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My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg ("My farm's name is Vergenoeg ['Far Enough']", 2005), a published play by George Weideman, is meaningful within the context of postcolonial discourse on land ownership and ecocritical views on the use of land. The play adds viewpoints to current postcolonial claims to land through several animal characters laying claim to being the first inhabitants, further commenting critically on man's greed and destructiveness with regard to the earth. This article undertakes an analysis of the play, firstly investigating the messages of these non-human voices, rarely remembered or heard in the historical constructions of South Africa's past. It focuses on Weideman's blending of aspects of different genres and periods, the animal epic and classical Greek tragedy, resulting in a powerful downplay of man's claim to sole ownership of the land. The study, secondly, considers the notion of landscape as defined by animals' ways of inhabiting and interaction, in addition to the notion of landscape as a cultural construct that is traditionally defined by man's ways of inhabiting and interaction. **Keywords:** Afrikaans drama literature, anthropomorphism, ecocriticism, postcolonial landscape, postcolonial land claims.

A new voice in an old discourse

The theme of land ownership is central to *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* ("My farm's name is Vergenoeg ['Far Enough']", 2005), written by George Weideman and winner of the Sanlam Prize for Afrikaans Theatre in 2004. One of the dominant literary discourses in South African society centres on this theme. Issues in literature regarding land ownership, such as land reform and land claims, are not only a reflection of controversial realities of the postcolonial era in South Africa, often touched upon in the media. They also reflect the situation in other parts of the world, such as South America and other African countries such as Zimbabwe (Brown 11), where the process of land reform grants occupation of land to those who lost their land.

The dispute over land ownership in *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* provides a link between this play and the modern Afrikaans farm novel. In this subgenre the literary tradition of the (white) farmer's close connection to his land and the implicit ownership thereof through succession, established and built upon through the traditional farm novel, is in many ways debunked (van Coller, "Die Afrikaanse plaasroman" 25; "Die representasie" 99; Prinsloo and Visagie 74). Central to Weideman's play is a commission

hearing during which Grace Boois demands the right to bury her son on the farm Vergenoeg. Grace is a former farmhand who had left the farm with her child seven years before. Her son, Whitey, is the illegitimate child of the farm owner's brother who died in a veld fire. Cruywagen, in a review on a performance of the play, summarises the complex situation upon which the Commissioner must give judgement as follows: "Who has first claim to the land, those who bought it generations ago, or those whose ancestors have lived on and off the land, without borders and political power, since the dawn of time?" (10)¹

In view of the fact that the commission hearing forms an integral part of the play it relies on testimony as a key dramatic strategy. Through the portrayal of the hearing, a narrative is created that is objective in nature—i.e. different characters offer various sides of the truth—and the implicit spectators are the witnesses and listeners (and therefore in a sense, participants) in the case (Beuke-Muir 363).

Issues of land and land reform have been accorded much attention in South African literature, particularly since the implementation of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994, promulgated to compensate those whose land had been expropriated under the provisions of the Natives Land Act of 1913. *Horrelpoot*, translated as *Trencherman* (Eben Venter), *Agaat* (Marlene van Niekerk) and *Disgrace* (J. M. Coetzee), for example, offer a convincing postcolonial discourse that subverts the coloniser's claim to ownership. In these novels, the colonial pattern of land transfer is broken, as the farm is ultimately handed over to the black/Coloured labourers who formerly worked for the white owners. *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* exhibits clear similarities with Helena Gunter's volume of short stories *Op 'n plaas in Afrika* ("On a farm in Africa"), in which the land claims of the Khoi descendants are pertinently discussed. In the title story of Gunter's volume, the Coloured farm worker Karel asserts that his ancestors lived on the farm Drie Brugge long before the whites arrived: "I can point out the shepherd's tree on this farm where my people had their home long before the white man knew of a place like Akoerabis" (Gunter 93).² This claim resonates in Grace Boois' words in Weideman's play when she points out her forefathers' (*voormense*) 'title deed' to the white owners of Vergenoeg: "The Bushmen [...] laid out stones in places—graves, other holy places [...] stones laid in patterns" (Weideman 18–19),³ and "Bushman maps, my mother's mother called them: stones that show where you can find water, point the direction in which a place lies" (Weideman 34).⁴

My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg has a unique place in contemporary writing on land ownership in conveying the message that human interest is *not* the only legitimate interest, as is suggested in those texts referred to in the previous paragraph. The play contains viewpoints and memories of animals, designated as seven different characters in the *dramatis personae*. The controversy over land ownership gets a new and intriguing dimension because of the animals' contention that their land ownership precedes even that of the San people. They base their concern about the ownership of the land

on man's greed and destructiveness with regard to the earth, which is the animals' only home. These non-human inhabitants' claim to land, and the message of human accountability regarding the environment, becomes an issue additional to that of postcolonial claims to land following South Africa's apartheid years.

This article focuses on the animal characters in Weideman's play that add their voices to the discourse on ownership of the land. South Africa has some of the worst examples of environmental degradation in the world (Martin 1). My analysis of the play seeks to bring much needed ecocritical perspectives, highlighting Graham Huggan's view of the "inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of colonial exploitation and authoritarian abuse" (41).

Rob Nixon (2005) and Huggan (2008) call for postcolonial criticism and ecocriticism to engage one another. Their essays explore the manner in which postcolonial critique and ecocriticism have thus far developed quite separately and distinctly; both authors call for increased dialogue between these in order to effect reciprocal enrichment of the other's critical language.

In this article, the issue at hand is located in the challenge of answering this call by undertaking an ecocritical reading of a play in which postcolonial issues are dominant. In several reviews of the play and its staging the voices of the animals are pointed out as the key aspect in understanding the way this play deals with the dispute over land ownership (Botha 12; Muller 2; Coetser 19; Cruywagen 10). Yet little effort goes towards analysing this new claim to land in Weideman's play, except in the literary discussions of van Coller and van Jaarsveld ("Tendense" 80; "Vergenoeg" 161–62). These articles make mention of the role of the animal choir in the play, resembling a classical Greek choir, which will be referred to in the section "Portrayal of a new claim to land". My article offers a close analysis of this aspect as well as of various others in examining the ecocritical perspective on the way in which land is owned and worked in present South Africa, as depicted in *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*.

Firstly, this article contextualises Weideman's play within the long literary tradition of animals-as-commentators and against the background of Afrikaans animal tales. It will also point out some marginal links with an earlier Afrikaans play in which a message of ecocritical awareness is combined with the theme of land reform.

Secondly, the portrayal of the opposition to man's claim to sole ownership of land will be investigated by analysing the new claim to land made by the animals. Here the article also will focus on Weideman's blending of elements of different genres and periods.

Thirdly, the article will investigate the manner in which the play gives rise to a reconsideration of the notion of landscape as a cultural construct, suggesting a view of landscape as being constructed by *all* its inhabitants—particularly those of a non-human kind.

Animals as commentators and a contextual framework for *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*

For the sake of the contextualisation of *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*, it is necessary to make cursory reference to the origins of the tradition of animals-as-commentators in literature. It extends as far back as Aesop's fables, which originated in ancient Greece between 620 and 560 BCE, of which those best-known today feature animals that speak about and offer comments on moral and practical issues, imparting a lesson to young readers (Clayton 179). Aristophanes (446–386 BCE), a prolific and much acclaimed comic playwright of ancient Athens, also used animals as commentators in a genre of comic drama known as Old Comedy (Nicoll 68). A good example is *The Birds* (414 BCE), one of Aristophanes's plays that survived virtually intact and in which an Athenian citizen persuades the world's birds to create a new city in the sky, thereby gaining control over all communications between men and gods. In the typical Aristophanic plot the chorus's *parabasis*—an address to the audience by the chorus while the actors are leaving or have left the stage—acted as the author's mouthpiece, often commenting on the follies of human politics (Nicoll 63). In *The Birds* the chorus members appear and speak as birds.

Another example is Geoffrey Chaucer's poem *Parliament of Fowls*, in which Nature convenes a parliament at which the birds choose their mates, and then some of the birds begin to protest and launch into a comic parliamentary debate (Smith 18). A novel well known in the tradition of animals protesting and commenting is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Alluding to political events in the Soviet Union and attacking the extremes of Stalinism, the novel relates the overthrow of a farmer's tyrannical rule by the animals in his barnyard—creatures that talk, walk on their hind legs, write laws, spout propaganda and commit crimes, all in the name of equality (Pashapour 7). A classical line from this novel is the single Commandment on the wall of the big barn: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell 90).

In Afrikaans literature, interesting similarities in *modus operandi* and theme are found between Pieter Fourie's play *Die koggelaar* ("The Teaser") and Weideman's play, although these plays simply link marginally and no claims of intended intertextuality are made. In *Die koggelaar*, the farm's stud ram Knaplat offers ironic comments and interpretation in the construction of the owner's (Boet's) life story, following his recent suicide, which opens the play. *Die koggelaar*, like *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*, is an ecologically aware play in which an animal character becomes the voice of the earth, calling the farmer to account. Knaplat's complaint is that he was no more to Boet than "*iets wat getap moet word*" ("a thing to be tapped"), a reference to semen collection for artificial insemination from a stud animal (Fourie 19). From Boet's side, no attempt was made at becoming acquainted with or showing appreciation of the ram with which he shared the land (Boekkooi 31).

The issues of land ownership and reform are also present in *Die koggelaar*. The family farm passes to another line following Boet Cronje's death: his Coloured

stepbrother, Andries. In *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* Jan Veldsman desperately fights against the denial of ownership of his land. He explains to the Commissioner that should Whitey Boois be buried on Vergenoeg, he would, through the burial, “buy” a section of the farm that has been in the Veldsmans’ possession for generations. Through this action strangers would gain a foothold claiming the farm as their moral property, increasingly demanding more (73).

The analysis of a contemporary literary text containing animal characters should also be done against the background of earlier Afrikaans texts in which similar events and characters occur. Presently, animal narratives that have been receiving renewed attention include G. R. von Wielligh’s *Dierestories soos deur Hotnots vertel* (“Animal stories as told by Hottentots”), originally published in four parts between 1919 and 1921. Also re-issued is von Wielligh’s *Versamelde Boesmanstories 1* (“Collected Bushman Stories 1”, 2009). Van der Merwe describes these stories as “character sketches” in which the animals reveal particular human qualities. Von Wielligh’s portrayal of his animal characters prefigures treatment of his animal characters a good eight decades later. There is more than a passing suspicion that the former’s animal tales must have been well known to Weideman, and the obvious similarities are too striking to be ignored.

In the *dramatis personae* of Weideman’s drama, Ystervark (Porcupine) has the crucial distinguishing physical quality of a “quiver with quills on back”. This representation and the Afrikaans word *koker* (quiver) is strongly reminiscent of the notion of a quiver with arrows, and it reminds of von Wielligh’s story “Ystervark en Vlermuis” (“Porcupine and Bat”), in which a little Bushman boy is changed into Porcupine. His arrows turn into quills, which he can still shoot at will, to protect him in dangerous situations.

The most important quality of Vulture (*Aasvoël*) apart from the gluttony associated with this bird of carrion, is his good memory (see Weideman 22,45). It is precisely this intellectual quality that distinguishes the character of Vulture in von Wielligh’s stories: “Vulture is a man who thinks deep thoughts” (von Wielligh 146).

In the portrayal of Baboon a particular character trait of this animal is highlighted in Weideman’s play—his destructive, vandalist urge: Porcupine reprimands him: “It is because you insist on breaking the quiver trees” (“Dis oor jy die kokerbome so breek” Weideman 59). This recalls Baboon’s wanton plundering of the trees in von Wielligh’s story “Bobbejaan en Skilpad plant vyeboom” (“Baboon and Tortoise plant fig trees”)—the opening sentence of the story, “Die bobbejane en ape” (“The baboons and the monkeys”) reads: “What could more resemble the human race than baboons and monkeys?” (“Wat lyk tog meer na die menslike geslag as bobbejane en ape?” von Wielligh 176) These words quite narrowly echo the dialogue in *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*. Baboon is asked: “What do you know about Bushmen?” and Scorpion answers quarrelsomely on his behalf: “Can’t you see that he resembles one?” (“Wat weet jy van Boesmans?”; “Kan jy nie sien hy trek op een nie?” Weideman 44).

In the following section attention will be given to the anthropomorphism of the animal characters in Weideman's play, often revealed through their argumentative and mocking behaviour. Von Wielligh's stories assume the form of fables, serving a didactic purpose, allowing his readers to learn from the animal realm (van der Merwe). Here too the tendencies among the animals to boast, to mock and to argue are dominant, as among others in the tales "Die kraai se vernedering" ("The humiliation of the Crow"), "Erdvark, Vlakvark, Kwagga en Bosvark" ("Aardvark, Warthog, Quagga and Bushpig") and in "Die geveg tussen lopende en vlieënde diere" ("The battle between the walking and flying animals"). As indicated, these correspondences indicate that Weideman knew von Wielligh's stories and textually referenced them with appreciation.

There are even clearer intertextual links between *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* and J. M. Coetzee's novel, *The Lives of Animals* (1999), in which animal rights constitute the central theme. The way in which Weideman builds on the views of Coetzee's Costello will become clear in the next section. The focus of investigation will be on the animals' proclamation of their ownership of the land and their demand to speak for themselves in Weideman's play.

Portrayal of a new claim to land

On a farm in the arid, vast expanse of southern Africa where the events in Weideman's play take place, the various animal figures, as with a classical Greek chorus, acts as interpreters of the action and providers of background information. Porcupine, Jackal, Vulture, Pangolin, Scorpion, Baboon and Mongoose sit on an additional, elevated stage at the back of the front stage. In utilising his animal choir the dramatist renews the chorus of the classical Greek drama (van Collier and van Jaarsveld, "Vergenoeg" 151).

The Greek chorus traditionally performed a number of dramatic functions of which some are taken over deftly by the animal choir in *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*. Van Collier and van Jaarsveld refer to the striking way the *parabasis* is used to make astute, often comical comments on the dramatic main text ("Tendense" 79). The function of *parabasis* was, among others, to disrupt the dramatic illusion (van Gorp 321). In Weideman's play the animals mimick the dramatic action on the front stage, disrupting it and thereby underlining certain elements in the storyline and downplaying others. One example is the scene where insults and rough handling on the animals' upper stage follow Jan and Ans Veldsman's conversation about racial violence (39). While the human characters act out the main story on the front stage, the backstage scene emphasizes the deep-set motives of conflict (Beuke-Meir 377).

Van Collier and van Jaarsveld give Weideman credit for ingeniously blending aspects of the classical Greek tragedy with those of the (satirical) epic animal poem ("Tendense" 11). The animal epic is a long, narrative poem in which animals are the

characters and comments are made—generally of a satirical nature—on aspects of society (Bisschoff 78). It developed from the oldest form of animal stories, such as animal fairytales and fables.

The animal epic poem, *Van den Vos Reynaerde* (“On the fox Reynaerde”) from the pen of an author known only as Willem, is regarded as one of the pinnacles of Dutch Medieval literature (Bosch 11) and aspects of this work are also recognizable in a reading of *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*. This Middle Dutch animal epic portrays a day in the royal court when all the animals appear before King Nobel to complain about the knavery of Reynaerde, the cunning fox. The animals act like thinking and speaking human beings and through their anthropomorphism an allegorical mirror is held up to the audience and readers of human society confronted by their disgraceful behaviour (van Oostrom 71). How this process unfolds in Weideman’s play is discussed somewhat later in this section.

In *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*, as in the animal epic poem or animal novel, animals are endowed with human qualities. In scene IV, the animals fall out, plucking and pulling at something that resembles a carrot. In their wrangling, they exhibit the human attribute of greed and their fight assumes a pattern of insult and destructive criticism so typical of human dispute. Porcupine says, “It’s mine! I found it first!”, Baboon barks, “Let go! You obese spined rat!”, but Porcupine refuses: “I was here before you!” (“Ystervark: ‘Dis myne! Ek het hom eerste gekry!’”; “Bobbejaan: ‘Los! Jou swaarlywige stekelrot!’”; “Ystervark: ‘Ek was hier voor jou!’” 39). The animals’ argument is interspersed with other instances of typically human behaviour, such as gossip and the telling of tales; for example, Vulture carrying news from Piekeloog (59) or Porcupine listening to Groukat’s tale, which he in turn heard from the farmyard cats (13).

Man’s critical attitude and intolerance towards other groups and their customs are reflected in the animals’ unkind name-calling of each other—Porcupine calling Pangolin *miermoordenaar* (an “ant murderer”, 13) and Baboon a *mieliedief* (“corn thief”, 39)—and in the bandying about of accusations. Pangolin reproaches Porcupine: “You are not supposed to dig for sweet potatoes. You ought to eat veld food” (13); Porcupine reproaches Baboon: “It’s because you keep on breaking the quiver trees” (59); and Vulture reproaches Mongoose: “After all, you steal eggs from under the hens’ (21) (“Ietermagô: ‘Jy’s nie veronderstel om patats te grou nie. Jy moet veldkos vreet.’”; Ystervark: ‘Dis oor jy die Kokerbome so breek.’”; “Aasvoël: ‘Jy gaan steel darem eiers onder die hennie uit.’”) The animals view their inclination to conflict as acquired behaviour typical of human nature. Pangolin says, ‘You are arguing about trifling matters. You’re becoming just like the forked legs’. Scorpion agrees: ‘The forked legs are forever quarrelling’, and Vulture adds, ‘Most often about land. Ridiculous!’ (“Ietermagô: ‘Julle stry oor onbenullighede. Julle word net soos die vurkbene.’”; Skerpioen: ‘Die vurkbene is aléwig aan die kyf.’”; Aasvoël: ‘Meeste van die tyd oor grond. Belaglik!’” 40).

In addition to its animal characters being endowed with human qualities, this play manifests as a modern animal story. In Chu's article "Dog and Dinosaur: The Modern Animal Story," she presents an overview of the anthropomorphic animal story as a modern genre and refers to the various accounts of animal actions that typified American journals at the turn of the previous century, in which animals "demonstrated complex moral or sentimental thought and action" (Chu 82). Chu concludes that "humans might be mere animals, but animal actions could be realistically documented in terms of the 'higher' emotions" (82).

Elements of the modern animal story are found in Weideman's play in considering the animals' attribution of meaning to the landscape and their comments on the way it is inhabited and owned by man. I use the term *landscape* in the same manner as Viljoen (74–77), who explains that this term implies more than simply a focus on aspects of the natural environment, rather drawing attention to the transformation of the geography of the land into a politically, historically and culturally charged entity. The next section of the article will demonstrate the manner in which the play suggests that certain cultural processes, such as seeing, imagining, historicising and remembering (Darian-Smith et al. 3), by means of which geographical territory is transformed into a culturally defined landscape, can be assumed by non-human role-players to add a new kind of meaning to geographical territories.

Analysing Weideman's play brings a fresh awareness of the difficulty of animal representation. Baker refers to two conflicting views in art: "animal-endorsing" and "animal-sceptical" (9). The former, according to Baker, "will tend to endorse animal life itself (and may therefore align itself with the work of conservationists or animal advocacy)" (9). The latter "is likely to be sceptical, not of animals themselves (as if the very existence of nonhuman life was in question), but rather of culture's means of constructing and classifying the animal in order to make it meaningful to the human."

This conflict is also visible in Weideman's play, which confronts the impossible task of allowing animals to speak without man speaking *for* them. Weideman achieves this by building on the views in *The Lives of Animals*. In Coetzee's novel, the fictive novelist Elizabeth Costello suggests, in her mock lectures at a fictitious college, that the continued mistreatment of animals is inseparable from the arrogant human belief in sovereign reason, a belief that has historically been used to legitimise dominion over the entire animal kingdom. Huggan and Watson note that in most of Coetzee's work, as in *The Lives of Animals*, he "not only challenges the certitudes of reason, but also seeks to undermine those 'discourses of power' that claim reason for their own" (14–15). Costello further suggests in this novel that the history of Western philosophy can be read as a "litany of excuses, justified in the name of reason, that have permitted the treatment of animals, and by extension the 'natural world', as a renewable human resource" (Huggan and Watson 15).

In *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg*, the animal characters' ability to speak confirms their capacity to reason and debate. They speculate about the true cause of events (46), ask various and incisive questions in analysing happenings (52, 53), and philosophically pronounce upon responsibilities (59) and the evasive nature of the truth (46). Yet, this faculty of reasoning adds to their animal characteristics, it does not take away from their innate animal nature. In some scenes, Baboon is seen catching lice; Vulture combs his feathers using his beak (14); the animals' mutual accusations and criticism attest to their innate nature, for example the eating of veld food (13, 39) and Vulture's ability "of always knowing exactly where to find carrion" ("altyd presies [te] weet waar die dooies lê", 14).

In a meaningful way the animal traits are mentioned first and prominently in the *dramatis personae*, although a human component is alluded to through the animals' costumes. For instance, Vulture is described in the character list as *kaalkop* ("bald-headed"), (an animal trait), *met verestola* ("with feather stole") and Pangolin is described as *met skubbe* ("scaly") (an animal trait), *met bril* ("with glasses"). Baboon has *bobbejaanbankies* "a bare behind" (on account of sitting so much) "and 'n *gelapte broek* ("patched trousers").

What emerges from the intertwined aspects of "animal-endorsing" and "animal-sceptical" representation in this play, is demonstration of Weideman's earnestness, akin to that of Elizabeth Costello in Coetzee's novel, in "reaching out to the animal world [...] seeking to inhabit the mental and emotional space of animals" lives through an act of sympathetic imagination" (Huggan and Watson 26). Proof of this intention can be found in dialogue that communicates the animals' position of hardship and endangerment at the event of the veld fire. Pangolin remembers: 'It was terrible. You could feel the flames' ("Dit was verskriklik. Jy kon die vlamme voel." 10). He reflects on their position of loss: 'Things will never be the same again' ("Dinge sal nooit weer dieselfde wees nie." 12).

On this point the contrasting views held in *The Lives of Animals* by Costello and Thomas Nagel, the American philosopher, are relevant. Nagel, disapprovingly quoted by Costello in her lecture, maintains that the resources of the human mind, powerful though these are, cannot suffice for man to know what it is like to be another, "to grasp a fundamentally alien form of life" (Huggan and Watson 31). This position Costello considers true to a point, but she challenges Nagel by arguing:

What is the imaginative faculty if not the attempt, defying the limitations of human consciousness, to enter the experiences—even the inner experiences—of lives other than our own? [...] If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life [...] There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. (Coetzee, *The Lives* 49).

Following Costello, Weideman demonstrates an attempt at speaking on behalf of animals without validating the view of those “who believe the world is theirs, and language theirs to shape it” (Huggan and Watson 26). In this way, Weideman contributes to the exploring of contradictions in the competing moral and intellectual discourses of ecological debates on the exploitation of non-human resources today.

Animals’ assumption of ‘human’ processes in constructing the landscape

According to Crang, we generally view landscape as culturally constructed, “denoting the interaction of people and place, particularly those spaces to which a group belongs and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning” (14). This is in accordance to Schama, who explains that the etymology of the English word “landscape”, like its Germanic root *landschaft*, signified a unit of human occupation and perception (10). He emphasises that “it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape” (12). Therefore, for Schama, the term implies the addition of culture to what he refers to as mere geology and vegetation.

The following paragraphs will demonstrate the animal characters’ involvement in the process of constructing landscape from mere geology and vegetation, in the manner Schama claims this to happen, that is by their “shaping perceptions” (10). This seeks to demonstrate the manifestation of the questioning of the view that “landscape” denotes interaction specifically between people and place, because of the animals in *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* attributing meaning to the landscape by means of observing, interpreting and imagining, remembering and historicising.

The most striking aspect of the manner in which the animals revisit the history of the farm through their memories is the clarity of the details provided, which serves to strengthen the authenticity and credibility of their account. The animals know all the various names given to the farm during its occupation by various groups (22). They know the exact location of the graves of Grace’s forefathers (13). They recall, in exact detail, a time prior to white ownership of the farm, when the farm served as a stop-off for a group of Nama nomadic farmers. Vulture describes: “There they stood with their little goats: such fat, well-fed lambs, it made one’s mouth water [...] soft little necks, soft little flanks” (22).⁵ The day the Nama left their children alone at the outspan is also described in detail to provide a faithful reconstruction of the history of conflict between cultures:

Pangolin: They [the children] were playing five-stone when the Bushmen crept up on them.

Mongoose: They captured all the children.

Vulture: They then cut them here. (Points to the throat). From ear to ear. Not even a sheep is slaughtered in such a manner.⁶ (45)

Through their observation over generations of the coming and going of man, the animals affirm themselves as being at one with the earth and part of *die wye, ope veld* ("the wide, open veld") from before the time the first San name was conferred on the land (44). Man is, however, repeatedly reminded that his conflict-filled stay on earth is but fleeting and that his so-called "ownership" of the earth is limited.

Animals: O land, O blood! There is little that belongs to you.
It will have a headstone and slab—
The rest will disappear. [Repeat] (34, 44, 75).⁷

The processes of interpretation and imagination allow the animals to gain a perspective of the pitiableness of puny man and his great delusion (that is he is master of the land and of others' access to it), as evident in their comments. The animals perceive Grace's unsuccessful request as fair and understandable: a mother's request to have the land cover her son like a *grondkaros* ("blanket of animal skin") (20). They interpret the owner's refusal to grant the body a place of rest, as well as episodes of land expropriation in history, as human pettiness on a planet sufficiently large to offer room for all. "Animals: The world is wide and the world is large; the world is too small for considering someone else's distress (36, 77).⁸

Animals' comments on man's way of inhabiting and owning land

The function of the chorus as used in the Greek tradition has already been referred to. In *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* the animal chorus renders commentary aimed at the dramatic events of the main text being played out on the front stage by the human characters.

The animals fiercely comment on man's lack of respect for the "other", be it a cultural "other" or nature as "other".

Scorpion: Nothing is sacred to them. See how they have already exterminated each other [...] The Boers the Bushmen, the Xhosas the Boers, the Bushmen the Namas. (40).⁹

On several occasions, the animals react vehemently to man's cruelty, which they regard as independent of race or age. They refer, for instance, to human children who set traps in the veld and roast the animals they catch (12). Vulture tells of the cruel slaughter of Namas by the San people—*die gifpyldraers* ("the carriers of poison arrows")—as was related to him by his great-grandfather. Baboon comments: "Bushmen are cruel things, as are all forked legs" ("Boesmans is wrede goed. Soos alle vurkbene", 44).

Through the animals' version of the events of the fire on the farm, they bring an additional dynamic to the action in the play. Although there is a comic undertone to

the animals' comments throughout, it lends a disturbing perspective to the circumstances of the fire. Porcupine gasps: "I almost didn't make it!" ("Ek het dit amper nie gemaak nie!"); Pangolin moans and groans about the terrible heat of the flames; and Mongoose complains: "The tip of my tail was singed." ("My stert se punt het geskroei" 11) Then follows the upsetting tidings: Tortoise was too slow; Steenbok was trapped. The fire was not the result of lightning; Baboon states with bitterness, "It was the humans", and Vulture confirms, "It was the forked legs" ("Bobbejaan: 'Dis mensekind', 'Aasvoël: 'Dis die vurkbene.'" 11) The destruction of the natural environment engenders hostility between man and animal, which is clearly expressed in the animals' wording in sentences like: "We who do not shoot and butcher tusks at sight" ("Ons wat nie voor die voet loop en skiet en tande uitslag nie", 69), and: "We who do not saw off horns and set traps" ("Ons wat nie horings uitsaag en strikke stel nie." 70). Man's mining activities and their effect on the environment are most strongly condemned. Baboon barks: "The holes bored by the mine are still there!" and Porcupine snorts: "And the machinery—brown with rust!" ("Die gate sit nou nog daar!"; "En die masjiene—bruin van die roes!" 23).

Unresolved conflict about land

The animals do not only offer comments on the nature of man and his influence on the environment. The effect of their comments is also a powerful downplay of man's view of his sole ownership of the land. As said before, the classical Greek chorus could underline certain elements in the dramatic story line or downplay others. Here the animal chorus follows suit.

The Commissioner reduces the issue of ownership to the following question: "But surely someone must have lived there first?" ("Maar iemand moes tog eerste daar gebly het?" 69). In answer to this question, Jan Veldsman offers the proof of legal ownership that has been in his family's hands for generations (18); in accordance with her people's belief, Grace Boois lays claim to her son being buried where his ancestors were buried (35, 67).

The animals provide their answer with great conviction: they call upon their authority as witnesses to the earliest events on the farm to motivate their earliest occupation of the land. Jackal refers to the very first name of the farm, the San name |Gôan-| goes, and Vulture says, "I remember! My papa told me. My grandpa hung around there [...]" ("Ek onthou! My ta het my nog vertel. My oupa het daar rondgehang." 22). Animals already inhabited this earth long before the San people were demarcating graves and holy places with stones. Vulture says: "My great-grandpa was there; he kept a close watch on everything from up there on the cliff" ("My oupagrootjie was daar; hy't als doer van die hang af sit en dophou." 45). Various animals offer the answer to the Commissioner's question regarding the earliest

inhabitants in turns, which has the rousing effect of a chorus: "We who cannot speak lived there first." ("Ons wat nie kan praat nie, het eerste daar gebly." 69)

The theme of conflict about land reaches a climax in the play's penultimate scene. The court asks Jan Veldsman to explain his final objections regarding Grace's request. In his response, Jan spells out the post-colonial fear of white landowners: "If Whitey Boois is buried at Vergenoeg, he will, by means of his body, 'buy' a part of the farm [...] There will then be a hold on the farm; it will become the moral possession of strangers who will increasingly demand more." (73)¹⁰

Jan, in his argument regarding the taming of the land on which he has stamped his colonial ownership in the form of wire fences and camps, acknowledges that the farm is home to wild animals—kraals made of stone protect his livestock against lions, leopards and wild dogs; porcupines are ever present (73). He therefore pleads in court to rather share the farm with the animals—"those for whom this rocky wilderness is their only home" ("hulle wie se enigste tuiste hierdie klipwildernis is" 74), ergo those who in his opinion are truly part of the land—than with "an undeserving martyr [...], a hero without cause" ("'n onverdiende martelaar [...], 'n held sonder rede" 74).

The court makes no direct judgement with regard to the underlying issue of who owns the farm. As no legal grounds for absolute personal freedom of choice regarding the site of burial were presented to the court, it is determined that the farm owner may exercise his right to refuse Grace's request (74). The commissioner thus paradoxically admits Grace's right to hold her religious convictions when her son is buried, yet arrives at the verdict that, when it comes to the place where he is buried, the next of kin doesn't have freedom of choice. Points of convergence occur between this play, represented within the context of a commission sitting and directly involving moral issues from the South African past, and the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The primary aims of the TRC had been to investigate, document and make public the violations of human rights in the South African past (van Coller, *Tussenstand* 74).¹¹

If we consider the attempts of the TRC a way to rewrite the narratives of the past, this time to include the voices of formerly silenced victims, then *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* perhaps comments on the TRC. It may suggest that the TRC, with its conflicting accounts and controversies, creates room for the intertwinement of technicalities with legal and ethical aspects, leaving people like Grace with no less confusion about the rights and wrongs of what happened in the past.

In the light of the unresolved matter of ownership of the property, there is evidence of the animals' quiet sympathy with Grace, who expresses her sense of displacement to the Commissioner this way: "Where should I put him then? Next door to [the farm]? [...] Where is next door, Mister? Where is next door?" ("Waar moet ek hom dan gaan wegsit? Hier langsaan [die plaas]? [...] Waar is langsaan, Meneer? Waar is

langsaaan?" 74). The play's final dialogue falls to the animals. The song and chorus that close the play indicate a shared experience of marginalisation, of also having to live "next to" or on the periphery, while man, ever self-centred, treats the land without care—land which, as the play contends, is not his property solely.

Animals: Take your things and go, Ferreira,
 take your things and go ...
 It's not mine, it's not yours;
 we're arguing about someone else's property ...
 [Repeat:]
 The world is wide and the world is large,
 The world is too small for considering someone else's distress ... (77)¹²

Here a last, significant resemblance between the animal chorus and the chorus of ancient Greek plays occurs. In tragedy, the chorus often represented the common people of the city-state ruled by the tragic hero; audience members could identify with the feelings and ideas of these people (Haamer). The tragic hero, a concept created in ancient Greek tragedy, must have, among others, two dominant characteristics: superiority (this can be in terms of politics, reputation, etc) and a tragic flaw that eventually leads to his demise (Nietzsche 44). In the final lines of the play the animal chorus identifies with the lot of Grace and resembles the Greek chorus of yore in representing the cause of Grace's community as lived under the South African apartheid regime. This regime complies with the core requirements of being a tragic hero, initially invested with political powers and ending at its downfall due to errors of judgement, which is the typical 'tragic flaw' in the Aristotelian tragic hero. The animals also represent themselves, however—they present their own case, being victims of permanent 'expropriation', under the hegemony of humankind being typified as tragic heroes and increasingly facing the causes of the "tragic flaw" of its own short-sightedness, as spelled out by the signs of the potentially devastating consequences of climate change.

In this way land issues in *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* are linked throughout with green issues, with the animals as bearers of notions of ecology.

Conclusion

This article undertook an investigation into what messages non-human voices convey in the literary portrayal of the dispute over ownership of land in South Africa. In analysing Weideman's play, attention was given to the animals' attribution of meaning to the landscape by vehemently and verbally claiming to be part of the farm and the history of the land, as well as by raising objections to human attitudes and practices by which animals are excluded or endangered. While *landscape* is generally viewed as

denoting the interaction of people and place, this article has focused on animals' participation in constructing a landscape that has traditionally been defined by man—and thus suggests that *landscape* may also denote the interaction of animals and place, indicating that it becomes something of an ecological construct.

My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg adds a new, ecologically oriented point of focus to the South African postcolonial debate, depicting the memories and beliefs of *ons wat nie kan praat nie* ("we who cannot speak") and their bold objections to man's means of owning land.

Notes

1. "Wie het eerste aanspraak op die grond: hulle wat dit geslagte gelede gekoop het of hulle wie se voorgeslagte van die eerste ontwaking van die mens die kontinent sonder grens of politieke mag bewoon en benut het?" (Cruywagen 10). All translations from the original are mine.
2. "Ek kan die skaapwagtersboom op hierdie plaas uitwys waar my mense huis gemaak het, lank voor die witman geweet het van 'n plek soos Akoerabis!" (Gunter 93)
3. "Die Boesmans het [...] op plekke hulle klippe uitgepak—grafte, anderlike heilige plekke [...] klippe in patrone gepak." (Weideman 18–19)
4. "Boesmankaarte, het my mama se mama dit genoem: klippe wat vir jou wys waar water is, watter kant toe 'n plek lê." (Weideman 34)
5. "Hulle het daar met hulle bokkietjies gestaan: sulke vet, uitgevrete lammers wat 'n mens laat watterand [...] sagte nekkies, sagte liesies." (Weideman 22)
6. "Ieternagô: 'Hulle [die kinders] het sit en klip-klip speel [...] Toe kom bekruipe die Boesmans die werf.' / Muishond: 'Hulle vang al die kinders.' / Aasvoël: 'Toe sny hulle hulle hiër. (Beduie na keel). Van oor tot oor. Nie eens 'n slaghamel sny jy só nie.'" (Weideman 45)
7. "O grond, o bloed! Wat joune is, is klein. / Dit kry 'n kopklip en 'n toemaakklip— / die res sal verdwyn. [Herhaal]" (Weideman 34, 44, 75).
8. "Die wêreld is wyd en die wêreld is groot"; "die wêreld is te klein vir andermansnood" (Weideman 36, 77).
9. "Niks is vir hulle heilig nie. Kyk hoe't hulle mekaar al uitgeroei [...] Die boere die Boesmans, die Xhosas die Boere, die Boesmans die Namas." (Weideman 9)
10. "As Whitey Boois op Vergenoeg begrawe word, dan koop hy met sy liggaam 'n stuk van die plaas af [...] Dan is daar 'n houvass; dan kom dit in die morele besit van vreemdes wat al hoe meer gaan eis." (Weideman 73)
11. Klaaren describes two parts to the TRC process (199). Victims and survivors came to the Commission to recount their stories of what had happened to them or members of their families. The second part of the process was the amnesty hearings in which perpetrators of these abuses were able to give evidence of what they had done, hoping that these confessions would bring amnesty and immunity from prosecution or civil procedures for the crimes committed. South African literature bears testimony of the drastic effect of the TRC on many lives. Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and plays like *The story I am About to Tell* (Duma Kumalo) and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (William Kentridge) are examples. Beuke-Meir considers *My plaas se naam is Vergenoeg* also a result of these processes of taking stock of the past, of re-memoration and introspection (206).
12. "Vat jou goed en trek, Ferreira, / vat jou goed en trek ... / Dis nie myne nie, dis nie joune nie; / dis andermansgoed wat ons om stry ... / [Gaan oor in 'n herhaling van:] Die wêreld is wyd en die wêreld is groot, / die wêreld is te klein vir andermansnood ..." (Weideman 77).

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