

## Post-Apartheid Hybridity Discourse and the Narrative Distinctions of Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*

Michael D'Itri

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

Nothing I am, of not tribe or race, and because of it full of a childish  
arrogance to defend myself against all of you

—Bessie Head, *The Cardinals*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In the foreword to Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly's *Writing South Africa*, the authors suggest that South African literature before and after apartheid produced texts which "recorded or satirized state-enforced racism, explored the possibilities of resistance and rebuilding, and creatively addressed the vexed question of literature's relation to politics and ethics" (i). Published in the aftermath of apartheid South Africa, I suggest that K. Sello Duiker's first novel, *Thirteen Cents* (2000), presents a narrative that responds to the political impact of apartheid's legacy, explores what resistance and rebuilding might entail for the nation's inhabitants, and addresses literature's relationship to politics. Duiker's protagonist, Azure, is a dark-skinned orphan with blue eyes who lives in the violent, tumultuous streets of post-apartheid Cape Town. Throughout the first-person narrative, we witness Azure's physical, financial, and sexual exploitation by street gangs who rebrand him with the name of his racially ambiguous eyes, Blue. After the gang leader Gerald saws off the cast on Azure's broken leg, Azure climbs the nearby Table Mountain in a state of madness that results in the unexpected and fantastical destruction of the entire city.

*Thirteen Cents* thus concludes with an intriguing, if not baffling, sequence of apocalyptic events on Table Mountain that have most commonly been read by critics as the conclusion of a *Bildungsroman* about Azure's empowerment, overcoming of adversity, and esoteric self-knowledge among the lingering phantasmagoria of post-apartheid Cape Town. In *State of Peril*, Lucy Valerie Graham similarly argues that the novel ends as an anti-*Bildungsroman* which reworks the genre in order to emphasize Azure's exploitation and expulsion from the nation-state. Picking up on this argumentative trend, Edgar Nabutanyi and Andrea Spain have recently tried to steer Duiker criticism away from the focus on a *Bildungsroman* reading of *Thirteen Cents* with respective readings that analyse the novel as a

dystopia and a depiction of uncertain queer futurity. However, these readings do not offer a full account of the postcolonial implications of muddling the violence of Azure the literary character with that of Duiker the author.

This article insists that to read the novel's apocalypse sequence as a part of a *Bildungsroman*—in which Azure's increased appeals to "getting stronger" (Duiker 121) are a form of marginalized "empower[ment]" (Nabutanyi "Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality" 39)—is to ignore that Azure increasingly appeals to patterns of domination, violence and re-victimization that have been previously inflicted on him by the colonial institutions and their legacy within South Africa. Azure's apocalypse cruelly wipes out both victim *and* perpetrator, both innocent *and* guilty, in much the same way that the post-apartheid oppression of Cape Town—which is inherited and experienced by Azure as gang violence and sexual exploitation—ignores distinctions between child and adult, or White and Black.

Azure's conjured apocalypse, I also argue, embraces a form of hybridity which resembles Homi K. Bhabha's elucidation of the term, and which is hence ideologically and politically disengaged from the realities of racial difference in post-apartheid South Africa. My analysis, taking up Amar Acheraïou, Zoë Wicomb and Gugu Hlongwane's critiques of Bhabha, thus positions Azure's embrace of hybridity in contrast to the competing discourses within Duiker's text which critique postcolonial hybridity's pragmatic ambivalence. Whereas Kazeem Adebisi reads the polyglossic features of *Thirteen Cents* as Duiker's endorsement of "hybridity," I suggest that the linguistic differences between those who are exploited and those who perpetrate violence highlights the political implications of language. I similarly read the numerous urban and rural non-human animals in *Thirteen Cents*, who speak back to Azure's attempts to collapse their differences, and hence assert their own distinct forms of organization. This article thus distinguishes between Azure as a survivor of post-apartheid exploitation who employs similar models of ambivalence and disengagement, and Duiker as an author who wishes to spotlight this disengagement and the violent consequences it has for the development of those who exist within its parameters. Duiker thus employs a narrative model to counter uncritically homogenizing theorizations of hybridity.

Theoretically, this project seeks to continue in the tradition of postcolonial considerations of Duiker's text, and further extend the critical analysis of the text's eco-critical, historical, and political implications. Duiker is an author deeply interested in issues of violence, and especially violence as it manifests linguistically. As he said in an interview with Fred De Vries in 2004,

[w]ithout wanting to trivialise [its] seriousness ... one can say that violence is a culture that communicates a certain message ... I wanted to explore how violence is not only a way of dominating people, but ... to show that violence is used by people to communicate with each other and to convey a message. The way in which this happens is deplorable. But we are part of a violent culture, and we never knew a period of rest, nor did we receive help to enter into a process of healing after apartheid ... It will take some time still, before violence neutralises itself. I look behind it: where does it come from, is it hate, anger or communication? In any case, it's a kind of language. (quoted in Raditlhalo "The Travelling Salesman," 101–2)

Duiker acknowledges that violence is a language that is historically inextricable from post-apartheid South Africa, and yet continues to manifest itself in “deplorable” ways which are inherited by Azure. Considering Duiker’s fraught relationship with violence—seen both in his upbringing during the pinnacle of South African apartheid, and in his eventual suicide by hanging—I submit that a more considered analysis of the political, eco-critical and cultural consequences of the destructive power embraced by Azure is necessary in order to critique the postcolonial institutions that wield and direct this power.

### Beyond the *Bildungsroman*

Critics of Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* find themselves in a considerable predicament when faced with its seemingly ambiguous ending, and have often employed one of two readings. As Sam Raditlhalo perceives, the “ending in either hallucinations and/or magical realism ... negates closure to what has been written in the social-realist mode” (“A Victory of Sorts” 275). Thus, we may either read Azure’s freedom from oppressive structures via the realm of magical realism as a redemptive, optimistic change (like Shaun Viljoen or Brenna Munro) or believe that these are hallucinations from a pre-colonial past to which Azure desperately attempts to cling (like Meg Samuelson or Sam Raditlhalo in “A Victory of Sorts”). Both of these readings suggest that Duiker attempts to further integrate Azure within the world of the novel as the narrative progresses, whether this means that Azure grows into a powerful member of society, or that he seeks some sort of alternative community on the mountain and successfully joins it.

Graham perhaps first recognizes the *Bildungsroman* as inherent in these critical accounts. In her book *State of Peril*, she asserts that the novel marks Azure’s

failure to integrate into the social world (or rather, the failure of his social world to incorporate and protect him). In the extent to which it foregrounds a street child’s complete marginalization within the nation-state, the novel is enough of a corruption of the traditional genre as to be read as an anti-*Bildungsroman*. (175)

In this manner, the novel is a critique of the social conditions that have encouraged and sustained Azure's prolonged alienation from any meaningful communities (176). Graham's emphasis on Azure's isolation, rather than focusing on Azure's agency and power, troubles the assumption that *Thirteen Cents* ends with an unambiguous optimism for the future. As Viljoen perceives, "[s]till completely alone, but with clarity of mind, [Azure] can, the ending suggests, begin again on the clean slate emerging beneath his feet" (xvii). However, both Graham and Viljoen ignore the colonially replicative violence seemingly endorsed and performed by Azure at the end of the novel, as I shall explore further below.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in his desire to move beyond a *Bildungsroman* reading of *Thirteen Cents*, Nabutanyi wishes to focus on the dystopian aspects of the novel without seriously contesting the notion that Azure's growth and development might be problematized by Duiker himself ("Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality"). As Nabutanyi lays out, "[w]ithout disputing these scholars' claim ... it might also be productive to read [the novel] as a commentary on post-apartheid socio-familial dystopia" (35). Although Nabutanyi counters readings that suggest the novel is a "[B]ildungsroman of [Azure]'s sexuality in foundation" (qtd. in "Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality" 43), Nabutanyi encourages *Bildungsroman* readings of the novel's ending. As Nabutanyi suggests, Gerald and "the perpetrators' desire to disempower [Azure] fails because ... sexual violation spurs [Azure] to regain [his] agency—with Azure hiking into the mountain to regain his independence and agency" (39). Indeed Nabutanyi does not seem concerned with the specific *forms* of "independence and agency" that Azure seeks, in which reading the end of the novel as an empowering "hike" threatens to misread and ignore the immense violence and colonial legacy that permeates it. For Nabutanyi,

[t]he mysterious death of Gerald and the prophesied destruction of Cape Town by the tallest wave "spreading its destruction" and a sky which "rains with fire" ... indicate that it is probably only in fantasy that the evil forces exploiting children like Azure get (spectacularly) punished and eradicated, Armageddon-style. (47)

However, reading the novel's end as a fantasy that seeks to eliminate only those who perpetrate violence against Azure clearly misreads the text. As Duiker emphasizes, the floods and fire that annihilate Cape Town destroy everything and everyone residing in it: "Nothing seems to escape" (Duiker 190) its destruction. What then do we make of Azure's appeals to violence?

Spain and Anthony Vital are two critics who have recently begun to wrestle with critical accounts of Azure's violence. Spain rejects "reading ... a coming community in Duiker's work as many critics have read" (417) in which the closing sequence is an "apocalyptic undoing of all sociality" (419), and asserts that Duiker affirms the queer "uncertainty of future forms of sociality" (417).

Despite Spain's problematic reading of Azure's sex work with wealthy white men as a space "which [Azure] largely controls, determining with whom he hooks up and steering the sex acts with a skilled, cultivated self-commodification" (428), which ignores the socioeconomic institutions that coerce racialized bodies into participating in sex work as well as the gruesome violence Azure experiences in Duiker's text,<sup>3</sup> Spain recognizes that Azure's "fantasmatic attachment" (431) to certain forms of violence indicates the "fragility" (431) of this nationalist masculinity. Similarly, Vital asserts that "[t]he end of the novel underscores [Azure's] capacity for violence. As the narrative progresses, his reflective abilities increase, as does his rage: 'destroy, destroy' and 'I am getting stronger' appear as refrains" (173-4). Whereas the transition into post-apartheid South Africa ought to be experienced as an "empowering" (174) historical moment for Azure, it is experienced as violence and loss in contrast to alleged narratives of redemption and community.

### Careful Distinctions: Azure and Duiker, Urban and Natural

Vital offers an ecological critique of *Thirteen Cents* which, although attentive to the patterns of violence embedded in Azure's narrative voice, ignores the competing discourses of Duiker's novel. Vital critiques what he perceives to be Duiker's nostalgic turn to nature during Azure's experience on Table Mountain, in which the novel privileges the natural over the urban. For Vital, nature offers Azure some sort of possibility, but this turn to the natural setting of the mountain ignores the interconnection between nature and city, as well as the violence that is present in Azure's natural world. Vital's ecological argument is in line with new ecology's emphasis on the urban as an ecosystem in its own right.<sup>4</sup> As Vital points out, then, Azure "experiences spiritualised nature in terms that point back to ways of living before the appearance of a colonial modernity on the African continent" (176), which is motivated by the "rejection of an urban life tied to globalism" (180).

However, Vital's argument does not merely suggest that Azure, as a literary character, performs models of violence and dismisses forms of urbanity that are linked to globalism, but that Duiker himself cannot conceive of the world of the novel in any other way. For Vital,

South Africa, post-1994, offers no scripts for systemic transformation other than the official version in line with the needs of capital. ... Duiker has nothing to draw on to offer his character other than a liberation that is internal, reinforcing his solitude and echoing the violence of the pasts that have produced his city. ... Duiker's narrative, in its social focus, gives sympathetic voice to one who seeks remedy in visions of apocalyptic violence. (173-7)

Duiker's "sympathy" for Azure, however, is not as simple as Vital may suggest. Although *Thirteen Cents* is indeed a novel of immense pathos, enabling us to feel sorrow or anger at Azure's treatment and the colonial history that has enabled it, Duiker presents us with a narrative voice that is immensely flawed and human. Azure must pick up the scraps with what little he has been given, and thus he makes mistakes, perhaps even grave ones, towards the end of the novel. In the context of Vital's argument, is the anthropocentric inclination to obtain meaning from the natural as opposed to the urban world a product of the novel or the narrator? I concede that this is a tricky question to pose in a first-person narrative with such a dominating voice as *Thirteen Cents*, but I assert that there are moments of competing discourse in the text which trouble and question Azure's increased confidence throughout the novel.

In particular, Duiker most clearly indicates his acknowledgement of Azure's troubled journey towards self-knowledge in the novel's title. After Azure's initial journey to the top of the mountain, he descends to Cape Town and discovers that he has lost a cent on the mountain, and hence only has thirteen cents remaining. The connection to Azure's age in the novel is clear enough, but what exactly this moment suggests has seen few convincing answers. For Nabutanyi, the thirteen cents are a renunciation of Azure's vulnerable status as a street child, from which Azure moves into an adulthood that allows him the ostensible agency to "exchange sexual favours for money" ("Archives of Troubled Childhoods" 2). This reading, however, does not seem to correspond with the fact that Azure's journey on the mountain was precipitated by his desire to *transcend* his status of being financially dependent on the exploitative adults of Cape Town. For Viljoen, "this becoming thirteen to which the title alludes ... positions [Azure] as a critical commentator moving into and out of the dominant matrix of hierarchies and power ... often drawn into and subject to this adult world and its values" (ix), which ignores Azure's similarly repeated appeals to power and hierarchy on the mountain. Upon closer analysis, Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* truly alludes to Azure's loss of identity and narrative meaning in the face of post-apartheid exploitation and violence, and highlights the narrator's increased appeals to this violence as the novel progresses. That is, as Duiker indicates, Azure realizes that he has *lost* something on the mountain, rather than gained. Although it is not clear what exactly corresponds to the cent that Azure loses (childhood innocence? humanity? redemption?), the emphasis here is clearly on the fact that Azure has *lost* a part of himself. Duiker thus indicates that Azure's is a narrative of a *loss* of identity within the exploitative and colonizing narratives of Cape Town. For Nabutanyi ("Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality"), the thirteen cents gestures towards Azure's commodification for sums

of money, which acknowledges Azure's vulnerability, but only hints at a narrative of loss.

Duiker also calls attention to Azure's loss of identity by the narrator's use (or non-use) of his own name. Although the novel begins with Azure's corrective insistence on his name, "Azure. *Ah-zoo-ray*" (1), Gerald renames him Blue, a name which we expect Azure to resist, but which he increasingly embraces as the novel progresses. Towards the end of the novel, when Azure refers to his own name for the last time, he introduces himself to Oscar as "Blue" (130) instead of Azure. Duiker thus indicates that Azure is still unable to reclaim his distinct identity from the violent institutions and colonial legacies of Cape Town, and will instead define himself relationally or derivatively, rather than originally.

Duiker also suggests that Azure reads, and often misreads, the urban and rural non-human animals that he encounters due to his increased appeals to colonial models of power and violence which have been visited upon him. In this manner, Duiker draws attention to moments in which Azure reimagines or contradicts himself about certain features of the non-human life of Cape Town. Perhaps the most consistent examples throughout the novel are the numerous pigeons and rats. At the beginning of the novel, Azure fears that Gerald will turn him into a rat or pigeon like the other street children who gave up their shoes to Gerald (46), which indicates Azure's association of the rat with a servile, pestiferous existence. However, by the end of the novel, Azure seemingly embraces the existence of a rat and the seeming form of power that it potentially allows. As he passes by dead trees on the mountain, Azure "move[s] quickly, like a rat, crawling over everything" and reminds himself of his increased sense of power: "I'm getting stronger I keep saying" (121). Azure momentarily appropriates pestiferousness and relishes in the rat's capacity for violence. However, later on the mountain, Azure admits that he eats rats, but despises the animals because even their meat smells of urine. Azure thinks of eating rats at this moment because he earlier imagines (or witnesses) a wolf which transforms into a bird of prey which feeds rats to its chicks (129). Azure's experience of the rat on the mountain is thus contradictory and generalized to the point that it may signify anything and everything, both predator and prey, both abject and subject.

Azure's perception by the end of the novel, as opposed to when he is kidnapped on the roof and pays attention to the distinctions between seagulls and pigeons, now collapses differences between animals; the wolf is a bird of prey, which eats rats, in which rats also move like Azure, but which he also finds revolting. What do we make of Azure's contradictions? I suggest that rather than chalking these contradictions up to the fantastical, mythological events of the novel's ending, they in fact are an integral aspect of Azure's discourse. In his

repeated and increasing desire to collapse differences between the creatures and environments around him — in which “[n]othing seems to escape” the destruction of Azure’s apocalypse, and all are lumped together as ally, enemy, and self — are a product of colonial discourse, as well as a postcolonial discourse which threatens to replicate colonial patterns. That is, I argue, Azure represents a profound attachment to models of “hybridity,” as the concept was articulated in the field of postcolonial studies in the early 1990s, a concept which Duiker and scholars like Acheraïou critique in their work.

## The Hazy Hybrid and Enduring Postcolonial Debates

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha develops an account of hybridity which attempts to construe the transitional space between categories of inclusion and exclusion as a destabilizing force for colonial powers. As Bhabha describes, “[t]he nonsynchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space — a third space — where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (312). This third space proclaims itself as a “political space to articulate and negotiate such culturally hybrid social identities” in which “unresolved, transitional moments within the disjunctive present of modernity” are “projected into a time of historical retroversion or an inassimilable place outside history” (359), which thus affords these moments of hybridity the power to destabilize colonial borders, ideologies and institutions and avoid easy categorization or essentialism.

Conceptions of hybridity such as Bhabha’s, however, have been met with their fair share of pushback. One of their most rigorous critics, Acheraïou, counters Bhabha’s account of hybridity, among others, as an anti-colonial activity. Acheraïou argues that while Bhabha’s hybridity seeks to “contest binaries, purity and essentialism” (96), hybridity discourse tends to privilege the synchronic, or the present conception of hybridity, over the diachronic context of hybridity’s “earlier racist biases” (101). In this manner, Bhabha de-racializes the concept of hybridity, and thus erases the “histories of colonial genocides,” the “exploitation of non-European societies,” and the “historical manipulations of hybridity discourse intended to uphold hegemonic imperial power structures” (101). For Acheraïou, hybridity as a “positive, emancipating agency” (102) only exists on a theoretical level. On the other hand, “[f]rom a pragmatic standpoint ... this ambivalence ... may turn out to be synonymous with ideological and political disengagement at best, and at worst a sign of complicity with both national and global structures of power and inequality” (103). Acheraïou’s critique of hybridity thus points to

how race should be a central concern to notions of hybridity. In the pragmatic reality of racialized individuals, being identified as hybrid often proves as “the space of the impossible” rather than a space of enunciative possibility. The third space is thus “a site of extreme psychological, cultural, and racial alienation in which the duplex, unique identity of mixed-blood offspring is subject to a double denial” (79).

Within the context of the immediate aftermath of post-apartheid South Africa, hybridity has also encountered its critics. In the context of the polyethnic category of “coloured” in South Africa, Wicomb considers how Bhabha’s hybridity and its enduring influence within postcolonial studies might serve rather than counter conservative discourses of purity. Wicomb examines the emergence of “exclusively coloured political organizations” which emerged in post-apartheid South Africa. For Wicomb, these groups signal “attempts at blurring differences of language, class, and religion in the interest of a homogeneous ethnic group” and “seem to defy the decentring thrust of postmodernism,” which “undermines the new narrative of national unity” (94). In terms of the novel, Azure’s dark skin and blue eyes yields an ambiguous and hence doubly marginalized racialization that hybridity discourse reads as a form of resistance, but which critics like Wicomb perceive as an idealized fairytale in the context of a persistent postmodern awareness of differences. Similarly, within postcolonial hybridity discourse, “the ‘borderline existence’ for the coloured marks a ‘deeper historical displacement’ ... a difference ‘within’ a subject that inhabits the rim of an inbetween [sic] reality” (101). The only way for the racialized subject to inhabit a space of inbetweenness, for Wicomb, is “symbolically” and hence “in silence” (101). The existence of a third space also assumes “an essentialist view which posits a ‘pure’ reality that is experienced in the space inhabited by the racially pure” (101-2). The link between hybridity and postcolonial resistance thus “seems to presuppose a theory of hybridity that relies ... on the biological, a notion denied in earlier accounts where Bhabha claims that colonial power with its inherent ambivalence itself produces hybridization” (102). In this manner, Wicomb concludes that Bhabha “cannot account for the current coloured politics, where it is precisely the celebration of inbetweenness that serves conservatism” (102-3).

In a similar manner, Hlongwane counters postcolonial “theories of cultural contamination and creolisation” such as Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*. Whereas Gilroy’s “postracial humanism” (*Against Race* 37) seeks to transcend racial and national categories, Hlongwane asserts the relevance of race as an analytical category and emphasizes the premature idealism of any post-racial or post-national conceptions of post-apartheid South Africa. Accordingly, South Africa is “a country where black identities are asked to disappear in currently fashionable theorisations of creolisation and hybridity” (113), which ostensibly

“function as conduits for a progressive ‘postrace’, modern humanity” (114). Gilroy and Bhabha thus do not address “the *nature* of the contamination” (119, emphasis in original), which threatens to enter the dominant discourse. In reality, “[g]lobal discourses have alerted us to the contamination or cultural fusions that are acceptable and those that are not” (119). Hence, “people refuse contamination, especially of the African type” (119). Moreover, the “modern contamination” that is often celebrated by hybridity discourse “is not only one-sided but is assimilative in its dominance” (119).

As thorough as critiques such as Acheraïou, Wicomb, and Hlongwane’s have been in challenging conceptions of the hybrid as an emancipatory state, postcolonial studies continue to employ the term without an acknowledgement of its full implications. Criticism of *Thirteen Cents* and its mixed race protagonist has been beset with this very tendency to use the term “hybrid” in a way that either erases Azure’s oppression, or does not specify which conception of the “hybrid” is being referred to. Munro, for example, writes that “[p]erhaps because his exotically hybrid body has been sexually commodified ... at such a young age, Azure has trouble ‘figuring out’ his sexuality,” which inverts conventional coming-out narratives in such a way that “he becomes more disoriented, rather than less, over the course of the novel” (201). Although Munro is in line with my reading of the novel as a story of loss and confusion, Munro problematically and ambiguously reads Azure’s body as “hybrid.” Munro neglects to underscore the pragmatic consequences of Azure’s “exotic” skin, which often intensifies his suffering and exploitation throughout the novel.

Kazeem Adebisi also affirms an ambiguous form of “hybridity” within *Thirteen Cents*. Adebisi’s analysis in “Linguistic Strategies” looks to the use of English, un-translated Afrikaans and linguistic code-switching in the novel, and contextualizes Afrikaner resistance to English, as well as Black resistance to the use of Afrikaans, which racially and linguistically compartmentalized socio-economic and political arenas (50). In this manner, Adebisi highlights Duiker as part of a post-apartheid trend towards “a kind of linguistic configuration built around hybridity or multiple lingos in the new fiction” (50). For Adebisi, the polyglossic language of *Thirteen Cents* is “a symbol of unity in diversity in all areas of life” (50), through which it contextualizes the backgrounds of Duiker’s characters, emphasizes the linguistic plurality of Cape Town, indicates how these opposing linguistic groups have begun a “rapprochement,” and is also “a celebration of hybridity which has come to be associated with postcolonial culture” (54).

Adebisi’s analysis of the novel’s hybridity is not only dismissive of the ongoing debate surrounding hybridity in postcolonial literature, but clearly falls prey to the criticisms of the hybrid as

articulated by Acheraïou. In emphasizing the polyglossia of the novel, Adebisi erases the violence and exploitation experienced by those who do not adequately subscribe to the language of those who wield power. In contrast, I thus assert that the polyglossic language of *Thirteen Cents* actually serves to highlight difference and emphasize the enduring colonial legacy's linguistic differences for racialized South African existence. As Azure's problematically "hybrid" body demonstrates, with its dark skin and blue eyes, no *meaningful* resistance emerges in the novel due to his seemingly ambiguous racialization. And yet, Azure appeals to models that resemble Bhabha's hybrid in their essentializing, and generalizing tendencies to collapse meaningful differences. Although Azure's third space is one of the "impossible," in which he encounters even greater obstacles due to his "hybridity," Duiker seems to distance himself from currents that embrace the "hybrid" as emancipator.

It seems unlikely that Duiker presents English and Afrikaans in close proximity so as to indicate some sort of optimistic "rapprochement" between distinct linguistic communities, but rather seeks to juxtapose the treatment of these two groups and the respective power they wield. As Adebisi rightly points out, "most of the Afrikaans texts in the novel ... are attributed to characters of Afrikaans' background" (54), which indicates that Duiker seeks to highlight the *differences* between Afrikaners and non-Afrikaners within Cape Town. Just as Richard, one of the exploitative gangsters of Cape Town, consistently speaks in long sentences laden with Afrikaans as he orally rapes Azure, Duiker emphasizes Azure's difference by the narrator's concise responses in English during this scene (Duiker 62-3). Duiker's emphasis on the linguistic contrast between the victim and perpetrator in this instance also continues between readers of Afrikaans and the wider international audience of the novel that speaks English, which distinguishes between South African blacks speaking English, South African blacks and whites speaking Afrikaans, and Western readers of English. In this context, the use of Afrikaans affirms the novel's audience as South African, and reminds outsiders of the text of their status by their inability to understand both languages of the text. Thus Duiker recognizes and foregrounds the political consequences inherent in linguistic differences. *Thirteen Cents* employs polyglossia in order to *reveal* rather than *conceal* the power differentials between those who are able to employ and navigate certain linguistic arenas.

### Azure's Ambiguity and Duiker's Difference

In addition to exposing the linguistic hybridity of Cape Town as a condition that is passive or complicit to the oppressive structures of power and inequality, Duiker similarly problematizes Azure's

tendency to collapse meaningful differences and seek emancipation from a postcolonial “hybridity.” To return to the example of the rats that Azure contemplates throughout the novel, Azure’s assessment that “pigeons, people ... are just rats” (31) is more troublesome than it may initially indicate. Distinctions between animals that are injurious, adults that are exploitative, or between animals and adults that may help promote freedom, disappear. Azure’s intertwining of human and non-human parts becomes monstrous once he reaches the top of the mountain and carries dead wood that he perceives as “arms, legs, bodies, birds, elephants, monsters with many arms and legs and other things” (125-6). Distinctions collapse and Azure imagines dead wood as the dead animals and humanity that he wishes to destroy by the end of the novel.

Far from an emancipatory movement, Duiker indicates that Azure’s generalized destruction also has the potential to destroy Azure himself. Azure believes himself to be constructed from the pieces of those around him: “In everyone I pass I can see a little of myself. I carry a little of everyone I know in me” (119). The problem with this construction is that if the limbs and torsos of those he has built himself up with are destroyed, he also risks his own existence. As Duiker makes clear by the meteor showers and fire that nearly kills Azure (190), it is uncertain as to who or what will survive the destruction of Cape Town, if anything at all. Indeed the question of who exactly Azure intends to destroy, and what will remain after this process is completed, Duiker suggests, is as indiscriminate as the violence that has been inflicted upon Azure.

Once Azure heads to the mountain with his cast off, he affirms an ambiguously violent form of energy that does not specify any clear target: “I stick out my tongue and pant like a dog. A mad, animal energy rushes through me. I’m going to destroy them. All of them” (120-21). Azure’s intention is clearly destruction, but that “all” must be destroyed neglects to acknowledge any meaningful differences in the treatment of racialized individuals in Cape Town. All differences are collapsed to the extent that all must be destroyed. Azure’s violence is problematic precisely because it refuses to make meaningful distinctions between the treatment of different entities. Although Azure’s apocalypse begins as a form of retaliation against Gerald, Duiker indicates how easily this train of thought leads from destroying Gerald, to the entirety of Cape Town: “I’ll give him fire. I’ll give him destruction. I’ll give them all destruction ...” (125). Just as the novel depicts Azure’s retaliatory apocalypse as “nature rising up violently against the violent, hurtful city, destroying what is destructive” (Vital 175), we must also consider Duiker’s resistance to this overly encompassing agency.

That is, Duiker’s complex formation of Cape Town — linguistically, culturally, politically, and racially— extends an

acknowledgement of difference from the non-human to include all forms of life. Duiker develops Azure into both an increasingly “powerful” agent responding to the exploitative world around him, as well as a product of those very same violent discourses which collapse distinctions, difference and hence pragmatic alteration. Thus, when Vital concludes that, “in turning to locate value in the rural community, [*Thirteen Cents*] encourages a blindness to the present and past complex ways in which urbanism both affects ecosystems and generates inadequate images of nature–human relations” (180), we must consider whether it is in fact Azure’s increased appeals to hybridity, and not Duiker himself, that are blind to the complex realities of Cape Town.

Aside from the linguistic features of the text which indicate that Duiker carefully distinguishes between the two languages of the novel and their inherent inequalities and racial histories, as discussed above, Duiker also calls attention to the dark, violent undertones of Azure’s apocalypse. Especially towards the end of the novel, Duiker suggests that the violent energy that Azure appeals to has the potential to resemble forms of genocide which threaten Azure and the racialized population of Cape Town as much as it threatens oppressors and centres of power. As Azure begins to witness the waves sweeping up streets of people, and feels the meteor showers spread fire all over Cape Town and the mountain, he perceives that “the whole mountain feels like an oven” (190), which eerily recalls the gas chambers and crematoria ovens used during the genocides of World War II. Although Azure would most probably be ignorant of this similarity, Duiker would not. Similarly, when Azure describes the meteor shower, he glosses over the potentiality that the destruction imitates forms of violence against racialized populations. Azure notes that “[w]hen the fireballs fall from the sky they make a frightening sound like a powerful machine rearing through something alive” (190), which indicates that this apocalypse is akin to a murder of some kind, in which the ecological spaces of the urban Cape Town and the “natural” Table Mountain are united in pain and suffering under the sky of meteors. Moreover, the sound of “powerful machines” tearing through the earth is haunted by the (post)colonial and industrial exploitation of ecosystems, in which Duiker highlights Azure’s ignorance of the destruction he has summoned. At the very least, Duiker is doubtful of the sort of emancipation Azure seeks.

## Fraught Emancipation and Violent Endings

Azure’s search for a form of power and emancipation and his ambiguous perception of hybridity and violence suggest that Duiker is not so confident in the optimistic reunion with a pre-colonial past

which many critics have hailed in the text. For Simon Lewis, Azure's interaction with Saartjie on the mountain suggests that he "appears to have a deep psychic connection to the original inhabitants of the land" (144). As Luc Renders and Viljoen reveal, Duiker's Saartjie is a seemingly ancient woman who invokes the Khoikhoi woman, Saartje Baartman, who was kidnapped, paraded, killed and displayed all over early-nineteenth-century England and France. Azure reimagines her as a maternal figure who protects him from the tyrannical and violent T-Rex, which "creates a new genealogy for himself to restore his dead mother and father" (Viljoen xvi). Munro observes that "Azure has no specific spiritual tradition to tap into, but he needs one in order to survive psychically," in "the sense that the natural universe is alive and part of him gives [Azure] a sense of connection and power" (204). On the other hand, as Viljoen hints, Duiker seems to emphasize that Azure makes *no* meaningful connections to some sort of heritage beyond his own memory. The spiritual tradition Azure taps into is not a positive, constructive power, but one which participates in colonial violence and affirms the family separations precipitated by nations which were destabilized under colonialism. Thus, far from representing an ancient, genuine and accessible form of South African heritage, Azure's encounter with Saartjie and the nostalgic, anthropologically Orientalist cave paintings he finds in the caves of Table Mountain are attempts to engage with a power that may not emancipate, but simply collapse pragmatic racial differences, and assign racialized persons to an imagined past. According to Wicomb, "Saartje Baartman, whose very name indicates her cultural hybridity, exemplifies the body as site of shame, a body bound up with the politics of location" (93). It is hence impossible to excavate a past "when virtually nothing by way of folktales, stories, or songs has been retained and when the only sources are records of the Court of Justice" (99).

As Duiker's Saartjie tells Azure, she is married to a T-Rex who terrifies the city (141) and is reminiscent of Gerald, as well as Azure's long-gone abusive father. Azure, however, begins to grow lizard skin (139) and Saartjie tells him he shall be the next T-Rex to replace his own father. Duiker thus indicates that Azure inherits a *violent* and *abusive* form of power which relies primarily on brute strength. As Azure tells Saartjie, the only reason he cannot immediately inherit leadership from the T-Rex and eat Gerald is not because Azure is unwilling, but because he is still too "little" (144). For the remainder of the novel, Duiker thus dramatizes Azure's quest for strength and power. What is also interesting to note here about Azure's muddled vision of Saartjie is that he combines an imagined national past with his oppressed and exploited present, which yields a monstrous hybrid of both. Neither emancipatory, nor acknowledging the real differences between then and now, Azure threatens to tear it all down without pausing to consider what will remain in futurity. Duiker's primary

concern as South Africa moves through the post-apartheid era is not, “What will continued freedom and emancipation for the oppressed *look like?*” but rather, “What are the oppressed fighting to be freed and emancipated *into?*” *Thirteen Cents* suggests that Duiker hopes — and this is a hope with a great deal of uncertainty — that it will not be more of the same, and that meaningful differences will finally be acknowledged and addressed. I emphasize Duiker’s uncertainty here, rather than his absolute rejection of Azure’s methods since, in some way, the novel *does* show a sense of hope that things will change, as much as it is concerned with the way this change will come about. As Munro argues, for example, “[i]n a queer refusal of normative masculinity and ‘adulthood,’ Azure goes back up the mountain and deeper into a kind of madness that might also be a way of seeing the world clearly, but from a different angle” (206). Although Azure may in fact represent a sort of queer futurity in line with Lee Edelman’s death drive, Duiker’s hesitance with Azure’s violence should also give us pause. Before we adopt models of hybridity, redemption or change, Duiker suggests, we ought to pause and consider what systems will be strengthened or reinstated by Azure’s apocalypse.

Azure’s violence fails to be generative in any way, homogenizing categories of oppression, collapsing distinctions, and overcorrecting systems of hierarchy so that no possibility of change or rebuilding is possible. However, I conclude with an important caveat. Indeed the novel’s focus on destroying the world in which Azure lives might be no less violent than the everyday and ongoing violence of neo-colonialism and capitalism that mark the post-apartheid city. Moreover, this analysis is not to suggest that Azure is a character who ought to be derided or demeaned as a model of violence or exploitation. Rather, I seek to underscore the ways in which Duiker cautions against the ways in which emerging powers within colonized communities may choose or be coerced towards a form of behaviour that replicates and reinstates violence towards racialized bodies. My emphasis is thus not upon Azure as an oppressor, but rather upon Duiker as an author who is concerned about the ways in which post-apartheid South Africa may respond to the legacy of its colonial-apartheid past once it has seized the opportunity to wield a certain power of its own. Duiker thus employs a narrative model to counter homogenizing postcolonial conceptions of hybridity—theories which have been too uncritically applied to *Thirteen Cents* in the past. This is not to say that Duiker cannot imagine forms of power that are wielded by the oppressed, but that he is skeptical that these powers may continue to oppress those who are not chosen to participate in its delegation.

## Notes

1. This epigraph is indebted to Wicomb 96-7. I must also acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the guidance and encouragement of Dr. Jesse Arseneault who made the publication of this research possible.

2. Spain similarly critiques Viljoen's optimistic reading of the novel's ending, and contrasts the devastation in *Thirteen Cents* with Duiker's subsequently published novel, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*: "While some critics, such as Viljoen, read these last lines as Azure finally coming to terms with his parents' death... it is, quite significantly, not a coming to terms that ushers in a hopeful, unified future as in *Quiet Violence*. Interestingly, the image of 'total destruction' and of drowned people occurs, too, in the last pages of *Quiet Violence*, but with a racial variant and a hopeful 'merging' of people ..." (422).

3. For a less optimistic reading of Azure's sex work in *Thirteen Cents*, see Munro 203 and Nabutanyi, "Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality," 43.

4. See Pickett *et al.*'s "Urban Ecological Systems," in which the authors "emphasize an open definition of urban systems that accounts for the exchanges of material and influence between cities and surrounding landscapes" (331). See also Robert Mugerauer's "Toward a Theory of Integrated Urban Ecology" and Nicholas Holm's "Consider the Squirrel" for more recent considerations of ecology discourse's integration of urban ecology.

## Works Cited

- Acheraïou, Amar. *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305243>.
- Adebiyi, Kazeem. "Linguistic Strategies in Post-Apartheid Fiction." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.8, no.1, June 2015, <http://jpanafrican.org/docs/vol8no1/8.1-7-Kazeem.pdf>.
- Attridge, Derek and Rosemary Jolly, editors. *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*.
- Duiker, K. Sello. *Thirteen Cents: A Novel*. Ohio UP, 2013.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke UP, 2004.

- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Colour Line*. Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2000.
- Graham, Lucy Valerie. *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. *Oxford Scholarship Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199796373.001.0001>.
- Head, Bessie. *The Cardinals— With Meditations and Short Stories (1960-2)*. David Philip, 1993.
- Hlongwane, Gugu. "What Has Modernity To Do With It?: Camouflaging Race in the 'New' South Africa." *Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1–2, 2002, pp. 111–31. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564710208530292>.
- Holm, Nicholas. "Consider the Squirrel: Freaks, Vermin, and Value in the Ruin(s) of Nature." *Cultural Critique*, vol.80, 2012, pp.56–95. *Minnesota UP*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/culturalcritique.80.2012.0056>.
- Lewis, Simon. "Embodying Black Ways of Being in the World in the Spatialized Historiography of Postapartheid Literature." *British and African Literature in Transnational Context*. UP of Florida, 2011. *Florida Scholarship Online*. <https://doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813036021.001.0001>.
- Mugerauer, Robert. "Toward a Theory of Integrated Urban Ecology: Complementing Pickett Et Al." *Ecology and Society*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2010, pp.31–44. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26268228>.
- Munro, Brenna M. *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom*. Minnesota UP, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*.
- Nabutanyi, Edgar. "Archives of Troubled Childhoods in Contemporary African Fiction." *postamble*, vol.7, no.2, 2012.
- . "Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*." *Matatu*, vol.48, 2016, pp. 33–48, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18757421-04801004>.
- Pickett, Robert, *et al.* "Urban Ecological Systems: Scientific Foundations and a Decade of Progress." *Journal of Environmental Management*, vol. 92, no.3, 2011, pp. 331–362. *Science Direct*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2010.08.022>.
- Raditlhalo, Sam. "A Victory of Sorts, All *Thirteen Cents* and *Bitter*, Too." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, vol.37, no.7, 2010, pp.266–279, <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/crci/index.php/crci/article/view/24476/18142>.
- . "The Travelling Salesman: A Tribute to K. Sello Duiker: 1974-2005." *Feminist Africa* vol.5, 2005, pp.96–104, [https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/29038/Raditlhalo\\_travelling\\_salesman\\_A\\_2005.pdf?sequence=1](https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/29038/Raditlhalo_travelling_salesman_A_2005.pdf?sequence=1)
- Renders, Luc. "Paradise Regained and Lost Again: South African Literature in the Post-Apartheid Era." *Journal of Literary Studies*,

- vol.21, no.1–2, 2005, pp.119–142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564710508530368>.
- Samuelson, Meg. “The City Beyond the Border: The Urban Worlds of Duiker, Mpe and Vera,” *African Identities*, vol.5, no.2, 2007, pp. 247–260, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840701403523>.
- Spain, Andrea. “Transitional Encounters: Practices of Queer Futurity in K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*.” *Safundi*, vol.17, no.4, 2016, pp.416–433, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2016.1233622>.
- Viljoen, Shaun. “Introduction.” *Thirteen Cents: A Novel*. Ohio UP, 2013.
- Vital, Anthony. “Critical Intersections: Ecocriticism, Globalised Cities and African Narrative, with a Focus on K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*.” *Natures of Africa: Ecocriticism and Animal Studies in Contemporary Cultural Forms*, edited by F. Fiona Moolla, Wits UP, 2006. *Project MUSE*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/50557>.