a series of questions which, though formulated separately and in linear fashion here, are overlapping, intersecting and, indeed, circular. First, what basis is there for solidarity? Is it nation, culture, or individual identity? Secondly, what form would any of these bases for solidarity take? Are nations best understood as “imagined” as Benedict Anderson proposes or real, as others discussed below contend? If culture is the basis for solidarity, is it traditional or modern, fixed or fluid? If identity offers the most workable basis for being-together in a globalising world, must identity be conceived of as coherent (if not essential), providing stability in a fragmented world, or is a fragmented sense of identity better suited to navigating a globalised world? Finally, what is the nature of the unity towards which we are ostensibly hurtling? Is unity inevitable and our progress towards it teleological? Or will disunity prevail despite the increasing integration of technologies and social systems? Is unity a process rather than a destination or is it perhaps necessarily and endlessly deferred? Can unity be achieved using a nationalist or cultural framework and would that unity be a hybrid or a complement? Can unity be achieved using rational and scientific formulations—*should* it even be conceived of in such terms—or does unity only have power in so far as it is driven by emotional and Romantic forces, not forgetting the history of violent excess of those forces? And further to all these questions: what role is there for Africa, however it is defined, to play?

2.3. Us and Them: Africa as invention, image and mask

As it is posed above, the question of what role Africa plays in these four texts’ working towards a unified human community invites the possibility of its active participation in this process. Africa’s agency however, appears to be undermined, if not directly negated, by the fact that these four texts continue to foreground Western characters; the agency of African characters is chiefly either a by-product of what they symbolise and/or limited to their relation to the white protagonists. What then is to be made of the sincerity of these four texts which,

on the one hand, fail to imagine African characters as actors but which, on the other, not only put Africa at the centre of their narrative but strive to centre an Africa authenticated in thought—through an association with Pan-Africanism and Négritude—and in action—that is, the Western characters' physical presence on the continent and their interaction with African characters? Are we to understand the image of Africa that emerges as inauthentic or false, the lack of agency of African characters as evidence of these texts as being thoroughly or irredeemably racist, their criticisms of colonialism and neo-imperialism as acts of bad faith; do we dismiss their Pan-Africanist and Négritudinist inflections as cynical cultural appropriation? To do so, I argue, results not only in the more productive and more interesting aspects of these texts going unnoticed but also in the continuation of the impasse that is the opposition of Africa and the West in the production and reception of texts centred on Africa and produced by non-Africans.

That Africa has long been invented and distorted by Europe and the West is not in dispute here. Critics of these inventions in the form of literature, visual media, geo-politics, popular culture and academic discourse—such as V.Y. Mudimbe (1988; 1994), Chinua Achebe (2006), Jan Nederveen Pieterse (*White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* 1995), Ali Mazrui (1996), Achille Mbembe (2001)—present a vast and varied set of arguments, a thorough survey of which lies beyond the scope of this project. What is of particular relevance to an understanding of the four texts' representations of Africa is the overarching issue of the antithesis between Africa and Europe/the West. What these analyses demonstrate time and again is that Africa suffers under a “negative interpretation” (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 1), whether that be in the form of a classical fantastical “geography of monstrosity” (Mudimbe, *Invention* 71), a purported absence of human-ness (Achebe) or “non-identity and difference” (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 4)—that is, absence and negation itself. In a 1998 interview, Mudimbe recapitulates this point when he says that in “papers, news and the common sense in Europe, Africa remains today the *absolute* difference” (Palmburg 248, emphasis added). If this negative interpretation is understood “as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over [Africa]” (Said 95) that remains unmitigated then there is little possibility of a movement beyond the subject/object dualism upon which imperialism relies. Such a position assumes that Europe is all-powerful, the converse of which is necessary and inescapable African victimhood unless Africa “writes back” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989) to Empire using and subverting the language of Empire and in so doing “asserts an identity in opposition to the identities imposed by colonisation” (Barber 6). This writing back and the framing of the colonial/postcolonial world

it presupposes has been criticised for reinscribing “the generalized model of a binary world of colonizer and colonized” (Barber 7). There is also, as Anne McClintock argues, the tendency in postcolonial theory to replace the “binary axis of *power*” with “the binary axis of *time*”, effecting a “re-centring of global history around the single rubric of European time” (“Angel of Progress” 85–6). In addition to (and in some cases at the basis of) these geographical, cultural and temporal dualisms, there is that of universalism and particularism which, as Robert Young notes, pervades Edward Said’s text, *Orientalism*, quoted above (*White Mythologies* 181).

As already stated, the four texts in question invoke the opposite of this negative image: Africa as the very fullness of human-ness made present. This reversal—and even the presence of some anti-imperial and anti-colonialist sentiments—does not mean, however, that these texts offer an anti-colonialist discourse; I do not propose that they be regarded as “the under/other side of ‘colonial discourse’” (Bhabha, “Difference” 155). Rather than the dismantling of colonial myth, this elevation of Africa is a continuation of one of the “two contradictory myths” that continued to inform colonial inventions of Otherness—that is, “the Rousseauian picture of an African golden age of perfect liberty, equality and fraternity” (Hodgkin qtd in Mudimbe, *Invention* 1)—which in conjunction with its Hobbesian counterpart, Mudimbe argues, are a means of exercising imperialist power. The particular elevation of Africa in the four texts—underpinned by religious-paradisiacal myth and anti-slavery sentiment—is a continuation of nineteenth century thought where the identification of Africans “as the true primeval humans” (Ramsey-Kurz xv) and the recognition of the common humanity of enslaved Africans had implications for understandings of their place of origin (Landau 2002). Serving, often simultaneously, deliberately inimical and well-intentioned ideologies and movements, the antithesis between Africa and the West is a dynamic one because Africa is itself conceived of in antithetical terms: Africa represents the best and the worst of humankind. The four texts are examples of the fact that while the collusion between the ‘Us/Them’ paradigm and the negative thesis where Africa represents the worst of humanity (including its absence) may appear to be challenged through recourse to the positive thesis, the success of that challenge remains limited and problematic because the overarching Us/Them dichotomy remains intact.

Acknowledging that Africa has long been invented and distorted by Europe and the West, therefore, is only the first step. It is also important to remain cognisant of the fact that Europe and the West are also inventions. This includes but is not limited to the fact that “Europe is”, as Fanon argues, “literally the creation of the Third World” because of the human

and natural resources “plundered from the underdeveloped peoples” (*Wretched “On Violence”*) and used to build and enrich Europe. The inventions that are Europe and the West are also ontological in nature. “[P]ost-Enlightenment projections of colonial paradises”, Helga Ramsey-Kurz notes,

reflected a greater need than ever to stress the Christian idea of prelapsarian goodness and to warn against the dangers of its corruption. They did so, however, not to defend the purported moral integrity of Western humans *but to question it* and assert in its stead the perfect innocence of subjugated and exploited natives. (xv, emphasis added)

Paul Landau refers to a similar questioning of Western human-ness that took place at the height of slavery when anti-slavery sentiment drew on an understanding of Africans as the embodiment of the slavers’ European ancestors. To reverse what was the standard denigration of Africans and claim common human ancestry, as freedman Olaudah Equiano did, did not necessarily result in European slavers accepting contemporary Africans as their equals but what it did achieve was the reframing of slavery as a form of ancestral cannibalism and, as such, undermining notions European civilisation that served to distance ‘Self’ from ‘Other’. What these two examples indicate is that ‘otherness’ “is at once an object of desire and derision” (Bhabha, “Other Question” 19). Therefore, rather than articulating colonial discourse, as Said does, in the form of “a binary opposition between power and powerlessness, which requires the supposition of an exterior controlling intention and leaves no room for negotiation or resistance” (Young, *White Mythologies* 182), Bhabha understands it as “a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes, across differential power relations, both colonizer and colonized” (*Location* 96). That the positive reversal of the Africa/Europe antithesis is an exercise in colonial and imperialist power does not preclude the fact that “the authority of colonial power was not straightforwardly possessed by the colonizer” (Young, *White Mythologies* 185; see also Bhabha, “Difference” 158). Thus the ambivalence of colonial discourse is productive for the exercise of colonial power and for the destabilisation of that power. Indeed, the positive reversal serves to highlight that there is a profound anxiety at the heart of the colonial subject which the four texts, written near the turn of the millennium, have inherited. In the interview cited above, Mudimbe adds that in “the globalising world in which we are living today” there is a “frightening” move towards a reduction of “*all of us, African and Europeans*, to objects producing according to the demands of multinationals” (Palmburg 249, emphasis added). Mudimbe is in this instance critical of global *economic* forces and though his framing of the shift from colonial

to corporate power risks a new Us/Them paradigm defined by a relation of powerlessness/power, the shift itself is indicative of the West's increasing inability to rest assured in the certainty of its own subjecthood and agency—that is, in the certainty of its human-ness.

That the West is a fraught invention does not in and of itself provide direct political resistance to domination. Nevertheless, in so far as the four texts have as their goal a universal human community, an exploration of the ambivalence and anxiety at the “point of enunciation and subjectification” (Bhabha, *Location* 80) of that community provides an alternative starting point for formulations thereof. Part of the inadequacy of Said's critique of colonialism is that in addition to making little to no room for agency on the part of the colonized it also “unifies the subject of colonial enunciation” (Bhabha, “Difference” 158). Bhabha's identification of the ambivalence of colonial discourse and power allows for a disruption of the binary by shifting focus from ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ to what he terms the “Otherness of the Self” (Bhabha, *Location* 97). Young argues that in Bhabha's earlier work, “[i]t is not [his] concern to focus on [anti-colonialist] resistance, but rather to show the hesitations and irresolution of what is being resisted” (*White Mythologies* 186). It has been objected that the poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial theories that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century have failed to provide a framework for an identity “stable enough to be mobilized politically in economic and social struggles” (Marzagora 174). The dilemma within Africa studies is thus that

[o]n the one hand, scholars point to the necessity of dismantling the system of dichotomies that posited Africa as a site of radical difference—a system produced by Eurocentric colonial thought, but also upheld by early African nationalist and radical thinkers. On the other, though, they maintain that it is similarly necessary to reject processes of cultural synthesis operated in the name of a putative universal sameness—processes that, at a second glance, often aim at assimilating cultural alterity to Western-dictated values and Western-centred knowledge. (Marzagora 174)

What this formulation of the problem does not recognise is that when exploring the ambivalence and anxiety at the site of enunciation and subjectification a third option becomes available that does not eradicate the dichotomy but which, by relocating it within the subject, problematizes the existence and imposition of universal sameness. In other words, the disruption of rigid dichotomies—that is, the exploration of ambivalence—does not resolve the dichotomy, thereby erasing all difference, between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ so much as redefine these terms and thereby make possible a different relation between them. Young

argues that the fact that Bhabha's "analysis cannot but be equally applicable to colonized as to colonizer" (*White Mythologies* 186) presents a political difficulty. However, in the four texts where the relations under scrutiny are framed predominantly as between human beings rather than between colonizer and colonized, the destabilisation of the subject, understood in its most inclusive sense, is potentially politically enabling (this will be addressed in greater detail below (section 3).

The agency that Africa has in these four texts does not take the form of direct political resistance but rather is located in the existence and nature of the image of Africa itself. That is to say, the ambivalence of colonial discourse and power has implications for the aesthetics with which they are interconnected. If the relationship between Africa and the West is inescapably and hierarchically dualistic, then these texts' Pan-Africanist and Negritudinist inflections may be condemned as no more and no less than neo-imperialist cultural appropriation. Such a charge relies on the assumption that what is being utilized is somehow purely or authentically African. The objections to and recuperations of Négritude outlined above and the account of Pan-Africanism below indicate that these are contested discourses precisely because they are not (nor could they ever be) authentically, that is purely, African. Indeed, like the "modern and modernist" cultural forms of the Black Atlantic that Paul Gilroy examines, it is the hybridity of these discourses, their "doubleness, their unsteady location" (*Black Atlantic* 73) that give them their power. Moreover, as Comaroff and Comaroff state (following Bhabha), "modernity", of which the image of Africa is a product, "was, almost from the start, a north-south collaboration—indeed, a world-historical production—albeit a sharply asymmetrical one" (*Theory* 6). To reject the image of Africa in these texts as no more than European/Western inventions and distortions relies on three assumptions about this image and image in general which Julie Gallagher (2015) enumerates and shows to be inadequate, if not false, when attempting to make sense of how image functions and who it serves or does not. First is the assumption that the image is different from reality and consequently serves to deceive (whether that deception be well-intentioned or nefarious); second, is the assumption of the power of images and, third, is the notion that "image is malleable and can be controlled" (2). It is the third assumption, particularly the idea of control, which Gallagher challenges with reference to the image of Africa conceived of as a map. European-drawn maps of Africa, Gallagher notes, presented "an image of a shadowy, barely grasped world, one that invited projected fantasies of horror and adventure" and which provided "a way for Europeans to make sense of themselves" (4). The authority of this image rests on the assumption that it is a scientific and rational close approximation of the real thing. The image

is prescriptive and the control of the map-maker is absolute because “[m]aps demand that the viewer enters into the world of the maker or she will literally be lost” (5). While this image is “artificial and constraining” (5), distorting the thing it claims to capture, Gallagher argues that rejections of this image that appeal to a reclamation of Africa and call for its image to be restored—that is, revealed—rest (like the assumptions of the map-maker) “on problematic fantasies of control and authenticity” (6). This fantasy, regardless of who holds it, is problematic because of its “ontological individualism”, which is to say “the denial of the relational nature of image” (6). Consequently, both the map and rejections of the map that seek to de-Europeanise Africa by erasing the past or returning to a pre-European idealisation, reinforce the notion that Africa is somehow separate from the rest of the world.

Having replaced fantasies of control with the notion of relationality, Gallagher’s theorisation reformulates the three assumptions about images in order to take into account how the viewer, the imaged and the image itself interact with and affect each other. She argues that “image is a product of relationships between the place, the people being imaged and those on the outside who are engaging with them”, adding that when the thing being represented is a country or a continent and therefore “not a ‘thing’ but rather [...] many ‘things’, and also nothing” (Gallagher 3) the artificiality, malleability and contingency of the image increases. Rather than a map, Gallagher argues that the image—a complex of relationships—can be thought of as a mask in which both the wearer and the observer “must make an investment” (7) for the image to resonate. Embodying the barriers between wearer and observer as well as mediating between them, the mask represents an image of the former, the artifice of which “is clear on one level to everyone”, while at the same time offering to the observer “something true” (7). Gallagher’s theorisation of how thing, image and outsider relate to each other draws on but, crucially, also extends Achille Mbembe’s discussion of image in *On the Postcolony*. She contends that though Mbembe acknowledges that in addition to being shaped by image, “the person being imaged [also] derives power from that image” (Gallagher 12) within the context of Africa, when it comes to Western images of Africa “image becomes emasculating” (10). With reference to Jean-Francois Bayart’s theory of extraversion, Gallagher states that “it may be possible to overplay the lop-sidedness of Western agency in the creation of images of Africa” (11) and demonstrates that to “restore agency” (16) by acknowledging that the image of Africa “can work in favour of the weaker protagonist” (11) is possible without subscribing to a fallacious notion of a balance of power between Africa and the West.

2.4. Global Pan-Africanism: the paradox of universal nativism

Africa is, in the four texts under study, useful for its ability to provide a basis for and enrich a cosmopolitan, human unity. Produced in the closing years of the twentieth century and those opening the twenty-first and, therefore, in the context of rapid globalisation and the rendering of the factuality of race as no longer self-evident, these texts appear to offer the fulfilment of Senghor's 'Civilisation of the Universal' without the divisive problem of racial essentialism. Instead of race, the basis for solidarity is species-being and the Senghorian notion of African culture as especially human because of its emphasis on rhythm and harmony in aesthetics and ontology is reified by the fact that Africa is the origin of humanity. While the obvious and potentially divisive cultural opposition of Africa and Euro-America is assimilated by the reliance on a peculiarly human African culture, such an invention of Africa, the exoticism underlying that invention, and the malleability of the notion of 'Africa' that makes that invention possible appear neutralised by the geographical and biological facticity of our single, shared origin: the human community that emerges is both assuredly universal and natural. These two features of Africanised cosmopolitanism—universality and naturalness—are the result of the (ostensible) transcendence of the divisive politics of nation and culture through recourse to family and "post-territorial politics" (Chandler 113). A series of paradoxes emerge, however, because Africa is both the means of expressing these four texts' cosmopolitanism and it signals the crisis within that cosmopolitan vision. The nub of the paradox lies in the tension between envisioning a cosmopolitan unity and making that vision expressive and, indeed, 'expressible' or shareable. The four texts under study constitute their human community through the "poles of geography and genealogy" (Gilroy, *Against Race* 122) and, while their appeals are to human unity based on universal and natural nativism and kinship, they remain caught up in particularistic and potentially divisive discourses of nation and culture.

Addison, Kingsolver, Mereilles and Meldrum's texts appear contradictory in terms of their position with regards to the nation: it is part of the structure of the division they work to transcend but it also provides the terms through which unity is forged. This is, in fact, the paradox of universal nativism. These texts can be described as engaged in what David Chandler terms "post-territorial politics" (113). This is a politics which has as its goal "the emergence of an immanent universalizing political community, capable of overcoming exclusion and hierarchy in international relations" (Chandler 115). The nation state as the point around and through which political community is organised as well as the negotiation of power by representatives are rejected in favour of a direct, inter-subjective and

individualised confrontation with power. In so far as post-territorial politics is a product of the liberal cosmopolitanism of the 1990s, Chandler argues that it is characterised by “elite advocacy” (114) and the notion of the citizen as a rights-bearing subject is replaced by the assertion of the human as self-evident. Martha Nussbaum, a proponent of liberal cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2006), like Chandler opposes cosmopolitanism and nationalism or patriotism, but conceiving of the latter as “both morally dangerous and, ultimately, subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve” (“I”), advocates for cosmopolitanism. Having acknowledged that, in sharp contrast to *world* citizenship, “patriotism is full of color and intensity and passion” (“IV”), Nussbaum ends her essay by conceding that often “the appeal to world citizenship fails” but, in a recuperation of what she regards as a moral good, she adds that “in its very failure it succeeds” (Nussbaum “IV”). In other words, the value and need for cosmopolitanism becomes apparent exactly when it fails to come into being and instead the divisions that inevitably accompany nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are reasserted. In contrast, Chandler dismisses cosmopolitanism and post-territorial politics as inadequate, positing that the severance of “the connection between [national] citizenship and political community [...] constitutes the death of political community” (114). Similarly, though in the context of Africa’s emergent nation states, Fanon blames the development of a weak national consciousness on those newly independent countries’ “deep cosmopolitan mentality” (*Wretched* “On National Culture”). Characteristic of the African bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, Fanon regards the adoption of “a thoroughly ‘universal perspective’” as resulting in individuals without anchorage, without borders, colorless, stateless, rootless, a body of angels” (*Wretched* “On National Culture”). For both Chandler and Fanon, national citizenship and not a transnational common humanity is the means of claiming political power.

The crisis in these four texts’ project can then be understood as that of the colourlessness of its universal humanism, the fact that it “seems to have a hard time gripping the imagination” (Nussbaum “IV”). Therefore, in recognition of the limits of a prosaic humanism but unwilling to jettison ‘the human’ as a category that is self-evident and universal, these texts re-territorialise their politics and their vision for universal human unity by orienting their politics toward, and locating that unity in, Africa. Any sense of isolation as a consequence of the rootlessness of exile is mitigated, first, by the fact that exile is a widely shared experience (everyone not living in Africa is by definition not at home) and so becomes the point around which a sense of community can be generated. Secondly, that rootlessness which is for Chandler and Fanon akin to being without political power is easily overcome by

a (re)turn to Africa which, conceived of as a contemporary site of profound suffering and as the primordial origin of the species, makes of the returnee a double-agent: they exercise political agency in their response to contemporary Africa and simultaneously transcend the 'politics of now' by returning to a home that is beyond and precedes history. Whatever affective and political influence western humanitarianism might still have and whatever cynicism and resistance such interventions elicit fade in comparison with the emotional power and natural self-evidence of species-wide autochthony, that connection between self (*autos*) and soil (*chthonos*), which "seems to represent the most authentic form of belonging" (Geschiere 2). As Peter Geschiere phrases it, "born from the earth itself—how could one belong more?" (2).

Whereas the ability of humanitarian discourse to mobilise is increasingly undermined by the recognition that unequal power structures may necessarily be reproduced as a consequence of well-intentioned intervention, nativism's or autochthony's "considerable mobilizing impact" (Geschiere 5) is explained, in part, by the "discourse's capacity to appeal to what seem to be primordial truths" (Geschiere 29). There is, in the claiming of national belonging, the possibility of one's nativism being both corroborated and betrayed by history: trace one's ancestry far enough and the authenticity of belonging becomes more firmly established; go back too far and, considering the centrality of migration to human history, a non-native ancestor is inevitably revealed. Autochthony, therefore, eventually requires "a basic denial of history, which always implies movement [...] a kind of negative history that always needs an Other—movement in any form—to define itself" (Geschiere 12). In contrast, an African-centred universal autochthony in the context of the OOA theory appears to have resolved this tension by transcending history. What is already "a kind of ur-belonging" (Comaroff and Comaroff, "Naturing" 658–59) in relation to nationalist nativism gains a more secure footing when it is located in Africa: Africa, already shorthand for that which is primordial but now, thanks to genetics, shorn of the divisive racism of polygenism, signals a self-evident geographical and biological origin characterised by "presence without difference" (Derrida, *Grammatology* 215), and thus a seemingly unassailable centre of belonging; the idea being that one cannot conceivably go—or at least reasonably be expected to go—beyond the very beginning of the species.

But, in addition to emotional power and self-evidence, autochthony is also characterised by "haunting uncertainty" (Geschiere 31); this is what Geschiere terms autochthony's "puzzling ambiguity" (12). On the one hand, autochthony represents the most authentic form of belonging but, on the other, Geschiere notes that "it turns up at highly

different moments and places, without a clear link, yet assuming everywhere the same aura of self-evidence” (2). The question that emerges and which drives Geschiere’s project is one that Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* also raises (Carsten 155): how can one account for the emotional power of nativism in light of its wide-spread and varied applications? This problem persists, though slightly altered, in the four texts under study because whereas the Africa understood as the origin of the species appears to offer the transcendence of history and scientific certainty, the Africa which the characters encounter when they arrive is a place marked by history, serving as a reminder of difference and potentially reintroducing division. However, the latter does not replace the former when the characters encounter “real” Africa, not least because “real Africa” is as much an invention as “primordial Africa”. Rather they co-exist and there is, throughout the four texts, an uneasy oscillation between these two broad versions of Africa.

This oscillation is also one between a problematic but unintended irony and the sincerity of the texts’ drive towards unity: the same difference that enlivens their cosmopolitanism, providing colour and ‘grip’ through recourse to a peculiarly African spirituality and tribal aesthetic, threatens the possibility of that universally-inclusive unity towards which they sincerely strive and which Africa as the origin of the species seems to make possible. This oscillation is also, then, between Africa conceived of as ‘particular’ and as ‘universal’. In order to make sense of the conceptual distance that needs to be travelled between these opposites in the recuperation of the possibility of universal nativism and unity through Africa, it helps to understand Africa as a universal particular. This formulation builds on Ali Mazrui’s description of Africa as representing a “continentalistic type of [...] nationalism” (“On the Concept” 93). Before I expand on this notion of Africa as a universal particular, it is necessary to attend, in general terms, to the contradiction this formulation suggests as well as concerns that may arise in relation it.

2.4.1. The Tenacious Nation

Though it forms the basis of a cosmopolitan community, in its reliance on continent-wide territorialisation of being and belonging universal nativism is not entirely unlike appeals to nationalist nativism. Appiah makes the point that “nativists may appeal to identities that are both wider and narrower than the nation: to ‘tribes’ and towns, below the nation state; to Africa, above” (*Father’s House* 56). Moreover, using both literal and symbolic births, deaths and rebirths of characters in Africa and through African ontology, these texts’ Africanisation of human unity can be regarded as a “radical indigenization of identity”, which Bhabha

describes in his 2004 foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as a "turn from a political commitment into a more inward identification" (*Wretched* "Framing Fanon"). The emphasis placed on the merging of self and soil that occurs during burials in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Constant Gardener* offer particularly strong examples of this and are a reminder of the centrality of funerals, since ancient Greece, in expressions of autochthony (Geschiere 10–11). Of course, Fanon's "self-fashioning [...] as an Algerian" (Bhabha in Fanon, "Framing Fanon") is a thoroughly nationalist project, requiring the surrender of his Martinican identity rather than an assimilationist unity. He is, moreover, arguably more critical of a continent-based approach to political resistance and unity than he is to a cosmopolitan mentality, seeing in the turn to African unity a deterioration into regionalism and racism in the years of and those following African independence movements. "There is", he opines, "a constant pendulum motion between African unity, which sinks deeper and deeper into oblivion, and a depressing return to the most heinous and virulent type of chauvinism" (*Wretched* "On National Culture").

Fanon's rejection of a continent-based politics, like his and Chandler's dismissal of cosmopolitanism in favour of national politics, overstates the distinction between that which is national and that which is transnational or cosmopolitan. Where Chandler and Fanon see a neutering and replacement of the nation state and national consciousness by and with more globalised forms of political identification and organisation, Geschiere notes "the tenacity of the nation state that succeeds, through a wide array of forms and processes, in grafting itself onto increasing globalization" (21). The rejection of the nation state in principle does not, in effect, mean a convincing departure from its discourses. The persistence of the nation does not only take the form of a multinational identity, which for Fanon requires the negation of all except one national identity or risks "psychoaffective mutilations" (*Wretched* "On National Culture"). Rather, "many of the categories of statism are implicitly reproduced in cosmopolitan discourse" (Baker and Bartelson 5) and vice versa. With regards to the latter, Geschiere cites a renewed interest (beginning in the 1980s) in discourses of autochthony in response to, *but also using* the language of, globalisation, democratisation, decentralisation, and cultural- and bio-diversity (16–18). Similarly, Mbembe notes a "rise in power of the nativistic reflex" where "nativism appears as an ideology glorifying differences and diversity" ("Ways of Seeing" 28) and in so doing uses the discourses of cosmopolitanism to covertly establish once more distinctions between 'true' natives and non-natives.

Considering the reinvigoration of nationalist nativisms in Europe and Africa at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries noted by Mbembe ("Ways of

Seeing” 2001; “Afropolitanism” 2007) and Geschiere (2009) and the decidedly conservative bent that mainstream appeals to nationalist nativism has acquired once more in the last few years, incredulity towards a nationalist project such as that of Fanon may seem wise. Moreover, their comments regarding the smuggling in of a divisive and exclusionary nativism while claiming to protect diversity adds to concerns regarding any conjunction of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. There are, however, two reasons for not disavowing the nation or dismissing it owing to the danger its rhetoric poses.

First, nationalism is not a homogeneous monolith and there are a variety of nationalisms. This is particularly important in the twentieth century during which the horrors of nationalism in Europe were followed by nationalist movements which sought to liberate those previously colonised by Europe. Pointing out the importance of not conflating repressive and imperialist nationalisms with those that underpin anticolonial movements, Paul Zeleza characterises the “overriding ambition of Africa’s colonial and postcolonial intellectuals” as the affirmation of Africa’s and Africans’ “historicity and humanity” (112). From this project emerges “a nationalist humanism that transcends the narrow confines of nationalism as conventionally understood” (Zeleza 112). A second counter to an unqualified disavowal of the nation is that though they are “imagined communities” (B. Anderson 1983), nations are social and psychological realities in so far as they represent a problem and/or a goal (Marzagora 2016; McClintock 1991; McClintock 1993). Preferring Ernest Gellner’s definition of nation as an invention, Anne McClintock argues that “[t]he term ‘imagined’ carries in its train connotations of fiction and make-believe, moonshine and chimera” whereas the latter “refuses the conservative faith in essence and nature, while at the same time conveying more powerfully the implications of labor and creative ingenuity, technology and institutional power” (“No Longer” 104) through which nations are constructed. Nationalism is, therefore, productive and while McClintock states that “all [nationalisms] are dangerous” she does not propose that they be simply opposed but rather understood as “representing relations to political power and to the technologies of violence” (“Family Feuds” 61) which may effectively foster feelings of cohesion. “Autochthony’s puzzling ambiguity” (Geschiere 31)—that is, the question of nativism’s continuing affective and mobilizing power that Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* raises but does not answer (Carsten 2004)—invites reconsiderations of the nation, its power and its continuing usefulness in contexts which purport to have moved beyond the nation. Geschiere’s turn to identity and his conclusion that “Appiah’s plea for a combination of cosmopolitanism and identity” (224; Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 2006) may provide a way forward is the starting point of my

discussion of the metaphors of family on which Africanised cosmopolitanism and the nation are built. It is to Africa's role as mediator between the national and the cosmopolitan that I turn first.

2.4.2. A Universal Particular

In order to make sense of Africanised cosmopolitanism in Kingsolver's, Addison's, Meldrum's and Mereilles' texts, it is important to work from the following points. First, these texts do not use cosmopolitan discourse cynically in order to smuggle in nativist sentiments that are separatist. Whereas Geschiere notes that "[o]ne of the interesting aspects of the term autochthony is that it easily bridges the gap between 'South' and North" (19), meaning that autochthony discourse appears and works equally well in Europe and Africa for the purposes of nationalist sovereignty, in these four texts autochthony's bridging of 'North' and 'South' reflects their desire for global unity, drawing on a tradition of emancipatory nationalism. The reassertion of an aestheticized and potentially divisive difference that emerges through processes of 'Africanisation' is less their goal and more a troubling result of their particular expression of transnational unity. Second and related is the fact that Africa's role in these texts is not limited to the provision of colour and texture—the particular spirituality of Africa—to what appears to be a grey and featureless cosmopolitanism; though, as the aesthetics of the 'I am African' campaign (section 1.2.) and the four texts' investment in African culture as especially spiritual indicates, this is also undeniably part of what makes Africa useful and should not be ignored nor should its problematic significance be understated. Nevertheless, Africa's role in these texts is equally the provision of a universal home for a global diaspora because it is the origin of the species. Africa functions in these four texts as a universal particular, a paradox that signals the continent's complex relation to geography and history and the traditions of particularism and universalism to which notions of African indivisibility are connected.

In his analysis of African nationalism, Ali Mazrui ("On the Concept" 1963) outlines the tensions that structured imperialist policy and its effects in and across Africa. The division and re-organisation of Africa into artificial nation states as well as the use of the term 'African' as a euphemistic catch-all for 'native', Mazrui argues, effected a dual process of divide-and-rule and unite-and-rule. In terms of the latter, colonialism resulted in African independence being conceptualised along lines often at odds with each other, that of the tribe, nation and the continent. African nationalism, therefore,

denote[s] any form of nationalism *in* Africa and involving *Africans*—the nationalism that looks inward territorially, like that of Nigerians after independence; the nationalism that looks inward tribally, like that of the Kikuyu in the 1940s and 1950s; and the nationalism that looks outward continentally or regionally and envisions the submergence of the colonial units into a larger creation. (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 92)

In light of the relatively recent invention and imposition of African nations by Europe as part of the imperialist project, an affirmative and emancipatory “sentiment of oneness” (Julius Nyerere qtd in Mazrui, “On the Concept” 90) conceived of continentally was, for some, more appealing than “the narrower territorial or tribal nationalisms [which seemed] in some sense ‘less nationalistic’ than the wider continentalistic brand” (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 92), in part, because of the latter’s stress on African indivisibility. The appeal of a Pan-Africanist nationalism underpinned by the notion of African indivisibility, which is itself a product of European invention and imposition, is that it offers a psychological defence. As Mazrui explains,

[i]n one sense the African nationalist has to think of Africa as ‘indivisible’ because the rest of the world tends to think of it as such. At least outside Africanists’ circles, it is frequent enough to hear an atrocity in Congo being stretched in significance and deemed a reflection not merely on Congolese but also on African capacity for, say, self-discipline. In the face of such generalisations, actual or anticipated, a nationalist from Ghana may decide that if he cannot defend himself by pointing out that he is not Congolese, he might as well defend himself by defending the Congolese—by discovering exclusively ‘external’ causes for the troubles of that country. (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 93)

The vagaries of the emancipatory power of the claim that ‘We are all African’ can also be attributed to what Mazrui calls the “intellectual [...] roots” (“On the Concept” 94) of African indivisibility, roots which can be traced back from Julius Nyerere, Nkrumah and Hastings Banda to John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson and, more significantly, Abraham Lincoln—whose declaration that “the Union could not ‘permanently endure half slave and half free’” Mazrui characterises as a “classic formulation of the doctrine of the indivisibility of freedom” (94). Africa works simultaneously, therefore, as an expression of a nationalist and a cosmopolitan identity and solidarity and while a distinction is often made between these two perspectives—a distinction echoed, for instance, in the differences between Nkrumah and Senghor and Anglophone and Francophone Africans, respectively—Mazrui maintains that “it is possible to exaggerate the difference between these two African views” (“On the Concept” 95). In recognition of the differences that do exist between these views’ interpretation of African indivisibility alongside the slippages that may occur between them,

the simultaneity of an African-centred nationalism and an African-centred cosmopolitanism is to be understood as an uneasy one.

Another tension which structures the notion 'We are all Africans', as analysed by Mazrui, is that between geography and history. To claim identity and solidarity through Africa—whether during the anticolonial and independence movements of the twentieth century or at the turn of the millennium in the name of cosmopolitanism—suggests that “geography matters more [than history]” (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 89). This is, to draw on Geschiere, not surprising considering “[a]utochthony’s uneasy relation with history” (28). But to deny history, as nativists often need to do, does not effect the erasure of history and where what Max Beloff calls the “contiguities of geography” are privileged over, or are regarded as causing, the “continuities of history” (qtd in Mazrui 89), the reverse may also be regarded as true. Mazrui demonstrates this using Nkrumah’s insistence that “the essential fact remains that we are all Africans, and have a common interest in the independence of Africa” (89 Mazrui, “On the Concept” Nkrumah qtd in). There is, Mazrui explains, the implication of a causal relationship between “being African and being interested in African independence” (“On the Concept” 89), where the latter follows on from the former. But, he contends, that causal relationship may, paradoxically, be read the other way: being African may follow on from a shared interest in the continent’s independence. “In other words,” Mazrui summarises, “if Nkrumah’s ‘We are all Africans’ is an assertion of a self-conscious collectivity, then the collectivity is as much an effect as a cause of the self-consciousness” (“On the Concept” 89). This is to neither simply accept that “Africa is a geographical fiction” (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 88) as Melville Herskovits maintains nor to claim that it is a factual entity merely in need of being revealed. Like the nation, Africa is an invention with psycho-social effects that must be understood as the workings of both geography and history. Africanised cosmopolitanism operates under a similar formulation as that by Nkrumah, though now it includes those biological contiguities revealed by the study of genetics (section 3 below): being human, a sameness rooted in bio-geographic contiguities, assures human solidarity. The indivisibility of Africa is here understood as incontrovertible on two counts: it is a geographical fact and the empirical origin of the species. But, following Mazrui, solidarity may also produce a sense of being human and of human sameness. Continuities of and disruptions in history may require that the indivisibility of Africa and, therefore, of human solidarity and human-ness itself assured through Africa be regarded as an effect rather than a cause. In both cases the reverse formulation—African-ness and human-ness as contingent—is a source of uncertainty and anxiety and consequently what the four texts

work to sublimate by framing this second “new consciousness of “geographical contiguities” (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 89) in terms of kinship, which I discuss below (section 3).

The problem of the reassertion of divisive and exclusionary difference in Africanised cosmopolitanism appears intractable when efforts at generating this cosmopolitan, transnational unity are read as a severing of the national and the cosmopolitan, or the transcendence of the former by the latter. To read it as such is, returning briefly to “The DNA Journey” (section 1.1), to leap over and effectively negate the moment of anticipation and uncertainty that occurs just before the participants read the result of their genetic ancestry test. Rather than leaping from a nationalist and divisive formulation of being and belonging to one that is utopian for being post-nationalist, these four texts can be read (in part) as occupying and exploring (to varying degrees) an anticipatory location. This is to understand the ‘trans’ of transnational not as severance but as “a *cusps* between the national and what lies beyond it” (de Kock 39, emphasis added). This is also to recognise that the tensions within a human solidarity claimed through shared African-ness draws on a history of a “continentalistic type of African nationalism” (Mazrui, “On the Concept” 93) that structured Pan-Africanism and debates on the forms of solidarity most appropriate to African resistance against European imperialism. The sentiment that ‘We are all African’—an assertion of a global, non-racial Pan-Africanism in the four texts under study—can, therefore, be read more productively than being either simply a contradiction or a utopian denial of history and difference. Rather, at certain points in the four texts of my focus, it functions as a pivot on which ostensibly irreconcilable opposites simultaneously turn and while it produces obstacles to the unity it proffers it may also be the means to redefining the terms of human unity.

3. A Certain Uncertain Species

Although nation and culture are invoked by Addison, Kingsolver, Meldrum and Mereilles to both productive and limiting ends, the possibility of a universal human community is more fundamentally based in family that is conceived of as universal and natural. Following on from a universal nativism and constituting the “pole of [...] genealogy” (Gilroy, *Against Race* 122), the particular power of Africa as the lynchpin of a universal and natural human community is a shared biology and a single genealogy that begins with Mitochondrial Eve. Family, both its ruin and its reconstitution, is central to each of the four texts. The undoing of the nuclear family unit serves as a symbol of the division between Africa and the West and is represented through the fracturing of conjugal relationships (*Amaryllis in Blueberry*,

The Constant Gardener) or, more dominantly, parent-child relationships (*The Garden of Burning Sand*, *The Constant Gardener*, *Amaryllis in Blueberry* and *The Poisonwood Bible*). Africa is the site of familial division but, importantly, it is not the source or cause thereof. The site of origin of familial discontent in *Amaryllis in Blueberry* and *The Garden of Burning Sand* is America. The denial of family is the consequence of corrupt interference by an indifferent Britain and Europe in *The Constant Gardener*. Finally, the dissolution of the American family unit in *The Poisonwood Bible* is attributed to the father, a symbol of Euro-American imperialism. Rather, Africa is the means of reunion and reconciliation as it symbolises the mother and/or father figure (*The Poisonwood Bible*, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, respectively) and the origin of the family, whether family is idealised as a biologically constituted unit (*The Constant Gardener*, *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Garden of Burning Sand*), configured extra-biologically as a social unit (*The Garden of Burning Sand*) and/or using classical and biblical myth (*Amaryllis in Blueberry*, *The Poisonwood Bible*).

The reconstitution of the family is not a return to the homogeneous, nuclear family that existed before its encounter with Africa. Rather it is the transformation of family into a cosmopolitan amalgamation which symbolises human union and community that holds promise for the future and, as in *The Poisonwood Bible*, stretches back to the beginning of life itself. This reconstituted family is, to adapt the title of Roland Barthes' essay "The Great Family of Man" (1957), the constitution of 'The Great Africanised Family of Humankind', a point at which continent, nation and culture coincide and become naturalised. Broadly speaking, the usefulness of the family is that it provides a means of expressing individual identity and collective belonging simultaneously; more specifically, the rooting of the family in Africa serves to expand identity and belonging across time and space. Myth and the child-figure are important for imagining this family and will be explored in greater detail in Chapters Two and Three, respectively. The implications of Africa as the origin of the species for a universal family are introduced in Chapter Four and examined more fully in Chapter Five. What I turn to below is the broader concern of the formulation of family as a biological, social and/or mythical unit as well as the productive and limiting tensions which emerge from the intersection of these formulations.

With regards to race, gender and class and in light of eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific racism, it is jarring if not ironic that the biological sciences (and particularly any claim that such a thing as 'human nature' exists) have come to provide the most convincing evidence of our social and political one-ness in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In overly simple terms, there has over the course of the last three

centuries been a journey inwards from phenotype to genotype and from right-wing racialised exclusion to left-wing universal inclusion. The study of the human body once produced 'evidence' for polygeny and racial superiority and inferiority based on cranial measurements and then IQ (Gould 1996) but now "genetic evidence show[s] that 'the modern human family' originated as a single genetic line in Africa within the last 200,000 years, and not as multiple separate evolutionary events in different parts of the world" (Meredith, *Born in Africa* 178). This journey is less surprising if one accepts Donna Haraway's contention that "[s]cience and humanism have always been bedfellows" (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 74) but it is no less perilous if, as she argues, humanism promises false human unity with biology providing "the cake of nature under the icing of culture" (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 73). Rather than discard science or the human,¹³ however, I follow Haraway and attempt to pay "close attention to stories in biology and anthropology, to the common structures of myths and scientific stories and political theories, in such a way as to take all these forms seriously" (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 82). The aim in doing this is a more critical understanding of the possibilities of 'the human' in the four texts of my focus. To do so requires, perversely in light of Haraway's suspicion of sociobiology (see *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*), acknowledgement that something that might be called human nature exists because "[a]s philosophers have long noted" right-wing and left-wing ideologies "are not just political belief systems but empirical ones, rooted in different conceptions of human nature" (Pinker, *Blank Slate* "Chapter 16"). From a perspective that is in some ways quite different from that of Haraway, Steven Pinker also indicates that this journey is not surprising when he points out that "[t]he political associations of a belief in human nature now crosscut the liberal-conservative dimension, and many political theorists invoke evolution and genetics to argue for policies on the left" (*Blank Slate* "Chapter 16"). Of course, as Pinker notes, an alignment of liberal politics and evolution does not guarantee social egalitarianism or justice, as the liberal eugenicist policies in the United States and Britain in the 1940s makes clear. It is, however, important to be cognisant of two facts which, Pinker argues, make possible a new productive alignment of liberal values and a theory of human nature based on the theory of evolution. First, those liberal eugenicists held an "Utopian Vision" with regards to the "perfectibility of man" and, second, those political ideologies (as well as conservative ones) are based on outdated and, in some cases, fallacious theories of human nature (Pinker, *Blank Slate* "Chapter 16"). Their differences momentarily aside, Haraway and Pinker are not

¹³ This is in recognition of the enduring usefulness of the 'the human' (even for anti-humanism) on pragmatic or strategic grounds, if not philosophical ones (Davies 1997; Soper 1986; Fraser 1989; Han-Pile 2010).

as opposed as they perhaps seem. Both ultimately consider the complex interweaving and intertwining of the biological and the social and the ways in which the results can be harmful or, indeed, enabling.

The origin of this now ostensibly egalitarian human family, Mitochondrial Eve, reflects the debates outlined below and she is significant in terms of her name, location, role and recentness. In terms of location and in continuation of the global Pan-Africanism of the four texts already outlined, Mitochondrial Eve “has evident utility for antiracists and universalists, as well as for those predisposed to claims of African priority” (Howe 29). In terms of role and recentness, she “is apparently powerful evidence for close human familyhood” because unlike earlier fossil finds of other hominin species—such as ‘Lucy’, the 3.2 million year old female skeleton from the hominin species, *Australopithecus afarensis*—this genetic ancestor provides “a relatively recent common ancestor” (Howe 29) to which one can imagine an uninterrupted genealogical line being drawn. It is worth noting that unlike ‘Lucy’, Mitochondrial Eve is recognisably human—that is, genomically recognisable if not morphologically—as she existed after the speciation of *Homo sapiens*. Despite her recentness, however, there is nothing visibly material or tangible about Mitochondrial Eve as there are no corresponding fossils and consequently no basis for even computer-generated reconstructions of her face and body; rather she resides within the mitochondria of every human cell, ever-present but simultaneously invisible to the naked eye. She is, therefore, an entity both real and imagined, simultaneously intimate and distant. Her name reflects the importance of both science and fiction or myth in constructions of human-centred notions of being and belonging. Mitochondrial Eve represents a number of tensions which will be examined in what follows, starting with what the possibility of human familyhood might be and what forms it might take.

3.1. Human Familyhood

A central assumption in *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, *The Garden of Burning Sand* and, in more complex ways, *The Constant Gardener* and *The Poisonwood Bible* is that family is synonymous with humanity and, therefore, the reconstitution of family along more diverse lines signals the attainment of a cosmopolitan human community. In his essay “The Great Family of Man”, Barthes criticises the “family of Man” of Edward Steichen’s famous exhibition for moralising and sentimentalising “a phrase belonging to zoology”, the purpose of which is to serve “as an alibi to a large part of our humanism” (100). At its root, Barthes’ criticism is of the tendency for “classic humanism” (101) to privilege Nature over History based on the

understanding that ultimately there is such a thing as a universal human nature and that those institutions and physical differences that serve to divide us are relative and superficial. But in the context of the Out of Africa theory, where at a genetic level humanity is conceivable as a biological-family, to what truths might a symbolic relation between family and humanity speak? Is human familyhood based on a shared maternal genetic lineage little more than a twenty-first century reinvigoration of a dangerous “Adamism” (Barthes 102) which serves to fetishize and then sublimate difference? Or is it a form of what Amy Hinterberger calls “emergent *molecular multiculturalisms*” where the incorporation of the “political logics of institutionalised multiculturalism” requires that differences be measured, counted and monitored in the name of diversity (218, italics in original)?

I argue that there are two visions of human familyhood in these four texts, the first of which is in its transcendent utopianism akin to what Barthes describes and criticises. In those instances, family holds the greatest promise for a diverse yet unified human community because it transcends both nation and culture. But, in the chapters of Kingsolver’s novel discussed in Chapter 5, family is equally a source of anxiety because the belonging it promises is accompanied by a sense of estrangement and ‘unbelonging’ and the intimacy of a familial connection is intertwined with a deep unease and sense of the strange. This is the second vision of human familyhood where, rather than a refusal thereof or a celebration of a facile yet controlling multiculturalism, the anxieties that permeate the physical and social experience of family suggest new possibilities for imagining and expressing human unity. Whereas Barthes characterises a “progressive humanism” as the reversal of the terms Nature and History in order to “establish Nature itself as historical” (101), my characterisation of the humanism that emerges towards the end of Kingsolver’s novel is more concerned with the slippages between Nature and History, the biological and the socio-cultural, the metaphorical and the literal, discourse and embodiment.

An analogous example of the two visions of human familyhood, or a family-rooted cosmopolitanism, at work in the four texts can be found in Appiah’s *In My Father’s House* which, while a study of the philosophy of culture, is also centrally concerned with family (Nzegwu 1996).¹⁴ A second similarity is that of the scientific context in which Appiah writes

¹⁴ Nkiru Nzegwu identifies “seven levels and ways in which family may be construed” in *In My Father’s House*: an extended global family that corresponds to Appiah’s own multinational extended family; this global family is narrowed down to one of African descent in Appiah’s discussion of Pan-Africanism in chapters one to three; in the next five chapters Nzegwu claims that the African continent itself is understood as constituting a family; the remaining four forms that family takes are that of the national family, family as an ethnic group, the *abusua*—that is, Appiah’s Akan-Asante matriclan—and, finally, his nuclear family which is bi-racial and bi-cultural (Nzegwu 176–77).

and which he explicitly outlines: the refutation by genetics of race as a meaningful biological category (*Father's House* 35–39). There are three explicit references to family in Appiah's work which taken together fall into the two broad visions. These examples reflect the tensions that arise in the four texts between family, understood metaphorically and literally, and broader units of togetherness. The first is in the preface where, having sketched an outline of his own multi-racial nuclear family and his multi-cultural upbringing, Appiah dedicates his book to “nine children” (*Father's House* viii). These are nieces and nephews “who range in appearance from the color and hair of [his father's] Asante kinsmen to the Viking ancestors of [Appiah's] Norwegian brother-in-law, who “have names from Yorubaland, from Asante, from America, from Norway, from England” and who in their geographical, racial and national multifariousness inspire “a certain hope for the human future” (*Father's House* viii). Their embodiment of a cosmopolitan togetherness expressed across nation and culture secures the second, metaphorical, deployment of family. The second reference appears in the final chapter before the epilogue, where Appiah proposes that “another Pan-Africanism—the project of a *continental fraternity and sorority*, not the project of a racialised Negro nationalism—however false or muddled its theoretical roots, can be a progressive force” (*Father's House* 180, emphasis added). In contrast to the optimism of the first and second, the third reference to family which appears in the epilogue betrays ambivalence. At his father's funeral, the conflict between family members over how best to bury Joe Appiah leads to the author's recognition that in learning more about his father's family he “discovered the ways in which it was and was not [his family]” (*Father's House* 183).

Nkiru Nzegwu, whose review focuses largely on the epilogue, reads the family conflict outlined there in cultural terms and attributes Appiah's anxiety accordingly. He charges that the conflict over funeral rites reveals “the long-standing simmering tensions between competing forms of family and their underlying behavioural and social expectations” (178); secondly, that Appiah ‘resolves’ this tension by claiming a rootedness in his African heritage while actually privileging Anglo-Saxon culture over Asante culture and Akan norms; and, thirdly, that the epilogue reveals the “crack in [Appiah's] façade” as being his “less than intimate knowledge of Asante culture” (178). These three charges are the result of Nzegwu's critique of the persistence with which Appiah refers to his father—a westernised Ghanaian who wore the “white wig of the British barrister [...] after independence as in the colonial period” (Appiah, *Father's House* vii), who stands as a symbol of the successful integration of western and African values and who, in Appiah's later work, is the inspiration behind his

particular cosmopolitan worldview (*Cosmopolitanism* “Introduction”). Nzegwu argues that these references in *In My Father’s House* serve to reorient a matrilineally-constituted society centred on the *abusua*—that is, Appiah’s Asante matriline—along patrilineal and, therefore, western lines. He points out, for instance, that

In choosing the title *In My Father’s House*, as if it were unproblematic, as if patriliney is the norm in Akan culture, Appiah overwrites the explosive issue of patrilinealization in Asante society. No doubt, avoiding conceptual engagement with society allows him to present Asante identity as an inheritable trait and patriliney as the channel through which it runs. (Nzegwu 184, italics in original)

The culturally-informed hierarchical structure imposed by ‘patrilinealization’ is consolidated by the lack of sustained reference to Appiah’s white, English mother, Peggy, whose absence is interpreted as a sign that “[s]he is present in his very words and represents the image of the hidden framework that he [Appiah] employs in judging Africa” (Nzegwu 178). Though Nzegwu is critical of Appiah’s euro-nativism—rightly so, considering Appiah’s critique of Pan-Africanism for *its* nativism—his framing thereof in antagonistic cultural terms fails to consider the ways in which nativism remains appealing across cultures (Geschiere 2009). Similarly and more pertinent at this point, his critique of Appiah’s ‘biologisation’ of family does little to explain the enduring appeal of family that is evident in the preface and final chapter and which effectively frames Appiah’s argument. Part of this enduring appeal, as I detail below, is attributable to the tension and slippage between family understood literally (as in the preface and epilogue) and metaphorically (as at the end of chapter 9). Further to the issue of ‘biologisation’, there is in Nzegwu’s alignment of family as a biological unit with western culture and family as a social unit with an African one the danger of repeating the interrelated dichotomies between ‘the West and the rest’ and between biological, universal family and a culturally-determined kinship which structured the ethnocentrism of mid-twentieth century anthropology (Carsten 10–15). This dichotomy, moreover, fails to account for the ways in which family is constituted at and extended through the intersection of biological and social forces, of which Appiah’s reference to his brother-in-law is an example. Finally, the criticism that Appiah privileges the patrilineal when the *abusua*, Nzegwu argues, requires that he favour the matrilineal betrays the fact that neither is a natural choice: “[t]he lineage chart is a tree pointing back in multiple directions, ever expanding into the past and comprising the individual in the present. Choosing which one of these lineages to speak about is often a situationally shaped social act” (Wailoo 17). Though valid in terms of its cultural critique, Nzegwu’s discussion of family is ultimately too narrow to make full sense of

Appiah's ambivalence towards family in the epilogue and the enduring emotional power of family in the preface and chapter nine.

I contend that when the references to family in these three chapters are considered together, the ambivalence in the last of the three indicates not only Appiah's lack of familiarity with the culture he uses but speaks to a broader concern. The epilogue shows the limitations of family, understood biologically, to foster cohesion and confer belonging across nations and cultures—that is, History. In contrast, the preface and chapter nine point to the enduring appeal of family and its ability to foster cohesion and confer belonging across nations and cultures. The question then becomes how one is to account for the enduring appeal of the biological family in this instance, and more generally as it occurs in the four texts under study, in light of what appear to be significant limitations. This is, more broadly, the question of the nature-culture dichotomy: which is to dominate in our understanding of the possibilities of human kinship? More to the point in terms of context: which is to dominate in this age of accelerated globalisation and technological advancement which brings us dangerously and promisingly closer to each other? The tension between a natural human family and one that is cultural as well as the imperative in the twenty-first century to resolve this tension is evident in the report from the 2001 *World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* which was held in Durban, South Africa. One of the declarations in this report attests to the determination, “in an age when globalization and technology have contributed considerably to bringing people together, to *materialize* the notion of a human family based on equality, dignity and solidarity” (UNCHR 4, emphasis added). The next mention of a human family, however, assumes that it already exists: “We further affirm that all peoples and individuals constitute one human family, rich in diversity” (6). The paradox of family here is that a single human family is cited as a driver for anti-racism and an *a priori reason* for combatting inequality in general; at the same time, the possibility of and indeed the need for such a family to emerge as a *result* of the victory over bigotry and intolerance is simultaneously championed. At the centre of this paradox is the attempt to make what is a biological family manifest or “materialize” socially, culturally and politically. In the vision of human familyhood presented in the preface to *In My Father's House* which also pervades the four texts to a significant extent, the suggestion is that this materialisation is possible and not only desirable but, contra-Barthes, unproblematic. My critique of this materialisation in Chapters Two, Three and, to a lesser extent, in Chapter Four draws on Barthes in so far as the privileging of Nature over, and in order to sublimate, History *is* problematic. However, his suggestion that the terms be reversed, that History

should take precedence over Nature in our understanding and use of the family, is equally unsatisfactory for the reasons I outline below.

3.1.1. Genetics and the Promise of Human Unity

There is in the fact of a shared biology and a single genealogy the promise of a unified human race. The optimism that is human familyhood is, in other words, premised on the notion that this shared biology and single genealogy provides a sound basis upon which a universal and truly egalitarian human community can be built. This optimism is present in, for instance, Kwasi Wiredu's understanding that species-being—what he terms 'instinct'—is the means for overcoming cultural division:

Human behaviour is, of course, governed by both instinct and culture. Because of the element of instinct we can be sure of a certain species-distinctive uniformity in human actions and reactions. But because of the element of culture, that of habit, instruction and conscious thought, there will naturally be plenty of room for variation [...] The point, however, is that what unifies us is more fundamental than what differentiates us. (22)

The fundamental nature and power of "our biologically-cultural identity as *hominines sapientes*" (Wiredu 22) is described with even greater assurance by George McLean who, in his introduction to Kwame Gyekye's *Beyond Culture* (2004), declares that being in "the very first decades of the new post-ideological global unity", that is the new millennium, "[u]niversality and universality are our keys to meaning and our assurance of truth" (2). This serves to set up Gyekye's own assertion that globalization "speaks to our common humanity and to the common yearnings and hopes that *must necessarily* be generated by it" (Gyekye 120, emphasis added). There is in all this optimism the danger of confusing the fact that our differences (specifically, in terms of race) cannot be meaningfully accounted for biologically with "the question [of] whether biological similarity accounts for our similarities" (Appiah, *Father's House* 35). In fact, underneath the optimistic assurances of unity and truth by Wiredu, McLean and Gyekye lie uncertainties which cannot be ignored: a fervent wish by Gyekye that our common humanity "must necessarily" lead to "common yearnings and hopes", the premature description by McLean of a post-ideological century, and Wiredu's admission that he "may be anticipating overmuch" (34) when he argues that "our common basic biology" (34) is cause enough for human unity.

The possibilities of biologically-based unity are not merely a philosophical proposition but, increasingly, a means of social and political organisation. In particular, the study of genetics and its impact beyond the laboratory, whether for individual and/or group identity

formation or in the construction of personal or group history, should be noted. Consequences of and advances in the study of genetics—such as the confirmation of the Out of Africa theory and the Human Genome Project—and the development of genetic technologies, some of which have become relatively cheap and accessible to the wider public (such as commercial genetic ancestry tests, or GATs), signal an important moment in our thinking about who and what we are (and could be) as individuals and as a species (Morgan 2006; Rose 2007; Wailoo, Nelson, and Lee 2012). Genetics is, as Alondra Nelson points out, “increasingly relied upon to answer fundamental questions, not only about human identity, but also about national and political community, social justice and collective memory”; it is, therefore, necessary to examine “*the social life of DNA*” (20, italics in original). For some, the significance of a new knowledge of our genetic selves is the signalling of the transcendence of ‘non-natural’ collectives such as the nation. Paul Rabinow (1996) identifies a shift from sociobiology to “biosociality” where individuals will organise socially and politically around shared genetic traits. He predicts that “the new genetics will prove to be a greater force for reshaping society and life than was the revolution in physics, because it will be embedded throughout the social fabric at the micro-level by a variety of biopolitical practices and discourses” (98). The transcendence of nation is also, for Nikolas Rose, the dissociation of this “new genetics” from a history of scientific racism. Indeed, Rose draws a sharp distinction between contemporary forms of “biological citizenship” (“Introduction”) and those of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Where the latter conjures the “specter of racialised politics, eugenics, and racial hygiene”, Rose argues that the former—that is, “contemporary biological citizenship, in the advanced liberal democracies of ‘the West’—“does not take this racialised and nationalized form” (“Chapter 5”).

A genetic understanding of ourselves and others also provides an opportunity for revisiting, mending and reconstituting broken identities and histories. As a body of knowledge and as a discourse, genetics has played a part in what Nelson terms “reconciliation projects” in which divided parties, whether formerly opposed or unified, are (re)united. It has been deployed in order to “ameliorate past injustices” (Aronson 295) in the context of post-apartheid South Africa and to “bolster legal claims” (Hamilton 268) in disputes regarding reparation based on ancestral dispossession in North America. In its conjunction with other technologies, such as television and the internet, genetic ancestry tests (GATs) have become a powerful part of the popular imagination and popular discourse. The British television documentary series, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, which traces the genealogy of celebrities and other public figures has run for 14 seasons, its American

version has run for ten seasons, and more than ten international adaptations of the format have appeared. And while the glossy genealogies of celebrities may dominate traditional media, Aaron Panofsky and Joan Donovan's study of the conjunction of relatively affordable GATs and internet forums reveals the extent to which an often sophisticated knowledge of genetics and its terminology has penetrated laypersons' conceptions of themselves and the communities to which they belong.

However, there is alongside all the promises of certainty and the transcendence of differences that the study of our shared biology suggests the fact that genetics can be the means of or legitimisation for redrawing lines of racial difference anew and/or creating new forms of division and discrimination. A statement such as "science explodes the myth of race" (Fairbanks 2015), as the subtitle of one scientific publication puts it, is generally valid in so far as 'race' refers to a *biological* category and 'myth' means scientific falsehood.¹⁵ However, understood too generally it becomes the triumphalist and false idea that race in its entirety has been rendered fictional and non-existent. "Race is", as Ian Hanley López summarises, "neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions" (966). Furthermore, this triumphalism is rooted in an alignment of science with Nature and Truth and, consequently, understood as being in opposition to social phenomena which are reframed as mere fictions. The fact is that any understanding of what the genes mean invites and often requires that one draw on already constructed racial, ethnic and national narratives (Hinterberger 2012; Kohli-Laven 2012; Panofsky and Donovan 2017; Sommer 2012). The interaction of genetic histories and conventional histories vary and may be put to very different, even oppositional ends. Genetics may collude with partial, reductive and exclusionary histories, often in surprising ways, to reconstruct narratives of purity. Nina Kohli-Laven outlines cases where genetic disease is interpreted through an ethno-national lens and where the occurrence of rare, heritable illness is read, and further explained by way of the founder effect, as confirmation of a pure—that is, homogeneous and bounded—cultural and biological genealogy. In the case of French Canadian and North American aboriginal groups in Quebec that she

¹⁵ I describe this statement as 'generally valid' because race as a marker of inherent and essential biological difference and, therefore, as a legitimate basis for racism has been debunked. This is race understood using evolutionary taxonomy. However, Robin Andreasen (2013) argues that if approached using cladism, which considers only common ancestry and not adaptive similarities, race may still be biologically real without providing a justification for racism. In short, Andreasen rejects the "widely held assumption that biological realism and social constructivism are incompatible" (Andreasen 168). For a response to and rebuttal of Andreasen's proposal, see "On the New Biology of Race" (Glasgow 2013).

discusses, readings of the individual, contemporary body often serves to validate archival records that obscure the extent to which settlers and their descendants intermarried with indigenous peoples.

Genetics may be used to simplify, distort and even supplant conventional history and the realities of the present. As Michael Kent and Peter Wade (2015) show, the use of genetic ancestry tests to better implement affirmative action policies in Brazil resulted in a politics that reduced race to ancestry, rather than operating from an understanding that it is “a composite of skin colour, ancestry, culture and geography” (Erasmus xxii). Kent and Wade show that the ‘forgetting’ that racial discrimination is also an institutionalised response to phenotype in the present created conditions in which the use of GATs to establish oppressed ancestors “[lent] itself to shaping power-blind public policy” (Erasmus 108), not only stripping valid candidates of access to affirmative action measures but also justifying redress for invented grievances by people who had not, in fact, been excluded on the basis of their skin colour. Marianne Sommer states that “[g]eneticists of the twenty-first century are successfully challenging the historian’s position as provider of identity-forming origin narratives” (225) and that the particular power of genetics lies in the fact that it is perceived as offering greater authenticity than conventional history. The gene functions both as a historical document offering “unambiguous answers and objective knowledge” (226) and as a commercial commodity that provides a “personal prehistory that is meant as a prosthetic memory” (231). What technologies like GATs are perceived as offering, she argues, are an “organic history” (235) relieved of the complexity—that is, the disruptions and discontinuities—of conventional history as well as an authentic, certain self in response to the ambiguities of modernity.

What this “organic history” belies is that the history ‘revealed’ by genetics is incomplete and often abstract and so needs to be supplemented and contextualised in order for it to make sense or be relevant to individuals and communities in their specific contexts. In his study of the identification using genetics of missing, murdered anti-apartheid activists, Aronson notes that the “identification process did not provide [all the families of victims] with an opportunity to clarify history” (304) and that this lack of closure is the result of the fact that there are “three forms of recognition in the context of the identification of missing victims of the apartheid struggle: biological recognition, familial recognition, and communal recognition” (302–3). While genetics could usually but not always provide the first, the other two were not at all guaranteed by the results of genetic testing. Some family members found it difficult to ‘recognise’ their loved one in the DNA sequence produced by genomic analysis.

Communal forms of recognition also did not necessarily follow on from successful biological recognition as many family members felt that their loved one's personhood and contribution to the struggle against apartheid were not sufficiently memorialised within the broader public sphere.

The complex interplay of the socio-political and the scientific, what Panofsky and Donovan call, "the ontological choreography of race" (4), is not only attributable to mutable and ideologically charged social forces but is also produced by the gaps in scientific knowledge and the various methods of, for instance, testing ancestry. This is particularly important to note when making sense of the fact that both African-Americans and white nationalists in Panofsky and Donovan's study use "genetic materials to reinforce, though also to reconfigure, their racial worldview" (Panofsky and Donovan 38). White nationalists who get a result that confirms that their European heritage is (or is close to) 100% readily accept GATs; the same is true for African Americans whose results cohere with their belief that they are "all mixed up anyway" (Panofsky and Donovan 35). However, when the GAT contradicts, for instance, a white nationalist's identity they may unsurprisingly reject the legitimacy of the test. What *is* surprising is that very often they still accept the science only to reinterpret the results in an effort to "repair [their] identity" (Panofsky and Donovan 41). This is a fairly straightforward process when autosomal DNA rather than mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is used because the former interprets ancestry in terms of relatively modern nation states.¹⁶ As Panofsky and Donovan show, white nationalists were able to explain away the presence of 'undesirable' ancestors through recourse to "deep histories of whiteness including its 'heroic' conquests, 'tragic' incursions of non-white populations and 'foolish' mistakes of whites" (26). Therefore, while white nationalists arrive at "the wrong conclusions [they] are doing so based not on wild misinterpretations or anti-scientific conceptualizations, but rather by processing through racist cognition [...] the materials that geneticists and genetic ancestry testing companies churn into the public" (Panofsky and Donovan 39).

Unity based on a shared "biologico-cultural identity as *homines sapientes*" (Wiredu 22) is not inevitable, as is clear from the complex, often contradictory and shifting interrelations between our genetic identities and histories and those informed by social, political, legal—that is, Historical—forces. Consequently, a human community based on a shared genetic history and conceptualised using 'the family' may seem no more assured.

¹⁶ The use of mtDNA does not discount the possibility of genetic-based belonging being formulated in cultural or indeed tribal terms, however, as Sommer argues citing Bryan Sykes's cultivation of a romantic Celtic brand in his 2006 book *Blood of the Isles: Exploring the Genetic Roots of Our Tribal History*.

The fact that genetics and, more broadly, the biological do not transcend nation, race or culture, however, does not mean that they have nothing to contribute to formulations of identity and belonging which attempt to grapple productively with what are considered obstacles to an inclusive human community. What is required is a less utopian vision of community and a more robust understanding of what it means to be fully human. The specifics of this new humanism will be outlined in the next section. It is necessary to first address the usefulness and relevance of family as the metaphor for human community. The contextualisation of family that follows is one which draws on its relation to nation in order to make sense of its deployment in relation to humanity. The reason for doing this is that global unity based on shared DNA, that is human familyhood, marks in many ways a continuation and development of the nation-as-family metaphor rather than an absolute departure from it. For instance, though the vision of family in the preface of *In My Father's House* as well as in "The DNA Journey" and the four texts transcends *the divisions associated with* nation and culture (or, at least, aspires to do so), it does not truly transcend nation and culture but rather constitutes itself as diverse through them—that is, by invoking and then incorporating them. As such, the constitution of a human family bears the traces of some of the enabling and disabling features that characterise national familyhood.

3.1.2. Perspectives on the 'as Family' Metaphor

Since the mid-nineteenth century, notions of what it means to be part of a nation have been fundamentally intertwined with the family, conventionally understood to be nuclear and based on natural—that is, biological—ties. Within this framework, not only do nation and family structures reflect each other but, as the staunchest critics of 'the family' claim, it produces, reproduces and naturalises broader structures of inequality along the lines of class, gender and race. With regards to class and gender, some Marxists and radical feminists (for example, Kate Millet and Fran Ansley) have called for the dissolution of the family. Considering the four texts' adherence to the family, more pertinent here is the simultaneous utility and instability of family as a metaphor for broader forms of group identity and belonging. Anne McClintock argues that with the emergence of Social Darwinism in the mid-nineteenth century following the publication of *On the Origin of Species* and the idea of the evolutionary Family of Man, the "'family' offered an indispensable metaphoric figure by which hierarchical (and, one might add, often contradictory) social distinctions could be shaped into a single *historical* genesis narrative" ("Family Feuds" 63). Towards the end of the century, however, the institution of family was increasingly viewed as separate from and

beyond the world of capital, politics and history itself. Consequently, as both metaphor and institution, “family thus became, at one and the same time, both the organizing figure for national *history*, as well as its *antithesis*” (McClintock 64, italics in original).

The implication of the family for nation and history, more broadly, is twofold: family provided “an indispensable figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative *organic unity* of interests” and “an indispensable trope for figuring what was often violent, *historical change* as natural, *organic time*” (McClintock, “Family Feuds” 64, italics in original). With the imperialist expansion that marked this period, the metaphor of the natural family extended beyond the state, giving “imperial intervention the alibi of nature” (McClintock, “Family Feuds” 65). Having outlined the ways in which ‘the family’ intersects with gender and nation in order to make women the bearers of national identities from which they were then excluded, McClintock ends her essay by raising the question of whether or not the “iconography of the family can be retained as the figure for [a progressive] national unity” (“Family Feuds” 78). McClintock’s essay—like other work by feminist scholars who analyse the gendering and naturalisation of nation (see Yuval-Davis 1997; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995)—is important for troubling the distinction between the domestic and the political and for shedding light on “the ways in which kinship can become a powerful political symbol” (Carsten 154). Nevertheless, the question with which McClintock closes her essay suggests the severing of family from nation. As is evident in the “DNA Journey”, the “I Am African” campaign and the four texts under study, the iconography of the family has endured. Owing to this and the fact that the context has broadened and changed, I propose a slightly different and perhaps more basic question: why is family *still* employed in imagining broader identities and forms of belonging and to what effect?

The first thing to note in answering to the enduring appeal of the family is that the broader history of blood ties as a means of creating kinship where none naturally exists is more mixed and contradictory than McClintock’s specific analysis of gender and nationalism conveys. As three examples in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* suggest, metaphors of blood ties are equally subject to the vagaries of social and cultural forces. For instance, in colonial contexts, an ‘optimistic’ view would see the possibility of a non-Western, non-white native achieving cultural equality and belonging—cultural Englishness, for example—“*despite* their irremediable color and blood” (Anderson 91, emphasis added). A racially fraught and/or white supremacist view typical of nineteenth and twentieth century American constructions of nation, on the contrary, sees the blood of a racial other as “hopelessly contaminating” (B. Anderson 58). But, later in the twentieth century, this

association was re-appropriated and flipped by African-Americans for whom the “tiniest trace of ‘black blood’” (B. Anderson 58) came to be regarded as a source of racial pride and belonging.

It is *because* of the vagaries of formulations of belonging that the iconography of family persists. The usefulness of family as a metaphor is not restricted to conservative and/or oppressive ideologies. Patricia Hill-Collins points out that “[j]ust as reworking the rhetoric of family for their own political agendas is a common strategy for conservative movements of all types, the alleged unity and solidarity attributed to family is often invoked to symbolize the aspirations of oppressed groups” (63). Recognising that the rhetoric of family has served to naturalise oppressive hierarchies and obscure unequal power relations particularly with regards to race and gender, she nevertheless contends that an intersectional approach to family has something of value to offer those “political movements [...] dedicated to challenging social inequality” (78). Therefore, rather than endless criticism, “reclaiming the language of family for democratic ends and transforming the very conception of family itself might prove a more useful approach” (Hill-Collins 78). The possibility of reclaiming *the language* of family rests on her claim that as an institution “families constitute primary sites of belonging to various groups” and, as such, the family “transcends ideology” (63).¹⁷ There is, in Hill-Collins’ formulation, slippage between family as a lived form of belonging and family as trope that, when understood as separating the family from the world of politics and ideology more generally once more, is problematic.

What George Lakoff’s work in cognitive psychology in *Moral Politics* indicates, however, is that rather than transcending ideology, metaphors of the family cut across ideologies and, because of the pliancy of the concept, form the basis of often vastly different political ideologies. Moreover, as he and Mark Johnson explain in *Philosophy in the Flesh* (*Philosophy* 1999) and *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) these metaphors are not simply a matter of flourishes of language easily abandoned, but are grounded in lived, embodied experience informing both thought and action. So while “[t]he nation is not literally a family” (Lakoff 323), the family-as-metaphor-for-nation is not purely arbitrary. For instance, Lakoff describes two oppositional moral systems that structure American politics, the ‘Strict Father’

¹⁷ Anderson makes a slightly different but not altogether different point when he states that nationalism is better understood when “treated [...] as if it belonged with ‘kinship’ and ‘religion’, rather than with ‘liberalism’ or ‘facism’” (5) because to align it with the latter reifies nationalism as constituting a single ideology and indeed a singular ‘it’—“Nationalism-with-a-big-N” (5). In this comparison, Anderson echoes David Schneider who, in a 1969 article, argued that “kinship, religion, and nationality in American culture were structured by the same terms” (Carsten 154). It is worth noting that Anderson’s comparison not only draws attention to the more deeply and widely felt emotional pull of nationalism, but the comparison also suggests that nationalisms like kinship networks are not singular monoliths but rather variable in form and nature.

model and the 'Nurturant Parent' model. He contends that these moral systems and their respective systems of metaphor are so deeply rooted that "there cannot be a politics in America without the[se] kinds of family-based moral systems" (24).

The persistence of metaphors of family can be attributed to the fact that 'family' is an example of a basic-level concept which, as Lakoff and Johnson explain, are a class of categories that "arise from the fact that we are neural beings, from the nature of our bodily capacities, from our experience interacting with the world, and from our evolved capacity for basic-level categorisation" (*Philosophy* "Chapter 3"). Basic-level concepts are "determined by their overall part-whole structure", provide the optimal level of categorisation from an evolutionary perspective and represent "the source of our most stable knowledge" (Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy* "Chapter 3"). When understood as a social construct masquerading as a natural entity and, therefore, serving to only (or even largely) legitimise hierarchies, the family is contradictory and anathema to a universal and egalitarian human community. When understood as being politically pliant, the persistence of the family as the organising metaphor for global equality is problematically paradoxical; liable to undermine the equality it promises, the affective power of family is puzzling. However, when it is also understood that family is a fluid but fundamentally experiential and embodied concept, the affective power of this category can be grappled with anew using insights gained in cognitive science as well as anthropology.

Described theoretically, the oppositional nature of Lakoff's two family models does not seem to offer much hope for a unified humanity: each model and its system of metaphors arises from embodied experience and so cannot simply be discarded as mere convention, yet these fundamentally oppositional systems are largely unconscious. The possibility of imagining human unity using the metaphor of family is not lost, however; rather, it simply requires that the nature and the mechanism of the metaphor be rethought. The following four points pave the way for this reformulation of family. First, though the models are diametrically opposed, there is variation within the practice of each model and each is characterised by an idealistic approach, on the one end, and a more pragmatic one, on the other (Lakoff 103–107, 139–140) with "pragmatic progressives and conservatives [being] more willing to compromise for practical purposes" (394). Secondly, although the systems of metaphor upon which each model is built are used unconsciously, this does not mean that Lakoff's analysis resigns us to an impasse or extreme moral relativity. He argues that it is precisely in recognising that systems of metaphor are at work in public, political discourse

in unavoidable ways and being cognisant of what the specifics of those systems are that choice and change are made possible and, indeed, ethically necessary (388–89).

The third point is that the ‘as family’ metaphor is not so conventional as to be literal and, therefore, fixed nor is it “‘mere’ metaphor, [that is] a superficial phenomenon” (Carsten 161). The ubiquity and inevitability of phrases such as ‘father of the nation’, ‘motherland’, ‘homeland’, *etcetera*, may suggest that the nation-as-family metaphor is a dead metaphor. In the traditional theory of metaphor this means it is an expression “that once [was] metaphorical, but has become frozen into [a] literal expression” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy* “Chapter 8”). The traditional theory of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson argue, “goes hand in hand with the objectivist interpretation of the commonsense theory of language and truth” according to which “all meaning is held to be literal” (*Philosophy* “Chapter 8”). The implication of these theories is that metaphors are only “indirectly literal, in that their meaning must be reducible to literal concepts, or else [they are] meaninglessly fanciful, in that they do not express literal ideas at all and thus have no meaning” (*Philosophy* “Chapter 8”). Lakoff and Johnson argue that dead metaphors in the sense described by traditional and objectivist theory do exist but that they are very rare. Moreover, conventional conceptual metaphors should not be confused with them because these are, in fact, “very much alive and cognitively real” (*Philosophy* “Chapter 8”). Lakoff’s work in *Moral Politics* indicates that family metaphors are conventional conceptual metaphors, rather than an example of dead metaphors, and that they shape thought and action in America in very real ways. Janet Carsten’s anthropological analysis of kinship in Western and non-Western contexts bears this out too.¹⁸ With regards to the “the occurrence of a language of kinship in political discourses of nationalism”, she cites examples (predominantly focused on gender) from Turkey, Israel, the former Yugoslavia and India and argues that the analyses thereof assume that the metaphors of family used are ‘dead’ rather than ‘live’ ones. Noting that “the line of distinction between the live and the dead is a shifting one” (H.W. Fowler qtd in Carsten 158), Carsten argues that the “naturalization at work” in discourses of

¹⁸ In anthropology, family has traditionally been distinguished from kinship on the basis that family is biological and kinship social, a distinction made and maintained by mid-twentieth century anthropologists (Carsten 10–16), or that “[t]he family is a special type of kinship group” (Harrell 5). However, the initial decline and subsequent revitalisation of kinship studies following David Schneider’s *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, in which he criticised the privileging of bonds of conception and parturition in kinship studies marks an important disruption of this tradition (Carsten 20–26, 109–135; Schneider 1972/2004; Stone 2004). The significance of Schneider’s work, Carsten argues, “can also be linked to a wider set of oppositions that are quite familiar in the anthropological study of kinship and beyond: the distinction between nature and culture, and between the biological and the social [which] have carried quite strong implications about the different nature of kinship in the West and ‘the rest’” (136).

nationhood “is of a rather special kind” and that they, in fact, “contradict the conventional wisdom” that such language is “straightforwardly metaphorical” (Carsten 160) and, therefore, somehow less real.

This point comes on the back of Carsten’s own analysis of interpersonal and familial relationships that are considered non-biological but which “are couched in an idiom of ‘natural’ ties—for example, adoptive ties, ‘fictive’ kinship, and gay kinship” (136). She notes instances where kinship is created and the “metaphorical usage of kinship is gradually and imperceptibly transformed into ties of blood and birth” (139) through not only marriage and procreation but (often more importantly) through deliberate acts of care performed over time. The transformation of what is considered social and metaphorical into that which is considered biological and physical is not a reassertion of the primacy of the biological but the troubling of that distinction by showing that “physical and social aspects of kinship apparently merge into each other” (Carsten 139). Three general conclusions that Carsten draws need highlighting here: first, kinship is susceptible to “continuous transformations and adaptations” (154); second, it is not simply the *apparent* naturalness of family that gives it emotional power but rather it is the “merging” (144) of or “slippages” (137) between the ‘real’ (biological) and ‘fictive’ (social) that “gives these kinship ties their salience” (144); finally, kinship that is perceived—which, following Lakoff, is to say *experienced*—as real and authentic is created gradually “rather than originating in a single moment of sexual procreation” (140). The significance of these conclusions will become clearer in the subsequent sections.

The fourth and final point for consideration in the reformulation of family is the strength of affinity between family and humankind. Working from Lakoff and Johnson’s theory that conceptual metaphors such as ‘the family’ are experiential, embodied and stable forms of knowledge, the relationship between family and humankind is even less arbitrary than that between family and nation. This is because ‘the family’ stands in a metonymic relationship to the species.¹⁹ The distinction between metaphor and metonym is subtle but significant because the latter opens up the field of comparison and shifts focus from similarity to contiguity. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, while both metaphor and metonymy serve to provide understanding, they are “different *kinds* of processes” and where “[m]etaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another [...] *in the case of the metonymy THE PART FOR THE WHOLE there are many parts that can stand for the whole*”

¹⁹ For the sake of simplicity, I follow Lakoff and Johnson here in their inclusion of synecdoche, where the part stands for the whole, “as a special case of metonymy” (37) rather than a separate figure of speech.

(*Metaphors* 37, italics and upper case in original). Therefore, though there is a stronger connection between family and humankind, the family as metonym makes it possible to conceive of the more abstract category of all of humanity without requiring the imposition of only one possible moral system. In so far as ‘the family’ McClintock refers to is a nuclear one defined by two heterosexual parents and their immediate and legitimate (i.e. biological) offspring, to challenge its naturalness—that is, its inevitability—is a valid approach. But the indispensability of the family as a conceptual metaphor must not be confused or conflated with the inevitability of one form of family. Similarly, the Family of Humankind metaphor is indeed built on an “indispensable trope” (McClintock, “Family Feuds” 64) in so far as ‘family’ is a metaphorical concept without which complex conceptualisations of belonging would be profoundly lacking. But the metaphor need not necessarily reinforce and naturalise oppressive social hierarchies because “[t]he Family of Man metaphor is so general that it does not specify exactly how we ought to behave” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy* “Chapter 14”). What the Family of Man or Humankind metaphor comes to project is, as Lakoff and Johnson make clear, dependant on the specific model of the family that is employed.

In the four texts analysed in this thesis, family (even the nuclear family) is shown to be less bounded and is characterised by both social and biological extensions into forms that are different from the conventional and idealised nuclear one. As such the definition of family at work in these texts becomes the more inclusive one in which a common ancestor is the determining feature. The question, thus, is not whether the family can be retained as a metaphor for humankind, a question which assumes an empirically false understanding of the nature of metaphor. Rather the question is to what extent the *particular* metaphors of family upon which these texts rely can produce social unity for humanity as a whole. Furthermore, the beginning of any viable answer to that question must proceed from an understanding that to simply reverse the terms and thus privilege the social (History) over the biological (Nature) risks substituting an oppressive hierarchy with an unsustainable and equally oppressive utopianism.

3.2. Species Uncertainty

The mid-nineteenth century, interrupted as it was with the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and later *Descent of Man*, signals an anxious moment for Europe/the West; it is an anxious moment which has lingered, finding renewal in the mid-twentieth century and again at the turn of the twenty-first. Darwin’s interruption of the notion of the liberal humanist subject—a decentering of *Homo sapiens* that Sigmund Freud

described as the second “great outrage upon [humanity’s] naïve self-love”(“Eighteenth Lecture”)—coincided with a significant blow to the Enlightenment belief in and assertion of universal humanity. A proposition already under pressure because of its partiality and exclusions, notions of a universal human nature came under particular strain with continued European expansion and the fraught encounters with diverse and different human societies that characterised imperialism (K. Anderson 2007; Young, *Colonial Desire* 1995). Of course, Darwin’s work poses a profound difficulty, in that, alongside the interruption of “[man’s] peculiar privilege of having been specially created” (Freud “Eighteenth Lecture”) was the utility of his ideas for providing scientific justification for imperialism and the imposition of the West’s self-declared superiority over ‘the rest’. Part of this difficulty is the conflation of Darwin’s theory with his politics or, put another way, the ideas of Darwin ‘the biologist’ and those of Darwin ‘the socio-cultural man’.

The first Darwin “treated humankind as just one species among all others, moulded by the same evolutionary forces”; his theory “stripped humankind of its unique status” and “opened the possibility of a world without purpose or direction, or long-term goal, a world that seemed to be no more than a product of chance” (Meredith, *Born in Africa* xviii–xix). The second Darwin was a Unitarian, abolitionist and “Progressivist” (Young, *Colonial Desire* 44; see also Desmond and Moore 2009) who believed in the progression of humanity as a species by way of the spread of European civilisation, which is to say through “direct and substantial ‘improvement’ by missionaries” (Gould 414; see also Sivasundaram 2010; and Weindling 2010). It is commonly the first Darwin and his theory that many defend (for example Gould 419; and Pinker “Chapter 2”) with the second Darwin often needing recontextualisation. The reason for invoking Darwin here does not lie in the reduction of him to a racist scapegoat whose work can be linked using a straight line to Nazi Germany (see Weikart 2004 as an example of this; and Weindling 2010 for a response); nor does it lie in the uncritical lionisation of his work on the basis that it is purely scientific and, therefore, politically and socially neutral. Both positions assume that the first, scientific, Darwin can be divorced from the second figure. Darwin’s theory *and its philosophical, social and political implications* are important here. But it is to the implications of the theory for a twenty-first century context towards which I want to work. As a start, then, it is necessary to ask the following question: what is the meaning of the man and his theory in the current moment of anxiety?

Two recontextualisations of Darwin which attempt to rescue him from reductionist caricature provide a starting point for what the answer might be and what it means for this

project. In *Darwin's Sacred Cause* (2009) Adrian Desmond and James Moore challenge an overly determined image of Darwin as a reclusive and single-minded scientist intent on “overthrow[ing] God and bestializ[ing] humanity” (“Introduction”) by attributing his pursuit of a theory of human origins and “descent with modification” (Darwin vii) to his Christian- and humanist-influenced abolitionist beliefs. Their response to the caricature of Darwin is to humanise him (Hooper 2009; Waller 2009) and central to this project is the relationship between Darwin and John detailed in the first chapter, “The Intimate ‘Blackamoor’”, and returned to in the final chapter. John, the titular ‘blackamoor’, was a former slave from Guyana who, over the course of two months, taught Darwin the art of taxidermy. As depicted by Desmond and Moore, theirs is a story of “anti-conquest” (Pratt 78) and the teacher-student relationship is an example of the “drama of reciprocity” (Pratt 79) where the veneer of mutual appropriation is belied by the fact that it is Darwin who has the greater authority—that is, the student, at this point a “sixteen-going-on-seventeen-year-old” (Desmond and Moore “Chapter 1”), has the authority not only to include the former slave into the fold of civilised humanity but to define the category itself. The fact that Darwin is unperturbed by “paying money to apprentice himself to a Negro” (“Chapter 1”) and subsequently declares John to be “a very pleasant and intelligent man” (Darwin qtd in “Chapter 1,” see also “Chapter 2”) indicates to Desmond and Moore that Darwin lacked “so much of the racist hauteur that characterized British society from mid-century” (“Chapter 1”). What emerges is a telling contradiction. John’s humanity (and that of the Fuegians and ‘Hottentot’ guide described later in Chapter 4) is confirmed in his (their) acceptance of and participation in the civilisation that is British society. Darwin’s humanity is affirmed by Desmond and Moore in two interrelated ways: first through his act of humanising John and, second, through his divergence from the norms of that same society into which John must be acculturated—that is, in a movement toward nature.²⁰

Taking a different approach to that of Desmond and Moore, Stephen Jay Gould’s recuperation of Darwin in *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996) confronts Darwin’s racism and calls into question the “common (and false) impression of Darwin’s egalitarianism” (417, see also 66-69). But, because of the “wonderfully incisive statement that he made about biological determinism to climax his denunciation of slavery” (19), Darwin is a hero of Gould’s

²⁰ Desmond and Moore’s reactionary Romanticism becomes particularly clear in a rather lengthy account characterised by pervasive speculation about who John was, what the specifics of his and Darwin’s exchanges during the taxidermy lessons were, and the influence on this relationship of Charles Waterton, an English traveller and animal stuffer who preferred the “freedom of the savage” and to whom John had formerly been apprenticed (“Chapter 1”).

and he “plead[s] for Darwin” (418) on two counts. First is Gould’s assertion that the problematic nature of Darwin’s attitudes should not outweigh the “practical consequences” of his scientific refutation of biological determinism and polygenism which posited and sought to legitimise “ineradicable inequality” (419).²¹ I have sympathy with Gould’s attribution of value to Darwin’s theory but note the importance of not understating “Darwinism’s [if not Darwin’s] deep implication in the ongoing and unfaltering project of colonialism” (K. Anderson 148) as a consequence of such sympathies.²² Second, he explains that Darwin’s racial views were in keeping with the norms of his time and that a “[b]elief in racial and sexual inequality was unquestioned and canonical among upper-class Victorian males” (418). So, whereas Desmond and Moore recuperate Darwin based on the notion that he was “an anomaly of his age” (“Introduction”), Gould does so by arguing that he was a man of his time. Gould cites the following statement about the anticipated increase in the gap between human and ape in *Descent of Man* as an indication of Darwin’s ‘troubling but typical of the time’ paternalism: “The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a *more civilized state, as we may hope, than the Caucasian*, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as present between the negro or Australian and the gorilla” (Darwin qtd in Gould 69, emphasis added). This does reflect a troubling imperialism but it is also revealing in terms of the “mounting insecurities [in the mid-nineteenth century] about what it means to be properly human” (K. Anderson 21). When read from “within the tale of the shifting ontologies of the human, nature and race” (K. Anderson 148), it becomes clear that Darwin’s concern is not simply the perceived sub-human or beastly-nature of the ‘negro or Australian’ but also the improvement of ‘man’ beyond even the level of the ‘Caucasian’ in order that the human may be more firmly secured *as human* in its separation from nature.

²¹ An important qualification with regards to the extent of these “practical consequences” must be noted. “The effect of Darwin’s work with respect to race”, Robert Young explains, “was by no means as decisive as in other areas of natural science” (12). On the one hand, “Darwinism displaced some racial ideologies, but replaced them with others” and, on the other hand, the usefulness of Darwin’s refutation of polygenism was undercut by the fact that, before the end of the nineteenth century, “the scientific arguments in support of racial prejudice moved elsewhere, to the theory of ‘types’, to questions of psychological, intellectual and ‘moral’ differences” (Young 12). See also Howe (30–31).

²² Steven Pinker, in his critique of social constructionism, makes a stronger case for Darwin and his theory by arguing that the latter was “commonly misinterpreted as an explanation of intellectual and moral progress rather than an explanation of how living things adapt to an ecological niche” (“Chapter 2”). He also maintains that Social Darwinism “ought to be called Social Spencerism” as it was reflective of Herbert Spencer’s view that “the impoverished classes and races [...] were [...] biologically less fit” and that to intervene would only be to “interfere with the progress of evolution” (“Chapter 2”). While this does challenge the line drawn from Darwin to Nazi Germany using his theory, it does not erase the problem of Darwin’s ‘progressivism’ and the extent to which his theory consequently became entangled in an arguably well-intentioned but undeniably harmful imperialism.

The tensions that crisscross these works, ranging from the latter half of the nineteenth century across the twentieth and into the twenty-first, mirror those that structure the humanism of the four fictional texts examined in this thesis. The examples that Desmond and Moore and Gould use to contextualise—that is, to humanise—Darwin only raise more urgently the question of what it means to humanise and consequently what it is to be human. Darwin's theory situates humanity firmly within the natural world; his socio-cultural beliefs reflect and support efforts at increasing the distance between humanity and that world. In Desmond and Moore's overall account it is the socio-cultural which generates the scientific, giving Darwin's "an-anthropocentric" (Derrida, "HOSTIPITALITY" 4) theory a human face, but in the specific example of his and John's relationship it is the abandonment of the social and a return to 'nature' which attests to his humanity. Desmond and Moore's reactionary Romanticism stands in sharp contrast with Darwin's anxiety about the relationship between man and nature that emerges in the quotation cited by Gould. Though, the latter also does not acknowledge that anxiety as it lies outside of his critical position—that is, "standard liberal race critique" (K. Anderson 199) which Kay Anderson argues has prevented an examination of the problem that is 'the human' itself. But it is worth noting that Gould does not regard the fact that humanity is "inextricably part of nature" as negating human uniqueness but rather that like all species "*Homo sapiens* is special in some way" (354). Gould maintains that what is special about humans is culture and that culture, though engendered by biology because it is a product of the brain, has evolved past and away from biology. This indicates that Gould, like Darwin, predicates the achievement of that which is "properly human" (K. Anderson 21) upon the movement out of nature (Gould 354–5). Darwin is a figure both prominent—in so far as he is of particular interest—and indistinct for being constructed and reconstructed in myriad ways and for various (often contradictory) purposes. The reconstructions outlined above are indicative of the burden that is still, perhaps inevitably, placed upon ongoing formulations of the human and humanity as simultaneously biological and socio-cultural entities. In turning to Mitochondrial Eve—a figure who is also prominent and indistinct, albeit in slightly different ways and for different reasons—the goal is to navigate the tensions between nature and society in a way that confronts the problem of the human without denying the importance of either the biological or the socio-cultural.

3.2.1. Recognisably Human

Mitochondrial Eve is characterised by an ambiguity that is indicative of the ongoing tension between the biological and the socio-cultural in “The DNA Journey”, the “I am African” campaign as well as the four texts that are the focus of this thesis. The reason she may be regarded as providing “powerful evidence for close familyhood”, Howe notes, is that she provides all of humanity with “a relatively recent common ancestor” (29). Understood in this way, she promises the possibility of an unbroken lineage and rewards the search for origins with an ancestral figure who is recognisably human, the Mother of all *Homo sapiens* (unlike ‘Lucy’ who belongs to a different species and, indeed, a different genus). As such Mitochondrial Eve represents what Zimitri Erasmus terms “genealogical knowing” (125) where one’s human-ness is understood as a product of one’s genealogy. This form of knowing and of humanising, Erasmus contends, “foregrounds the biological, paying little attention to the complex and constitutive relationships between the biological and the historical-cultural” (126). Second, it privileges substance, understood as stable, over dynamic processes. Third, its emphasis on genealogy reasserts the distinction between the human and the non-human and between subject and object, which invites the reiteration of hierarchies and exclusivity within a deeply racialised context. Drawing on Fanon and making a connection to Foucault’s genealogical method with its emphasis on the archive, Erasmus proposes “sociogenesis” as an alternative to “biocentric ways of knowing [which] are a version of the same explanatory and genealogical frame at the centre of Western humanist, monotheistic and binary thought” (129). Following on from Fanon’s term ‘sociogeny’, Erasmus explains that sociogenesis “foregrounds lived experience of the social in making what it means to be human as much as what it means to be considered less than human” (130). Rather than humanise—which Erasmus argues “is to impose upon the world a preconceived meaning of the human” (xxii)—and unlike the “genomic principle”, the “sociogenic principle” (Sylvia Wynter qtd in Erasmus 130) allows for the social and cultural practice she terms ‘humaning’, an open-ended process that “is historically and socially specific” (xxii) and, therefore, never reducible to a single correct method.

There are two aspects of Erasmus’ approach worth highlighting here. First, sociogenesis does not require the dismissal of science, as Erasmus claims that it “enables one to look, write, think and act against a reified genetics that naturalises and glorifies ideas of racial, ethnic and population belonging, *without resorting to anti-science, technophobic* or Creationist conceptions of the world(s) and the place(s) of all sentient beings” (130, emphasis added). Indeed, as Haraway argues, an anti-science or technophobic response

is as deeply implicated in humanism as a blind belief in human progress through scientific technologies. Both technophilias and technophobicias (and their competitors organophilias and organophobicias) are effects of the “fantasy of human exceptionalism” (Haraway, *Species* “Chapter 1”; see also Haraway, “Manifesto” 37). This is because of their reliance on, and reiteration of, the ‘Great Divides’ between nature and society and the human and the non-human that Bruno Latour (1993) identifies as the problem of modernity itself.

Second, and in response to the easy triumph of family over history evident in, for instance, “The DNA Journey”, sociogenesis “call[s] into question genealogical definitions of the human” (Erasmus 130). But to call into question *genealogical* definitions of the human does not fully address biological nor even genomic definitions of the human. Erasmus’ analysis is a three-part examination of how the ‘the look’, ‘the category’, and ‘the gene’ reify race and, though she notes the problem of conflating ‘gene’ and ‘genome’ which are different entities in form and function (119), her opposition of the sociogenic and the genomic in a critique of genealogical knowing reduces the genomic to the genealogical. Heredity is only one of the key components of genomics and “[w]e can hope to gain a comprehensive picture [of our genetic history] only by probing many areas of the genome” (Dawkins and Wong “Archaic Homo Sapiens”). Furthermore, the opposition of the sociogenic and the genomic on the basis that the former is a dynamic process while the latter is fixed substance fails to take into account the fact that the genomic and even the genealogical are also dynamic processes to which change and response are integral (Hull 1976; Mukherjee 2016).²³

Erasmus is critical of common-sense assumptions about the biological as a means of securing the human and about what genetics means for conceptions of belonging. In adhering to a dichotomy between the socio-cultural and the biological, however, she risks reaffirming those assumptions. Consequently, while biology is not dismissed entirely, it is only cursorily acknowledged and any role it may play and to whatever degree in any one instance of behaviour or identity is effectively negated.²⁴ In effect, language, discourse and

²³ Taking a broader look of the human body and biology, the study of epigenetics, which work to ‘switch’ genes ‘on’ and/or ‘off’ often in response to the environment, is another reminder of the dynamism of genes and the human genome (Carey 2012; Mukherjee 2016).

²⁴ This strategy is rooted in suspicion of the notion of any kind of biological human nature, as is indicated in the original conclusion of Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man*. As an evolutionary biologist, Gould claims that he cannot accept the notion that the human is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate in the way “imagined by some eighteenth-century empiricist philosophers” (354). But, as Pinker demonstrates, formulations of the blank slate may have originated in the eighteenth-century but they have not remained there. He argues that “radical scientists”, including Gould, subscribe to an updated version of the blank slate in which any discussion of genetics and behaviour is conflated with “determinism” and “reductionism”. These charges, as Pinker outlines, are often made despite the explicit acknowledgement by those who stand accused that culture plays an

culture matter and “the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter” (Barad 801). Social Darwinism clearly indicates that to conflate the biological and the socio-cultural, producing ‘neutral’ and immutable, that is, naturalised social ‘facts’ is dangerous; however, to separate them entirely and reduce all that matters to social phenomena where there are no facts, only signification, is also deeply problematic for it is critically and epistemologically disabling (Latour 2004; Barad 2003; Pinker 2002). Rather than contrast the genomic and the sociogenic or, more broadly, the biological and the socio-cultural (and thereby overemphasise disparity) or conflate them, it is more productive to understand their relationship as being one of analogy. To do so responsibly requires that the biological sciences and the study of genetics and genomics not be treated as if it is a monolith, represented by an all-knowing and unchanging unanimity but rather a dynamic discipline constituted by heterogeneous ideas and the understanding that biological facts are liable to change but that this does not mean they do not exist.

To interpret Mitochondrial Eve as providing a stable origin for a single human family tree and, therefore, as a guarantor of human unity on the basis of biological sameness is, on the one hand, to run the risk of privileging the biological over the socio-cultural and historical. But it is also to misread and misrepresent her biological significance. In terms of the former, though he acknowledges that Mitochondrial Eve has great appeal for antiracists, Stephen Howe is ultimately sceptical of this Eve’s power to refute racist thinking and unite humanity, arguing that “hypotheses of a recent, common ancestor for all human groups do not necessarily buttress antiracist beliefs” (30–31). This is not least because the debate about the origin of humanity as a species has, in some cases, been replaced by one focused on the origins of human civilisation (Howe 1998). In other words, one can accept that the species originated in Africa without having to accept that human beings are equal in moral worth. Richard Dawkins and Yan Wong (2004) make a similar point when they argue that to frame the debate as between ‘Out of Africa’ theorists and ‘Separate Origins’ theorists is misleading owing to the names used. The real disagreement does not concern whether or not *Homo sapiens* emerged out of Africa but rather *when* and, consequently, when they became recognisably human. Reflecting what is then a continuum rather than an opposition, the authors propose describing the debate as being between the ‘Recent African Origin’ and the ‘Ancient African Origin’ hypotheses (“Archaic Homo Sapiens”).

important, and even dominant, role in explaining the variation within and across human behaviours and practices (“Chapter 6”).

In addition to an overstatement of Mitochondrial Eve's socio-political significance, there are also a number of misconceptions—some of which are relevant here—about what Mitochondrial Eve means biologically. She is not, in fact, the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) but rather, like 'Y-chromosome Adam', a "special-case common ancestor that we reach if we travel up the family tree from mother to mother, or father to father respectively" (Dawkins and Wong "Archaic Homo Sapiens"; see also Lemonick and Garcia 1987). There are, as Dawkins and Wong explain, many ways in which genes "move through the family tree" and that "[e]ach of these possible pathways will have a different MRCA, all of whom unite humanity, many of them more recently than [Y-chromosome] Adam or [Mitochondrial] Eve" ("Archaic Homo Sapiens"; see also Lewin 24).

Second is the misconception that Mitochondrial Eve is a single and particular individual locked in time. The name given to her (in addition to problematically invoking the creation myth, an idea developed below) is a "shifting honorific title" ("Archaic Homo Sapiens") that, in the event of a particular gene tree dying out, would necessarily describe a new *more* recent common ancestor. Or, depending on "the pattern of population dynamics" that produces the mtDNA data, Mitochondrial Eve may be found to have existed before the establishment of *Homo sapiens* as a species; that is to say, it is possible that she "was a member of the archaic sapiens species, and was not yet an anatomically modern human" (Lewin 24; also Dawkins and Wong). This speaks to what Dawkins and Wong describe, in the opening pages of the chapter titled "Archaic *Homo Sapiens*", as the difficulty of drawing a neat line between the "Archaics" and the "Moderns". This is an example of "species uncertainty" (Hey et al. 2003) or the "species problem" (Baum and Shaw 1995; see also Hull 1976) and it has significant implications for how one might conceive of species belonging (see below). These two initial points are consequences of the fact that while the genealogy of a gene parallels that of human beings "where we follow surnames through records of Births, Marriages and Deaths", "gene trees" and "people trees" are, nevertheless, separated by a "telling difference": humans have two biological parents; a gene has only one 'parent' (Dawkins and Wong "Archaic Homo Sapiens"). The biological relationships that they trace are varied and shifting; they are analogous.

The third and final point of clarification marks a return to Darwin's theory of evolution in so far as it refuted human exceptionalism and teleology: the survival of Mitochondrial Eve's matrilineal line is not an indicator of any special quality inherent in her genetic code but rather a random evolutionary outcome which, with a change in circumstance, could have given rise to something other than *Homo sapiens* as we recognise it (Dawkins and Wong

“Archaic Homo Sapiens”). Rather than ameliorate this human precarity with socio-cultural theories of inevitable progress and improvement as Darwin did, it can be a productive contributor to praxes of human identity and relationality—that is, to formulations of human community—that take difference seriously. Erasmus argues (echoing Glissant) that

[s]ociogenesis for futures is an art rather than a method. A method suggests predesigned procedures for doing something, the outcomes of which may or may not be predictable, in some ways akin to a recipe. An art, on the other hand, suggests emergent, unfolding processes the outcomes of which are infinitely open and wholly unpredictable” (131).

When the biological is included with responsible sincerity, Mitochondrial Eve represents an embodied relationality premised on and characterised by the blurred boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, human and non-human. This does not require the abandonment of that which is not biological nor the declaration that the biological is dominant but, as her name reflects, a recognition that humans are constituted both symbolically and materially. In what follows, I outline the ways in which the inclusion, by way of cautious analogy, of biological definitions of the human and humanity may form part of such an art of human relationality.

3.2.2. Embodied Relationality

Embodied relationality recognises that the human—as individual and as category—is neither exceptional nor sovereign and that this is as much a condition of our biological nature as it is of our socio-cultural nature. Rather than secure ‘the human’, a biological reading signals a shift towards the posthuman because it emphasises the difficulty of defining the human which is ever-mutating and emergent (Hayles 1999).²⁵ Not only a matter of semantic confusion and the subjective nature of scientific taxa, species uncertainty refers to the fact that species entities, understood as “real things that have a location in space and time, and that can be acted upon and change”, are “evolutionarily and demographically dynamic” (Hey et al. 598–9). Owing to the fact that “[s]pecies split into two or more species very gradually” (Hull 176), there is no single clear point at which the emergence of a species can be observed. There is no point at which a species can be said to be truly itself but rather, “[a]t any one time, there are species in all stages of speciation” (Hull 176). The difficulty of defining the human as a species is connected to the difficulty of describing the individual

²⁵ While the posthuman is often associated with the digital age and cybernetics, Katherine Hayles makes the point that “even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman [because the] defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components” (4).

human biologically without reference to that which is non-human. Consequently, the interrogation of humanism that embodied posthumanist relationality invites does not begin with the “relationships of humans to their wider non-human environment” (Erasmus 125) but more fundamentally with the relationships of humans with their *internal* non-human composition.

In this, Mitochondrial Eve’s name suggests our fundamental otherness to ourselves. Mitochondria, that which allows for our matrilineal connectivity to be traced, “constitute an independent line of genetic reproduction inside our bodies, unconnected with the main nuclear line which we think of as our ‘own’ genes” (Dawkins and Wong “Archaic Homo Sapiens”). The mitochondrion—the development of which was a key moment in evolutionary history—is itself the result of endosymbiogenesis, which is the appropriation of a microorganism by a larger cell to perform a particular function beneficial to the host. In fact, the human body is a complex ecosystem with the human genome accounting for “only 10 percent of [it]” at the cellular level; the “other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to [one] being alive at all” (Haraway 3–4; see also Zimmer 2000; and Yong 2016). ‘Our’ genome is also populated with an array of ancient viruses—endogenous retroviruses—which are themselves non-living entities and yet are also constitutive of us (Zimmer, *A Planet* 2015). In other words, a biologically informed approach to the self draws attention to a world within but not wholly contained or possessed by a person and, to appropriate Haraway, “[i]t is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and [non-human]” (“Manifesto” 33). The individual body as conglomerate and the fact that the species is as of yet a flicker, “a part of the coda” (Yong 7), in the histories of those microbes that largely constitute human bodies (and the planet) indicates that as much as we are one (uncertain) species, we are also not ourselves or, at least, we are not our sovereign selves.

The relationship between human and ‘non-human’ is not an oppositional interaction premised on a sovereign and independent self and other or subject and object but rather one characterised by “intra-action” where the “relata do not pre-exist relations” (Barad 815) but rather emerge from them. Intra-action is the foundation of what Haraway terms “companion species” (not to be confused with companion animals), which she argues “is less a category than a pointer to an ongoing ‘becoming with’” (*Species* 16). This appears to mirror Erasmus’ notion of humaning as “a lifelong process of life-in-the-making with others” (xxii), a formulation of a new humanism that draws on Tim Ingold’s discussion of the difference between humanising and “humanifying” (117). According to both Erasmus and

Ingold, to become human is an ongoing act, a process of doing. Posthumanism indicates, however, that human-ness is also (and perhaps equally) characterised by an undoing of the category (K. Anderson 2007; Hayles 1999) and of the individual (Haraway, *Species* 2008; Kubiak 2009) without the comfort of the illusion that there has been a movement beyond the human towards something new nor a transcendental assimilation of or into the other.²⁶ Therefore, this undoing does not signal once more the end of ‘man’ (Foucault, *The Order* 1970) for, as Bruno Latour notes, “[m]odernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of ‘man’ or as a way of announcing his death” (*Never Modern* 13). Rather it is to recognise “the simultaneous birth of ‘nonhumanity’” (*Never Modern* 13) and take seriously the ambiguous fact of humanity—of its materiality—without elevating or fetishizing it.

At the same time, this undoing is not to fetishize the crossing of boundaries, producing a biologically-driven “happy hybridity” (Lo 2000). To read the human as a living organism rather than merely a collection of genes requires that one not overstate the permeability of boundaries nor overstate the desirability of crossing any and all boundaries (Keller 127–8). Indeed, to read the human biologically is to occupy a position of ontological ambivalence and political unease. It requires that ‘human nature’—that which “has been given over to social conservatives and sociobiologists” (Tsing 144)—be recouped and redefined as “an interspecies relationship” (Tsing 144), a symbiotic relationship that may be asymmetrical, even parasitic. It thus also requires that ‘nature’ and ‘evolution’ not be coupled with moral sentiments such as ‘good’ and ‘progress’, a decoupling that is central to the development of what Peter Singer (1999) calls a “Darwinian Left”.²⁷ Pinker explains that being “[m]indful both of science and of history, the Darwinian Left has abandoned the Utopian vision that brought so many unintended disasters” (*Blank Slate* 385). Though a biological reading rejects Romantic Utopianism, it does not mark the abandonment of Romanticism in so far as transience and uncertainty continue to be key characteristics. To read the human biologically

²⁶ This can be understood as a *reluctant* posthumanism in so far as Haraway notes that “urgent work still remains to be done in reference to those who must inhabit the troubled categories of woman and human, properly pluralized, reformulated, and brought into constitutive intersection with other asymmetrical differences” (17). Reluctance or caution is also necessary in light of the argument that “‘human’ and ‘posthuman’ coexist in shifting configurations that vary with historically specific contexts” (Hayles 6).

²⁷ To cite Peter Singer alongside Anna Tsing on the notion of human nature is intentionally provocative in light of the former’s engagement with E.O. Wilson’s work in *The Expanding Circle* and *A Darwinian Left* and the latter’s explicit disdain for sociobiology. This provocation mirrors that of aligning Haraway and Pinker at the beginning of this section. Nevertheless, the provocation is mitigated by the fact that neither Singer nor Pinker endorse Wilson’s work wholesale and they criticise, in particular, the notion that “our knowledge of evolution [can be used] to discover ‘ethical premises inherent in man’s biological nature’” (Singer 12) and Wilson’s claim that “moral reasoning will someday be superseded by evolutionary biology” (Pinker “Chapter 6”).

is to acknowledge that 'it' exists within and through unavoidable uncertainty; it invites the practice of negative capability. This undoing of the human is, thus, both a return to and a departure from Darwin for there is a decentring of the species but it is one which has implications for subjectivity and relationality that are very different from Darwin's vision of humanity arranged hierarchically along a track leading inexorably towards perfectibility.

From the above it should be clear that embodied relationality does not mean that "the body is simply required for 'doing relationships'" (Gergen 120) from which personhood emerges. Rather, bodies themselves emerge from the relationship between the human and the 'non-human' and this has implications for how social bodies are formulated and the myriad ways in which personhood and relationality are thought. The latter counters a Foucauldian understanding of the body as a site upon which meaning and power are inscribed, a position which in light of Foucault's genealogical method has been criticised as incoherent or contradictory. For instance, Nancy Fraser argues that Foucault's exemption of the body from those instruments of domination (such as 'Man' and sex) suggests that it is a "transcendental signified"—existing prior to and outside of history—and, therefore, at odds with his "antifoundationalism [which] requires him to reject such a notion" (60–61). Following Fraser's critique, it is unclear how the body may serve as the basis for a human community because if it is politically and historically inscribed as is required by Foucault's genealogical project, "[w]hat justifies his assumption that the various invested bodies [...] are all species of the same genus?" (Fraser 61). This critique is echoed by N. Katherine Hayles' point that Foucault erases the particularities of bodies through recourse to 'the body': "[a]lthough the bodies of the disciplined do not disappear in Foucault's account, the specificities of their corporealities fade into the technology [like the disciplinarians themselves], becoming a universalized body worked upon in a uniform way" (194; see also Butler, "Paradox"). Fraser's critique of Foucault's understanding of the body is situated within her broader point that over the course of the three stages of Foucault's philosophy (archaeology, genealogy and history of subjectivity) there is a hardening of what is initially only a conceptual rejection of humanism to one that is strictly normative and unjustifiable (Han-Pile 2010). Consequently, Fraser remains ambivalent about the usefulness of Foucault's work, claiming that he "tends to assume that his account of modern power is both politically engaged and normatively neutral" (Fraser 18) and that he is unable to distinguish between power that is productive and that which is prohibitive, domineering and oppressive. There are, however, two interconnected ways in which embodied relationality signals a continuation of Foucault's work rather than an absolute departure.

The first initially draws on Béatrice Han-Pile's proposition that Foucault's early and late work may be reconciled in a way that maintains certain humanist ideals "but seeks to construe them in non-metaphysical ways" (120). Han-Pile argues that, in his later analyses, Foucault "acknowledges the importance of the notion of subjectivity to understand human practices" and at the same time "emphasiz[es] the reciprocity and historical plasticity of subject/object relations" (137). Because of the subject's capacity for "free agency" and "self-problematization" which "effect[s] a 'permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy'", it is not only shaped by its "economic, social and political conditions of existence" but also "constitutes itself through practices of subjugation, or in a more autonomous fashion through practices of liberation" (Foucault qtd in Han-Pile 137–8).²⁸ Rather than contradict "his early attacks against the dominance of the subject", Han-Pile argues that this altered position "puts forward a promising alternative to think subjects in a non-metaphysical, non-essentialist way" (137).

What Han-Pile calls the "reciprocity and historical plasticity of subject/object relations" is reflected in Hayles' outline of processes of inscription and those of incorporation which stand in a homologous relation to 'the body', as described by Foucault, and embodiment. As stated above, Hayles is critical of the universalising impulse of 'the body', as described in Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, arguing that by focusing on inscription, he erases embodiment. She explains that while Foucault's "absorption of embodiment into discourse" gives his work "interpretive power", it is also limiting for failing to account for the fact that "[f]issuring along lines of class, gender, race, and privilege, embodied practices create heterogeneous spaces even when the discursive formations describing those practices seem uniformly dispersed throughout society" (Hayles 195). Citing Elizabeth Grosz,²⁹ Hayles distinguishes between 'the body', which is "always normative relative to some set of criteria", and embodiment which "is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment" (196). Embodiment and practices of incorporation are distinct from but overlapping with discourse and processes of inscription. The knowledge that comes from incorporating practices "retains improvisational elements that make it contextual rather than abstract"; because it is embedded within the body, "it is highly resistant to change"; arising from repeated bodily performances, this knowledge is often subconscious and habitual;

²⁸ Han-Pile quotes from volumes two and four of Foucault's *Dits et Ecrits* (1994) which have not been translated into English; as such, I rely on her translation.

²⁹ That is, Grosz's claim in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* that "there is no body as such; there are only *bodies*" (19).

finally, following on from the foregoing three features, incorporated knowledge “has the power to define the boundaries within which conscious thought takes place” (Hayles 205). This recognition that experiential bodies are both fundamental and varied is not to suggest that embodiment represents a more natural and, therefore, universal body of knowledge. Rather, drawing on and responding to Mark Johnson’s work on the embodied nature of metaphorical thinking, Hayles argues that embodiment and discourse co-construct the “heterogeneous spaces of postmodern technologies and cultures” (206) in complex ways.

The second link between embodied relationality and Foucault is the fact that there is always the possibility of a reversal of power. Margaret McLaren notes that Fraser is persuasive in her claim that Foucault’s work is normatively confused but suggests that she “may be holding Foucault to too rigid a standard” (23) and that his work “suggests several different ways to think about the body” (106). For instance, in “The Subject and Power” (1982), Foucault states that the exercise of power is only possible alongside the existence and exercise of freedom. This is because power

is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of action upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their action or being capable of action. (Foucault, “The Subject” 789)

McLaren’s attempt to make use of what she considers a productive tension between the subject and power stresses that, because power is “always subject to reversal” (McLaren 65), it is not only distinguishable from domination but it is also the means of resistance to it.

Like McLaren, Judith Butler sees an opportunity in the contradictions that arise in Foucault’s analysis in, for instance, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Butler explains that the paradox of Foucault’s culturally inscribed body is that “[b]ecause the distinction between the historical act of inscription and the body as surface and resistance is presupposed in the task of genealogy as [Foucault] defines it, the distinction itself is precluded as an object of genealogical investigation” (“Paradox” 607). What Butler proposes in subsequent works (and in response to criticisms of her own perceived excessive social constructivism in *Gender Trouble*) is, first, a distinction between “the subject itself” (being) and “the conditions of its emergence and operation” (*Bodies* 7). To designate the subject as constructed is not to abolish the former—being—but rather to explore the contours of the latter, which is to say, meaning. Secondly and consequently, Butler returns to and develops what the nature of matter might be as first suggested at the end of “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions”. Like the cultural construction of ‘the body’ which Butler argues is

“diffuse” (“Paradox” 607), the body as matter is not a “surface” that is simply inscribed but rather “a *process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*” (Butler, *Bodies* 9, italics in original). Thirdly, Butler regards the body to be constituted through the shifting relations of self and other, subject and power. As such “the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of these as well” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 26). The body is an instance of reciprocity and precarity: it is simultaneously the site of power as violence and the instrument of violence as well as the site of power as compassion and the means of its expression. Consequently, there is agreement between Foucault and Butler in terms of the body not being stable but, whereas for Foucault this means that it “cannot serve as a common identity among individuals cross-culturally or transhistorically” (Butler, “Paradox” 604), for Butler it is precisely our awareness of our common precarity which signals the possibility of a becoming together that is ethical.

To understand that the species and biological bodies are entities of continual emergence characterised by relationality and contingency has implications for the conceptualisation of social bodies. That is to say that the relations within bodies provides an analogy for relations between bodies predicated not on sovereignty and dominance but on a shared precarity. Similarly, the dynamism of and consequent uncertainties that characterise species are suggestive of a human unity that if premised on species-being is also always emergent and in process, never final and never transcendent. The structure of this analogy cannot be strictly described as a parallel: biological and socio-cultural formulations of being and relationality intersect and interlace. Nor does Elizabeth Grosz’s image of the Möbius strip suffice. Even though the indistinguishable nature of the distinction between states is evocative of the unclear boundaries between one human/’non-human’ body and another, it is limited because it “make[s] it difficult to chart gradations within the continuum” (Hayles 196; see also Grosz 209–10). This may exaggerate the blurring of boundaries, collapsing the biological into the socio-cultural. Hayles suggests that “the ‘field’ in which bodies take shape may profitably be represented as an interplay between two intersecting axes” which has the advantage of recognising “the historical importance of dichotomies” (196). In light of the tendency in the texts under study to simply privilege the more palatable end of any dichotomy, intersecting axes with clear and opposite ends risks reasserting the possibility and desirability of a pure position. Thus, the analogous relationship between the biological and socio-cultural in the texts on which I focus—

particularly in *The Poisonwood Bible*—may be more accurately and productively represented using the image of the Gordian Knot (Latour, *Never Modern* 1993). This image reflects that the biological and the socio-cultural are distinct but tightly interlaced and that this interlacing presents an intractable problem for which there is no single theory or praxis. Adding to this unavoidable unease, is the fact that the contingency suggested by a biological reading of the human should not be interpreted as a perverse assertion of certainty, as if what it means to be human is decidedly undecidable. The nature of the knotted relationship between the biological and the socio-cultural is such that the direction of their interweaving and the structure of their overlap is always subject to reversal. It is once again the name of our most recent matrilineal common ancestor that serves as a reminder of this.

3.2.3. Of Metaphor and Myth

The name 'Mitochondrial Eve' is a reminder that the apparent objectivity and sense of complete-ness of a genetic history needs to be supplemented not only with conventional historiography but also with metaphor and myth if it is to be part of a history that can be called fully human. In fact, the scientific study of our origins and our cultural creation myths share the drive to “pin down the origin of mankind [*sic*] to one place and one event, even if the place may be out of our reach” (Gross 295). Those who defend myth do so on the basis of its fundamental importance to humanity’s political and collective well-being. The political intention of Lakoff’s study into the metaphors that structure our political affiliations is informed by an acknowledgement of what he says American conservatives recognise and liberals, to their own political detriment, do not: “Conservatives know that politics is not just about policy and interest groups and issue-by-issue debate. They have learned that politics is about family and morality, about myth and metaphor and emotional identification” (20). Though Lakoff defends a liberal perspective, his point is that if liberal politics is to become and remain an *effective* politics it must learn to capture the imaginations of people. In *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Harari argues that myth has been essential to the survival of the species, stating that

fiction has enabled us not merely to imagine things, but to do so *collectively*. We can weave common myths such as the biblical creation story, the Dreamtime myths of Aboriginal Australians, and the nationalist myths of modern states. Such myths give *Sapiens* the unprecedented ability to cooperate flexibly in large numbers. (“Chapter 2”, italics in original)

The ongoing existential importance of myth in a globalised world where strangers are increasingly entangled becomes clear when he later adds that “[l]arge numbers of strangers can cooperate successfully by believing in common myths” (“Chapter 2”). In many ways, then, the interlacing of science and myth is unremarkable. As Michael Gross points out,

[t]he quest to establish the specific details of [Homo sapiens'] population history has often been framed in terms derived from the genesis. Thus, Homo sapiens' native habitat became the Garden of Eden, and efforts to establish genetic characteristics of a founder population were often described as a search for the genes of Adam and Eve. (295)

Additionally, as more is learnt and facts necessarily change to accommodate new knowledge, it is possible that “the popular story of a geographically well-defined ‘cradle of mankind’ and a small founder population may turn out to be a simplification, if not another creation myth” (Gross 295).

The inclusion of ‘Eve’ and the subsequent invocation of biblical myth, “to the probable delight of creationists” (Lemonick and Garcia 66), can legitimately be criticised and opposed, where such objections are to the invitation of known falsehoods into a scientific theory which strives to be accurate. Similarly, biologist and proponent of the theory of symbiogenesis, Lynn Margulis is critical of the use of metaphors of competition in explanations of evolutionary theory, arguing that such metaphors “do not beget but preclude scientific understanding” (“Chapter 1”). She goes on to state that substituting symbiotic metaphors for competitive ones are equally problematic, explaining that “[s]ociety will be better served by more accurate scientific understanding, and this is not to be gained by substituting one pole of oversimplified metaphors for another” (“Chapter 1”). There are also political grounds for such objections to metaphor as Haraway points out when she claims (only somewhat tongue-in-cheek) that “teaching modern Christian creationism should be fought as a form of child abuse” (“Manifesto” 4). Yet, Haraway objects to a specific (and a specific kind of) myth, not myth in general. Similarly, Margulis cannot escape metaphor, noting its aptness in some cases (“Chapter 7”) and citing an example where it has made the Earth’s history comprehensible to the public (“Chapter 8”). In truth, Margulis is critical of “superficial dichotomizations” and ultimately argues that “new thought processes” and, indeed, “[n]ew metaphors” (“Chapter 1”) are needed.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Haraway accept the inescapability and importance, respectively, of myth, with each proposing a new relation to myth. For Nancy, the significance of myth and its totalising power is a consequence of both its form and content. It is not “simple

representation” but rather a “fiction that founds” (Nancy 56) a world for the subject and for subjectivity. The totalising and “tautegorical” (Schelling qtd in Nancy 49) nature of myth means that myth “signifies itself, and thereby converts its own fiction into foundation or into the inauguration of *meaning* itself” (Nancy 53, italics in original). As such, Nancy argues that, rather an escape from myth (an impossibility) or attempts to demythologise (a dangerously self-defeating task), what is needed is the interruption of myth: resistance to the totalising power of myth lies in a movement of myth towards and onto its own limit. Literature is, for Nancy, the “voice of interruption” because “[n]ot only is literature the beneficiary (or the echo) of myth, [it] has itself in a sense been and no doubt should be thought as myth—as the myth of the myth of mythless society” (63). In “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (“Manifesto”1987), Haraway also makes a case for literature, arguing that it can interrogate those myths that seek to establish hierarchies of power premised on an original innocence to which an individual or whole community can return. Echoing Nancy’s formulation of myth and community as co-constitutive, Haraway calls for “a world-changing fiction” (“Manifesto” 2) characterised by irony. An ironic myth, she argues, produces a blasphemous relation to community rather than one of apostasy, because the former “protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community” (“Manifesto” 1). The struggle in each of the four texts under study can be broadly characterised as a struggle with myth, its inescapability and, simultaneously, its limits. The premise of that which is to follow in Chapters Two to Five is, therefore, less that myth should or can be done away with in favour of truth. In fact, as I will demonstrate, these texts fail to project a universal human community because they have relied too strongly on certain myths as often as they fail for having rejected, dismissed or ostensibly progressed past myth.

Chapter Two

Imposed Kinship: Allegory, Symbol and Myth in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Amaryllis in Blueberry*

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history – true or feigned– with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.

J.R.R. Tolkien, “Foreword” to *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001: xi)

There is a great difference between a poet’s seeking the particular from the general and his seeing the general in the particular. The former gives rise to allegory, where the particular serves only as an instance or example of the general; the latter, however, is the true nature of poetry: the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general.

Goethe quoted by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (2003: 161)

2.1. Introduction

There are two thematic tensions at the core of Barbara Kingsolver’s 1998 best-selling family saga, *The Poisonwood Bible*, and Christina Meldrum’s similar but rather less well-known 2011 novel, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*. The first, more obvious, tension emerges from the novels being presented as political engagements, with regards to colonialism and neo-imperialism, and their pursuit of a transcendental humanism. In other words, both novels present the problem of how the West is to relate to ‘postcolonial Africa’, often in light of the West’s reluctance or even refusal to admit to its role in the colonial past and present of the continent, and both suggest that the transcendence of difference in the name of a unified and universal human family is the solution. Therefore, the second tension, less conspicuous only because it underlies the first, is that between the awareness of difference, of otherness, and the desire for the unification of self and other and of sign and meaning. Though they are preoccupied with regaining a lost unity, often expressed in paradisiacal or Edenic terms, these novels do not, strictly speaking, express a Christian worldview. Nevertheless, the use of Christian and classical myth and symbol to conceive of humanity as both immanent and transcendent is reminiscent of that Romanticism, which, as M.H. Abrams argues, equates “division,

separateness, externality, isolation [...] with evil, as well as with that other consequence of the Biblical fall of man, death” (181).¹ In terms of the narrative mechanics of *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, this is the distinction—present also in Romantic thought and critical reception thereof—between a unifying and totalising symbol and myth and what Walter Benjamin calls symbol’s “speculative counterpart” (161), allegory, which emphasises discontinuity and difference.

2.1.1. Unity and Difference, Symbol and Allegory

In the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a shift in emphasis from Romantic “affirmation[s] of unity” to “the Romantics’ attraction to separateness” (Swingle 361), followed by a shift back to unity albeit now formulated in more complex ways. With reference to Georg Hegel, Abrams argues that the “typical Romantic design” for regaining lost unity is not that of the circle but rather that of the spiral and that “in the most representative Romantic version of emanation and return, when the process reverts to its beginning the recovered unity is not [...] the simple, undifferentiated unity of its origin, but a unity which is higher, because it incorporates the intervening differentiations” (183–4, emphasis added). Though this “Abramsian Compromise” may have provided “a guideline for coming to terms with the tension between unity and opposition among Romantics” (Swingle 362), its limitations come to the fore in Kingsolver’s and Meldrum’s novels where difference as well as a persistent transcendentalism (with its implied teleology) simultaneously suggest the possibility of unity and prevent its fulfilment.

Similarly, having long been negatively opposed to symbol and consequently relegated to the margins, allegory has been the object of renewed interest since the second half of the twentieth century (Eagleton 2009; Mileur 1986; Cowan 1981; Mirabile 2012). This follows the posthumous appreciation of Walter Benjamin’s “effort to salvage allegory from the ‘enormous condescension’ of history” (Eagleton 6) as well as work by Paul de Man, such as his essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality”. Subsequently, allegory has come to be regarded as “a privileged form of discourse in postmodern artistic practice and theory” (Smith 106).

¹ It is worth noting here that Walter Benjamin makes a distinction between theological symbol and that vaunted by the Romantics, stating that in the latter “[t]he unity of the material and the transcendent object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence” (160). As Bainard Cowan explains, Benjamin “does not question the validity of the theological symbol because it is presented as a *mystery*, available to the soul but not to the intellect” (111 italics in original). Making a similar distinction but demonstrating the reverse in terms of preference, Abrams distinguishes between Romantic unity and Christian unity (and that of Neoplatonism), arguing that the latter is circular whereas the former advances and “close[s] where it had begun, but on a higher plane of value” (184).

Though Benjamin and De Man understand allegory in quite different terms (more on this below), their recuperations thereof have similarities which may be understood in broad terms as the refutation of “every possible naturalness of the linguistic sign” (Mirabile 322). More specifically, both treat allegory “as a rhetorical trope and an interpretive strategy” (Mirabile 322); both are critical of symbol conceptualised by the Romantics as distinct from and superior to allegory; and, finally, both argue that there is, in modern and contemporary aesthetics, the tendency to confuse symbol and allegory (Mirabile 321–322)—that is, a failure to recognise the presence and effect of allegory in Romantic aesthetics and critical reception.

But the renewal of interest in allegory has not necessarily redeemed the term. One of Tolkien’s objections to allegory referred to in the epigraph above is premised on a distinction between allegory and history. According to Tolkien, history is preferable because it applies to the reader’s “thought” and “experience” whereas allegory is little more than the “purposed domination of the author” (xi). In contrast, allegory is described by Benjamin as being “pre-eminently a kind of experience” understood as being both “an outward form of expression” of that experience as well as “the intuition, the inner experience itself” (Cowan 110). Craig Owens defines allegory as when “one text is doubled by another” (53), arguing that allegory, therefore, requires history. Similarly, Stephen Slemon contends that because “the allegorical sign refers always to a previous or anterior sign”, it is “inherently involved with questions of history” (158). While Tolkien’s neat distinction between allegory and history is false, it is less clear what the nature of the relationship is between the two. Owens and Slemon claim that allegory recuperates and transforms history, respectively, with the latter describing its working in postcolonial fiction as a “politics of resistance” (163). It is worth noting that the significance of allegory for postcolonial fiction may be reductive and overstated as demonstrated by Frederic Jameson’s contention that all ‘third-world’ narratives are necessarily allegorical (Jameson 1981; see also Ahmad 1992). Taking a more critical stance, Paul Smith argues that the allegorist effects “an excessive forgetting of the past and a powerful will to survive in the future” (114). However, in a move which echoes Benjamin and De Man, Smith notes that the allegorical and the symbolic often become confused in postmodern art and critical reception and that this is evident in postmodernists’ “almost overdetermined nostalgia for the primordial, for what might lie beyond language and culture and prior to both” (112). These mixed and even contradictory positions with regards to allegory may be attributed to the dialectical—or, according to Andrea Mirabile, the

“contradictory” (325)—nature of reformulations of allegory, what Terry Eagleton calls the “doubleness” (20) of allegorical discourse.

Allegory, as described by Benjamin, is both the recognition of, and an escape from, temporality. This dualism at the centre of allegory is reflected in the image of the death’s head which, Benjamin explains in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, “gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual” (166). In other words, “allegory arises from an apprehension of the world as no longer permanent, as passing out of being” (Cowan 110). As Andrea Mirabile notes, the connection between allegory and death leads to “a similar connection between allegory and (or as a form of) mourning” (324) when Benjamin designates mourning as “at once the mother of allegories and their content” (Benjamin 230). But the death head’s “total expressionlessness—the black of the eye-sockets—[is] coupled to the most unbridled expression—the grinning rows of teeth” (Benjamin qtd in Eagleton 20). Benjamin’s conceptualisation of allegory, therefore, includes, “at least potentially, an element of hope and salvation” (Mirabile 324) because, according to Benjamin, “an appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory” (223). It is the melancholic and redemptive qualities of Benjamin’s formulation that sets it apart from that of de Man, according to whom there is no relief from the fragmentary and contingent nature of allegory in which, like irony, “the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous” (De Man 209). Mirabile posits, however, that the commonly-held opposition between Benjaminian and de Manian allegory as, respectively, “mystical, nostalgic, and pathetic but redemptive” and “secular, apathetic, and neutral but linked to death and silence” is “too simplistic” (328). Noting the vertiginous nature of de Man’s conceptualisation, Mirabile suggests that “the damning movement of [de Man’s] ironic-allegorical language” can be better understood as the “dark counterpart” of Benjamin’s “redemptive movement” (328). He explains that “[t]he two processes, though moving in opposite directions, share the same vanishing point: the concept of language as an entity that mingles with the mystical—as a redemptive horizon in one case, a threatening abyss in the other” (328). Though he characterises the end result of Benjamin’s and de Man’s projects as “end[ing] up in an incomplete dialectic and a critical aporia”, Mirabile considers each of these to be “a productive darkness” (329, 330) out of which a new understanding of allegory may emerge. It is to these two movements—one redemptive and transcendental and the other abyssal—that I turn in my discussion of allegory and symbol in Kingsolver’s and Meldrum’s novels.

2.1.2. Myth, Totality and Contingency

Myth, like symbol, is a means of creating unity through recourse to universality. Twentieth-century myth scholarship, in particular, stresses the universality of myth and its unifying impulse. In *Four Theories of Myth in 20th Century History*, Ivan Strenski demonstrates that despite some differences between Ernst Cassirer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Mircea Eliade and Claude Levi-Strauss, the will to unite is central in formulations by all four.² In other words, for these theorists myth is the means of describing—that is, revealing—the existence of a single, true human community. As Cassirer claims, “myth has its own truth as its symbols serve to unite humans into a community” (Cassirer qtd in Schultz 88). This is a human community premised on a fundamental sameness, as indicated by his contention that myth offers an emotional truth through which “absolute reciprocal strangeness is annulled” (Strenski 29). Similarly, Malinowski, who was “unable to abide a fragmented world”, insisted on “some central principle of organisation” (Strenski 68) which, in the case of what Malinowski called “primitive culture” was provided by myth because, he argues, “it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief [as well as] safeguards and enforces morality” (Malinowski qtd in MacQueen 146). For Levi-Strauss, the transcendence of difference occurs across culture and is possible, indeed inevitable, owing to the notion that myth is a highly structured story and “[w]ith structure we reach fundamental levels of human existence” (Strenski 131). Consequently, myth offers a return to that which is before and outside of history. According to Strenski, Eliade understands myth as helping one to “recover primordial time composed of an eternal present” (Strenski 74–5) which underlies the various worlds and how they have come into being.

Strenski’s project is to position each of the theorists in what he terms their internal (that is, academic, professional, and institutional) and external (historical, political) contexts and to demonstrate that all these theorists claim to be describing myth when, in fact, they are prescriptively creating myth. Furthermore, in their structuralist analyses that ignores or explains away the particulars of any one mythology, there is the tendency to conflate the ubiquity of myth with the existence of a universal one, that is to say the universality of myth’s form and function. The understanding that it provides an account of the origin of the world which underpins each of the four theorists must be positioned within its specific context: myth, as described by Cassirer, Malinowski, Eliade and Levi-Strauss, provides an

² The kind of differences noted by Strenski include, for instance, Cassirer’s emphasis on the emotional truth of myth as a philosophy as opposed to Malinowski’s emphasis on the utilitarian function of myth understood as an action.

explanation of the origin of the *Western* world. Jean-Luc Nancy goes further when he suggests that “[t]he idea of myth alone perhaps presents the very Idea of the West, with its perpetual representation of the compulsion to return to its own sources in order to re-engage itself from them as *the very destiny of humanity*” (46, emphasis added). The problem to which Strenski points—that is, the problem of what myth is—is, on the one hand, the problem of definition because of what folklorist Lauri Honko terms the “semantic span of the concept”: that is, the fact that “myth can encompass everything from a simple-minded, fictitious, even mendacious impression to an absolutely true and sacred account” (7). Though his subsequent definition, an attempt to follow “a middle course between the extremes of too wide a definition and too narrowly drawn a definition” (15), reflects a predominant concern with myth as the expression and confirmation of *religious* norms and values, it is built on four criteria—form, content, function and context—from which emerges the more fundamental problem of myth at issue here.

As outlined by Honko, the form, content and context of myth is that of “sacred *origins*” (16) and “the beginning of time” (17), while its function and context are driven and shaped, respectively, by models for behaviour (17–8). In short, “myths can”, Honko states, “be characterised as ontological” (18). This ontology is to be understood once again in structuralist terms, as Honko’s explanation of the “cosmogonic” nature of myth—under which he subsumes “the 96th sura of the Koran, the birth of Christ, the life of Lenin, Che Guevara’s death and Mao’s speeches” (17)—indicates. He explains that “the term cosmogonic in this sense comprises all those stories that recount how the world began, how *our* era started, how the goals that *we* strive to attain are determined and *our* most sacred values codified” (17, emphasis added). This in conjunction with Nancy’s description above, therefore, indicates that myth (and myth scholarship as outlined) may be a form of “metaphysical colonization” (Leitch et al. 1415) produced, like symbol, through the transformation of the particular into the universal. The ostensible meaninglessness of myth owing to its semantic indeterminacy is what makes it useful and, indeed, powerful because in response to that apparent meaninglessness myth can be endlessly invented: “the invention of myth is bound up with the use of its power” (Nancy 46). Consequently, “what is in question is always, definitively, the original or principle function of myth” and, later, that the question is “not what myth is [...] but rather what is involved in what we have been calling ‘myth’” (45, 47). Rather than the definition of myth, it is the assumptions underlying myth’s form and function that need to be interrogated.

Myth, its form and its function, is understood by Nancy to be doubled, in that it both reveals and founds community, and “tautegorical”, in that “it says nothing other than itself” (49). Simultaneously, “immediate and mediated”, myth is “humanity being born to itself in producing myth” (Nancy 49, 45). In this, Nancy echoes Roland Barthes according to whom myth has “a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (115). Though Barthes’ analysis is premised on a structuralist formulation of myth as “a system of communication”, a “mode of signification” (107) and mythology as a “science of forms” (110), it does not reproduce myth as timeless and universal. For Barthes, “[a]ncient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things” (108). The effect of myth is, according to Barthes, transformation and naturalisation or the depoliticisation of speech—that is to say, myth transforms “historical intention [into] a natural justification” and makes “contingency appear eternal” (142). Similarly, Nancy argues that myth has a will to power and is totalitarian in form and content. With regards to form, “myth is not simple representation, it is representation at work, producing itself” and representing itself “as a remainderless totality” (Nancy 56). More than a system of communication, however, the content of myth is, according to Nancy, “always a communion, or rather *all communions*: of man with nature, of man with God, of man with himself, of men among themselves” (57, emphasis added). In other words, not only is community—understood as a “communitarian communion” (57)—a myth but also community cannot exist “outside of myth” (57) nor vice versa; the two are fundamentally and irrevocably co-constitutive.

The ubiquity of myth, its structuring presence in art, literature as well as apparently quotidian objects and daily events, makes resistance to or escape from myth a near-impossibility. Recognising that resistance to myth can itself become mythologised, Barthes declares that because “it is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside [...] the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*” (134), one that bears the mark of its relation to something prior and thus refuses essences and stresses historicity. Nancy posits, however, that “[i]t is perhaps not enough to know that myth is mythic” (46) because to do so may have the two-fold effect of allowing myth to multiply and dangerously so while, indeed *because*, we perceive ourselves to be beyond or outside of myth. Contra-Barthes, there is, for Nancy, no position outside of myth. Thus, myth can only be interrupted from the inside through “myth’s passage to a limit and onto a limit where myth itself would be not so much suppressed as suspended” (Nancy 47). Cognisant

of the totalising power of myth, the ability of myth to transform resistance to itself into myth, the interruption of myth is necessarily transient and the repeated passage to the limit can never be a return but must always be undertaken anew.

2.2. The Poisonwood Bible

Barbara Kingsolver's ambitious 1998 family saga, *The Poisonwood Bible*, is commonly identified as being political (Peck 2002; Koza 2003; Strehle 2008; Kilpatrick 2011) based on Kingsolver's own description, during an interview, of "what happened to the Congo [as] one of the most important political *parables* of our century" and of her novel as a "political *allegory*" (Barbara Kingsolver website, emphasis added).³ What has emerged from this description and the existing critical work on the novel is the sense of a moral lesson which is, in one way or another, more about America than it is about Congo. J.U. Jacobs (2002) considers whether Africa is allowed to speak in the cross-cultural discourse that Kingsolver sets up using chiasmus and palindromes and concludes that it is ultimately due to the palindromic nature of the text that *The Poisonwood Bible* "reflects mainly its own meanings [and] is more concerned with its own discursive constructedness" (115–16) than with giving Africa a voice. Kimberley Koza (2003) argues that even though "[m]aking a difference' guides [Kingsolver's] work" (284) her primary aim with this novel is to represent America, not Africa. For Sophie Croisy (2012) *The Poisonwood Bible* is a "contact zone" (223) between the old American South and Africa, intended as a critique of Southern values and identity. Susan Strehle (2008) notes the lack of engagement by critics with the novel as an allegory and goes on to discuss the extent to which it demonstrates the creation of American exceptionalism—particularly in and through the home with Nathan Price at the head of the household—and the destruction thereof as the narrative unfolds and the Price women reject Nathan's worldview.

In all of these discussions and a few others,⁴ whether or not the allegorical elements of the novel are taken into account, the representation or utilisation of Africa, never mind Congo, is hardly addressed. There are some noteworthy exceptions, such as, Stephen Fox's critique of the novel's representation of disability in which he demonstrates how Kingsolver's

³ An important exception to this is Janice Peck's 2002 article which illustrates that the inclusion of *The Poisonwood Bible* in Oprah's Book Club resulted in the stripping away of political meaning in the novel due to the "Oprah aesthetic" (166) in which reading is a tool for self-improvement and self-actualisation.

⁴ For Kingsolver's use, (mis)interpretation and undoing of Christianity see Kilpatrick (2011), Purcell (2009), and Ognibene (2003), respectively; for a feminist reading or discussion of the novel in light of domestic/neodomestic fiction see Demory (2002) and Jacobson (2005), respectively.

attempt to undermine stereotypical images of disability results in a romanticised image of Africa; Koza's observation that Kingsolver effectively silences African voices by limiting the narrative voice to those of the Price women; and Lee Siegel's caustic 1999 review of Kingsolver's work, including *The Poisonwood Bible*, as an example of exploitative and over-sentimental "Nice Writing" (30). None of these readings, however, take into careful consideration Kingsolver's use, and representation, of Africa within the allegory. To ignore Africa in the novel based on the idea that the author's aim is to represent America is to ignore the layering of allegory that gives the novel much of its complexity. To begin the task of examining the intersections of Africa and allegory in the novel, I will turn to Ruth May, the youngest of the Price daughters and the character most conspicuously absent from critical readings of the novel. Ruth May is the lynchpin of Kingsolver's political allegory because in so far as allegory is a movement between past and present, it is through Ruth May that the novel looks back—to the beginning of the world, America's enslavement of Africans, and the loss of Congo's independence—and attempts to look forward to the transcendence of all that suffering.

2.2.1. Allegory, the Recuperation of History and Disruption of Ideology

Derek Attridge (2006) notes that allegorical readings are often motivated by a lack of specificity in the work's temporal or geographical setting, making the search for meanings beyond the literal especially appealing. Kingsolver's novel, however, is located very specifically, both temporally and geographically, in pre- and post-independence Congo/Zaire, America, and various other African countries in the decades following Congo's independence. The specificity of this layer of allegory can be read as the novel's post-colonial impulse. Koza, Croisy and Strehle's claims that Kingsolver is more concerned with America does not necessarily negate the novel's political nature because the relationship set up between American/Southern values, identity and American exceptionalism and the imperial and neo-imperial history of Congo is an attempt at a recuperation of the history of these interconnected forces. In other words, by setting up a critique of Nathan's patriarchal imperialism alongside an admission of America's role in undermining Congo's independence, Kingsolver claims the history of Congo as part of the history of America and vice versa. Written by a white American woman as it is, the novel's allegory is, however, less of a "politics of resistance" (Slemon 163) against imperialism and more of an

acceptance of a share in the responsibility for that imperialism.⁵ At this level of allegory, in other words, the novel does not enact a collapsing of all histories into one but rather, with an eye towards the intersection of race, gender and imperialism, draws parallels which indicate the interconnectedness of the histories of America, Congo and imperialism.

Ruth May's death, which occurs almost exactly two-thirds into the novel at the end of Book Four,⁶ is the lynchpin of my discussion of *The Poisonwood Bible* in chapters two and three because it is both the height and undoing of the novel as political allegory. Yet this event and its ramifications for the novel's project have been neglected in existing readings of the novel. This chapter will turn to the moment of her death more directly at a later stage, a discussion which will be carried over into Chapter Three, but for now it is necessary to outline the allegorical relationship that is set up between Ruth May and Africa via her parallel with Patrice Lumumba. Ruth May is associated with Africa in two ways. First, the association is made structurally when, in her relation to the main narrative, Ruth May parallels Patrice Lumumba and Congo's imminent independence that drives the first part of the novel. The association is also made diegetically through Ruth May's allegorical relation to the myth of the Tribes of Ham.

When Ruth May dies it becomes clear that she has paralleled the Congo, and specifically Patrice Lumumba and independence, throughout the first two-thirds of the novel because her premature death coincides with Lumumba's untimely death, which also marks the curtailment of Congo's independence. Despite the fact that the first part of the novel drives inexorably towards independence and its loss, up until the moment of her death Ruth May occupies a seemingly insignificant place in the text. Her narration does not progress the plot, she is not a subject that acts directly upon other subjects, except to elicit worry and sympathy when she is sick with malaria, and she is granted the least textual space as a narrator. Similarly, Lumumba is a figure that never really appears in the novel, except through second-hand accounts which serve to keep him hovering at the margins. The uncertainty of Ruth May's position in the narrative is mirrored by Lumumba's status as a

⁵ A caveat here would be the extent to which the allegory of colonialism and patriarchy in the novel may be described as a "politics of resistance" in terms of gender. The novel's awareness of intersectionality, mainly through Orleana, however indicates that to ascribe to the allegory a simple politics of resistance in terms of race and post-coloniality would be a negation of the different kinds of power and privilege at play.

⁶ *The Poisonwood Bible* is divided into seven books—"Genesis", "The Revelation", "The Judges", "Bel and the Serpent", "Exodus", "Song of the Three Children" and "The Eyes in the Trees"—each of which, except for the last two, is prefaced by a retrospective account of the events leading up to and following Congo's failed independence and introspections by Orleana from various locations in the US. The books, constituted by chapters which are all narrated by the daughters, are subtitled as follows (except for Book 6 & 7): "The Things We Carried", "The Things We Learned", "The Things We Didn't Know", "What We Lost", "What We Carried out".

figure wrought through uncertainty, owing largely to the fact that he is generated by differing accounts serving various purposes. He is described as not only the symbol for and leader of an independent Congo but also “the new soul of Africa”, “a barefoot post office worker who’s never even been to college”, a man who, when inaugurated as Prime Minister, “seemed to stand ten feet tall”, whose “eyes seemed to be on fire”, “a danger to the safety of the world”, and a humble man “who washed his face each morning from a dented tin bowl, relieved himself in a carefully chosen bush, and went out to seek the faces of his nation” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 138, 139, 207, 208, 363). Each of these descriptions serves an ideological purpose largely revealed to be rooted in resistance to or fear of Congolese independence expressed by those who utter them.

In a novel based on historical events, that is framed by Orleana’s retrospective account of the Price family in Congo, which utilises multiple narrators, thus drawing attention to differing, though overlapping perspectives and which is, therefore, concerned with history both thematically and structurally, this multiple and even contradictory description of Lumumba serves to demonstrate that history is a discourse. Diane Kunz, in a defence of future American intervention based on purported successes in the past, argues that *The Poisonwood Bible* and Kingsolver are naïve about Lumumba and that history has proven the United States justified in intervening in Congo during the Cold War. Kunz’s wholesale justification of U.S.-led intervention goes so far as to claim that “[o]nly outside intervention rid the Congo of both these men [Lumumba and Mobutu]” (297) but does not admit the role played by the United States in instituting and maintaining Mobutu’s three decade long dictatorship in the first place (Meredith 2005; Hochschild 1998). This glaring omission reveals the extent to which history is a partial version of events, “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (White 3). In this regard, Kingsolver is less concerned with revealing history, as Kunz claims, than she is with putting into question the very notion of history as entirely knowable. This is part of the novel’s post-colonial impulse where it is clear that “the problem of history goes beyond the simple binary of either redeeming or annihilating the past” (Slemon 158). Kingsolver’s Lumumba is an interruption of official history, not an annihilation nor recuperation of history itself.

Similarly, Ruth May is an interruption of narrative. Ruth May’s apparent narrative insignificance is in fact a narrative marginality paralleled in the way that both Lumumba and independence appear to be narratively secondary to the daily hardships of the Price family,

only to dominate the course of their lives at the very point at which they disappear. Her textual marginality is reinforced by the fact that she is often described as apart from but witness to, and therefore a part of, both insignificant and significant events: “spying on the African Communist Boy Scouts” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 132), overhearing her parents discussing Rachel’s marriage to the chief and the female circumcision expected should the marriage take place, peering through holes in the walls of the chicken house to try and see Nelson naked, and seeing the diamonds that Eben Axelroot smuggles. Her movement to the centre of the narrative upon her death—her death is the climax and turning point of the novel—does, however, suggest that her marginality would be better described as liminality: she undergoes a change from one position and state to another. Victor Turner’s work is useful for thinking through Ruth May and Lumumba because they represent, perhaps to varying degrees, “radical critiques of...central structures” (Turner 50) because of their “interstitial” (Turner 47) and potentially transformative states.⁷

The liminal’s potential for disruption is significant for Kingsolver’s political allegory when one considers the layers of allegory that function in this novel: Ruth May is allegorically related to Patrice Lumumba who in turn represents the possibility of an independent Congo. On the surface of it, this three-pronged comparison is made to work because all three are killed, in one way or another, and so come to a premature end. Ruth May is what makes Lumumba more concrete and both Ruth May and Lumumba, to different degrees, are what make independence more concrete. Allegory or serious uses thereof “come about because allegory makes abstract ideas appear real, forceful” (Tambling 12). But there are allegorical layers in the novel which serve to include and reflect on the contact points between the Price family, Europe/the West and Congo. There is, for instance, the allegorical relationship between patriarchy and colonialism and imperialism where the domestic tyranny of Nathan refers back to the tyranny of King Leopold’s exploitative rule over, and Belgium’s colonial control of, Congo; both are the denial of independence. There is also the parallel between Methuselah, the ironically-named parrot that is set free “because his captivity is an embarrassment” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 173), and Congolese defiance and lost independence:

Curiously exempt from the Reverend’s rules was Methuselah, in the same way Our Father was finding the Congolese people beyond his power. Methuselah was a sly little representative of Africa itself, living

⁷ Liminality in *The Poisonwood Bible* will be considered in greater detail in Chapter Three, as it is bound up with notions of the child-figure.

openly in our household. One might argue, even, that he was here first.
(*The Poisonwood Bible* 69)

And, again, when Methuselah is killed by a wild animal:

Set upon by the civet cat, the spy, the eye, the hunger of a superior
need, Methuselah is free of his captivity at last. This is what he leaves
to the world: gray and scarlet feathers strewn over the damp grass.
Only this and nothing more, the tell-tale heart, tale of the carnivore.
None of what he was taught in the house of the master. (*The
Poisonwood Bible* 212)

The multiplicity of allegories, which all in one way or another refer to Congo and sometimes its people, suggests the arbitrary nature of the link between the abstract concept and the concrete thing. Allegory, as De Man argues, “designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin” (207) and as such is discontinuity. The fact that both Ruth May and Methuselah are exempt from Nathan’s rule and are connected with Congolese defiance only reiterates the distance between allegory and source.⁸ The meaning of these allegorical relationships—that is, defiance or resistance—are constituted through repetition which serves to draw attention to the fact that those relationships are arbitrary, that the origin and the allegory do not in fact coincide. This is, for De Man, the temporality of allegory in which

the relationship between signs [in allegory] necessarily contains a
constitutive temporal element; it remains necessary, if there is to be
allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it.
The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only
in the *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous
sign with which it can never coincide, since it is the essence of this
previous sign to be pure anteriority. (207)

The parallel between Ruth May and Lumumba-Congo-Independence-Africa, reiterated but also constituted through Methuselah and Nathan, as allegory “disrupts the rule of ideology” (Tambling 116); the ideology in this case being unification and totality of meaning.

2.2.2. Ruth May and the Re-mythologisation of the Tribes of Ham

The second association between Ruth May and Africa is generated using both allegory and biblical myth. It is worth noting that Kingsolver’s novel is directly concerned with Christianity and is critical of the role it played in the imperialist oppression and subjugation of people in

⁸ Due to her age Ruth May is to a large extent outside the scope of Nathan’s religious and patriarchal domination, which he imposes on his daughters as a form of punishment in the copying out of one hundred Bible verses, the last of which reveals their transgression. Because she cannot yet read or write Ruth May cannot be punished with “the Verse” (68). For obvious reasons, Methuselah too cannot be subjected to “the Verse”.

the colonies. Kingsolver does, however, use those aspects of Christian theology and myth which are redemptive and in doing so, I argue, undermines the disruption of ideology that allegory makes possible. Therefore, allegory and myth are in tension and, ultimately, in conflict as they are put to work together but to incompatible ends. The Bible fulfils a structural as well as a thematic function in the novel. It is, as the novel's opening epigraph initially indicates,⁹ one of Kingsolver's intertexts, along with others such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and poetry by Emily Dickinson. Importantly, it is a sustained intertext which serves to structure the novel throughout: the novel is divided into seven books, five of which bear the title of a canonical biblical book or are a reference to the biblical apocrypha.¹⁰ But the Bible and Christian myth is most important in establishing the setting of the novel as an Adamic-Noahic world and developing the attendant themes of origins and the structure and nature of human community. Central to these themes is the myth of the Tribes of Ham—also referred to as Noah's Curse or the Curse of Ham—the key points of which are outlined below. There is a wealth of scholarship explaining and commenting on the myth of the Tribes of Ham. For the purposes of this discussion, I rely primarily on David Whitford's study of the racialization of the myth from the early modern period onwards.

The story of Noah's Curse comes from Genesis 9 where Noah, drunk on the first wine ever produced, is found naked and asleep by his son, Ham. Instead of immediately covering his father himself, Ham tells his brothers, Japheth and Shem, of their father's state. The two brothers cover their father, walking backwards towards him so as to not look upon his nakedness. Upon waking, Noah blesses Japheth and Shem but, for reasons that are not entirely clear, curses Ham's son, Canaan, and all his descendants to a life of servitude.¹¹

There are three central points regarding the details of this myth and the uses to which it has been put that Whitford raises. The first is that, beginning in the Middle Ages, the curse underwent a number of alterations and revisions—some ignorant or the result of lazy homiletics while others were done knowingly and with the intention of career advancement or self-interest. Whitford contends that the most significant alteration in this process is the gradual shifting of the curse from Ham's son, Canaan, and his descendants to Ham himself. This allowed for the curse to be applied to all of Ham's sons, including Cush, who is given

⁹ The epigraph, from Genesis, is God's command that humankind occupy the whole earth: "And god said unto them, / Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, / subdue it: and have dominion / over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, / and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

¹⁰ These are "Genesis", "The Revelation", "The Judges", "Exodus" and "Bel and the Serpent".

¹¹ Considering the severity of Noah's punishment, there is ongoing debate with regards to the nature and details of Ham's transgression with interpretations ranging from Ham 'merely' seeing his father's naked genitals to Ham either castrating or sodomising Noah (Goldenberg 2005; Kugel 222–23).

Africa as his domain in Genesis 10. Hence a direct link was established between Ham, his sin and subsequent punishment, and Africa that is not supported by the earliest versions of the story. The relative ease with which the myth could be altered and then appropriated as a justification for slavery is a result of the fact that Genesis 9.25 is what Whitford calls a “text of opportunity” (4): it is remarkably brief and scant on details, inviting a variety of interpretations and requiring the filling in of gaps, and yet “the text of Genesis 9 is [simultaneously] pivotally important to the nature and organisation of postdiluvian life” (Whitford 14). This is because Noah’s curse is the first one in the new world in response to the first sin, the story of Noah and his family details the second creation and it establishes the subsequent form which human society was to take.

The second point worth noting is that the details of the myth as they emerge from the fifteenth century onwards constitute what Whitford calls “the ‘Curse Matrix’” (105), which came to be regarded as the essential nature of Ham and his African progeny. In short, Ham’s accursedness became inextricably linked with blackness in this period. The “Curse Matrix” refers to the tripartite description of Ham as a “blackskinned, hypersexualised, pagan slave” (105) which was established by men such as Annius of Viterbo, George Best and Charles White. According to Whitford, these men’s respective claims about Ham and Africans were not made to justify slavery. Nonetheless, their perpetuation and the growing association of Ham with Africa meant that when slavery needed a legitimising myth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “the Curse of Ham and its three-pronged nature provided [...] a more noble façade to cover the seamliness of the slave trade” (Whitford 140).

Third and finally, the myth of Ham changed in function from being an explanation of extant conditions to an ongoing prophecy, effectively sealing the fate of Ham’s African progeny. Before it was racialised, the myth of Noah’s Curse served in the Middle Ages as an explanation for European servitude, with Ham being regarded as the father of European serfs. In other words, the myth was used to justify *existing class* hierarchies. However, the eighteenth century view, proposed by Thomas Newton, was that “Genesis 9.25 ought to be read primarily as a prophecy” (Whitford 160) and this shift formed part of the basis for arguments surrounding the existence and *continuation* of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Moreover, the extent of Newton’s influence, the fact that “he became a key figure in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates over slavery” (160), meant that the relevance and applicability of this myth-as-prophecy was not limited to proponents of slavery but also extended to “abolitionist parodies of proslavery tracts, to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [and] to the United States Congressional Record” (160). Therefore, its uses

became entangled with anti-slavery sentiment as well as epistemological and politico-legal discourses.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Ruth May is paralleled with Africa through a comparison between her and Ham. In fact, the primacy of her connection to Ham and, thus, Africa is indicated by her direct expression of this connection at the beginning of her opening chapter: “Ham was the youngest one, like me, and he was bad” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 23). The comparison of Ruth May and Ham and their shared ‘badness’ creates a stark contrast which undercuts the established depiction of Ham’s (and his descendants’) *essentially* bad nature. As outlined above, Ham is ‘bad’ for being a “blackskinned, hypersexualised, pagan slave” (Whitford 105); in contrast, Ruth May is innocently bad because her transgressions are usually borne of a childlike ignorance of consequences and is characterised by acts of disruption, of hearing or seeing what she should not and being somewhat outside of the rules and punishments established by her father. The comparison between them, therefore, suggests that ‘badness’ is not an essential truth but rather the condition for marginalisation. Ham’s badness, like that of Ruth May, is better understood as resistance to historically, socially, and culturally constructed norms and inventions of otherness rather than the essential antithesis of ‘Civilisation’ and ‘Humanity’. In Nancerian terms, then, the comparison of Ruth May and Ham signals an interruption of the myth of his (and his mythical progeny’s) essential otherness-as-badness.

To compare Ruth May, a young, defenceless and pre-literate child, with Ham, the mythical progenitor of all Africans, raises the problem of the transference of the qualities of ‘the child’ onto the ‘native Other’ in imperialist logic and colonialist policy (see, for instance, Ashcroft 2000; Wallace 1994). The problematic conflation of child and colonial/racial other will be outlined in more detail in its relation to both Kingsolver’s novel and Addison’s *The Garden of Burning Sand* in Chapter Three. At this point in her connection to Ham, however, the characterisation-by-association of the racialised other as child-like, unsophisticated and helpless is resisted by the allegorical nature of their connection. As Ruth May says, “Ham was the youngest one, *like me*” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 23) and it is the use of simile, that which “keeps the two terms of the comparison apart” (Tambling 6), that marks the relationship as one of allegory, of similarity and difference. Moreover, the difference between Ruth May and Ham is expressed most clearly in her regurgitation of the myth as justification for racial segregation. Stephen Haynes makes the point that Noah’s Curse was once again applied to race relations in the twentieth century, particularly to “impending Civil Rights legislation by recasting it as a biblical rationale for ‘discrimination’” (116) as opposed to a

justification for slavery, as was common before the Civil War. Reflecting the persistence of this myth, and indeed of myth as described by Barthes and Nancy, Ruth May moves seamlessly from retelling the story of Ham to explaining that “in Georgia they [African-Americans] have their own school” and that “the man in church said they’re different from us and needs ought to keep to their own” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 23). Later, she wonders how someone who was hungry would have “a big fat belly” and when her father explains that it is due to a lack of vitamins, she declares that “that’s what they get for being the Tribes of Ham” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 58). The irony of this ambiguous statement reflects how the acceptance and perpetuation of a myth serves to justify that myth—that is, to “transform history into nature” (Barthes 154) and a mythical invention into fate. Additionally, Ruth May’s matter-of-fact repetition of her elders’ rationalisations exposes the poor logic underpinning their thinking. In other words, in these instances the lack of sophistication and logical thinking normally associated with a young child are a reflection of racist, imperialist attitudes and not of Ham.

Thus far, Ruth May’s relationship to Africa using the myth of Ham—if it is read allegorically—is a disruption of imperialist, colonialist and racist ideology. By invoking the myth differentially, Ruth May denaturalises or historicises it. This alongside the significance of Ham and Noah’s story for “the nature and organisation of postdiluvian life” (Whitford 14) have implications for the theme of origins in the novel as well as its projection of community. Nancy argues that the political is “the disposition of community” (40) and that true community is premised on “being-in-common [...] not a common being” (29) and that, consequently, its basis is resemblance as an ongoing action and not sameness as a state of being. He explains that a “like-being resembles me in that I myself ‘resemble’ him: we ‘resemble’ together [which] is to say, there is no original or origin of identity. What holds the place of an ‘origin’ is the sharing of singularities” (33). Adam and Eve and Noah and his family represent the first Family of Man and the second-first Family of Man, respectively, as both myths detail a beginning of the human world (Haynes 2002; Whitford 2009). In a continuation of this pattern, Ruth May’s likeness to, or ‘resembling’ with, Ham sets the Price family up as the third-first Family of Man. Similar to the Ruth May-Lumumba-Congo parallel, the use of compound ordinal numbers which operate under the conditions of temporality, denying simultaneity and absolute sameness, signals that their family is merely one of multiple ‘original’ families produced in and marked by history, not *the* original family that, in turn, guarantees an origin for humanity that is absolute and defined by a natural, de-historicised sameness. However, the allegorical and, therefore, differential relation between Ruth May

and Africa that Kingsolver sets up throughout much of the early parts of the novel does not, ultimately, extend to a critique of the notion of an absolute origin nor the transcendence of difference and guarantee of a unified humanity such origins promise. This is because of Ruth May's transformation from marginal disruptor to central victim, sacrifice and redeemer.

2.2.3. Redemption: Cure and Curse

Kingsolver's redemption of Ham forms part of a broader narrative of redemption in the novel that reaches its zenith in Ruth May's apotheosis—that is, her transfiguration into “*muntu Africa*” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 607). The theme of redemption is this novel's *pharmakon*, both a cure and curse (Derrida, *Dissemination* 1981), because the redemption of Ham from the “Curse Matrix” (Whitford 105) is integral to the novel's political project but the means of his redemption—his comparison to Ruth May—and the overall narrative of which it is a part marks the negation of that project. It is important to note that there are, broadly speaking, two modern versions and uses of the Myth of Ham and, though the denigration of Africans is integral to both, one is integral to accounts of a single human origin while the other is integral to polygenist accounts (Mamdani, *When Victims* 2001). Crucially for Kingsolver's redemption of humanity, it is the monogenist version of the myth, where “differences continue to be within a single family” (Mamdani, *When Victims* 82), to which she responds using Ruth May.¹² In order to understand the tensions present in the redemption of Ham via Ruth May, it is first necessary to consider other counter-readings of the myth which similarly seek to redeem Ham. There are, as Stephen Haynes notes, a number of counter-readings ranging from pre-modern to abolitionist and modern reinterpetations and these reinterpetations use a variety of means to challenge the myth and its premise, including more careful consideration of the historical context of Genesis 9:25, showing that there are no racial dimensions to the original curse, the correct application of the rules of biblical exegesis or challenging assumptions that have come to shape the text. It is, however, Haynes' own theological study and Zora Neale Hurston's play, *The First One*, which reflect the particular tensions within Kingsolver's own utilisation of the myth, because they recast Ham as a victim but have very different attitudes to sacrifice and unity.

¹² As Mamdani explains, a second version of the myth of Ham emerged following the Comte de Gobineau's hypothesis about Asia being the site of the origin of three tribes—the Hamites, the Semites, and the Aryans (Japhites)—that constitute the human race. This theory became useful for those polygenists who wished to explain away any sign of civilisation found in Africa by arguing that these civilisations were the product of Hamites who, in this version, were considered to be Caucasians underneath their darker skins and were, therefore, superior to Negroes. The latter were consequently excluded from the human species entirely (Mamdani 83–86).

Concerned about the loss of an originary myth for humanity, Haynes proposes a cure for the curse using a three-pronged approach. First, he argues that the biblical version needs to be revised and the “textual logic of blame and punishment” (202) subverted; second, the story must be read in the context of the Bible’s “message of redemption” (203); finally, while the curse needs to be subverted, it must be done in a way that retains “the theological advantages of the biblical doctrine of creation” (203). In relation to his first strategy, Haynes contends that while there are linguistic and thematic similarities between the story of the Garden of Eden and Noah and his family, there is no textual evidence that Noah’s curse is sanctioned by God, unlike the curse upon Adam and Eve which God, himself, utters. He extrapolates from this that if Noah does not represent God’s wishes then Ham’s role may be that of victim, “which creates a canonical link with Jesus, the victim” (203). Secondly, refocusing the myth using René Girard’s concepts of mimetic desire, scapegoating and sacrifice, Haynes argues that Shem and Japheth are mimetic rivals for their father’s blessing and that Ham is the only scapegoating mechanism available that can relieve the conflict. If Ham is declared guilty of sin then Noah’s own sin (getting drunk) and the brothers’ antipathy towards each other is redirected towards a third party—Ham—who “becomes a perpetual human sacrifice” (212). Ham’s comparison to Christ is furthered by his acceptance of his status as sacrifice: “If the church fathers thought that Noah represented the suffering of Christ and Ham those who mocked him, we now see Ham as the true type of Christ, the innocent victim who put an end to scapegoating by refusing to retaliate” (217). Despite admitting that the similarity between Ham and Christ is limited by the fact that “Ham is made a victim” and “Jesus chooses victimhood”, Haynes dismisses this key difference and regards Ham’s victimhood as “good news for a culture affected by racism and the biblical myths that sustain it” (218).

In *The First One*, Ham is also re-envisioned as the victim of the machinations of his brothers, Shem and Japheth, and their wives who regard Ham to be a threat to their inheritance because he is favoured by Noah. Following the events in which Noah is drunk, must be covered, awakens and then curses Ham thinking him guilty, Noah is distraught at having cursed his favourite son but, nevertheless, banishes him saying, “Thou art black. Arise and go out from among us that we may see thy face no more, lest by lingering the curse of thy blackness come upon all my seed forever” (Hurst 73). Ham is horrified by his black skin and his father’s cruelty but is not made to take on the mantle of sacrifice. Instead

he curses his family to a life of hardship,¹³ declaring that he will “go to the sun” (74). Significantly, Hurston describes Ham’s exit in optimistic terms: “*After he is offstage comes the strumming of the harp and Ham’s voice happily singing: ‘I am as a young ram in the spring’*” (74). In Haynes’ words, Hurston “embrace[s] the Hamitic origins while recasting Genesis 9 in light of the ‘rising glory of the sons of Ham’” (195–96) but, though she like Haynes challenges the curse by showing that Ham is the victim, she does not limit him to that role. Instead, Ham sets a course of resistance, retaliation and joy despite the oppression and exclusion of him and his African descendants. Moreover, unlike Haynes, she does not remove the blame from Noah and his family, even as she reinforces the notion of sacrifice as an empty gesture: they are described, just before the curtain falls, as “*ghastly calm*” (74) with Mrs Noah sobbing upon the altar on which they made their sacrifice to God.

The central question that emerges from these two re-imaginings of the Myth of the Tribes of Ham is whether or not the beginnings of justice or the recognition of a wrong inflicted by one member of a family (or one group within the human race) onto another (or a different group within the human race), can co-exist with the unity of that family (or human community). Though Haynes claims his version of the myth to be a curative for contemporary racism, it is in actual fact not racism but human disunity which is the more urgent problem for him. Consequently, the effect of his reading is less a challenge to the racism that the Myth of Ham has been used to support and more, circularly the redemption of the Bible and its doctrine of redemption. In contrast, the disunity in Noah’s family is not represented as a problem in Hurston’s play; what is problematic is Noah’s cruelty and racism. Therefore, while Hurston’s politically-minded redemption of Ham is more akin to Kingsolver’s in so far as it serves to disrupt the ideological underpinnings of the myth and its uses, the outcome of her play is anathema to Kingsolver’s overarching narrative of transcendent redemption for all of humanity. Ultimately, it is along lines more similar to Haynes that Kingsolver develops her narrative. It is important to note that the basis for unity in Haynes’ narrative of redemption is sameness and the cost is justice. Based on the ‘logic’ of Genesis, Haynes states that

All human beings are Noahides. Before we are Hamites, Semites or Japhetites; Caucasians, Hispanics, or Asians; Jews, Christians, or Muslims; we are ‘sons of Noah’. If we are ‘sons of Noah’, Genesis 9:20-27 suggests that we are all victims, all victimizers, all at the centre of our own myths, all in need of rescue and redemption, all loved and favoured by God, all revealed in our depravity by God’s truth. (218)

¹³ Hurston has Ham say to them, “Oh, remain with your flocks and fields and vineyards, to covet, to sweat, to die and know no peace” (74).

Collapsing victim and victimiser entirely, Haynes shows total disregard for the realities of racism and its asymmetrical material and socio-political effects throughout history. In other words, he simultaneously elevates and reduces black African victims and white European and Euro-American victimisers to universalised human beings because it is only the wilful loss of the material realities experienced by the other and inflicted by the self-same that will allow for possibility of this family of humankind. Importantly, the collapse of sinner and victim in relation to slavery—each only a part of the whole—indicates that Haynes' has moved into the area of symbol. Kingsolver's redemption of Ham is very similar to that of Haynes: she too casts Ham, via Ruth May, as universal victim and sacrifice and she does so by transforming the allegorical relationship between Ruth May and Africa into a symbolic one. Even though Kingsolver is not concerned with redeeming the Bible (in fact, the opposite is true) her reliance on biblical myth as well as the doctrines of redemption and absolute unity results, similarly, in the loss of history and justice.

2.2.4. A Deathless Death: Symbol and the Arrival of Communion

The culmination of Ruth May's transition from allegory to symbol is premised on, in fact it requires, a fixed and transcendent origin through which a totality of meaning can be secured. Despite her critical stance towards Christianity, Kingsolver sets Congo and eventually, necessarily Africa up as a special case: Congo/Africa comes to symbolise the Garden of Eden, complete with a neo-Adamic language and a return to a pre-agricultural reliance on the grace of God. This is in sharp contrast with the disjuncture between signifier and signified, knowledge and truth as well as intention and outcome that is integral to Kingsolver's criticisms of Euro-America. Thus, Kingsolver's strategy is doubled and each branch of that strategy is split into the recognition of difference followed by the transcendence—that is negation—of difference.

The representations of Nathan Price and, the eldest Price daughter, Rachel are instances of the "thematization of [...] difference" (De Man 209). In other words, Kingsolver treats these two characters with irony throughout the novel and in doing so shows language to be inadequate and undermines the epistemological certainties that characterise patriarchal-imperialism. One of Rachel's defining characteristics is her propensity for malapropisms. Her declaration that to stay in Congo following independence would be a "tapestry of justice" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 202), her begrudging willingness to be a "philanderist of peace" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 303) and, when faced with the prospect of becoming one of the chief's wives, her indignant claim that "Christians have [their] own

system of marriage, and it is called Monotony” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 460) certainly function for the purposes of humour and, in the case of the latter two, foreshadow her future in Africa (Rachel maintains her lifestyle by marrying a variety of wealthy European men). But these are also “displacements of language” which “provide a definition of what happens in allegory, for at its simplest, allegory [like irony] is a way of saying one thing and meaning another” (Tambling 6). This allegorical and ironic layering of meaning also points to the complicated nature of intervention in Africa: the “tapestry of justice” that is the continued presence of the Price family in Congo and Africa suggests that intervention is neither necessarily the absence of justice nor its guarantee but rather an interweaving of the promise of justice and the sometimes-fulfilment, sometimes-undermining and sometimes-negation of the good intentions that accompany the claim to a pursuit of justice.

Because he represents Euro-American patriarchy and neo-imperialism, the ironic representation of Nathan, though humorous at times, is the more serious of the two in terms of Kingsolver’s political project. Nathan’s failed attempts at translating the ‘good news’ into the local language, Kikongo, which is the cause of his failure to convert the villagers to Christianity, is another example of the arbitrary nature of the sign. He confuses the Kikongo words *bangala*, meaning ‘something precious’, and *bängala*, which refers to the poisonwood tree, when he declares that “Tata Jesus is *bängala*!” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 312). Another example that details the inability of language, even *or particularly* sacred language, to refer to the world adequately is Brother Fowles’ lesson to Leah that the Bible is a product of sometimes flawed translation. (This echoes Adah’s collection of old books and Bibles that “are famous for their misprints” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 602), an example to which I return in the final chapter.) Similarly, Nathan attempts to ‘civilise’ the villagers through agriculture as understood and practised in America. This attempt, what he refers to in “Genesis” as his first “African miracle” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 42), also fails because he assumes that his knowledge of farming is universally applicable, regardless of environment and context: first, he makes beds “as flat as the Great Plains” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 48) which are subsequently washed away in the “pestilence of rain” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 67); second, once he finally heeds Mama Tataba’s advice to mound the earth, his plants produce no fruit and he is forced to recognise that there are “[n]o insects here to pollinate the garden” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 92). It is this second agricultural failure, however, that signals a problem for the political allegory because it is also an example of the contrast between over-abundance and starvation which creates an image of the villagers of Kilanga as peculiarly subject to fate or the will and whim of God, a point to which I return below. The displacements

of language as well as the ironic layering and distortions of intended meanings are most closely and persistently associated with Nathan, his sermons on a Jesus that “will make you itch like nobody’s business” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 312), and his various failed miracles and this indicates that the primary target of Kingsolver’s critique is religion and the civilising mission. Consequently, her concern with the limitations of language is in turn limited to that critique.

When Kingsolver turns to Africa, any doubt or suspicion regarding language and its ability to refer to the world adequately falls away. Leah describes her first days and weeks in Kilanga in Adamic terms:

In the beginning we were just about in the same boat as Adam and Eve. We had to learn the names of everything. *Nkoko, mongo, zulu* — river, mountain, sky — everything must be called out from the void by the word we use to claim it [...] Our very own back yard resembles the Garden of Eden. I copy down each new word in my school notebook and vow to remember it always, when I am a grown-up American lady with a backyard garden of my own. I shall tell all the world the lessons I learned in Africa. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 115)

A few pages later, Leah describes the children speaking Kikongo: “They speak a language that burgles and rains from their mouths like water through a pipe” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 120). Even though Leah admits that she “had no memory of ever having had to work hard for [her] native tongue” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 120), the imagery she uses attributes a heightened quality and special *naturalness* to a language that is described as being unmediated; meaning is simply conveyed by the conduit pipe. Therefore, while the Price family’s early days in Congo are not *exactly* Adamic in the sense that they name things in the material world for the first time, their acquisition of the language of the Other is Adamic—perhaps, neo-Adamic—in so far as that language is a form of establishing dominion through calling the thing, everything, “out from the void by the word [used] to claim it” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 115). Whereas Nathan’s and Rachel’s use of language is “speech [as] the representation of itself” (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 57), Kikongo not only represents the world, it gives the privileged speaker access to the meaning of the world and the very essence of things.

The turning point in the representation of Nathan—following which, irony and allegory begin to give way to a problematic symbolism—is evident in his second disastrous miracle. Growing desperate in his efforts to convert the villagers, Nathan promises “Kilanga’s hungry people [...] more fish than they had ever seen in their lives” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 81). In a tragicomic reversal and subversion of the biblical story in which Jesus feeds the five

thousand on two fish and five loaves of bread, Nathan sends men from the village, armed with dynamite, onto the river in their canoes. Nathan's instruction to throw the dynamite into the water yields thousands of dead fish which are partly consumed by the villagers but, owing to a lack of refrigeration, are mostly left to rot. As with his failed garden, this is intended as a critique of the civilising process; this time it is Nathan's short-sightedness and the cynical emptiness of his 'miracle' that is the specific target. But, when read as representations that require Congo/Africa and the villagers/Africans, this failure as well as Nathan's realisation that there are no pollinators for his garden have troubling implications.

The underside of the irony in both cases is the cliché of African backwardness and helplessness. For these villagers to live alongside a river containing fish and have canoes but suffer from extensive periods of malnutrition or starvation suggests that the cause of the villagers' suffering is simply a lack of ingenuity and, indeed, initiative. Similarly, the need for Nathan's first 'miracle'—that is, the villagers' inability to feed themselves adequately with manioc, which is utterly lacking in nutritional value—contradicts the description of the village and its surrounds as a kind of Garden of Eden in which, as Leah points out, beans, sugarcane, breadfruit, peanuts, oranges, bananas, pineapples and papayas "grow wild" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 115). Though they certainly undercut Kingsolver's critique of imperialist intervention, the reiteration of tropes of helplessness ultimately serves Kingsolver's overarching narrative of redemption and the move into symbolism. The purpose of this peculiar naturalization of the village and its people becomes apparent when Brother Fowles says to Leah during his lesson that "the Congolese have a world of God's grace in their lives, along with a dose of hardship that can kill a person entirely" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 278). The Congolese, unlike their Western counterparts, occupy both a profoundly special and a cursed position; only they are abundantly blessed but also fundamentally cursed and only they are wholly subject to fate. The culmination of these examples demonstrates that Kingsolver does not straightforwardly criticise Christianity's role in the subjugation and exploitation of Congo; not only does she use problematic tropes long-associated with the continent to do so but she also depicts Kilanga, its people and its language in ante-diluvian and Adamic terms without irony. Even though Kingsolver demonstrates that by imposing meaning language is often a tool of imperialism, Kikongo is exceptional because it is able to transcend the most fundamental of difference and provide direct access to an essential meaning; it allows for a metaphysics of presence.

The fulfilment of this metaphysics of presence is Ruth May's death—that is, her apotheosis and transfiguration into "*muntu* Africa". Her death simultaneously marks the

meeting point of the various strands of allegory and the undoing of the allegorical relationships between her and Lumumba-Congo and Ham, in so far as allegory is understood as the recognition of temporality. This is, therefore, allegory in the Benjaminian sense: a dialectic represented by the death's head in which there is the recognition of mortality alongside the projection of deathlessness. Eagleton characterises this other, hopeful side of allegory as liberation "into polyvalence" (21), where the allegorical object is shown to have "multiple uses" (22). Through this aspect of the dialectic, Eagleton explains, history "progresses" for Benjamin "by its bad side", which is to say that it "reckon[s] loss, ambiguity and *mauvaise foi* into the calculation" (21–22). However, as Eagleton admits, there is a "nostalgia for a pure, prelapsarian word" (19) in Benjamin's work and it is this impulse within allegory that comes to the fore at the moment of, and those immediately following, Ruth May's death such that, rather than "irreducibly multiple" (Eagleton 20) meaning/s, what results is the unifying and totalising impulse of a transcendental allegory or, put differently, a return to symbol.

Ruth May's death is a return to symbol because, while the religious symbolic potential with which her father invests her is rejected, it is immediately replaced with a transcendental, humanist symbolism that, nonetheless, has religious overtones: she is transformed into a Ham/Christ figure. When she dies her father's greatest regret is that, like the children of Kilanga, "[s]he wasn't baptised yet" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 419). Rather than concern for the "condition of [her] soul", however, his regret is due to the fact that Ruth May was going to be his symbol of baptismal good faith: baptising her "along with all of Kilanga's [children] would lend an appearance of sincerity to the occasion" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 419). But Ruth May is only temporarily stripped of her symbolic potential because her death coincides with (and the significance she attains in this moment may go so far as to suggest that her death results in) a break in the long drought and Nathan uses the pouring rains to try and achieve his mission; he moves "around the circle baptizing each child" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 427). Once again Nathan's imposed baptisms—the children are not even aware of Nathan as they mourn Ruth May—is treated with irony and the daughter most like him, Leah, condemns his opportunism and desire for "pageantry" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 419).

It is, however, also Leah who reinvests her sister with a religious, transcendental symbolism, offering her up as a Christ-like sacrifice when she prays next to her sister's corpse; notably, the prayer culminates in her recitation of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 427). There is in this moment, therefore, a

tug-of-war between Kingsolver's critique of the civilising mission and the novel's liberal humanism, its desire for human unity. Mirabile notes that "Benjamin's allegory appears to be both ancient and Christian, both secular and nonsecular, and, significantly, the author often mixes a secular vocabulary with a religious one" (325). Consequently, he contends, "[t]he dark side of allegory is rescued, as if in a sudden 'about turn', by a subsequent positive-redemptive movement" (325). Similarly, Kingsolver rejects religious imperialism only to recuperate its redemptive impulse by mixing a secular register emphasising human unity with a religious one that allows for a transcendence ostensibly loosened from the dark history of the civilising mission.

Like Kingsolver's simultaneous renunciation of and reliance on religious transcendence, difference is simultaneously evoked and sublimated when Ruth May dies her deathless death. Though Ruth May's transfiguration into a Ham-Christ figure is an appeal to a universal humanity, it is a peculiarly 'africanised' universality. The special African-ness of Ruth May's humanist transcendence is made apparent by her transfiguration into "*muntu Africa*" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 607)—that is, human Africa. The collapse of the parallel between Ruth May and Lumumba-Congo is signalled by Orleanna's failed attempt to narrate the death of her daughter alongside Lumumba's death without becoming detached from one or privileging one over the other. She collapses Lumumba and Congo into Africa, and Africa into Ruth May, addressing her directly:

A small burial mound in the middle of Nathan's garden, where vines and flowers have long since unrolled to feed insects and children. Is that what you are? Are you still my flesh and blood, my last born, or are you now the flesh of Africa? How can I tell the difference when the two rivers have run together so? (*The Poisonwood Bible* 437)

It is, therefore, less that the evocation of difference attendant to this 'africanisation' undermines universality and more that the evocation of difference is both integral to this universality and that which is excluded by it and haunts it. The collapse of the allegorical Ruth May-Lumumba-Congo parallel into the symbol that is 'muntu Africa' is not the erasure of difference but the elision thereof—that is, a merging as well as an omission, an act of concealment. Derrida argues that in the move from mortality to immortality, "[t]he move which leads from the *I am* to the determination of my being as *res cogitans* (thus, as an immortality) is a move by which the origin of presence and ideality is concealed in the very presence and ideality it makes possible" (*Speech and Phenomena* 55). Ruth May's deathless death and her transfiguration into the "flesh of Africa" and "all that is here" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 607) is, therefore, the move by which Africa, the purported origin of

presence and ideality, becomes concealed in the very presence of Ruth May that it (Lumumba-Congo-Africa) has made possible. Rather than the one-body-in-Christ doctrine of religious community/communion, the merging of Ruth May and Africa announces the arrival of one-body-in-Africa, a human community/communion founded on common being, the individual and infinitude rather than “being-in-common” (Nancy 28) which is founded on finitude and singularity.

Therefore, this ‘africanisation’ betrays itself as simultaneously the working of the totalising impulses of symbol and of empty myth-making by the very fact that Ruth May is cast into a generalised mould of Africa-ness instead of remaining the allegorical counterpart of Lumumba and/or Congo. Myth, Barthes argues, “prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where meaning is already relieved of its fat” (151). As a “second-order semiological system”, myth marks the transformation of meaning into form, from “already complete to empty, impoverished and evaporated history” (137, 140). Congo, a linguistic sign with multiple meanings, becomes ‘Africa’, an empty form which can be tied to and imbued with a concept such as originary human-ness, a concept which implants “a whole new history” (Barthes 142) as it elides Congo and its history. The impossibility of incorporating Congo into the myth of human redemption is made ironically clear in the second part of the novel when Leah bitterly describes Mobutu’s project of *authenticité*: a process of renaming the country, its streets and cities in a hollow gesture of transformation and independence, while torturing and imprisoning dissenters like her husband, Anatole. This is not to suggest that Kingsolver’s and Mobutu’s elision of Congo is equal in nature or degree. Rather, this simply notes that Kingsolver cannot recuperate the story of Congo into her myth of redemption in a way *not entirely unlike* Mobutu’s inability to include Congo in his project of national transformation and that Leah’s condemnation of the latter does not extend to even an acknowledgment of the former. As the novel itself demonstrates through the Lumumba-Congo parallel, Congo is too filled with history, too multiple in its meanings, to be useful. On the other hand, ‘Africa’ as *the* origin of humanity and the essence of human-ness provides the means through which the symbol that is Ruth May ultimately generates the myth of a humanist communion, an absolutely unified humanity.

2.3. Amaryllis in Blueberry

While community as communion is generated through the work of death in Kingsolver’s novel, Christina Meldrum’s 2011 family saga, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, sets love and the reunion of the biological family to work as the means of transcending difference and

envisioning a human community. Despite differences in overall approach, there are similarities in theme and character between these two novels. Both focus on the undoing of a white American family as a means of commenting on intervention in Africa, and both engage (albeit to varying degrees) with the history of slavery and colonialism as well as the state of the continent after independence. The dynamics within the Slepny family echo those of the Price family: there is Dick Slepny, the father who is myopically determined to save Africa despite a lack of relevant skills; the mother, Seena Slepny, who is trapped in a marriage not quite of her choosing; and, finally, four daughters—Mary Catherine, Mary Grace, Mary Tessa and Amaryllis (Yllis)—who each present a slightly different perspective on the family and the events that take place in the fictional country of “West Africa”. Seena’s narration, like that of Orleanna, reflects back on her experiences, with the novel beginning near the end of the family’s time in the village of Avone and then recounting the events that led up to the climax. As in Kingsolver’s novel, religious zeal, humanitarianism, gender and family relations, sacrifice, patriarchy, colonialism and slavery are the central themes in *Amaryllis in Blueberry*. Finally, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, like *The Poisonwood Bible*, casts the undoing and reconstitution of family in and through Africa as symbolic of the reunion of humanity.

Allegory is also a central device in Meldrum’s novel, with parallels set up between her characters and those of Greek and Norse myth often drawing attention to the differential relations that exist, and although she does not explicitly claim her novel to a political allegory, her representation and utilisation of Africa is laced with the tension between an awareness of the overtly political and a disavowal of the political in favour of the universal. As becomes clear, the turn to the universal in Meldrum’s novel, nevertheless, resides in the intersection of classical or traditional myth and familiar myths about ‘Africa’; that is to say, the novel’s consistent and persistent use of Greek and Norse mythology collides and colludes with well-worn myths of Africa in an attempt to speak universally. William Righter contends that the breadth of Barthes’ definition of myth as a form of speech “destroys [the term’s] critical usefulness” and that when studying literature what is more relevant and useful is the “intentional use of myth as a means of deepening and enriching a poem or narrative” (28). What Meldrum’s novel indicates is that these two definitions of, and approaches to, myth are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the setting of this novel in Africa, a place deeply mythologised in a Barthesian sense, is inextricable from myth defined more narrowly as stories about gods, goddesses and heroic mortals because both kinds of myth insist that they reflect that which is universal about, and universally true for, humanity.

2.3.1. Setting the (A)political Agenda

In order to understand the novel's turn to the universal using myth, it is necessary to establish the nature of the tension between the political (that which is historically specific) and the apolitical (that which professes to being universal). This tension is evident in both the paratexts of the novel and the novel itself.¹⁴ Another point of overlap between *Amaryllis in Blueberry* and *The Poisonwood Bible* is the process of shaping readers' engagement with and understanding of the novel through a public, online book club. The size and degree of influence of the two book clubs are notably different but their approaches and the outcomes are very similar. For a fuller discussion of the dynamics and influence of the Oprah Book Club on the public's reception and perception of *The Poisonwood Bible*, Janice Peck's 2002 study is excellent. For my purposes it suffices to point out that the shaping of readers' experiences of that novel took place simultaneously within the private space of the home and at some distance, with question and answer sessions, discussions with the author and between readers being facilitated online using the Oprah website forums (Peck 2002). Peck notes that the Oprah Book Club "tapped into the mythic story of reading, literacy, and literature" in which reading and writing are powerful contributors to "individual progress, socioeconomic development, and political liberty" (114). Though *The Poisonwood Bible* marked a departure from the usual Book Club selections for being "an overtly political undertaking" (Peck 163), Peck demonstrates that the novel was framed in escapist terms—readers were encouraged to go on "'vacation' with the Price family in the Congo" (165)—and ultimately assimilated into Oprah's "self-actualization philosophy" (160), with all efforts by the author to draw readers' attention to the harms caused by European imperialism and problematic aspects of American foreign policy becoming subsumed by the Oprah brand's drive for personal self-transformation.

Similarly straddling the public and the private, the edition of *Amaryllis in Blueberry* discussed here is concluded with a "Gallery Readers Group Guide", composed of a list of discussion questions, a short list of resources—suggestions for further reading intended to "Enhance Your Book Club" (*Amaryllis* 372)—and an interview with the author in which she is asked to elucidate on a number of choices for and scenarios in the novel.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Though the paratexts of *Amaryllis in Blueberry* are a useful starting point as they are indicative of the tensions within the novel, I do not provide a theoretical framework within which to situate them at this point. Paratexts are of much greater importance in Corban Addison's novel, *The Garden of Burning Sand*, and Fernando Mereilles' film, *The Constant Gardener*, and so it is in chapters three and four, respectively, that I provide a theoretical orientation for reading paratexts.

¹⁵ All of these supplementary components of the novel are also available through the author's website.

suggestions for further reading are instructive. The three entries consist of a webpage containing information on the slave castle referred to in the novel,¹⁶ a reference for a Wikipedia entry on synaesthesia, a condition which affects Yllis, and an invitation to “[p]repare a feast” (*Amaryllis* 372) using the recipe book, *The Africa Cookbook: Tastes of a Continent*, or so-called African selections from the cooking website, www.epicurious.com. While the webpage features some photographs of the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana and a summary of the significance of the castle during the Transatlantic Slave Trade with the article’s author describing it as “the most evil and insidious holocaust of Black human beings in history [...] perpetrated primarily by White Europeans” (Simmonds, no page), the other reading suggestions are intended apolitically. This is particularly true of the recipes, though their effect is not oriented towards self-transformation so much as exoticism and ethnic tourism. The invitation to produce (cook) and consume (eat) Africa in one’s own home provides the opportunity to familiarise, personalise and internalise that which is exciting for being strange and as such functions as a “domestication of the exotic” (Said 60). The title of the cooking website, with its portmanteau of ‘epicurean’ and ‘curious’, underscores the disavowal of the political in favour of indulgence, luxury associated with and curiosity about the ‘Other’. Said argues that the process of “Orientalizing the Orient” (167) is one of definition but also, importantly, one of editing and this becomes clear here where the ‘Other’ is defined as ‘Africa’ but is represented only by an array of largely Moroccan dishes. An overview of the slave trade is matched with and overshadowed by the means to experience ‘Africa’ in a way that serves to suggest historical and political awareness but which is actually the consumption of a limited, Eurocentric idea of the continent.

In addition to conjuring the exotic, Africa as the setting for the majority of the novel’s action serves the novel’s philosophy of self-transformation, which is initially set up as a political project, albeit of the individual and personal kind. Meldrum claims in the paratextual interview that Africa is “[her] place of prodding” (*Amaryllis* 373) which, when set in comparison with America/the West, “might spur some thinking about our own culture” (*Amaryllis* 375). This statement reflects the political potential of the novel in so far as it provides some commentary on the limits of Euro-American intervention and the harmful nature of its interference, but it also raises the problem of texts presented as being ‘about Africa’ when in fact they are about America, a problem that has occupied a number of studies

¹⁶ The webpage is from the LA Sentinel website which focuses on events are of specific relevance to African-Americans. Its logo is an outline of the African continent laid on top of a map of North America.

(see for instance, Croisy 2012; Jacobs 2002; and Magee 2012). Two moments from the novel serve as examples of this problem of the political engagement through literature that is too self-reflexive and yet not self-critical enough.

In the first example, upon the Slepys family's first meeting with the village chief's son, Mawuli, Yllis notices his gold tooth and declares that "[they] don't have jewelry for teeth in America", adding that when he smiles she cannot see him because "[her] eyes like the gold" (*Amaryllis* 114). Mawuli responds that she is like other Americans who "have a tradition of seeing gold when looking at West Africans" (*Amaryllis* 114). Dick, clearly offended at the suggestion that their intentions are not purely altruistic, insists that they are not interested in gold, only in helping the villagers. Dick's inability to make this connection must be read in the broader context of his blindness to the truth about nearly everything in his life; in contrast, Yllis is the novel's truth-seer and truth-teller, and so her exchange with Mawuli functions as a critique of the self-interest of American intervention that is usually framed as altruism. That this purported altruism has the effect of dehumanising or rendering invisible those who ostensibly stand to benefit is reiterated in the second example, which reverses the traditional roles of American giver and African receiver.

In this, second example, Seena Slepys—who (like Orleanna) shows the most awareness of America's role in the oppression of Africa—attempts to negotiate the price of some food "being sold at a stall by a woman with no teeth" (*Amaryllis* 149). The woman's poverty is quite evident but Seena negotiates because her husband declared that "[b]artering is part of the culture" (*Amaryllis* 149) in Africa and their white skin means they will be taken advantage of. Her offer of one *cedi* is rejected by the woman because the items cost two *cedi*, but, trusting in her husband's stereotypical notion of pre-modern business-practices in Africa, Seena persists. Finally, after a man in the queue speaks to the woman, she gives Seena a bunch of bananas in addition to her tea, eggs and bread and continues to serve other customers having taken no money from Seena at all. The man who spoke to the woman explains to Seena that he paid for her because the cost of the food was higher than her offer, adding that the "[p]rices of such items are set. A certain profit. A certain cost" (*Amaryllis* 151). The bunch of bananas, he adds, was a gift because the seller came to believe that she simply could not afford to pay the price of the food. That this scene serves to challenge the idea of Africa as cut-off and lagging behind the West is clear. Moreover, the fact that Seena does not need nor want the bananas suggests an awareness of how the contents of aid are not necessarily appropriate to the receiver's needs and may, therefore, serve purposes other than what is claimed. What is most significant for the narrative and for

Seena's character is her sense that she "no longer exists" (*Amaryllis* 151) following this exchange that is also a non-exchange.

These incidents can be read as criticising those false assumptions about Africa's backwardness and as pointing to the hypocrisy of aid intervention, owing in part to its links to more obviously exploitative and self-serving interventions. Underneath these valid criticisms, however, lies a deeper anxiety about what it means to be human. This is suggested by the fact that in both examples Seena retreats from the more obviously political implications of their presence in 'West Africa' and reflects on the universality of human-ness. Following Mawuli's joke about American greed for gold, Seena acknowledges to herself that her family "are in Africa searching for gold" but adds that it is "that gold at the end of the proverbial rainbow" (*Amaryllis* 114). The implication that she and her family may be utilising Africa in a way *not entirely* different from those colonialists is undercut by her thought that "Hades is the god of gold, and Hades rarely leave the underworld" (*Amaryllis* 114) and so by coming to Africa they might simply be trading in one hell for another. In the second instance, following her botched attempt at haggling, Seena thinks to herself that perhaps the woman does not have less than her, "at least not of what matters" (*Amaryllis* 151). In these two examples, the significance of paradoxical but not competing notions of Africa comes to the fore: Africa is both hell and the model for, as well as the means of, an improved humanity. Therefore, Africa is, for the Catholic Slepys, Purgatory. As the reference to Hades suggests and the pervasive references to myth throughout the novel demonstrates, myth is central to the transformative power of Africa.

2.3.2. Mythical Red-herrings

In a video interview on her website, Christina Meldrum describes *Amaryllis in Blueberry* as "a myth about myths" ("Official Website"). Similarly, in the interview included at the back of the Gallery Books edition, she states that the novel is an exploration of the extent to which "each of our lives is a story at some level" ("A Conversation with Christina Meldrum"). To characterise the novel in this way is suggestive not only of the constructed nature of truth but also of a Barthesian understanding of myth as a "*metalanguage*, because it is a second language, *in which* one speaks about the first [that is, the language-object]" (113–14, italics in original). Critical of the openness of Barthes' definition, Richter characterises the myth of myths as "a nostalgia for precisely the quality of explanation which can no longer be given" (Richter 98). This definition implies that we are in an age that is, or considers itself to be, post-myth. Barthes and Nancy are critical of the possibility and, indeed, the desirability of

being somehow demythologised. As Nancy argues, the belief that “we no longer have anything to do with myth [...] is, as often happens, the surest way to let that which we wanted to be done with proliferate and become even more threatening” (46). As this section demonstrates, Meldrum’s use of myth, particularly classical Greek myth, is initially allegorical and ironic. The comparisons between characters in the novel and in Greek mythology serves to reflect or create and then undermine character’s beliefs and/or reader expectations. In this and predominantly through the character of Seena, the novel suggests, as quoted above, that “each of our lives is a story at some level” that those myths are themselves mythic. However, as Nancy notes, “[it] is perhaps not enough to know that myth is mythic” (46), and so rather than interrupt myth, the novel ultimately turns not only to another myth—that of Africa as origin and transcendence—but in doing so reiterates the fundamental nature and function of myth. “Myth”, as Nancy defines it, “is of and from the origin, it relates back to a mythic foundation, and through this relation founds itself (a consciousness, a people, a narrative)” (Nancy 45). As discussed below, it is through Yllis—the heroine of the novel in search of her origins and the character most profoundly connected to Africa—that this retreat into a transcendent origin is generated.¹⁷

Seena’s tendency to see her own life and that of her family through the lens of Greek myth is used as a point of irony in the novel. As she stands trial for her husband’s murder in the opening pages of the novel, she makes an extended comparison between her situation and that of Greek myth in a way that suggests differences even as it claims similarities:

Seena thinks, He [the village chief and her judge] is *neither wise nor old, yet* he has the power of Zeus, *here*. He and the queen of this village—Avone—are the gods of *this* universe, painting *this African sky*. Painting me, the *African version of Clytemnestra*. (*Amaryllis* 5, emphasis added)

Seena draws a comparison between Zeus and the chief in terms of their power over her life but, simultaneously, establishes the differences in terms of their qualities and context. Similarly, her description of herself as “the *African version* of Clytemnestra” draws attention to the differential nature of her relation to the figure in classical myth, not least for the peculiarity of describing herself—a white, American—as African. As the events leading up to her trial reveal, however, the comparison is not without significant similarities. Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s wife, had an affair with Aegisthus and so murdered her

¹⁷ Despite the use of multiple narrators, Yllis’ status as the heroine is made explicit a number of times. In addition to the title the novel, Meldrum makes this assertion in the video referred to above, a video which is itself titled “Sense the world through the heroine of *Amaryllis in Blueberry*” (Meldrum).

husband upon his return (Bulfinch 216). Seena too has an affair in America, with their local Catholic priest, Father Heimdall Amadi. Moreover, the novel begins with her standing accused of murdering her husband. The final twist in the novel, however, reveals that it was Yllis who slingshot the poisoned stone at Dick. This revelation appears to retain the ironic/allegorical nature of the comparison, continuously setting up and then subverting the reader's expectations. The extent to which this comparison between Seena and a mythical character is a red-herring is, however, itself a red-herring. In other words, the absence of Seena's responsibility for Dick's death—that the comparison to Clytemnestra is itself mythic—is only true in so far as his is a physical death. As both Dick and Seena claim, she is responsible for his spiritual death because of her infidelity: "Seena really killed Dick—she and Dick both know this—because Dick was dead before he died" (*Amaryllis* 350, see also 316, 326 and 327). At the level of the metaphysical then, the allegorical use of the myth of Clytemnestra is not a red-herring but rather a reflection of a greater truth.

There is in the story of Yllis' origin and her search for her biological father a similar process of invoking specific myths, followed by a subversion of the explanations they offer and then a retreat into a more general truth, a universalising myth. The story of Yllis' birth that Seena tells her invokes a number of myths, classical and modern, specific and vague. Yllis is born on Independence Day while her mother is out picking blueberries; the new born lands in a blueberry bush and is marked as different from the start. Yllis retells this story, noting that "[her] hair has always had a touch of blue when struck by morning light, and [her] skin is nearly as dark as [her] sisters' is light. And [her] eyes are that pale, just-ripe-blueberry blue" (*Amaryllis* 9). Her unique colouring is one of the markers of her true paternity, as is revealed later in the novel. The Seena must cut Yllis' hair with her pruning shears to set her free from the bush—shears she also uses to cut the umbilical cord—and that she names her daughter 'Amaryllis' "after a shepherdess in her favorite Virgil poem" (*Amaryllis* 9), who is also a figure from Greek myth, emphasises the mythical quality of the story of Yllis' birth. But this story is also mythical in as far it is a fabrication, a fantastic lie that Seena tells in order to hide the truth of Yllis' paternity. The youngest Slepys is not born in a blueberry field, as if unbidden; rather, realising that she is about to give birth, Seena contacts the father, Heimdall Amadi, and goes to the old trail in the woods to give birth. Seena's mythical fabrication to cover up her infidelity is only one example of her tendency to use Greek myth to escape the dreariness and incoherence of her life. The truth of Yllis' birth is hinted at when, on her 11th birthday she encounters "one of those ill-referenced Indians" on the old trail and, seeing that "he had [...] blueberry eyes" (*Amaryllis* 14), assumes that he must be

her biological father. Therefore, the fact that Yllis misidentifies her paternity at the place where she was, in fact, born renders this moment doubly ironic. But this subversion of her origin story, including her failure to recognise the significance of the physical place of her birth, gives way to the truth of Yllis' origin in a transcendental sense. As will become clear in the next section, her metaphysical and originary connection to Africa is not subjected to irony.

In both these instances, the potential interruption of myth and of its power to reveal a truth or an origin it has itself founded is invoked and then subsumed in the name of a greater, metaphysical truth. Righter maintains that the use of myth in comparisons is different in effect from non-mythical comparisons. This is because the latter are arbitrary, whereas the "use of mythical comparison implies a slightly different kind of force, for the resemblance claimed is not entirely of particular to particular, but of particular to something larger" (Righter 49). The significance and usefulness of this, according to Righter, is that such a comparison allows for universalisation, because

To compare a character in a novel with a mythical figure is to contrast the elaborately controlled with the relatively open, for the figure drawn from myth is subject to none of those localising restrictions or precise delimitations which apply to the inhabitants of either the living world or works of art. (50)

It is worth noting that the examples Righter cites as proof of the arbitrary nature of non-mythical comparison are all examples of simile. The arbitrariness of the relation is not only based on the fact that *x* may be compared to *y* or *z* and so does not share an essence with either *y* or *z*, but is also emphasised by the separation of the two terms by the word 'like'.

This opposition does not account for more complex modes of comparison, such as mythical comparisons that use simile or non-mythical comparisons that use metaphor and where, consequently, the disparities between comparative terms, as well as those between literal and figurative meanings, may not be as determinable (see, for instance, Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy* 1999). At the same time, what this strict opposition does imply is that the terms of mythical comparisons share an essence which makes possible the movement from the "particular to something larger" (Righter 50). In other words, Righter's characterisation and elevation of myth in opposition to the non-mythical echoes the opposition of allegory and symbol, reiterating similarities between symbol and myth as totalising discourses. "The valorisation of symbol at the expense of allegory", as de Man explains,

coincided with the growth of an aesthetics that refuses to distinguish between experience and the representation of this experience. The poetic language of genius is capable of transcending this distinction and can thus transform all individual experience directly into general truth [...that is,] a total single and universal meaning. (188)

This transformation of individual experience into general, universal truth through myth—which is, as Nancy argues, the birth of humanity unto itself—must be understood in relation to the concomitant impulse in the novel to ‘africanise’. This impulse is reflective of what Wole Soyinka refers to as “a second epoch of colonisation” (*Myth x*) through myth. The means of this colonisation is, he explains, the extension of an invitation to black Africans to “submit themselves to [...] a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems” (*Myth x*). In the case of *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, however, the sublimation of the Other via the imposition of a prescriptive notion of what it means to be human does not assume the inferiority of the Other; rather it is premised on the elevation of the Other as especially, transcendently human which is, in turn, premised on the construction of Africa as *the* origin of human-ness. This ‘africanisation’ of classical myth and the specific myth of Africa to which the novel retreats (discussed below) suggest that in addition to being a derivation of Western epistemologies, myth in *Amaryllis in Blueberry* betrays that the West is also haunted by an ontological lack.

2.3.3. Seeing is Knowing, Knowing is Belonging: Yllis and Africa

Meldrum states that she “find[s] perspective fascinating” (Gallery Books “Interview”) and this fascination is reflected in the structure of the novel. The novel begins with Seena’s trial in “West Africa”, which is the end of the story read chronologically, and then jumps back and forth in time—between 1956 and 1976—and between settings, Danish Landing, Anne Arbor, Grayling and Midland in America and the “West African” village of Avone. The novel is divided into four books and an epilogue, with each of the books constituted by sections titled “Before”, “The End”, and “After” and for the epilogue, “The Beginning”. A fascination with perspective is also reflected in the use of multiple focalisers: each of the Slepny family members recounts their experiences in America and Africa, with a few chapters devoted to the perspective of the family’s neighbour, Clara, who lives in Grayling; Heimdall Amadi is the focaliser in the epilogue. However, though the use of multiple narrators and a non-linear narrative structure may be suggestive of the many questions about the nature of perspective Meldrum says are worth asking, I argue that the character of Yllis and the centring of Africa

represent an attempt to re-impose a singularly truthful point of view. In short, Meldrum's fascination with perspective does not result in an interrogation of the nature and the limits of perspective.

Meldrum's fascination and the novel's preoccupation with perception can be characterised as a duality: failures to see the truth that are typical of the Slep family and the ability to see that which no one else can. The latter is Yllis' defining feature because she is an "emotional synesthete" (*Amaryllis* 90) and it is her ability to see things as they *really* are that forms the basis of the transformation of her individual perception into general truth. The distinction made in the novel between her kind of synaesthesia and other kinds is important: her synaesthesia is not simply the stimulation or overlapping of different senses so that the material world is perceived as sensually multi-layered; rather, her synaesthesia provides insight into the secret thoughts and essential nature of others:

I wasn't sure I belonged on earth. Yet I knew things about earth—about people on earth. I often know what people would say before they spoke, I knew whom people loved, whom they despised. I knew what gave others joy and fury and envy, even when they didn't seem to know it themselves. (*Amaryllis* 10)

But it is even more than that because, as Yllis reveals on the flight to Africa, to be a synaesthete like her is to occupy a God-like position where her experience is unmediated and, therefore, is truth:

Some say [synaesthetes are] given a richer planet, one that lies somewhere between heaven and earth. Some say it's like experiencing the world straight on, while everyone else stands behind glass. Some say it's like entering God's mind, seeing the dimensions intended for God alone. (*Amaryllis* 92)

Synaesthesia has been associated with transcendent knowledge since the Romantics, with their desire to experience the world unmediated (Cytowic 1997). Richard E. Cytowic stresses that while synaesthesia is phenomenological, the experience of synaesthesia is noetic; thus, synaesthesia is "knowledge that is experienced directly, an illumination that is accompanied by a feeling of certitude" (25). Yllis' synaesthesia, therefore, goes beyond psychological insight and gains cosmological and transcendental force. But her ability to see the truth, what Meldrum describes as Yllis' ability to see "beyond myth" (Gallery Books "A Conversation with Christina Meldrum"), is not only a consequence of her synaesthesia; it is developed through her connection with Africa, a connection which is expressed through both form and content.

In terms of form, the universality of Yllis' perspective is further established through a lack of temporal and spatial markers for her narrative position. With only a few important exceptions, all of the chapters are narrated in the present tense, from the third-person point of view and focalised through the family members, Clara, or Father Amadi. At the start of each chapter, Meldrum establishes the time and/or place of the focaliser/focalisation, whether it be "Ann Arbor, Michigan 1956" or simply "West Africa", which situates Seena's present tense description of her trial; in these instances the temporal setting—1976—is implied. Conversely, Yllis' chapters are narrated in the first-person, using past tense. Only her very first chapter is prefaced with the location (Danish Landing, Michigan) but because of the use of past tense, this location only signals *where* the events took place and not *when* Yllis narrates them. The temporal location of Yllis' narration is only indicated vaguely using the two of the overarching markers referred to above—"Before", "After", "The End", and "The Beginning". "Before" takes place in America, as Yllis describes it, "in the time BEFORE—before Africa" (*Amaryllis* 11, emphasis in original), while "After" designates all of Yllis' chapters detailing their time in Africa; "The End" encompasses Seena's trial for Dick's murder in Avone and "The Beginning" deals exclusively with Father Amadi's decision to admit to being Yllis' father. If one includes the geographical settings of the novel with the temporal, therefore, the novel can be divided into "Before Africa" (1957 and early 1976), "Africa" (1976) or "After Africa" (no specific year), with Yllis' chapters falling nearly exclusively in the atemporal category of "After Africa".

Taking these specifics of form together, there are three implications that need highlighting and development below. First, despite what appears to be an exploration of the fractured nature of perspective and the partiality of truth using a non-linear structure and different focalisers, the use of a temporally decontextualized, God-like narrator and the predominance of a place which (as I demonstrate below) is similarly decontextualized reasserts the existence of a single, universal truth. Second, the fact that the only indications of temporality with regards to Yllis' narration are "Before" and (predominantly) "After" Africa suggests not only the centrality of Africa to the setting of the narrative but, more importantly, its centrality to the narrative of transformation. Lastly, although the Africa that is centred is set up in typically dualistic terms as suggested by the descriptors "The End" and "The Beginning", it is the latter, Africa's significance as origin and, therefore, the means of familial reunion that matters most for the novel's narrative of transformation and its overall project of community.

Yllis' connection to Africa is established and described throughout the novel in synaesthetic and genealogical terms such that the transcendental and originary nature of that relation is stressed. Initially and very briefly, Yllis' synaesthetic certitude is countered by the uncertainty she feels about where she belongs and where she comes from. Importantly, her uncertainty about where she belongs is caught up in her questioning of her own human-ness. Therefore, rather than simply representing the imposition of a particular perspective and epistemology as if they were universal, Yllis also represents an ontological anxiety. After Dick rejects her for being a "half-blood" (*Amaryllis* 89), Yllis wonders if she is "just half a person—a semblance of a human" (*Amaryllis* 91). The fact that for her the problem of her human-ness arises at the point when her biological origin, her paternity, is characterised by lack is an early indication that Yllis' search for her biological father carries a metaphysical and ontological weight that exceeds her as an individual character. Though these two states of being—synaesthete and "half-blood"—initially raise the problems of belonging and human-ness for Yllis, they ultimately also signal the solution to these problems when she encounters Africa.

Yllis' physical arrival in Africa marks her metaphysical return to her origin and the amelioration of her ontological anxiety. When the Slepny family arrive in "West Africa" and pass through immigration, Yllis discovers that she belongs in this place where the "earth and air are not so separate" and, consequently, Yllis can breathe "her" (*Amaryllis* 92) in, that is Africa experienced as a scent. Her synaesthetic experience of Africa quickly turns into the personification of Africa as a mother who replaces the emotionally, if not yet physically, absent father and still-present mother, providing Yllis with a sense of belonging:

Like an enormous woman with folds of warm flesh, I felt her enfold me.
As I looked out the window at the African earth and the African people
on that earth, I sensed Africa summon me, and I let go of Mama's
hand. Seemed Africa had butted in: she wanted this dance. (*Amaryllis*
92)

The shift from simile to personification makes Africa the embodiment of belonging and the repetition of the word 'Africa' emphasises the point that it is an as yet vaguely-defined 'African-ness' which is at the root of this belonging. The shift to personification and the sense in which Yllis is being physically incorporated into Africa, rather than incorporating Africa into her particular experience, are signals that this is a story of "anti-conquest", where the parent-child relationship is an example of the "drama of reciprocity" (Pratt 78, 79). As she continues, the physicality of Africa takes on metaphysical significance as Yllis' movement through immigration becomes her transition from a state of 'unbelonging' to one of belonging.

Though she feels caught between her biological mother and her spiritual mother when she states that she is “the rope in this tug-of-war”, she senses that “Africa wanted [her]” and interprets the customs official’s reluctance to let her through immigration (an attempt to extract a bribe from her parents) as a secret acknowledgment that she does not really belong with her family, that Africa is merely “leasing” (*Amaryllis* 94) her out to them. Therefore, while Africa embodies belonging for Yllis, her sensing of Africa becomes her means of “emplacement” (Howes 167). Similarly, her sensing of Africa, her process of *making sense* of it, is the creation of transcendental, originary Africa because, for synaesthetes, “as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place” (Howes 167).

The custom official’s attempt to extract a bribe and Yllis’ interpretation thereof hints that her perception of Africa, her sense of place in it and her belonging through it may not be the truth. However, any doubt as to the essential connection between her and Africa is soon negated. When the family meets Mawuli for the first time but before any introductions have been made, he correctly identifies Yllis as a “Saturday child” (*Amaryllis* 108). This is because her name, Amaryllis, contains the word ‘Ama’ which, in his culture and language, is the name given to children born on a Saturday. The full significance of Mawuli’s seemingly magic trick (or perhaps synaesthetic ability) is only one example where names are charged with meaning, often serving to reveal truths about the characters. For instance, the Slepys family (except for Yllis who is not really a Slepys) undergoes a process of awakening while in Africa and Mary Catherine’s religious zeal and extreme acts of repentance, such as fasting for dangerously extended periods of time and cutting off all her hair, echo those of Saint Catherine of Siena. Most important are the interrelated truths that Yllis’ full name contains. Amaryllis’ name is saturated with clues as to her true paternity: the part of Amaryllis’ name that is conspicuously absent connects her to her biological father, *Amadi*, instead of Dick. This is underscored by the fact that ‘Mary’, which is Dick’s contribution to the naming of all his daughters, is erased when *Amaryllis* is called Yllis and not “Marylla” or “just plain Mary” (*Amaryllis* 9). But the etymology of Amaryllis’ name also reveals the specific nature of her African-ness. Yllis explains that the “name Amaryllis comes from the Greek *amarysso*, meaning ‘to sparkle [...] *to shed light*’” (*Amaryllis* 9, emphasis added). Similarly, Mary Tessa describes her younger sister’s eyes as “sort of see-through [...] all pale and glassylike [...] they seem to see *through*” (*Amaryllis* 41, emphasis in original).

Heimdall Amadi, who shares his daughter’s unusual blueberry-coloured eyes, is also associated with the same ability to perceive essential truths. The Norse god and watchman of Asgard, Heimdall, had “bestowed upon him senses so keen that he is said to have been

to hear the grass grow on the hillside, and the wool on the sheep's back [and] to see a hundred miles off as plainly by night as by day" (Guerber 147). Heimdall's unmatched ability to perceive meant that he was attributed with "an all-embracing knowledge" and his name has been interpreted as "illuminator of the universe" (Guerber 148).¹⁸ Even though Heimdall Amadi is half-Swedish and it is his Nordic name which initially indicates that he may have extraordinary powers of seeing and knowing, it is ultimately his African-ness that makes seeing and knowing the truth plausible. In what is another instance of apparent demythologisation followed by re-mythologisation of a different, greater order, Seena claims that before her arrival in "West Africa", Heimdall was her "window into this world [Africa]" (*Amaryllis* 147). Conversely and emphasising the innate-ness of the connection, when she is in "West Africa" she claims that "this country conjures him" (*Amaryllis* 175). Unlike "Michigan dirt", African soil is, according to Seena, "magical", "fairy dirt" which, like Yllis' birth, "colors all Seena sees" (*Amaryllis* 107-09). In typical synaesthetic-fashion, Yllis determines that "[i]n order to parse out truth" she would "have to hold what [she had] heard to the African light" (*Amaryllis* 145). Amaryllis and Heimdall's shared African roots not only connects them to each other but their African-ness signals access to truth that, because it is seen through Africa, is paradoxically unmediated.

2.3.4. Universal, Transcendental Africa

Considering all that befalls the Slepys family in "West Africa", it is tempting to regard this novel as yet another instance where Africa represents the worst of the world and of humanity. But it is worth reiterating a point made in Chapter One: Africa is not the source nor cause of familial discontent and individual suffering in the four texts under study. In the case of *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, all the difficulties the Slepys face originate in America as a result of their own choices and character defects. What Africa serves to do is to bring to light that which has been wrong in the Slepys family for some time and, as a seemingly natural consequence, to provide the means of healing the family by transforming it. Admittedly, this power to transform arises, in part, from a tendency to hold Africa up as a mirror to the West and the consequence of this is the distortion and erasure of Africans and Africa. That Africa has long been projected as a place of self-discovery for (usually white) Western men and

¹⁸ An interesting side-note is the fact that Heimdall is also known as Riger, who, in Norse mythology, is "considered the divine sire of the various classes which compose the human race" (Guerber 151); an originary myth which echoes that of Noah and his sons. Guerber describes the three classes of humans sired by Heimdall/Riger as the dark-skinned serf fit for labour, the lighter-skinned husbandman fit for agriculture, and the huntsman, who has the lightest skin, is multi-talented and is thus considered the superior and highest-ranking of the classes (see also Lindow 2001).

women, where the romanticisation of and triumph over hardship lead to self-knowledge (see, for instance, Wittman 2011), is not in dispute here. Rather what Meldrum's novel indicates is that the nature and effect of the reflected image serves to unsettle the West's image of itself as much as it serves to (re)confirm it. It is the specifics of that unsettling and the subsequent recuperation of the West's image of itself that is discussed here.

Narratives of self-discovery in which transformation results from the conquering of difference have undergone a shift in the age of humanitarianism, becoming narratives of self-discovery where transformation is the result of the envelopment and absorption of difference—that is, the projection of a universal human community premised on an essential sameness. There is a telling moment in the novel where the notion of such an essential sameness is shown to be problematic. Mary Tessa compares her initial experience of “West Africa” to that of Disney World, particularly the famous “It’s a Small World” ride. As they approach an intersection in the city, she observes that “[t]here’s no traffic light, no stop sign, just a lot of clay dust and honking” and concludes that there is “[no] doubt they’re not standing in line waiting for Space Mountain” (*Amaryllis* 99). Though the ‘culture shock’ she experiences is in response to fairly stereotypical notions about Africa’s poverty and lack of development relative to America, her simultaneous suspicion about the truthfulness of the Disney ride is noteworthy. Carol Magee argues that Disney World, including the “It’s a Small World” ride, is a reflection of American identity, its values and of its particular image of the rest of the world. What the ride offers, therefore, is “a Disney ideal of a small, *white, American* world” (“Chapter 5”). Tessa seems to recognise that the Disney image of world harmony is underpinned by cultural imperialism when she says that she “sensed, even then, as she watched the children of the world frolic, their different faces not really different, their singing voices all the same, that the ride was all wrong” (*Amaryllis* 99). What Tessa realises when she arrives in “West Africa” is that “[t]he world is far bigger than [she] imagined” (*Amaryllis* 99). If the ride represents an American identity, as Magee argues, then Tessa’s suspicion of the ride’s message of universal sameness is a suspicion about American assertions of human sameness. As such, she points to an ontological anxiety at the root of its cultural imperialism. Rather than confront this anxiety, however, Tessa and the novel as a whole attempt to incorporate difference productively and, arguably, sincerely—that is to say, they ‘africanise’ what has been revealed to be a bland, universalist humanism. This can be characterised as ‘sincere’ because, rather than seeking “productive encounters with alterity” (Wittman 46) for the purposes of self-transformation and ultimately excluding the

Other, alterity is made productive for generating a human community intended as truly universal for being diverse.

Tessa's criticism of the idealisation of universalism quickly turns into the idealisation of Africa, constructed as a place of profound meaning. Tessa admires the local women's clothing, musing that

She'd always thought Grace's interest in clothes was an utter waste, but the women here wrap themselves up in layers of glee, patterned and bright, each woman an original Matisse. Tessa's art teacher at school had described Matisse's work as 'expressive', saying his use of color was not intended to mimic reality but to express meaning [...] Just looking at these women makes Tessa feel not so much happy as brimming, alive. There's something here—Tessa senses this. Just like with Matisse. And as with Matisse, the meaning's out of reach—but Tessa feels like reaching for it anyway. Seems Tessa's been sleeping her life away and the noise in Africa woke her up. (*Amaryllis* 100)

What is empty vanity in America is transformed in Africa into an expression of meaning, the pursuit of which will wrench one out of existential slumber. The recognition that meaning is elusive is subsequently replaced by the attainment of meaning: that which Tessa wants most of all, a sense of belonging and community. While in the city, Tessa notices a small group of women cooking around a fire. Their apparent enjoyment of the task despite the fact that, as Tessa says, "cooking here seems even more of a chore" (*Amaryllis* 103) contrasts sharply with the miserable domesticity of her own mother. The significance of this moment becomes clear when, in the village of Avone, Tessa finds a sense of belonging among the women and girls, despite the "indecipherable language", as they cook the food for the "hand-dipping ritual of *fufu*" (*Amaryllis* 249). What Tessa finds in "West Africa" is a sense of community-as-family, revealing the lack of connection that she experiences in her own Western, individualistic family.

The transformation of the quotidian into the transcendental in Africa suggested by the significance of the women's clothing and their cooking confers a sense of the materiality of human connection, of the everyday-ness of human community. But this 'africanised' universal humanism ultimately loses any meaningful specificity as it reaches for the transcendental. The most striking example of this occurs when the Slepny family, while on their journey to Avone, takes a detour to see the slave castle. This momentary diversion is a central moment of self-reflection for the family as a whole and their ruminations reflect the simultaneous fullness and emptiness of Africa in the novel. On the one hand, this moment of reflection makes possible a confrontation with the specific trauma of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and, therefore, with a key part of the history of fraught relations between

America and Africa. Tessa acknowledges that the lives of the slaves were “[s]natched by people like Tessa’s family” (*Amaryllis* 210) and Dick makes a “poetic connection” between the “ominous, white castle” and the “ominous whites” (*Amaryllis* 189) who built it for the purposes of subjugation. On the other hand, the slave castle stands more generally as a symbol of the division of humanity and the family’s self-reflection becomes a means of restoring the universality of humanity.

Tessa, Dick and Yllis each respond to the slave castle in problematic ways, but it is Seena’s response that illustrates most clearly the significance of this event to the novel’s narrative of transformation. Meldrum explains that the importance of the slave castle is not only as a reminder that “slavery lives on” but also as a symbol of how “each character in *Amaryllis in Blueberry* [is] enslaved at some level” and “how and to what degree [...] each of us [is] similarly enslaved” (Gallery Books “A Conversation with Christina Meldrum”). There is, in the novel and its structure, a similar movement from the specificity of history down to the individual and back outwards to all of humanity, which effects an elision of the history upon which this movement relies. The detour to the slave castle provides Seena with the opportunity to reflect on a conversation about love that she had with Heimdall, in which he said that, like the existence of a resonance between quantum particles which are separated by “millions of miles” (*Amaryllis* 184), love is a powerful mystery. Recalling this conversation and “as the slave castle appears in the distance”, Seena is struck with the certainty that “she and Heimdall are those quantum particles” [...] “connected” [...] even though a universe lies between them” (*Amaryllis* 185). Her connection to Heimdall results in Seena’s spiritual rebirth “[b]ecause in Heimdall’s spoken words, Seena found herself baptized, born anew” (*Amaryllis* 185). Her relationship with Heimdall, whose “face seemed to embody the world” (*Amaryllis* 183), takes on transcendental power. This is not simply romantic hyperbole but rather the elevation of their connection to a cosmic level and the transformation of subjective, individual experience into general truth.

That general truth is the undoing of the American Slepny family, representative of discord and division, and its reconstitution through Africa—that is, through Heimdall and Yllis—into a symbol of a united, diverse human community-as-family. Though it becomes clear in the Epilogue that Heimdall, Seena and Yllis have not become a family in the legal sense, Heimdall’s resolve that “the charade will end [...] and] Yllis will know her father” and his final hope that “God has not forsaken him” (*Amaryllis* 365) nevertheless point to the redemptive reunion that the structure of the novel and its idealisation of Africa enacts. The “Epilogue” is the only chapter focalised through Heimdall Amadi, who is the answer to the

questions that have haunted Yllis throughout the novel: where does she come from and where does she belong? Yllis's killing of her father symbolises a rejection of a false origin, the source of her sense of dislocation and that which put her humanity and belonging into question. To turn to Heimdall Amadi at the end and to contextualise this ending as "The Beginning" is to signal an arrival at the true origin of her human-ness cast as full and transcendental.

2.4. Conclusion

The Poisonwood Bible and *Amaryllis in Blueberry* are set up as political in so far as they offer critiques of unequal power structures and of those myths of absolute and essential difference that underpin Western intervention and interference in Africa. What these novels offer instead is a human community premised on an essential sameness. Nancy defines the political as "not [...] just the locus of power relations" but rather, more fundamentally, as "the place where community as such is brought into play" (xxxvii). Kingsolver's and Meldrum's own political interventions are, therefore, not fundamentally located in their criticisms of Western colonialism or humanitarianism cast as neo-imperialism. Their political intervention is the simultaneous constitution of a human community through the transcendence of difference and the representation of that community as natural and inevitable. Furthermore, because community and myth are inextricably co-constitutive, theirs is a community founded on the myth of a transcendent humanity at precisely the moment they attempt to move beyond myth. In both novels, allegory and irony are effective mechanisms for establishing the falsity of myths of *essential, absolute* difference *between* human beings by recuperating History and drawing lines of similarity. But, because these novels take the human for granted and assume that essential sameness secures a universal community, allegory and irony become problematic owing to these modes' insistence on the difference that is humanity. The turn to symbol and myth, therefore, not only has the effect of a de-historicisation but effects a retreat from the very temporality that defines humanity.

Chapter Three

Original Innocence, Innocent Origins: the child-figure in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Garden of Burning Sand*

My heart leaps up when I behold
A Rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is Father of the Man
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

William Wordsworth, 'My heart leaps when I behold' in *Selected Poetry*
(1994: 122)

3.1. Introduction

The child is a powerful figure, paradoxically, because it is characterised by powerlessness. The child, and by extension childhood, is seemingly always in danger because children represent the most vulnerable members of society and are, therefore, a great impetus for action. Their representative currency is only partly because they *are* amongst the most vulnerable members of society. In other words, it is sometimes as much the preservation of childhood as of children themselves which occupies the social conscience. Nowhere is this clearer than in so-called Third World contexts where the faces and the bodies of children are made to represent a country, a conflict and even the state of humanity itself. Africa, the world's symbol of need, is overwhelmingly represented by its children: anonymous but recognisable, individual but not individualised small, black faces have been made the ambassadors—poor and partial—of the continent. This chapter will examine the uses of the child-figure in Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* and Corban Addison's 2013 novel, *The Garden of Burning Sand*. While the child in each novel appears to be very different—one a very young, white, American, able-bodied girl and the other a black, adolescent girl with Down Syndrome from Zambia—the child-figure is the means of achieving human unity in both novels. As I will demonstrate, the usefulness of the child in the projection of human unity is located in the child-figure's ambiguity, which is figured through the malleability of the

figure itself and the liminality of childhood. In order to make sense of the child-figures in Kingsolver's and Addison's texts, it is necessary to keep the history of childhood and "the child" in mind.

3.1.1. The Ontology of Childhood and "the child"

Childhood is regarded, in Western society and at this point in history, as a special period in the life of the individual. The special-ness of this stage of life is located in the separation of childhood from adulthood and the characterisation of the former as a time of innocence and vulnerability. The origin of this notion of childhood has traditionally been attributed to the Romantic-era and its writers; particularly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued in *Émile* that childhood is a state distinct from adulthood, and William Wordsworth, for whom the child embodied the Romantic ethea of innocence and transcendence.

Childhood as a Romantic invention is, however, not without contestation. As Linda M. Austin(2003) points out, the association of childhood with Romanticism may well be the product merely of "historical coincidence" because it was at the tail-end of the eighteenth century that children were regarded as "autonomous beings rather than extensions of a patriarchal family" (75). In her book, *Forgotten Children: Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900* (1983), Linda Pollock provides a useful gloss of the theories that have dominated the debate over how recently childhood, as a concept, was conceived. Starting with Philippe Ariès's claim that the concept of childhood did not exist in the middle ages, she challenges the notion that the concept of childhood is recent in its invention by asserting that "both childhood and adolescence were recognised in previous centuries, although children may not necessarily have been viewed in the same way as children today" (1). More recently, Daniel T. Kline (2012) argues that even though Ariès's theory has been challenged by history scholars, "literary scholars seem prone to 'the Ariès effect'" (22). Kline addresses this lingering association of Romanticism and the origin of childhood by demonstrating that representations of children in Middle English literature are evidence of a pre-Romantic society very much concerned with the role and position of children as well as the concept of childhood. Alan Richardson, in "Romanticism and the End of Childhood", takes the position that childhood "as a unique period of life [...] can be traced back to Renaissance humanism or even earlier" (24). He notes, however, that this notion of childhood was limited to the social elite until the nineteenth century. His argument, drawing on Hugh Cunningham's study *The Children of the Poor* (1991), is that what has come to be regarded as the Romantic ideal

of childhood was in fact an incoherent collection of philosophies and ideals which were popularised and democratised by Romantic writers such as Wordsworth and Coleridge.¹

Whether or not the concept of childhood is a Romantic invention or the product of an earlier period, what is regarded as the Romantic child remains part of Western, specifically British and American, culture today. Richardson argues that at the end of the twentieth century “American childhood [...] continues to be haunted, for better or worse, by the Romantic conflicts of identity which polarize an autonomous, imperial self and an Other located variously in nature, in society and/or within that same self” (McGavran 2). Even Mitzi Myers (1999), who aims to “denaturalize the masculinist high Romantic discourse of childhood”, claims that “the Romantic child is our foundational fiction, our originary myth” (44–45). The Romantic child, however, does not account for the entirety of the concept of childhood in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries; it is merely one of the many influences on contemporary understandings of childhood.

3.1.2. Contexts of Childhood: from Romantic to Contemporary

While a single, naturalised discourse of childhood may come to be associated with any one historical, social and political moment, “multiple and often contradictory discourses of childhood do exist simultaneously” (Gavin 3). In order to begin to make sense of the child-figure in the early twenty-first century it is necessary to take account of five key historical contexts which continue to shape the discourse on childhood: the Romantic and Victorian periods, colonial and postcolonial society and the era of humanitarianism in which we now find ourselves. The debate over the origin of the concept of childhood, briefly outlined above, attests to the fact that childhood is considered by scholars to be a construct and that, more specifically, “the child of literature is inarguably a construction of art” (2). Pollock’s assertion, in particular, that children have been viewed differently over time, that “the child” is historically contingent, points to the fact that “the child” is more of a naturalised construct than a natural, biological phenomenon. The product of these historical and literary childhoods, which cannot be shaken off entirely, comes to bear on Africa at least in part because Africa has consistently been the marginalised locus of the ethea of these histories and their literatures.

¹ Richardson describes the Romantic image of the child as a “somewhat incoherent, intermingling [of] the sentimentalism of eighteenth century verse, the transcendentalism of Vaughan, a Lockean emphasis on the child’s malleability, and a Rousseauvian faith in original innocence and ‘natural’ principles of growth” (25).

The tension between the Romantic era's "sympathetic humanism [...] and its vision of human progress often appropriated by pro-capitalist and imperialist arguments" (Hogle 28) forms the historical basis for this chapter. It is a tension which runs throughout the Romantic, Victorian, colonial, postcolonial and humanitarian contexts and which comes to bear on the child-figure as well as Africa: both the child and Africa are sites for development. The child-figure and Africa are further interconnected by their shared associations with the primitive. A product in part of "Rousseau's notion of primitive man" (Ruston 7), the Romantic child is a being "possessing basic intrinsic goodness embodied in the imagination [...] a little [version] of the 'noble savage', more attuned to that gigantic concrete abstraction, nature" (Morton 700). Childhood should, Rousseau argues, be allowed to remain uninfluenced by the adult world for as long as possible. Furthermore, as the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge illustrate this unadulterated state of being is desired by, but by definition remains unattainable to, the adult world. The Romantic child is, therefore, ironic because it "may remind us of the glory and the dream, but it also reminds us that the glory and the dream are time-bound and subject to end" (McGillis, "Irony and Performance" 102). The glory and the dream—what Adrienne Gavin describes as a "longing for past innocence and hope for the future" (7), in other words the potential for transcendence of the present—offered by the primitive-esque Romantic child remains part of more contemporary conceptions of childhood; arguably a result of the lingering overdetermined influence of what Sharon Ruston calls "the 'big six' Romantics" (76). As Ruston and Jerrold E. Hogle (2010) each demonstrate, however, Romanticism was a disparate, even contradictory, "movement" which was shaped into coherence largely in the Victorian era. Ruston, Hogle and McGavran all point out that the influence on English studies of cultural studies, Marxist studies, feminism, gender studies, deconstruction, new historicism and postcolonial theory and criticism has led to an interrogation of the "Romantic myth of childhood as a transhistorical holy time of innocence and spirituality" (McGavran 12) and an understanding of Romanticism as not a single mode, ideology or system but rather a cobbling together of Romanticisms.

These retrospective interrogations of Romanticism have resulted in the dismantling by Marxism of the "Romantic 'I' into the many social relations that constitute it" (Hogle 18) and the revelation of a number of female writers from the Romantic period who did not concern themselves with celebrating the achievements of the individual imagination. Rather they were concerned with "the workings of the rational mind [...] and] an ethic of care which insists on the primacy of the family or the community" (Anne Mellor qtd in Hogle 19). These

efforts notwithstanding—to reiterate Richardson’s claims—the Romantic child and its association with the “primitive Other” continues to haunt the Western imagination. This persistent alignment of child and the “primitive Other” is evident even in Myers’s critique of masculinist Romantic discourse where instead of dismantling the “homogenising hegemony and binary discourse of the Manichean opposition” that is Orientalism, she chooses to rather “transvalue the customary denigration of ‘native’ as child, to take the feminized juvenile seriously as a syncretic locus of revisionary community” (51). The usefulness of the union of “child” and “native” is that it unites all humanity, easily transcending difference, because as Myers points out “[w]e are all natives of somewhere; we have all been children” (51). One form of homogeneity has simply been traded for another, more comprehensive and seemingly more natural one because instead of the discourse of the individual (masculine) imagination there is the discourse of the community of humankind which can be accessed through the primitive-esque child.

In addition to the Romantic child as the site of transcendent union, the Victorian association of the child with misery is a driving force of current representations of children in the world of humanitarianism. While the eighteenth-century literary child functioned symbolically (O’Malley 2012), the Victorian literary child—no less a matrix of sometimes contradictory ideals and concerns than the Romantic child—was injected with the realism of the harsh lives that many actual children experienced in industrialised Britain. As Gavin summarises,

Childhood in Victorian texts for adults was no longer a state longed for, or inspirational, as it had been in Romantic writing or would become again in Edwardian texts; it was a vulnerable, often painful, powerless state, frequently lonely, with the child portrayed as a victim of adult power, emotional or physical brutality, social neglect, illness, and early death. (9)

This turn towards social realism was produced by, and in turn served, the evangelical and philanthropic humanitarian movements of the time (Gavin, 2012); the rhetoric of which was not limited to Britain but became the moral foundation of empire’s ‘civilising mission’. While the Romantic child-figure was perhaps more explicitly symbolic, the Victorian child-figure was by no means purely mimetic. The trope of the child in need goes hand in hand with that of self-redemption through good deeds and the humanising of the Victorian child as a vulnerable, powerless and miserable figure is accompanied by the elevation of the child-figure to angel: “etherealized and closer to God” (Gavin 9). The Victorian child-figure is often given the mantle of Christ-like sacrifice (Wood 119), which, while different in means from

that of the Romantic-child's closeness to nature, is not very different in its end; that is, transcendence.

However, as with the Romantic child-figure, the Victorian child-figure carries within it the certainty of its own end. The transience of the Romantic qualities associated with childhood, which were represented by the inevitable transition into adulthood, is reworked into literal and physical vulnerability and very often the early death of the child in Victorian literature. Even in death or, rather, especially in death the Victorian child is a redemptive figure because a premature death "preserved the child's innocence and inspired adults with thoughts of heaven and an afterlife where that innocence could be preserved" (N. Wood 116). So while the Victorian child is rarely associated with the "primitive Other", it is closely associated with the ideal of transcendence and the harsh, often degraded, material reality of humanity; both of which become distilled in the colonial and imperial encounter between Britain and Africa.

It is important to note at this point that these conceptions of childhood are largely those of Western and, more specifically, British society and culture, as it were. They do not speak to and cannot speak for conceptions of childhood outside of Britain and, as I will demonstrate in my discussion of the colonial and postcolonial worlds, within the far reaches of the British Empire. The separation of Victorian and colonial contexts in the opening paragraph of this section is not intended to suggest that these contexts are separable but rather to indicate the shift from a largely British context to that of a globalised one, which the Victorian-era—the height of colonial expansion and the beginning of anti-colonialism in Britain, slavery and anti-slavery movements and the beginnings of the human rights movement—was instrumental in bringing about.

Romantic and Victorian notions of "the child" and the expansion of colonialist imperialism are not mere historical coincidence because, as Jo-Ann Wallace argues in her 1994 study of colonial and postcolonial readings of Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, the "West has to invent for itself 'the child' before it could think a specifically colonialist imperialism"; in other words, 'the child' is "a *necessary precondition* of imperialism" (176, emphasis in original). The invention of a child-figure that makes possible colonialist imperialism is based on the Romantic association of the child with the primitive. Literature has and continues to be complicit in this relationship between 'the child' and colonialist imperialism as Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* makes clear: *Robinson Crusoe* offers children, according to Rousseau, "a natural education" (Gavin 7) and it "set the pattern for colonialist fiction" (McGillis, "Introduction" xxvii). Wallace outlines the three forms which this

association between child and primitive takes as follows: firstly, childhood is considered a primitive state of being in so far as “the child predates and will evolve into the adult” (Wallace 174); secondly, because “primitive” is a relative term which invokes its opposite—“civilised”—the child as primitive also conjures this binary, drawing lines of comparison between the child and the “native Other”; finally, the term primitive “also signifies the pre-literate: that is, the pre-writing, pre-historic” (Wallace 174–5). Wallace and Bill Ashcroft (2000) identify the inter-linking of “the child” and the “native Other” as the “parent-child logic of imperialist expansion” (Wallace 175) to which Clare Barker, in her study *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability* (2011), adds disability as another imposed marker of the supposed “helplessness, dependency and subnormality of Third World countries” (7). In all three cases—childhood, Otherness, and disability—binaries of normalcy and aberrance, the familiar and the strange are set up.

The normal-aberrant and familiar-strange binaries set up, maintained and reinforced by colonialism and imperialism contain within them the potential for resistance and transgression. Wallace not only argues that ‘the child’ makes thinkable nineteenth-century imperialism but that it also makes possible twentieth-century resistance to imperialism. Barker locates this potential for resistance in the strangeness of the child, which, in postcolonial literature, is reconfigured into exceptionality. As she demonstrates, disability is a significant part of postcolonial literature’s focus on exceptionality and the extent to which postcolonial child characters “mirror the narratives of infancy, development and conflict that accompany the maturation of the postcolonial ‘child-nation’” (Barker 2). It is the child’s state of strangeness as in-between-ness that serves to function as resistance. But herein lies the limit of the child as a form of resistance because the child is, by definition, in transition, unlike the “native” or the disabled person. Myers, in her transvaluation of the denigration of “native” as child, situates the political power of the child in the fact that the child is liminal. For her, the child’s liminality serves to “unite disparate states” (58). There is much to be said for the disruptive potential of the child and the Other—some of which will be addressed in this chapter—but to cast the child, due to its close association with native Otherness, as a strange or liminal yet unifying figure requires careful attention and the attempt to do so will take up much of this chapter. As stated previously, Myers’s formulation retains the binary that makes possible the Romantic discourse of childhood which she aims to denaturalise. The interdependent nature of the relationship between the colonial-imperialist conception and denigration of the child-as-primitive and ‘primitive’-as-child based on strangeness, on the one hand, and the potential for resistance to colonialist-imperialism offered by the

strangeness, reconfigured as exceptionality, of this dual figure, on the other hand, demonstrates that the Romantic tradition continues to shape the child and those who are made to stand separate from the West. McGavran states that the Romantic tradition is “simultaneously subversive and conservative with regards to social change” (2) and I would add that the twentieth century, postcolonial and transnational traditions follow suit due to their dependence on the binaries of normalcy-aberrance and familiarity-strangeness, regardless of whether their projects aim to revalue those categories.

A distinction between postcolonial literature written *in*, or *by* members of, former colonies and literature written *about* former colonies by those who are of the former colonial and the current neo-colonial centre is important for the time being. As Barker points out, while childhood and disability have been reworked in the former kind of literature “in terms of potentiality, vulnerability and inclusivity [...] legacies of colonialist connections between disability, race and childhood continue to surface in transnational relations” (Barker 9). It is through these transnational relations that many of the old, and some new, colonial patterns and relations of power operate. One example of such a pattern or relation of power is humanitarianism; whether it be humanitarian aid or military, corporate, international or individual (so-called “voluntourism”) intervention under the auspices of humanitarianism. Children occupy a uniquely prominent position in humanitarian discourse. The reason for this being that humanitarian discourse requires a human community which is not the product of nationality, race, class, gender etc. but rather, simply, the lowest common denominator: membership in the species *Homo sapien*. In other words, it is a community unmarked by difference or division; a community that is universally open and inclusive.

The child is the perfect representative of such a community because of the child’s status as universal. This universality, however, is a figment of the West’s imagination or perhaps more accurately a construct of its own ideology and is, therefore, political. Alice Byrnes’s attempt to account for the “universal appeal” (1) of the child is a useful starting point for understanding the working together of universality and political ideology, even though she is not explicitly concerned with humanitarianism. Working from Jung’s theory on the archetype of the child and his notion of the collective unconscious, Byrnes describes the child in terms of its redemptive qualities, its ability to effect wholeness by constituting a “composite of opposite qualities” (36), the child as symbol and generator of personal growth and integration, and a community builder. What is revealing about Byrnes’s project is that while she claims to be addressing the universal appeal of the child, the literature on which she bases this project is exclusively Western. Some of the works are translations into

English but all the texts are the products of white, Western writers. The political nature of this understanding of the child as universal is revealed when one considers Byrnes's discussion of Dorothy from Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. In her discussion of the "the child savior" Byrnes categorises Dorothy as "the liberator of the mythic land of Oz" and, therefore, a "democratic heroine" (29). She places the writing of the novel in its historical context, pointing out that when *The Wizard of Oz* was written, at the turn of the century,

Territorial expansion had exhausted geographic limitations. Americans began looking beyond the borders of the United States to new territories such as Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Phillipines. Like their parents who were searching for new life in faraway lands, American children hoped to explore new realms of experience in unfamiliar places. Young readers found a delightful escape in their cosmic journey to Oz. (28–9)

This context, which raises the spectre of America's imperialism in the twentieth century and aligns it with Dorothy's journey to Oz, is necessarily bracketed off in order to celebrate Dorothy as "Baum's Miss Everyman [who] is one of *us*, levelheaded and *human*" (Littlefield qtd in Byrnes 29, emphasis added).

The centrality of the child in the continuation of imperialism "after" colonialism and the social and political relations which constitute "us" and notions of the "human" have been interrogated by a number of critics who have demonstrated that the "uses of children" (Malkki, "Children" 59) in transnational, humanitarian relations and representations may claim or appear to be apolitical but are political in effect, if not in intention. Nancy Ellen Batty (2000) and Liisa Malkki (2010;1996;1994) both argue that the use of children in humanitarian appeals, which are almost exclusively appeals on behalf of the "Third" or "developing world", serves to depoliticise and obscure the political causes of suffering. Central to Malkki's work is the understanding that "contemporary humanitarianism constitute[s] a key global terrain for the construction of the human" and that "children occupy a key place in dominant imaginations of the human and of the 'world community'" ("Children" 58). It is the constitution of a human community using the child-figure and Africa in Kingsolver's and Addison's novels that will be explored further in this chapter. As such my focus is not on representations of children in humanitarian appeals but will be informed by critical work in that field in order to make sense of the effects of the use of the child-figure in literature that takes as its subject Africa and/or African countries.

This approach raises, and addresses, the issue of the difference between physical, historical children and the child-figure. Wallace and Byrnes both draw a distinction between "the child" and children, albeit in different ways. For Wallace the distinction is based on her

acceptance of the idea that the figure of the child or childhood as a “separate life stage” is a relatively recent, that is late seventeenth century, invention with a recent “discursive history” (173). For Byrnes, the distinction rests on the understanding that Jung’s archetype of the child must “be regarded as a symbol and not as a child per se” (1). The uses of actual children in the age of humanitarianism, however, reveal the limitations of such a distinction. As Barker points out, the need to represent communities or whole nations which are seen as being in crisis as well as the need to raise funds in order to respond to that crisis means that children are turned into “universalized, interchangeable ciphers” whose individual stories also have “to be made exceptional to achieve maximum [financial] impact” (Barker 11). In his moving yet disturbing reflection on the representations of children in crisis, McKenzie Wark makes a similar point when he describes the response to “Bosnia’s little baby Irma” who became the focus in British politicians’ and the media’s attempts to “outbid each other in public displays of compassion” (Wark 39). More contemporary examples of this would include Malala Yousafzai, a teenage girl who survived being shot by the Taliban and has gone on to be an internationally recognised and celebrated activist, and Jacob Avaye who, in the Kony2012 campaign video, was made to represent child-soldiers in central Africa. The fact that actual, individual children are made poster children for the loss of childhood innocence as well as the success of intervention makes a neat distinction between “the child” and children difficult to maintain.

There are two further interconnected distinctions that some of the authors already cited make which become problematic in the age of humanitarianism. First, Austin’s distinction between attitudes towards childhood and children and the treatment of children; second, Pollock’s distinction between public discourse and policy designed for children and the private, domestic lives of children. In the age of globalised humanitarianism, private lives are consumed publically² and public policies affect private lives, not only within the confines of the nation-state but transnationally, through bodies such as UNICEF. I problematise these distinctions not to suggest that children as historical, social and cultural subjects are one and the same as the conceptual construct of “the child” but rather to demonstrate the interconnectedness of them. In this regard I follow Christine Wilkie-Stibbs in her argument that the child as “fictional construct with a problematic ontology” and the “flesh-and-blood

² The scale of this public consumption becomes clear when one considers the widespread, albeit brief, success of the Kony2012 video that “reached 100 million views in 6 days, and [to which] 3.7 million people pledged their support” (Invisible Children).

reality whose ontology is not in doubt [...] both converge via a process of narrativization in the discourses through which they appear” (9).

3.2. The Poisonwood Bible

In the previous chapter, I argued that Ruth May’s transformation from allegorical tool, via myth, to symbol ultimately undermines Kingsolver’s explicit political project. While this takes account of Ruth May as symbol, it does not account for the fact that Ruth May also functions specifically in the novel as a child-figure; a figure which, as this chapter introduction demonstrates, is the product of a long and complex history that is inextricably bound up in (neo)colonial and (neo)imperial modes of thought. The child-figure in this text is clearly informed by the Romantic, Victorian, Colonial and Postcolonial contexts outlined above and this results in a character that is liminal, disruptive and complicit in history but also tragic, ahistorical and transcendental. If it is not clear from the previous chapter that Ruth May does and does not die, then it is important to clarify that point now. Weakened by malaria and with the threat of violence against white foreigners looming, Ruth May is given an *nkisi*: a fetish to house her spirit. Should she start “fixing to die” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 269), Nelson tells her, she must use the fetish to will herself into another form. When she is bitten by a green mamba, she dies only to be transformed into snake-form as well as “*mntu* Africa, *mntu* one child and a million all lost on the same day” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 607). This figure of *mntu* Africa—that is human Africa—was the focus of Chapter Two. The focus in this chapter is on the Ruth May, the child-figure, who dies. I will demonstrate that both Ruth May’s deathless death—that she does not die—and the tragedy of her death—that she does die—are necessary requirements for her assimilation into and replacement of Africa.

3.2.1. Familiar Yet Strange: liminal disruption and the problem of transition

Ruth May, a very young white American child, represents Congo, the loss of Congolese independence and the death of Patrice Lumumba but she is not clearly an example of what Dave Calhoun calls “white guides [who] lead us through black pain” (Calhoun 33). This is because she is neither a protagonist nor the point of focus in the novel, at least not until her death, even though she is the means of communicating the larger but often peripheral context of Congo’s movement towards independence. On the one hand, the Congo that Ruth May represents is overfamiliar and over-determined: the object of pathos, helpless and always in danger of succumbing to malaria (or disease in general). On the other hand, she

is, like Congo, strange to the narrative: she deviates from it and sometimes disrupts it. Both Ruth May's over-familiarity and her strangeness, and therefore her Congo-ness and ultimately African-ness, are caught up in the fact that she is a child.

Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that the child is "unharmonizable" (4) because it is that which is excluded from and yet agitates the system of development that shapes the human. It is, paradoxically at first, the fact that the child is outside of the system of humanity that the child is the prototypical human. Childhood as a form of inhumanity is, for Lyotard, an important moment in the resistance of that which is inhuman. As outlined in the introduction to *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Lyotard distinguishes between two kinds of inhumanity: the first is the "inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development" and the second is the "infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage" (2). Lyotard aligns the child with this second understanding of inhumanity because

Shorn of speech, incapable of standing upright, hesitating over the objects of its interest, not able to calculate its advantages, not sensitive to common reason, the child is eminently human because its distress heralds and promises things possible. Its initial delay in humanity, which makes it the hostage of the adult community, is also what manifests to this community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls on it to become more human. (Lyotard 3–4)

The disruptive potential of the child, located in the child's pre-human-ness, echoes Viktor Turner's formulation of the liminary. As indicated in Chapter Two, the phase of liminality offers the opportunity for critique and transformation due to the liminary's interstitial nature: the liminary "evade[s] ordinary cognitive classification" and is paradoxically "*both this and that*" (Turner 49, emphasis in original). In this regard, Ruth May as liminal and as a child-figure—terms which share a history—offers Kingsolver a means of further establishing her political critique of the central structures that are (neo)colonialism and (neo)imperialism.

Firstly, she is exempt from her father's preferred form of punishment: the Verse. He forces his other daughters to copy out a bible verse which at the end reveals the nature of their transgression. But Ruth may cannot read or write yet. She is, therefore, outside of Nathan's patriarchal-imperial system of control and punishment. Secondly, the three older narrators—Rachel, Leah and Adah—tend to focus on the daily events that constitute their lives in Kilanga. Family conflict is usually the focus of these narratives, and their chapters, though overlapping, are chronological, linear and realist. The chapters that are narrated by Ruth May, however, offer a deviation from or disruption of this focus. Her chapters are often the result of eavesdropping and of seeing things that she should not and which appear to

be meaningless to her; she is frequently spying from tree branches or through windows and holes in walls. The events she narrates occur at the margins of the text even though they remain central in so far as the novel drives towards the moment of Congo's independence. The chapters that detail her malarial fevers are characterised by incoherence and the lines between the worlds of dreaming and that of reality and, indeed, between those of the living and the dead, become blurred (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 244–45). Her relaying of snatches of conversation is characterised by questioning, uncertainty, and misunderstanding: for example, her mishearing of the word circumcision for "circus mission" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 306); her mistaking the Jeune Mou-Pro for "the Jimmy Crow" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 132); her alarmed confusion over children who have skinny arms but "big fat bell[ies]" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 38); and the oft-repeated phrase "I don't know" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 24, 58, 175). Her questions and refusal to go along with the telling of a linear or coherent story operate as a counter narrative or an agitation which is a reminder that there are things not being said or that are being said but in unrecognisable ways.

Sometimes humorous but often disconcerting, Ruth May's narration makes what is already strange and terrifying (female circumcision and kwashiorkor, for instance) even more so but it also narrows the gap between the reader and these disturbing events in the text. This is achieved using the particular narrative and temporal-spatial position of Ruth May. Ruth May's tendency to be an invisible (to the characters) and uninvolved observer mimics the reader's relation to the text. In many ways Ruth May is involved in acts of "reading" (and sometimes misreading) the half-heard conversations and half-seen actions to which she is only secretly privy. Furthermore, her chapters are narrated in the first person and present tense, whereas the other Price daughters tell their stories in the first person but using the past tense up until just after Ruth May's death. Moreover, the opening lines of the novel, narrated by Orleanna, are a direct address to the reader: "Imagine a ruin so strange it must never have happened. First, picture the forest. I want you to be its conscience, the eyes in the trees" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 5). Here the reader is made, at least partly, responsible for the narrative through the act of imagining and by being the narrative conscience. Importantly, as the opening chapter and the novel progress, it becomes clear that Orleanna is not addressing the reader; or at least not exclusively. The "you" to whom she refers is also Ruth May because it refers to Orleanna's "uncaptured favourite child, [who is] wild as the day is long" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 8). Ruth May also goes on to describe herself as the "eyes in the trees" and the "forest's conscience" (*The Poisonwood*

Bible 607–8). In other words, Ruth May comes to occupy the same position at the end of the novel into which the reader was invited at the beginning.

Wark claims that when he sees images of children, he “becomes childlike” because the “child occupies such a sacred place in our structures of feeling that one cannot help but feel – something” (36). In Kingsolver’s novel there is a similar process at work, albeit not using visual images as in the aid appeals to which Wark refers.³ The use of first-person, present tense narration and the shared position of “the conscience” of the text which the reader and Ruth May occupy have two effects. First, Ruth May is more than a translator of the strange into the familiar—she is more than a “white guide”—because her seemingly unmediated narrative pretends to be more of a direct experience for the reader. Second, and as a consequence of the first, the child-like confusion and innocence that belongs to Ruth-May is temporarily imposed upon the reader. This affective imposition is temporary because the reader is not limited to Ruth May’s perspective nor to the status of unknowing child: any initial shared confusion is soon replaced by the realisation, on the part of the reader, of what is being described. In other words, innocence borne of ignorance is quickly supplemented for the reader, if not for Ruth May, by knowledge. When encountering the world of Kilanga and Congo through Ruth May’s eyes the reader occupies a dual and conflicting position: innocent experiencer and knowing observer.

The reader/Ruth May’s position as observing outsider and role as narrative conscience serves the novel’s political critique in so far as the reader is encouraged to judge the Price family as representatives of neo-imperialism, albeit to varying degrees. Orleanna warns the reader/Ruth May at the beginning of the novel about feeling too much sympathy for the Price women; an early indication that they too will be shown to be complicit in the various forms of violence inflicted on Kilanga and Congo because they are members of the community responsible for the violence and their actions and attitudes sometimes reflect those of neo-imperialist America and Europe.⁴ Even Ruth May, the youngest and most innocent Price family member, is shown to be complicit when, in the novel’s closing pages, the reader is returned to a slightly altered description of the Price women in the forest which appeared in the novel’s opening pages:

³ I would argue, however, that imagery certainly plays a role. For instance, Ruth May does not encounter kwashiorkor by hearing the word and knowing or finding out what it means; rather she sees kwashiorkor in the emaciated limbs and swollen bellies of children. In other words, her experience of it, as it were, does not take the form of a concept but a direct, visual image which is communicated to the reader using imagery.

⁴ The most obvious examples here would be Rachel’s racism—which is the main theme of her chapters following Ruth May’s death—and Leah’s insistence on challenging the hunting norms of Kilanga, which mirrors her father’s missionary interference and the United States’ involvement in Congo’s political transition.

Behind [Orleanna] the smallest child pauses to break off the tip of every branch she can reach. She likes the stinging green scent released by the broken leaves. As she reaches to snatch a leaf she spies a plump, orange-bodied spider that has been knocked to the ground. The spider is on its back and fatly vulnerable, struggling to find its pointed feet and scurry back into the air. The child delicately reaches out her toe and squashes the spider. Its dark blood squirts sideways, alarmingly. [...] If the mother and her children had not come down the path on this day, the pinched tree branches would have grown larger and the fat-bodied spider would have lived. Every life is different because you passed this way and touched history. Even the child Ruth May touched history. Everyone is complicit. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 608)

The use of direct address in both the opening and closing versions serves to situate the reader, as argued above, but also to implicate the reader in the narrative itself and history more generally. The complicity of even the most well-meaning reader is underscored by the description of Ruth May's killing of the spider as delicate and the breaking off of the branches as pleasurable and quotidian. It is, however, unclear when this picnic in the forest takes place in the course of the narrative; relayed without markers of time in the opening and closing pages of the novel, it is separate from the rest of the text. Floating outside of the linear narrative of the text, both of these sections perform the function of indicating to the reader how the text is to be read and interpreted: as an indictment of America's actions in Congo and the ignorance thereof of American citizens, yes, but also an indictment of all humans throughout history because "[e]very life is different" and "[e]veryone is complicit", even the seemingly innocent child. Kingsolver, having aligned the reader with Ruth May (through her other-ness to the text), points out the reader's complicity and makes it very difficult for the reader to claim ignorance as a basis for self-exculpation. Kingsolver also, however, turns any sense of complicity into an ahistorical one where one's connection to a specific moment in history is subsumed by all of history.

Turner's discussion of liminality makes it very clear that liminality is not, or should not be, a fixed state. To be in a state of perpetual liminality is to be in a state of crisis, because liminality is only one phase in the rites of passage "which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age" (Van Gennep qtd in Turner 48). Liminality is preceded by separation and followed by re-aggregation and is, therefore, a state of transition. Childhood is a liminal state and that is what gives it its power to disrupt the world of the adult; that is the world of the fully human. But as Lyotard admits, childhood represents only an "initial delay in humanity" (3). Childhood must and does end, becoming that which it initially disrupted. Ruth May, the child, does transition out of her state of liminality but she does not

simply re-aggregate into the world as a new member of the fully human, adult world. Rather she, like symbolic Ruth May, becomes that which constitutes all of humanity. While Ruth May, the symbol of Africa, constitutes Africa and humanity by becoming *mntu* Africa at the point of death, Ruth May, the child-figure, appears to become part of Africa in so far as she is literally assimilated into the African soil, what Orleanna calls the “flesh of Africa” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 437). The reference to soil as if it were flesh is important: Orleanna turns Africa into a single living, corporeal being which is less a heterogeneous geographical space marked by history and politics and more akin to the figure of the native Other. This is significant because of the relationship that exists between the child, particularly the outsider child such as Ruth May, and the native Other. As Wilkie-Stibbs argues, the

concept of child-outsiderhood is different from, *and more than*, the mere ‘Other’ (though the latter is subsumed in it), because, unlike the ‘Other’ of psychosocial theorization, which is by definition locked into the subjective, self-Other binarity, child-outsiderhood *incorporates into itself* also the pluralist context (10, emphasis added).

In other words, because the continent is figured as a corporeal Other, Ruth May’s physical assimilation into Africa allows Africa to be subsumed by Ruth May, the child-figure.

3.2.2. Death and Liminality

Death and dying are central to liminality because death is what characterises the first phase of the rite of passage—separation—and it marks the beginning of the interstitial phase, liminality itself. The liminary has undergone

a separation from a relatively fixed state of life and social status, and [has passed] into a liminal or threshold phase and condition for which none of the rules and few of the experiences of their previous existence have prepared them. In this sense, they are ‘dying’ from what was and passing into an equivocal domain occupied by those who are (in various ways) ‘dead’ to quotidian existence in social systems. (Turner 29)

This symbolic death describes the whole of the Price family as they move from Bethlehem, Georgia, to Kilanga, Congo, “bearing Betty Crocker cake mixes into the jungle” and soon learning that their once essential “supplies from home seem to represent a bygone world” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 15–16). The uselessness of their American essentials echoes the uselessness of their American life experience when, among other examples, Rachel claims that they, the white American Price family, “are supposed to be calling the

shots”, but instead they appear to be in charge of nothing, “not even [their] own selves” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 26). Ruth May’s symbolic death, however, is doubled because, not only does she share the family’s dislocation, she is marked for literal death at the beginning of the novel. As soon as the family disembark “into the swelter of Leopoldville” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 19), Ruth is overcome by the heat and faints. As the novel progresses she is plagued by malarial fevers that put her in the interstices of the living and the dead, until her symbolic death is followed by her literal death,⁵ which marks her crossing of the threshold into her elevated state of *muntu* Africa.

Ruth May’s death has been discussed in Chapter Two in its relation to, and use of, symbol, and there I mentioned that her death marks the point at which her parallel with Congo is both cemented and collapsed. The implications of this paradoxical moment in the relationship between Ruth May and Congo, in so far as it is the product of death, needs further attention. Doing so will help to demonstrate how the disruptive potential of the child-figure is sublimated by the unifying power of the child-figure. Maurice Blanchot claims in “Literature and the Right to Death” that death is “the achievement of freedom [...] the richest moment of meaning” but “also only the empty point in that freedom, a manifestation of the fact that such a freedom is still abstract...Dying is an event without concrete reality” (377). He goes on to argue that death is beyond intention because, in the moment of death, that which produces intention is destroyed, making the representation of death impossible. Simon Critchley, working from this premise, argues that “the ultimate meaning of human finitude [that is, death] is that we cannot find meaningful fulfilment for the finite” (31). The ambiguous nature of death is captured in the simultaneous deaths of Congo’s independence and Ruth May.

On the one hand, post-Lumumba independence is independence in name only; it is an event without concrete reality or meaning. Freedom in Zaïre is nothing more than a chimera and an abstraction. The fatuous place name changes in the spirit of *authenticité*, the repeated imprisonment of Leah’s husband without legitimate charge, and Leah and Anatole’s constant moving to different parts of the country mirror the meaninglessness of life in Zaire. In fact, their lives become defined by liminality because they are in an extreme “state of betwixt-and-betweenness” (Turner 33). The interstitial moment that is the transition from colonial rule to independence has been transformed into a fixed state of uncertainty. Mobutu is the trickster that Turner identifies as being the figure who, in a state of permanent

⁵ Of course, as argued in chapter two, Ruth May’s literal death is not devoid of symbolism but rather overloaded with the symbolism of communion.

liminality, appears to be a saviour but who in fact is the opposite; he too is a chimera. The death of independence is doubly “the empty point” (Blanchot 377) in the achievement of freedom and, thus, salvation is impossible. As such, the end of independence itself is not, and indeed cannot be, represented. The full extent of its representation is Orleanna’s attempt to imagine, years later, what happened—an attempt that occupies all her chapters.

On the other hand, Ruth May’s death, because it is also the point of her humanistic apotheosis, is the “richest moment of meaning” in Kingsolver’s novel. Not only is it highly symbolic, her transformation is also the product of her will and intention. The moment itself is narrated multiple times and it becomes the unwavering point of reference, and locus of meaning, with regards to Africa for the remaining Price women. Unlike Mobutu, Ruth May is the saviour and through her transfiguration into *mntu* Africa salvation is made possible. This is because Ruth May’s death is likened to a birth. Adah says that she “was not present at Ruth May’s birth but [she had] seen it now, because [she] saw each step of it played out in reverse at the end of her life” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 416). Adah goes on to liken Ruth May’s “final gulp of air” to “a baby’s first breath”, describing her “last howling scream [as being] exactly like the first” and finally, her sister’s body comes to resemble that of a foetus as “[h]er spine curved, and her limbs drew in more and more tightly until she seemed impossibly small” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 416). Ruth May’s death framed as a return to the state of a new born, or even the not-yet-born, sets her transfiguration into *mntu* Africa up as the rebirth of all humanity. This almost literal configuration of birth allows for a new humanity that is not historically contingent.

The splitting of the Ruth May-Congo parallel at the point of death not only allows Kingsolver to make death mean something different for each—stretching the two possibilities for death out into different directions—but it also allows her to have liminality be both nihilistic and transcendent. Liminality as “antistructure is also ambiguous, for it may represent nihilistic solitude for the temporarily exposed individual, or it may be the epiphanic uncovering of a new depth of human communion [...] transcending the kinship terms through which it is often metaphorized” (Turner 147). By splitting the Ruth May-Congo parallel, Kingsolver transcends kinship based on connectedness and difference and opts for human communion—kinship that is based on manufactured sameness. The possibility for disruption that is signalled by both the child-figure and the liminary is quelled by opting for that which is transcendent in both death and liminality. Finally, Kingsolver also opts for what is transcendent in the child-figure by resorting to tragedy.

3.2.3. Strange Yet Familiar: tragedy and the sublimation of disparity

The strangeness of the child-figure (its closeness to nature and the primitive, its propensity for wretched suffering, its transformative power etc.) is also the common characteristic that runs through the various permutations of the child-figure from the Romantics to the transnational, humanitarian now; a characteristic which makes the child simultaneously very familiar. Malkki identifies five interrelated registers in which children appear: one, embodiments of basic human goodness and symbols of world harmony; two, as sufferers; three, as seers of truth; four, ambassadors of peace; and five, as embodiments of the future. While Ruth May is often a reminder of that which is strange or unrecognisable, she is also very familiar: as a seer of truth, as a sufferer, as an embodiment of the future and ultimately as a symbol of world harmony. In short, she is a sacrificial Christ-figure. As a child-figure who is also a sacrificial Christ-figure, Ruth May represents immense suffering and vulnerability—an inheritance of the Victorian period's social realism—as well as humanity's best hope for salvation.

This interweaving of often contradictory meanings assigned to the child-figure still comes to bear on children today, particularly children who are seen as part of the “developing world”. No child is more tragic and transcendent, or perhaps tragically transcendent, than the (usually dark skinned) starving, abandoned child from the war-torn country who is saved by, and in turn saves, the (usually white) Western volunteer. What is most important about these registers in general is that through them children are often represented as the essence of human-ness by being supra-human even as, and because they are, the epitome of metaphysical beings in vulnerable physical form. Children are made to signify “something essentially but often shiftingly human”; they are “naked humanity” (Malkki, “Children” 64). This state of human-ness serves to depoliticise because the affective work of the child-figure “tends to be identified as apolitical, even suprapolitical” (Malkki, “Children” 59). The labelling of the combination of these registers of the child-figure in Ruth May as “Christ-like” is both obvious and important. It is obvious (by now) because the text invites such a reading, as discussed in Chapter Two. It is important because “while such figurations of the child and the human are putatively universal, they are in fact both culturally Western, and in many ways quite Christian” (Malkki, “Children” 59). This state of human-ness with its emphasis on vulnerability serves to reinforce the connection between the child-figure and the “developing world”, even in texts which take an anti-colonial stance, because of the metanarrative of humanitarianism: speaking globally nothing is made to appear more

vulnerable than Africa and, speaking universally, no one is seen as more vulnerable than the child.

The ability of the child to unify humanity is due to the child's purported universality: everyone is, or was at some point, a child and so, like humanity, it is another form of the lowest common denominator. Unlike humanity, however, it is a transient lowest common denominator, which in humanitarian aid narratives and Kingsolver's text is ameliorated by tragedy; that is the death of the child. Kingsolver's novel is framed from the outset as tragic: the blurb on the back cover of the 2000 Faber & Faber edition summarises the novel as "the story of one family's tragic undoing" whose personal belongings, lives and beliefs are "calamitously transformed on African soil". Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle provide a useful gloss of tragedy in literature arguing that tragedy has undergone "a fundamental shift from the classical idea of tragedy as inevitable and beyond human control to the modern idea of tragedy as something humanly engineered" (113) and, therefore, preventable. In so far as Ruth May's death signals the end of independence for Congo, this notion of modern tragedy suffices and Ruth May's death is in keeping with the novel as a critique of US-led interference in Congo. Bennet and Royle argue further that tragedy "has to do with strangeness"; "tragedy is an encounter with the death of a character and the prospect of our own demise" and as such the "tragic is not rationalizable, rather it is an *affront* to our desires for meaning and coherence" (106, emphasis in original). As already argued in the previous section, Ruth May's death is, in fact, the triumph of meaning. But it is not only the strangeness of tragedy that is of concern in this definition but also the collective pronoun that is employed: what constitutes this collective? In his study on tragedy, George Steiner, operates from the assumption that while "tragedy as a form of drama is not universal" "[a]ll men [*sic*] are aware of tragedy in life (3). But, as Raymond Williams demonstrates, tragedy as dramatic form *and* lived experience are contextualised politically, socially, and philosophically and that the aesthetics of tragedy are shaped by the experience of it. Tragedy, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, however is unmarked by any contexts. Leah ascribes universality to the death of her sister based on the idea that "[a]ll of [the villagers] had lost children before" and that the Price family's suffering was therefore "[n]o different" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 422) from that of the people of Kilanga. Moreover, Leah says in response to the villagers' grief at the death of Ruth May: "We were all cut down together by the knife of *our* own hope, for if there is any single thing that *everyone* hopes for most dearly, it must be this: that the youngest outlive the oldest" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 422, emphasis added). The death of one child is made equal to the death of any and all other children, obfuscating

the causes and effects of those deaths and making a community of mourners possible despite the fundamental differences in the contexts of those deaths.

In contrast to Bennet and Royle's general definition, Alain Robbe-Grillet defines tragedy, in his 1957 essay "Nature, Humanism and Tragedy", as "an attempt to reclaim the distance that exists between man and things, and give it a new kind of value" (71). He defines humanism similarly as that which incorporates everything "including things that may be trying to limit or even reject it" (66) with the goal being solidarity between the human being and the universe which it inhabits and the saturation with meaning of all that is not human. Tragedy and humanism, therefore, share the same impetus: "communion" (Robbe-Grillet 69). In fact, tragedy "figures as the ultimate invention of humanism in its attempt to allow nothing to escape it" (Robbe-Grillet 71). The disjuncture between Ruth May and Congo is not only relieved by the union of Ruth May and Africa, the very potential for disruption offered by both the child-figure and the liminary is transformed through the inevitable and easily universalised tragedy of the child's death into the "sublimation... of disparity" (Robbe-Grillet 71). Ruth May's ascension to the state of "*muntu* Africa" connects her death to a "more general body of meaning" (Williams 47), that of human suffering and redemption, and divorces it from any one particular meaning, such as the political and social death of Congo and its people.

3.3. The Garden of Burning Sand

Corban Addison's 2013 novel, *The Garden of Burning Sand*, is easily identifiable as a typical novel about Africa. It is the story of a white, affluent, American lawyer—Zoë Fleming—who, tirelessly and at great peril to herself, fights for justice for Kuyeya Mizinga: a young, poor, black girl with Down Syndrome who has been raped in a country—Zambia—which is shown to be equally indifferent to the needs of disabled people as it is to the plight of women and children. This novel bears the aesthetic and ideological hallmarks of the white-industrial-saviour complex narrative and these features will be discussed below. However, the main focus will be on the paratexts of the novel, specifically the dedications, epigraphs and the "Author's Note". Gerard Genette's understanding of the paratext as a "*threshold*" and "'an undefined zone' between the inside and the outside" (Genette 2) aligns the paratext with the child-figure; both are liminal. I argue in this section that the use of paratexts in conjunction with the child-figure in *The Garden of Burning Sand*, serves to cast the novel's aesthetics and ideology simultaneously as uniquely African and universally human.

3.3.1. Conjuring 'Africa'

The aesthetics and ideology of *The Garden of Burning Sand* are inextricably tied up with an image of Africa that is hardly new. The setting of the novel is all at once 'Safari-Africa', a broken and corrupt continent in need of fixing, a homogenous, exotic and fecund place, the object of a love affair, and the place from which neo-liberal humanism's greatest African icons, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, originate. However, the most important description of Africa in this novel is as a possession and an inheritance that is passed on from one (white) person to another. Importantly, these ideas about, and conceptions of, 'Africa' are not limited to the foreign, white characters but are also found among the black African characters who are already made to stand as representatives of a continent and who now are betrayed by their own imposed representativeness. Kuyeya, who has been kept in seclusion and even isolation because she has Down Syndrome, has a perception of Africa that is shaped by stories which her mother told her: these are "*stories about cats [...] that lived wild in Africa*" (Addison 5, italics in original). While there is a blurring of the lines between the perceptions of Zambia and Africa held by black African characters and white foreigners, it is perhaps unsurprising that the greatest number of examples of this stereotyping come from the American characters, if only simply because their voices are dominant in the novel. Echoing Kuyeya's notions of Africa, Zoë is described as admiring the poinsettia tree, which "had been her mother's favourite African plant [and which is] a symbol of the continent's exoticism and fecundity" (*The Garden* 27). With no elaboration on the reason for this particular symbolic relationship between the poinsettia and African exoticism and fecundity, this reference functions merely as another reiteration of 'wild Africa'. The fact that the poinsettia is, in fact, not an African plant but, rather, is indigenous to Mexico ironically underscores the imported-nature of this conception of the continent: the exoticism of Africa is as much an import as the poinsettia tree.

Descriptions like this are Addison's attempt in this novel to "capture the African continent in all its astonishing beauty and heart-wrenching brokenness" (Addison, "The Story"). The aesthetic and extreme emotion appear to be in opposition to each other, but they work together to create an aesthetic of suffering that has come to dominate and even drive representations of Africa, and the developing world more generally. This aesthetic of suffering becomes part of the very act of reading in Addison's novel when Zoë reads Kuyeya's mother's journal, which is largely made up of letters addressed, but never sent, to Kuyeya's white South African father, Dr Jan Kruger. Zoë reads this journal beside the pool in her upmarket security complex inhabited exclusively by foreign diplomats and white

Americans. The contents of the journal, “a lament of poverty, disease, and violence” (*The Garden* 70), are framed by the beauty of the setting: the “tall sky [holds] the afterglow [of the sunset] like the embers of a dying fire” (*The Garden* 69); Zoë, under the shade of a jacaranda tree and exhilarated by her cold-water swim, breathes “the scented air [...] deep into her lungs” (*The Garden* 69) while a robin sings. Later that night, Zoë continues her reading of Charity’s “mordant recollections” after a meal of “leftover *nshima* and *ndiwo*” and a “bottle of South African pinotage” (*The Garden* 71). The Romanticism of the pool-side setting does not negate the suffering recorded and read in the journal, rather it accompanies it and renders that suffering authentically ‘African’. Much like the authentically African food and wine next to which Zoë places the journal, Charity’s suffering is consumable.

The littering throughout the novel of scenes of extreme beauty worthy of tourism advertisements and those of poverty and degradation often encountered in aid appeals mean that the reader’s act of reading mirrors Zoë’s acts of reading. To read this novel, indeed to read in this novel, is to encounter the extreme states of Africa. These states—extremes which both attract the West and provide a justification for its interventions and extremes which have come to dominate Western thinking about Africa—are repackaged throughout the novel as a means of achieving a deep, even profound, connection to other (Other) humans. The extreme beauty of Africa and the extreme suffering of its inhabitants work together to create a sublime experience of shared humanity, of humanity as a family. In her attempt to unearth Charity’s past by reading her journals, Zoë begins to feel that she knows Kuyeya’s mother, that they are “*sisters, [that] Kuyeya is family*” (*The Garden* 251, italics in original). This easy progression from familiarity to familial connection is also made possible through Kuyeya, the orphaned child with whom Zoë feels, from their first meeting, “a bond [...] that she could not explain” (*The Garden* 26). Kuyeya ultimately serves to unite those who are separated by time, place, past traumas and race because, like the extreme states of Africa, she offers an experience of the sublime. Before I turn towards the working of the child-figure in more detail, however, the novel’s setting requires further comment.

In addition to the exotic African fauna and flora, the social and judicial systems of Zambia are repeatedly reframed as homogeneously African. Even though much of the action takes place in Lusaka and the specific city is identified, using a subheading, at the beginning of each relevant chapter, the specificity of Lusaka is often replaced by the generalisation of ‘Africa’. In the opening lines of Chapter One, for instance, Lusaka is presented as a modernising city where the “beat of the drum [...] had been replaced in the cities by the throbbing insistence of electronic bass” (*The Garden* 15). The image here of a specific, 21st

century, urban space is undermined when it is stated that this raucous music is an ever-present feature of “African clubs” (*The Garden* 15, emphasis added). The reframing of the specific into the homogenous is seen again when Zoë’s efforts to get justice for Kuyeya in Zambia are described triumphantly, by an American senator, as her “[taking] on the African justice system” (*The Garden* 8, emphasis added). This last example is a significant aspect of the novel’s white-industrial-saviour complex because Zoë’s act of taking on the “African justice system” forms the central narrative, even though her contribution to the legal process of prosecuting Kuyeya’s rapist, Darius Nyambo, is severely limited. Kuyeya’s case is handled by a team of non-profit lawyers and social workers who, unlike Zoë, are part of the official Zambian judicial system; Zoë, as an American, cannot actually practice law in Zambia. Her contributions to the case—discovering who Kuyeya’s mother and father are and how the mother is connected to the rapist—are declared by the judge to be immaterial to the case against Darius. The process of discovering Kuyeya’s parentage is, nevertheless, the core of the narrative and this suggests that the novel has greater ambitions than simply being a legal thriller. This is a legal thriller with a conscience and Zoë’s presence and centrality in the novel is legitimised by the fact that she cares about Kuyeya. The novel’s conscience extends to Africa and even here the specific setting of Lusaka is useful. Zoë’s traversal of the city takes her along streets such as “Addis Ababa Drive”, “Haile Selassie Avenue”, “Cairo Road” and “Nyerere Road” (*The Garden* 65, 87, 29, 19)ⁱ, evoking the whole of ‘Africa’, as if she were moving through the continent. As the city of Lusaka is mapped with specific and repeated references to these streets, recognisable parts of Africa are conjured for the reader, making Lusaka representative of ‘Africa’. The novel’s conscience also extends to all of humankind in so far as humankind constitutes, and is constituted as, a family, a point which will become clearer as the discussion of the novel’s paratexts develops.

3.3.2. Paratexts: a definition

Genette’s work, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, is an attempt to define the paratext, bearing in mind the heterogeneous forms and functions of all that which counts as a paratext: the title, author’s name, any prefaces, illustrations, epigraphs, dedications, jacket covers, etc. of a work as well as interviews with the author and, I would add, official websites for or dedicated to the author and/or the work. For the purposes of this discussion paratexts can be defined, drawing on Genette, by their functions and by their characteristics. Firstly, the function of the paratext is determined by the fact that it is “a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself [the text]

that constitutes its *raison d'être*" (Genette 12). The paratext exists to serve the text but, as Genette also points out, the paratext also surrounds and extends the text "in order to *present* it" and "to *make* [the text] *present*" (1 emphasis in original). In other words, the text is served and shaped by the paratext; the former "does not exist and never has existed" (Genette 3) without the latter.⁶ Secondly, paratexts are characterised as transitional and transactional: a paratext is a liminal device which "controls one's whole reading of the text" (Philippe Lejeune qtd in Genette 2), which is stamped with "an authorial intention and assumption of responsibility" (Genette 3) and which, therefore, influences the public's reception of the work. Throughout his discussion, Genette works at defining various paratexts by asking certain questions of each one. Where is it located? When did it appear or disappear? What form does it take – verbal, written or other? Who is the sender and who is the recipient? What function does the paratext aim to fulfil? This final question is of particular relevance to the discussion of Addison's novel which follows.

3.3.3. The Author's Note

I start with the "Author's Note", which appears at the end of the novel, because it functions as the threshold which takes the reader from the world of the novel back into the "real" world. (It also clarifies the function of the paratexts which appear much earlier and which I discuss below.) But this "Author's Note" blurs that distinction by attributing to this fictional story a representative role: this is what Africa, or at least sub-Saharan Africa, is. Of equal importance is the end of the "Author's Note" which explains what "we" can do about it.

Addison's take on Africa—the continent of "astonishing beauty and heart-wrenching brokenness" ("The Story")—is not merely aesthetic; this novel is ultimately an appeal for humanitarian action. Addison begins the "Author's Note" by stating that even though "*The Garden of Burning Sand* is a work of fiction [...] it was inspired by *real* issues [...] and] Kuyeya's story offers an *authentic* glimpse into the horrifying world of child sexual assault in sub-Saharan Africa" (*The Garden* 419, emphasis added). Tellingly, the realness of these issues and the authenticity of Addison's representation are bolstered by his claims to moral and legal authority, as a father and as a lawyer. His performance of authority serves to legitimise the text which is set up as representative not of Zambia only but "countries like Zambia" (Addison, *The Garden* 419). The possibility of differences between sub-Saharan

⁶ Genette also argues that "paratexts without texts do exist, if only by accident" (Genette 3), citing works of which we know the title but nothing else because the texts have been lost. This particular paradox of the paratext is, however, not at issue here.

African countries implied by the word 'like' is squelched by the overwhelming representativeness attributed to this text and its characters as well as the authority with which the author appears to speak. Addison, for example, supports claims about "African children with intellectual disabilities" (*The Garden* 419, emphasis added) with statistics from Zambia.

Not only is this work of fiction inspired by real issues, it is also inspired by Addison's self-declared "love for Africa and its people" (*The Garden* 419). A love for Africa, as my discussion of the dedication below demonstrates, is the strongest driving force in this novel. But 'who loves what or whom and why' are questions which this novel fails to address. As already demonstrated, it is easy to love wild, exotic, fecund and beautiful Africa but why is it that a character such as Zoë loves Africans? The dedication and the epigraphs reveal that what inspires this love is the transformative power that Africa and African children offer. Importantly, this is not a transformative power that will unsettle the status quo or challenge the relationship of power that currently exists. Rather it transforms the Western individual and thereby inspires them to "maintain the spirit of magnanimity that has defined our relationship with the developing world for generations" (Addison, *The Garden* 420). The collective "our", which maintains the distinction between "us" and "them", reveals the intended audience of this novel as well as the agents of change. Addison ends his note by stating that "[i]t is up to all of us to ensure that [the continuation of foreign assistance] happens" (*The Garden* 420). Even though he includes the word "all", it is by now very clear that "us" does not in fact include "all". That privileged collective is limited to those who love Africa and not those who are African.

3.3.4. The Dedication

The dedication of *The Garden of Burning Sand* functions in two distinct but interrelated ways. First, it proclaims a problematically neat relationship between the innocent, African child in need of saving and the charitable aid worker and, second, it represents the African child as transformative. Genette argues that the "dedication always is a matter of demonstration, ostentation, [and] exhibition [in that] it proclaims a relationship" (135). Addison dedicates his novel "[to] the children of Africa who meet suffering with song [a]nd [to] the people of goodwill in every land who have not forgotten them". This dedication rests on a rather too neatly formulated relationship between the givers and receivers of goodwill which erases that unassimilable and troublesome figure: the heterogeneous, complex, capable and culpable African adult. As Wark argues, adult recipients of aid are rarely allowed in the world of

humanitarian appeals because “[t]here’s always the suspicion that they may be adulterated by impurities—such as politics” (Wark 40).⁷ In light of this absence of the African adult, the relationship set up between African children and people of goodwill in the epigraph is that of a parent and child.

For this to be possible, the “children of Africa” first have to be made orphans. The epigraph erases African parents and creates an absence which it then fills with those “people of goodwill in every land”: African children are the children of, or rather belonging to, the world (a world which clearly excludes African adults). In so far as the dedication—as a proclamation of a relationship—“is always at the service of the work” (Genette 135), it is significant that Kuyeya is an orphan, at least until Zoë discovers that her biological father is still alive. The fact that her biological mother’s name is Charity also literally makes Kuyeya the child of charity, ironically invoking but also erasing the biological mother.

Parent-child relationships are an important theme in the novel. Zoë has a strained relationship with her father, Jack, because he failed to respond justly when she, as a teenager, revealed to him that his business partner’s son had raped her; to preserve his business and ultimately political connections, he chooses to believe that Zoë misinterpreted what happened. Their differing stance on foreign aid—Zoë campaigns for the continuation of aid while her father’s political platform includes a drastic retrenchment of aid—becomes the battleground of this tension. Unsurprisingly, Kuyeya, both a rape survivor and a recipient of aid, provides the impetus for their reconciliation. This is made possible by Kuyeya functioning as a stand-in for Zoë: towards the end of the novel, Zoë confronts her father once again about his dismissal of her rape and offers him a “chance at redemption” (*The Garden* 391) by making the funds for a life-saving surgery that Kuyeya needs available. The compassion and guilt he fails to feel regarding his daughter is awakened by Kuyeya. By saving Kuyeya, he can redeem himself of his action, or lack of thereof, towards Zoë.

⁷ African adults are present in Addison’s novel and some are represented, albeit briefly, as resourceful and capable of operating in a modern world despite ever-present corruption. The Nyambo’s housekeeper, Anna, shows immense courage and provides Zoë with an important volume of Charity’s journal which she had taken from her employer’s bedroom (297); however, she is rendered child-like because she is completely dependent on Zoë and the Thompsons, “an Embassy couple” (Addison 292), for protection and a livelihood afterwards. At the end of the novel, Zoë regards Darius Nyambo’s mother, Patricia—a sitting High Court judge—in a new light when she realises that Patricia has betrayed her husband and her son, both of whom had a sexual relationship with Charity. Patricia uses her position to ensure that justice is done, thereby “salvaging the institution to which she had committed her life” (Addison 412). Examples such as these, however, do little to change the persistence of the white-saviour complex throughout the novel because they are little more than asides in relation to the narrative that the novel’s dedication sets up.

The key difference between Zoë and Kuyeya, based on Jack's refusal to believe his daughter, is that of innocence. Jack chooses not to believe his daughter because he claims it "wasn't clear what happened", while Zoë's stepmother argues that Zoë and the teenage boy "had a relationship [...] were infatuated with one another [...] and she] was certain they were having sex" (*The Garden* 389). It must be said that Addison offers a critique of victim-blaming, especially the notion that if a woman is sexually active with a man she cannot be raped by him. However, using Kuyeya as a stand-in for Zoë so that Jack might recognise his ethical failing as a father relies on the binary of innocence and (potential) culpability: there can be no doubt in Jack's mind that Kuyeya is an innocent victim; therefore, helping her offers him easy redemption for his failure to believe his daughter. Their reconciliation is symbolised in his meeting Kuyeya, where he squeezes her hand—"the hand that held Charity's ring"—and Zoë sees "a vision of the world that could be, the world of the possible" (*The Garden* 406). This world is one where people of goodwill—people like Zoë and eventually her father—save and are, in turn, redeemed by African children like Kuyeya. The performative nature of the relationship between African children and people of goodwill set up in the dedication is echoed here and this moment, functioning as one in a series of mini-climaxes, reveals the extent to which the dedication sets the moral tone of the novel. Genette argues that while

the dedication's directly economic function has disappeared, its patronage role or its role as moral, intellectual, or aesthetic backing has for the most part persisted: on the threshold or at the conclusion of a work, one cannot mention a person or thing as a privileged address without invoking that person or thing in some way [...] and therefore implicating the person or thing as a kind of ideal inspirer (136).

The dedication frames this moment of easy reconciliation and handholding as not only unproblematic but as ideal. It is untouched by the politics of power that inform aid as well as sexual violence and instead is presented as simply an African child and a person of goodwill connected by charity.

Another important theme in the novel, which is linked to the parent-child relationship, is that of inheritance. What keeps Zoë connected to her dead mother is their shared love for the continent. In the first description of her mother, Catherine, Zoë explains that "Africa was her [mother's] great love affair, and she had passed it on to Zoë. It might as well have been written into her will as a bequest" (Addison, *The Garden* 6). Zoë has inherited "her father's

near-sightedness”⁸—a “curse of Fleming genetics”—as well as his “extraordinary memory” (*The Garden* 27–8) but she has inherited her philanthropy and love for Africa from her mother. Not only is Africa objectified as needy, it is also objectified as something which one individual can pass on to another. Africa, the object of a love affair, personified yet unpeopled, is possessed and passed on, like DNA, from mother to daughter. In response to a comment that she “could almost pass for an African”, Zoë says that when Africa “gets in your blood there’s no reversing it” (*The Garden* 152). It is unclear what it is about Zoë that makes her “almost African” but spoken by Joseph Kabuta, the novel’s black voice of morality,⁹ these words are intended to be taken seriously. The absurdity of a white American telling a black African what African-ness feels like is, however, lost on the novel itself. Rather claims like this are bolstered by descriptions of Catherine and Zoë’s shared love for the continent. Zoë’s mother’s diamond ring carries the great weight of this symbolic inheritance. This diamond ring, which “Somalis had salvaged from the wreckage of her mother’s plane” (*The Garden* 12), was given to Zoë after her mother’s death. She in turn gives it, albeit temporarily, to Kuyeya in an attempt to quiet the traumatised girl. A mother-daughter lineage is referred to and continued when Zoë hands over the ring to the orphan child, saying to Kuyeya that it “was [her, i.e. Zoë’s] mommy’s” (*The Garden* 21). This mother-daughter lineage is given an African twist in it having been passed on to the daughter via the hands of the Somalis. Furthermore, her mother’s diamond ring is a vehicle for memories of Catherine and as Zoë says, holding “her hand to the sun, allowing the diamonds to catch the light”, “almost all of [her] memories of [Catherine] have something to do with Africa” (*The Garden* 155). The fact that Kuyeya’s name means memory (*The Garden* 273) draws a direct line from Catherine to Zoë to Kuyeya via the ring. Kuyeya is not only the embodiment of innocence nor is she simply the embodiment of the future because she not only carries the memories of the past, she transforms them.

3.3.5. The Epigraphs

The transformative power of African children who “meet suffering with song” introduced in the dedication is contextualised, and simultaneously decontextualized, in the two epigraphs which comprise two quotations: “A person is a person through other persons”, attributed to Desmond Tutu, and “The burning sand shall become a pool”, attributed to Isaiah the

⁸ It is important to note that this reference to being short-sighted is without irony; however, if one is to read ‘against the grain’ this character description is indicative of the shortfalls of the novel’s ideologies themselves.

⁹ This status is hinted at early on in the novel when he is described as “remind[ing] Zoë of the young Nelson Mandela” (Addison 16).

Prophet. Genette identifies the “most direct function” of the epigraph as “commenting [...] and thus elucidating and thereby justifying not the text but the *title*” (156, italics in original). He goes on to argue that the “use of the epigraph as a justificatory appendage of the title is almost a must when the title itself is a borrowing, an allusion, or a parodic distortion” (157). The second quotation is of obvious relevance here. The second function of the epigraph, according to Genette the “most canonical”, is that of “commenting on the *text*, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes” (Genette 157, italics in original). In this regard, both quotations are significant but, as I will demonstrate, this is particularly the case with the first.

The quotation from Tutu refers to *ubuntu*, which is commonly regarded as an African assertion of humanism. In the 22nd Raymond Dart Lecture (delivered in 1984 and published in 1986), Es'kia Mphahlele provides a general definition of humanism as “any philosophy that affirms the value and dignity of man [*sic*] as the centre of all things; its theme is human nature, including its limits and aspirations” (1). He offers a gloss of the development of European or “historical humanism” (Es'kia Mphahlele 5), citing the changing influence of Christianity which was eventually superseded by scientific thought. He then distinguishes European humanism from African humanism based on a variety of claims about the latter, for instance: social relationships are more important to African humanist morality than “any abstract notion of sin against God”; “Collective work” and “sharing” are important characteristics; “Man is at the centre of life” but “the plant, animal and human kingdoms form a sacred organic unity; “the African humanist loves life for its own sake and is not forever haunted by a sense of apprehension about the after-life” and; “Respect for elders” is a central tradition (9). Importantly, Mphahlele subsumes what is now referred to as *ubuntu* under African humanism. By way of explaining the claim that the plant, animal and human kingdoms are a unity, Mphahlele states that “[a]mong human beings we say, ‘I am because you are, you are because we are...’” (9). That Mphahlele does not conflate African humanism with *ubuntu* is significant because of his influence in understandings of African humanism itself. Mphahlele argues that “African humanism is not a philosophical contention that has been argued. It has never been a subject of analysis, but we have ample evidence of it as a *way of life*. The African lives it and *does not stand outside it to contemplate the process*” (10, emphasis added). The sum total of Mphahlele’s writing, in fact, constitutes just such a process of contemplation as it works towards and, one may argue, achieves a thorough development and refinement of the concept of African humanism (Rafapa, 2005). The concept of *ubuntu* has grown in prominence and received closer or more direct critical

attention in recent years. Mogobe Ramose asserts in “The Philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Ubuntu* as a Philosophy” that *ubuntu* is the “root” or “basis of African philosophy” (230). Working from the etymology of the word, he argues that *ubuntu* is both ontological and epistemological; it is “simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy” (230). The centrality to African philosophy that Ramose attributes to *ubuntu* is, however, not to be confused with a conflation of the two. As he argues, *ubuntu* “is always a –ness and not an –ism” (231).

I present these two discussions of African humanism and *ubuntu* not in order to offer a comprehensive summary of either term in so far as they are the product of academic work. I offer this gloss only to distinguish between such work and the populist use of the term: *ubuntu* has come to function as a synonym for African humanism and indeed African-ness. I aim to show how such a populist notion of *ubuntu* is made to serve the ideological purposes of Addison’s novel. My reason for not delving deeper into *ubuntu* as a philosophy, or a component of a philosophy, is two-fold: firstly, such an endeavour lies outside of the scope of this project and, secondly, as I will demonstrate, Addison does not use the maxim “a person is a person through other persons” in a philosophically serious way; he is not engaging with a philosophy, African or otherwise, but rather cashing in on a buzzword which signifies familiarity more than meaning.

In populist use the word *ubuntu* is used to suggest authority but does not secure it and it is used to convey meaning but only because of its paucity of meaning; it is for these reasons that *ubuntu* is used widely in various Western public spheres to serve various purposes. Before I turn to Addison’s use of the word, it is useful to consider three examples where *ubuntu* is used to suggest authority and/or convey meaning. First is a 2007 Denver Post article by Mark Kiszla in which the Boston Celtics basketball team is described as chanting *ubuntu* “when breaking a huddle” (no page). Second, is the documentary about Malawian orphans, *I Am Because We Are* (2008), written by Madonna and directed by Nathan Rissman. Third, there is US Special Representative for Global Partnerships, Elizabeth Frawley Bagley’s, swearing-in speech in which she refers to “Ubuntu Diplomacy” (2009). In the first example the team coach is described as “distribut[ing] handsome beaded bracelets emblazoned with an *exotic, powerful* word from the African Bantu language” (Kiszla, no page, emphasis added). Neither the coach nor the players offer an explanation of the significance of the word *ubuntu* for the team, choosing to keep it “in-house” (Kiszla, no page). This confers the sense of exoticism and mystic power attributed to the bracelet, which is drawn from stereotypical associations with Africa, on to the word itself. This Celtics’

ritual of handing out African bracelets and chanting *ubuntu* is placed in direct contrast, by Kiszla, with the rituals of “properly sports-crazed Bostonians” who are described as “lighting a candle [...] for their beloved Sox” (no page).

In the documentary and Bagley’s swearing-in speech, *ubuntu* is given authority through an association with Desmond Tutu; in turn, *ubuntu* is used to legitimise humanitarian aid and foreign diplomatic relations. Tutu, in a video clip from *I Am Because We Are*, which is on the documentary’s official website, provides an explanation of what *ubuntu* is and then connects it directly to humanitarian aid in a way that effectively erases the disjuncture in the relations of power inherent therein. In a documentary about *Malawian* orphans, Tutu explains how, despite all the “evil” in the world, “the Darfurs provide an incredible opportunity, which people take. Those people [from affluent parts of the world] go there to provide humanitarian aid” (“I Am Because We Are Official Website”). Structural violence and inequality is re-framed as “evil” and humanitarianism is represented as simply the goodwill of affluent people towards a homogeneously needy world in a way that takes no cognisance of how the cause of that need is inextricably caught up in the processes which generate that Western wealth. The goodwill of these affluent people is what Tutu offers up as an example of *ubuntu*. In her swearing-in speech, Bagley explains *ubuntu* using a quotation from Tutu, which is very similar to the one used by Addison: “As Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes this perspective, ubuntu ‘is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am a human because I belong. I participate. I share.’ In essence, I am because you are” (no page). It is important to note that Bagley places her use of *ubuntu* in the context of Hillary Clinton’s repeated references to another African saying as a model for foreign relations, both diplomatic and humanitarian: “It takes a village to raise a child”.

While it is certainly important to note how Africa is exoticised by the Boston Celtics team and how Tutu makes Darfur representative of all places in humanitarian crisis, it is also important to take note of how *ubuntu* acquires its meaning *in situ* across these three examples. *Ubuntu* is both a usable alternative to Western Catholic sports ritual and a diplomatic alternative to Western liberal humanism. The viability of *ubuntu* as an alternative seems to be situated in the fact that *ubuntu* is regarded as “distinctly African” (Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory” 375) and as “present[ing] an interesting contrast to what is dominant in Western ethics” (Metz, “Toward” 340). *Ubuntu* is seen as a solution to the crisis of Western culture and liberal humanism based on its African-ness, that is to say, its Otherness (this is a point to which I will return at the end of this chapter). The Otherness of the concept, coupled with its malleability, makes *ubuntu* a liminal idea, a means of traversing the divide

between “the West and the Rest”. Secondly, the association between Tutu and *ubuntu*, which in Addison’s novel and elsewhere is the attribution of the latter to the former, is prevalent in the texts discussed here but also more broadly. This association is key in understanding the workings of the epigraph to Addison’s novel.

There is an association between Tutu and *ubuntu*, evident in the use of the term in Western public spheres, which has become so pervasive it seems intrinsic, or natural. Arguably due to the global interest in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Tutu’s public and central role therein, Tutu’s definition or understanding of *ubuntu* has become the definitive one, such that the complexity of the concept has been reduced to little more than a catchphrase. It is, however, a catchphrase which is in turn saturated with great moral weight and with significant ideological purpose. This is also an amorphous morality and ideology *because* of its association with Tutu. It is this association between Tutu, as a moral personage, and *ubuntu*, as “authentic” African concept, which Addison uses to confer authority on to what is a philosophically thin text and to smooth over the ideologically problematic approach it takes. Throughout this section it is important to take cognisance of the fact that “very often the main thing [about an epigraph] is not what it says but who its author is, plus the sense of indirect backing that its presence at the edge of the text gives rise to” (Genette 159). Tutu is a black, public figure made ‘safe’ and agreeable through incorporation.¹⁰ Tutu, or rather the figure of Tutu, is a de-radicalised and consumable figure: a paragon of universal love, peace and forgiveness. Held up as an exemplar of goodness, Tutu is often made child-like. In Tutu, the public figure, we have an African face which, like African children, appeals to all because his message is framed as being universal even though it is ideologically Christian. In other words, in Tutu we have the promise of the transcendent packaged in an easy sort of Africanism, masquerading as universalism. As a public figure, he has been made malleable and useful in so far as the message is a de-politicised one of reconciliation simply through love which does not take account of inequality or violence as being material, structural and systemic.

Unsurprisingly then, Tutu’s *ubuntu* as formulated by Metz, is that of “a basic obligation to promote harmonious relationships and to prevent discordant ones” (“Toward” 341) where harmony can be thought of in terms of “a broad sense of ‘love’” (“Toward” 337). Significantly, Metz describes this broad sense of love as the combination of “shared identity” and “good-

¹⁰ I am not suggesting that Tutu was ever truly radical in his views or actions, being limited by the doctrines of the Anglican Church; however when Tutu is used in Western discourse it is rarely, if ever, the Tutu who, for instance, denounced Reagan, calling him “the pits as far as black people are concerned” (“Tutu Denounces Reagan”).

will” (“Toward” 337). While my intention here is not to offer a critique of Metz’s formulation of *ubuntu*, his explication of an “African Moral Theory” using Tutu’s *ubuntu* as the “favoured account” (“Toward an African Moral Theory” 334) is useful for making sense of Addison’s use of Tutu and *ubuntu*. As my discussion of Zoë and Jack’s relationship in the previous section shows, reconciliation is a central theme of the novel and the African child-figure is the impetus for that reconciliation. What the epigraph indicates is that reconciliation (that is, the promotion of harmonious relationships) in the novel is to be read through a peculiarly African lens, even though, as the novel makes clear, reconciliation is the product of the agency of charitable white Americans. The reference to *ubuntu* is a way to imbue the novel’s ideology of magnanimous charity with African-ness, to offer what appears to be an alternative. It is, however, an African-ness that remains familiar and usable; *ubuntu* and its attribution to Tutu serve to represent the text’s ideology as peculiarly African and universally human, when in fact it is Western and Christian.

The projection of a universal, yet Africanised, humanism is bolstered throughout the novel through the use of epigraphs at the beginning of the prologue and each of the five parts of the novel.¹¹ While the epigraphs function, on one hand, as a straightforward reference to the main event or plot development of that section, on the other hand, in the same way as the main epigraphs do, they serve to specify and emphasise the meaning of the text as a whole. For instance, the prologue depicts the night of Kuyeya’s rape as well as the senate hearing which Zoë attends and which marks the point of crisis for her personally and politically. This is also the beginning and climax of the novel’s humanitarian message; it is the moment in the novel when “generosity itself is on the gallows” (*The Garden* 7). Not only does the juxtaposition of these two moments reinforce the problematically neat relationship between African child victims and white Western saviours which the dedication establishes,¹² it also suggests that the solution to child rape in Zambia is the continuation of American generosity, which the “Author’s Note” states explicitly. The prologue’s epigraph serves to connect Kuyeya and Zoë narratively and metaphysically: Zoë is the end lost interminably in Kuyeya’s beginning; therefore, it is in Kuyeya, the African child-figure that she finds herself again and again. The final epigraph reflects the novel’s denouement in which Darius Nyambo is found guilty of the crime of defilement, Kuyeya receives life-saving

¹¹ Prologue: “I am the end of the tunnel lost in my beginning”, Dambudzo Marechera; Part One: “The night comes with its breath of death”, Anonymous; Part Two: “A clear conscience fears no accusation”, African proverb; Part Three: “The love of power is the demon of men”, Friedrich Nietzsche; Part Four: “An angel rides in the whirlwind”, John Page; Part Five: “That which is good is never finished”, African proverb.

¹² This includes the gamut of stereotypical humanitarian figures: the activist with a deep love for Africa, the well-meaning politicians and the philanthropic movie star.

surgery and Zoë vows, in the closing lines, to return to Africa. Darius's conviction and Zoë's actions, and those of people like her father and Jan Kruger, are the "good" to which the epigraph refers but the necessity of the continuation of that good is not only reflected in Zoë's vow but also in the plea for the continuation of charity in the "Author's Note" which follows.

As with the epigraph to the novel as a whole, the significance of these epigraphs lies less in their content and more in the authors to which they are attributed. In fact, it is the diversity of authors (a Zimbabwean writer, a German philosopher, and an American statesman) coupled with the lack of identifiable, individual authors (the inclusion of African proverbs and an anonymous quotation) which give these epigraphs their effect. In the case of the first—the named authors—it is the mere presence of these notable figures of history, literature and thought that gives the text authority. In the same way that the simple presence of an epigraph, regardless of its content, acts as a sign designating the novel's cultural value by inserting it into an established tradition, what Genette calls the "epigraph-effect" (160), the presence of Dambudzo Marechera, Friedrich Nietzsche and John Page "is a signal (intended as a *sign*) of culture, a password of intellectuality" (Genette 160 italics in original). The culture or tradition into which Addison attempts to insert his novel is that of humanity. None of these epigraphs are contextualised: no date or textual source is indicated in any of the epigraphs. These quotations therefore appear to float freely as if they are not the products of people located within specific historical, political, ideological or cultural milieus; they are merely the products of humanity. The sense of non-specific human wisdom is echoed by the epigraph attributed to an anonymous figure and particularly the use of proverbs. Paremiologist, Arvo Krikman, argues that proverbs can only be properly analysed within their specific context because of their "'semantic indefiniteness' [...] that results from their hetero-situativity, poly-functionality and poly-semanticity" (Krikman qtd in Mieder 13). The reader's ability to apprehend or even encounter the proverbs used by Addison in a context-sensitive manner is made both possible and impossible by the designation of the proverbs as simply "African". Without any indication from which African culture(s) these sayings originate, these proverbs function as both "linguistic and cultural 'monumenta humana'" (Mieder 1) and items of an amorphous African wisdom; they are "universally applicable piece[s] of folk wisdom" (Mieder 5). These African proverbs are then peculiarly African and also universally human instances of wisdom.

The significance of the epigraphs at the start of each section in relation to the novel and its humanitarian message is the transformation of that which is specific into that which

is general because “[b]y associating an actual situation with a metaphorical proverb, the particular matter is generalised into a common occurrence of life” (Mieder 12). In other words, not only is Kuyeya representative of African children, nor is Zambia only representative of Africa but the events of the novel are made, through the use of these epigraphs, representative of a much broader occurrence of life, that is, humanity in general. The epigraphs are a representation, at the level of the paratext, of one of the novel’s main ideological contentions: *E Pluribus Unum*. Zoë reflects on this, the motto of the U.S., at the senate hearing and recalls that her mother had been fond of this saying, claiming it was a “motto for the world, not a nation alone” (*The Garden* 11). Zoë reiterates this sentiment when she describes “America and the globalizing world as a melting pot united by more than the sum of what divides us” (*The Garden* 375). As a counter to this “utopian” sentiment, Zoë, recognising what she calls the “age-old distinctions in human society”, claims that she does not “believe that the world should become homogeneous, but she [does] believe passionately in two notions—justice and generosity” (*The Garden* 375). Despite claims to a rejection of homogeneity, the world is subsumed by America and its already homogenising “melting pot”. This uncritical understanding of American ideology finds support in the notion that distinctions in human society are not historical and cannot be viewed as products of specific societies and their ideologies. Zoë, in her appeal to the committee, promptly jettisons justice in favour of generosity because “[u]nlike justice, generosity isn’t hard to define” (*The Garden* 375). Justice requires an investigation of history, a critical engagement with ideology and an understanding that nothing is ahistorical or universal; generosity only requires that some be needy so that others can be generous.

Addison generates one ideology—humanism/humanitarianism—and one context—humanity—out of the many ideologies and contexts to which the many epigraphs refer and from which they are drawn. Deborah Bowen, in her discussion of the use of epigraphs in John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, notes that “late-twentieth-century plural texts” are examples of how the epigraph’s “transgressive potential may be realized in meanings that exceed or even contradict those of the text” (69). This is because the epigraph is authored by someone other than that of the novel, “thus formalizing the notion of the ‘intertextual event’ and consciously admitting a polyphony of voices” (Bowen 69). However, whereas Fowles’s text is a “renegotiation of realism” (Bowen 72) and a playful interrogation of the ‘author as God’, Addison claims real-ness for his text by making it representative, most explicitly in the “Author’s Note”; he cannot justify his call for action if what he has

represented is not 'real'. In *The Garden of Burning Sand* any plurality of voices is intended to signify the unity of humanity.

3.3.6. Traversing the Disjuncture: the return of the child

As stated above, populist notions of *ubuntu* offer the West something 'distinctly African'; it is an antidote to Western philosophy or thought. As a consequence, in Addison's novel, the epigraphs and the "Author's Note" occupy the same text rather awkwardly because while the former uses *ubuntu* and a vague sense of humanity to project an Africanised universality, the latter remains firmly entrenched in the Western concept of the individual. The use of the former is an attempt to reach for an alternative to what the latter proposes at the close of the novel. The exclusionary collective—the "we" and the "us" to which Addison gives all the agency in the "Author's Note"—bears much of the weight of this contradiction but it is the figure of the child which ameliorates it. Because we have all been children and that experience carries with it a certain universality, the liminal and malleable child-figure traverses that disjuncture between that "us" and those who are not included in the collective, thus smoothing over the fissure. While Addison explicitly makes the child-figure the lynchpin of his appeal in the "Author's Note", I want to turn to a brief but revealing moment in the novel itself where the child-figure is used to smooth over, or rather draw attention away from, the incompatibility of the novel's ideologies.

At the end of "Part Three", Zoë is conflicted about whether or not she should continue her relationship with Joseph because he has revealed that he is HIV positive. A memory from her past, however, provides the clarity that she needs and she decides to continue with the relationship. It is this memory which is symptomatic of the novel as a whole:

Suddenly, [Zoë] remembered something from the past, something her mother had told her at an Ethiopian orphanage surrounded by malnourished children wearing irrepressible grins: '*Life is a broken thing. It's what we do with the pieces that defines us*' (*The Garden of Burning Sand* 269, italics in original).

Here memory is reconciliatory because not only is this memory a link between Zoë and her mother but it is the basis for Zoë and Joseph's reconciliation. Significantly, it is revealed on the very next page that Kuyeya's name means 'memory', reinforcing her dual roles as reconciler and representative of all needy children and, therefore, of both humanity's plight and salvation. There is the inspiring, orphaned child in the background who, despite or rather because of enormous suffering, is transformative for those who operate, have agency, in the foreground. There is the adage, which masquerades as ahistorical and universal

wisdom, positioned textually next to the Ethiopian orphans who, as a collective, have a specific social and political history but are themselves rendered ahistorical. That this is an *Ethiopian* orphanage is significant only in so far as Ethiopia is overwhelmingly associated with starving, desperate orphans; this detail is not intended to convey a history or context of structural or systemic violence, rather it is intended to convey an image, an aesthetic. There is the Western individualist ideology of triumph over hardship simply because of individual strength. This ideology is reframed as a universal, human truth with no cognisance of that hardship which is not individual and which cannot be eliminated through sheer individual perseverance. This universal, human truth is legitimised by its Africanisation: if Ethiopian orphans can have irrepressible grins then “we” all can overcome “our” suffering.

3.4. Conclusion

The child-figure is productive in both Kingsolver’s and Addison’s texts in ways which, on the surface, may seem very different but these differences are details which are subsumed by the greater power of the child-figure. Both texts invest in the child-figure because of that figure’s malleability, universality and liminality. The child, along with ‘Africa’, populist notions of *ubuntu* and the figure of Tutu, provide the novels with vessels which can be filled with their own ideologies and which, simultaneously, smooth over the rifts that exist in the texts’ projection of a peculiarly African, universally human reconciliation, redemption and transcendence. The ambiguity of the child-figure—that it can be a form of resistance as well as a the reason for maintaining the status quo—is what gives these texts their potential for disruption and that which allows these texts to become part of the structures they seek to challenge. What Kingsolver’s and Addison’s use of the child-figure, in conjunction with the structure and paratexts of the respective texts, indicates is that these novels are, despite what they may proclaim, not committed to justice. At the very least, they struggle to remain committed to justice because of their desire to transcend the structures of injustice. What I have demonstrated is that it is necessary to confront the structures of injustice in order for justice to be possible and that, as a consequence, these two novels fail to offer the justice they promise.

Chapter Four

Inconstant Genres and Third World Eyes: Fernando Mereilles' *The Constant Gardener*

Movies belong to genres much the way people belong to families or ethnic groups.

Richard T. Jameson, *They Went Thataway* (1994: ix)

'[Arnold] Bluhm's as close as you'll ever get to a *good man*,' she insisted, as if *good man* were a finite condition like *Homo sapiens*.

John le Carré, *The Constant Gardener* (2001/2011, 99 italics in original)

4.1. Introduction

An assumption of belonging underpins many discussions and critiques of “Africa films”. This has much to do with the fact that these films, which tell stories about ‘Africa’ (or simply, using ‘Africa’), are visually and conceptually conventional and are, therefore, treated as genre films. “Africa films” do arguably constitute a genre and (even though it is not one of the “classic, bedrock genres” to which Jameson refers in the epigraph if one mentions or begins to describe, say, *Blood Diamond*, *The Last King of Scotland* or *Beasts of No Nation*, “even the most casual moviegoer will come up with a mental image of it, partly visual, partly conceptual” (Jameson ix). The white saviour (*Blood Diamond*), the African dictator (*The Last King of Scotland*) and the African child-soldier (*Beasts of No Nation*) are but some of the tropes which pervade “Africa films” made over the last few decades. Such tropic figures appear in conventional landscapes—whether jungle, savannah or over-crowded ‘shanty towns’—and follow familiar, exotic narratives of savagery, violence and corruption. Critics (Calhoun 2007; Mayer 2002; Cameron 1994; Keim 2014) have rightly focused on the stereotypes employed in representations of the continent. In earlier work, such as that by Cameron, the result is a catalogue of colonialist tropes and films that employ them most emblematically; this was a necessary step. Subsequently, however, criticism of Western cinematic (and televisual) representations of Africa has to a large degree not moved beyond identifying and commenting on these well-worn stereotypes. This is understandable in so far as Western “Africa films” have themselves not stopped relying on these stereotypes. Such an approach is also, however, limiting for two reasons. Firstly, it tends to treat individual films a- or uni-historically, even as the negation or flattening out of history in such films is

noted and criticised. This has resulted in studies of “Africa films” being solely focused on colonial and neo-colonial discourse. Even in more recent studies of representations of Africa in the context of humanitarianism (see Higgins 2012 for instance), the scope is limited to whether or not “Africa films” reproduce or subvert colonial narratives. Secondly, the existing approach fails to take account of these films—individually or collectively—as instances of other genres. Consequently, when looking across texts which are labelled definitively as “Africa films”, similarities between films are foregrounded and those aspects of any one film which do not quite follow the convention are necessarily ignored.

These limitations are a consequence of the treatment of the genericity of “Africa films” along the same lines as traditional film genre theory. In other words, the problem is not that “Africa films” cannot be regarded as—or treated as if it were—a genre but rather that the usefulness of doing so depends on how genre is understood. In his re-examination of genre, Rick Altman (1999) outlines ten ideas which form the basis for what is generally understood by the notion of film genre. These ideas relate to the usefulness of genre, who defines genres, the role of the critic and what the characteristics or nature of genre and its function(s) are. Pointing out the surprising coherence of film genre theory (as opposed to literary genre studies), Altman sums up these ideas as follows:

According to this account, the film industry, responding to audience desires, initiates clear-cut genres that endure because of their ability to satisfy basic human needs. While they do change in predictable ways over the course of their life, genres nevertheless maintain a fundamental sameness both from decade to decade and from production through exhibition to audience consumption. Guaranteeing the broad applicability of generic concepts is the broad range of meanings attributed to the term genre, along with the conduit-like nature of textual structure. Seen from the vantage point of the distanced critic, genres at times appear to function ritually, and at other moments to operate ideologically. (29)

Altman, in the chapters that follow, goes on to re-examine the validity of the ideas underpinning the theory by attending to the history of film genre, with a focus on contextual aspects such as the production and marketing of films. The two core concerns for this chapter that emerge from Altman’s précis of genre theory are the stability of genre borders in general and the positioning of any individual film within a single, stable genre. Taken together, these concerns relate to the problem of generic mixing or what Celestino Deleyto identifies as the “idea of belonging” (Deleyto 220). The problem of belonging is central to my reading of Fernando Mereilles’ film, *The Constant Gardener* (2005), an adaptation of John le Carré’s 2001 novel of the same title. *The Constant Gardener* has often been included in

discussions of “Africa films” and, while I agree that it employs a number of the stereotypes typical of the genre, I argue that a reading of the film only through the lens of African stereotypes fails to take note of an ambivalence, or even anxiety, that permeates the film and which the film’s DVD paratext attempts to settle. This ambivalence—the problem of belonging—emerges when one notes moments that do not fit the conventional “Africa film” narrative; these are moments that may not quite disrupt the stereotypes but which shake up the singularity of the force attributed to them even as they are employed. I will demonstrate that this problem is expressed—and can consequently be examined—through the film’s generic multiplicity. The theoretical underpinning for such a conception of genre will be outlined before I offer my reading of Meirelles’ film but first, it is necessary to provide a summary reflecting the range of responses to the film (and the novel to a limited extent). I do so, in part, to reflect the multiple definers of a genre. “Africa films” is a genre identified as such by film scholars and critics, a group often regarded as distanced from the process of genre construction (Altman 1999). To read *The Constant Gardener* as an instance of “Africa films” is then to (re)assert the importance of the critics to genre. However, to only read it as such is to swing too far in the opposite direction of traditional film genre theory.

4.1.1. Critical Responses to *The Constant Gardener*

Critical responses to Meirelles’ *The Constant Gardener* can be divided into three broad, inter-related foci: its representation of Africa, the plot of the film (and to a large extent of the novel), and the film’s activism. What these three foci result in, broadly speaking, are criticisms of the lack of African agency in the film as well as the narrative focus on the love story between the two main characters, Justin and Tessa Quayle, and, more positively, praise for the film’s (and the novel’s) representation of “Big Pharma” and its abuses. To organise the critical responses to *The Constant Gardener* as I have done above is not intended to suggest that critics are in total agreement over the film. There are significant differences in the positions taken, which I will outline below.

Le Carré provides an extensive disclaimer at the end of *The Constant Gardener* (2001), regarding the correlation of the characters, institutions and events described in the novel to that of the real world. While he downplays, perhaps ironically, the potential for corruption by actual British officials, he earnestly emphasises the severity of the abuses of pharmaceutical companies: “by comparison with the reality, [his] story [is] as tame as a

holiday postcard” (578).¹ It is *The Constant Gardener’s* representational and material activism which is praised most widely. With regards to the film’s representational activism, Marcia Angell (2005), Jeanner Lenzer (2005) and Anthony Robbins (2006) affirm the veracity of le Carré’s and Meirelles’ representations of drug company practices. Robbins goes so far as to applaud and thank the novel and the film for “[doing] more to present the pharmaceutical industry’s obstacles to improving health in developing countries than [...the Journal of Public Health Policy] can with one hundred articles or that all health and science journals can in a year” (212). Angell is more measured in her response. She claims that the novel’s success lies in its explanation of the ins-and-outs of pharmacological research, how unethical practices are allowed in the Third World, and how global economic and political inequality are the causes of the problem. In contrast, she claims that the film fails to explain these crucial details, leaving viewers to conclude that the practices portrayed on screen “are wildly implausible [and] in no way representative of real drug company behaviour” (no page). Wallace Katz, in his review of “explicitly political films”, extends the film’s representation of pharmaceutical practice to include “corporate globalisation”, when he argues that the film offers the viewer “an intricate understanding of the global system that dominates and simultaneously destroys our world” (107).

The veracity of the film, which is at the core of its representational activism, is located not only in the claims which Meirelles, and le Carré before him, are regarded as making but also in the documentary style of the film. In other words, the film’s representational activism requires the impression that what is seen on screen is somehow unmediated, or at the very least ‘real’. “[T]echniques of cinema verité, docu-fiction, and the new journalism on a broad scale”, popular since the 1980s, have the effect of “both authenticating fiction and fictionalizing authenticity” (Mayer 182). Jessica Winter, in a 2005 review for *Sight and Sound*, places *The Constant Gardener* in the context of the intersection of documentary and fiction film. She argues that while there is no fiction film counterpart to the activist documentary, there has been growing studio interest in the “front-page travails of sub-Saharan Africa” (50). Le Carré calls the film a “‘semi documentary’ that can fill a ‘documentary/fictional gap in human knowledge’ created by the ‘inanities of received information as it is transmitted to us now’” (le Carré qtd in Lenzer 462). The placement of *The Constant Gardener* in the intersection of fiction and documentary has as much to do with the purported influence on le Carré of Pfizer’s testing of harmful drugs in Kano, Nigeria,

¹ This quotation is included in the film’s closing credits, appearing above le Carré’s name.

as it does with the film's aesthetic and location (see Laurier for a brief outline of this influence). While Meirelles' uses unnatural colour tones, which highlights the film's artifice, he also employs choppy editing and handheld cameras which create the look of 'real life', even while drawing attention to the frame and the existence of a camera. This is most notable when Tessa (Rachel Weisz) is seen moving through Kibera, interacting with the local inhabitants. The overall effect is paradoxical: a sense of mediated immediacy or self-conscious immersion.

The two stars of the film, Ralph Fiennes and Rachel Weisz, ascribe the authenticity of the film to the fact that it was filmed in Kibera, Kenya, where the story is set. Weisz seems to echo the notion that the film occupies a position in the world of non-fiction when she claims, in the DVD bonus feature "Embracing Africa: Filming in Kenya", that "it wasn't a film set. It was Kibera. And they weren't film extras. They were the kids from Kibera" (Mansi, *Embracing Africa*). For Weisz, the importance of filming in Kibera is that *The Constant Gardener* is, as a result, a story about Kenya, and not as some critics have argued, a story about white, British people who happen to be in Kenya. In his review for the *New Yorker*, Anthony Lane (2005) is less optimistic about this claim to authenticity, noting that while the novel makes it clear that "this is a Kenyan story, [...] the film seems diffuse on the matter, and many viewers leaving the theatre will struggle to name the location" (161). Lane's short review is noteworthy for its consideration of the film's "fervid rebuke" (161) to the West's treatment of Africa alongside an awareness of its problematically vague setting which suggests that "Meirelles wants to tell an all-Africa tale of woe" (161). Rod Amner (2009) echoes Lane in his review when he notes that while the makers of *The Constant Gardener* contributed materially to Kibera,² on the representational level it remains guilty of reinforcing stereotypes about Africa. The film's most noted transgression in its representation of Kenya and Kenyans is that the former is reduced to a mere backdrop while the latter are represented as having no agency. Grace Musila ("Representations of Africa" 2008) and Christopher Odhiambo Joseph (2012) both argue that *The Constant Gardener* might first appear to offer a view of Africa that is more sensitive but that the film ultimately reflects the usual process of othering the African continent, typical of Hollywood films. This is a result of the tension between the film's activism and its stereotypical representation of Africa. As Joseph argues, "it is by deliberately emphasizing the derelict image of Africa that this film

² Amner is referring here to the trust set up by the cast and crew of *The Constant Gardener*. In the DVD bonus feature, "Embracing Africa: Filming in Kenya", much is also made of the bridge that was constructed in Kibera by the film construction crew. The combination of the bridge and the use of the residents of Kibera as extras in the film is seen by its makers as a process of building literal and symbolic bridges with the local community.

ends up undermining its own apparently well-meaning intervention enterprise against Western global capitalism and its attendant acts of greed and exploitation of third world nations” (97). Rachel Stein (2010) follows a similar line of critique when she argues that “Mereilles’s film remains safely within a colonialist viewpoint even as it exposes the assumptions of the colonizers” (103). Diana Adesola Mafe (2011) takes a slightly different tack, arguing that *The Constant Gardener* “resists the visual exoticisation of Africa so common in both British and US cinema” (73) but, due to its reliance on archetypal imperialist characters, the film fails to offer up a different version or vision of Africa.

Finally, the love story between Justin and Tessa is contested terrain. In existing discussions of the novel and film, Justin and Tessa’s relationship is evaluated according to its narrative and political functions. In what are very brief reviews, Stuart Klawans (2005) and Bill Ott (2002), reviewing the film and the novel respectively, argue that the love story is the central plot point and, therefore, what drives both texts. For Klawans, this means that “[a]t the heart of this political story, and so of the critical difficulties, lies a human problem” (42). For Ott, Justin is simply and only motivated by love. In contrast, for Joanne Laurier (2005) the love story is the weakest element in the film, although she does not elaborate on the point at all. Picking up on the political implications of the film’s love story, in what is a more sustained engagement with the film, Joseph takes the position that Justin and Tessa’s romantic relationship functions to distract the viewer from the political. Not only does the Quayle romance “[divert] the attention of the viewer from the narrative of vulgar Western capitalist exploitation”, it also “ensures that Tessa remains within the center of the film’s frame long after her death” (Joseph 99). Interestingly, while Klawans and Ott see the love story as the central narrative drive, Joseph categorises it as a “romance subplot” (99). Todd McGowan (2011) sees the romantic as a means to the political; for him, it is Justin’s love for Tessa which politicises him, making romance the “vehicle for political awakening rather than the path [...] to an apolitical retreat” (113). McGowan’s position is based on a psychoanalytic reading of the film’s editing and a Heideggerian reading of time.³ For him *The Constant Gardener* is an example of atemporal cinema, through which Meirelles “enact[s] the politicisation of romance” (111). McGowan’s discussion of Mereilles’s film is important because of its careful reading of the film’s structure but it is also problematic due to its reliance on, and re-inscription of, “the difference between a masculine logic of the whole constituted through the exception and the feminine logic of incompleteness” (McGowan 119).

³ McGowan’s chapter on *The Constant Gardener* is particularly important for its focus on editing, seeing as this striking aspect of the film is repeatedly mentioned by critics but not examined closely.

In other words, McGowan's psychoanalytic approach undermines the political reading he offers because it is essentialist in problematically gendered ways. Furthermore, his political reading using psychoanalysis depends upon an apolitical conception of the human psyche as pre-social and therefore pre-political.

What emerges from these discussions are a number of tensions and questions. Firstly, the relationship between authenticity and veracity, or 'realness' and 'truth', is complicated. While *The Constant Gardener* is regarded as representing or revealing the truth of pharmacological abuses in Africa, there is less agreement over whether its representation of Africa is authentic or truthful. Is it possible to represent the unethical practices of 'Big Pharma' in Africa truthfully when the truthfulness of the representation of the continent is in doubt? Is authenticity, in this case, the same thing as truth (if truth is even possible)? Weisz, Fiennes and Simon Channing-Williams, the film's producer, seem to think so (Mansi, *Embracing Africa*). This tension between authenticity and veracity is, in part, a result of the problems embedded in attempts to tell specific stories within the context of a globalised world. Is the truthfulness of the story of Kenya (or more broadly and problematically, Africa) necessarily sacrificed in the telling of the story about the West's exploitation of Kenya? If the story is global in so far as 'Big Pharma' and all the other 'Big Industries' exploit a number of Third World nations and peoples, is there space for the specificity of Kenya? Or is Kenya simply and necessarily a representative victim? Considered from another perspective, how does the setting of Kenya (or a generalised Africa) reshape the global story? This tension between authenticity and veracity is also a result of genre. Taken together the responses outlined above reveal the extent to which Mereilles' film occupies, participates in and moves between genres. The film is classified, on *The Internet Movie Database*, as a drama, mystery and romance. The novel from which it is adapted is a thriller. The inevitable death of both characters due to corporate powers necessitates the inclusion of modern tragedy and the look of the film is at times that of the documentary.⁴ Alongside the official and obvious genres, there are the following narratives, which in their recognisability function generically: the humanitarian narrative, the white-saviour narrative and the social problem film. As Steve Neale (2000) explains, genre relies on recognition which is based on the viewer's expectations, which are in turn based on a body of knowledge necessary for understanding. As such, genre is made possible through

⁴ Like feature films, documentaries appear in a number of modes or sub-genres and there are at least three at work in Mereilles' film: cinema verité as already mentioned, the poetic, which is reflected in the non-linear structure of the film, and the expository, which is part and parcel of the mystery and conspiracy at the centre of the film. Bill Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) provides a useful discussion of these modes.

an adherence to “various regimes of verisimilitude” (Neale 28); that is, the appearance of plausibility, probability and truthfulness. A film which participates in a number of genres will necessarily reflect a variety of generic truths, complicating any remaining notion of a film’s veracity in its relation to an authentic or real object.

Secondly, what is to be made of the tension between the lauding of helping Africa alongside the criticisms of representations of the continent as being in need of help? Would a Western film which works to positively impact on the local crew and community, alleviating need in the process, but which does not represent that community as being in need avoid committing the mistakes that, according to Joseph and Musila, *The Constant Gardener* makes? Would such a film be any less disingenuous, untruthful or ideologically problematic? Can material and representational activism be separated in films set in “Africa”? Should they be separated? Finally, is it possible for romantic love to be a means of politicisation? Or is it unavoidably apolitical, a distraction from the political? What if that romantic plot ends in tragedy? Can a turn to tragedy—which brings us back to genre—return us to the political? More specifically, what are the requirements for, and contours of, politicized love (tragic or not) in mainstream, transnational films? What might the outcome of such a politicised romance be for the traditionally misrepresented and/or underrepresented masses?

The full range of these questions is outside of the scope of this chapter and this project as a whole. My focus will be on a specific intersection of some of these concerns, specifically in Meriilles’ film. Broadly speaking, my argument is structured around the film’s participation in multiple genres as well as processes of adaptation. This is not to dismiss the stereotypical representation of Africa in this film but, rather, to read these stereotypical aspects alongside characters, sequences, or scenes in the film which do not conform to type or which relate to the stereotype in a way that complicates it. The centrality of Justin and Tessa’s love story is central to this discussion; however, I want to move beyond the often too-neat separation of, or distinction between, the political and love. I aim to trace the film’s navigation between the political and the romantic with the following in mind: both the political and love (including romantic love) are structures of relationality. While these two concerns inform my discussion of genre, the first—stereotypical representations of Africa—is also central to my discussion of the film as adaptation. However, I will not be conducting a point-for-point comparison between le Carré’s novel and Meriilles’ film nor will I ignore fidelity. Questions of fidelity, so important to Justin’s initial motivations, are not framed here in terms of fidelity discourse, which so often limits the analysis of adaptations. Rather fidelity will be read more broadly in terms of the film’s relation to its most sustained intertext—‘Africa’. This relation between text

and intertext will be discussed by focusing on the film's "author function" (Foucault 1984), which is constructed in the paratexts ('making of' documentaries, or MODs, included on the DVD) of the film. The thread that runs through the rest of this chapter is that of the structures of relation and relationality between Justin and Tessa, Tessa and Africa, Justin and Africa, the film and Africa, the film and its director, and the director and Africa. First, however, it is necessary to position these instances of relation within the broader concepts of adaptation and genre.

4.1.2. Adaptation

I use, as a starting point, Linda Hutcheon's "doubled definition of adaptation" (2006: 22), where adaptation is both a product and a process. I will examine *The Constant Gardener* in its status as adaptation and its role as adapter. Such an approach allows the film to be seen as an adaptation of le Carré's novel without limiting the discussion to that of fidelity discourse. Secondly, and consequently, it opens the discussion up to considerations of how the film is itself involved in a process of adaptation, creating a text which is both a new version of the adapted text and something quite different.⁵ As an alternative to fidelity discourse, Hutcheon and biologist, Gary R. Bortolotti, conceptualise cultural adaptation as being homologous to biological adaptation.⁶ Fidelity discourse, shaped by "the language of 'original' and 'source' [and] the (post-)Romantic (and capitalist) valuing of the originating creative artist-genius" (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 445), has resulted in the "denigration of adaptations" (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 445). It has also largely limited adaptation studies to considerations of the adaptation of canonical and elitist literature into what is often considered commercial and, therefore, 'less culturally valuable' movies.

Hutcheon and Bortolotti's recuperation of adaptations is based on the biological concept of the process of replication and change, or as Hutcheon puts it in *A Theory of Adaptation*, "repetition without replication" (7). The result is an organism, or text, which "stands on its own" (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 444), even though it replicates an existing narrative. The text functions as a "vehicle", while the narrative is the "replicator" (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 452) and it is the success of the narrative more than the text which is of

⁵ I follow Hutcheon in opting for the phrase "adapted text" as opposed to "source text" or "original" because of the way in which the latter terms reinforce the notion of the adapted text's superiority simply for being prior.

⁶ In an earlier work, Sarah Cardwell (2002) proposes that biological and cultural adaptation may be thought of as being analogous and this is a comparison that also informs Julie Sanders' (2006) work on adaptation. The notion of the analogous relationship between biological and cultural adaptation is rooted in Richard Dawkins' comparison of 'memes' and genes in *The Selfish Gene* (1976).

importance. The success of a narrative is determined not by its proximity to any kind of original or source but rather by its survival—what Bortolotti and Hutcheon refer to as its “persistence” (450)—and its dissemination, especially across media—what the authors call its “diversity” (450). While change is central to the survival of a narrative, and therefore necessary in any successful adaptation, Hutcheon maintains that it is also the proximity of the adaptation to the adapted text which provides much of the viewing (or reading) pleasure. It is neither change nor fidelity alone which results in the continued popularity of adaptations; rather it is the “comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (Hutcheon 4). Following on from Julia Kristeva (1980), in effect the audience that watches an adaptation will recognise it as an instance of intertextuality while recognising its textual novelty.

There are two criticisms of Hutcheon’s formulation of adaptation which are of relevance here. The first criticism pertains to Hutcheon’s definition. In an overview of the various attempts to theorise adaptation, Rainer Emig claims that the problem with Hutcheon’s doubled definition is that it renders “the status of the object of inquiry” (17) unknown; for him it cannot be both product and process. For Emig the root of the problem is that in disavowing “traditional ideas of the ‘creative process’ (17), Hutcheon seems to disavow the ‘author’ and the ‘work’ only to re-invoke them when she describes adaptation as involving interpretation of an existing product and the creation of a new one. Consequently, “[a]uthority, authorship, and originality enter Adaptation Theory through the backdoor exactly when it needs to discard them to set itself up as distinct from traditional literary and artistic criticism” (Emig 17). Firstly, I read Hutcheon’s argument not as a negation of the ‘author’ and the ‘work’ but a challenge to notions of both as fixed. What Hutcheon’s definition highlights is that adaptations trouble notions of fixed or singular origins. The notion of fixed origins in Merrells’ film occurs at two levels, that of authorship and that of humanity itself. The tension between these two informs my discussion of the film’s multiple genericity and of its settling in the DVD paratexts. Secondly, I am unconcerned with the formulation of Adaptation Theory as a distinct theory and, therefore, do not find the persistence of questions of authority, authorship and originality problematic. Emig sees these questions as an obstacle to other branches of inquiry: “If one succeeds in breaking out of this implicit discourse of authority, one can open up the debate towards more pressing questions” (Emig 19), such as that of cultural appropriation. What my discussion of *The Constant Gardener* demonstrates is that these two discourses—authority or authorship, and cultural appropriation—are not necessarily so easily separated.

The second criticism is that of Hutcheon's understanding of the necessary recognisability of the intertext. Emig notes that Hutcheon's 'solution' to the continued problem of authorship is a turn to intertextuality and dismisses it on the grounds that "theories of intertextuality are notoriously contradictory" (18). Thomas Leitch also sees a problem with this need for an adaptation to be perceived intertextually by an audience in so far as the status thereof becomes unclear should "a given audience [miss] the intertextual reference of a particular adaptation" (Leitch 95). Leitch's argument, which is a response to Hutcheon's earlier *Theory of Adaptation*, is valid in terms of the recognisability of the details of a particular text but does not account for the recognisability of narratives. Furthermore, for my purposes, the problem of the recognisability of intertextual references is largely negated by the fact that *The Constant Gardener's* most sustained intertext is not le Carré's novel but rather 'Africa'⁷; that is, the textual Africa which is overly-familiar. In this way Julie Sanders' approach to "the pleasure principle" (24) is useful. She locates the pleasure of adaptation in the offer of a prolonged encounter with a text. Sanders quotes John Ellis who "suggests that 'adaptation trades upon the memory of the novel, a memory which can derive from actual reading or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated memory'" (Sanders 25). While not quite the classic of literature meant by Ellis, 'Africa' can also be regarded as a generally circulated memory. In the same way as reading Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is not a prerequisite for making a film adaptation of the story of Romeo and Juliet (an example cited by Bortolotti and Hutcheon), one can make a film that offers a widely recognisable 'Africa' without ever having been to any one part of the continent.

'Africa' is generic, a series of conventions which are repeatable. This repeatability, what Derrida calls "citationality, duplication or duplicity, [...] iterability" ("Signature" 12), is structured as much by sameness as difference. This echoes Hutcheon and Bortolotti's formulation of adaptation as well as Mereilles' film—not only because there is "hardly a scene intact in this movie that comes from [le Carré's] novel" (Ayers 2006) but, more importantly, because of the film's adaptation of a conventional view of Africa. The narrative, or replicate, in question in the critiques above is that of needy, derelict and/or corrupt Africa. But something more complex emerges when this conventional narrative is placed in conversation with other conventional narratives present in the film as well as that which may

⁷ In the DVD extra, "Anatomy of a Global Thriller: Behind the Scenes of *The Constant Gardener*", le Carré claims that "[t]here's hardly a scene intact in this movie that comes from my novel" (Ayers, 2006). Importantly for adherents to fidelity discourse, le Carré does not regard this as a failing of the film but rather as its success.

be described as the “uncited”: those “images and sequences that stand outside this dominant system of citations, images that arrest us precisely because they do not fit into the structures of our expectations” (Garuba and Himmelman 16–17).⁸ The self-acknowledged limit of Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s biological/cultural homology for adaptation is, to an extent, the beginning of my project in this chapter. They argue that cultural adaptation involves a level of complexity with regards to causality that differs from biological adaptation. While biological mutations are “random with respect to the direction of adaptation required for the environment” (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 453), cultural adaptations “are not truly random, but are designed to solve specific problems’ and so are ‘purposive and intelligent’” (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman qtd in Bortolotti and Hutcheon 453). Even though Hutcheon’s approach is based on a critique of the Romantic positioning of a genius-artist at the origin of the work, in this distinction between biological and cultural adaptation there is the danger of attributing a singularity of intention to the production of a text. This, in turn, suggests a falling back into the trap of Romanticism and its metaphysics of presence. The implication of iterability on intention is not that “the category of intention will [...] disappear”, as Derrida argues, but rather that “it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance” (“Signature” 18). What Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman offer is a view of culture that ignores the “invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, [and] ploys” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 76) that have shaped speech and texts, what Emig calls “the instability of exactly those epistemes that guarantee and structure the cultural production of meaning” (2012: 16). Mereilles’ film does offer an Africa characterised by poverty and corruption, but there are images and sequences in the film which, in their adherence to other systems of convention or their conventional blankness, modify and sometimes challenge that vision. It is with this in mind that I turn to genre.

4.1.3. Genre

My treatment of genre is necessarily narrow, considering the historical and discursive enormity of the subject. Broadly speaking, my focus is on film genre which, although it derives from literary genre studies, is not the same thing as literary genre and should not be treated as such (Altman 1999). My focus is further narrowed by the overarching theme of this project: belonging. As such, my theoretical basis for discussing genre in *The Constant Gardener* is grounded in reconceptualisations of genre as a system necessarily

⁸ Garuba and Himmelman respond to Edward Said’s notion of citation by tracing images or sequences which are not grounded in, or retrievable from, established discourses.

characterised by belonging. Finally, this focal narrowing is countered by an understanding of genre as both textually and contextually constructed. I will examine both these aspects of Meriilles' film in order to demonstrate the generic multiplicity of the text and the settling or taming of that multiplicity in the DVD paratexts. A consideration of *The Constant Gardener* using genre as a framework serves two purposes: first, by treating the representation of Africa as generic, this aspect of the film can be put into conversation with its other generic features and aspects; second and consequently, it offers a more complex reading of Meriilles' film because unlike the relative fixity of the stereotypes put up for critique in the film, the working of its genres is dynamic.

A simple definition of genre, such as that offered by Barry Keith Grant, corresponds to that of adaptation, in so far as its central drive is familiarity generated through a process of repetition and variation. Genre films are "those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations" (B. K. Grant 1; see also B. K. et al Grant). Despite the persistence of traditional genres in his analyses, Neale (2000) has suggested the inclusion of non-commercial, non-feature films—in short, films outside of the Hollywood mainstream—to be included in the definition of genre. A more controversial issue, however, is the interplay of repetition and variation, or sameness and difference, in any single genre and in any single genre film. Traditional film genre criticism, such as that by Thomas Schatz (1981), treats genre as a system of stable, predictable and distinct categories; Schatz's approach conceives of genre in purely taxonomic terms, despite criticisms of such an approach as early as 1975 (see Ryall, for instance). According to Schatz, genres function as a manifestation of rules, like Saussurean sign systems. The focus on genre as a system is also central to Neale's approach, but his is shaped by a concern with the contextual or industrial forces that act on cinema. In other words, genre is formed (in part) through and by the industries associated with films: production, marketing and audiences.

This focus on external factors is central to genre criticism because it was one of two main reasons for the development of the movement in the late 1960s and 1970s: the first was a "desire to engage in a serious and positive way with popular cinema in general and Hollywood in particular"; the second "was a desire to complement, temper or displace altogether the dominant critical approach used hitherto—auteurism" (Neale 8; see also Gledhill 58). As Neale indicates, the tendency for auteurism to result in the cultish elevation of individual directors meant that it could not offer a way of exploring the broader movements within the Hollywood system but genre, which takes into account the production and

marketing of films as well as the expectations of audiences, could. Auteurism and genre criticism remain in tension, both in general and in this project, and various approaches to the relationship exist: for instance, Jean-Loup Bourget sees this tension as a productive “analytic tool [which] allows for a reconciliation of two apparently antagonistic approaches” (70); noting the influence of auteurism on genre theory, Neale (2000) suggests that the former distorts the latter because what he considers to be exceptions are studied as if they are the norm; and, in sharp contrast to Neale, Robin Wood (1968), in his discussion of Howard Hawks’ *Rio Bravo*, sees genres as foundational conventions upon which the director can build his artistic vision. My aim is not to propose a general theory of the relationship between auteurism and genre, but rather to attempt to make sense of this tension and its functioning in relation to *The Constant Gardener*. Furthermore, I argue that this tension is central to a more general tension between the representation of Africa in the film and the (re)construction or reframing of that representation in the DVD paratexts. Importantly, the tension is not defined in this instance as a question of the superiority of one approach over another but rather as a question of the nature of genre, the construction of the author and how the latter is employed as a way of settling the former in Meriilles’ film.

Defining genre in traditional terms carries with it the unavoidable limitations of taxonomy and the related problem of purity. An insistence on stable, distinct categories limits genre criticism to charting a film’s adherence to or deviation from convention. In the case of the latter, parodies or subversions of conventions are often labelled as exceptions which prove the rule (Deleyto 2012; see also Derrida 1980). But as Rick Altman (123–43) and James Naremore (1998) argue, the mixing of genre is less recent and less problematic than traditional critics suggest. Altman’s position is that there has always been generic mixing in Hollywood films, while Naremore asserts that “every movie is transgeneric and polyvalent” (6, emphasis added). This need not be a problem because, as Altman demonstrates, genre mixing offers the novelty that producers seek and a film which can be classified using multiple genres is more widely marketable. Naremore and Altman go some way towards loosening genre criticism from the confines of the purity/impurity debate. Their analyses, which are grounded in critiques of categorical thinking,⁹ offer a challenge to notions of stability, linearity, predictability and the possibility of fixed boundaries inherent to traditional genre criticism. But, as Celestino Deleyto argues, they do not go far enough in terms of the

⁹ Naremore uses cognitive science, in particular George Lakoff’s 1987 *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, as a basis for his critique of Aristotelian categories. Altman refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, which also forms the basis of Lakoff’s critique.

problem of membership or belonging imposed by genre conceived of as types or groups: “The groups are looser and interact with one another in more intricate ways than before but remain, however vaguely defined and however provisional, still groups” (223). Deleyto addresses this problem of belonging by drawing on chaos theory and Derrida’s law of genre, both of which offer a way of thinking through that which is generic in *The Constant Gardener*.

A “chaotic view of genres”, Deleyto argues, “underlines their instability, the impossibility of establishing clear lines of demarcation, and the nonlinearity, unpredictability, and complexity of their evolution” (222). More importantly, using this approach, genre as a system can be viewed, reviewed, considered and reconsidered by attending to “individual films, scenes, or even shots” (Deleyto 222), which reflect the structure of a genre and the intersections between two or more genres. Derrida’s “law of the law of genre” addresses both notions of purity and of membership when he argues that this law “is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity [...which offers] a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set” (Derrida 59). So, whereas Jameson ascribes stability and clear boundaries to genre when he compares them to families or ethnic groups, Derrida identifies the “many classificatory vertigines” (“Genre” 61) of genre itself. What is at stake is “the relationship of nature to history, of nature to its others” because *genos*—that place between nature and its others and that which designates a unit of belonging—“indicates the place, the now or never of the most necessary meditation on the ‘fold’ which is no more historical than natural” (Derrida, “Genre” 60, 61). Genre simultaneously is and is not historical and natural and, thus, no text can be described as genre-less. At the same time, no text belongs to a genre but rather “participates in one or several” (Derrida, “Genre” 65). Derrida, like Jameson, aligns genre with groupings such as race and the family, what he calls “the generous force of engenderment or generation” (Derrida, “Genre” 61), but importantly, he regards such classifications as endlessly classificatory. Genre, like race and family, is ‘unfixed’, not because of what he calls “free, anarchic, and unclassifiable productivity” (Derrida, “Genre” 65), indicating a point of difference with an approach to genre using chaos theory. But rather that genre is an “axiom of non-closure or non-fulfillment [which] enfolds within itself the condition for the possibility and the impossibility of taxonomy” (Derrida, “Genre” 65).

Although chaos theory and Derrida’s “law of the law of genre” differ with regards to the nature of belonging, a combination of these two approaches will be applied to my reading of *The Constant Gardener*. Derrida’s formulation of genre as “the possibility and impossibility of taxonomy” (“Genre” 65) provides the theoretical basis for my reading, while chaos theory

provides a method of sorts. More specifically, it is the significance of a single film, scene or shot as an instance of the intersection of genres which will guide my reading of Mereilles' film because, in its emphasis on multiple genericity, chaos theory overlaps with Derrida's notion of generic participation. A focus on generic participation suggests a focus on the text itself, as opposed to external factors which, as I have already indicated, have played a central role in film genre criticism. However, in my consideration of the DVD paratexts in the second half of my discussion, I will include a consideration of the film as product. The DVD MOD provides insight into various stages of the film's production and its reconstruction or reframing following its release. Deleyto, noting (and welcoming) the shift by critics such as Neale and Altman "from the texts themselves to systems of communication and expectation within which they operate", nevertheless makes the case for a more textually driven criticism that "takes into account the relative distance that exists between films and genres" (219). Such a textual approach is useful for making sense of Mereilles' film as it appears on screen but the inclusion of the contextual is equally important for making sense of the film as it appears in the cinematic imaginary.

4.2. Genre and *The Constant Gardener*

In her acceptance speech for the 2006 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, Rachel Weisz describes le Carré's novel as "an unflinching, angry story". The cover of the 2011 Sceptre edition of the novel includes a quotation from the *Observer* which makes a similar claim: "The book breathes life, anger and excitement". The anger of le Carré's narrative is in response to the injustice of Third World exploitation by global corporations. That the novel ends without these corporations being held accountable, making them seem untouchable, points to an accompanying cynicism which runs through the narrative. There is also a degree of anger and cynicism present in Mereilles' adaptation and, as in the novel, Sandy Woodrow (Danny Huston) and Sir Bernard Pellegrin (Bill Nighy) are the targets of this anger because they are emblematic of the self-interest that causes and sustains this exploitation. However, the anger in Mereilles' film is less obviously in response to the injustice of Big Pharma's actions. This is, in part, because of the film's failure to properly outline the contours of this exploitation as Angell points out. It is also, I argue, because the film has a broader concern than that of the novel: human disunity in a globalised world. This concern is borne out in the form and content of the film as well as its participation in, and deviation from, two sets of generic convention: romantic drama and "Africa Film". Seeing as the first—romantic drama—is characteristically concerned with union and the second—"Africa Film"—is

characterised by physical and aesthetic space, an examination of the interplay of these genres offers an opportunity to consider anew the binary set up between the political and the romantic in much of the criticism on *The Constant Gardener*.

Schatz's work on film genres and genre films provides a useful starting point for thinking through the interplay of space and union in Meriilles' film, although *The Constant Gardener* breaks many of the 'rules' he outlines. Schatz distinguishes between two types of genre, arguing that there are those of indeterminate and determinate space. One of the main differences between these types relates to the possibility of the integration or reintegration of the individual or collective hero into a community. In the case of determinate space, the individual or collective hero enters an "iconographic arena" (Schatz 698) characterised by instability with which they are in conflict but to which they then bring order; the Western is arguably the most recognisable of the determinate space genres. Importantly, the hero remains unchanged and, at the end of the film, is ultimately excluded from the community which they have created, completing what Schatz calls the "entrance-exit motif" ("Film Genre" 698). The "Africa film" and, in particular, the 'white saviour narrative' (Calhoun 2007; Amner 2009) relies on iconographic settings, often employing the entrance-exit motif.¹⁰ Importantly, whether the white hero brings order to an African community, or salvation to a single token African, or must flee an irredeemably disordered place, the hero is necessarily changed by Africa. In Schatz's second group, genres of indeterminate space—such as the romantic drama—there is a "progression from romantic antagonism to eventual embrace [...which] signals the integration of the couple into a larger cultural community" ("Film Genre" 698). "[G]eneric resolution", Schatz argues, "operates by a process of reduction: the polar opposite is reduced, either through the elimination of one of the forces (in genres of determinate, contested space) or through the integration of the forces into a single unit (in genres of indeterminate, civilized space)" (Schatz, "Film Genre" 701). Even a surface reading of Meriilles' *The Constant Gardener* reveals that the film works both through and against these formulations. On the one hand, as many critics of the film attest, the setting of the film is iconographic because of the reliance on conventional, stereotypical 'African' city- and landscapes. By opening and closing on Justin and Tessa—both of whom represent the white heroes of the story—the film employs an "entrance-exit motif". On the other hand,

¹⁰ This use of this motif in "Africa films" can be seen in, for instance, *The Last King of Scotland* and *Shooting Dogs*, where the entry of the white, British protagonist—or white saviour—marks the beginning of the narrative and their eventual escape (from the horrors brought about, respectively, by an African dictator or genocide) constitutes the end. Even in cases where the white saviour does not escape but rather dies—*The Constant Gardener* and *Blood Diamond*, for instance—his/her exit remains a structuring element of the narrative.

neither Tessa nor Justin bring stability or order to the setting. In fact, the thrust of the narrative is that they both disrupt the status quo of corporate culture, of which British nationalism is a central component and African corruption a required add-on. Secondly, while Justin undergoes a significant change from an apolitical low-ranking diplomat to a man determined to expose the wrong-doing of his country and its corporate bed-fellows, Tessa remains largely unchanged in the course of the narrative. This generic inconsistency is also evident when the film is viewed from the perspective of genres of indeterminate space. The progression of Justin and Tessa's relationship from antagonism and separation to embrace (albeit a metaphysical one as opposed to the more traditional kiss) is countered by the fact that their union does not signal integration into, or the constitution of, a community in a straightforward manner.

The simultaneous utilisation of and deviation from generic convention needs to be further clarified and I will do so along the following lines in the course of the section to follow. A key issue, on which I will elaborate, is the claim to iconography. While I have placed *The Constant Gardener* partly and tentatively in the category of determinate space based on the stereotypical representations of the continent, there is a subtler kind of iconography at work, the implications of which have not been explored. Africa—specifically Lake Turkana, the site of Tessa and Justin's deaths and reunion—symbolises the origin of humankind. Through its geographical placement, Justin and Tessa's romantic reunion takes on a much greater symbolic weight than that of reunited lovers. Consequently, community must be examined more closely: what kind of community, if any, is created and are Justin and Tessa excluded from or (re)integrated into it? In order to answer these questions, Justin's transformation will be discussed in light of Tessa's constancy, which will itself be conceptualised and explained in relation to the iconography at play.

Considered in terms of its representation of Africa and its structure, the central theme of *The Constant Gardener* becomes clear: return. In other words, when both space and time are considered, the film tells a story of returns. When Joseph argues that Justin and Tessa's relationship is a romantic sub-plot, he does not take the structure of the film into account. His critique, and that of Musila, is one that stresses the importance of space. Such an approach works to reveal many of the problems of the film's representation of the continent but it is a limited reading that renders the film generically fixed. In contrast, McGowan's discussion of the film's atemporal structure, which recognises the centrality of the

protagonists' relationship, does not pay close enough attention to space.¹¹ So even though he points to the theme of return in relation to the "origins of Justin and Tessa's relationship" (113), he does not comment on the place to which the film returns repeatedly: Lake Turkana. To consider only time or only space or to neatly oppose the romantic and the political is, I argue, to miss the film's attempt to project or create the possibility of human unity in a divided world. To make sense of this community, the film will be reconsidered in terms of its participation in both romantic drama and "Africa film" as well as its construction of time and space.

4.2.1. Romantic Drama: separations and reunions

The theme of return is reflected in the structure of the film, centred as it is on the various separations and reunions that characterise Justin and Tessa's relationship. McGowan describes the opening scene of the film as the "first suggestion of the nebulous status of their relationship" (114),¹² specifically Justin's suspicions that Tessa is being unfaithful. However, McGowan's focus on fidelity as a way of explaining Justin's politicisation only works up to the point when Arnold's homosexuality is revealed; at this point Tessa's fidelity is no longer a concern and, therefore, can no longer be considered a driving force for Justin. I agree that the opening scene sets up this narrative of marital infidelity but, more importantly, it is also the first instance of separation more generally, laying the foundation for the reunions that occur throughout the film and, particularly, towards the end when Justin's suspicions of infidelity have long been allayed. Tessa's temporary departure from Justin in the aeroplane hangar foreshadows the more permanent separation that is brought about by her murder. Her death is hinted at in the next scene (and confirmed in the sequence thereafter) when a vehicle overturns violently at Lake Turkana, the sound of clanging metal

¹¹ McGowan's preference for time over space draws on Heidegger's "critique of the spacialization of time" (24) and his claim, working from Henri Bergson, that "[s]patial existence is necessarily existence at the behest of an external authority; temporality or duration allows the subject to break from this authority" (23). The problem with McGowan's discussion of *The Constant Gardener* is that it ignores that existence, in fact the very possibility of existence, in "Africa films" is inextricable from the space in which that existence is formulated. Despite the relative optimism of Merille's film compared to le Carré's novel, the possibility of a subject breaking free from external authority is dependent on that subject's death. The problem of regarding death as transcendence is a key point in the previous chapters as well as this and the final chapter.

¹² The film opens with a black screen and dialogue between Justin and Tessa. Slowly, a picture appears showing them and Tessa's activist colleague, Dr Arnold Bluhm (Hubert Koundé), in the hangar of a small airfield: Tessa and Arnold are on their way to Lokichogio to listen to a Kenyan activist speak, although the audience does not know this yet. The lighting of this scene is as important as the interactions of the characters: the transition from a black screen to the "backlit dimness of the exchange" (McGowan 114) in which Justin politely declines an implied offer from Arnold to carry Tessa's suitcase, only for Tessa to let Arnold carry it, suggest Justin's doubts about his wife's fidelity.

and startled, screeching flamingos signalling the disruption that is to come into Justin's relatively peaceful life. The camera lingers on the birds as they fly over the lake and, forming the link between the scene at the lake and the sequence leading to Justin being informed of his wife's murder, they function as symbolic bearers of bad news. Later they function as harbingers of Justin's death when they return to the lake.

Following the opening scene at the airfield and the two short sequences suggesting and then confirming Tessa's death, the first flashback occurs: Tessa and Justin meet in London when he delivers an uninspiring speech on Pellegrin's behalf. The contrast, suggestive of antagonism between Tessa (the fiery, political, young woman) and Justin (an apolitical and excessively polite older man) is generically- and narratively-speaking the beginning of their union. Placed as it is after her death, however, it also functions extradiegetically for the viewer as a reunion. Moreover, the speed with which the initial potential antagonism is replaced with sexual attraction and marriage—the film leapfrogs the development of their relationship—indicates that separation and (re)union themselves are more important than the progression from antagonism to embrace. In the extended flashback that follows, Justin and Tessa go to Africa and the narrative proceeds chronologically, showing the increasing distance between the lovers. As a pregnant Tessa becomes aware of the exploitation of the local population by Big Pharma and the British government, she grows increasingly desperate to expose them, and then loses her baby. Justin—kept out of the loop by Tessa and manipulated by Sandy and those whom Tessa is investigating—grows suspicious of her relationship with Arnold. Roughly one-third of the way into the film, the viewer is returned to the opening scene at the hangar and that of the overturned vehicle and startled flamingos at Lake Turkana. The past catches up to the present when Justin goes to the morgue to identify Tessa's body: a moment in which Justin is reunited with Tessa but, ironically, the permanence of their separation is underscored.

The second part of the film charts Justin's investigation into his wife's death, culminating in his murder at Lake Turkana, which is also his final reunion with her. There are three scenes or sequences which reflect both the larger structure of the film and the concern with antagonism and embrace central to romantic drama. After Justin is beaten in a hotel room in Germany, he 'sees' Tessa reflected in the mirror on the bathroom door (Fig. 1). This echoes an earlier moment but is not a flashback so much as the coexistence of past and present: their bathroom from the earlier scene in Kenya is integrated seamlessly into the hotel bathroom in Germany (Fig. 2) and they occupy the same frame. The physical and temporal distance that separates husband and wife appears collapsed into itself. But the

emotional distance is reasserted: in the earlier scene, Justin reads an email which plants the seed of doubt in his mind regarding Tessa's fidelity; in the later scene, he asks her why she did not tell him about her investigation because he "could have helped" her.



Figure 1: On the floor of his German hotel room, Justin sees Tessa in their bathroom in Nairobi. The Constant Gardener (2005)

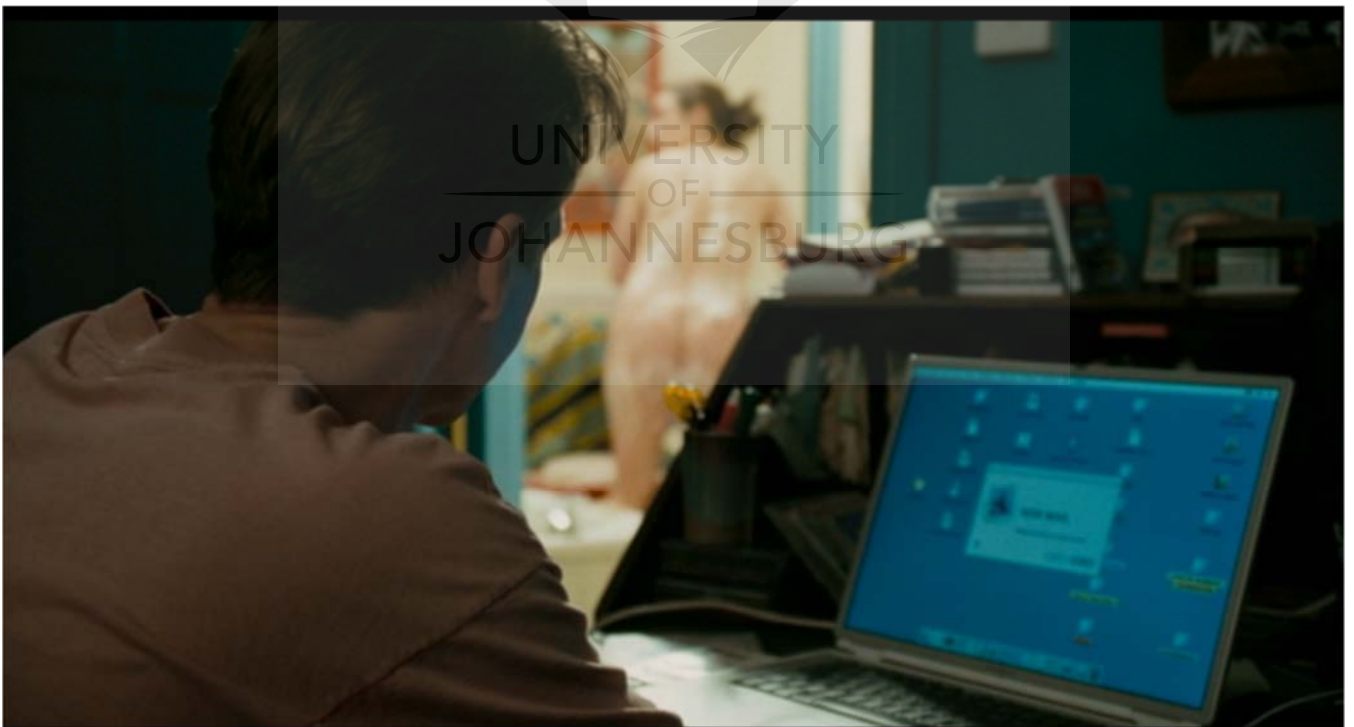


Figure 2: Justin discovers Tessa's 'infidelity'. The Constant Gardener (2005)

In the second sequence, the emotional, physical and temporal distance between Justin and Tessa is more complex. Justin, in the present, is driving to Lokichogio and, in the course of the trip, he sees and speaks to Tessa. In one moment Justin is wearing a faded red T-shirt and the scabs from his assault in Germany are clearly visible; in the next moment, he has no scabs and is wearing a white, collared shirt (Fig. 3). The difference in Justin's appearance suggests that this is a convergence of the present and a memory of a trip they took together. The rapidity of the jumps between past and present, the fact that Justin is framed similarly in both, and the flow of dialogue across shots of the past and the present serve to interweave and even collapse timeframes. However, at the same time, the physical space defined by the camera frame suggests distance or separation and this is reinforced by Tessa's use of a hand-held camera within the scene.



Figure 3: Justin simultaneously in the past (right) and present (left). *The Constant Gardener* (2005)

The film consistently draws attention to ways of looking and framing. It does so through its use of a cinema verité aesthetic as well as the variety of tonal washes already mentioned. There is also the self-reflexive use of cameras within the film space. In this scene in the car, Tessa turns the camera alternately on Justin and herself; extreme close-ups on their faces creates a sense of intimacy while the necessity of alternating between faces reasserts the distance between them. This interplay of physical intimacy and distance is reflected in their declarations of love for each other and the repetition of Justin's wish that Tessa had shared more with him. When they do appear together in a single frame it is when her hand and foot are near his face in moments that convey an intimacy between lovers that is simultaneously disembodied (Fig. 4), considering the mediating presence of the hand-held camera and the absence of the rest of Tessa's body. The portable or hand-held camera as intermediary—a link which both connects and, in doing so, highlights the need for connection—also appears prominently in the earlier bathroom scene. This time Justin uses a webcam to film Tessa in the bath, and the intimacy of the moment is conveyed directly to

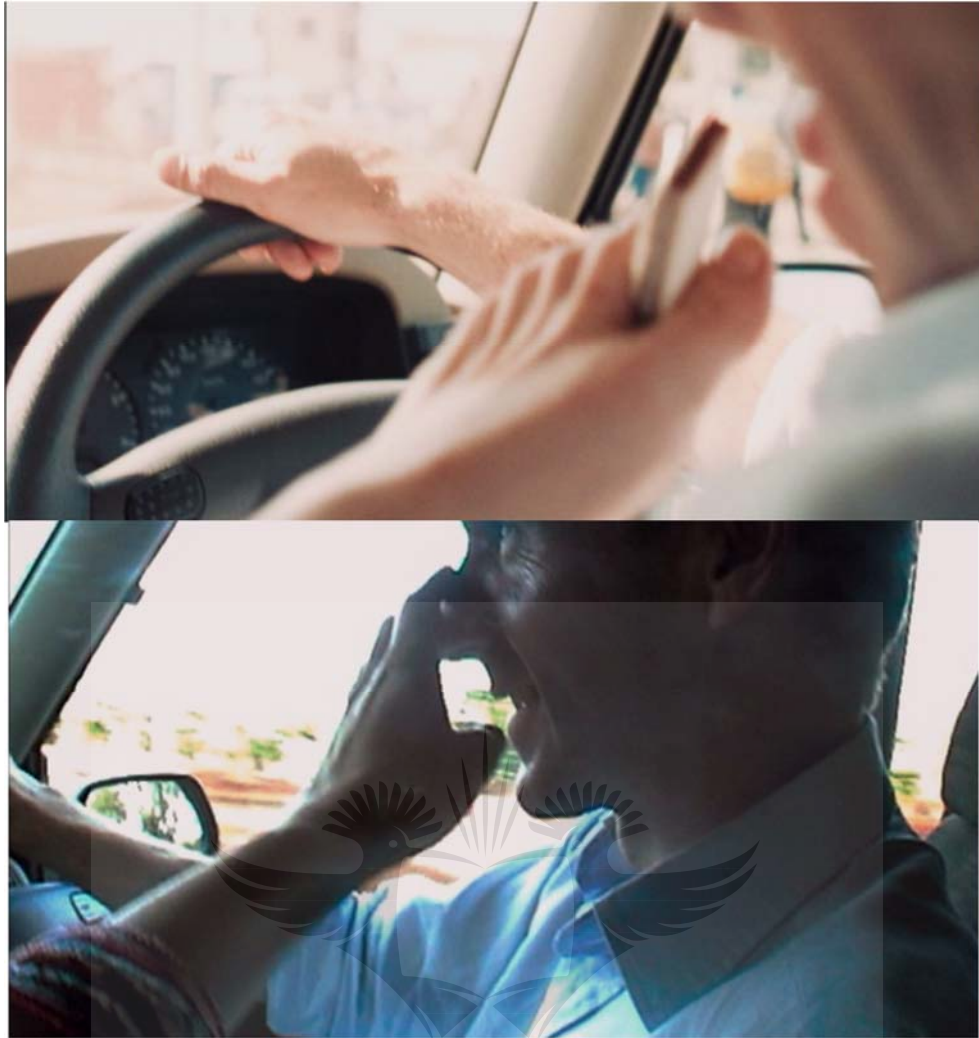


Figure 4: *Disembodied intimacy. The Constant Gardener (2005)*

the viewer when the image captured fills the screen. Once again, extreme close-ups are used (Fig. 5). This intimacy is placed at a remove, however, when Justin is reflected in the mirror and the webcam image is shown simultaneously on the laptop just outside of the bathroom (Fig. 6). By charting the disjunction between the physical and the emotional and using the camera self-reflexively as intermediary, these two scenes play on connection and disconnection between the characters and between viewers and the world on screen, creating what Jacques Rancière, in *The Emancipated Spectator*, calls an “aesthetic community” (2009: 57). Rancière defines such a community as being “structured by disconnection” (59), as a way of “being together when apart” (57).¹³ The opposite is also true: Justin’s initial suspicion and later sense of loss because of the secrets she kept from him indicates that theirs is also a being apart when together.

¹³ In the chapter, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community”, Rancière begins his discussion of community and separation by working from a translated quotation in Stéphane Mallarmé’s prose poem, “The White Water Lily”: “Apart, we are together”.



Figure 5: Intimate intermediaries. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)



Figure 6 Justin and Tessa apart when together. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)

The third sequence relevant to this discussion is the final moments in the film in which Justin arrives at Lake Turkana to await his death; he too will be murdered by mercenaries. The oscillation between and near-convergence of past and present that characterises the previous two sequences is replaced by unity of both time and space. Justin speaks to Tessa

and they appear together in the same frame (Fig. 7). The realism of the film dictates that this is not physically possible but, nevertheless, metaphysically true. In an earlier scene, the local British spy, Tom Donahue (Donald Sumpter), attempts to save Justin by convincing him to quit his investigation. He tells Justin to “go home and live”. Justin replies that he does not have a home because “Tessa was [his] home”. His return to Lake Turkana and his



Figure 7: Justin and Tessa reunited on the interstices of life and death. The Constant Gardener (2005)

metaphysical reunion with his wife echoes this confluence of home and Tessa: he says to her in the closing shot, “You want me to come home. But I am home”. Avtar Brah argues that in diasporic writing “home is a mythic place of desire” (192) and so Justin’s reunion with Tessa, the object of his desire, cast as a homecoming indicates the diasporic impulse of the film.¹⁴ The metaphysical nature of Justin’s return is also conveyed through his arrival at a point of understanding regarding Tessa and her work: “I know all your secrets, Tess. I think I understand you now”. The physical and emotional distance between the lovers appears to now have been erased, completing the movement from separation(s) to final union. Using Schatz’s understanding of generic resolution, the “polar opposite” that is Justin is reduced, having been assimilated into a single unit with Tessa. (The full significance of this diaspora and that of unity is made clear when the place of this homecoming is considered in my discussion of Lake Turkana).

¹⁴ In the novel, this impulse would be more accurately described as an exilic impulse considering Justin’s sojourn on Elba. The significance of the island is suggested through the references to Napoleon’s “ten restless months of exile” (le Carré 258) and Justin’s similar restlessness while on the island.

A key point in McGowan's argument is that in the course of his investigation "Justin gives up his belief in Tessa's secret desire that he might access and embraces the unrelenting drive of her political mission" (128). What these three sequences reveal, however, is that Tessa's secret desire and Justin's attempt to understand what it is are not so easily dismissed, nor are Tessa's and Justin's desires separable from their political mission. The point of intersection between desire and political mission will be explored when I return to the final scenes of the film at Lake Turkana. That their union—the embrace of romantic drama—is enacted through death, not marriage, might suggest tragedy. However, to read it as such is to miss two important things: first, the possibility of justice that the film offers by intercutting these final moments with the revelation of Pellegrin's misdeeds at Justin's memorial service (another oscillation between past and present); second, the constitution of, or reintegration of the lovers into, a community that is the end goal of romantic drama. I will return to these two points when I discuss the significance of the end of the film and Lake Turkana.

4.2.2. Africa Film: the 'Imperial Man' and 'Mama Africa'

The structure of the film creates a parallel between Justin and Tessa which is invested with a greater symbolic significance because of what Justin and Tessa represent: the West and Africa, respectively. As the protagonist, Justin undergoes a significant change from retreating, excessively polite diplomat and Englishman in neat, grey suits to a dishevelled agitator who—dressed in clothes that begin to blend into the red, dusty 'African' landscape—succeeds in exposing the crimes of Big Pharma (represented by the fictional companies, KDH and ThreeBees), the Kenyan Health Ministry and, most importantly, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Using Cameron's list of archetypes, Mafe describes Justin as "the new millennium incarnation of the Imperial Man" (74), arguing that even though he undergoes a transformation it is simply from one archetype to another, that of "the Helper" (75). The conclusion Mafe draws from Justin's entrapment within archetypes is that his "efforts to help 'Africa' have less to do with the continent than with his wife and his guilt-driven desire to complete her work" (75). This argument begs the question: are these archetypal characters merely the result of lazy screenwriters indifferent to or, more worryingly, intent on the erasure of the 'real' Africa? Or do these archetypes serve a purpose or have an effect beyond that of a racially simplistic representational shorthand? I argue that Justin's efforts cannot be so easily divorced from the continent, which is not to say that there are no problems with the film's representation of Africa using racial archetypes. In other

words, Justin's transformation and his efforts have as much to do with the continent, albeit a symbolic version thereof, as it does with his wife. That is because, in addition to occupying archetypal roles closely associated with 'Africa', Tessa symbolises 'Africa' itself.

Justin is at first a foil for Tessa but later occupies the role and expresses the sentiments of his humanitarian wife. First, she bequeaths along with her wealth, her "African women's charity" to him. In another more significant moment he repeats nearly verbatim Tessa's argument for intervening in the lives of the local people. Upon leaving the hospital after losing her baby, Tessa pleads with her husband to give Wanza's brother, Kioko (Donald Apiyo), her baby, and an unnamed woman a lift home. Justin points out the futility of doing so, saying that "there are millions of people [that] need help. That's what the agencies are for". She responds that "these are three people that [they] can help". His request that she be "reasonable" wins out and they drive home. After a bandit raid in Sudan, Justin brings a small child with him on the rescue aeroplane. The pilot (Sidede Onyulo) refuses to take the child because it is against the rules and ultimately, as he says, "there are thousands of them out there". Justin responds that "this is one [they] can help". Justin must follow a path almost identical to Tessa because as important as it is that he expose the guilty parties, it is equally important for him to understand his wife. It is, after all, the secrecy of her investigation which drives a wedge between them and, in completing her work, Justin gains insight into, and a renewed sense of connection to, Tessa; her infidelity is ultimately little more than a red-herring. In other words, he can only reunite with Tessa by becoming like her.

But to understand Tessa is quickly made analogous to understanding Africa. The alignment of Tessa and Africa begins early in the film when, in Justin's London office, she asks him to "take [her] to Africa with [him]". When he points out that they hardly know each other, she suggests that he "could learn" her. Pressed for an answer, Justin begins a halting sentence and the scene cuts, interrupting him with an explosion of noise, colour and activity, to what can only be presumed to be 'Africa'.¹⁵ Not only does this abrupt cut provide an answer to Tessa's question—effectively the change in location speaks for Justin—it also signals the beginning of the process of learning Tessa and, indeed, "Africa". The viewer is

¹⁵ The word choice—Africa—is significant here. Neither Tessa nor Justin name the specific country, Kenya, even though Justin (presumably) knows to which country he is being deployed as a diplomat. Moreover, no specific African country has been indicated to the viewer at this point and so the central location of the film's action remains "Africa", even though so much is made in the MODs of the authenticity of filming on location in Kibera. If one watches this scene set in Kibera with the DVD subtitles for the hard of hearing, the language that the locals speak is identified as being merely "foreign". This occurs again when the house staff express their condolences to Justin, after he has identified her body at the morgue, and again at various other points in the film. In contrast, when Justin is beaten up in Germany, the background chatter of his assailants is identified as being in German (Fig. 8).

bombarded with images typical of “Africa”: poor black bodies crowd the scene, jostling for space next to shacks and runaway chickens. The burst of energy that characterises this opening of the scene echoes the energy that Tessa exudes and which is in sharp contrast with Justin’s quiet, reserved and polite demeanor. The camera settles on an outdoor theatre performance for a few moments—it is, of course, a play about AIDS—until it is drawn to the only white face in the audience: a visibly pregnant Tessa, with an African child on her hip (Fig. 9).¹⁶ She is presented with a homemade mobile for the coming baby’s crib; the children giving her the gift are clearly familiar with her and she knows them well too. Arnold joins Tessa and the ensuing shots alternate between Tessa and various local children as she and Arnold walk through Kibera.



Figure 8: The foreignness of ‘Africa’; the particularities of Europe. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)



Figure 9: Tessa receives a gift (or two) from the children of Kibera. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)

The suggestion that Tessa is a ‘Mother Africa’ figure is noteworthy. Mafe identifies three archetypes which Tessa embodies—the White Queen, the Helper, and the True-Blue White Woman—and I want to add ‘Mother Africa’ to this list. It is not for nothing that children

¹⁶ There is a noticeable continuity error here where Tessa is first seen without a child on her hip and then is seen holding the child in the very next shot. I highlight this error because of its suggestiveness: Tessa is, in the image on the left, holding her belly but in the one on the right, she is holding a black, African child. This moment, albeit inadvertently, foreshadows the hospital scene where Tessa is once again holding a black, African baby after having given birth.

are highlighted in the early “Africa” scenes. Arnold provides medical care by handing out nevirapine to adults but Tessa, who has no medical skills to offer, provides maternal care by kissing babies and showering children with attention. Tessa, pregnant and caring for the local community, occupies a mothering role and this is emphasised by the many close-ups on children, many of which are shot from Tessa’s point of view (Fig. 10); a camera shot which is rarely used for African adults in the film. Her position of mother of/for Africa is reiterated more directly and powerfully when her own child is stillborn and she nurses the baby of Wanza Kilulu (Jacqueline Maribe), one of the Kenyan test subjects who has died shortly after giving birth. In a later scene, having identified Tessa’s body at the morgue, Justin returns home and is met with condolences from the house staff—Mustafa (Samuel Otage), and two unnamed and uncredited women. Justin refers to them as “Tessa’s family” and Mustafa refers to Tessa as “Mama Tessa”.



Figure 10: Tessa makes her way through the children-filled streets of Kibera. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)

The symbolic merging of Tessa and “Africa” is made literal when she is buried. At her funeral two men arrive with a wheelbarrow filled with concrete, which they intend to pour over the coffin “to keep the grave robbers out”. Justin refuses to let the men do their job because it was Tessa’s “wish to lie in African soil”. Again, the use of the general over the specific suggests that “Africa” functions symbolically. A “poor, incomplete image” (Barthes 151), ‘Africa’ is given meaning when occupied, literally, by Tessa. In this brief moment Justin again expresses directly what the film in its use of the camera and editing suggests. For Justin, the literal merging of his wife with Africa is what drives him to a course of action in sharp contrast to his life as a quiet gardener who shows very little interest in Kenya or Africa

before his wife's death. It is, for Justin, the death of his wife which imbues 'Africa' with meaning and, as he investigates her death, it is 'Africa' which imbues her life and death (and consequently his life and death) with meaning and purpose.

McGowan argues that two of these scenes—Tessa and Arnold walking through Kibera and Tessa nursing Wanza's baby as Arnold and a visibly upset Justin look on—serve to "locate [the spectator] within the romance narrative and then reveal how the question of Tessa's fidelity merely obscures the political problem of Western capital's exploitation of Africa" (117). A specific example of this, according to McGowan, is when Arnold helps Tessa over the many polluted ditches and rivulets as they tease each other flirtatiously. While Tessa's fidelity is central to the narrative intrigue, McGowan does not take into account the special bond between her and 'Africa' that the film frames and which still remains in play after the truth about Arnold's homosexuality, and therefore of Tessa's fidelity, has been revealed. His argument does not take into account Tessa's interaction with her surroundings, especially the children, which takes up the bulk of the scene in Kibera and which the camera privileges with the many close-ups. Additionally, it does not consider the full influence that the surroundings have on the narrative: the outdoor theatre performance to which the camera jumps periodically throughout the scene is noteworthy because it reiterates the theme of separation and unity beyond the scope of marital fidelity. The viewer is only shown snippets of the performance but they reveal the breakup of a family (the son is diagnosed with AIDS and the family reject him) and the final scene from the play that is shown in the film is the mother's plea that they reunite: "Stay", she says, "Let us be as we were in the past". This play-within-a-film serves as an early indication that being together is at the centre of the narrative. The longing to return to a past state of togetherness is also an early indication of the film's diasporic impulse and its range beyond Justin and Tessa's relationship. Lake Turkana, to which I will turn in the next section, is central to this diasporic impulse.

The Constant Gardener is structured around and thematically focused on separations and reunions, often blurring the lines between the two. The significance of these separations and reunions, and consequently of Justin and Tessa's love-story, cannot be thought through without attending to place, which means attending to the film as an example of "Africa films" and making sense of the function of stereotype. In other words, the significance of their reunion is located in the romantic and the political. When *The Constant Gardener* is read generically and with awareness of its participation in both romantic drama and 'Africa film', a clear distinction between the romantic and the political becomes difficult to maintain. The

romantic is not a distraction from the political; it intersects with the political and this intersection is not limited to the politicisation of one character through misdirection. Read generically and with an awareness of the nature of genre itself, *The Constant Gardener* can be described as being concerned with belonging and community, a concern which is reflected in the film's structure and content and which is explored through the romantic couple Justin and Tessa, as well as their roles as symbols of the West and Africa. Put in the terms of cultural adaptation as processes of problem solving, *The Constant Gardener* attempts to solve the problem of human disunity in a globalised world. Its anger is aimed less at the injustice that is the exploitation of the developing world and more at the divisions between the West and the Rest, of which Africa is representative. Justin and Tessa's romance works in conjunction with stereotypes of Africa in an attempt to heal that division by projecting a human community.

4.2.3. Lake Turkana: "let us be as we were in the past"

The opposition of the romantic and the political in responses to Meriilles' film carries with it the danger of conceiving of relationality, of belonging and community, as non- or apolitical. But what even Schatz's conservative take on genre suggests is that the constitution of, or reintegration into, community is political because it is bound up in acts of exclusion and inclusion. A third position with regards to the relationship between the political and the romantic underpins Stuart Klawans' brief review of *The Constant Gardener*. He suggests that "[a]t the heart of this political story, and so of the critical difficulties, lies a human problem: Can meek, decent British diplomat Justin Quayle dare to believe that his wife, Tessa, loves him?" (42).¹⁷ Here the romantic is not a distraction nor a means of politicisation but rather, because of its human-ness and therefore universality, it is the essence of the problem. The political is little more than a mask or, in contrast to Joseph and Musila, a distraction from the more fundamental question of human love. Klawans does not elaborate on what he means by "critical difficulties" but, seeing as his review focuses on the seemingly non-political issues of Fiennes' and Weisz's star power and Meriilles' expressionism, such difficulties are annulled by the human-ness of the 'real' problem of love. The problem is not that Klawans is wrong to state that it is a human problem at the heart of Meriilles' film. That the final union of husband and wife, both of them humanitarian champions, occurs at the

¹⁷ Klawans answers this question by asking another, this time reframing the issue in terms of the credibility of two film stars being in love. From the perspective of celebrity culture, the answer is for Klawans an obvious 'yes'.

origin of human civilisation is evidence of the film's humanist drive. The problem is that the apolitical nature of human-ness is taken for granted. Put another way, the heart of the story is less a human problem than it is the problem of the human. Viewed from this perspective, the film displays an irresolvable ambivalence towards the possibility of a human community.

The meaning and purpose for the film's greater project of Tessa and Justin's lives and deaths, and separations and reunions hinge on the specific place to which the film returns. The significance of Lake Turkana as the site of Tessa's murder is shot through with irony in le Carré's novel. In an early description of the press coverage of the murder, the narrator mocks the media's ignorance of Africa alongside its tendency to burden the continent with the weight of the dark essence of humanity itself:

An editorial in the *Guardian* made much of the fact that the Millennium's New Woman Diplomat [sic] should have met her death at Leakey's cradle of mankind, and drew from this the disquieting moral that, though racial attitudes may change, we cannot plumb the wells of savagery that are to be found at the heart of every man's darkness. The piece lost some of its impact when a sub-editor unfamiliar with the African continent set Tessa's murder on the shore of Lake Tanganyika rather than Turkana. (63)

The propensity of the media to use Africa as a basis for drawing "disquieting morals" about humanity is echoed by the two detectives in the novel who, in the course of their investigation, are occupied with questions of Justin and Arnold's potential darkness. Following a run-down of who Richard Leakey is—the political agitator and "white African legend [...] anthropologist and archaeologist" (le Carré 93) associated with Lake Turkana—one of the detectives muses "what sort of *man*" (94, emphasis in original) Justin is. Sandy Woodrow's response, an attempt at delay via retreat into theatrical and empty philosophising, is to ask "who are *any* of us?" (94, emphasis in original). Later the pendulum swings too far in the other direction when the same detective states with certainty that "Bluhm's as close as you'll ever get to a *good man*", a claim tempered by the narrator's remark that such a statement assumes that "*good man* were a finite condition like *Homo sapiens*" (le Carré 99, emphases in original). In the context of the triumph of corporate and government corruption and greed as well as the pessimism, or even nihilism, with which the novel ends, this question of what makes a (hu)man good becomes increasingly irrelevant. Marlow's ruminations on the dark nature of man in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is invoked and then rejected: to get lost in such philosophising about human nature is to miss le Carré's point about the specific injustice that is the exploitation of the world's most vulnerable people.

Equally important is le Carré's ending. Justin's return to the lake is not a reunion with Tessa through which he arrives at a point of knowledge or understanding. Rather, as he is taken by boat across the lake, Justin—dehydrated and fevered—does see Tessa but, importantly, a variety of other people from his life as a diplomat are also crammed into his hallucination. The reader is presented with a tableau depicting the politically and personally fraught relationships within the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Instead of a romantic and metaphysical reunion, the novel depicts a man who is haunted by a community he has disavowed because of its moral corruption, from which he has been ejected but is unable to remedy or disengage from. Moreover, when Justin arrives at the exact location of his wife's death, he is alone. The boatmen who took him there are persuaded to leave him and, after "clambering over the slabs of lava rock [...] at the cradle of civilisation" (le Carré 569), Tessa and the various members of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office disappear from the narrative. Instead of reunion, Justin's death is preceded by observations about the surrounding flora:

Then, as a methodical man, he returned to the boulder he had chosen as his sitting place when he first came here, and sat down on it again, and devoted himself to the study of a small blue flower not unlike the phlox that he had planted in the front garden of their house in Nairobi. But the problem was, he was not absolutely sure the flower belonged to the place where he was seeing it, or whether in his mind he had transplanted it from Nairobi or, come to think of it, from the meadows surrounding his hotel in the Engadine. (le Carré 572)

That which previously served as a distraction from the political—gardening—is now an analogy for his persistent state of unbelonging. Furthermore, his inability to be sure of the origin of the small blue flower undercuts the significance of the lake as the origin of human civilisation. Like the flower and despite "the transition in his nature" (le Carré 573), Justin remains an outsider, and is not assuaged by a renewed connection to his wife. His transition, therefore, is less determined and integration into a community of any kind is rendered questionable, if not impossible.

In contrast with the novel and because it is concerned with the broad strokes of human disunity more than the specifics of a particular injustice, Mereilles' film remains caught up in the problems of the human and of a human community. Whereas in the novel Lake Turkana is mentioned only for its symbolism to be subverted and serves as a false alibi for Arnold and Tessa—making it a red-herring on two counts—in the film it is turned into an inevitability. This inevitability coupled with Justin and Tessa's reunion cast as a metaphysical homecoming points to the paradisaical nature of Lake Turkana. But, as Helga Ramsey-Kurz

points out, paradise is an ambiguous concept structured around and through a series of dichotomies: “inclusion and exclusion, bliss and discontent, innocence and guilt, transience and permanence, materiality and transcendence, beginning and end” (vii–viii). Importantly, in Mereilles’ film the structuring of paradise occurs externally—the opposition of Lake Turkana and London—and internally, within Lake Turkana. This reveals an irresolvable ambivalence about the possibility of a human community.

When read in its relation to London, Lake Turkana is a site of inclusion, bliss, innocence and transcendence. Through the “integration of the [opposing] forces into a single unit” (Schatz, “Film Genre” 701), the resolution of the love story is one of inclusion. Following on from the film’s atemporal structure in which beginnings are endings and endings are beginnings, Justin’s reunion with Tessa is another ending as beginning. The specifics of this beginning are tangled up with the film’s humanitarian-humanist drive as well as Lake Turkana, the cradle of human civilisation. In other words, this is an ending which is not only a beginning but a return to an origin as if Justin is going back in time. (McGowan notes that Justin’s memorial service occurs at the same time as his death; another instance of the atemporality of the film.) Consequently, Justin and Tessa’s reunion which is also a union of Africa and the West suggests the (re)creation of a human community, an attempt at bridging the divide by being once again “as we were in the past”. This is a community characterised not only by knowledge and understanding of the other but also a sense of bliss which comes from such a position. In its opposition to London, it is characterised by innocence and heroism. The innocent humanitarian heroes are both excluded from the corrupt world they have disrupted, and reintegrated into a human community. Finally in the suggestion of a beginning born of an ending, a reunion made possible through death, it is a community that offers the transcendence of death.

London and, specifically, Justin’s memorial service form the opposite to Lake Turkana, functioning as sites of discontent, guilt and corrupt materiality. The warm, rich red tones used for the lake are starkly contrasted with the sombre, grey scene of the London memorial service, extremities between which the film alternates in its final sequence. Justin’s lawyer and Tessa’s cousin, Arthur Hammond (Richard McCabe), reads out by way of eulogy Pellegrin’s letter to Woodrow, implicating both men and the British government in the unethical and criminal activities of KDH and ThreeBees. The large columns and imposing stone walls of the church to which the camera cuts reinforces the opposition of Lake Turkana and London. As Ramsey-Kurz notes, the Persian roots of the word ‘paradise’ include *pairi*, which means “‘around’ or enclos[ed], ‘as with a wall’” (viii). Ironically, the sacred world of the

memorial service—shortly to be exposed as filled with corrupt representatives—is walled off from Lake Turkana as Pellegrin flees the church, a flurry of journalists in pursuit.

There is a second irony, a corollary of Justin (the West) and Tessa's (Africa's) reunion and the construction of this reunion through an opposition to London. Justin's 'africanisation'—that is, his becoming more like Tessa, the symbol of Africa—ultimately maintains the opposition of Africa and the West. The creation of a human community is not predicated on a resolution of the divisions between Africa and the West. Rather, through Justin's transformation, it is the collapse or negation of the differences that exist. Consequently, the opposition of Lake Turkana and London reasserts the original division. The film's participation in both romance and 'Africa film', therefore, signals both the (re)union of Africa and the West as well as the continuing division between them.

The aporia which results from *The Constant Gardener's* multiple genericity and which becomes clear in the opposition outlined above is heightened when one considers Lake Turkana as itself internally contradictory. In a chapter about the Leakey family's work at Turkana, Martin Meredith describes the lake area as "resembl[ing] a lunar landscape, a boundless expanse of lava and littered with the wrecks of ancient volcanoes" (2011: *Born in Africa* 76). Meredith could be describing the lake as it appears in Mereilles' film (Fig. 11). In fact, as Justin is flown over the northern parts of Kenya, near Lake Turkana, the pilot calls their landing spot "the surface of the moon". In the novel and in keeping with its censure of



Figure 11: The lunar landscape of Lake Turkana. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)

media sensationalism, when Justin arrives on the shore of Lake Turkana it is described as being littered with "the junk that these days was inseparable from any well-publicised event: discarded film cassettes and boxes, cigarette packets, plastic bottles and paper plates" (570). In addition there is mention of fishing boats; there is a sense of human activity. Lake Turkana, in the novel, is part of the material world but in the film it's otherworldliness suggests both a desolate materiality and transcendence. Within Mereilles' frame, Lake Turkana appears untouched by the very thing it is credited with generating: human civilisation. Justin, walking across a cracked, rust-coloured expanse, is for the most part

solitary and it is as if he is the first human to exist in this hostile place: his footprints are the only ones. This is not the pre-lapsarian Garden of Eden so often associated with lush, jungle Africa and found in Kingsolver's Congolese village. Rather, it appears primordial, an ancient, almost alien landscape which does not signal a departure from paradisaical constructions of Africa but rather frames paradise in less biblical, more ancient terms.

The irony that marks the depiction of the church as a walled off space is repeated and reversed in a series of shots of Lake Turkana in which Justin is alone. The opposition of Lake Turkana and London is mirrored in the opposition of the shots in which Justin is with Tessa (discussed above) and those in which Justin is utterly alone, in a state of despair and finally murdered. The sound of Pellegrin describing him as "self-effacing" ironically reinforces Justin's forced exclusion. These shots suggest an alternative in which Justin does not transcend death through reunion but rather where the boundlessness of Lake Turkana is circumscribed by the violent intrusion of a non-transcendental death. When the mercenaries arrive, armed with guns, ammunition and alcohol, Tessa is no longer with Justin and Justin's final word—"Tessa"—underscores the contradiction of a homecoming through death. This disruption of a paradise characterised by inclusion, bliss, innocence and transcendence through its constitutive opposites—isolation, despair, guilt and death—points to the aporia of a human community originating in the constructed paradise that is the origin of human civilisation. Not only is (re)union rendered even more uncertain in these shots due to Tessa's absence but, stripped of transcendence and excluded at the origin of humankind from both his wife and his former world, Justin's death negates community as a form of unity and, therefore, the possibility of a human community which resolves the divisions between Africa and the West.

4.2.4. An Ambivalent Human Community: three moments

This ambivalence towards human community is not limited to the film's resolution; it can be noted at various points in the course of the film, suggesting a persistent struggle with notions of both individual and communal belonging. Before turning to the deployment of the author-function in the DVD MODs as an attempt to stabilise the contradictions in the film itself, I will focus briefly on three moments which trouble readings of the film as being either political or apolitical. These moments cannot be slotted into a single generic convention, nor do they clearly defy such conventions. As with the examples cited and discussed above, they are examples of the various and often contradictory forces at work within any one shot, scene or sequence.

Working backwards from the end of the film, the first moment which struggles against easy constructions of a human community occurs when Justin is awaiting his death at the site of Tessa's murder. His trek across Lake Turkana has, until this point, been one of solitude with no sign of human life, modern or otherwise. But, in a brief series of shots which serve the development of theme and not the progression of plot, a blurry figure appears in the distance while Justin is in focus. Justin turns his back to the camera and looks in the man's direction, drawing the viewer's eye towards the figure. A medium shot reveals an African man in what appears to be non-western, 'tribal' clothing, walking across the landscape from left to right. Justin enters the shot—he is closer to the camera and some distance away from the hazy figure—and walks from right to left, as the African man disappears from the frame, seemingly oblivious to Justin and without acknowledging the camera (Fig. 12). This figure seems to both invite and resist interpretation. There is something very conventional about this African man clad in red cloth, hints of traditional jewellery around his ankles and wrists. But his lack of acknowledgement of Justin and the camera—of the frame in which he is momentarily caught but not contained—and lack of participation in the scene (if he can be described as an extra, he is an unscripted one) in which he appears renders him inscrutable. This lack of participation should not be equated with a lack of agency, however, as the man's purposeful stride points to another narrative, a series of events beyond the narrow purview of this film. Furthermore, the one-sided awareness of another's presence and the different directions of the men's paths, as if they are walking away from each other, suggests not only simultaneous connection and disconnection on Justin's part but a relation which, because of the African man's lack of concern for Justin and the camera, must be thought of in entirely new ways.

The second moment of importance here is, on the surface, a puzzling repudiation of humanitarianism in a film which remains focused on the importance of sincere humanitarian intervention.¹⁸ I stated earlier that Justin echoes Tessa's humanitarian sentiments in South Sudan when he attempts to bring a small child (Ann Achan) with him on the rescue aeroplane only for the pilot to refuse. What is noteworthy is that the child jumps out of the stationary aeroplane and runs away, choosing another course of action. McGowan

¹⁸ During his eulogy at the end of the film, Arthur Hammond mentions the expansion of ThreeBees and KDH's operations into Zimbabwe. This and his ironic meditation on "who has committed murder" is evidence for the continuation of activism which, unlike the work of these companies, is genuinely concerned for all of humanity's well-being.



Figure 12: Connection and disconnection at the origin of humankind. *The Constant Gardener* (2005)

describes this decision by the child as rendering Justin's argument moot, as having no practical relevance. However, the moment strikes me as being not only a rejection of Justin's white-industrial saviour complex but also a rare instance of African agency in a film which

neglects other opportunities to represent African characters in such a light. That this decision to act against the grain of the white-saviour narrative comes from a child makes the moment doubly significant. But, as with the African man discussed above, the brevity of this moment makes of it an uncertain thing. The child's rejection of Justin's humanitarianism is countered by Dr Lorbeer's (Pete Postlethwaite) pessimistic comment that "she might make it to a refugee camp...if she's lucky": any ideological victory signalled by the girl's agency is undermined by the near-certainty that her decision will result in continued hardship, if not death. Within Justin and Tessa's humanitarian impulse lingers a moral superiority not easily shaken off. On the other hand, what does the girl's rejection of Justin signal for the possibility of a human community? If Justin's transformation and resulting reunion with Tessa is central to the film's imagining of a human community, then this moment in which Justin's transformation is seen in action and summarily rejected suggests a sense of ambivalence about a human community well before the film ends.

The third moment relevant to the film's complex, contradictory and even anxious grappling with human community returns us to the intersections of the intimate (romantic) and the public (political). Tessa and Arnold walk through Kibera, distributing medicine and maternal care, and finish their tour at Jomo's (Bernard Otieno Oduor) house when Tessa encourages him to be tested for HIV. Jomo then rushes off to his job in the city and the camera follows him as he cycles through Kibera and into Nairobi. Through this extended tracking shot, the viewer learns more about 'Africa' along the way and so Jomo is temporarily aligned with Tessa in that they both offer a means of accessing 'Africa'.¹⁹ Jomo's arrival at work, where he quickly washes himself in an outdoor communal basin before changing into his waiter's uniform, is immediately followed by the scene, to which I have already referred, in which Justin films Tessa in the bath. Justin, using a slow tracking shot, moves around the bath and eventually reveals Tessa as the subject of the shot. He affects a French accent and describes what he sees as though he were an explorer encountering a foreign, exotic phenomenon: "Now, for the first time we are exploring a new territory. This is a new discovery for the famous marine biologist, Jacques Cousteau". To invoke Cousteau is to evoke not only the exploration of unknown parts of the world and unknown forms of life but also the confluence of acts of discovery and filmmaking.

¹⁹ Joseph sees in this tracking shot through Kibera and Nairobi an attempt to represent an African city with more complexity, an awareness of the coexistence of poverty and wealth, slums and business districts with high-rise buildings.

The camera, whether it is wielded by César Charlone (the cinematographer) or Justin, is a means of unifying what appears to be disparate. A tracking shot reveals 'Africa' followed by a tracking shot that reveals Tessa. The commonality of the act of washing oneself also connects Jomo and Tessa but the context of the act, the clear material differences—Tessa is having a leisurely bubblebath in a private bathroom while Jomo must wash hurriedly at an outdoor, communal basin—undercuts the human universality suggested by the act itself. The next scene reveals that Jomo's job is to waiter at an embassy party which Tessa and Justin attend: the universality of the human connection is put under strain with these reminders of the differing social and political positions of power afforded African and Western characters. Lines of connection or association are also drawn between the director/cinematographer and Justin, through the repetition of a tracking shot which serves to both discover and reveal an unfamiliar object-subject. A similar association is drawn between Justin, the lover with intimate access to his wife, and the viewer who is granted the same access. The intimacy of this bathroom scene is unsettling and not simply for the explicitly voyeuristic nature of the camera.²⁰ Justin's impression of Cousteau raises the spectre of the more politically and ideologically fraught exploration of 'unknown' parts of the world and forms of life: the colonies and those who inhabit them. Considering the convergence of the various figures with the power to frame and look (cinematographer, Justin, the viewer), the reference to Cousteau in this scene, himself an explorer and filmmaker, raises the uncomfortable possibility that the earlier scene where Jomo is tracked cycling through Kibera and Nairobi is similarly tainted. Justin's tracking of Tessa becomes a (arguably playful) performance of discovery and a claim to possession, a kind of visual colonisation enacted by he who wields the camera. In a film which encourages reading forwards and backwards throughout, Justin's framing of Tessa reflects back onto the film's framing of Jomo and 'Africa', creating a tension between what connects characters and what disconnects them.

When *The Constant Gardener* is regarded as situated at the intersections of romance and 'Africa film' what emerges is a text which works through both genres to generate a human community, a project that is thwarted by the various tensions, contradictions and

²⁰ This is one of a handful of moments in the film where the camera is clearly a tool for voyeurism or surveillance. Tessa jokingly calls Justin a voyeur and the viewer, who sees what Justin sees on a laptop screen and also sees him reflected in the bathroom mirror, is reminded of their own voyeurism. Later, at Heathrow Airport, Justin is tracked by security cameras and the viewer sees him on a security guard's computer screen. The intrusion on the private or intimate by the camera is suggested again when Justin watches home videos after Tessa's death: everyone else in the scene leaves to give him privacy but the viewer, beholden to the camera, cannot leave.

aporias that arise from the marriage of the romantic and the political. In other words, the marriage of the romantic and the political is simultaneously productive and circumscriptive. This results in a film which seeks to imagine what the contours of a global relationality might look like but which becomes increasingly anxious about, or ambivalent towards, the possibility of such a global relationality or human community. Although Merille's film seems to work harder than Kingsolver's,²¹ Meldrum's and Addison's texts at navigating the tension between sameness and difference, it remains caught between two unappealing options: the creation of a human community which bridges the division by reasserting it, or accepting a divided world and the impossibility of a human community.

4.3. Adaptation and Authorship in *The Constant Gardener*

The structures of a global relationality do not only function in an abstract manner at the level of text in Merille's film. *The Constant Gardener*, like many films, is a transnational product. Ostensibly, *The Constant Gardener* is an English film adapted from an English novel but, as Andrew Higson demonstrates, it is a film with "a much more thorough-going transnational dimension" (2011: 67). This is obvious at the level of plot: British diplomats and spies operate in Kenya, which is the meeting point for a number of characters—aid workers, employees of transnational corporations, mercenaries *etcetera*—from around the world; Justin must travel to England, Germany and South Sudan in order to piece together the events leading to his wife's murder in Kenya²²; and the corporate villains, KDH Pharmaceuticals and ThreeBees, operate in at least three continents across the world. The film's transnational dimension is also a result of its processes of production and is reflected in its reception. Funding came from America (Focus Features, a division of Universal Pictures), Britain (UK Film Council and Scion Films), Germany and Canada. The locations included England, Kenya, Germany and Canada.²³ The screenwriter and producer—Jeffrey Caine and Simon Channing-Williams—are British, the director is Brazilian, and the cinematographer is from Uruguay. While *The Constant Gardener* was not a blockbuster, it made a respectable profit in the area of \$52 million, won awards across Europe and America and was screened in

²¹ This refers specifically to Ruth May as laid out in the previous chapters. Adah, discussed in the next chapter, is an example of a more sustained engagement with difference in *The Poisonwood Bible*, offering a stark contrast to the easy transcendence of difference through sameness which Ruth May represents.

²² In the novel, he also travels to Canada and is in temporary, self-imposed exile on the Italian island of Elba.

²³ Scenes set in Canada were, however, cut from the final edit. They are available as part of the "Deleted Scenes" feature on the DVD.

over 30 countries worldwide (Higson 67, 69, 72; for a comprehensive list of production credits see Winter 2015).

Writing about national cinema, Higson concludes that “[i]n various ways, all these filmic developments are the products of transnational cultural exchange, and all of them challenge the concept of national cinema” (70). Similarly, they challenge the notion of a single, creative origin. Film, from its beginning as entertainment for the masses to its development as a global cultural product, can and has been regarded as “the art form of democracy” (Cartmell 3). Similarly, when freed from fidelity discourse, adaptation is “the art of democratization” (Cartmell 8). I agree with Deborah Cartmell’s assessment of adaptation, and film more broadly; however, the processes of production of each should not be conflated with their modes of representation, even though they can and do influence each other. The former may allow for the temporary economic upliftment of, or longer term skills development within, a local community but that does not guarantee a fair “democratic” representation of that community. Higson notes that the transnational production of a film may often be a strategic economic arrangement that, particularly in the case of independent or small studio films, ensures wider distribution and greater profits in the shadow of Hollywood’s market dominance. However, he does not lose sight of the lingering national identity of such films. Mafe and Higson separately identify the problem of these modes of representation in transnational cinema with the latter claiming that:

As national boundaries become blurred and transnational or even global cultures form, we might expect the cinematic projection of a self-consciously national identity to be markedly weakened. I would suggest, however, that very often the most traditional and stereotypical manifestations of English national identity are reproduced as novel and meaningful in films intended for transnational circulation. The most banal images of England and Englishness are underlined, exaggerated and foregrounded; banal markers of national identity thus become exotic signifiers of difference in the global marketplace. On the one hand, this might allay the fears of those who see national cultures being eroded by the forces of globalisation: national identities and traditions are still presented on screen. On the other hand, it is often the least complex and the most familiar, the most stereotypical ‘national’ representations that prevail in such circumstances. (71)

It is important to note that, taken together, Higson, Mafe, Joseph and Musila indicate that *The Constant Gardener* employs stereotypes for all its main characters, British and African. The construction of Africa by (neo)colonial, (neo)imperial as well as Pan-African movements as a relatively homogeneous entity, as if it were a culturally homogeneous country, means that a similar process of national stereotyping takes place despite the obvious fact that Africa

is not a nation. The banality of these markers of national identity suggest that national and racial stereotypes serve to stabilise the transnational cinematic narrative, making the potentially overwhelming convergence of a variety of Others more familiar and more manageable: the pleasure of familiarity reins in the piquancy of surprise. For instance, even as he seeks to disrupt the network of greed and corruption that murdered his wife, Justin remains recognisably “British”: polite, contained, and a persistent gentleman (see Lane 2005). Similarly, despite being homosexual, Arnold Bluhm is, necessarily from the perspective of plot, regarded as a sexual threat to Justin and Tessa’s lilywhite love. Much of the film’s intrigue is tied up in colonialist stereotypes of a white woman’s purity threatened by the black, hyper-sexual male body, the social disgrace of an inter-racial affair and briefly the threat of miscegenation. Justin and the audience can only breathe a sigh of relief upon finding out about Arnold’s homosexuality if he is first seen as a threat.²⁴ Attempts by the film to undermine stereotypes are grounded in re-stating those and other stereotypes. The potential for heterogeneity suggested, or potentiated by the film’s various points of creative origin is corralled into little more than a collection of “exotic signifiers of difference in the global marketplace” (Higson 71). Because everyone is stereotyped to some extent in this film, a strange unity of sorts is generated out of a pool of troublesome difference. It is a unity via a hybrid of stereotypes which, having reasserted national and racial difference, seeks to erase difference wholesale. This is a reminder of the problem that *The Constant Gardener* attempts to solve, a problem it has itself reconstructed to begin with: what sense of unity may be relied upon for the anger expressed at the divisions between ‘the West and the Rest’ to gain its foothold?

I have demonstrated that the relationship between Justin and Tessa as an analogy for a reunion between the West and Africa is riddled with contradictions, resulting in a film that remains ambivalent about the possibility of a human community. But, in the DVD paratexts, a second attempt is made. This approach is not fundamentally different in its premise—that a single origin offers a stable basis for a community—but it does turn to a seemingly less abstract kind of origin: the director or author of the film.

²⁴ In both le Carré’s novel and Meirelles’ film, Arnold’s sexuality provides an opportunity to ‘expose’ Kenya’s oppressive stance, particularly under Daniel Moi’s government, towards homosexuality and homosexuals. Nevertheless, that that critique of prejudice relies on the reassertion of a racialised stereotype—also the product of prejudice—renders the representation of Arnold highly problematic.

4.3.1. Authorship, Authority and Appropriation

Authorship (and its attendant issues of authority and originality) remains a contested notion in film studies, even more so when the film operates explicitly as an adaptation. When I write about the film version of le Carré's novel, I call it 'Mereilles' film' and even though this is for practical purposes it nevertheless effects a re-inscription of the primacy of the director as owner and creator (as the designation 'le Carré's novel' does in the first instance). On the other hand, as the previous sentence already suggests, film adaptations present a challenge to the idea of a single authorship—a mode of possession and creation attributable to one figure—because of the simultaneous presence of two authors, necessitating a distinction between the novelist's text and that of the director. Add to this the often visible and traceable creative contributions and usually unknowable intentions of the screenwriter(s), cinematographer(s), post-production editor(s), to name just a few of the key roles in both film and filmic adaptations, and the notion of a single author and/or origin of a work becomes increasingly limiting.²⁵ Adaptations, and film more broadly, offer an example of what John Bryant calls "*shifting* intentions" (qtd in Hutcheon 95, emphasis in original)—that is, a reminder "that there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history" (Hutcheon 111). Importantly, such a conceptualisation of the author/director as being both inevitable (if only for practical reasons) and ever-shifting need not be an obstacle to exploring the roles played (or made to play) by a director nor a plethora of other issues pertinent to film adaptation.

Rainer Emig's evaluation of Adaptation Theory, to which I referred in the introduction of this chapter, posits that questions of authorship, authority and originality hamper the more important issue of the role of cultural appropriation in adaptation. While Adaptation Theory or simply considerations of adaptations would benefit from a more diverse range of approaches, Emig's separation of authorship, authority and originality from cultural adaptation is unhelpful because it fails to acknowledge that notions of the former often underpin, and constitute the mechanisms of, cultural appropriation and vice versa. This is certainly the case in *The Constant Gardener*, specifically in the construction of the director as authority-figure in the 'making-of' documentaries (MODs) included on the DVD. I am not suggesting a return to a position that regards the author and their intentions as the only or even the main determinant of meaning for a text; neither am I trading in "author gods" for "idols of adaptation" (Emig 17). Rather, in an effort to make sense of how Mereilles is made

²⁵ The existence of a 'director's cut' of a film, which privileges the director as author, however, also points to the uncertain status of the work, particularly when the question of the author appears to be settled.

to function in relation to the film, I am turning to Foucault's notion of the "author function" as that which is "characteristic of the mode[s] of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 108) and which is constructed as "author". The author function is particularly relevant in light of my discussion of the film thus far because, as Foucault argues, "[t]he author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing" and "serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 111). In short, I argue that Meirelles is constructed, and is made to function, as a stabilizing force. Meirelles' status as a 'Third World' director is used throughout the MODs to give authority and authenticity to the film's representation of Africa in an attempt to settle the film as being not only about Africa but a political film about Africa. This construction of the author is enacted through a process of cultural appropriation.

4.3.2. A 'Third World' Anger, a 'Third World' Eye

The Constant Gardener positions itself and/or is positioned as political. On the one hand this is because of its location between fiction and documentary. On the other hand, this is because of how Fernando Meirelles is set up as an authentic Third World authorial/directorial eye. In a *Time* article, Ralph Fiennes claims that "he was not looking to make a political film" and that "[i]t was only when [he] saw the film in its first cut that [he] thought, 'This is about Africa'" (Corliss and Luscombe 64). This article makes a point of Fiennes' relative lack of public and political involvement.²⁶ The message of the article is clear: Fiennes is not a 'typical' Hollywood star, but rather a serious actor, and this includes his reluctance to be a celebrity-activist-philanthropist. Even though Fiennes is set up as being serious and, therefore, to be taken seriously, his reading of the film as being political because it is 'about Africa' is seen as a consequence not of his own political leanings but rather of the director's eye. The article emphasises this contrast between star and director by stating that the "result [of Fiennes' reticence and Meirelles' probing] is a First World story seen through the acute eyes of a Third World auteur" (Corliss and Luscombe 64). The film, according to Corliss and Luscombe, is a successful marriage between First and Third World. This confluence between Meirelles and the Third World is reiterated throughout the DVD bonus features. Le Carré, whose novel is described on the cover by the *Observer* as "breath[ing] anger" (see also Lane 2005), claims that Meirelles "brings a Third World eye, a Third World anger" (Mansi, *John le Carré: From Page to Screen*) to the film. Meirelles

²⁶ The authors cite as evidence of this the fact that Fiennes participated in a march against the Iraq invasion "anonymously" (Corliss and Luscombe 64).

echoes this when he claims that “the big change between the script and the book” is that while, in the case of the novel, “somebody in the First World [writes] about what happened with them”, he “put [himself] in the other position” (Mansi, *John le Carré: From Page to Screen*). Meirelles goes further when he claims that he “see[s] the story from a Kenyan’s point of view” (Mansi, *Page to Screen*). Meirelles, because he is from a country located in the Southern hemisphere, is made to function as a signifier of “Third World-ness”, which in turn authorises him, gives him authority, to speak for “Africa” or even “Kenyans”.

Two ideas need to be interrogated: that of Meirelles’ status as *auteur* as well as the privileging of him as being authentically Third World and by extension, the validity of the term itself. I will begin with the second idea because, as I will demonstrate, Meirelles’ *auteur*-ship depends on his Third World-ness. The presentation of Meirelles, in the DVD bonus features, as a *Third World* director is significant because of the relationship such MODs have with the films themselves. While John Caldwell (2008) focuses on the DVD bonus feature as simply one of a series of promotional tools, Paul Arthur (2004) and Nicola Jean Evans (2010) each take a less dismissive approach. Even though Arthur appreciates the ‘making-of’ documentary (he calls himself a “making-of addict” in the essay title), he likens MODs to a parasite which “has been proliferating, and mutating at a speed that dwarfs that of the production of ‘original’ features [to the extent that] occasionally a cinematic parasite manages to supplant, even devour, its host” (39). Evans, in an approach which echoes but does not mention Gerard Genette’s discussion of paratexts, argues for a less hierarchical and less threatening relationship between films and their MODs by “considering how such supplementary materials reconfigure what we imagine and consume as the film text” (590). The film and the MOD are treated by Evans as “two related performances that feed off each other, each performing the cultural work of the film” (590). The most common focus of MODs is that of the director and the performance or “validation of directorial artistry”, often presented through interviews and/or behind-the-scenes footage in which “an updated myth of auteurism” (all quotations from Arthur 40) is offered. Importantly, Arthur points out how interviews with those “usually relegated to the back pages of film history”—script writers, cinematographers, special effects experts, *etcetera*—may foreground “the problematic nature of authorship in Hollywood production” (all quotations from Arthur 40).

The problem of authorship in *The Constant Gardener* is less about the origin of the plot or story; the film as *adaptation* is foregrounded in the MOD *John le Carré: From Page to Screen* and interviewees across the MODs include both le Carré and Meirelles as well as less commonly recognised creative figures. The problem of authorship in this case is that of

authority, authenticity and legitimacy as they relate to the subject of the film: 'Africa'. Contrary to what Corliss and Luscombe suggest, First and Third World are not that easily married. The MODs are almost exclusively concerned with establishing the film's legitimacy by repeatedly asserting the authenticity of the location and the authority of the director.²⁷ The authority of this director is not located in a Romantic understanding of the creative genius, also typical in certain readings of the *auteur*-figure, nor in what Arthur describes as the likeability of the "regular guy [...] nor nerdy project manager" (41). Meirelles' authority as a director is located in his nationality and that nationality is collapsed into a broader, more nebulous, yet still fundamentally Romantic Third-World-ness. It is this aspect of Meirelles which is intended to serve as the basis of his position as *auteur*. In his essay, "The Auteur Theory", Peter Wollen clarifies what is meant by the term—according to *auteur* theorists—and places that theory in the context of its democratic impulse:

It [auteur theory] sprang from the conviction that the American cinema was worth studying in depth, that masterpieces were made not only by a small upper crust of directors, the cultured gilt on the commercial gingerbread, but by a whole range of authors, whose work had previously been dismissed and consigned to oblivion. (Wollen 565)

This democratic impulse is reflected in, or is perhaps the product of, the fact that *auteur* theory is not a clear-cut or definitive programme; it is not a "manifesto" (Wollen 565) but rather "reveals authors where none had been seen before" (Wollen 566; see also Hillier's discussion of authorship). To claim that the author is revealed obscures the process through which the author is in fact constructed. The process of author-construction *a posteriori* of the film is central to its cultural work. In his essay Wollen provides a distinction between the *auteur* and the *metteur en scène*. In films by the former, there is a "semantic dimension" (Wollen 566), while in the case of the latter, the film "does not go beyond the realm of performance, of transposing into the special complex of cinematic codes and channels a pre-existing text" (Wollen 566). In the case of the *metteur en scène* meaning is generated *a priori*, as opposed to the *auteur* where meaning is generated *a posteriori*.²⁸ As an examination of Meirelles *vis a vis* *The Constant Gardener* reveals, and indeed as Wollen points out, the distinction between *auteur* and *metteur en scène* "is not always clear-cut"

²⁷ Weisz's comments about the authenticity of Kibera and its residents cited earlier are echoed, and expanded to Africa more generally, by Fiennes and Channing-Williams throughout *Embracing Africa: Filming in Kenya* (Mansi 2006). The references to Meirelles' "Third World eye", already cited, occur in *John le Carré: From Page to Screen* (Mansi 2006).

²⁸ To read a film and its director from the perspective of the *metteur en scène*, as described by Wollen, risks a return to the priority of a source text and to criticism based in fidelity theory. Any neat distinction made between *auteur* and *metteur en scène*, therefore, must be seen from the outset as limited and limiting.

(Wollen 566). In fact, it is the intersection of these two modes of authorship which most accurately captures Meirelles' role as author of *The Constant Gardener* because meaning in the text is created *a priori* and *a posteriori*. 'Africa' is the *a priori* meaning which Meirelles transposes into a cinematic code that, due to the distinctive use of colour and editing, masquerades as *auteurism*. The extent to which Meirelles' seemingly distinctive style is imbued with *a priori* meaning is reflected in his claims about "an African situation [being] much warmer, more colourful, brighter" (Jays 10) than a European one, which is represented in "greenish, low contrast [light, where] everybody wears greys and blacks" (Jays 10). Not only does Meirelles homogenise the continent, but he subscribes to rather tired ideas about Africa being somehow more vibrant and, paradoxically alongside the narrative of suffering, *more alive* than anywhere in the First World; he is tapping into a well-established body of ideas about African-ness and Africanity.

Ideas about African-ness are dressed up as Third World-ness through assumed similarities between Kibera and the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, which is the setting of Meirelles' previous, critically acclaimed film, *Cidade de Deus / City of God* (Meirelles and Lund, 2002). Similarities in style in *The Constant Gardener* and *City of God* appear to be the grounds upon which Meirelles may be regarded as an *auteur* (Atkinson; Lane; Laurier; Winter). Indeed, according to *auteur* theory as laid out by Wollen, an *auteur* is identifiable once an existing body of cinematic work by one director is deciphered or decrypted and a structural or aesthetic pattern can be discerned. By these standards, it is perhaps too early to ascribe *auteur* status to Meirelles, seeing as *The Constant Gardener* was only his fourth feature film,²⁹ even though there are undeniable similarities between *City of God* and *The Constant Gardener* in terms of aesthetics and editing. What rings more true in the case of Meirelles when it comes to his purported *auteur*-ship is the fact that he provides coherence: "What the *auteur* theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final 'coherent' version" (Wollen 577). This is not to say that the look of *The Constant Gardener* and *City of God* is irrelevant to Meirelles' function as *auteur* but rather to point out that it is only part of what constitutes him as such. Meirelles' *auteurship* is therefore not located solely in an aesthetic but also in his "ability to express a certain world view" (Hillier 6). The aesthetic is, in this case, a means of conveying a political and ideological statement about the Third

²⁹ A family film, *Menino Maluquinho 2: A Aventura* in 1998 was Meirelles' first feature film, followed in 2001 by *Domésticas*, a more political film which "exposed the invisible world of five Brazilian maids in São Paulo" (The Internet Movie Database).

World, and to only focus on the aesthetic results is a failure to take into account the tenuous nature of the underlying statement.

Meirelles, the eye of Third World anger who also restates reductive notions about African-ness, betrays the tenuous nature of that aesthetic coherence. In other words, Meirelles is the stabilising figure, the *auteur* who provides coherence because he is 'of the Third World', and yet he betrays that coherence because his being 'of the Third World' reveals the collapsing into each other of incompatible positions that the label requires. In a short interview published in *U.S. News and World Report*, Meirelles talks about his visit to Africa, before filming *The Constant Gardener*. He says that he had been to Kenya, "just to game parks for fun", and that he had found it "[v]isually [...] very interesting" because the "people are beautiful, and they use a lot of colors—greens and pinks" (Hallet 20). It is not surprising that a film director should think visually, of course, but what this statement also reveals is a tourist-oriented view, that of 'safari-Africa'. When asked in another interview whether he was prepared for Kenyan poverty "[a]fter working in the favelas" for *City of God*, Meirelles responds by re-establishing differential specificity but then sublimating it when turning to the immaterial and transcendent: "I thought it would be similar to Rio, but it isn't. There's such a gap. But you feel the same *spirit* that I found in the favelas: such dignity, and it's really energetic" (Jays 10, emphasis added). By universalising the structures and experiences of poverty found in Rio and Kibera, the interviewer sets up an ill-defined equivalence between the two. In turn, Meirelles bridges the gap between Rio favelas and Kibera by sentimentalising poverty; he offers a romanticised notion of the perseverance and "spirit" of the disenfranchised. This is particularly important in the context of his *auteur*-ship based on stylistic similarities in *City of God* and *The Constant Gardener*. Meirelles, "a middle-classer from Rio" (Atkinson no page), is accused of conveying only a removed sense of sympathy for his subject. Referring to both films, Laurier calls this "his sympathy for but essential distance from what he [Meirelles] terms the 'underdogs' of society" (Laurier no page). The director's distance consequently "allows viewers to remain detached from the Kenyan population, rather than identifying with their suffering and according them full human status" (Stein 106; see also Atkinson). Curiously, Meirelles perceives a barrier between himself and the British, which he clearly does not in the case of Kenyans. He explains that his "feeling is that the Brits [sic] have a code between themselves that only [they] can assess. [...] It's a code between [the British]. [He] tried to get the code, but it's impossible for a foreigner to penetrate [their] secret" (Jays 10). Meirelles does not afford Kenyans such an

identity, albeit a homogenous national identity, because for him they are Third World, like the locals in the favelas and, untenably but necessarily as the *auteur*, like him.

When the DVD bonus features are considered alongside a number of interviews with Meirelles and articles about his work, it becomes clear that the director is, consciously or not, in a constant process of legitimising, and being used to legitimise, his authority on the basis of his purported Third World-ness even as he betrays his distance from the position which he claims to occupy artistically. He must be constructed and reconstructed as the author. His status as *auteur*, therefore, has less to do with his directorial style, although the often-made references to these aesthetic aspects purports that that is what is central to Meirelles' function in *The Constant Gardener*. Rather his status as *auteur*, his authority as author, lies in his ostensible legitimacy as a representative of the Third World. In other words, the film is about Africa because we see it from the perspective of a Third World eye; Meirelles may not be Kenyan nor African nor from a poor background but he is somehow "Third World". Put another way, Meirelles is made an analogue for the Third World, which is, in turn, made an analogue for Africa, which is, in turn, made an analogue for Kenya. This Third World coherence is, as demonstrated, tenuous and needs to be restated and reframed through the camera lens using the trope of a peculiarly African vibrancy, which is also peculiarly poor. Meirelles' position as an inhabitant of the Third World lends that African vibrancy a Third World-ness, which is based on the sentimentalisation of poverty. That sentimentalisation of poverty appears on the screen, reaffirming and then erasing the viewer's distance from Kenyans by reproducing a familiar 'Africa'. Thus, a problematic feedback loop is created. The marriage between First and Third World is enacted by Meirelles and by the presentation of Meirelles as representative of the Third World in the MODs. Meirelles' position as a Third World eye, however tenuous such a position is, performs the cultural work of the film, designating it as political and legitimising its point of view.

4.4. Conclusion

Meirelles' *The Constant Gardener* is an important text for rethinking the fixity with which Western films about Africa are conceptualised. By looking at its utilisation of genres, in this case both romance and 'Africa film', and doing so with an understanding of genre as a complication of fixed notions of belonging, opens up the possibilities for reading the film beyond the Us/Them paradigm. This is not to claim, however, that processes of stereotyping and cultural appropriation do not occur and/or are not worth commenting on—my discussion

of the construction of a Third World director-figure is evidence of the continuation of such discourses and the need for critique. The danger of being too caught up in approaches which work to identify (neo)colonialist conventions is that the subtler, more universalisable ends to which those conventions are put to work go unnoticed. Merilles' film is important because, relative to the texts by Meldrum and Addison, it offers an engagement with Africa, albeit sometimes still 'Africa', that foregrounds and grapples with concerns such as belonging, which may not be entirely new in and of themselves but which have in recent decades gained a wider urgency. A text such as *The Garden of Burning Sand* finds in 'Africa' an easy means of generating unity, whether familial or racial. But *The Constant Gardener*, through a process characterised by moving with the currents of convention and stereotype, but also moving against them and being caught between those two motions, begins to reveal the difficulties of unity. In the next chapter, I return to Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* to discuss a more thorough-going engagement with the difficulties of, and possibilities for, unity in the face of an uncertain origin.



Chapter Five

Not Our Sovereign Selves: the parasite and human community in *The Poisonwood Bible*

You can't be another century constantly confronting the end of the world. You can live this as a metaphor, suggesting that certain contemporary positions and ideas are now deeply undermined, rendered increasingly fragile as it were, by having the fact of the world's end as one of their imminent possibilities. That is a radically new historical fact and, I think, it has de-centered us all.

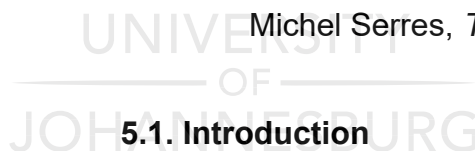
Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation" (1986/1996: 134 emphasis in original)

I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very 'I' who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling: the very 'I' that is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing.

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (2004: 23)

The theory of being, ontology, brings us to atoms. The theory of relations brings us to the parasite.

Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (1980/2007:185)



5.1. Introduction

Both Stuart Hall—speaking towards the end of the Cold War—and Judith Butler—writing in response to the September 11 attacks—raise the question of what it means to live in a world that seems always to be ending. The turn of the century brought with it no relief from tragedy, conflict or suffering but rather marked the continuation and apparent intensification of it on a televised, global scale. The reach and transmission in and across disparate communities—whether familial, cultural, religious, economic, political, social or national—of such events in turn raises the question of “how are we to live *together* in this new century” (Ang 141, emphasis added); how are we to relate to each other in a world increasingly connected and, simultaneously, divided? ‘Africa’, that constant yet contradictory sign of suffering and hope, has proven useful once again, offering a rallying point for a renewed Humanity. The rallying call is ‘We are all African’, a phrase that has appeared in print with

increased regularity since 1987¹, the year of Mitochondrial Eve's unveiling, and, as outlined in Chapter One, an ethos which informs the texts discussed in this project. As the century drew to a close, the end of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear fallout gradually replaced by the War on Terror, the discovery of Mitochondrial Eve provides an origin that could unite us all. Therefore, in a mixed-up, turbulent world seemingly always nearing its end, it is, paradoxically but perhaps not surprisingly, Africa that offers a stabilising point on the horizon. Even though it remains plagued by war and corruption in the global imaginary, it also offers a common origin for our divided species. Africa provides a basis for a human community—that is, a Great Africanised Family of Humankind.

5.1.1. The Limits of 'We are All African'

'We are all African' is, on the surface, a claim to non-racial solidarity. However, it is a proclamation of sameness ('all') which is marked by inequality: the 'We' has the power to name and describe, while 'African' designates being named, being described. Indeed, the 'We' *needs* to name and describe itself in these terms. Consequently, the 'We', having the power to name itself as the other, betrays the 'all' at the same time that a collective ontological certainty is asserted: *We are all African*. This claim is also both metaphorical—a figurative expression which functions aesthetically, politically and culturally—and literal; it is a scientific, biological truth. It is in the slippage between these two—the literal and the metaphorical—that a universalised African identity is created: a biological fact is used to answer an ontological question that is indissociable from ideology. 'Africa', as the origin of the species that is *Homo sapiens*, gains its particular power to unite a culturally and economically disparate, globalized world in which identity politics have become prominent. 'Africa' is both specific and universal and so to claim that 'We are all African' is to claim a specific and a universal identity simultaneously; it is to claim a natural common humanity through a constructed identity. A specifically Africanised human-ness, therefore, serves as an antidote to the "profound suspicion of any universalising claims to 'a common humanity'" (Ang 141) without actually sacrificing those universalising claims. The tendency, outlined in the previous chapters, to transcend this specificity even as it is claimed enacts a process of ideological leapfrog: 'Africa' is the means to an end, always needed and always left behind.

¹ This according to Google's Ngram Viewer, "an online search engine that charts frequencies of any set of comma-delimited search strings [...]The program can search for a single word or a phrase [...] and, if found in 40 or more books, are then plotted on a graph. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Ngram_Viewer.

To claim that 'We are all African' is also to cling to a Romantic notion of social cohesion. Paul Gilroy argues that "national solidarity and cohesion" (111) is produced by the Romantic "association between identity and territory" (100). This is an "automatic solidarity based on either blood or land" (Gilroy 133). The ethos of a universal-African humanity is the construction of an identity based on *both* blood and land, a Romantic national-like cohesion constituted not between but through "the poles of geography and genealogy" (Gilroy 122). The reliance on a genealogy and geography constituted through the continued "invention of Africa" (Mudimbe, 1988 and 1994; Appiah 1992) makes this identity appear primordial and eternal and, therefore, fixed and stable. So, how are we to live together in this century in which division has yet again failed to be defeated? The answer offered by this universalised African solidarity is a Romantic proto-nationalist, global Pan-Africanism which, unlike the diasporic Pan-Africanism Gilroy refers to, does require a return—whether televisual, physical or metaphysical—to the continent. Of course, a televisual or physical return so often threatens to reiterate the disjuncture between the 'We' and the 'African', although not always in expected ways. After all, what is encountered is not the shared primordial origin but rather places and peoples marked by (often unknown or unacknowledged) cultures, histories and politics, that is to say, difference. So, again, how are we to live together? For proponents of 'We are all African' the answer is to overcome difference by becoming Africanised; appear to adapt to Africa by inventing it and then appropriating it.

With a reminder of difference tucked into the assertion of sameness, 'We are all African' can be read as an attempt to claim "togetherness-in-difference" (Ang 141). Ien Ang uses this phrase in his argument for moving beyond diaspora toward hybridity as a way of thinking through "complicated entanglement" (Ang 141) in a context characterised by identity politics. However, despite Ang's formulation of hybridity as a concept which does not subsume difference, hybridity remains guilty of just that: it is often criticised for ignoring or even reinforcing power imbalances in its easy celebration-cum-appropriation of difference (see Mayer 2002; Nederveen Pieterse 2015). In a context in which sameness is foregrounded, celebration of difference becomes too easily and too often a momentary form of "carnavalesque pleasure" (Mayer 8) appropriated and enjoyed by the 'We' and, in its more long term effects, little more than "happy hybridity" (Lo 2000). Hybridity then tends towards togetherness-despite-difference, which is to say togetherness through the negation of difference.

The question still remains: how are we to live together? I want to propose an inclusion of difference (a turn to it, if not a return) that is more fundamental: a contingent togetherness

which is established through difference, never negating it. Such a formulation has its basis in Stuart Hall's understanding of the double-meaning of articulation: to utter or speak as well as "two parts [that] are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage that can be broken" (Grossberg 141). This linkage "is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (Grossberg 141) and as such is the articulation of difference that does not seek to overcome difference. The importance of difference is also central to Gilroy's conceptualisation of diaspora in which, he argues, attention is focused "equally on the sameness within differentiation and the differentiation within sameness" (Gilroy, *Against Race* 125). Diaspora "disturbs" the notion of unity conceived of as "closed kinship and subspecies being" (Gilroy, *Against Race* 125). But what 'We are all African' claims is not subspecies being; rather it claims a universal kinship on the basis of species being. Therefore, this particular ethos requires consideration that, while acknowledging its proto-nationalist position, does not remain bound to nationalist or 'subspecies' perspectives. After all, the power of this ethos is at least in part due to its apparent transcendence of nation and race. Importantly, my proposition to turn to a more fundamental understanding of difference is neither a dismissal of the claim that 'We are all African' nor an attempt to redeem or recuperate it. Until the biological basis for this claim, its literalness, is disproved or radically altered, the metaphorical claim will not be shaken off. However, it may be shaken up, re-examined and reimagined.

My argument in this chapter proceeds from the point made in Chapter One that human beings are both biological and social beings and that the interplay between these two constitutive aspects is complex, unpredictable, constantly shifting and subject to a web of influences. The biological body and the individual and collective social body are analogous. Thus, the fundamental vulnerability of the human body at the level of its genetic constitution is suggestive of the vulnerability of the human body at the level of the social and the inter-relational. The cause of this vulnerability is, for both the biological and the social, located in the dismantling of the divide between self and other—that is the undoing of the sovereign, autonomous, self-contained individual.

5.1.2. Parasites and Precarity: The Otherness of Humankind

As discussed in Chapter One, genetics has not settled questions of who we are and how we are to live together as social beings. The study of genetic variation has, according to Stanford geneticist, Luigi Cavalli-Sforza, not only "confirmed that homogeneous races do not exist" but, moreover, that racial purity is "entirely unachievable, and would not be

[genetically] desirable” (13). But these biological facts have not translated into social and political egalitarianism, integration and unity on a scale comparable to the harmful impact of biological determinism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More specifically, while the rhetoric of ‘We are all African’ has significant affective power for claims of non-racialism and is supported *in some senses* by genetics, palaeoanthropology and palaeontology, it too does not provide a sure foundation for the transcendence of the divide between Africa and the West. As in the case of the biological determinism that sought to legitimise racial segregation and discrimination, optimism about the ability of biology to generate socio-political cohesion privileges the biological (‘Nature’) over the social (‘History’). However, as I contend in Chapter One, rather than simply privilege the social over the biological as a corrective, it is necessary to take their points of entanglement seriously.

On the one hand, the problem is one of overdetermination. ‘We are all African’ extrapolates social cohesion from the fact of our genetic sameness but does not take into account that the notion of a shared African-ness is genetically meaningless. This is not only because ‘Africa’ is a non-biological construct but also because of the fact that our genetic sameness as a species does not mean that difference itself, whether understood culturally or genetically, has been erased. In other words, while race is meaningless as a genetic category, difference itself is not: the “main differences are between individuals and not between populations, or so-called ‘races’” (Cavalli-Sforza vii, emphasis added; see also Mukherjee 2016). Furthermore, if existing trends in, and processes of, global migration and mixing continue, “genetic differences between groups will diminish [...] and difference between individuals of the same population will increase” (Cavalli-Sforza 206). As for a shared African-ness, Siddhartha Mukherjee makes the point that “in a genetic sense, an African man from Nigeria is so ‘different’ from another man from Namibia that it makes little sense to lump them into the same category” (342). To claim that ‘We are all African’ based on a shared genetic ancestor is challenged not by any notion of distinct biological races but by the fact that ‘Africa’ holds no single genetic truth.

On the other hand, then, the problem is also one of truncation. That is to say that the application of evolutionary and genetic theory to social and political discourse can also be regarded as too limited because it does not take into account what these scientific theories reveal about difference. By difference, I do not mean the invented and racialised differences between human beings that underpin the biological racism of nineteenth and twentieth century imperialism. Rather, difference is here that which is within all human beings, that

“opacity [...] with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing” (Glissant 111), and which rather than establish a basis for ontological separatism points to our incontrovertible entanglement and, thus, the need for our interrelation. It is less in the settling of questions that genetics is ontologically useful, therefore, than in the opening up of new ways to think about difference. Broadly speaking, difference is both the result and the origin of human entanglement and interrelation; this differential nature of human entanglement and interrelation, as it appears in the final chapter of *The Poisonwood Bible*, requires an examination of the slippages between the human and nonhuman, as well as the literal (or, scientific) and the metaphorical. For this I turn to the parasite.

The parasite offers a fascinating instance of the slippage between conceptions of the human and nonhuman as well as figurative language, more specifically metaphor, and literal language (that which in this case is associated with science). J. Hillis Miller’s well-known deconstructionist excavation of the etymology of the word in “The Critic as Host” reveals the layering of metaphor that has come to be present in contemporary uses of the word. Working from the Greek *para* (beside) and *sitos* (grain or food), Miller demonstrates that the word parasite “was originally something positive, a fellow guest, someone sharing the food with you, there with you beside the grain” (“The Critic” 179). Only later, early to mid-nineteenth century, did the word begin to serve as the biological term to describe an unequally harmful relationship between a plant or animal parasite and its host (Chang 2003; Gullestad 2011). Therefore, the biological term is in fact metaphorical and contemporary metaphorical uses of the word—the human described negatively as a parasite—is a metaphor of a metaphor, a dead metaphor. The shift to an overwhelmingly negative association prevents this from being a return to the original ‘more literal’ use of the word. So to refer to a person as a parasite is to confer the negative associations of the animal, the bacterial, the viral—that is, the non-human—(back) onto the human. It is, therefore, a return to the human by, apparently, departing from it.

Miller’s essay functions alongside Michel Serres’, book-length and theoretically wide-ranging, *The Parasite*, as well as work on hospitality by Derrida. Serres defines the parasite along three lines: the biological, the social, and, drawing from the French, static or interference; this is what Serres calls “noise”. Noise is not simply extraneous to the signal transmitted between sender and receiver; noise is an always already there and necessary “excluded third” (Serres, *Genesis* 57). That is to say that the exchange between the sender and receiver cannot take place without this third. Crucially, noise is not simply a disruption—static which interrupts or confuses the message—but rather it produces by disrupting: “The

noise, through its presence and absence, the intermittence of the signal, produces the new system, that is to say, oscillation” (Serres, *Parasite* 52). It is this play between absence and presence—the disruption of presence— which produces the thing, the message, because “[a] signal which did not stop would thereby stop being a signal” (Serres, *Parasite* 52). This play between absence and presence is, of course, central to Derrida’s deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence in *Of Grammatology* and throughout his oeuvre. The trace, as the mark of the absence of presence, echoes Serres’ noise.

Second, and equally important to the parasite as a producer of the new system, is the reversibility of the direction of the system and the positions or roles of parasite and host. Using the fable of the city rat who invites the country rat to share in the comfort of a rug and the food scraps left over from the farmer’s table, Serres demonstrates that all three parties are parasites:

The tax farmer is a parasite, living off the land: a royal feast, ortolans, Persian rugs. The first rat is a parasite: for him, leftovers, the same Persian rug. At the table of the first, the table of the farmer, the second rat is a parasite. He permits himself to be entertained in such a fashion, never missing a bite. But strictly speaking, they all interrupt. (Parasite 3)

In a later example, the two feasting rats are interrupted by a noise the farmer makes; the farmer is the parasite, interrupting the meal of those who are/were the parasites at his table. The reversibility of this system means that “we don’t know what belongs to the system, what makes it up, and what is against the system, interrupting and endangering it” (Serres, *Parasite* 16). This reversibility, the creation of a new dynamic, is fundamental to the host-guest relation in Derrida’s construction of hospitality. Hospitality, the exchange between host and guest, is a “self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct” (Derrida, “HOSTIPITALITY” 5). The host invites the guest and, in doing so, becomes the guest or hostage of the first guest who is now the host. The possibility of the host taking and becoming a hostage in his/her own home speaks to the slippage between hospitality and hostility, the aporia that is “universal hospitality” (Derrida, “HOSTIPITALITY” 3), which Derrida terms “hostipitality”.

I will be drawing on and referring to Serres’ and Derrida’s philosophical formulations throughout; however, concerned with the biological and the aesthetic as this chapter is, I want to frame this discussion of the parasite, Africa and the human in *The Poisonwood Bible* with a slightly altered emphasis. Adah’s work as a virologist towards the end of the novel and her generous use of metaphorical language alongside that of science suggests a need

to take more seriously the biological parasite. This is not to elevate the biological over the literary and metaphorical but rather to position my argument more firmly within the interstices of the two. One of Han-liang Chang's points of departure in "Notes towards a semiotics of parasitism" is the claim that Miller and others have not "drawn enough on the biological foundation of parasitism" (1). His response to Miller is that the latter is in fact describing mutualism. Miller, he contends

has rightly dismantled the opposition traditionally accorded to parasite and host, and demonstrated that their relationship can be displaced, and has identified, instead, two parties' reciprocal obligations in food-giving and food-receiving [...] But this is to miss an important element in parasitic relationship[s]. Miller is in fact discussing biological mutualism or symbiosis rather than parasitism because the latter involves the host's disease and death. (12)

As will become apparent in the discussion of parasitism in Kingsolver's novel to follow, disease and the possibility of death in the parasitic relationship should not be ignored; Adah's reflection on African parasites does not offer a purely positive mutualism but rather an existence where human and virus exist tentatively between the poles of positive mutualism and fatalistic parasitism. Furthermore, her final chapter deals with 'real' parasites as much as metaphorical parasitism and any responsible reading of it, therefore, must walk the line between the 'real', the literal, and metaphorical.

Before that line can be walked, the question of what a biological parasite is must be asked and an answer attempted. Anders Gullestad does so in his essay "Literature and the Parasite", highlighting the problem of a neat or clear definition. Beginning with a standard definition of the term², Gullestad raises the question of what is meant by the term 'animal'. *Homo sapiens*, humans, are included in the category *Animalia* and so whether or not humans can be considered parasites in the 'non-metaphorical', biological sense of the word becomes an intriguing notion. This is not to denigrate humanity (at least not entirely) because of the earlier positive application of the term to human beings as outlined by Miller, to which Gullestad adds two additional positive iterations: the ancient Greek parasite which was a holy figure as well as the stock character from Latin and Greek comedy. Secondly, a distinction between human and non-human parasite is further complicated by the

² Gullestad uses a definition formulated by Bernard E. Matthews' *Introduction to Parasitology* (1998) in which Matthews suggests that "we consider parasites as being animals that live for an appreciable proportion of their lives in (endoparasites) or on (ectoparasites) another organism, their host, are dependent on that host and benefit from the association at the host's expense" (2005: 12).

“immunological problem of pregnancy”³, where the human embryo inhabits and derives nourishment from the mother’s body in a manner similar to that of a “foreign body”, which the mother’s “immune system would normally consider [...] a threat to be disposed of” (Gullestad 306). The implication of the problem of classification and the mother-embryo relationship mimicking a host-parasite relationship is that

contrary to the common-sense view where social parasitism is seen as a metaphorical extension of a biological phenomenon, not only were humans the original carriers of the title parasite, but we also all start our lives in such a way that scientists will have a hard time explaining why exactly we (at least prior to birth) should not be considered as full members of the class of parasitic entities. (Gullestad 306)

Even here, and this is the third problem of defining a parasite, there is the difficulty of the fact that “parasites are not a natural class or group” (Gullestad 307). That is to say, there is no single class of parasites and that any one parasite can only be classed as such, and then sometimes only temporarily⁴, in its relation to the host which is not only a different organism but also a different species. Therefore, as Gullestad points out, not only is parasitism relational but the construction of that relation is differential. Finally is the fact that viruses (which are a part of this loose grouping called parasites) “are not really alive at all” and as such, “a more internally coherent definition [of parasite] would therefore cause the set of parasitic entities to be extended all the way across the divide between life and non-life” (Gullestad 307). The inclusion of the non-living virus gains a particular, terrifying force when one keeps in mind that the virus has the ability to “turn the host into multitudinous proliferating replications of itself” (Miller, “The Critic” 181). That genetic differences between individuals are increasing may suggest a biological basis for an intensified individualism but turning fully to the genes of the individual reveals how profoundly contingent and other to itself the individual human is, thus unsettling individualism.

Alongside the terrifying vision of body-invading parasites, is the “*creative* element involved in their work” (Gullestad 310, italics in original). Creation should not be understood as an ordinary act but rather a differential one. Serres’ definition of the ‘parasite’, indeed what he calls “the best definition”, is that of “an exciter” which “makes [the system] change

³ Here Gullestad refers to British zoologist Peter Medawar and his work, “Some Immunological and Endocrinological Problems Raised by the Evolution of Viviparity in Vertebrates” (1953), as well as Luis P. Villareal’s article, “On Viruses, Sex, and Motherhood”, *Journal of Virology*, 71:2, pp. 859-65.

⁴ Gullestad makes the point that “parasites will often go through non-parasitic stages during their lifecycles, leading to the question: how much of one’s time has to be spent sponging on a host organism to qualify as a proper parasite?” (307).

states *differentially*” because it “inclines”, “irritates” and “inflames it” (*Parasite* 190–91, italics in original). Thus, that every species, including *Homo sapiens*, and every member of a species “is composed of material largely alien to itself” (Kubiak 52) and that this truly ancient material—microbes, endogenous retroviruses, bacteria, *etcetera*—is constitutive of our embodied selves and life itself whilst also being threatening (Haraway 2008; Zimmer 2000; Zimmer 2015) suggests a more profound frame of reference for conceptualising human relationality than hybridity which too often reiterates the initial sovereignty of the mixing parts. Donna Haraway, in what appears to be a continuation of the utopianism of “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” in *When Species Meet*, describes our genetic otherness to ourselves, our “becoming with” (*Species* 16) other species, as a fact that she “love[s]” (*Species* 3). However, she makes it clear that companion species are characterised by “relations of use” which, though not reducible to “unfreedom and violation”, are “almost never symmetrical” (*Species* 71). So while there is in this self-otherness a strong sense of difference understood as the “*exultant* divergence of humanities” (Glissant 190, emphasis added), there is also the need to recognise that “ecologies of significant others involve messmates at table, *with indigestion* and without the comfort of teleological purpose” (Haraway 71, emphasis added). The human body and species is not only constituted by the parasite and the virus but is also, of course, threatened by them. In other words, a fuller genetic view of the human points to the simultaneous constitution and undoing of the human.

The implication of *being such* for *becoming with* other humans—that is, the implications for community—are described by Judith Butler (*Precarious Life* 2004) and Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) as shared precarity and “compearance”, respectively. For both, being with others is not simply the extension of a different way of being oneself—that is, the magical translation of individualism into community. If there is ‘an individual’, ‘a self’ designated by an ‘I’ it is “the very ‘I’ that is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 23). In other words, being with others is concomitant with an understanding of ‘individual’ being that is inextricable from vulnerability. For Butler there is a productive and irreducible tension between a “struggle for autonomy” alongside the consideration of “the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another” (*Precarious Life* 27). Nancy explains that

[b]eing *in* common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (*comparaissent*), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or

offered to one another. This compearance (*comparution*) is not something added on to their being; rather, their being comes into being in it. (58, italics in original)

Whereas 'We are all African' works from the notion of genetic sameness, Butler's and Nancy's formulations of community echo a fuller understanding of our genetic selves, one that points to our shared self-otherness, an otherness that is both constitutive and unsettling. Butler frames this tension between autonomy and interdependence as "another way of imagining community [...] in which we are alike only in having this condition [of vulnerability] separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference" (*Precarious Life* 27). Importantly, though shared precarity questions the absoluteness of our autonomy it does not mean the eradication of boundaries. Echoing Keller's warning about genocentric biology's overstatement of the permeability of boundaries and the desirability of unrestrained boundary transgressions (see chapter 1, section 3.2.2), Butler notes that being "something other than 'autonomous' in such a condition [of shared precarity] does not mean that we are merged or without boundaries" (*Precarious Life* 27). Indeed, it is precisely the wanton or well-intentioned disregard of boundaries that collapses the productive tension between autonomy and interdependence structuring this alternative imagining of community. 'We are all African' and its manifestations in the four texts under study are examples of the violence that comes from the proliferation of well-intentioned boundary crossings that are too eager and too triumphant; that these boundary crossings are a response to that earlier violent transgression of boundaries and that both result in the reification of the divide between Africa and the West signals the need for another way. There are in the final chapters of *The Poisonwood Bible* the beginnings of another way of imagining community that rather than favouring only the most reassuring of the oppositional poles, accepts and sets to work "the resources of ambiguity" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 97).

Advances in the study of DNA and genetics have begun to return our understanding of the parasite to its literal anthropomorphic meaning without, of course, forgetting or leaving behind the accumulation of negative, metaphorical associations. In other words, the slippages between metaphorical and literal, human and non-human, beneficial and harmful and life and non-life all come to bear on our understanding and use of the concept of the parasite. These slippages will also come to bear on the representation of Africa as well as the possibilities for and characteristics of inter-species and intra-species relationality in Kingsolver's novel.

5.2. The Poisonwood Bible

The shift from Ruth May to Adah in this chapter is intended to examine a moment in the novel, however brief, where a gesture to an alternative to the transcendentalist foreclosure of meaning is made possible. In chapters two and three, I have argued that Ruth May—as a ‘speaking’ subject, who cannot read or write but rather ‘speaks’ directly, a marginal child-figure who becomes the omnipresent origin and centre that constitutes Humanity and, therefore, a presence which offers the unmediated, universal truth—reflects the novel’s sublimation of difference. Adah offers something quite different; she offers difference and, in terms of the assurance of the constitution of Humanity, she signals deferral. Adah is an instance of *différance*. Both Ruth May and Adah are marginal and vulnerable but, while the former’s marginality and vulnerability is made the basis for her transcendence of mortality and of the limit which designates difference, Adah’s uncertain position—her vulnerability and the movement between margin and centre—is not overcome. Ruth May, as *mntu*-Africa, erases (or attempts to erase) disparity and incommensurability but Adah suggests a “sameness which is not *identical*” (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 129). This is a sameness which does not require a total collapse of the parallel between self and other but which also does not require that difference be absolute such that it itself becomes an unassailable, universal truth. To contrast Adah and Ruth May is not to suggest that they are neat oppositions; rather it is to point out that Adah exposes the incompleteness of the totality that is Ruth May/*mntu*-Africa. The initial focus is on Adah’s limp and her slant, that is, her hemiplegia as a marker of *différance* and *supplementarity*. The sections that follow will demonstrate that even once these external markers have been removed, Adah remains an instance through which “the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences” (Derrida, *Positions* 27) is present.

5.2.1. *Ada(h)*: silent, lame gallimaufry

Adah’s language play contrasts with the transcendentalism of Ruth May’s speech as presence and the novel’s structure as self-contained closure. Adah aims to “[t]ell all the truth but tell it slant” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 461, italics in original). Importantly, Adah tells this truth through writing because her chapters are not, like Ruth May’s, the attempted product of natural, unmediated speech and, therefore, of presence. In effect, Adah’s is a doubled-writing. Adah is “the one who does not speak”, preferring to observe (always from the margins) and pass judgements by “unpassing” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 37) them. Adah’s self-effacement through this word-play, the creation of a non-word, is a disruption of the

structure of language itself which, in turn, works to undo the opposition between presence and absence, truth and non-truth. Her slanted thinking, expressed most often through her palindromic language play, is her means of telling the truth or, more accurately, revealing a truth which supplements—modifying and challenging, adding to and replacing—that which is spoken and accepted. Jacobs argues that “[t]he problem of Kingsolver’s novel is precisely that of the palindrome”, in so far as the reversal, evident in Adah’s language play as well as the novel’s overall structure, only reflects “a modified representation of American identity” (115). I agree with Jacobs in part, considering that the repetition of the phrase “walk forward into the light” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 427, 614), uttered by Nathan and Ruth May at the end of Book Four and at the end of the novel, respectively, reflects a more complete closure of meaning: death as the transcendence of the limit that is death itself.

However, I would disagree with Jacobs in so far as such an interpretation of Adah’s language play fails to take account of the disruptive element contained therein. The structure of the novel presents a foreclosure on meaning which is reflective of Ruth May’s palindromic transformation: her death as the ultimate reversal of death. However, Adah’s disruption of the structure of language, her intervention into its readability, means that many of her palindromes cannot be read backwards without the act of knowing and the certainty of understanding being resisted. For instance, she refers to her father’s sermons as his “Amen enema” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 80); this is an instance of a palindrome in which the reversal of the phrase is a meaningful reflection of itself. However, she turns her father’s proselytising—oh God! God’s love! (*The Poisonwood Bible* 197)—into an utterance of nonsense: “Evol’s dog! Dog ho” (197, italics in original). Similarly the single red feather that signals Methuselah’s death and foreshadows Congo’s doomed independence is rendered as “Emulp der eno” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 211) and she designates herself as the opposite of her twin, Leah, using an equally nonsensical palindrome: “niwt” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 154).⁵ Many of Adah’s palindromes function as “articulation[s] of nonsense”, which are, Homi Bhabha contends, “the recognition of an anxious contradictory place between the human and the not-human, between sense and non-sense” (*Location* 178). Bhabha, in his critique of dualistic colonial thinking (nature/culture, chaos/civility, human/non-human) which applies beyond colonialism (speech/writing, absence/presence, truth/falsehood) argues that the language of nonsense “displaces [such] dualities” (*Location* 177). In other words, Adah’s

⁵ More examples include: “*Ti morf sgniht wen nrael nac uoy dna tnorf ot kcab koob tnereffid a si ti*” (Kingsolver 67); “*Steckub pmud!*” (67); “NEVAEH NI SEILF FO FOORP WEN .REHCTACYLF ESIDARAP” (156 capitals in original).

palindromes are not expressions of 'Truth' and they do not signal a closure of meaning; rather they signal free play as "the disruption of presence" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference*) and, therefore, interruptions of truth and closure. What is significant about Adah's palindromes, then, is not that they are meaningful, perfectly mirrored reversals (they often are not and that is the point) but rather that they are reversals which attempt a movement through dualities.

Her nonsensical palindromes are attempts at 'unstructuring' the structure, they are the "movement of *supplementarity*" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 289, italics in original). While she does not 'unstructure' the novel entirely (if that were possible), Adah does, in her final paragraph, point toward a similar movement of supplementarity within its title. After listing a series of bibles "famous for their misprints"—"the Camel's Bible [...] Murderer's Bible [...] the Sin-on Bible" *etcetera*—Adah concludes that the bible her father wrote in Africa is the Poisonwood Bible because "the mistakes are part of the story" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 602–3). The disruption of the truth of language extends to the novel itself. Even though the novel ends with Ruth May/*muntu*-Africa, perhaps it is a transcendentalist ending which, nevertheless, remains marked by this disruption. Throughout her early chapters—those set in Congo—Adah passes judgement by 'unpassing' it, 'unspeaks' truth by silently writing it backwards, undoes presence by marking it with her absence.

Because of her hemiplegia, Adah is a "lame gallimaufry", "a crooked little person, obsessed with balance" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 39, 461). In her early chapters, she is the embodiment of disparity: her brain is "asymmetrical" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 39) and she limps, her right side dragging behind her. In Congo, this gives her a dual identity, expressed through another play on words: she is "one-half benduka, the crooked walker, and one-half bënduka, the sleek bird that dipped in and out of the water with a crazy ungrace that took your breath" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 559); she is both the slow girl and the bird that "darts crookedly quick" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 335). In America, "there is no good name for [her] gift" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 559) and soon after returning to her former home Adah begins to speak, "as a matter of self-defense" (461), and, thereafter, undergoes a neurologist's experiment to cure her of her hemiplegia, now revealed to have been "a life-long falsehood" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 496).⁶ Interestingly, the correction of "Adah's False Hood" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 496) is a process in which she returns physically to early childhood: the

⁶ Stephen Fox (Fox) points out and critiques the improbability not only of curing hemiplegia but also the problem of the romanticisation of disability in Africa. He makes a good case but one which does not consider Adah's critique of 'wholeness', including her rejection of the neurologist because of his desire to make her whole, nor the fact that Adah's difference is not really cured but rather relocated.

neurologist's experiment sees her 'unlearn' her physical disability, a "habit [...] learned in infancy" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 496), by first crawling like a toddler and then learning to walk without her right side dragging. Crucially, she is not "learning [to walk] all over again but for the first time, apparently, as [Orleana] claims [she] did none of these things as a baby" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 497). In other words, she returns to that stage of being human which is a becoming marked by the "initial delay in humanity" (Lyotard 4). The loss of her limp is then a process whereby Adah, like a child learning to navigate the world 'normally', enters the world of the adult community, that is, the world of the fully human.

A potential problem lurks here: is this not to equate able-bodiedness with humanness? Such a position misses the point that Adah's emergence into a fully human world is the beginning of her destabilisation of the structure of humanness itself, that is, Humanity. The loss of her limp functions as part of the critique of humanness defined as wholeness. Adah undercuts her physical transformation by refusing to submit to such a normative rhetoric:

If you are whole, you will argue: Why wouldn't they [the crippled beggars who Jesus cured] rejoice? Don't the poor miserable buggers all want to be like me? Not necessarily, no. The arrogance of the able-bodied is staggering. Yes, maybe we'd like to be able to get to places quickly, and carry things in both hands, but only because we have to keep up with the rest of you, or get The Verse. We would rather be just like us, and have that be all right. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 559)

Furthermore, Adah's physical transformation is not the loss of disparity—that which is "unharmonizable" (Lyotard 4)—but rather disparity is shown to be that which is present through its absence. Following her decision to talk and the loss of her slant, Adah feels as if she has lost *Ada*: the name and personhood that "goes either way" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 67). However, as her penultimate chapter demonstrates her loss of *Ada* is not total:

I am still Adah but you would hardly know me now, without my slant. I walk without any noticeable limp. Oddly enough, it has taken me years to accept my new position. I find I no longer have *Ada*, the mystery of my coming and going. Along with my split-body drag I lost my ability to read in the old way. When I open a book, the words sort themselves into narrow-minded single file on the page; the mirror-image poems erase themselves half-formed in my mind. I miss those poems. Sometimes at night, in secret, I still limp purposefully around my apartment, like Mr Hyde, trying to recover my old way of seeing and thinking. Like Jekyll I crave that particular darkness curled up within me. Sometimes it almost comes. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 558)

By the end of this chapter, however, Adah admits that she is still constituted, even if only in part, by *Ada*: "Tall and straight I may appear, but I will always be *Ada* inside. A crooked little

person trying to tell the truth” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 562). This coexistence of Adah and *Ada*—that is, *Ada(h)*—marks the “enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside” (Derrida, *Grammatology* 70). *Ada(h)* is a trace, that “mark of the absence of presence, an always already absent present” (Spivak in *Grammatology* xvii). The unharmonizable is simultaneously internalised and externalised, itself enacting a movement of supplementarity.

Adah’s physical transformation is not the overcoming of difference but rather the work of *différance*. This is because *Ada*’s difference is not fixed. Her decision to speak and the loss of her limp and her slant do not erase *Ada*. These losses reveal the more fundamental “movement of play that ‘produces’ [...] differences” (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 141), that is to say, *Ada(h)*. The structure of humanness—Humanity—is shown to be deferred at the very moment when she expects to enter into it: when she loses her limp and her slant. The precarious balance of being *benduka-bënduka* is not replaced by the ‘wholeness’ of able-bodied humanness but rather displaced, relocated to the movement between Adah and *Ada*, between self and that other which constitutes and unsettles the self. ‘Wholeness’ is thereby irrevocably undone. Adah may not be silent nor lame anymore but *Ada(h)* is still a gallimaufry: a confused, medley of things; a unit-without-unity.

5.2.2. The Father and the Family: something rich and strange

The Great Africanised Family of Humankind designated in the claim that ‘We are all African’ presents a Rousseauian origin as presence-without-difference.⁷ Through it a single, homogenised origin—Africa—and a single *telos*—unified humanity—are imposed. The logic of this claim echoes that of *The Family of Man* exhibition, the ideological working of which Barthes lays bare in his essay “The Great Family of Man”. There are also differences or ‘developments’ which reflect a more twenty-first century perspective. Gone is the reintroduction of God and the diversity of men as a testament to “[God’s] power, his richness [...] his will” (Barthes 122), and behaviour, as the locus of similarity in humans, is emphasised less than being. What remains present is the “placing of Nature at the bottom of History” (Barthes 122). However, the terms (the words if not the concepts) in which Nature is constructed have changed. When the ‘artificial’ layer of History is peeled away now, “the solid rock of a universal human nature” (Barthes 122) is revealed to be that of our common

⁷ This refers to Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages* in which he argues that human languages all arise from the expression of simple passions. Derrida critiques this position in *Of Grammatology* by pointing out the ideality of such an origin which precedes, and is unmarked by, difference.

genetic heritage. The essence of humankind is now based on the fact (one free from religion but not from transcendentalist yearnings) that humankind is a biological family unity. Barthes addresses three universal facts in his essay: birth, death and work. So far birth and death have received attention in the previous chapters but work has not. The work of relevance here is not the kind of work that “is ‘natural’ just as long as it is profitable” (Barthes 124) but rather the even more ‘natural’ labour of reproducing the Great Africanised Family of Humankind. The common-ness of humankind in this instance is more tightly tied to the family unit than even Barthes’s Great Family because of its basis in genes, the most basic unit of heredity and, as such, the biological family. The genetic basis of this Great Africanised Family, that is its ‘naturalness’, belies the fact that, like Benedict Anderson’s national community, it must be imagined and reimagined, produced and reproduced in order to keep at bay that other universal fact: death.

Leah, Adah’s twin, works to overcome the incommensurability between her and Africa (and indeed Africans) that her presence reveals through such a reproduction of an Africanised human family. She is the sister most consumed by personal and national-cultural guilt because of her childhood devotion to her father and her need to be accepted by him. Leah expiates the sins of her father by making herself a symbolic victim-perpetrator and then by finding absolution through her marriage and her family. She makes the guilt of her father’s patriarchy and America’s imperialism her own, turning herself into a martyr, who is both symbolic victim and symbolic perpetrator: she “crave[s] to stop bearing all the wounds of this place on [her] own narrow body” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 538). The need for this process of self-valorisation through self-flagellation is intimately connected with her whiteness. Leah’s marriage to Anatole serves to legitimise her presence in Zaire and indeed any of the African countries in which they live.⁸ She relies on him to “justify and absolve her” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 534) and he does this by providing an Africanised aesthetic which masks her whiteness. This is an African-ness which can be, and indeed is, worn: “cloaked in [her] *pagne* and Anatole, [Leah] seemed to belong” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 535, italics in original). Anatole, like a recognisably ‘African’ piece of clothing, covers Leah’s whiteness with African-ness. This is part of a double movement in which African-ness is first racialised and then, paradoxically, universalised, that is de-racialised. Leah wishes that she could

⁸ While Anatole is the novel’s most concerted effort at a Congolese, or even African, character that is more than mere background to the story of the Price family, in his relation to Leah he remains largely symbolic: his imprisonment recounted by Leah is the imprisonment of a country under Mobutu’s dictatorial rule and their marriage signals Leah’s absolution. That she, who is so determined to save others, becomes the one who is, and who continually needs to be, saved by Anatole generates a too-neat reversal that posits him as little more than a version of the Noble Savage.

“scrub the hundred years war off [her] skin till there’s nothing left and [she] can walk out among [her African] neighbours wearing raw sinew and bone, like they do” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 538). Finally and echoing *The Constant Gardener*, abject poverty and hardship is sentimentalised as if it were an ideal spiritual state; once again, African people offer a kind of shorthand for such ideal suffering.

More pertinent here, however, are Leah’s references to the exterior of the body—clothes and skin—in her attempt to attain a different, “raw”, and, therefore, more human interiority. Having failed to relieve herself of her conspicuous whiteness through adornment as a form of concealment, Leah seeks to strip away that which bears the mark of whiteness and as such keeps her separate from the Africanised humanity that she has imagined. She yearns to be freed from the containment of her whiteness. In his essay, “White”, Richard Dyer discusses the logic of whiteness as containment, arguing that the polarisation of whiteness as “boundedness” and blackness as vitality raises the “spectre of white loss of control” (145). Leah does not fear this loss of containment but rather wishes for it because, unlike the horror of its opposite found in texts that Dyer examines, this loss of control is equated with human life itself, its origin and its intensification through African-ness. The “risk of [the self] keeling over into its opposite” (Mayer 266) is transformed here into the desire for it. In addition to the sentimentalisation of suffering, there is, therefore, the moralisation of that erotic colonial desire for the other which in its former context was “constituted by a dialectic of attraction and repulsion” (Young, *Colonial Desire* 166) but which is now structured exclusively using the most reassuring of the poles.

The double movement of this racialised/de-racialised human-ness and the desire for human-ness expressed as the loss of bodily containment reveals the corporeal anxiety that the disjuncture between Leah and Africa generates in her. This disjuncture cannot be resolved by wearing—that is appropriating—African-ness so Leah sets about producing, that is to say, reproducing through her sons, versions of the Africanised humanity that she craves. Leah describes her children as being “the colors of silt, loam, dust, and clay” and as, therefore, providing “an infinite palate for children of their own” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 595). Instead of the concealment of her whiteness or the stripping away of it, Leah now aims for its dissolution through the hybrid reproduction of the family. The danger of cultural and (even more problematically) racial hybridity is evident here: racialised difference is reasserted in order to assert a common humanity, thereby by-passing the more difficult, less superficial difference signalled by History. Furthermore, in a move that echoes the “Adamism” (Barthes 124) of the Price family when they arrive in Congo (discussed in

Chapter Two), Leah sets herself up as the progenitor of the fourth-first family of humankind, a second, more knowable Mitochondrial Eve; however, this time the conditionality of the ordinal number is placed under erasure by the triumph of the biological, as opposed to the symbolic, family unit.

In contrast, the Price family is shown by Adah to be a unit which has at its origin a difference, an incongruity, a strangeness, which cannot be concealed, stripped away nor dissolved; rather it must be accepted, unsettling as it is. The source of this strangeness is the father, Nathan, who, as Adah reveals in her penultimate chapter, died in a “blaze of glory” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 561). The announcement of his death to Orleana raises the question of what to make of the loss of a father and husband who was cruelly domineering. While Adah states that she “despised him” and that he “was a despicable man” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 562), she cannot wrest herself from the connection to him. Adah’s penultimate chapter opens with a few lines from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (Act I, Scene II): *Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made: / Those are pearls that were his eyes: / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange.* In the course of the chapter, Adah reveals to her mother that Nathan died in “[a] blaze of glory” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 561). The lines from *The Tempest* quoted above suggest transmutation: Ferdinand’s father, Ariel claims, has been drowned at sea and his body, whether through Prospero’s magic or another natural force, has been transformed into coral and pearls. In Shakespeare’s play, the claim that Ferdinand’s father is dead is a red-herring—his father is neither dead nor transformed—and Ariel’s song is a spell meant to manipulate and deceive Ferdinand. In contrast Nathan *has* died and in this chapter it is transformation itself which is emphasised.

However, the nature of transformation in this instance is noticeably different from Ruth May’s transfiguration into *muntu* Africa. Whereas Ruth May’s transformation is into something spiritual and profound, the transformation of the father’s body “[i]nto something rich and strange” suggests something grotesque; such a transformation, indeed a transmogrification, is a very strange consolation (see Fain 1968). The inclusion of this quotation in Adah’s penultimate chapter points to the ways in which she is unsettled just as she has begun to accept her new position, her newfound ‘able-bodied-ness’. At the end of her preceding chapter Adah learns that Orleana saved her because “a mother takes care of her children from the bottom up”; she “find[s] this remarkably comforting [and decides] to live with it” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 502). With the opening of this chapter, however, Adah is once again unsettled. Importantly, this is not because of her hemiplegia.

In fact, this new state of being unsettled is, in part, spurred on by the loss of her physical disparity and the consequent need for her to reevaluate her position within the family structure. As such, it is Adah's outward physical transformation that is the red-herring in Kingsolver's text; her strangeness has not been cured by the neurologist but rather a more fundamental strangeness is revealed to have been thinly masked over by her hemiplegia and by the illusion of human 'normalcy' when she is cured.

Adah follows these quoted lines with the assertion that Nathan "occupied [them] all in life and is still holding on to his claim" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 557). This occupation of his daughters, his colonization of them, is not only the psychological or emotional scars that they carry as a result of their traumatic childhoods; it is also something much more fundamental and, at the same time, banal: he is "the stuff [Adah and her sisters] came from" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 557) and, as Adah admits, she "own[s] half his genes, and all of his history" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 603). While part of her concern is how much guilt she should bear, that is, to what extent are "[t]he sins of the father" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 561) also her sins, of equal interest here is the description of Adah (and her sisters) as "[e]stranged" and "disarranged" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 557) as they confront their shared genetic origin; they are all gallimaufries. In fact, separated from each other by a continent and an ocean, the Price women, their relation to each other and their narratives—which at this point no longer overlap as they did before Ruth May's death—are characterised by estrangement. When the sisters are together briefly once more in Africa, their physical proximity only emphasises their otherness to each other. Orleanna calls her remaining daughters "Lock, stock and barrel" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 600) and the sense of wholeness which this phrase suggests is undercut by Adah's interpretation of it, which names the inescapable differences between the sisters: "Rachel is clearly the one with locks on every possible route to defenestration. And Leah barrels forward, setting everything straight. So I am the one who quietly takes stock" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 600). With the deaths of Ruth May and then Nathan, the incoherence—that is the disunity—of the Price family comes to the fore. This is especially true in this chapter of Adah's where she admits to her childhood fantasy of "getting the kerosene and burning [Nathan] up in his bed" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 562). Working from the Latin for estrange and strange, *extraneus* (not belonging to the family, external), the estranged Price daughters are then a family defined as such in so far as they do not belong to a family. Yet, they are family; they have inherited the Price name and the Price genes. They are a family, a unit-without-unity, whose point of connection—their father—is revealed to be strangeness and unassimilable yet inherent, inherited

difference. To be a Price daughter then is to be estranged in two senses: it is to belong and not belong to the family and it is to be marked by strangeness. That this strangeness is confronted by Adah (and, according to her, her sisters) in their “darkest hours staring at those pearls [that were his eyes], those coral bones” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 557) points to the curiously internal nature of this externality. It is, therefore, not transcendence that offers an answer to the question of how Adah is to live with herself and her history as well as with her family and its history. It is the movement between dualities—Adah/Ada, Adah/Nathan—and through that unsettling difference that offers a sense of the self as whole without negating the supplementary other and of a familial unity, without all that Adamism.

Adah frames the movement between and through these dualities as an attempt at balance. Importantly, this is not balance in the sense of objectivity or stability but an oscillation; this is balance, always attempted but never assured, through constant movement between the oppositions, an ever-shifting equilibrium. Adah accepts the absent-presence of Ada because “[t]he power is in the balance: we are our injuries, as much as we are our successes” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 562). Similarly, she accepts those strange genes and the history that is shackled to them because “[w]e are the balance of our damage and our transgressions” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 603). In sharp contrast with Leah’s attempt to legitimise her presence in Africa through her family—that is, by reproducing a biologically and aesthetically Africanised humanity—Adah begins what will become an excavation of Humanity by recognising the strangeness at the origin of her family and the incoherence, the lack of unity, of such a familial unit. Her position as a part of and apart from the Price family is not resolved when her physical disability is ‘cured’. Rather her external physical disparity is internalised and simultaneously relocated and her dual position is shown to be more profound than previously thought. The loss of her limp and her slant and the turn towards that which is both strange, even despicable, to her and yet constitutive of her become occasions for a reconsideration of her human self as well as Humanity. The originary strangeness of the family to its members is a reflection of the originary strangeness of the self in its relation to itself and, importantly, to those others who both constitute the Great Family of Humankind and serve to expose its lack.

5.2.3. A Parasite of Humans

In what is a brief commentary on *The Poisonwood Bible*, Ruth Mayer argues that “the fear of extermination by a virus may inadvertently merge with the desire for emulation and

imitation” (265) but that in Adah’s case her position as an expert means that the distinction between virologist and virus is maintained. Mayer draws in part on Dyer’s point about whiteness becoming its other in a chapter that explores the associations with Africa of viruses, contamination and other forms of biologically-informed corruption. Adah’s relation to African viruses, she argues, does not conform to this dual logic of fear and desire because of her “expert position” which is conceptualised as being “outside and above” (Mayer 266) the feared and desired other. Such a distinction—between virus and virologist—is, however, not as clear cut as Mayer claims. What her argument fails to take account of is the process, or rather un-process,⁹ of unsettling such neat dualities evident in Adah’s preceding chapters, which have been discussed. Consequently, Mayer’s position also does not take into account the sense of unease which characterises relations between Adah and herself, her family and their intertwined histories. This unease also continues to permeate Adah’s final chapter, from which Mayer draws her evidence. For Mayer, Adah’s relation to the viruses she studies is simply one of distanced admiration. To take the progressive disruption and displacement of dualities into consideration reveals that the so-called clear-cut distinction is more accurately described as a precarious balancing, the continuous movement between dualities which marks the always incomplete nature of dualities and, therefore, the always necessary undoing of them.¹⁰ Adah’s relation to the African viruses she studies and consequently to other people is characterised by such phenomena.

The context of Mayer’s position on Adah is that of the coexisting stereotypes of Africa as both hell and heaven on earth. Mayer asserts that the virus “seems to have a special affinity to the imagery of Africinity” (Mayer 257). When Africa is perceived as that most dangerous place, the virus becomes the means through which colonial fears are again projected onto the continent, continuing the co-existent tropes of “Africa as corruption and Africa as paradise” (Mayer 258). These well-worn tropes—metaphors which are generated by, and in turn reinforce, Africinity—are the problem for Mayer; these dual stereotypes have also been critiqued in chapters two and three above. Adah’s description of Africa as a place of “[l]oss and salvation” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 598) at first appears to fall into this trap. However, Mayer’s summary of Adah does not consider the abundance of figurative

⁹ The word process suggests something that is more linear and teleological than what Adah’s chapters suggest. Much like her unpassing of judgements, her process of unsettling dualities and, in turn, being unsettled can perhaps be best described as an un-process, which contains within it both absence and the possibility of its own reversal.

¹⁰ At the beginning of her chapter, Mayer quotes Etienne Balibar whose phrase “[v]acillating borders” (qtd in Mayer 257) echoes such a continuous movement between dualities. However, she does not see this vacillation in Adah’s relation to viruses.

conceptions of Africa. This abundance self-consciously points to a lack. Nor does she see the disruptive potential of the virus in Adah's case, although she does point to its ambivalence elsewhere in relation to other texts. The virus as a disruptor and the abundance of figurative conceptions of Africa alongside that of the continent as literally the source of both *Homo sapiens* and that which undoes the species points to a lack of fullness, presence, and wholeness at the origin of Humanity.

In her well-known essay, *Illness as Metaphor* (and later *AIDS and its Metaphors*), Susan Sontag argues for the need to eliminate metaphorical and mythical thinking from understandings and representations of disease. One of the modalities up for critique in Sontag's essay is the West's tendency to designate contagious diseases—such as AIDS—as foreign:

Part of the centuries-old conception of Europe as a privileged cultural entity is that it is a place which is colonized by lethal diseases coming from elsewhere. Europe is assumed to be by rights free of disease. (And Europeans have been astoundingly callous about the far more devastating extent to which they—as invaders, as colonists—have introduced *their* lethal diseases to the exotic 'primitive' world.) (138 emphasis in original)

The perverse reversal of the colonial relationship—perverse because this logic is in fact an extension of colonial thinking and power structures—is made possible through a separation of history and culture from nature. An important consequence of “the usual script for plague” (Sontag 135) is that the spread of contagious disease in the Third World is regarded as a natural event, a non-event, and de-historicised—AIDS or Ebola are just part of what makes Africa 'Africa', for instance. In contrast, in the First World the occurrence and spread of such a plague is “filled with historical meaning” (Sontag 171). Plague is a cataclysmic event in the West but merely 'run of the mill' for the Rest.

While this sense of cataclysm coming from afar is part of what constitutes and perpetuates the stereotype of Africa as a place of corruption of the physical and social body, there are problems with Sontag's argument; two of which come to bear here. First, Jody Norton points out that while the attempt to demythify HIV/AIDS is “a worthy one”, Sontag's analysis, and particularly her point that giving disease meaning is punitive, is “theoretically unsatisfying, after Derrida and poststructuralism, in its insistence on a radical distinction between meaning and materiality” (101). Secondly, Sontag's metaphors of illness belong, according to Naomi Schor, to the category of “enforced [and] also dead metaphors” (Schor 78). In other words, these are metaphoric catachreses or “obligatory metaphor[s]” (Schor

77).¹¹ Consequently, the impossibility of dispelling figurality from language in general is doubled when it comes to representations of Africa. To strip representations of Africa of metaphors of disease and corruption (whether physical or socio-political) is, or it seems to be at this point in time, little more than a fantasy. 'Africa' itself is, problematically and unsatisfactorily, an inescapable if not obligatory metaphor.

To contest these negative metaphors, Adah does not disavow metaphor but, rather, shows the incompleteness of these metaphors. Africa is not stripped of figurative language nor even myth in Adah's final chapter. Instead what becomes clear as the chapter progresses is the impossibility and, perhaps undesirability, of doing so. Throughout the chapter Africa is personified and represented using metaphor and synecdoche; as the origin of an array of parasites that will make "[you] shriek for a cure" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 599), Africa functions metonymically as the apocalypse both at the level of the individual and of society. A few quotations serve to illustrate the abundance of figurative language used to describe Africa:

[Albert Schweitzer] meant to save every child, thinking Africa would then learn how to have fewer children. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 597)

[...]

Africa has a thousand ways of cleansing itself. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 598)

[...]

Back then I was still a bit appalled that God would set down his barefoot boy and girl dollies into an Eden where, presumably, He had just turned loose elephantiasis and microbes that eat the human cornea. (*The Poisonwood Bible* 598–99)

Importantly, it is not only Africa that is treated figuratively. In addition to the human "dollies" left to fend for themselves described above, Adah describes God as being "a virus [and] an ant", driver ants are a "Biblical plague", the Biblical plague of ants are the most efficient of house cleaners and the various viruses found in Africa are "brooms devised by nature to sweep a small clearing very well" (all quotations from *The Poisonwood Bible* 598). The accumulation of figurative language—the "[c]onjuring of metaphor with metaphor" (Schor 91)—works to emphasise the incompleteness of such a system of signification, whether it be a system that works to construct 'Africa' or, indeed, anything else. The abstraction that

¹¹ A second, important, critique by Schor is that Sontag uses the terms 'myth' and 'metaphor' interchangeably, adding that what Sontag's project is really focused on, despite the emphasis on metaphor in the essay title, is the dispelling of myths generated around illnesses. The distinction between these two terms is tempered somewhat by the fact that metaphors and myths often work together, the former being integral to the constitution, and indeed longevity, of the latter.

is 'Africa' is emphasised as such through the piling on of personification, metaphor and metonymy. So too with God, driver ants and the virus. Instead of discarding figurality, if it were possible, Kingsolver emphasises both the inevitability of these metaphors and their incompleteness by adding figurative formulations which, in their simultaneous newness and familiarity, work as a reminder of the strange ontology of the sign: "half of it always 'not there' and the other half always 'not that'" (Spivak, Preface in Derrida, *Grammatology* xvii).

The extensive use of figurative language throughout the chapter works towards Kingsolver's explicit political critique of colonialism and imperialism. So, whereas, 'Apocalyptic Africa' is rendered ahistorical according to Sontag, in the following extract the African-ness of the apocalypse is challenged precisely by being put into the historical contexts (that is, social, political, and economic) of colonialism and imperialism:

But remember: air travel, roads, cities, prostitution, the congregation of people for efficient commerce—these are gifts of godspeed to the virus. Gifts of the foreign magi, brought from afar. In the service of saving Africa's babies and extracting its mineral soul, the West has built a path to its own door and thrown it wide for the plague. (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 599)

Apocalyptic Africa, bringer of the plague, is put into context in this extract; it is not de-historicized but situated within the history of colonialism and imperialism. As much as Africa is the source of a virus or a plague brought from afar, so too the West brings its 'gifts' to Africa from afar. The placement and incompleteness of the fragment, "Gifts of the foreign magi, brought from afar", makes its referent and applicability ambiguous. If the gifts refer to air travel, roads, prostitution, *etcetera*, then here it is the West that is foreign, making Africa the centre. Furthermore, if this is the case, the 'gifts' include both humanitarian intervention and the theft of Africa's resources. An understanding of the former as simple altruism—a true gift—is subverted in its connection to the latter. This subversion of the goodness of the gift (indeed, its very existence as 'gift') is also evident if the fragment is read as referring to the virus itself. At the very least, the spread of the 'gifts' of colonialism are so interlaced with the virus that the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of distinguishing between them is evident. Moreover, the "[g]ifts of the foreign magi" are chimeric in so far as to give is also, even simultaneously, to take. As Carey Wolfe states, summarizing a range of Derrida's texts, "nothing is less assured [...] than the distinction between *giving* and *taking*" (Introduction to *The Parasite* xx, emphasis in original). The event that is the plague's arrival can only be understood in relation to the event of the West's colonisation of Africa; both events signal the arrival of the gifts of the foreign magi. The West is also complicit in its own demise or, if

demise only ever looms on the horizon, the system which generates the threat of its own demise.

Most significant, then, is the reversal of the system's direction generated by the insertion of Apocalyptic Africa into its historical context and the concomitant complicity of the West. This differs from the reversal identified by Sontag. When the West renders contagious diseases foreign it effectively removes itself, in terms of complicity, from the system. It is a simple reversal of the coloniser-colonised relationship which maintains a distinction between host and parasite and reflects the traditional biological understanding of the parasitic relationship that privileges uni-directionality. What Adah describes is an exchange—a plague of parasites for the 'gifts' of colonialism and imperialism—informed by the particular slippage that occurs between host and parasite, giver and recipient. This is a slippage which is the basis of Serres' and Derrida's analyses of the parasite and of hospitality, respectively. Both Serres and Derrida stress the reversibility of such a system. Not only do host and guest, host and parasite "change places", but "[i]n the logic of exchange, or really instead of it, [this slippage] manages to hide who the receiver is and who the sender is" (Serres, *Parasite* 16). Furthermore, the host can only be a host when it is also the guest, the stranger, and the parasite. This is "the reversal in which the master of this house, the master in his own home, the host, can only accomplish his task as host, that is, hospitality, in becoming invited by the other into his home [...] in receiving the hospitality he gives" (Derrida, "HOSTIPITALITY" 9). The structure of this exchange is relational but, importantly, it is a relation that undoes the structure of oppositional dualities. The host cannot exist and cannot be thought without the guest-parasite which the host itself must become; the parasite-guest cannot exist and cannot be thought without the host which it also will become. Similarly the event that is Apocalyptic Africa cannot exist and cannot be thought without the event of the West's colonizing project and chimeric gift and vice versa. As already pointed out, the act of giving and that of taking are not distinct; so too, the gift and the parasite. The gift of health to African babies is precipitated by the existence of the parasite and the arrival of the plague in the West is precipitated by the gift of health and all the taking that is implicit therein. The *para*-of 'parasite', alongside, next to but also resembling, is doubly important. Not only is the gift an instance where giving and taking are indistinct but the gift and the parasite coexist, resembling each other.

Leading up to Ruth May's death, Kingsolver's political critique takes the form of the parallel between Ruth May and Lumumba and Congo's independence and, as argued in the first chapter, it is the collapse of that parallel—the erasure of the difference of its parts in the

name of a single humanity—that marks the failure of that critique. That parallel, characterised by allegory and undone through the turn to symbolism, is the victim of an adherence to a humanism in which the preservation of the Human takes precedence. The political critique offered in Adah's chapters does not work to preserve the pre-eminence of the Human and therein lies its effectiveness. The critiques of colonialism and imperialism in the extract above must be understood in the context of Adah's broader undoing of Humanity as a coherent unity—a community without difference—and its eventual dethroning. From her perspective, Humanity is not the transcendent goal suggested by Ruth May's *muntu*-Africa; rather, it is a state of interminable unease or, in light of the centrality of the disease-carrying parasite and the reversibility of the power relation, a state of interminable *dis*-ease. As with the unsettling of the various dualities between self and other outlined above, this *dis*-ease is generated, in the first instance, by the shifting relation between predator and prey:

Africa has a thousand ways of cleansing itself. Driver ants, Ebola virus, acquired immune deficiency syndrome: all these are brooms devised by nature to sweep a small clearing very well. Not one of them can cross a river by itself. And none can survive past the death of its host. A parasite of humans that extinguished us altogether, you see, would quickly be laid to rest in human graves. So the race between predator and prey remains exquisitely neck and neck. (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 598)

In the same way that the West is responsible for its own apocalypse, humanity is complicit in its own demise because it offers the means for the parasite to spread. The proximity of virus and human already implicit in the spread of disease is further emphasised by the reversibility of the predator-prey relationship: parasites are nature's "brooms" for clearing Africa of humans and, in turn, humans strive to eradicate parasites. As much as there is an "array of creatures equipped to take root upon the human body" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 598), humanity takes root in a similarly parasitic manner. Serres claims that "man [*sic*] is the universal parasite [because] everything and everyone around him [*sic*] is a hospitable space. Plants and animals are always his hosts; man is always necessarily their guest" (*Parasite* 24). Kingsolver is clear about the devastating effect that humankind has on everything around it. The link between environmental damage and colonization and imperialism evident throughout her novel. What becomes clear in Adah's final chapter is humanity's tendency to be parasitic beyond the relatively narrow confines of the exploitation of a colony's resources. Parasitism is not confined to colonialism; it is a state of humanness. In the extract above, there is the suggestion of a collective noun in the phrase a

“parasite of humans” alongside what is an equally suggestive claim to ownership. A parasite of humans, that is collective humanity, is under threat of being undone by a parasite that belongs to humans, a parasite that forms a part of the whole that is humanity and, therefore, is constitutive of it even as it threatens it.

Adah’s job as a virologist means that she is part of a system which seeks to find ways of curing humans of their parasites; this is intrinsic to the expert position Mayer ascribes to her. But, importantly, Adah conceives of her object of study in a way that counters eradication with relation. She does not merely admire viruses from afar, she regards virus and human to be primordially interconnected. Adah presents a history of the world in this chapter, starting with when “God was a child [and] the Rift Valley cradled a cauldron of bare necessities” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 597), moving through the emergence of *Homo sapiens* from Africa and into the rest of the world, pausing for a moment at the point where the West colonised Africa, taking stock of herself and her family and ending with an explanation of the significance of the novel’s title. What prevents this account of the world from becoming another grand narrative of/for Humanity that projects wholeness and presence is the disruptive and supplementary existence of the parasite and the attendant dis-ease which permeates every relation, whether human-human, human-parasite, human-Africa. This account is “the life histories of viruses” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 599) as much as it is the story of Humanity. Because “[w]e and our vermin all blossomed together out of the same humid soil in the Great Rift Valley”, it is a history of the “partnership” and “accord [...] struck in Africa” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 599); if there is unanimity it is also shot through with incongruity.

Serres argues that “history hides the fact that man is the universal parasite” (Serres, *Parasite* 24). This should not be interpreted as a repudiation of history or the historical, as such, but rather a repudiation of History as the story of the Human as a cultural being “outside and beyond” (Mayer 266) the Natural. In fact, for Serres “[h]istory is full of [parasites], or maybe is made solely of them” (*Parasite* 5). What Kingsolver indicates through a blurring of the separation of History and Nature is that history—that is, an evolutionary perspective on history which accommodates the slippages between culture and biology and “holds all things in the balance” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 596)—can also reveal the fact of humanity’s parasitism. Importantly, this is not simply misanthropy. Adah is accused by Orleana of “hav[ing] no heart for [her] own kind” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 600) but, as she counters, it is not indifference to her family or her species that she is expressing. Rather knowing what her family and her species have done and, therefore, deserve, it is an

acceptance of “the [equal] right of a plant or a virus to rule the earth” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 600). In other words, Humanity is not universal; it is only universally parasitic which is to say a universal that carries within it its limit.

5.2.4. Dethroned Humanity, Interrupted Community

Human-ness is not experienced in the achievement of transcendence but, rather, experienced at its limit. Adah chooses virology instead of medicine because she “could not accept the contract that every child born human upon this earth comes with a guarantee of perfect health and old age clutched in its small fist” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 596). For Adah, who “in the Eden of [their] mother’s womb [...] was cannibalized by [her twin] sister” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 39), such a guarantee is antithetical to what it means to be human. Importantly for Adah, birth and death are not the sterile human events that Barthes finds in projections of the Great Family of Man. Both are only meaningful in context and that is why she rejects the Hippocratic Oath. Her argument that the death of a child from hunger is only immoral in a society “where we pay soothsayers and acrobats to help lose our weight” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 596) is not to suggest that the death of a child from hunger in a poor society is a natural, meaningless event, a non-event. Rather it is to acknowledge the fact that

Lives are supported and maintained differently, and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grievable’. (Butler, *Precarious Life* 32)

Adah rejects the Hippocratic Oath because to accept it would be to deny the existence of the differences in ‘grievability’ of lives and to deny these differences would be to condone their perpetuation. The universalisation of birth and death into nothing more than a common human experience serves, as Barthes demonstrates, to transcend, that is negate, the essential otherness of humanity in the name of a religion of Humankind. When Adah studies the “congregation” of her “church [in] the Great Rift Valley” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 597) she finds “a religion that serves” (*The Poisonwood Bible* 463), in so far as it honours the balance between birth and death, loss and salvation without promising transcendence. Ada(h)’s religion is ironic and through it “the certainty of what counts as nature—a source of insight and a promise of innocence—is undermined” (Haraway, “Manifesto” 5). This religion and its misprint bibles indicate that “[t]he transcendent

authorization of interpretation is lost, and with the ontology grounding ‘Western epistemology’ (Haraway, “Manifesto” 5) If there is an Eden in this religion of Adah’s, it is one marked by cannibalism and the guarantee of death—that is “completely without innocence” (Haraway, “Manifesto” 3). Nancy contends that the birth that exposes another singularity “is not the opposite of death, for the death of this singular being who has just been born is also inscribed and communicated by its limit” (Nancy 60). Whereas *mntu*-Africa comes to signify transcendent humanity in the case of Ruth May because her (re)birth is the negation of death as a limit, in Adah’s case it, *mntu*, “refer[s] to a living person or a dead one with equal precision” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 598): to be *mntu* is to be exposed to the certainty of one’s own death, which is to say, the self-other.

The dethroning of Humanity—the fact that it is neither universal nor transcendental—in Adah’s chapters makes possible a human community which does not value sameness over difference but rather one which is characterised by the disruption of totalising sameness by shared difference. Adah thinks “of [viruses] as [her] relations” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 599), speaking not only to the historical connection or parallel that exists between humanity and its vermin but also to the more unsettling intimacy of that connection: a familial relation which reflects the strangeness at the centre of the family unit and indeed the species. The sense of estrangement from, and the possibility of being ‘disarranged’ by, one’s family that Adah expresses in her penultimate chapter is shown in her last chapter to be a consequence of the “primary vulnerability” (Butler, *Precarious Life* xiv) that structures an ethical conception of the human. The undoing of the human communal collective through an acknowledgement of this “primary vulnerability” is not the valorisation of the individual, not least because the coherence of the self is rendered contingent and uncertain by the constitution of the ‘I’ through and, crucially, as the ‘not-I’. The ‘I’ is the hostage of the ‘not-I’ that is part of it. This marks a departure from what Levinas calls the hostage in so far as the latter conceptualisation designates responsibility in terms of the ‘I’ and the other, which, as Derrida argues, “assumes that I am, in a non-negative sense of that term, from the outset, me: myself, in as much as I say ‘Here I am’” (‘HOSTIPITALITY’ 9). Adah’s unsettling of self—that is, of her relation to herself—at the point at which she appears most whole suggests that every ‘I’, every whole individual, is an incomplete gallimaufry. More fundamentally then, this is not the valorisation of the individual because the source of this “common human vulnerability [...] precedes the formation of ‘I’”; it “emerges with life itself” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 31). Butler echoes Nancy who describes community as a communicative act “demanding to pass beyond every limit and fulfilment enclosed in the form of an individual”

(60). The undoing of the human communal collective is precisely the working, or rather emergence, of community, the becoming of a human community which will never, can never arrive.

The disruption of community which produces community, the noise that enables relation, disrupts it and produces a new one, is evident in the disease and dis-ease which runs through Adah's final chapter. It is significant that what Adah studies are viruses which cause communicable diseases: diseases—AIDS and Ebola—that spread through intimate human contact and the exchange of bodily fluids. Sontag points to the ways in which AIDS creates communities of infection. Such communities are forged through processes of connection and inclusion based on similarity (all 'members' are infected) and disconnection and exclusion based on difference (those who are not infected cannot be 'members'). Nancy's community as the impossibility of community works to eradicate the dualistic processes of exclusion and inclusion and he finds a useful metaphor in the spread of communicable disease. The propagation or communication of community can also be thought of as contagion which "interrupts fusion and suspends communion, and this arrest or rupture once again leads back to the communication of community. Instead of closing it in, this interruption once again exposes singularity to its limit, which is to say, to other singularities" (Nancy 60). A human community as contagion, relation structured by dis-ease, is evident in two instances in Adah's final chapter: first in the friendship between Adah and her unnamed colleague and, secondly, in Orleanna's relation to Africa as perceived by Adah.

Adah and her colleague are the same in that they are both "anchorite[s]", recluses, who know what it is like to be different: the colleague "suffers from post-polio syndrome" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 601) and is bound to a wheelchair. What is noteworthy about their friendship is the importance of silence and noise in their relation to each other and to the people around them. They "[s]ometimes" play chess and "can pass whole evenings without need for any sentence longer than 'Checkmate'" and, "[s]ometimes [they] drive out of town [...] park the car [...] and let moonlight and silence reclaim [them]" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 601–2). This act—allowing silence to reclaim them—always follows their attempt to go to a restaurant or to see a film only to find that "the racket always overwhelms [them]" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 601). In a revision of one of her earlier puns, Adah declares that "[e]ros is not so much an eyesore [...] as just too much noise" (*The Poisonwood Bible* 601). This noise is also "in [her] brain" and she attempts to silence it by "clamp[ing] it to the page" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 602). Dis-ease is signalled by both their silence and the noise; that is, the intimacy or eros which disrupts that

silence. In the first instance it is because they are both anchorites, recluses, whose being together is structured around silence. In a relation that is possible because of silence, to speak, to say “Checkmate”, is to disrupt that relation.

However, a relation that is made possible through silence is one which bears the mark, the trace, or the absence of voice: it is an absent presence. Furthermore, to say “Checkmate” when breaking that silence suggests the inescapability of the relation: to claim “checkmate” in chess is to declare victory by taking your willing opponent’s king, the ultimate host, hostage. The disruption of this being-together of two recluses by that “excluded third”—the other people in the restaurant or cinema—catalyses them to leave and find the solace of silent companionship alone and together, recluse and companion. The system of relation, disruption and altered relation necessarily repeats, albeit differently. Their escape from the crowds is not a permanent escape from the noise as the noise in Adah’s head indicates. Even here her attempt to make the noise “be still” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 602) fails because her writing about her “lost sisters”, the Great Rift Valley and her “barefoot mother glaring at the ocean” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 602) is simply a reminder of the noise: the estrangement that defines family, the fundamental otherness of self, family and humanity, the difference at the origin which produces the thing itself.

The second instance of community as contagion raises the question of what role does Africa play in this system of relation? What does it signal? Adah and Orleanna settle into a similar pattern as the one described above. Adah visits her mother regularly and they “mostly pass [the time] without speaking”; Orleanna “lets [Adah] be” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 600). When they do encounter other people, distance is inscribed in and defines, in part, the interaction: “we will sometimes pull into the dirt parking lot of a clapboard praise house and listen to old, dark Gullah hymns rising out the windows. We never go inside. We know our place” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 600). Adah and Orleanna are both present—listening to the hymns—and absent—never going inside. It is the next sentence, however, which is most important and which reflects back onto, making sense out of, this absent presence: “Mother keeps her head turned the whole time toward Africa, with her eye on the ocean, as if she expects it might suddenly drain away” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 600). There is a wariness, a sense of dis-ease which permeates this description but there is also longing. It is as if Orleanna watches Africa in the hope that she will be reunited with Ruth May but also with the attendant uncertainty of what the erasure of the barrier between her and Africa would mean. In an earlier moment of grief, Orleanna asks her dead child, “Are you still my flesh and blood, my last born, or are you now the flesh of Africa? How

can I tell the difference when the two rivers have run together so?" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 437). In the second chapter I argue that this is a moment which signals the collapse of the parallel between Ruth May and Congo in light of Ruth May's transfiguration into *muntu*-Africa. But in Adah's final chapter, Orleanna's relation to Africa is not structured around a transcendent Ruth May but rather around this experience of disease—the combination of longing and wariness—and the "several diseases she contracted in the Congo" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 601) from which she continues to suffer. Africa is now part of Orleanna's flesh and blood through the presence of the parasite, both in its literal and biological form as well as figuratively, or relationally. She has "schistosomiasis [caused by a parasitic worm], Guinea worms [which are parasites] and probably tuberculosis [a communicable disease]" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 601) and the presence of Africa, so far across the ocean and so close inside her own body, threatens to disrupt and unsettle her. Adah treats these "small maladies" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 601) but does not, seemingly cannot, cure her mother of them; they are part of the new system of relation, part of the new balance between loss and salvation.

Africa is both the origin of humankind and of that which disrupts humankind, reconstituting it anew, continuously. In their study of embodied metaphors, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that there is "no completely decentered subject for whom all meaning is arbitrary, totally relative and purely historically contingent, unconstrained by body and brain" (*Philosophy* "Introduction: Who Are We?"). The significance of Adah's and eventually Orleanna's relation to Africa is less that it does not offer an origin for humanity and more that the origin offered is contingent and unstable. What Adah's chapters suggest is that any conceptualisation of Africa as a unifying origin, which offers transcendence of difference through the sameness that is the Great Africanised Family of Humankind, is undermined by the lack of unity inherent in Humanity—that is, the fundamental uncertainty of Humanity. This uncertainty articulates with the uncertainty of humanity's constitutive parts: the family and the self. Africa is, like the self, the family and the species, the host which is also the guest, which is also the parasite which disrupts the host, becoming for a moment, necessarily only a moment, the host once more.

5.3. Conclusion

In Adah's final three chapters, the self, the family and the species all exist in a state of relationality characterised by dis-ease. Adah holds none of these to be sacred nor does she renounce them; her position is that of Haraway's blasphemmer who not only accepts but

inhabits and embodies contradictions without the need to resolve them “into larger wholes, [not] even dialectically” (Haraway, “Manifesto” 1). This state of dis-ease is not about living in a state of fear; rather it is, like Haraway’s cyborgian world, “about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (“Manifesto” 8). However, unlike the utopianism of Haraway’s earlier work, dis-ease is more akin to that “nourishing indigestion” (*Species* 300) of her later explorations of the constitutive relations between human and animal. Demonstrating neither blind faith towards community nor the disavowal thereof, Adah’s recognition that the self, the family and the species are each constantly and simultaneously secured and undone represents the rethinking and reimagining of the possibilities of constituting a human community. So, how are we to live together? The tentative answer in Adah’s final chapters is that we are to begin doing so with the full acknowledgement that we have inherited both our genes and our history and that both are likely to disrupt our sense of self as often as they are to secure it. To live together requires not the triumph of sameness but the acknowledgement of our shared self-otherness. Rather than transcending—which is to say, renouncing—boundaries, living together requires that boundaries be navigated with care, always keeping in mind our shared, though sometimes unequal, precarity.

Conclusion

There is no liberalism that is not always already a form of communitarianism.

Leonhard Praeg, *A Report on Ubuntu* (2014: 23)

Every book has a centre, even if it is only an imagined one.

Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing* (2004: 48)

In the course of this thesis, I have explored efforts in instances of contemporary literature and film at envisioning a universal human community that is made expressible through the specificity and authenticity of an Africa long invented and reinvented. A key premise of this study has been that these inventions are not exclusively nor straightforwardly European/western but rather the result of cultural and ideological exchanges, albeit asymmetrical, between the constructs that are the West and Africa. In short, these texts seek in Africa *the* site in which securely to root a human unity that would otherwise be abstract and colourless. What my reading of *The Poisonwood Bible*, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, *The Garden of Burning Sand* and *The Constant Gardener* indicates is that their failure to secure human unity in and through Africa—imagined and projected as a place of tangible spirituality and a heightened, even urgent, human-ness—is a consequence of the very means through which that human unity appears possible. The Africa these texts imagine is defined by a desirable difference which promises to complement and complete an ontologically impoverished West. However, their failure to grapple fully and meaningfully with difference results in the heightening of the disjuncture between Africa and the West, reinscribing the Us/Them paradigm which these texts are intended to transcend. Furthermore, the difficulty of their simultaneous need to transcend division and their inability to transcend the difference that occasions division is at its height in those instances where this difficulty is ignored and/or suppressed

Two central overarching questions were raised in the Introduction. First, how do these texts navigate between their multiple interventions? In other words, what are the tensions that emerge from these texts as humanitarian, political, anthropological and literary interventions and how are those tensions resolved? Secondly, how do these texts conceive of and deal with difference in their projections of a universal human community? This second question was the distillation of three *pharmakons*: the good intentions of the four texts which remain caught in hierarchies of power and the fixity of positive stereotype; the generation of

community through the privileging of sameness and the exclusion of troublesome difference; and the necessity of privileging Nature over Culture to support the assumption that 'the human' is a universal category of being and belonging.

Each chapter focused on a specific means through which a universal human community might be realised and the ways in which each fails to do so. As discussed in Chapter Two, the turn in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Amaryllis in Blueberry* toward unifying but totalising symbolism and myth—Africa as the absolute origin of humanity and the site of its rebirth into fullness and presence—and away from the multiple and productive contingencies of allegory serves to draw greater attention to the loss of history and the foreclosure upon a human community that is truly inclusive. Similarly, in Kingsolver's novel and *The Garden of Burning Sand*, the child-figure formulated as a (potentially) liminal and disruptive force which signals togetherness without the loss of difference is superseded by Romantic formulations of the child as the original human, securing the Great Africanised Family of Humankind (Chapter Three). As demonstrated in my discussion of *The Constant Gardener* in the latter part of Chapter Four, the insistence on an authentic Africa in the paratexts of the film represent an inability, or perhaps refusal, to confront the existence of a discontinuous and fragmented world, a world to which the film itself gestures. Finally, a handful of chapters in *The Poisonwood Bible* gesture toward new possibilities for thinking the human and therefore human community. By not shying away from troublesome difference but rather accepting dis-ease as a necessary and even ethically enabling feature of being and of being together, Adah's chapters represent the possibility of a new relation between 'Us' and 'Them'.

In the course of each chapter, it became clear that those texts (*The Poisonwood Bible* and *Amaryllis in Blueberry*) that were presented as being politically motivated and which endeavoured to be critical of Western (neo)colonialism and (neo)imperialism could not attain their fundamental goal of projecting a universal human community without turning to that which appears to be free of the political: the human. The political implications of this turn towards the purportedly apolitical became most strikingly apparent in the text which is most assured of its good intentions and of its humanism, *The Garden of Burning Sand*. Addison's novel, it is important to note, was also the text most eager to escape its status as fiction in its blurring of the distinction between representation and advocacy. There is the MODs of the film, *The Constant Gardener*, a similar effort at asserting the realness of its Africa but what emerged as being most interesting and productive about Mereilles' film was the ambivalence that arises from its multigenericity, which is to say the unruly nature of it as

fiction. This ambivalence, though tamed in the MODs for *The Constant Gardener*, was shown to provide new ways of imagining a human community without disavowing the political in the last chapters of *The Poisonwood Bible*.

The resurfacing of the oppositional paradigm (Us/Them) at multiple points, however, indicates that there are a handful of interrelated questions that remain, perhaps, unavoidable but which are also insufficient. First, is the image of Africa in these four texts false? Second, is their deployment of a globalised Pan-Africanism or Negritude to be understood as a form of cultural appropriation? Third, are these four texts that centre Africa but marginalise and/or subsume Africans racist? Finally, are their critiques of colonialism and neo-imperialism (to the extent that they exist) made in bad faith? The first and second questions, though contradictory on the surface, are both premised on the limiting belief in authenticity and ownership and, thus, “on problematic fantasies of control” (Gallagher 6). The denial of image as relational implied by these questions and the four texts’ insistence on the authenticity of their Africa are, therefore, of a piece. In response to the third question, it is clear that these texts are not racist but that racially-structured thinking pervades their efforts to project a non-racial harmony. The more productive question then becomes ‘what role, if any, does (and should) race play in the envisioning of a universally inclusive humanity?’ Overall, these four texts do not engage with this question, though the character of Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible*, as discussed in Chapter Five, does gesture towards an alternative to the violence of a totalising incorporation. The answer to the fourth question—are their critiques of colonialism and neo-imperialism made in bad faith—is quite clearly ‘no, but they are insufficient’, not least because the true object of their critiques is human disunity conceived of more generally.

What the last two questions highlight—and this extends to the first two—is the underlying issue of sincerity: ‘what is to be made of these four texts’ sincerity?’ My proposal has been that the sincerity of their good intentions and of their belief in a unified humanity needs to be taken seriously. That is to say that a responsible reading of these texts should not dismiss their sincerity nor should it be seduced by it; rather it should recognise its limitations. The limitation of their sincerity is that of their liberal conceptualisation of the western human as independent, sovereign and, therefore, prior to society and of the African human as communitarian such that African society is prior to the African individual. This distinction is, as Leonhard Praeg notes, “haunted by an incoherence that is a function of the deep structure or axiomatic of Western modernity itself” (22–3). As Praeg explains, the incoherence arises from the fact that

[e]very political liberal thinks of him- or herself first and foremost and inescapably in terms of a constitutive attachment to liberalism *qua* tradition. Tradition, history, community: these things precede us even (especially) where they are denied as fundamental starting points for various forms of political and philosophical individualism. In the case of liberalism, its constitutive attachment to liberalism as a tradition and the community of liberals who share an apophatic assumption about our interdependence becomes the unthought of liberalism, or that which makes it possible, while remaining invisible. (23)

The problem in these texts—the cause of their failure convincingly to fulfil their own projections of human unity—is not fundamentally their (mis)uses, (mis)representations nor (mis)appropriations of Africa, though the persistence of representational inequity is a problem that must not be ignored. The fundamental difficulty is their reification of an ontological dichotomy—Western individualism and African communitarianism—which is a product of Western modernity. The centre of these texts is less (or not only) an imagined one—that is, ‘Africa’—and rather more (or, perhaps, equally) an invisible one, that of ‘the human’. Where these texts begin to succeed, where they point to more productive ways of thinking about community (as discussed in Chapter Four and, more fully, in Chapter Five), is where they attempt to think the unthought and make visible that which is invisible—that is, they become aware of, acknowledge and confront the limitations of ‘the human’ as conceived by this modernity.

As literary and cinematic texts, *The Poisonwood Bible*, *Amaryllis in Blueberry*, *The Garden of Burning Sand* and *The Constant Gardener* are inheritors of a literary moment as well as the critical tradition which ensued, albeit belatedly, in response to that moment. Joseph Conrad’s *fin-de-siècle* novella, *Heart of Darkness*, is these four texts’ ur-text and is, in the case of *The Poisonwood Bible*, an explicit intertext. But it is equally true that the polarised critical reception in the late-twentieth century of Conrad’s work has also laid a foundation not only for how these texts are read but for the texts themselves. Remarking on the polarised critical reception of *Heart of Darkness*, Paul B. Armstrong states that “[i]t is curious, to say the least, that the same text can be viewed as an exemplar both of epistemological evil and of virtue” (430), though the former estimation constitutes, by and large, the lion’s share of critical attention (Miller, “Should We” 2006). Emblematic of the first is Achebe’s charge against Conrad for being a “thoroughgoing” or “bloody racist” (343). Achebe’s charge is two-fold: using the narrator, Marlow, Conrad relegates Africa to mere background against which stories about Europe and Europeans play out and, concomitantly, he dehumanises Africans. Crucially, for Achebe, this is not the failing of a single prejudiced man but typical of an “age-long attitude” (344) fostered in and well beyond Conrad’s time.

Another, opposite reading by a proponent of the novella's "virtue", James Clifford, regards Conrad "as an exemplary anthropologist" and the text "a heteroglossic rendering of cultural differences without any attempt to synthesize them" (Armstrong 429–30). The four texts under study in this thesis as well as the apparent possibilities for how they are to be read are caught between and constrained by these two diametrically opposed responses. Critical of explicit and institutionalised racism, these texts struggle with the enduring gulf between Africa and the West; determined to overcome that gulf, they reproduce cultural differences in the name of diversity which they then simultaneously fetishize and synthesize in the name of unity.

However, when their sincerity is taken seriously and the more fundamental but invisible centre of their project, which is also to say the limit of that project, is interrogated, alternative and generative readings of these texts become possible. Noting the importance of Achebe's essay, particularly for "break[ing] the aura of the text" (444), Armstrong, nevertheless, posits that "Conrad is neither a racist nor an exemplary anthropologist but a sceptical dramatist of epistemological processes [and that] *Heart of Darkness* is a calculated failure to depict achieved cross-cultural understanding" (431). Armstrong counters what may be regarded as a dismissal of Conrad's novella for racism by demonstrating that, because "Marlow is both open and closed to cultural differences" (437), the novella is shot through with ambivalence and irony. Marlow's failure cannot be summed up as the moral failure of racism without returning us to an impasse; however, when it is understood as an epistemological failure preceded by the potential for dialogue and reciprocity, as Armstrong proposes, the subtleties and complexities of the text come to the fore without ignoring or superseding its problems.

It is important to note that I do not invoke Conrad's novella and Armstrong's reading thereof in order to indicate a strict equivalence with Addison, Meldrum, Merilles and Kingsolver. Though there are similarities, the differences are equally important because they clarify the thought structures that underpin the literary and scholarly traditions exemplified by *Heart of Darkness* and diametrically opposed responses to it, such as those by Achebe and Clifford. The first difference is that while the more explicit racism within Conrad's novella is absent from these four texts, so too are the layered textual strategies and the consequent irony through which that racism can be interrogated (Miller, "Should We" 2006). This means, secondly, that the failure of the four texts is not strategic so much as the undesirable and problematic by-product of an effort to assimilate all and any difference into a harmonious union. Third, where Conrad remains hopeful but uncertain about whether "hermeneutic

education and social change can overcome the solipsism dividing individuals and cultures” (Armstrong 431), these four texts assume—with a sometimes arrogant ‘can do-ism’—the inevitability thereof. Finally, noting that *Heart of Darkness* is “remarkable for its time (and perhaps for ours) because it makes such dialogue thinkable” (Armstrong 440–41), Armstrong charts Marlow’s journey as being one from the assumption of immutable difference to the recognition of similarity in the moment of contact, ending in the failure to “move from similarity to reciprocity” (434). These texts begin with the assumption of sameness and in the encounter with cultural difference fail to turn the potential for dialogue and reciprocity into an actuality. Ultimately, the four texts offer (for the most part) not explorations of the troublesome nature of self, other and humanity but sincere projections of self and other as constituting an assured humanity which forecloses the possibility of actual dialogue and the realisation of reciprocity, however initial, halting or imperfect. To read these texts as racist, and consequently to dismiss them, or to read them as celebrations of unity-in-diversity, and thereby be seduced by their sincerity, is similarly to foreclose the possibility of dialogue and the realisation, however initial, halting or imperfect, of reciprocity. In chapters four and five, I have offered a reading of *The Constant Gardener* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, respectively, which attends to the ambivalences and ironies. These ambivalences and ironies not only reveal the anxieties of and within ‘the human’ but are suggestive of alternative forms of a belonging premised on the discontinuities and vulnerabilities of ‘the human’.

The initial impulse behind this thesis was a sense of exasperation at the representations of Africa by the West that were so persistently reductive and ridiculous that they had become worthy of comedic treatment and little more. *The Good Samaritans*—a mockumentary-style television series distributed online—and *Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway*—an annual campaign that produces videos that satirise Northern Europe’s obsession with saving Africa—are just two examples of the eye-rolling derision aimed at Western sanctimony. Notably, this derision emanates from within the African continent as well as from Europe. The unpredictable nature of research and of the close-reading of the four individual texts, however, meant that this exasperation turned into curiosity about what might underlie this too bold and too assured drive to save Africa. This thesis, consequently, took a slight detour as it explored those underlying anxieties about the uncertain ontology of the human. These anxieties are not new, though they appear to be intensifying as is suggested by the increased certainty that characterises Addison’s novel as opposed to the ambivalence that marks Kingsolver’s: read chronologically there is a sense in which Meldrum and Addison

are hastily backing away from those ruptures that, in Merleau-Ponty's and Kingsolver's texts, are cause for unease but an unease that is necessary and possibly generative. It is this movement away from that which is difficult to digest that returns me to Africa and the question of what roles are there for 'it' to play—whether willingly, forcibly, or through the back and forth of transnational and transcontinental forces and resistances. Because as much as these four texts are nostalgic for an idyllic past and a universal origin, they are also hopeful, looking forward to a future characterised by togetherness.

The significance of an alternative world view, an African perspective, was for Lewis Nkosi, as it was for Leopold Senghor and his contemporaries, a means of resisting white domination. A final question that is worth considering here, then, is what relevance might Africa or an African perspective, whether that be Pan-Africanism, Negritude or another Africanist-philosophy still to emerge, have outside of anti-colonial discourse? If, as Mudimbe contends, the dehumanisation of us all is already imminent in the twenty-first century (Palmburg 2001), then the promise of a universal ontological origin and home in Africa becomes ever more alluring. Writing half a century after Nkosi, Jean and John Comaroff note that the significance of an African perspective is increasingly global in its affirmation: in light of the “the dialectics of contemporary world history”, they suggest, “the north appears to be ‘evolving’ southward” (Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory* 13). This ‘evolution’ is, crucially and contra-Senghor, not teleological; the Comaroff's use of the term ‘evolution’ is to be understood as “pointedly provocative, partially parodic, [and] counter-evolutionary”, not because they reverse modernist reason but, rather, “call into question the epistemic reflex on which that reason is founded” (*Theory* 12). Africa, conceived of as the “cradle of humankind”, both fails and succeeds in making possible a human community. The outcome evident in the texts under study in this thesis is, however, primarily a question of what is meant by ‘humankind’ and secondarily a question of what is meant by ‘Africa’. In other words, the four texts that have been the focus of this discussion are arguably early examples of the continuing relevance of Africa for the world and of this evolution southward in so far as they demonstrate a desire to emulate a different way of being. But it is the foundation and nature of that emulation, of the evolution that is not an evolution, where these texts serve through both their failures and their successes as a warning of the difficulty of thinking being and belonging and the urgency of approaching the task anew.

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