Set in the late nineteenth century, Knysna Forest is home to wild elephants and the fiercely independent families of woodcutters, who have coexisted warily but, for the most part peacefully, for generations. Now their future, and the destiny of the forest itself, is threatened by the exploitative greed of the timber merchants and ivory hunters, and the rumours of gold in the far reaches of the Forest’s rivers.

Saul Barnard, son of woodcutter Joram Barnard, stands on the deck of the ship called the ‘Pictor’. There is urgency in him. Once they have set sail he would be free of everything he had once cared for; the forest, Kate, Old Foot. Behind him, 29 years would die. While still in the harbour the wrinkled Outiniqua – Maska-brought him the news that his brother’s son had been gored by an elephant – Old Foot- and that Fred Terblans was going to shoot him. A special relationship existed between Saul and Old foot. He felt that he owed it to Old Foot to save him – the king of elephants – from the humiliation of falling to Terblanche’s gun. If someone had to do it, it would have to be him. So with four days left before the ship would sail, Saul left the ship, borrowed a gun from Maska and headed back into the forest to look for his animal brother.

As Saul walked into the forest, it felt as if he was walking backwards into himself. He relives his past. He again remembers being fourteen; butchering the Gallhead, the cutting of the Kalander, his experiences with Old Foot, Kate, the woodcutters and the wood buyer, Mac Donald, the discovery of Millwood and his years as a gold-digger. At the end, he has to face his fears, the forest, Kate, Old Foot… and come to terms with his past.
05. TEXT ANALYSIS OF ‘CIRCLES IN A FOREST’
‘Circles in a forest’ were chosen as text for this study as it is both a South African and a universal story. In South Africa it is generally well-known and prescribed for high school language subjects. It presents a segment from the country’s industrial development and gives insight into the history of South Africa.

It tackles the ever relevant issue of man’s careless and greed-driven destruction of natural resources without considering future generations. Jooste, (1986, 3) describes ‘Circles in a Forest’ as a timeless story, so human that anyone can relate to it. It is a story about Man’s search for worth and dignity. It tells about the division between classes and the struggle towards social and economic justice and equality. ‘Circles in a Forest’ is also a story of hope and the triumph of an individual in the face of adversity.

‘Kringe in ’n Bos’ has been translated into English, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Icelandic, Spanish, Hebrew, German, Swedish, Italian, Finnish and Norwegian. It is also available in Braille and on cassette for the visually impaired. Philo Pieterse Productions produced ‘Circles in a Forest’ as a feature film and the stage adaptation of ‘Kringe in ’n Bos’ was done by Peet van Rensburg.

5.1 UNIVERSAL STORY

5.1.1 Relevant Issues

- Relationship between Man and his environment
- Natural resource dependency, exploitation, destruction & protection
- Discrimination, class struggle for social & economic equality
- Eco-fable relevant to architecture

5.2 THE MAIN THEME

5.2.1 The obliteration of nature

The destruction of the Knysna Forest and its elephants is one of the main themes of ‘Circles in a Forest’. Tracing history it is true that the demand for wood during the discovery of gold and diamonds in the 19th century contributed to the demise of parts of the Knysna Forest.

“Where Harrison or his men stopped them today, they felled tomorrow because the Government were putting pressure from the west for more and more wood for railway lines, wood for jetties, wood for harbours, wood for the mines, wood for making wagons that had to take man and his possessions north! Wood for tables, wood for chairs and cupboards and beds! Wood! Wood! Wood!” (Matthee, 1984, 109).

To the woodcutters, the forest was home. They believed it belonged to them and that they could fell trees and shoot elephants as they wished. Any attempt at nature conservation was met with severe resistance.

“Everybody was shooting, everybody was felling. Harrison’s control was not strict enough; where he warned them off today, they cut open the roof of the forest that should have protected the seedlings tomorrow. Or they shot the cows that should have calved in the spring. Harrison says, the way they’re felling now, there will be little more than fifty years left for the forest…How long for the elephants.” (Matthee, 1984, 109).

5.3 OTHER THEMES

5.3.1 Liberation & boundaries

“At the age of 29 Saul Barnard had just one overwhelming need – to be free! He wanted to be free of everything he had once cared for: the forest, the people of the forest, the things of the forest, Kate, Old Foot” (Matthee, 1984, 13).

5.3.2 The truth versus the lie

“To believe a lie is to betray yourself. To walk past the truth because the path of the untruth is well trodden is just the same. Let him then be guilty of everything, but not that!” (Matthee, 1984, 63).

5.3.3 The bond between human and nature (animal)

“…every time something happens, I find him somewhere in my way. The first time was when my mother died. In between, every time I’ve been in trouble.”

“Then it is so”, he whispered in awe.

“Old Foot is watching you…”

“You are the brother of the noblest Bigfoot that ever walked this Forest” (Matthee, 1984, 242).

5.3.4 Circles (circle of life)

Life is a crooked circle: “the woodcutter killed the forest; the wood-buyer killed the woodcutter. Round and round you walked the crooked circle year in year out. The wood-buyer got richer and richer while the hands that held the axes had
“Elephants have this primeval self-defence tactic to find out whether someone was following him or not. They walked in circles "round and round and round. At some time the elephant must catch up from behind” (Matthee, 1984, 183)

"Saul walks a circle back into his past. "Saul Barnard walks into the forest and it feels like walking backwards into himself” (Matthee, 1984, 1)

5.3.5 Superstitions & myths

Uttering the word ‘elephant’ was forbidden. “You never say their name in the forest! They will hear you and think you are calling them. You called them ‘bigfeet’ or ‘thicklegs’ or Old people but never by their name” (Matthee, 1984, 20)

“…the grown-ups taught you another thing about the blue buck: they were different from all the other buck in the forest because their gall was in their heads” (Matthee, 1984, 27)

This belief left Saul feeling uneasy. He looked for the gall in its head but found it in its usual place. “Either the grown-ups had deliberately lied to him or they believed the lie themselves” (Matthee, 1984, 40)

The forest was home to the woodcutters and their families

“By the time it was dark they were back in the forest. It was like a thick blanket closing around your body, warming you against the cold,” (Matthee, 1984, 61)

“...lay like a thick black wall around big island” (Matthee, 1984, 27)

The forest was a unifying element that has a life-presence and becomes an antagonist in the story. The experience of the forest makes a strong onslaught on the senses and its impenetrable terrain is often made worse by natural elements such as rain and mist. Jooste, (1986, 3) describes the forest as having a unique, secretive and mystic beauty.

“Maska, you used to tell us that the spirits live in the trees” (1986, 240)

Patterson: “I’m suffocating! This place is too close round me” (Matthee, 1984, 147)

“The grey timber walls are parched like deadwood, the roof sagging to the one side” (Matthee, 1984, 63)

5.4.1 The forest

Muffled, subdued, still, peaceful, dark

The forest is a unifying element that has a life-presence and becomes an antagonist in the story. The experience of the forest makes a strong onslaught on the senses and its impenetrable terrain is often made worse by natural elements such as rain and mist. Jooste, (1986, 3) describes the forest as having a unique, secretive and mystic beauty.

“Maska, you used to tell us that the spirits live in the trees” (1986, 240)

At the beginning of the 1800’s the Knysna Forest was tremendous and dense. The Great Lourie, the Blue buck and the Kalander (Outeniqua yellowwood tree) are icons of the forest.

“...lay like a thick black wall around big island” (Matthee, 1984, 27)

“He would hide in the forest so that nobody would ever find him. Surely God could not have seen down into the forest from up in the sky, even the sun has to struggle to shine to the ground. Only specks of sunlight got through that roof of the tree tops” (Matthee, 1984, 47)

The woodcutters were afraid of the forest

Patterson: “I’m suffocating! This place is too close round me” (Matthee, 1984, 147)

“The grey timber walls are parched like deadwood, the roof sagging to the one side” (Matthee, 1984, 63)

5.4.2 The woodcutters’ houses

“In some places there were natural openings in the forest like Big Island and there you could find 3-4 families living in makeshift homes of wood and corrugated iron sheets…The grey timber walls are parched like deadwood, the roof sagging to the one side” (Matthee, 1984, 63)

“Woodcutters never made wonderful houses; when the forest became thinned out around them, they just moved to another clearing in the forest. Their houses like most had only two rooms. Old Anro had made himself a lean-to against the outside wall” (Matthee, 1984, 26). While cutting they lived in an almost nomadic fashion – moving from tree to tree. They built a shelter and a workplace.
where they were cutting. Here they stayed until the wood was ready to be taken to town.

5.4.3 Cripple Bush

“…where diggers’ axes had hacked out everything to make space for the tents and houses, and to provide firewood.” (Matthee, 1984, 109)

5.4.4 Old Foot

“The great terror that walked the forest: the elephant” (Matthee, 1984, 20)

“Where the huge thick tusks bulged from their sockets at the side of his head, they were smooth like butter and yellow. The lower part right down to the rounded tip was stained greenish black at least a hundred pounds of ivory on each side of his head. Under the eye a wet patch stained the rough wrinkled skin dark.” (Matthee, 1984, 29 & 30)

“Something indescribably majestic about him…” (Matthee, 1984, 30)

5.4.5 Kalander

“…enormous”

“Standing with his feet almost in the water of the Homtini… The most beautiful… Towering above all other trees. Giant roots anchored it to the ground like giant arms. Grey bark hung like dry strips of skin”

“The old man’s beard, moss in its branches hung like thin green hair, waving eerily in the wind.” (Matthee, 1984, 74)

5.4.6 Going to the village

Saul was 14 years old when he first saw Knysna village.

“And nobody ever told him that the village was not in the forest.” (Matthee, 1984, 53)

5.4.7 Knysna Town

“They came out of the forest on the eastern side of the town. One moment the forest was still around and above them, the next moment it started thinning out, getting lighter…more sun and then suddenly the world was lying open. Naked. Like someone without a hat. Without a roof. He wanted to turn round and run back to the shady shelter of the forest. The sun was hurting his eyes.” (Matthee, 1984, 54)

5.4.8 Mac Donald’s wood yard and shed

“They were enormous. Wood was stacked up everywhere, wood wherever you looked! Mountains of wood. Next to a large shed men were loading some of the wood on other wagons…” (Matthee, 1984, 56)

5.4.9 The Pictor

“450 ton, three masted barque, sails furled, was lying on the starboard side of the wooden jetty” (Matthee, 1984, 11)
5.5 CHARACTERS

**FOREST**
- Woodcutters:
  - Joram (father)
  - Joseph (brother)
  - Anro (uncle)
  - Simple minded, ignorant, superstitious, helpful and generous

**<MASKA>**
- Friend
  - Link - forest & Saul
  - Spiritual/mystical
  - Native Outiniqa
  - Bridge/medium between Saul and the forest

**SAUL**
- Deviant
  - Rebel against society & rules, headstrong, loyal, leader
  - Protector of the forest
  - Bridge between two worlds

**<KATE>**
- Challenger
  - Exuberant, presumptuous, obstinate, curious
  - Challenge society & rules
  - Link between Saul and the village

**VILLAGE**
- Wood buyers:
  - Mr. Mac Donald (Kate's father)
- Gold diggers:
  - Patterson
  - Crampton
  - Exploiters
  - Power & control

5.6 NARRATION & STORY TELLING

The story is told by a narrator in the third person but through the eyes of Saul. This allows the audience to associate and sympathize with Saul. The non-chronological order of the events and the storyline that weaves between the past and the present gives the audience the opportunity to discover the story.

“This wherever there are people, the world over, there are tales…” (Savory, 1982, 171)

The stories of a ‘People’ is very much part of its life. Fables are told for the purpose of enforcing, or supporting, some point of family discipline, tribal custom or life-lesson. These rely on make-belief and elements of fantasy for their popularity – called magic realism (Gordon, 1995, 9). They uphold conduct that benefits society, individual character and the welfare of the community. They gain a great deal of their power from their skilful exploitation of language (Savory, 1982, 9).

This powerful tradition of the spoken word is called the oral tradition, and Africa is world famous for its rich storehouse of literature composed and handed down in this way (Gordon, 1995, 5).
1. & 8. Saul borrows the gun from Maska, to shoot Old Foot before Terblanche does. Saul walks back into the forest and into his past to find Old Foot. _Prologue_

2. Saul’s 14th birthday Saul starts questioning the superstitions of the woodcutters. _Act1, Sc1_

3. The first time Saul leaves the forest & visits Knysna village. He meets Kate & Mac Donald. _Act1, Sc2_

4. Felling of the huge yellowwood (against his will) _Act1, Sc3_

5.7 STORYLINE_NOT CHRONOLOGICAL_BETWEEN PAST & PRESENT, FOREST & VILLAGE

7. Saul boards the Pictor setting sail in 4 days. Maska tells Saul that his brother’s son has been gored and they say it was Old Foot. Terblans is going to shoot Old Foot. Saul decides he’ll rather do it himself & he gets of the ship. _Act2, Sc6_

8. Saul follows Old Foot’s tracks in circles through the forest. After 4 days Old Foot leads him back to Millwood to show him the destruction of the forest. Old Foot gets shot. _Act2, Sc7_

9. Saul realises his responsibility towards the forest & his people. Saul decides to stay in the forest. _Epilogue_
3. Saul confronts his father about the crooked circle of their way of life
Saul leaves his father to work for Mac Donald in Knysna
Acts 1, Sc5

4. Maska comes to tell Saul his father died
Major encounter between Saul & Old Foot
Acts 2, Sc2

5. Kate shows up in Millwood (gold town)
Figure 191. Kate & Saul spend two days together in the forest. Acts 2, Sc4

6. Mac Donald doesn't approve & gets revenge by refusing to buy his brother's wood
Saul confronts Mac Donald but agrees to leave the forest. Acts 2, Sc5
5.8 STORYBOARD

5.7.1 PROLOGUE

**Key events**
Saul borrows the gun from Maska, to shoot Old Foot before Terblanche does Saul walks back into the forest and into his past to find Old Foot

**Setting**
Maska’s scanty wooden house in a clearing in the forest. Maska is sitting by a small fire on one side of the stage. Saul walks up to him.

**Mood**
Mystic and spiritual, then panic and urgency.

**Lighting**
Cool, soft and dappled with fine bright rays of violet & white light. Gets more dappled & darker as Saul walks deeper into the forest. Spotlight on Saul.

**Sound Effects**
Birds and other forest sounds. Footsteps - walking on stones. Sound gets softer as Saul walks deeper into the forest. Smoke effect at Maska’s house.

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Figure 90. Maska’s house (Author, 2010).

Figure 91. Saul walking into the forest (Author, 2010).
5.7.2 ACT I SCENE 1

**Key events**
Saul's 14th birthday.
Saul starts questioning the superstitions of the woodcutters

**Setting**
Cutting shelter.
Joram & Anro on stage. Saul comes in with food in his hands.

**Mood**
Celebratory, playful, confusion, defiance, unease

**Lighting**
Warm, dappled, scattered white, sharp rays

**Sound & Effects**
Bird sounds, fire, chopping of tree

5.7.3 ACT I SCENE 2

**Key events**
The first time Saul leaves the forest to go to Knysna

**Setting**
Traveling through the forest with the wagon

**Mood**
Curiosity, excitement

**Lighting**
Gets whiter & brighter as they walk out of the forest

**Sound & Effects**
Forest sounds fade as they go further out of the forest
5.7.3 ACT I SCENE 2

**Key events**
Saul meets Kate & Mac Donald for the first time

**Setting**
Knysna town  
Mac Donald’s wood yard & shed

**Mood**
Exploitation, intimidation & fear

**Lighting**
Harsh, bright, white & blue

**Sound & Effects**
Foghorn, distant waves, yard sounds, school bell & children.

Light: softer; violet spot on Saul & Kate.

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Figure 94. Mac Donald’s wood yard & shed (Author, 2010)

Figure 95. Saul & Kate meet at the wood yard (Author, 2010)
5.7.4 ACT I SCENE 3

Key events
Felling of the huge yellowwood against Saul’s will
Saul raises his concern – that the tree feels
Joram forces Saul to help cut down the tree
The tree falls.
They see signs of Old Foot’s presence

Setting
Forest, walking through the under bush, big Kalander tree, cutting shelter
Night & daybreak

Mood
Anticipation, amazement, frustration, helplessness, anger & despair

Lighting
Warm amber & green, scattered white rays, dappled effect
Fades and gets bluer and darker to show the day passing and turning into night
Spot on tree

Sound Effects
Forest sounds, footsteps walking on forest floor, chopping of the tree, tree crashing to the ground.
5.7.5 ACT 1 SCENE 5

**Key events**
Saul confronts his father about the crooked circle of their way of life and the destruction of the forest. Saul leaves his father to work for Mac Donald in Knysna.

**Anro** walks into Old Foot.

**Setting**
Another cutting shelter.

**Mood**
Conflict, tension & anger.

**Lighting**
Dim, somber blue, grey and green with scattered white rays creating a dappled effect.

**Sound Effects**
The far off sound of trees being felled and falling to the ground.

**Figure 98. Saul leaving his father** (Author,2010).

**Lighting**
Harsh, bright, white & blue.

**Sound & Effects**
Foghorn, distant waves & yard sounds.

**Figure 99. Saul at the wood yard to work for Mac Donald** (Author,2010).
5.7.6 ACT 1 SCENE 6

**Key events**
Saul is sent to the forest as a guide for gold prospectors. They find gold in the river.

**Setting**
Knysna town, Mac Donald's wood yard and a stream in the forest.

**Mood**
Curiosity & suspense.

**Lighting**
Village - harsh, bright, blue & white.  
Forest - dappled blue, amber and white.

**Sound Effects**
Village - Foghorn, waves, yard sounds.  
Forest - Birds & other forest sounds.  
Flowing water.

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5.7.7 ACT 1 SCENE 7

**Key events**
Saul leaves Mac Donald's wood yard in search of gold.

**Setting**
Knysna town, Mac Donald's wood yard and a stream in the forest.

**Mood**
Defiance, adventure, and excitement.

**Lighting**
Village - harsh, bright, blue & white.  
Forest - dappled blue, amber and white.

**Sound Effects**
Village - Foghorn, waves, yard sounds.  
Forest - Birds & other forest sounds.  
Flowing water.

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5.7.8 ACT 2 SCENE 2

**Key events**
Maska comes to tell Saul his father has died.  
Saul comes across Oldfoot in the forest.

**Setting**
A stream in the forest.

**Mood**
Sorrowful & solemn, owe & wonder.

**Lighting**
Village - harsh, bright, blue & white.  
Forest - dappled blue, amber and white.  
Gradually becomes darker & down lighting create somber shadows.  
Broad ray of light on Oldfoot.

**Sound Effects**
Forest - Birds & other forest sounds.  
Flowing water.

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5.7.9 ACT 2 SCENE 3

**Key events**
Saul and Kate walk into each other in Millwood (gold town). She confronts him about being swept up in the gold rush and so contributing to the destruction of the forest.

**Setting**
Millwood (gold town)

**Mood**
Unease, confrontation & frustration

**Lighting**
Village - harsh, bright, white & blue
Forest - dappled green, amber and white rays

**Sound Effects**
none
### 5.7.10 ACT 2 SCENE 4

**Key events**
Kate asks Saul to show her the forest as he sees it. They spend two days in the forest.

**Setting**
Forest

**Mood**
Surreal & dreamlike

**Lighting**
Soft, dappled violet, amber & green – spot on Saul & Kate

**Sound Effects**
Birds & other forest sounds

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 105. Saul runs into Old Foot (Author, 2010).**

### 5.7.11 ACT 2 SCENE 5

**Key events**
Mac Donald doesn't approve of their friendship. He gets revenge by refusing to buy Joseph's, Saul's brother's, wood. Saul confronts Mac Donald but eventually he agrees to leave the forest.

**Setting**
Mac Donald's wood yard

**Mood**
Tension, confrontation & anger

**Lighting**
Harsh & bright, white & blue, red spot on Mac Donald

**Sound & Effects**
Foghorn, distant waves & yard sounds

![Image](image2.png)

**Figure 106. Mac Donald refusing to buy Joseph's wood (Author, 2010).**

### 5.7.11 ACT 2 SCENE 6

**Key events**
Saul boards the 'Pictor', about to set sail in 4 days. Maska comes to tell him that his brother's son has been gored. They blame Old Foot and Terblanche is going to shoot the elephant. Saul decides he'll rather do it himself and gets off the ship.

**Setting**
The deck of the Pictor

**Mood**
Serious, unsure & urgent

**Lighting**
Harsh & bright, white & blue

**Sound & Effects**
Foghorn, waves & seagulls

![Image](image3.png)

**Figure 107. Saul on board the Pictor (Author, 2010).**
5.7.12 ACT 2 SCENE 7

Saul follows Old Foot’s tracks in circles through the forest. After 4 days Old Foot leads him back to Millwood and shows him the destruction of the forest.

Figure 108. Saul trekking Old Foot in circles thought the forest (Author, 2010).
5.7.13 ACT 2 SCENE 7

Old Foot gets shot by one of the gold diggers.

Figure 109. Old foot gets shot (Author, 2010).
Saul realises his responsibility towards the forest & his people. Saul decide to stay in the forest.