CHAPTER 15

Wet and Dry Hinterlands: Pluviality and Drought in J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*

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I

J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) is a novel generally read for its dramatization of the problems of how the individual should be situated in relation to history, of interpretation and the appropriation of an other's story, and of the force and eventual dissolution of political allegory (see Head 2009). It has passed largely unobserved that it rains incessantly for the first thirty-nine pages of the novel—and that conditions of pluviality (rain that causes flooding) and dryness are crucial to the novel's

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registers of extraction, abandonment, and care in its looped hinterlands from the port city of Cape Town into the uplands of the Karoo.[1]

Michael K and his mother Anna K live in a cupboard intended for air-conditioning equipment which has never been installed, under the stairs at a block of flats called Cote d'Azure in Sea Point on the Atlantic seaboard. On the cupboard door is written *Danger-Gevaar-Ingozi* and there is no electric light or ventilation. Michael K has recently lost his job as a gardener for the City of Cape Town Parks and Gardens department; his mother has spent her adult life as a domestic servant and works in a flat upstairs. When rain drips through from the stairs outside, week after week, they place a towel against the door to prevent it from seeping in. Anna K feels "like a toad under a stone" (9) living there and dreams of escaping from "the careless violence, the packed buses, the food queues…sirens in the night, the curfew, the cold and the wet" (8).

Finding a wheelbarrow and building a wooden platform with a canopy on it, Michael K decides to act on his mother's desire and pushes her into the hinterlands, toward the natal earth of the Karoo farmland on which shegrew up, near the town of Prince Albert.[2] As K pushes, they escape the soaking wet of Sea Point into the downpours and deluges of the port city's margins, passing old fuel storage tanks, the warehouses of the dock quarter, the ghostly industria of Paarden Eiland, the cement works, and sewage department trucks. No site "seemed more sheltered from the elements than any other" (24). Despite all his attempts to keep his mother dry—with the canopy, a blanket and a plastic apron—the rain and cold kill her before they pass Stellenbosch.

Traveling alone, the combination of fine rain and mist on the escarpment enables K to skirt a checkpoint as he heads away from the carceral conditions of his life in the city toward the Karoo and his mother's

[1] I am grateful to Meg Samuelson for convening at panel called "Wet/Dry" as part of a conference entitled *Southern Waters* at the University of Adelaide in December 2021, with Isabel Hofmeyr, Charne Lavery, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, and myself, in which she drew together emerging work on wet form, dry form, and aridity and the novel form, as well as her own work on coastal form; see especially Samuelson's "Coastal Form" on amphibian aesthetics (2017). The panel was helpful for thinking through how to conceive of wet and dry hinterlands in this chapter.

[2] "The problem that had exercised him years ago behind the bicycle shed at huis Norenhuis, namely why he had been brought into the world, had received its answer: he had been brought into the world to look after his mother" (7).

birthplace.[3] To do so, he must pass the chimneys and pylons of Worcester, brickfields, railway sidings and the Railway Police, steam locomotives, telegraph wires, and "bare neglected vineyards" (41); filling stations and roadhouses, children's playgrounds alongside the national road, construction sites, blackened shells of warehouses, and 'resettlement camps' (73). These are the near hinterlands in what Coetzee only terms a "time of war" (7). The dimensions and detritus of industrial modernity merge with the political landscapes of coloniality—and the earthslides and washaways caused by flooding. Forced into involuntary labor at a further checkpoint due to his lack of an "exit permit," K clears undergrowth from the riverbed upstream and downstream from a railway bridge, and is shunted up and down the line in a packed railway car bearing the logos of the Railways Administration of the Prince Albert Divisional Council. In the near hinterland, K is an exposed and largely abandoned subject reduced to the labor he can provide.

Yet the novel explores, too, the possibility of living outside (or, in a more complex vein, *living* within) these hinterland regimes. K attempts to exist, survive, and even minimally flourish obliquely to the regimes of involuntary labor imposed by colonialism and capitalism, beyond the terms of camp life and outside of the logics (and logistics) of war. Crucial to K's project of escape from the terms of his multiple confinements are questions of wetness and dryness, pluviality, and drought, in which rain or the lack of it can destroy not only life but the smallest project of freedom.

Escaping the labor gang into which he has been forced to work, K reaches an abandoned farm, possibly of his mother's youth, and blue skies at last. He avoids the abandoned farmhouse, sleeps in a dry riverbed, and must find a way to water the pumpkin seeds he has kept in his pocket. He spends the day near the farm dam and begins to wrestle with the dam pump until he discovers how the brake mechanism works. A minor engineer, he learns how to control the dry spinning of the wheel and restores a system of furrows that could irrigate just enough land near the dam to

[3] While it rains incessantly with the force of a structural condition and thus of the intensified social, Coetzee also attends to pluviality's material specificities. Rain falls heavily, beating through the broken windows of the Cote d'Azur, creeps with the cold into his mother's cushion and then her chest, mingles with grey sea, produces heavy mist and dew on the escarpment, allies with high winds, falls into the box containing his mother's ashes, floods river banks, and washes away railway tracks in a muddy deluge.

grow his vegetables.[4] Next, he tackles the borehole, which had been pumped dry, yielding only a weak and intermittent trickle. It becomes his deepest wish to restore "the flow of water from the earth" (60), as he imagines an inner sea or deep pool with no bottom beneath the ground. Michael K is perhaps at his happiest when he works the wind pump and the borehole at the dam in order to water his pumpkins and feed himself from the wet earth. Refusing the temptation of setting up a "rival line" to the now abandoned farmhouse out at the dam, he is content to master the technological devices needed for gardening, not for others, but to sustain himself.[5] As the ex-farm begins to be subject to surveillance, from both ground and air, however, K and his dam activities have to be rendered surreptitiously: "the vanes of the pump must never be seen to be moving, the dam must always seem to be empty" (102)—except by moonlight. The far hinterland is subject to its aerial dimensions as much as to war and contestation on the ground; under cover of night, some movement and a little water becomes possible.

II

The story of the settler hydropolitics of the Karoo, as Lesley Green (2020) has termed it, has often been told in relation to the windmill and, more recently, the fracking derrick. If the !Xam and Khoena peoples who lived in dry semi-desert Karoo lands before colonialism developed a complex mythology around rain—both as sky fall and as stored earth waters in the aquifers below—then the windmill, Green shows, produced a new technological era. The discovery of diamond-bearing rock in the northern Karoo in 1869 brought colonialists, industrialists, and migrant labor to the region, and farmers, who "no longer needing to wait for rain" (64), gained the means to turn locals into indentured servants and laborers

[4] For an earlier rendition of this argument, extended substantially in this chapter, see Hofmeyr et al. (2022).

[5] Coetzee returns repeatedly to the figure of the dam and the wind-pump across his work. In *Boyhood* (1997), the first of a trilogy of third-person memoirs, we read that "[j]ust above the farmhouse is a stone-walled dam, twelve feet square, filled by a wind-pump, which provides water for the house and garden" (85). In the later memoir *Summertime* (2009), John describes how the dam used to be filled by a wind-pump, was then replaced by a diesel-driven pump, but when the oil price rocketed it was necessary to "go back to God's wind after all" (95). This is in the Kroup region (kroup is a Khoi word for 'dry place'), where "it has rained not a drop in the last two years" (103).

instead. Erratic rain had made farming a risky enterprise; windmills meant that, as Green writes, "air and aquifer entered into a new relationship with the landscape. There was less need to wait for rain. Wind could make water (and an entire industry of water diviners sprung up)" (64). The settler novel, or the farm novel Coetzee identifies as central to 'white writing,' meanwhile, showed its own signs of both the wet and the dry, as we have seen above. Hofmeyr (2021) has argued that, even as the form was relocated to the semi-arid interior of South Africa, it persisted: "the imported British novel presupposed abundant water as much for its plotlines as for the production of its paper" (n.p). Coetzee intervenes in this imported logic, as K reduces the full reflective water surfaces of the farm dam to just a trickle, in a feint of a protective aridity.

For Michael K, it is the small wind-pump at the dam that provides him with the minor technology to begin on a different condition of being, mode of life, and narrative trajectory. Here in the 'far hinterland,' as Neel (2018) might term it, he sets about trying to redefine the conditions of, and relations between, extraction, abandonment, and care. Alone in the "burrow" he has constructed near the dam or out in the open veld in moonlight, he thinks repeatedly of his mother's life. Of the extraction of her labor until she was old and sick, and subject to abandonment, in the cold and rain, by the economy that fed off, extracted, the energies of her body itself. And of his attempted escape from "camp life," his retreat to the stony ground and his extraction of just enough water to nourish his plants, so that he could eat, re-situating his work as a gardener, shepherding the earth in order to feed himself. K embraces "idleness versus surreptitious theft from involuntary labour" (114). Living beyond the reach of calendar and clock, half awake, half asleep, he thinks of himself as being "like a lizard under a stone" (116).[6] In truth, he is "waiting for the army to forget him" (103). Surely, "I can think of myself as lost" (66), he muses. To "live so that he leaves no trace of his living," he takes succor from his vision that "every being of this earth will be washed clean by the rain, dried by the sun, scoured by the wind" and "there will not be a grain left

[6] In Coetzee's *Boyhood*, the narrator, "John," is by himself in a dry river bed as a train passes over a railway bridge, thinking about "sustenance in this arid earth" (92); of the Karoo as "the only place in the world he wants to be, live as he wants to live: without belonging to a family" (93). He wants to be a creature of the desert, like a lizard and is proud of how little he drinks" (85).

bearing my marks" (just as his mother has been pluvially washed and "drawn up into the leaves of grass") (124).

Thus it is, in the colonial and later apartheid matrix of power, that the South African hinterland, or more specifically the Karoo as hinterland, becomes the site of both extraction and abundance.[7] Or at least Coetzee, in this enduringly brilliant novel, incorporates registers of both in Michael K's quest for freedom and self-possession, subsistence, and regeneration. The extraction and abundance of land, animals, and aquifers that played into the conditions of both death and life in this region are vividly captured in K's unfolding story. In South African historiography, moreover, hinterlands have most often been conceptualized as "frontier zones" or as "the interior." As in the Karoo, they were shaped by the dynamics of colonial expansion, in generally dry and rocky lands north of Cape Town, and stretching past the Orange River, in a ruthless quest for land, labor, and livestock resources. What this historiographic record seldom dwells on, and what this chapter tries to open up, are the wet registers and pluvialities that shape relations of extraction, abandonment, and care in these hinterlands.

When an army commando, searching for aiders and abettors to those who have blown up Prince Albert's water supply come through, they variously smash up the wind-pump at the dam and find Michael K malnourished, weak, and close to death.[8] K is captured again by a system intent on putting him back to work and extracting, too, his story, which amounts to attributing to him a narrative that is not his own ("You want to live…then tell your story" [150]). Part of that attempted extraction is getting him to

[7] "He felt a deep joy in his physical being" (102), "time poured upon him in an unending stream" (102), and, eating the food of his own labor, he felt "thankfulness like a gush of water" (113); "he was himself … all that was moving was time, bearing him onward in its flow" (115). Interestingly, joy is severally imagined here as watery.

[8] The "soldiers" that find K and mine the dam, having blown up the ruined farmhouse, are an unspecified force in the deliberately ambiguous "time of war" that the novel depicts. They carry echoes of the "commando" that Nigel Penn (2005) depicts in his study of the Cape Interior, operating in zones of fractured sovereignty, where no single power held indisputable sway. These colonial commandos proceeded via warfare, conquest, annihilation, or incorporation of prior inhabitants of the land (the Khoisan) into colonial society, to profoundly shape the racial hierarchy that emerged in modern South Africa before the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in the nineteenth century. Instances of primary resistance, guerrilla warfare, rebellion, flight, and protest abounded, Penn shows, as some groups removed themselves beyond the limits of colonial settlement altogether, while others became colonial fugitives: company deserters, bandits, and assorted criminals.

admit to being either a victim or in the resistance, which he is not, except insofar as he is resisting the social and political system which repeatedly attempts to capture him in its carceral logics by refusing to be a term in it—an endeavor for which he needs, first and foremost, water. Lying in bed at the prison hospital to which he has been taken, staring up at the electric fan and refusing to eat, K speaks only to say "I am not in the war" (138) to the medical officer attending to him. He dreams of his garden next to the dam and the waters beneath the earth that offered his pumpkins succor.

Michael K, we could say, must depend materially but also imaginatively on the deep underground waters beneath the hydrocolonialities of the arid surface. Waldo in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), as Maria Geustyn (2020) has pointed out, looks at the stones and hills of the Karoo, after his friend and young feminist Lyndall has decried the dryness of history, and conjures up their "geologic and submersive" past[9] ("what are dry lands were once lakes…the stones rolled together by the water"), at once material and immaterial ("it seems that the stones are really speaking—speaking of the old things, of the time when the strange fishes and animals lived that are turned into stone now, and the lakes were here" [17]).[10] If Waldo suffers the aridity of authoritarian settler cultures that refuse and refute imaginative freedom and escape, K, in his attempt to "live nowhere" (119), needs to drink from fossil waters in order to maintain life.[11] Pluvial time takes on an ontological and metaphysical quality ever deepening in the hinterlands of this novel, only intensified as K lies curled in a fetal position of refusal in his prison-hospital bed as the new site of his social incarceration. "He is like a stone, a pebble … since the dawn of time. Cannot eat camp food, does whatever stick insects do to maintain life," says the medical officer of K (135). Full of liberal hubris, the officer tries to invent a story for K as a universal or original soul. He does so oceanically. "There is no home left for universal souls, except perhaps in Antarctica or on the high seas," says the medical officer portentously; and, as a soul "without history," "[y]ou are the last of your kind, a creature left over from an earlier age, like the coelacanth" (151).

[9] I draw this phrasing from Hofmeyr et al. (2022).

[10] This point is made, and extended, in Hofmeyr et al. (2022).

[11] That Waldo is white and K is "Coloured" and thus subject to far greater dispossession in the system depicted only sharpens this divide.

Simon van Schalkwyk, in an essay on Rustum Kozain's poetry, writes about the coelacanth as embodying "an especially curious mode of temporality" (2022, 414). Believed to have been extinct for more than 66 million years, the coelacanth's reappearance off the coast of Chalumna River on the East Coast of South Africa in 1938 represents "a curiosity of deep-time": a creature that does not go extinct but appears rather to have only temporarily disappeared from the fossil record, sometimes for millions of years, before reappearing unchanged. Its survival is figured as something "intermittent and resistant to temporal codes of development or progression," a state "decimated and unchanged," writes van Schalkwyk (2022, 414), adding that far from representing a long-lost past concordant with "the telos of modernity," the coelacanth rather announces "an alternate living present," of an erased or concealed or vaporized indigeneity that continues "alongside, and in spite of settler colonial ruin" (D'Oleo 2019).

What the medical officer misses, in his narrative charity, is that K, like the coelacanth, lives not out of time but submerged inside of history in its most intense form, the time of war. Moreover, as K lives not only in temporal layeredness and spatial contiguity across near and far hinterland, desert and ocean, in rain and drought, so, too, do coelacanths bear bodily histories of both land and water: living in the oceanic depths, they are believed to be the closest living fish to tetrapods, who lived on land. Thinking with the coelacanth, of K as coelacanth, we arrive at an altogether different imaginary of dry land than has generally been visible.[12]

Back at Sea Point, Cape Town, after his release from the prison-hospital, K walks among the rocks peering into the tidal pools, where he sees snails and anemones "living lives of their own" (177). Forced again into the role of vagrant or charity case, K longs to live a life of his own, as the sea creatures do. Clearly close to death, he plans a new trip to the hinterlands, with a teaspoon and a string in his pocket, which he will lower into the

[12] I also note here Meg Samuelson's careful tracing of Coetzee's repeated turn to littoral settings as part of what she reads as an orientation "southward" (2021, 3) across his work. If the Karoo was "the country of his heart," as he writes in *Boyhood*, she shows how he later explores "a landscape iterated across the southern temperate zone," spaces that have experienced comparable "histories of colonial invasion and settlement" (Samuelson 2021, 5).

waters of the earth—and live a life that belongs to him. In this complex, deeply psychic sense, the hinterland becomes a sea-space.[13]

Peters and Steinberg write about how the ocean exceeds itself and its liquidity to become embodied, internalizing itself within the subjects that constitute the marine environment, citing Safina's view that "we are wrapped around an ocean within" (1997, 435). Thus, there is a seawater environment that permeates far inland, scientifically and imaginatively, in an embodied way. Their notion of a hypersea points to a global environment that is fundamentally oceanic in nature, "even as its fluidity is superficially masked by a prevailing materiality of dryness" (Peters and Steinberg 2019, 297). This is what they call the more-than-wet "hydrosphere." What I have sought to show is that relations of extraction and abandonment in the hinterland are written in registers of wet and dry that are unpredictable, uncertain, and may be deeply "interior" to the self.

III

In the hydropolitics of the looped hinterland of sea, city, and semi-arid desert today, the windmills still turn on the remote farms and back gardens of the dwellers of the town of Prince Albert, but so too do the fracking derricks plunge into the aquifers below.[14] Before subsistence farming, or gardening, comes the question of the rain (or Rain, as we will see) and of the waters below, facing increasing drought but also contamination.

Fracking wells, lined by cement, targeting Karoo methane, trapped in shale, "a power source at the far end of recoverable petroleats" (Green 2020, 62) are, many studies show, discharging hundreds of waste chemicals into shallow ground waters as well as "deep formation waters" (Vengosh et al. 2014, 8334). Petro-capitalists are proceeding as if cement offers "immunity to geological time" (Green 2020, 63) and to the physics

[13] Lying on a piece of old cardboard left by a "vagrant" before him, in the very cupboard he had shared with his mother before their trip to the hinterlands, K thinks: "my mistake was to plant all my seeds together in one patch" (183). He should have planted them one at a time over miles of veld in "patches of soil no larger than my hand" and drawn a map of where they were so that every night he could "make a tour and water them" (183), he surmises, devising an ever more miniaturized politics of escape from systemic capture.

[14] This looped hinterland is defined by the industrial and logistical economic loop we can draw between Cape Town, the Karoo, and Prince Albert, traversed by the railways and the road system, servicing the sheep farming industry and the tourist market, amongst other imperatives.

of flows between states of matter: "Fracking puts at risk the Karoo's aquifers, which were formed and filled on a fossil timescale. Harming them, without knowing either the extent of their interconnections, would potentially cause effects at fossil timescales. … thus the need to address not only the rights of future generations but the rights of future forms of life. Fracking sets in motion molecular flows that cross state, property and bodily lines" (Green 2020, 73). Fracking cannot be managed by property law, Green points out, which at this point does not address biogeochemical flows.[15]

Considering these "ecopolitical" questions for the future of the Karoo, Green turns to the relationships that people, land, and living beings have with rain. Recalling the Bleek and Lloyd archive of !Xam stories worked on by Pippa Skotnes, she glimpses in them "a Rain that is not a Thing but a being who transforms landscapes and plants, animals and people," and that is "linked to falling stars, finding food, flowers, swallows and hunting" (2020, 75). At issue for her is "not the reality of the Rain Being, but the fiction of corporate mastery. The Rain being stands as a figure reminding markets and technologies and legal regimes that they may extract, but they cannot live without the relations that compose life in this dry landscape" (2020, 76). The idea of a responsive earth is a reminder that the dry interior of South Africa is not a silently "enduring vista awaiting extraction but … a calling to life the dust, plants and creatures of the Karoo, inviting those who would live here to share in that convocation" (Green 2020, 76).

Dominating the front page of the *Prince Albert Friend*, the local newspaper, when I visit in December 2021, is rainfall. "When is a drought not a drought?" poses the unusual headline. The opening paragraph provides its answer: "There is no word to describe it." This is because a drought is "just a dry patch in a series of normal rainfall years," the article explains. Rainfall records have been kept for the town since the 1880s, showing some wet cycles and some dry; the last few years, however, have been "disastrously dry" (Milton-Dean and Dean 2021, 1). Any rain that falls now "returns to the atmosphere," available to neither people nor plants, it continues; temperatures are rising to the mid-40s in summer, many plants are dying, and "you can't maintain a lawn" (Milton-Dean and Dean 2021,

[15] Land redistribution is an urgent task in South Africa, Green goes on, and "land redistribution with poisoned water and soils would leave to future generations a new, cruel historical legacy of apartheid: this time in toxic reparations" (2020, 73).

2). The article mentions climate change, but what it seems to be suggesting is that the "disastrously dry" is not yet in the lexicon of what can quite be known in this region.[16]

Hofmeyr (2021) has written about how South African literature has struggled to become "drought-resistant," even where Olive Schreiner and Bessie Head have experimented with "drier forms." Head wrote out of "spare conditions," writing "a saga about the elements" which resituated "the media of anti-colonial nationalism" (Hofmeyr 2021). In thinking with Hofmeyr about what a wider drought-resistant literature might look like, we could remind ourselves that groundwater is often the most exploited and crucial water resource available in arid areas. It, like coal or gold deposits, will eventually be used up completely. K's attempts to survive outside of camp life and property relations in the tillite hills above Prince Albert would today be impossible, as drought deepens into the "disastrously dry" of catastrophic climate change.[17]

In the local museum, swallow-like figures, capped with antelope ears and human-like arms, appear on rock-paintings from the area.[18] The placard informs the visitor that these were assumed to be versions of the water spirits (referred in some Southern African traditions as the more gendered

[16] In the back gardens of the houses of the small town, there are reservoir dams—and windmills. The huge windmills loom high over the houses. It is an odd sight. In the township of North End, adjacent but separate from the town, there is no sign of any water anywhere, no dam, leiwater, or windmill in sight. Separating the town and township is the *drankwinkel*, selling liquid of one form or another; just inside the town boundary is the correctional services prison. Apartheid social engineering could be thought of in the registers of the wet and the dry in this way, with liquor and incarceration mediating the violent separation of town/ship.

[17] Dark grey tillite was laid down by glaciers that moved across the Karoo 300 million years ago, when Africa was part of Gondwanaland. The stones now found in this grey rock were carried by ice-sheets from the north. Tillite hills, such as those near Prince Albert, have a characteristic ragged look. The soils they produce are often saline. Scientists predict increased aridity in the Karoo, even given current levels (see Estler et al. 2006).

[18] The placard reads: "Swallow painting from Scholtzkloof, Prince Albert. The strange head and human-like arms indicate a symbolic rather than literal meaning. It emerges from a natural crack (top left) and flies towards a larger hole in the rock face (right: out of view). The San believed that the rock on which they painted represented a 'screen' between the everyday world and the unseen dimension that lay behind. The swallow, like a spirit in flight, is heading towards the realm beyond the rock. The swallow has been painted below the knee-level and is clearly not meant to be decorative."

watermeisies) in the region.[19] Yet when they were shown to "San prisoners" in the local prison down the road, I was told by a tour guide, they identified them immediately as rain-gods.

IV

For Michael K (and Anna K), pluviality is the harbinger and medium of both death and life. Rain is not decorative, it is occurrence (event) and substance (or infrastructure). In the hinterland, it is also a potential mode or condition of care of the self. For K, hinterland is or could be a place of regeneration—not just a zone of extraction or a zone of abandonment. This is so, however, in an individualizing way, since he is trying to escape the iron cage society has become. No collective escape is proffered by this novel (which is perhaps striking at the time of the novel's writing, when many were engaged in the collective liberation struggle against late apartheid). No community is available to K as such, only communion with his dead mother (an apparent community of fellow 'vagrants' and disenfranchised people encountered on his return to Sea Point offers only anonymous sex, over-drinking, and theft of his minimal possessions, including his pumpkin seeds, while he is asleep). It is perhaps the waters of deep time, the fossil waters of the aquifers of the Karoo, that offer him not only water for food but the most sustained mirror, a self-reflective if submerged surface rather than the still waters of the dam, which must be minimized to a trickle, used and emptied out, surreptitious waters under cover of aridity.

Coetzee's novel is striking for its hinterland reticulations: his multiple lists of hinterland infrastructures operate as mini supply chains of their own, galvanizing the narrative itself with the logistics and labor conditions along the production lines of South Africa's uplands and inlands.[20] Throughout the novel, engineering, infrastructural, and ontological

[19] In her PhD thesis entitled "Of Water and Water Spirits in Southern African Literature," Confidence Joseph (2021) discusses how "aquatic spatial beings" can be thought of as innovative hermeneutic devices embedded in multiple historical contexts, with complex relationships to water's materialities. Growing up in the "arid city of Bulawayo," she recalls minimal encounters with "water bodies," but an abundance of stories of water spirits. Walking in Prince Albert, I came across a non-binary *watermeisie* painted onto a decorated garbage bin, part of an artist's project throughout the town.

[20] Allowed out of a camp once on a Sunday, K ventures into Prince Albert, where he encounters the shop full of "galvanised iron bath tubs, bicycle wheels, fan belts and radiator hoses, bins of nails, pyramids of plastic buckets, canned goods, patent medicines, sweets, babywear and cold drinks" (50) which can still be seen in Prince Albert today.

projects both large and small are subjected to climatic and ontological conditions of rain and flooding, drought and aridity.[21] These pluvialities become elemental or earth infrastructures of their own (see Nuttall 2021). And they form a highly complex rendition of "pluvial time," (Nuttall, 2020) drawing on the figuration of material and immaterial waters to deepen the temporal registers of novelistic form.

The hinterland is "not distinguished by any particular physical or social geography," writes Esther Peeren in this volume: it is "brought into being and put in the service of an evolving global capitalist-colonialist economy." Yet our analyses have also to pay close attention, more than ever, to the shifting forces of its elemental life. These, too, shape the conditions of extraction, abandonment, becoming lost, regeneration, self-care, and dreaming. If Peeren's reading is of a hinterland and a state of being "at sea," submerged under the ocean in a time of ruinous climate change and sea-level rise, mine has explored a hydrocolonial terrain and form of subjectivity written in the registers of wet and dry, pluviality and drought.

Coetzee explores a denser rubric of change than one offered by resistance in its conventional forms: like the choke-points of logistics circulation, which seem to offer a way to break open or fracture the stranglehold of the contemporary capitalist machine, and its "operational fantasies" (Chua et al. 2018), but don't really, K is re-captured repeatedly—yet his imagination and his refusal to be a cog in the political and narrative system is watered by the more-than-wet registers of his elemental world. Does his

[21] Rila Mukherjee writes about earlier spatial shifts within capitalism in which waterscapes became separated, as new importance was placed on the terrestrial sphere and on the development of pockets of land within the capitalist enterprise. She shows how important it is to re-join land and water to reach for a more "encompassing spatiality" (2014, 87) of history and place. Raymond Williams, writing about the hinterland as he called it in the singular, showed with such clarity how, as networks of income became not only industrial but imperialist, the countries of Empire were turned into Europe's hinterlands, and a rural mode of "the countryside" was built in the metropole on the profits. Williams welded, as a critical practice, this wider system of relations with sometimes minute and subtle "physical awarenesses" in which so much history and feeling is held: for altering connections and intermediate places, for "what earth, which tree, by whose labour or locomotion" (1973, 7–8) and, behind all of this, for the personal pressures and commitments emerging from his own history and self. Williams's systems of relations and structures of feeling do not, however, dwell on water. Hydrocolonialism (Hofmeyr 2022), and its attendant practices of reading for water, changes the picture. Doing so in a time of accelerating climate crisis exacerbates the need for that shift.

coming death at the end of the novel suggest the triumph of capitalism-colonialism? Or the always-alive dreamlife of the trip to the hinterlands, for succor and sustenance, the waters of the earth and gardening? It suggests both.

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