

Sekhmet and the Shaman: Extinction, Ferality and Trans-species Connections in Henrietta Rose-Innes' *Green Lion*

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Abstract

In her fourth novel, *Green Lion* (2015), Henrietta Rose-Innes depicts nature's precariousness in a commercial-driven city. The novel focuses on how, in the Anthropocene epoch, destructive human activities such as property development and hunting have emptied the city of Cape Town's peri-urban areas of wildlife, to the extent that Sekhmet is the last surviving black-maned lioness in the world. In response to this overwhelming loss, *Green Lion* turns its attention to what remains in nature, depicting what Fredric Jameson identifies as an 'imaginary regression to the past and to older pre-rational forms of thought' (64). The novel thus foregrounds the ecocritical concept of age-old interconnections between human and nonhuman life through its depiction of the transformative shamanistic relationship between the protagonist, Con Marais, animal activist Mossie and Sekhmet. In this article, I elucidate the change of state and ferality that this transformative relationship elicits in Con, and I extend the notion of ferality to encompass its ecological connotations.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; ferality; liminality; shamanism; Henrietta Rose-Innes; *Green Lion*

Introduction

Acclaimed South African writer Henrietta Rose-Innes is the author of four published novels – *Shark's Egg* (2000), *The Rock Alphabet* (2004), *Nineveh* (2011), *Green Lion* (2015) – and a short story collection, *Homing* (2010). *Nineveh* and *Green Lion* were both shortlisted for the Sunday Times Fiction Prize and her short story 'Poison' received the 2007 South African PEN Literary Award and the 2008 Caine Prize for African Writing. Her inventive and crafted fiction, which represents how humans impact on and respond to their environment, painstakingly situates its protagonists in spaces of social and ecological turmoil. In a 2019 conversation with Gail Fincham, Rose-Innes discusses her recently completed manuscript, *Stone Plant*, which she sees as the 'third part of a very loose trilogy of environmentally themed novels, along with *Nineveh* and *Green Lion*' (89). Her statement that each of the novels 'examines the human relationship with the nonhuman world in different ways' confirms her fiction's alignment with ecocriticism (89) and its focus on the impact of the Anthropocene, a time marked by humans' destruction of the planet, causing significant global warming and other changes to the atmosphere, environment, land, organisms and water.

South African critic Hedley Twidle notes a literary representation of the cohesion between human and nature in Rachel Carson's ground-breaking ecocritical novel, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 (52). Using Carson's novel as an example of fiction with a heightened awareness of environmental damage, Twidle contends that the simplicity and lyricism of certain ecocritical novels produce a 'carefully-worked for effect' that spotlights 'ecological complexity and global pollution' (52). Numerous critics have noted this poetic quality in Rose-

Innes' fiction, which, like *Silent Spring*, is concerned with how we incorporate nature into our social order. Rose-Innes' fiction also creates a liminal intersection of urban and rural spaces which serve as a setting for interspecies coexistence, and affirms that part of what she 'wanted to convey in *Nineveh* is that cities and nature' are 'inextricably mixed up and tangled in each other' (Fincham 91). She values a 'destabilising sense of estrangement in writing' when she writes about the 'nonhuman,' and her approach is identifiable in the diverse contemporary literary forms that depict the environment as degrading (92). The speculative element of her fiction is integral to its ecocritical message.

Green Lion portrays Cape Town's Table Mountain as a fragile ecology under threat from species loss, climate change and habitat destruction. In his discussion of speculative fiction in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson asserts that this type of fiction presents a 'vision of an immense historical degradation and the end of the old world, the old society and the old ways' (67). *Green Lion* presents a similar vision by giving prominence to the irrecoverable loss of animal species. The motif of the black-maned lion recurs in the novel, not only in relation to Sekhmet, but also through references to legends, alchemical symbols, taxidermied animals and old photographs. These human-made signifiers insistently recall the virtually extinct animal but cannot compensate for its physical absence. As Louise Viljoen notes, *Green Lion* highlights a central concern of South African ecocriticism by drawing attention to the relationship between ecocriticism and postcolonialism (20). The novel places the emphasis on the devastating impact of the country's colonial history on its human and animal inhabitants, the intertwined histories of conservation and extinction and the impact that this history has on human beings' relationship with animals as well as its psychological consequences. The novel relates the extinction of certain animals in South Africa to the country's colonial history in which both animals and the indigenous peoples, including the San hunter-gatherers, were displaced and died in colonial displays of patriarchal power.

As the novel's title suggests, alchemy is instrumental in Con's transformative journey. Historically, the power of alchemy and its capacity to 'bring things back to life' and 'cure diseases' (*Green Lion* 49) was facilitated by a series of steps, named after animals, and the green lion's role was to 'dissolve gold' (101). The novel develops this transformative concept of the lion as integral to Con's spiritual development. Sekhmet, then, functions as a type of alchemical green lion, leading Con through a series of transitions which mark the phases of his liminal journey. The novel presents a uniquely South African speculative perspective in its incorporation of San folklore when it portrays Con as a modern-day indigenous San shaman who can connect with the lioness on a deep spiritual level. Significantly, the novel draws on the *kukummi*, the collection of San tales and accounts.

In this article, I draw parallels between Con's experience and the stories and legends of the San community, who were hunter-gatherers and lived in close harmony with nature. San shamanism is noted for its visionary trance-like experiences, connections to mythological forebears, extracorporeal journeys and spiritual transformation to animal form (Solomon 102). I conclude by examining how *Green Lion* confirms that human clarity of vision is necessary for ecological awareness and the promotion of environmental justice. In *Green Lion*, the innovative environmental centre that Con helps to conceptualize and create at the end of the novel offers the hope that wild animals will no longer be seen as commodities to be destroyed and exploited.

As a speculative novel, *Green Lion* presents Table Mountain as having been completely fenced off for the creation of areas that are only accessible to privileged people with financial means.

The Parks Board has reserved a section of the mountain around the cable-car station for tourists, and, as the Board extends the fence, the higher slopes are cut off.¹ Located on the mountain slopes is the Lion House sanctuary, which houses Sekhmet. Con Marais uneasily exists at the threshold of the city's fragmented spaces. He has experienced profound loss over the course of his life. He has drifted from job to job and is living with his lover Elyse, an aspiring actress. Con's childhood friend, Mark Carolissen, was a lion keeper at the Lion House and took care of Dmitri and Sekhmet. After Mark was savagely mauled and Dmitri was euthanized, Con took his place, and he looks after and is increasingly fascinated by Sekhmet. The lioness is consistently represented as elusive and transient, inhabiting the cage's shadows, avoiding human contact, and representing a part of nature that will inevitably be lost.² Despite his relationship with Elyse, Con has a brief but momentous affair with a woman called Mossie, a member of the animal activist 'Green Lion' group. Interestingly, his feral intimacy with her is associated with short periods when he can see and sense Sekhmet most clearly. The novel therefore links sexuality and animality, emphasizing an animal, instinctual element of human experience, and it therefore often emphasizes Con's sexual experience as intensifying his understanding of the lioness. The climactic moment in the novel takes place when the protagonist's encounter with the animal triggers a shift in the balance of power between human and nature, with the latter gaining ascendancy. Mossie manipulates Con to gain access to Sekhmet and free her, and Con then climbs Table Mountain in search of the escaped lioness, taking a journey that I identify as a significant moment of liminality. Although he cannot find her, he attains self-sufficiency and clarity of vision which enable him to accept and reconcile himself to a future where the lioness no longer exists, except as a memory. Paradoxically it is after the lioness is released from captivity, and has vanished altogether, that the community becomes most aware of her presence: she becomes the subject of legends, part of a human system of signifiers, the proliferation of which only serves to emphasize her physical loss.

'Floating on grim foundations': The Graveyard of Nature

The setting of *Green Lion*, Cape Town, is complex and finely balanced. As Duncan Brown notes, the city is characterized by the 'paradoxes and contradictions of urban wildness' where populations of wild plants and animals inhabit built areas, and rivers and fynbos abut on buildings (107). One of the primary concerns of *Green Lion* is the impact that commercial activity has had on the peri-urban areas of Cape Town. Table Mountain, a significant setting in the novel, is described as having a 'tarnished' silver finish that belies its potential resilience and ability to 'sing with power' (14). Greed and commercial development have destroyed the mountain's ecology, as the description suggests, in a process fraught with 'tender fraud ... bribes paid and favours granted' (85). The parks department has also populated the ecologically sensitive areas of the mountain with 'antelope, zebra, baboons, breeding pairs of eagles, all kinds of rare and endangered creatures' (85). Despite this semblance of conservation, only people with a permit and a guide may access the area, suggesting that the department is profiting from the project (86).

Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre identifies a similar pattern of duplicity in his major philosophical work, *The Production of Space* (1991), when he notes that although 'everyone wants to protect and save nature' and 'nobody wants to stand in the way of an attempt to retrieve its authenticity,' nature is threatened because 'at the same time everything conspires to harm it' (30). Lefebvre's warning that 'natural space will soon be lost to view' (31) is realized in the way that the view of the mountain is eventually blocked in certain areas by the fence-line, the department houses in front of it, and the products of discarded technology such as 'old car doors, pieces of wood' and 'a rusty washing machine' (*Green Lion* 131). The accumulation of

technological detritus on the mountain may recall literary critic and science fiction author Samuel Delany's post-apocalyptic vision of the dystopian 'Junk City,' where 'techno chaos' litters the deteriorating environment (304). The houses on the mountain have been 'made respectable, with running water and electricity' (*Green Lion* 131), but they have created a polluted landscape and contributed to the environment's increasing destruction.

In *Green Lion*, natural spaces have therefore been colonized, destroyed and remodelled. The Lion House, which stands on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, represents an ineffectual attempt to replace or reflect the reality of what it exhibits. It is built on land that has been inhabited by multiple animals and people, and its archaeology comprises a series of layers that reflect a history of displacement. When Con fetches Mark's belongings from the Lion House, he sees how nature was displaced to make way for the building. A large window in the inner chamber of the sanctuary reveals the lower slopes of Table Mountain, with its 'specimens of fynbos flora,' a 'tiny grey bird' and 'boulders and shrubs' (15). The building itself is a testament to palimpsests of human endeavour and construction that persist in its structure, which will eventually become buried in the Earth's sediments, thus contributing to the novel's archaeological metaphors. On the literary website 'Africa in Words,' Graham Riach describes the Lion House as a 'building that is some amalgam of the physical site of the old Groote Schuur zoo in Cape Town and the history of the Western Cape's Tygerberg Zoo' ('Being Green' N. pag.). The signs of the 'gloomy old Victorian zoo' that made way for the sanctuary are still visible in the form of 'the elegant art nouveau lines of the original aviary' and the 'ominous pit of a lion den' (*Green Lion* 14). The Lion House resembles a 'strange mirage' which floats on the original building's 'grim foundations' (14) and evokes the recurring theme of 'invasion and underground spaces' that Shane Graham (65) notes in Rose-Innes' fiction. There is a pervasive 'distrust in the stability of built environments' (*Green Lion* 67) and a 'constant state of impermanence' (68) that manifests in one zoo constructed above another, both of which colonize the environment. As well as suggesting archaeological and paleontological layers, the 'grim' foundations also signal a legacy of the harsh conditions in which animals were kept in the older Victorian zoo and indicate that the zoo was founded to profit from exhibiting animals. As Louise Viljoen points out, these grim foundations are further underscored by the fact that the Lion House is located where Cecil John Rhodes built a zoo in which he wanted to house animals from all over the British Empire on land that he owned (25).³

The Lion House has been modernized, and there are posters everywhere which attempt to educate the public about the dangers of 'climate change and the countrywide drought, species loss, habitat decimation' and the 'importance of keeping the fragile Table Mountain ecosystem closed off to people' (*Green Lion* 14). The poster is ironic given that the rich inhabitants of Cape Town can purchase permits to access these areas of the mountain. Despite its posters, displays, dassie enclosure and the mountain in the background, the Lion House is still strongly associated with commercialism and the commodification of nature. The plans to modernize it are motivated by financial gain and are typical of contemporary architecture.

'There's ... energy we get from wild animals': Shamanism in *Green Lion*

Green Lion chronicles how museums and animal sanctuaries cannot compensate for the loss of animal life. The novel's structure expresses nostalgia for a time when animal species were abundant: each chapter title is named for an animal, some of which are endangered (such as Lion, Wolf and Elephant) or extinct (such as Quagga), thus creating a litany of loss and disappearance. The novel foregrounds how, as animal species needlessly become extinct, their living space is lost. Although the Cape lion (*Panthera leo melanochaitus*) has been extinct

since the middle of the 19th century, it still clings on to existence in the novel as Sekhmet – one of the ‘very rare, the ones that have the ancestral features’ (18). Con is appointed in Mark’s place as the ‘Head of Large Mammal Management’ (113) and his duty is to care for Sekhmet. When he receives a visit from government and bank officials who are considering cutting funding to the Lion House, he pleads for the future of the lioness. Speaking ‘fluently and persuasively,’ as if to mirror the fluidity and strength of the animal itself, yet failing as we shall see, Con describes the former magnificence of *Panthera leo melanochaitus*, emphasising how ‘famously large and ferocious’ the lions looked, with the ‘thick dark manes that grew over their shoulders, down their chests and along their bellies; their tails tipped with a black whisk and the fronts of their toes that, in a delicate touch, were tufted and pale’ (113). His attempt to evoke the lion fails to convince the officials, however, as does ‘a photo of the last known true Cape lion in captivity, a dim black-and-white shot from 1860 of a sick-looking animal in a tiny cement cage in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris’ (113). The pitiful photograph of the captive lion is a strong reminder of South Africa’s colonial history in which ‘some species of wild animals were hunted to extinction’ (Viljoen 24). In its failure to represent the lion, Con’s description, like the sickly photograph, is simply yet another simulacrum, and his eloquent but hollow rhetoric an unsatisfactory substitute for the living Cape lion.

Although *Green Lion* emphasizes that certain lion species have vanished forever, preserved only in the form of threadbare taxidermied models, faded pictures and bones in foreign museums, the novel resists utter dystopia because it draws on an eternal optimistic yearning for, and the possibility of, human connection with animals. As Louise Ferreira observes in a 2015 review in *Die Burger* (quoted on Rose-Innes’ personal website), ‘the characters’ longing for a deep connection with another being echoes a human desperation to preserve nature, but also to touch something bigger than themselves’. The human desire to engage with nature is age-old, and the speculative aspect of Con and Sekhmet’s relationship is foreshadowed when Elyse discovers, among Mark’s possessions, a postcard of a painting of Saint Jerome in his study – ‘a man in a red robe bent over a desk, in what seemed to be a kind of medieval workstation: neat wooden cabinetry, filled with books and pot plants and other interesting objects’ (*Green Lion* 29). Significantly, the final section of the novel is titled ‘Jerome’ and the collection of ‘books’ and ‘interesting objects’ depicted in the postcard foreshadows the educational displays in the museum that Con helps to create after he becomes an activist and teacher like Jerome. In the picture, a lion stands behind Saint Jerome, ‘lionlike but diminutive, the size of a lapdog’ (39), recalling the well-known story of how Jerome rescued a wild lion by removing a thorn from its paw, resulting in his lifelong companionship with the animal. Con also remains bound to the memory of Sekhmet. The postcard therefore introduces a legend and emphasizes the importance of the imaginary in conveying the interconnection of animal and human.

Despite *Green Lion*’s allusion to European iconography, the novel’s focus, evident in the epigraphs that reference the San *kukummi*, is on indigenous shamanism. Several of the epigraphs are extracts from the narratives of the renowned San storyteller of *kukummi*, ||Kabbo, and the first of these describes how two pointer stars, which indicate the location of the Southern Cross constellation, were ‘formerly men, and at the same time lions’ (67). Even after both men became stars, they still remained ‘not far from the lioness’ on the Earth (67). This San narrative illustrates the shamans’ mystical world, where they are able to take the form of an animal and attain an elevated level of spirituality, and it signals what Rose-Innes describes as a ‘grey zone’ in her fiction where it crosses over between non-speculative and speculative fiction; this liminal feature of her writing, referring to fantasy and multicultural mythic elements, arguably does so to breach the abyss between humans and nature (*Strange Horizons*).

This return to indigenous mythology corresponds to Jameson's assertion that fantasy that revisits 'legends' counteracts modern 'exhausted and alienated lives,' as it 'breathes a purer and more conventional... atmosphere' (60). While it cannot be considered merely conventional, Rose-Innes' portrayal of the shaman invites us to consider the possibility and power of the connection between the lion and the human.

The San shaman's isolation and nomadic existence are traits of the 'threshold person' who, according to Victor Turner, has an ambiguous identity and 'slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space' (Turner 95). In addition to their deep 'sympathetic bond' with animals, the San hunter-gatherers led a nomadic existence (Hewitt 34). In their discussion of liminal subjects, Hein Viljoen and Chris van der Merwe include shamans among this category and describe them as 'outsiders' who are 'permanently or situationally set apart or outside the structures of a given social system' (11). Con's encounter with the 'Green Lion' group, and with Mossie, is the catalyst for him to assume the shaman's characteristics in his liminal journey, as he learns that physical barriers, such as the mesh of the cage, are not barriers to deep spiritual connection with the lion.

'Bars, stone, bars, stone': The Transgressive Liminal Space

Green Lion foregrounds the trope of restrictive physical borders in the form of the fence on Table Mountain and the lion's cage, which separate the urban from the untamed space of nature. These partitions enforce inequality by limiting the freedom of those who are dominated by an authority, and they barely contain a collective South African anger that threatens to explode. The ubiquitous man-made silver fence that 'necklace[s] the base of Table Mountain and '[sings] with power' is the 'powerfully symbolic and polyvalent locus' that restricts physical access to the mountain and also marks the border of a liminal space, permitting both 'entry' and 'exit' (*Green Lion* 14). As a 'marker of separation,' it divides the urban from the rural, keeping indigenous animals 'out of sight' (20). The fence also slices through the area where marginalized people have been living in precarious shacks made of 'corrugated iron and cardboard and castoff bricks' (87). The legacy of apartheid's system of forced removals persists as industrial corporations which enjoy protection from the government counter these protests with violence. As Riach asserts, Rose-Innes' writing reveals that South Africa's 'troubled past continues to occupy a place in the present through its material remains and spatial legacies' ('Politics of Space' 13).

The fence is a reminder of a time when the right of access to land was denied and both nature and the poor were, and continue to be, the victims of human greed. Similarly, the bars of the lion's cage represent a physical and metaphorical barrier between what Edmund Leach would call 'this [human] world' and an 'other [animal] world' (81). The cage physically resembles the fence, with its tall poles and 'razor serrations running along the top,' that snakes across Table Mountain (82). Con's initial encounter with the lioness is violent. As he approaches the lioness's cage, he sees

bars, stone, bars, stone – and then a clang as his arm was smacked back by the force of some huge hot weight throwing itself against the metal. Con lurched away – for a moment glimpsing a snarling mask – and sat down hard, fingers burning, head buzzing with the savage noise. A liquid chainsaw roar. (16)

The metaphors that describe Sekhmet's savagery portray the lioness as a hybrid of animal and machine. The mechanical 'chainsaw roar' and 'snarling mask' suggest the use of 'armour' and

‘weapons’ in the struggle against humans. Con remains mindful of co-worker Isak’s warning always to ‘keep the bars’ of the lion cage between him and Sekhmet, and never to ‘stick [his] hand through’ it (101). Although Con interacts with and cares for Sekhmet, she remains the predator, determined to ‘demolish the animal on this, on his side,’ and he is always aware of his vulnerability because only ‘one layer of wire mesh, as thin as skin’ separates him from the lioness (159), and from death. As Duncan Brown notes, the ‘lines that we draw between the wild and the tame, or the wild and the protected, may frequently be notional, though their consequences may nevertheless be momentous’ (89). Despite their proximity, Con cannot initially perceive the lioness because she stays in the shadows, and controls what he is allowed to see: ‘a paw, a flank, an eye: as with the elephant in the fable, he could never see the whole’ (160). This fragmentary description is a reference to the Indian fable of ‘The Blind Men and the Elephant’ where six blind men touch different parts of the same elephant but cannot discern it, identifying it as a wall, spear, snake, tree, fan or rope. In *Green Lion*, humans see the same lioness in different ways and Sekhmet therefore becomes a floating signifier of sorts. She is a source of entertainment for visitors to the Lion House who have ‘booked long in advance’ to see her, and she is a means to generate profit for the ‘Parks Department’ and ‘government high-ups’ (16). Mark views her as a powerful healer and associates her with the green lion symbol in alchemy. In contrast, Isak, who was once a ‘circus man’ (98), and now works at the sanctuary, finds her untameable, dangerous and unpredictable. The lioness’s essence, however, remains undetermined, not only because of her alien nature, which renders humans incapable of knowing her, but because humans refuse to work together to learn about her and to acknowledge her as their ancestors once did.

Green Lion presents Sekhmet as mystical and elusive, yet when she permits human connections, as she seemingly does in the novel, they are transformative. It is clear that she is on the brink of extinction and that any contact with her will result in a notable ‘change of state’ (*Nineveh* 172). In one of the novel’s most poignant scenes, Mossie remarks that Sekhmet is “‘all alone here. No mate. No others like her, anywhere at all’” (*Green Lion* 171). Mossie observes that Sekhmet is the last of her kind, that the extinction of her species is inevitable, and reflects the precariousness of our human future. Her appreciation of Sekhmet is an ecological dialogue that acknowledges what Patrick Murphy terms ‘anotherness’ – a recognition that ‘we are not ever only existing as an “I” in the world but are also always existing as “another” for others’ (316). In the context of *Green Lion*, Mossie and Con are feral human liminal subjects who demonstrate both a physical resemblance to, and a deep affinity with, the nonhuman animal, and who are aware of this ‘anotherness’. Ferality is defined by Leesa Fawcett, a specialist in animal consciousness and culture, as a state where the ‘porosity and possibilities of boundary crossings between wild, feral, and domestic spheres are limitless’ (259). Boundary crossings are a necessary element of the liminal journey, and in Rose-Innes’ fiction, they involve an interconnectedness between human and animal. In her reading of *Nineveh*, Wendy Woodward reinforces this association when she asserts that Rose-Innes’ portrayal of ferality in *Nineveh* is a literary device that ‘extends human body space to incorporate the nonhuman’ (207). In so doing, it depicts how the ‘very boundaries of human bodies waver, with the feral manifesting as outer beast or savage in order to enact an inner wildness, a reconnection with the natural’ (208). For Mossie, Con is ‘the lion man’ (*Green Lion* 123), and she recognizes that he is a ‘man merged with lion’ as she senses and accepts his animality, which mirrors her own. Her recognition of Con as the ‘lion man’ highlights his developing ferality, elevated spirituality and deepening bond with animals in a manner that is typical of shamanism.

Con’s connection to the lion’s spiritual world intensifies his own ferality and ambiguity. Brigitte Le Juez argues that, in the context of Peter Høeg’s *The Woman and the Ape*, the human

liminal subject assumes more animal-like characteristics within the transgressive spaces. To 'blur the boundary between humans and nonhumans,' Høeg uses 'animal metaphors' to depict 'zoomorphized humans' (Le Juez 187). I contend that Con is similarly 'zoomorphized' as he becomes acutely aware of his senses. In her interview with Fincham, Rose-Innes explains that she is 'more a sensual than a cerebral writer' and that in *Green Lion* 'there's much more attention paid to smell, befitting a book focused on a large mammalian predator' (91). In focusing on secondary senses, she intends to 'distance [herself] a little from the human prejudice towards the visual' and to 'access the nonhuman experience,' and this objective is evident in the physicality of the novel's descriptions of the lion. From the time that Con first meets Sekhmet, he can smell her 'feral whiff' (16), as 'her brooding, elemental presence in the narrative, and its breathing, scent and roaring appear to inform the protagonist's very sense of who he is becoming' (Brown 93). Her smell becomes part of him as he continually notices 'the reek of the lion cage' (23) on his skin and the 'humble animal funk' (54) on his socks. Con's animal smell is picked up from Sekhmet in a transmission of animality that invades the novel's human world. The novel contrasts his 'animal funk' with the insubstantial 'pale carpet' and 'gauzy curtains' of Elyse's home and emphasizes his increasing separation from his urban environment (54).

Con's dreams of lions signal his development as a shaman figure and connect him to the animal's spiritual world. Shamanism has a strong association with sexuality and, as Daniela Peluso notes, the hallucinogenic ayahuasca brew, consumed by pan-Amazonian shamans, induces intense erotic experiences that are believed to heighten the shared collective consciousness of humans, animals, plants and spirits (245). Dreams have a similar effect, as depicted in Con's recurring 'lion dream,' where the lion 'stood over him and breathed on him, pushing its burning, matted mane into his face, and he turned away but couldn't escape it' (*Green Lion* 209). The lion's close physical proximity indicates the dissolution of the boundary between the neat categories of the 'human' and the 'animal'. Con's contact with Sekhmet at the Lion House intensifies the dream, making it 'extremely clear and detailed,' as Con finds himself 'wrestling with another lion: a sister-lion, brother-lion. It breathed, it rumbled, it pressed its meaty weight upon his face' (26). In this dream, the 'meaty weight' signifies not only the lion's muscle and power but also its substance and tangibility. Con's dreams therefore negate the precariousness of the lion's existence and depict it as real and solid. Con's dream connects him to the animal world, and his conscious decision to return 'from the lion dream into his human skin' (32) suggests that his dreams resemble the 'out-of-body journeys' that are 'simply part of daily life' for a Shaman (Lewis-Williams, *Image-Makers* 36). Con has the shaman's capacity to grasp 'the mysterious power which infuses parts of the natural world' (Hewitt 143). Hewitt argues that shamans' dreams disrupt the 'world of social order' as they 'provide direct access to other worlds' (143). In *Green Lion*, they signal mutating locations and indicate a shift between reality and fantasy.

By highlighting the similarities between the renowned shaman ||Kabbo and Con, the novel urges us to consider how dreams are portals interconnecting the shaman and the lion. The epigraph to the third section, 'Eden,' recounts ||Kabbo's vivid dream of lions that can speak and describes a similar scenario to Con's lion-dream:

I dreamed of a lion which talked

Of lions which talked to their fellow lions.

I heard them, I saw them: in my dream they were black.

Their paws were just like the paws of real lions. (135)

||Kabbo's observation that the talking lions' paws looked like those of real lions indicates that the animals in his dream were half-human. In addition, it reflects how San *kukummi* narratives blur boundaries as their subjects often shift between human and animal forms (Lewis-Williams, *Myth and Meaning* 78). The San told stories of Kaggen, their supreme God and a shapeshifter who could take the form of various animals. His dreams not only provided him with special knowledge but also allowed him to grasp the mysterious power that manifests in the natural world. Significantly, if the trance dancer was not restrained and calmed, it was feared that he would 'turn into a lion and attack people' (*Green Lion* 79). On the day after his dream of Sekhmet, Con feels similarly unsettled and barely in control, and his dream lingers, making him aware of 'running,' 'seeking' and 'the sensation of blood at the back of his throat,' as if he is on the verge of attacking somebody (27). As a result of the dreams, he develops 'a kind of clarity' (160) and incorporates the lion's senses into his own, feeling 'sharply alert to light and shade, to things hidden, hiding' (161). He becomes increasingly feral, aware of the 'lion-purring in his blood,' and its 'big-predator adrenaline' leaves him feeling 'strange' and 'sharper' as he assumes the animal's heightened senses.

The dream about Sekhmet also has a sensual quality which indicates that passion is strongly linked to Con's increasing animality and concurrent liminality. He recalls how 'each hair was crisp, each claw-thrust ecstatic; the weight of the body on top of him was crushing' (26). Initially, he appears to be playing with another lion. However, the dream becomes increasingly erotic, as suggested by the 'ecstatic,' repetitive 'claw-thrust' of the lion on top of him, foreshadowing the subsequent sexual encounter that will occur between Con and Mossie, with the lioness nearby. *Green Lion* questions the human-animal opposition by blurring Con's mental distinction between Mossie and Sekhmet. The novel suggests that Con's fascination with Sekhmet has a sensual valence. His dreams about her have an erotic quality, and the lioness is integral to his relationship with Mossie, which culminates within a transgressive liminal space. Humans deny their animality by calling themselves 'human,' a nominal act that, according to Christopher Peterson, 'assists the human in cordoning itself off both from the nonhuman and from its own inherent animality' (3). When Con acknowledges his animality, defying the taboo, and Sekhmet arouses him, he crosses the cordon that society has established between the human and the animal and experiences a transformed way of viewing both himself and the lioness.

Through his sexual encounter with Mossie, Con undergoes a liminal journey into a space of transgression that brings him into close contact with Sekhmet. In Sekhmet's physical proximity to Con and Mossie, sexuality is transferred onto Sekhmet, and it is this connection that reflects on Con and Mossie's ferality. The novel suggests that a nonviolent connection between human and wild animal is possible when it entails the necessarily challenging border crossing of a liminal journey. Discussing the liminal space of transgression, Brigitte Le Juez describes the contrast between the city's 'striated space,' which is 'gridded with all kinds of lines and barriers' that enforce the restrictive 'conventions and prejudices' of society, revisiting the assertion that, like striations, spires of a fence and bars of a cage are a means of enforcing inequity (197). Movement out of this space, into a 'smooth' open space 'rouses an essential yearning, which may be considered nostalgic or incantatory, and is therefore transgressive' (198), permitting the liminal subject to 'question the meaning of [their] existence and identify [their] true desires' (198). In *Green Lion*, the striations of the bars of the lion cage demarcate its inner 'pulsing blackness' where Con transcends the boundary between human and nonhuman (16). This in-between area, which is not 'clear-cut and unambiguous,' and which

therefore cannot be described by language, which functions according to demarcation and categorization, becomes 'taboo' and is 'powerful, dangerous, untouchable, filthy, unmentionable' (Leach 156), making it a transgressive liminal space.

Con's sexual encounter with Mossie, which takes place next to the lion's cage, and close to Sekhmet, is the culmination of an almost erotic attraction towards the lioness. When they make love, Mossie is 'something inchoate, slippery, unfinished' (*Green Lion* 162) and her body seems 'barely human, formless, turning, never holding still long enough for [Con] to get a lock on it, to see it all in all' (184). Sekhmet has been described in a similarly elusive fashion but is at her most vital at this point. As the lioness roars, the 'bars of the cage trembl[e] and resonat[e],' indicating the structural disintegration of the conventional boundaries that separate human and nonhuman animal. Con is permitted to enter what Turner would call a sense of 'communitas' (360) with Sekhmet and Mossie as they stand together outside society. After they are intimate, the liminal space is alive:

He was aware that the darkness beyond the bars was no longer empty, it had grown full, plumped with breath and blood. It moved, shifting against the bars, seeming to blow them towards his face Sekhmet had come to the bars and laid herself out, was pressing her length against them as if offering her warmth or seeking his. . . . He could feel her heat against his cheeks and forehead, smell her reek. At last his fingers came to rest, very lightly, on her spine. (*Green Lion* 186)

The encounter with Sekhmet, rendered in the physicality of the description and the corporeal enmeshment of Con and Sekhmet despite the dividing bars, signals the deliberate blurring of human and animal worlds. Con's ferality enables him to experience Sekhmet through sensation as he feels her 'warmth' and 'heat' and 'smells her reek'. Con lies between Mossie and Sekhmet, in a sequence where one is unsure 'where the part you call human ends and the part you call animal begins' (Høeg 245). Turner asserts that 'liminal phenomena' occur in a 'moment in and out of time and in and out of social secular structure' where a 'generalized social bond has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties' (360). Here, the bars of the cage are breached, the threshold between the civilized and wild is reduced, and the narrative shifts into speculative mode, transcending conventional time. The unconventional 'social bond' between Con, Mossie and Sekhmet is momentary and fragments into a 'multiplicity of structural ties' after Mossie frees Sekhmet (*Green Lion* 360). At this point, the novel draws attention to a disturbing aspect of artifice and manipulation on Mossie's part and raises questions about the motivation of her 'Green Lion' group. Brown raises a similar concern when discussing how ecopsychology and ecotourism are 'simply another way in which we assert the needs of humans over those of animals, in that the animals only have value to the extent that we can access them and identify with them' (179). In a negation of this exploitation, Con returns to an older system as he begins to look for the lion.

'Last crossing': The Definitive Liminal Journey

Con's journey on Table Mountain in search of Sekhmet is a definitive movement into the liminal space of the mountain beyond. A new hybrid space opens where past and present merge. In his passage up the mountain, Con follows the fence and finds a gap underneath where 'the soil had been dug away further to allow a large body or bodies to pass' (225). He travels 'across abandoned paths, up into the mountain, emptied of people now, differently occupied' (225). Con is at what Homi Bhabha calls the point of 'transit where space and time cross' and he experiences a momentous 'sense of disorientation' and a 'disturbance of direction, in the

beyond' as he moves towards a 'cross-cultural initiation' in a dreamlike encounter with ancestral hunters at the top of the mountain (141). At the highest point of his journey, he sees a 'secret sky, perhaps even containing different stars and planets to the ones the city folks could see ... or perhaps the same ones, arranged in subtly different constellations, as they were aeons ago, or aeons in the future' (*Green Lion* 228). Con's vision of a sky where past, present and future cannot be differentiated evokes Jameson's assertion that science fiction blurs the notion that time is made up of discrete sequential periods. Jameson argues that although 'Science Fiction is understood as the attempt to imagine unimaginable futures,' it focuses on 'our own historical present' (345). Discussing the prolific science fiction author Philip K. Dick's novels, Jameson asserts that the 'future of Dick's novels renders our present historical by turning it into the past of a fantasized future' (345). Con's heightened awareness brings him to a point of liminality in time, where he understands the implications of a future without animals, realizes the impact of current human activities that are creating that future and appreciates a past that was once abundant with wildlife.

Once Con moves across the fence, and into the mountain's liminal space, he attains shamanistic levels of spirituality through his dreams and visions of ancestors. In a trance-like state of half-sleep and half-wakefulness, he becomes aware of a 'greenish, lunar, almost phosphorescent' light and then sees 'dark figures' dancing alongside the 'great corpse' of a creature and hacking at its flank (*Green Lion* 228). Hein Viljoen argues that liminal spaces that become sacred include

high hilltops or other prominent geographical features where humans have encountered the transcendental. Such places, dark caves for example, are also associated with mystery and danger, since they are invested with the immense and mysterious powers of the numinous. (193–94)

The dead 'leviathan' lying next to a 'bonfire' suggests that Con's vision is of ancient hunters celebrating their slaughter of a primeval monster (*Green Lion* 228). As Viljoen asserts, 'the sacredness of a place is often a communal thing: they are sacred because the community maintains and reinforces their sacred status by means of festivals and animals' (194). At the height of his transcendental search for the lion, Con experiences a sense of communion with the legendary hunters – age-old ancestors who offer a portal to the lion's spirit.

Con's liminal journey is a circular one and culminates in a return to its starting point. As Turner asserts, the liminal subject is at first 'released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas' (373). In what may be his 'last crossing,' Con leaves the hunters and returns to the fence, and to the threshold (242). In a moment of intense clarity that indicates his 'revitalisation,' he realizes that there are 'no lions' on the mountain, and that 'the things around him – these rocks, these crumbs of damp, quartz-salted Earth' are as 'crisply defined in the diffuse light as a relic in a museum case, and as drained of life' (238). The landscape is therefore a museum of the Anthropocene, stripped of life. The pattern of Con's journey, while spatially resolved, highlights that the insults to the environment persist and that the lioness has vanished. Con's journey evokes that of Azure in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000). In this *Bildungsroman*, a twelve-year-old orphan, also a liminal figure, struggles to survive in the streets of post-apartheid Cape Town, where commodification, commercialization and exploitation are rife. Like Con, Azure experiences epiphanic moments on Table Mountain, as he reimagines Cape Town through a lens of history and African folklore. In contrast to Con's revelation, Azure's final vision on the mountain is apocalyptic as he witnesses a monstrous flood and fireballs raining from the sky. For Anthony

Vital, Azure's 'final apocalyptic vision of nature's power, a vision that affords him a sense of connection both with nature's power and old African ways of knowing, serves as a culminating moment' where the violence is the only solution to a social world that offers no possibility of transformation (177).

In contrast to Duiker's vision of annihilation, Sekhmet vanishes physically but becomes, in her absence, the ubiquitous subject of myth. The narrator describes how a 'lioness was moving through the city: she had been spotted in Strand, in Rondebosch, in Gugulethu' (*Green Lion* 250). Although Sekhmet is gone, she still features regularly in newspaper reports. She is sighted 'now and then in ever more fantastical circumstances' (261). Con's keen perception allows him to sense the lioness everywhere and he imagines that he 'sees her form slipping around every corner, her eye peering from every window, her growl behind the traffic rumble' (262). For Con, a modern-day shaman, the lioness is part of his urban space. In speculative fashion, *Green Lion* builds a new myth that is characterized by sightings of Sekhmet in increasingly 'fantastical circumstances' (261). In her aesthetic representation of space, Rose-Innes therefore crosses what Bertrand Westphal has identified in fiction as the 'threshold that spreads out between the real and the fictional,' generating a liminal space of creativity inhabited by the memory of Sekhmet (4).

It is significant that Con's transformation is catalyzed by a wild animal, rather than a companion animal. In his fascinating book on ferality and rewilding, George Monbiot advocates restoring the ecosystem, rendered 'lopsided, abridged, dysfunctional' by destructive industrialization and commercialization, to its original 'feral' state (107). As a potential solution, ecological rewilding permits the ecosystem to recover while allowing humans to experience the emotional and subjective essence of the wild. Brown emphasizes that it is fallacious to separate 'nature' from 'society' when working to restore the ecosystem (49) and argues for rewilded areas where humans should relinquish rather than assert control over environments to allow biological processes to resume (178). Con's entry into the wild's liminal spaces and his subsequent reintegration into society are the catalysts for him to participate in the renewed artistic creativity that manifests in the Green Lion Centre, offering a solution to the apparent impasse created by the irreversible loss of authentic wildlife. The newly created Green Lion Centre, which was converted from the Lion House, is associated with the rebirth of community spirit and a heightened interest in nature. It is now 'devoted to the interdisciplinary conjunction of Arts and Natural Sciences, under the joint auspices of the Departments of Environment, Recreation and Culture' (*Green Lion* 257). The interdisciplinary collaboration recalls Jason W. Moore's observation that

the Anthropocene has become something more than a scholarly concept. It has become a wider conversation around humanity's place in the web of life – a conversation unfolding in the popular press, in activist circles, and across the Two Cultures of the human and natural sciences. (595)

The Green Lion Centre, where nature and culture are no longer separable, has become a place that represents Val Plumwood's ideal 'locus of continuity, identity, and ecological consciousness' (139). It is positioned as a place where there could be a clearer understanding of the earth's future. The novel's conclusion questions the ethical thinking and decisive social action promoted by ecocritics such as Patrick Murphy. As Louise Viljoen observes, 'Mark and his Green Lion group's hope that contact with wild animals will heal psychological trauma and restore life to an exploited earth is a vain one,' and the novel ends on a melancholic note (27). Louise Green astutely points out that game reserves remain separated from surrounding land

and society, the physical surroundings are reworked by architects and designers, and visitors' experiences are carefully managed (136). The novel's conclusion perhaps questions the ethical thinking and decisive social action advocated by Murphy, because of the Green Lion Centre's sense of inauthenticity.

Green Lion reminds us that, although the death of endangered species cannot be avoided, the memories of animals should be preserved. The novel is a performance of how animality and ferality can function in fiction as a reminder that we all 'live at a wild interface' (Brown 96). Cultural geographers such as Franklin Ginn are optimistic about how humans have become 'more than human' as a result of the network of connections that exist between all aspects of nature, in ways 'at once both geological and biological, ways through which Earth forces have been folded within us' (351). *Green Lion* depicts this transformation as a liminal journey that blurs human-animal boundaries to highlight the network of human-animal connections in a world where nature seems helpless in the face of ongoing destruction. Ferality is threaded through the novel, and Sekhmet's strong presence is a call to return to wildness and to allow ecological processes to resume spontaneously.

Notes on contributors

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Notes

1 In reality, the Table Mountain National Park is an open-access system with only four pay-point destinations. The novel portrays the Park as inaccessible to foreground the effects of commercialism on the environment.

2 The novel's use of the pronoun 'she' for Sekhmet raises the issue of anthropomorphism, which assigns human characteristics to animals. As Lawrence Buell argues, ecocritics have often struggled with the problem whether the use of human language introduces an anthropocentric slant to a literary work (432). Speculative fiction, however, increasingly represents human-animal hybrids to sustain the earth's ecology and in the context of *Green Lion*, where Con and Sekhmet share a deep connection, the use of the third-person pronoun is appropriate. This article therefore follows Rose-Innes' lead and refers to Sekhmet with the feminine pronoun.

3 Cecil John Rhodes is noted for his commitment to imperialism and British dominion from the Cape to Cairo.

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