

Shifting Representations of South Africa
in
National Geographic Magazine
1960-2006:
Nature as Allegory

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It has been submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Publishing Studies), in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Natalia Anderson

9th day of February, 2009.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
List of Tables and Figures	viii
Preface	xii
Introduction.....	1
PART ONE	
<u>Theoretical Framework and Related Literature</u>	
Chapter 1: Styling nature, <i>Naturalising Allegory</i>	11
1.1. Definitions – ‘Ecocriticism’, ‘Nature’, ‘Allegory’.....	12
1.2. Typological Allegory.....	24
1.2.1. Roderick Frazier Nash: <u>Wilderness and the American Mind</u>	24
1.2.1(i) Barney Nelson – Commentaries and Criticisms.....	32
1.2.1(ii) South African Context.....	37
1.2.2. Tropes of nature.....	48
1.3. Psychological Allegory.....	61
1.3.1. ‘Nature as Allegory’ and the ‘elements’.....	61
1.3.2. ‘Nature as Allegory’ and the ‘kingdom of plants’.....	65
1.3.3. ‘Nature as Allegory’ and ‘megafauna’.....	69
1.4. Nature, Allegory and National Geographic.....	74
Conclusion.....	85
PART TWO	
<u>Historical Overview: (1960-2006)</u>	
Chapter 2: Representations: 1962 – Mapping Eden.....	88
2.1. Historical Overview.....	88
2.2. Synopsis.....	91
2.3. The Palliative Garden Trope.....	96
Case Study A: Cultivating Golden Allegories in the Republic of South Africa.....	106
Conclusion.....	118
Chapter 3: Representations: 1977 – Re-representing the ‘Garden’.....	122
3.1. Historical Overview.....	122
3.2. Synopsis.....	128

3.3. Imagining Kruger	138
Case Study B: ‘Thundering’ African Herds:	
The Ideological Airspace of the Aerial Photograph.....	141
Conclusion.....	148
Chapter 4: Representations: 1986 - <i>Desert Solitaire</i> Wilderness.....	150
4.1. Historical Overview and Synopsis	150
Case Study C: The Colonial and Post-Colonial Gaze: Allegorising Landscape.....	158
Conclusion.....	165
Chapter 5: Representations: 1996 - South Africa’s Edens.....	169
5.1. Historical Overview and Synopsis.....	171
5.2. Re-imagining Kruger.....	173
5.3. Geographic Felinephilia? Cove[r]ted Cats and Dormant Dogs	178
5.4. Man versus Beast: Replaying Ancient Battles of Good over Evil.....	187
Case Study D: Spatial and Temporal Metamorphosis:	
From the ‘ <i>Twilight</i> of Apartheid’ to ‘ <i>spring</i> in a new democracy’.....	194
Conclusion.....	202
Chapter 6: Representations: 2002 – Nature as Theatre: ‘the greatest shoal on earth’.....	209
6.1. Historical Overview and Synopsis	209
6.2. Novak’s Typology.....	210
6.3. Rethinking the Shark.....	212
6.4. Dramatising Nature.....	218
Case Study E: Allegorical Names: South Africa Personified.....	223
Conclusion.....	228
Chapter 7: Reflections: Synthesis of Shifting Representations: (1960-	
2006).....	231
7.1. Typological Allegory.....	233
7.2. Psychological Allegory.....	240

INTRODUCTION

‘green thinking’

With time, the subject matter, point of view, and technical execution of photography change. Reportage changes as well, even styles of titles. Today we would hardly call radioactive atoms ‘obedient’ and ‘friendly’ as we did in two titles during the 1950s. Just as parents can embarrass their children, so our former attitudes and expressions often seem dated. Put in the broader perspective of two or three more generations, though, and the whole takes on the cast of history.

-Editor William Garrett, introducing the National Geographic Magazine Centennial Index (1888-1988): Editorial, ‘Witness to a Century of Change’ (NG/Feb1989/275).

Beautiful, influential, familiar and famous predominantly for its photographs, is there any other institution more widely associated with nature than National Geographic? Up until 1979, it was ‘primarily’ a magazine of ‘natural history’ (Pauly, 1979:518). Although this no longer seems to be the case,¹ the representation of nature has always been, and continues to be, a consistent feature in the magazine. As such, National Geographic is arguably, still ‘an important source of popular perceptions and misperceptions of the natural world and the scientific endeavour’ (Pauly, 1979:518).²

Through the National Geographic looking glass we gaze at the natural world as did generations around the globe before us. While children are often disappointed with zoos because of the inactivity of the animals and their tendency not to meet the human gaze (Berger, 1980:21), in the glossy pages of National Geographic, they would not have to page through too many copies to find an animal seemingly looking squarely at them.³ In this way imaged nature, can often be more animated - than ‘reel’ nature.⁴

¹ I have not included environmental issues in the way I have defined nature here.

² Pauly (1979) makes this comment about the National Geographic Society in the context of its scientific research expeditions, but there is actually no reason why one should not extrapolate this role to its magazine, particularly as the magazine generally carried news of these expeditions.

³ This is an informal observation based on years of reading both magazines. Although, admittedly, the earlier one goes back the harder it seems to find this face-to-face image.

⁴ This conclusion is based on my own informal observations but has been influenced by Eco (1986), who speaks of ‘hyperreality’, and Lawrence, (2001). In addition, Mitman’s book, Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on film (1999), is the inspiration for this pun.

The central concern of this report, then, is the way that the magazine has imagined the relationship that humans have, and have had with nature, and the way this has been imaged and written about. Its central contention is that the representation of nature in National Geographic's South Africa is an allegory. The magazine does not present a nature that is a simple, objective recording of physical actualities its staff sees in the environment. Through selection, framing and discourse, the nature that we are shown has a meta-text that is polysemic. Out of the multitudinous meanings it could have, this study is primarily concerned with two: the first, what the images *reveal* about the human-nature relationship at that particular point in history; the second, how these images *reflect* popular international perceptions about the socio-political climate in the country at various times.

This binary of *reveal* and *reflect*, fits neatly into Barney's (1979) sub-division of allegory into the two categories of 'typological' and 'psychological'. Before launching into a definition of typological allegory, and to assist the reader to better understand what it entails, a quote from an ecocritical text is useful: 'Every epoch, age and era had "its own nature," with myth, history and ideology as its dominant shaping forces' (Herzogenrath, 2000:blurb). This statement is based on constructivist theory that purports that people throughout history have viewed the literal environment through a cultural lens. As attitudes towards nature have changed, the perceptions of that environment have changed. Conversely, as physical, environmental, economic or other conditions have changed, attitudes toward nature have also changed.

Presumably then, the images of nature that National Geographic has produced throughout its history have not been invariant but have evolved in relation to a variety of broader developments. As a consequence of shifting cultural perspectives, environmental circumstances, and other factors, nature has been talked about differently, and imaged differently, in different historical periods. If this logical sequence is reversed, then a study of the images, and the discourses that frame these images, would reveal the underlying ideology and history that have influenced their construction.

It follows, then, that a comparison of the representations of 'green' South Africa, at two crucial points in its history, would *reveal* two unique *types* of relationships with nature. These may form a complete contrast with each other, or repeat various themes. From comparisons like these, certain conventional ways of representing nature emerge. These can be seen as genres or tropes. These tend to reappear in different contexts. Typological allegory is therefore concerned with genre and history. This academic approach to nature, as employing certain ideologies that influence the way it is represented, has been relatively well researched, outside the yellow borders of National Geographic, that is. This would include Nash (1969), Kolodny (1975), Coetzee (1984), Slater (1987), Buell (1995), Garrard (2004).

While topological allegory is concerned with *revealing* the dynamics of the human-nature relationship, psychological allegory is concerned with how depictions of South African nature within the magazine, *reflect* the socio-political climate of the country. Again, before delivering a theoretical statement, a cue can be taken from Comaroff and Comaroff 's seminal essay (2000), from where the term, 'nature as allegory' was culled. I do this at the risk of greatly simplifying their abstract and complex argument, and the broader global and theoretical developments within which they situate it. The essay analyses and describes the public discourse around the unprecedented rampant fires on Table Mountain in 2000. This took on the form of highly emotive 'hate-speech' against the 'alien vegetation' that was perceived as being responsible for the disaster. Rather than seeing this development as apolitical and separate from other anxieties in post-apartheid South Africa, they insist that,

It is tempting in the South African case, to invoke yet another connotation - one owed to Durkheim - according to which processes in nature are taken to be a direct **reflection** of processes in society. Some local commentators did precisely this ... finding in the panic about invasive plants a **mirror** for the angst about immigrants (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:36) (My emphasis).

In translating this observation to this report, it seems feasible to say that the shifting representations of nature in National Geographic's South Africa ventriloquise the magazine's perceptions of the socio-political climate in the country at any given point in history. It is also a mirror for the magazine's own ideologies that extend beyond its representation of South Africa. This psycho-historical perspective on the human-nature relationship is less

documented. The theorists that have been drawn on include Kolodny (1975), Mackenzie (1984), Ritvo (1987), and Baker (1993).

Kolodny's inclusion in both categories indicates that they are inter-linked, and that although separate space has been allocated for them, there is likely to be some overlap in the discussions. More importantly, to view the selection of images of nature of National Geographic's South Africa as being entirely metaphorical or allegorical in ontology, is simplistic. The investigation needs to be seen as simply highlighting an area of research that has previously been overlooked. Certainly, given the magazine's startling visions of nature, it is surprising that despite being researched so broadly, the magazine's representation of the natural world has drawn such scant academic irrigation.

Most academic studies of the society and its magazine have followed Said, the prophet of post-colonial studies, in an analysis of the ethnographic content of the magazine, and the part that has played in the formation of western identity. In adapting his ideas to National Geographic, the focus has been on the contrastive role that the photographs of the developing world in the magazine have played in the construction of American national identity (see for example Lutz 1993, Tuason 1999, Steet 2000, Beaudreau 2002, Jansson 2003).⁵ Other academics, like archaeologist Gero (1990), have written about US nationalist ideology and expansionism. A few academic and journalistic investigations have looked at the society's history (for example Pauly 1979). Only Donna Haraway (1989), in her examination of primates within National Geographic television documentaries, deals primarily with the natural world. .

In its totality, then, academic study of the magazine has straddled several disciplines and several regions.⁶ To this menagerie this report will officially add Publishing Studies. Strictly speaking, though, it is more of a sociological study. In addition, it draws on work in history,

⁵ This method is based on psychoanalysis, where identity formation is seen as a comparative process in which the development of the ego requires an alter-ego.

⁶ These include Archaeology (Gero, 1990), Geography (Jansson, 2003), Anthropology and Sociology (Lutz, 1993). Specific regions include the Phillipines (Tuason, 1999), the American South (Jansson, 2003), Canada (Beaudreau, 2002) and the Middle East (Steet, 2000). This list is not exhaustive, but covers a fairly wide range.

geography, anthropology, cultural studies, colonial discourse studies, nationalism, the visual and literary arts and the natural sciences,⁷ to investigate the way National Geographic has imagined South Africa and the South African relationship with nature. These images both shape (Beaudreau, 2002:517-519), and are influenced by the way its readership views the country.⁸

The study centres around six articles over the period 1960-2006 that have ‘South Africa’ in their titles.⁹ The publication of these six features, coincide with significant political and public events in the country. While these form the caucus of the report, references to additional articles not listed in the sample are also made where appropriate. The emphasis, however, is not on the written part of the article, but on the 194 photographs within the sample. In this regard, the report runs parallel to most of the other academic writing cited above, in recognising the primacy of the visual in National Geographic. It deviates from them, by including what I have called, ‘supporting text’: the discourse that frames these photographs, and any information that could be garnered from an arbitrary scanning of the text, including extracts, captions, titles, sub-titles and blurbs. As a result, the research is more dependent on content and discourse analysis than might otherwise have been the case for a photographic study.¹⁰

Some observations of the photographic content of six articles in the sample, have been linked empirically, to measurements: this quantitative dimension was restricted to the calibration of the content of the photographs and noted, for example, the percentage of the photographic narrative that had an ‘outdoor’ setting. Other aspects include ‘natural environment’, ‘race’, ‘gender’, ‘weather’ and ‘wildlife’. Comparative analysis was then done using both types of

⁷ Let me indulgently add, that having come from an educational background, I had no knowledge at all about most of these fields before beginning the report, nor had I ever heard of any of the scholars mentioned in this report. In fact, I practically did a B.A. from scratch!

⁸ In this way, I argue differently from Beaudreau (2000). We agree that the magazine shapes public perceptions of Canada. I add, largely based on the events around the 1977 South African article, that this is a cyclical and not a uni-linear process. The American public’s perceptions of the country also shape the construction of the country in its magazine.

⁹ The only article that did not comfortably belong in this biome was a piece titled, ‘Adventures with South Africa’s Black Eagles’ (NG/136/4/Oct1969). This feature was a prelude to Jeanne Cowden’s semi-autobiographical work, *For the Love of an Eagle*, that was published a few years later in Cape Town and included the photographs from the original article. Here, the words, ‘South Africa’, are used simply to establish location, rather than to make some kind of commentary on the state of the nation. Consequently it was culled.

¹⁰ This was deemed necessary as there is a tendency for certain images to reincarnate in the magazine (Beaudreau, 2000). This implies in turn, that different images can be framed differently in different contexts.

data, from one text in the sample to the next, to plot the ‘evolution’ of thinking about nature.¹¹

The limits, 1960 to 2006, were consciously set and proved fortuitous, because they incorporated significant national, continental, international and editorial developments. The year 1960, saw the Sharpeville killings put South Africa on ‘the world’s radar’ (Rantao, 2006). One assumes then, that the representation of the country in the magazine would have been affected by this seismic event. The ceiling of the study, 2006, is momentous for a reason more related to this report. It is the year that a trans-frontier park was formed between Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. It seemed appropriate to end at this point because this amalgamation could be seen in some ways, as a climax in the country’s environmental history.

This stretch of local history, from 1960 to 2006, also encloses the launch and burgeoning growth of the environmental movement globally. Journalist, Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, is credited with kick-starting environmentalism. First published in book form in 1962, the controversial but groundbreaking work, drew public attention to the dangers of pesticides, and led to the creation of the field of ecology. The prefix ‘eco’ is now firmly implanted in popular culture. Ex-US presidential candidate, Al Gore, also ensured his place in the environmental history books with the Oscar, Emmy, and Nobel Peace Prize winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, in 2006. The apocalyptic film alerted audiences on the movie circuit, to the imminent threat of global climatic and ecological collapse, one that has since been parodied with images of lonesome polar bears on tiny, isolated, icebergs.

As a final consideration, there were two National Geographic editions entirely devoted to Africa, one in September 1960, and the other, in September 2005. Both had the title – ‘**Africa**’, printed boldly against a plain white background. Both the editions took a

¹¹ I have used this word ‘evolution’ hesitantly as it implies that there has been ‘progress’, and hence a judgement on ideologies of the past, whereas we know that the past has a way of re-surfacing. After all the ‘strides’ that modern science made, did we ever think that farmers would go back to hand weeding and that the world would view this enlightened practice? This example also demonstrates that the world’s thinking can sometimes be more circular than linear, like the title of the old T.E.D. (Transvaal Education Department) history textbook, *Tydkring* (‘Time Circles’).

comprehensive look at features of various regions, as well as social issues particular to various countries. An analysis of way the representation of Africa has shifted in these two editions is an interesting study in its own right, but one that will not be touched on in this report. Consequently, they have been mentioned, only because they form useful bookends for the demarcation for the beginning and end of the report.¹²

To allow for a historical tracking of the shifts in image and discourse that occur over these forty-six years, the structure of the report follows, for the most, the chronology pre-determined by the articles in the sample. The first chapter contains the requisite theoretical framework from which the report needs to proceed. The next five all have, as their locus, an article from the sample that has been listed at the front. All begin by giving an overview of the course the argument will take and by contextualising the article historically and where relevant, editorially. The main body of the chapter deals with typological allegory, while the case-study at the end showcases particular aspects of the article that demonstrate psychological allegory. Each chapter concludes by tying the key elements within it to the allegorical threads of the main argument. An overview of the report follows:

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and Related Literature provides detailed definitions for the three pivotal concepts around which the report revolves – Ecocriticism, nature and allegory. Nature is defined in terms of natural environments, like the Kruger National Park, and human-made environments like a garden. The allegorical dualism of typology and psychology is then dealt with substantively. The former profiles Roderick Frazier Nash's classic history of the social construction of nature, first published in 1969 and titled, Wilderness and the American Mind. This is followed by a listing of tropes, like the pastoral and the picturesque, that still influence photographs of nature even in contemporary contexts. Psychological allegory describes the way that discourse and imaging of the elements, the floral and animal realms, can reflect socio-political, ideological and colonial pre-occupations. Representations of nature, however, must always be reflected through the conceptual prism of

¹² The choice of 1960 as a baseline is also significant in terms of the process of decolonisation in Africa which began in 1957. This starting point allows for the tracking of that influence on the representations of Africa and South Africa within the magazine. Encompassing such a broad time span also meant that the impact of the Republic's reign from 1961 to 1994, versus that of the subsequent democratic political dispensation, on the representation and re-representation of South Africa's natural realm in National Geographic, could also be ascertained.

National Geographic's publishing principles, which include – balance, permanent value, timeliness, and the avoidance of partisanship and anything controversial.

Chapter 2: 'South Africa Close-up' (NG/122/5/Nov1962), was published during the period that the magazine is criticised for its idealised portrayal of the world. Criticisms which the magazine, as indicated in the opening quote, acknowledges and has since endeavoured to move away from. This particular article is analysed in relation to the other parts of the edition that showcase sub-Saharan Africa. It demonstrates that a unique identity is created for South Africa in part through the contrast of cultivation and agrarian abundance with wildlife and agrarian lack. This is achieved predominantly through the influence of tropes like the garden, Eden and certain colonial conventions that, in following the upheaval of the Sharpeville Massacre, unfortunately resulted in a representation of the land as invariable, peaceful, safe, and perhaps even subdued. The article could in effect, be sub-titled, 'Life in wonderful white South Africa'.

Chapter 3: 'South Africa's Lonely Ordeal' (NG/151/6/June1977), reverses the racial configuration of the garden metaphor of 1962. Whereas 1962, presented the national garden as secure, there is a slight sense of a threatening black majority that threatens to overrun the small, sheltered niche that white people occupy. Although this dyad is pervasive throughout the piece, there are a few pictures that break the stereotypical black-poor/white-rich divide. Published in the month of the one year anniversary of June 16, 1976, the article has a stronger journalistic flair, and some heart-rendering photographs, that were no doubt influenced by the volatile news coverage that followed this startling event. The article, was, as the editorial team expected, controversial, and resulted in strong criticism from various quarters, including the South African embassy. In accordance with the magazine's policy of balance, places that would be considered, natural environments, like Table Mountain, are showcased as apolitical, natural environments that are disconnected from the indigenous people. This is an ideology, in keeping with ecocentrism, that sought to separate nature and culture. The aerial photographs in this feature draw attention to the general pervasiveness of this visual perspective throughout the sample, as well as suggesting reasons for this phenomenon. I also argue that it is, at least in part, a colonial legacy, where the camera has replaced the gun, the

photographer has replaced the male hunter, and the aeroplane has replaced the horse or elephant.

Chapter 4: ‘Dilemma of Independence for South Africa’s Ndebele’ (NG/169/2/Feb1986), is published during a dire, economically depressed and turbulent time in South Africa, and so an invocation of the topos of wilderness seems the only plausible option for representation. This is not the wilderness of respite, but wilderness in the much older sense of the word that signifies desolation and disconnectedness. As a relatively grim portrait of the Ndebele, despite the sprightly cover, it continues the journalistic leaning set in the previous article that the magazine did on South Africa – almost a decade earlier! The case-study considers ideological and economic issues around landscape, and brings into prominence a high angle photograph from the article under discussion. By comparing an aerial station perspective from the 1962 article, it notes that the difference in depictions generally, and of the depiction of nature in particular, correlate with modernist and postmodernist conventions of representation of the ‘third world’. In this regard, the report draws largely on Pratt’s notorious, ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ scene, and its repercussions for the perceptions that the magazine generated of the South African context, during these two years.

Chapter 5: ‘The Twilight of Apartheid: Life in Black South Africa’ (NG/183/2/Feb1993) and **‘A Place for Parks in the New South Africa’ (NG/190/1/July1996)**, focuses on the second article, which in the hopeful circumstances of a nation reborn, entails a rational return to nature, with its connotations of growth, energy, replenishment and in small parts, rebirth. The first is included in the case-study. What is most noteworthy is the rise to prominence of the Kruger National Park, and the representation of its expert, yet also still developing, management, as a meta-text for the admiration that the world held for what was perceived as a peaceful and skilfully manoeuvred transition from apartheid to democracy. The largest part of the discussion, however, investigates the reasons for the general obsession with the African big cat, and presents as evidence, the number of covers that utilise images of great and little felines, as opposed to wild members of the dog family. The case-study considers the different representations of nature in the 1993 and 1996 articles and links them to the political circumstances that straddle this period of South African history. This chapter is not as tightly framed as the others.

Chapter 6: ‘South Africa’s Teeming Seas: Oceans of Plenty: Movable Feast’ (NG/Aug2002), breaks away from previous representations in that the allegorical connotations of the previous tropes that appeared in the sample are not as pronounced, and in some parts have disappeared altogether. Socio-political issues seem to have given way to the drama in the theatre of nature, or as it were, the marine world of the two oceans around the country. There is also an opportunity to observe the shark as it travels from being a dangerous ‘man-eater’ to being an endangered species, to having unlimited entertainment value as a fearsome and macabre creature. The case-study takes cognisance of articles that have been published in the post millennium context, and notes both the ambivalence of South Africa’s place in Africa, fostered largely by the sense of natural ‘wealth’, and its increasing convergence into the regional identity of Southern Africa, which presents as more problematic.

In the concluding remarks, the validity of allegory as an ideological device in the selection and framing of the photographs of nature in South Africa will be assessed. Other general observations of the representations of South Africa, over the entire historical trajectory from 1960 to 2006, will be made. The notes on typological and psychological allegory that have been made throughout the report, as they pertain to the way National Geographic has imagined the relationship that humans have with nature, will then be drawn together. The addendum contains notes on the methodology used to empiricise the photographic content, as this was too complex to enunciate at the outset.

PART ONE

Theoretical Framework and Related Literature

Chapter 1: Stylising Nature, *Naturalising* Allegory¹³

What is it about bats that makes people think Halloween instead of, say, Valentine's Day?

- National Geographic Kids Magazine, 'Change your BAT-ITUDE' (2007:28).

This chapter will define the pivotal concepts around which this research revolves – 'Ecocriticism', 'nature' and 'allegory'. The two types of allegory identified by Barney (1979) will then be engaged with separately. The first, 'typological allegory', utilises Roderick Nash's history of the concept of wilderness in America, and outlines some of the phases or 'types' of nature he identifies. A sketch is provided of some of the tropes of nature, and the discourse and nature associated with them, that can be found in some of the phases Nash identifies. The second, 'psychological allegory', discusses the concept as it operates within the elements, the floral kingdom and the animal world. To make for a well-rounded study, the concepts of nature and allegory have to be looked at within the specialised context of National Geographic itself. This is done in the last section. As an aside there are some notes on how some South African theorists have viewed nature. These are purposefully perfunctory, as they are only intended to give the reader a general idea, and are not part of the main thrust of the report.

¹³ The title is meant to pun on the word 'naturalizing'. The word *naturalis* is the Latin etymology of the word 'nature'. Since I have used this obscure pun in the title, I thought I would spend a little time explaining it. The word 'naturalize' means, to the average person, to make a foreigner a citizen of the country, or to introduce a plant into another region. In this case, the coined term is meant to refer to the way allegory, which is traditionally a rather stylised genre, becomes embedded in images of nature, in a way that is hard to recognise and hence, seems 'natural'. It is meant to contrast with the first part of the title – 'stylising nature'. Nature is understood as free and organic and yet there are certain modes of representing it according to certain ideologies that 'order' and 'arrange' it in various ways. Hence the nature we are shown is not simply being captured on film, but being 'stylised' to some extent. This process is not always conscious.

1.1. Definitions

Defining Ecocriticism

[A]ny analysis claiming to be ecocritical must define the parameter of “Ecocriticism.” Since its beginnings in 1996, Ecocriticism has sought, but not found, “a paradigm-inaugurating statement like Edward’s *Orientalism* (for colonial discourse studies) ...” (Buell 1091). Nevertheless, activity in this field has been frenetic.

-Simon C. Estok, ‘Theory from the fringes: Animals, Ecocriticism, Shakespeare’ (2007:61).

It is challenging to define ‘green criticism’ or ‘Ecocriticism’, partly because Ecocriticism is still very busy defining itself. Like all emerging interdisciplinary fields, it constantly seems to be outgrowing its own original self-imposed limits. In its infancy, Ecocriticism was ‘the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment’ (Glotfelty, 1996:xix), a definition that has now been cited so often in ecocritical studies that it has almost become a cliché.¹⁴ Rather than treating the environment as a backdrop, Ecocriticism takes an ‘earth-centred approach’ to literature (Glotfelty, 1996:xix). So for example, one could look at how nature was represented in various literary forms like novels. This has now grown into exploration of text in its broadest manifestation – print, image, art, TV and film. Popular scientific writing, such as National Geographic, would also fall in this ambit. The burgeoning study has reached even further into cultural studies – architecture, zoos, theme parks and shopping malls (Garrard, 2004:4).¹⁵ But Ecocriticism has gone even beyond this into cross-fertilising with other fields like Ecology, Environmental Studies and Geography. Scholars like Barney Nelson (2000) have even gone so far as to cite biological and agricultural research. It is probably best, then, to use Buell’s term (1995) ‘heterogeneous movement’ (1-2) to define Ecocriticism. In relating Ecocriticism to allegory, Ferrara’s comments on Rosendale’s book, *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory and the Environment* (2002) may be helpful:

¹⁴ This observation is based on the numerous postgraduate studies on nature-writing from American universities that are available on the internet.

¹⁵ Distinguishing between Ecocriticism and ‘green’ cultural studies is not always that easy. Bruce Boehrer’s, *Shakespeare among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England*, (2002), for example, seems like an ecocritical work but has been published under the banner of cultural studies.

It (Ecocriticism) analyses the role played by the natural environment in the community imagination at a specific historical moment, and examines the values assigned, or denied, to the concept of nature. Specifically, Ecocriticism concerns the **metaphorical** or factual **use of nature in literature** along with assumptions about nature from genres that, even when not addressing the topic directly, are concerned with the human-nature relationship.

(Ferrara, 2003:238) reviewing (Rosendale (ed.):2002) (My emphasis).

Rosendale's explanation identifies the two-pronged thrust of the report: it highlights, that different genres of literature reveal the various 'assumptions about nature' that have been operative at 'specific historical moment(s)'. This is what has been termed, 'typological allegory' in this report. The quote points further to the figurative way in which nature can be employed in a text. This is what has been termed, 'psychological allegory'. Apart from these two main concerns, Rosendale's definition strips away common perceptions about Ecocriticism. The first of these is that the text must deal with nature directly. Even texts that do not broach the subject directly though, can also make inflections about the human-nature relationship. It is this premise that has largely driven the report.

Then there is the matter of the 'natural environment' versus environments that speak less obviously about 'nature' as it is commonly understood. One example would be the Transkei, which is viewed as a rural place of abode, rather than a wilderness area. In the latter there is much more conspicuous intersection of nature and culture. This differentiation is dealt with in more detail in the section that follows.

Defining nature

At the beginning of the new millennium, evidence abounds that an American debate still rages over the meaning of "nature" At the same time, the contemporary tailoring of nature to postmodern needs inevitably reveals the conceptual difficulty of any possible, simple opposition between nature and culture as if they were clearly distinguishable domains ...

Blurb, From Virgin Land to Disney World: Nature and its Discontents in the USA of Yesterday and Today. [Herzogenrath, B. (ed.):2000]

“Nature” has a double meaning and represents at one and the same time both a physical realm and the realm of cultural ideals and norms - all of which we lump together as the “natural.”... Despite the fact, then, that nature is one of the most abstract and complicated concepts we have, nature nevertheless signifies all that is concrete, unmediated, and naturally given. It is this doubleness of meaning that makes the term “nature” so duplicitous that it should never be taken at face value.

-Kenneth R. Olwig, ‘Re-inventing Common Nature: Yosemite and Mount Rushmore - A Meandering Tale of a Double Nature’ (1995).

The discussion in the previous section suggested that ‘nature’ can be loosely grouped into two categories. Korfiatis (2003) provides a useful and formal framework for this photographic sorting in her analysis of ‘Images of Nature in Greek Primary School Textbooks’. Using the heading ‘Types of Nature’, she roughly divides representations of nature into groups. The first, the ‘natural environment’ that Rosendale referred to above, is popularly seen as a realm devoid of humans and human intervention [(Haluzá-Delay, 2001) in (Korfiatis, 2003:77)].¹⁶ This conceptualisation of nature and culture as separate spheres was promulgated by modernism. The second, the ‘human-made’ environment (Korfiatis, 2003:77), refers to places in nature where humans have exerted a strong influence, and so have been remade or reorganised, but which also still incorporate some natural feature. These would include cultivated fields, gardens, tourist resorts, tree-lined avenues in cities etc. These are places that the most people would not normally call ‘nature’. The human-made environment thus combines nature and culture.

It is in the human-made environment, as mentioned earlier, that issues of nature are not usually directly broached. Together with photographs that reveal the natural and human-made environments through content and setting, there are also, images that do not show any natural elements. Even the absence of any trace of ‘nature’ as will be demonstrated in the report also reveals editorial attitudes and perceptions.

¹⁶ Korfiatis (2003) draws on a huge number of theorists in her compilation of nature ‘types’. Acknowledging each source would have been too time-consuming, that is, that contain some natural element as defined under her ‘Types of Nature’ banner and codes the values of human-nature interaction they present as biophobic (fear of nature), biophillic (love for nature), arcadian (appreciation for the beauty of nature) or resource (nature as valuable to humans as a resource).

The first category, 'natural environment' would include:

- tourist attractions like Table Mountain and officially designated wilderness areas.
- sea areas, marine life, avian life, wildlife, flora.
- the elements, light, sunshine, the weather.¹⁷

In 'human-made' environments, elements of nature exist within what is commonly seen to be a human environment. The definition of such environments provided by Korfiatis (2003) has been amended to exclude cities, urban or very developed areas. This category incorporates:

- human and rural activity outdoors in non-urban or semi-urban areas- farms, farming, cultivated land, dams, country roads, unpaved roads, graveyards, domestic plants and crops.
- pets, farm animals, other domesticated animals.
- human-made "natural" areas within an urban area designed to offer respite – gardens, parks, atriums, gardens of a university campus, fountains, beach areas.
- photographs of informal settlements taken outdoors where some elements of landscape can be seen.
- fire, water, smoke (from human sources), lighting (artificial), whether indoors or outdoors.
- rural areas with an ambiguous status like the apartheid homelands where aspects of landscape can be seen.¹⁸

In the report these two types of nature- 'natural environment' and 'human-made environment', as well as the terms 'wilderness' and 'landscape', have been gathered in the basket called 'nature'. They have also been used separately in terms of their more specialised definitions. A lot more licence has been taken with the term 'animal' which has been used rather broadly to include fish and birds.

¹⁷ Examples of 'penetrative nature' like weeds, mosquitoes and rats [(de Groot, 2002:5) in (Korfiatis, 2003)] have also been excluded as these are not common subject matter in the magazine.

¹⁸ The homelands were areas of land which, according to the apartheid government, were autonomous regions akin to a country like Lesotho, although these were not recognised internationally. These were, for the most, ethnically organised so that each 'state' was home to a particular ethnic group. This was often reflected in the names like Venda (for Venda people) and KwaNdebele (For Ndebele people). A good example of the kind of ambiguity mentioned would be the photograph of the Valley of a Thousand Hills dotted with huts in what would have been part of the homeland of 'KwaZulu', that features in the article, 'The Zulus: Black Nation in a Land of Apartheid' (NG/Dec1971/738-775).

Other terms that have emerged from the lists just give, and that may need some clarification are ‘wilderness’, ‘environment’, ‘landscape’, and ‘nature’. In their colloquial usage they are often used interchangeably. Indeed, it has been suggested that ‘Nature - not to be too tedious - in America means the wilderness’ [(Miller, 1964) in (Novak, 1995:4)]. These terms are not, however, interchangeable signifiers. The ‘environment’ is ‘the sum total of all the physical conditions, animate and inanimate, in a specific area’ (Korfiatis, 2003:77). ‘Nature’ exists within the environment, and ‘wilderness’ is a part of nature. ‘Wilderness’, being, the term in currency in the United States for protected ‘natural’ areas like the Grand Canyon. The fourth term, ‘Landscape’, refers in this report specifically to photographs that reveal stretches of land that may or may not be developed, that is, that may be ‘human-made’ or not.¹⁹

The representational elements of nature mentioned in the two categories of ‘Types of Nature’ have been interpreted in terms of National Geographic editorial policy, editorial context and cultural constructions at various historical junctures. More specifically, they have been examined for their metaphoric and allegorical value. The factual context of National Geographic seems easily compatible with an ecocritical study of its representations of nature, but not with an ecocritical study of its allegorical uses of nature. The next section shows how Ecocriticism, nature, allegory and a popular ‘scientific’ publication can be integrated into one investigation.

Defining Allegory

Illustration is friendly ... for it makes itself clear. Allegory is friendly, too, hiding its meanings on the respectful assumption that we will be able to find them Having said that, I should add that the art on view here is also cruel. The friendly face of illustration has another side. And allegory has endless other sides, like personalities we call faceted ... but they are never absolutely elusive.

-Carter Ratcliff, Illustration & Allegory: An invitational exhibition curated by Carter Ratcliff.
May 13-June 14, 1980.

¹⁹ ‘The word *landscape* ... enters English in the sixteenth century as a term from the art of painting: landscapes were pictures of stretches of countryside’ (Coetzee, 1984:37).

Driving back to Soweto [from the Kruger National Park], I kept wondering, what if the animals started a revolution? My mother said I had read *Animal Farm* once too often.

-Matebello Motloung, 'Kruger Park is just magnificent', *The Star*, April 2004.

The way in which most people of all ages would have encountered allegory, is through stories. Nature and Allegory, in the world of mythology, have a long, intertwined history. Berger has suggested that 'it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal' (1980:5). Following on from this, 'it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first' allegory was an animal story, especially since allegory is sometimes seen as an extended metaphor [See for example (Fletcher, 1964:71)]. The trend to use animals in allegories has continued till today. More recent examples, like George Orwell's Animal Farm, demonstrate not only the adaptability of this literary medium to modern and far more complex concerns, but also, its popularity for all age-groups.

In both the ancient context of mythology, and more modern fictional contexts like Animal Farm, allegories consist of two stories that run parallel to each other. The storyteller scripts a simple narrative that consciously alludes to another 'story', not visible to the reader. In these cases, the first story is literal, and 'makes good enough sense all by itself' (Fletcher, 1964:7). The secondary meaning is figurative, and is conveyed through the use of various allegorical devices. The reader is meant to be aware that the various imaginative elements in the literal story have very specific counter-points in reality. The fictional text therefore alludes to a particular non-fictional, moral, or historical context that is usually more important: '[a]llegorical stories exist, as it were, to put secondary meanings into orbit around them; the primary meaning is then valued for its satellites' (Fletcher commenting on Frye's definition, 1964:220).²⁰

²⁰The term 'allegory' is derived from the Greek roots of the two words – 'parallel' and 'category'.²⁰ An allegory is formed when two stories run concurrently, that is, *parallel* to each other, but only one of them is apparent. The other is underneath, implicit, and only indirectly revealed. The first story is consciously written and structured according to certain principles that restrict the interpretative parameters for the reader. The second story, being more elusive, reveals its secrets only gradually, step by step. The first story *alludes* to the second (Barney, 1979). This very basic convention has operated in a multitude of ways since ancient times to the present day.

Another animal allegory that is less familiar, is American Mary Austin's short story, 'The Flock'. Austin wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, at the time of John Muir's campaign to establish a national park in California, and the battles between preservationist and rural interests that accompanied it. The reservation of land in the inimitable Yosemite Valley, for 'protection' from humans like farmers, resulted in the displacement of members of Austin's rural community. Muir, the preservation movement's eloquent evangelist, wrote lyrically about the beauties of the wilderness area that would eventually become Yosemite National Park. In contrast, he referred to sheep grazing in the area as 'hoofed locusts'. Muir's metaphor proved to be highly effective in suggesting that sheep were pestilent and that they damaged the environment. Influenced by this view, state legislation eventually removed them altogether from the park (Nelson, 2000:75).

Austin in antipode, wrote a story called, 'The Flock', seemingly in response to what she, in all likelihood, saw as Muir's anti-pastoral or pro-preservation 'propaganda'. 'The Flock' is an allegory in which Austin objected to the way in which the 'preservation' of nature disadvantaged her rural community in California (Nelson, 2000:75). Nelson in her study of Austin's work, astutely observed that in this period of ideological tensions and conflicting preservationist and rural needs, 'two authors in particular concentrated their politics into literary allegories using sheep: Mary Austin and John Muir' (Nelson, 2000:75). Austin's 'The Flock' operated with fictitious animal characters, whereas Muir employed 'real' animal characters, in what appeared to be writings based on actual observations.

Thus far, we have seen allegory as it operates in ways that many might find familiar. Frederick Jameson's modern conceptualisation of the term, however, takes the notion of allegory to entirely different level. He quickly dismisses 'our traditional conception of allegory' as a 'one-dimensional view of this signifying process' (1986:73). Instead he introduces the descriptor 'national allegory', which Jameson claims, is present in all 'third world' texts. The spirited academic argues that in such texts, the individual story 'is **always** an allegory' (1986:69) (my emphasis) for the broader political situation in that country, in particular the struggle against some form of oppression like colonialism. Hence the term - '**national** allegory' (my emphasis). As with the familiar forms like Animal Farm mentioned above, the intention of the 'third world' writer is consciously political, or consciously

allegorical. According to Jameson, this phenomenon does sometimes occur in ‘first world’ literature, but the national allegory that emerges from the text is incidental and not conscious.²¹

Indian resident, Aijaz Ahmed (1987), understandably provoked by what he sees as Jameson’s brazen paternalism, vehemently discounts any such notion. He argues that any fictional text, ‘first world’ or other, can be allegorical as the visible narrative always reveals aspects of the collective or society within which it is set. Although Jameson and Ahmed seem to be pitted against each other, they do actually agree, albeit implicitly, on the sociological and political dimensions inherent in the allegorical mode. This report embraces Ahmed’s notion that any (fictional) text can be allegorical, but also respects Jameson’s assertion of national allegory – with some latitude. This ‘latitude’ can be seen in the way the report adapts these conceptualisations of allegory to ‘non-fictional’ texts.

Angus Fletcher agrees with Jameson, that “[w]hile allegory in the middle ages came to people from the pulpit, it comes to the modern reader in secular, but no less popular form’ (Fletcher, 1964:5). What is more significant for this report about Fletcher’s study, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode, is that it incorporates allegory as it operates in the visual mode. The academic uses Frye’s (1964) observations as a springboard for his own analysis (Frye also hints at the possibility of taking an allegorical stance in a ‘scientific’ context, such as the one under discussion in this report):

Frye goes further than most critics when he observes that any practice which invokes several disciplines – e.g., history, psychology, semantics, rhetoric – is by definition reading polysemously, that is allegorically [(Frye, 1964) in (Fletcher, 1964:221)].

²¹ Maru (1971), by Bessie Head exemplifies this idea quite clearly, although in this case, the novel is very consciously a national allegory because Head writes in order to alert the reader to racism toward the Bushmen (Masarwa) in Botswana and its effects. She comments, in her exposition, on their place in society that, ‘In Botswana they say: Zebras, Lions, Buffalo and Bushmen live in the Kalahari’ (11). This provocative statement implies that the Bushmen are seen as part of nature and hence primitive in some way, and perhaps even sub-human. This implies, in turn, that they can be treated like animals.

Having found a theorist that provides a portal into the study of allegory in more unorthodox mediums, Fletcher (1964) takes his research into areas like Freudian psychoanalysis, warfare, heraldry, insignia, iconography, architecture, ornamentation, jewellery, dress and illustrations. He does this in a novel way that no other academic has attempted before. More directly related to aspects of this study is his analysis of landscape, including the picturesque and sublime tropes. Fletcher concludes that, '[b]oth the sublime and the picturesque can assume new guises, which happens for example, in commercial art' (1964:275). If allegory extends into commercial art, then by association, it definitely extends into commercial photography, and possibly even further, into National Geographic's photojournalism. Fletcher rounds off his argument by declaring, that when the allegorical mode is, '[f]reely employed' (Fletcher, 1964:275), it can be applied in countless contexts.²² Fletcher's thoughts not only confirm the presence of allegory in the visual element, but also dispense with the need for a storyline, implying that not only photographic narratives, but single images can also operate allegorically.^{23/24}

To investigate allegory in the context of the photographs of National Geographic and the supporting text as defined in the introduction, elements of figurative language are highlighted and assumed to signal the presence of allegory. These include myth, metaphor and symbol. It is not within the scope of this report to engage in debates about the difference between these. The stance that will be taken is that these devices all contribute to the creation of an allegory. In addition, this investigation concedes that the use of allegorical techniques found to be operating in the magazine, may be for the most, seemingly innocuous, and hence, not always the conscious process that may define allegory in the literary sphere. Similarly, the secondary meanings that would generally be accessible to the reader of a literary allegory like *Animal Farm*, are usually not noticed by the average reader.

²² Christo Oberholzer's (2006) masters study uses Jameson's concept of national allegory ingeniously in an investigation of South African film. Photographic essays, like films, have narratives, and in the case of National Geographic, some of the features have corresponding documentaries with similar footage.

²³ Goin is another commentator on the image as a fictional device: 'Whenever a camera shutter opens and closes, recording a latent image on film, a fiction is created. Yet the image, once developed and printed in positive form, presents to the uninformed an overwhelming conviction of fact' (2001:36).

²⁴ This understanding in terms of National Geographic context would seem to imply that both single images, and photographic narratives can demonstrate allegory. Support for this contention is found in Barney's work: 'I propose that we conceive of the (static) scene as a stilled moment in a moving narrative' (Barney, 1979:30).

-typological and psychological allegory

It is Barney (1979) that we turn to now to understand the way allegory has been further subdivided in the report into the categories of typological and psychological allegory. Barney identifies these two types of allegory in his study of this genre before the Enlightenment (1979:13-60). The former –‘typological’, is concerned with non-fictional ‘stories’ like those of the Old Testament. These ‘stories’ fit into certain *forms, genres, tropes* or *myths*, which are characterised by specific *discourses* and which are recognisable to the reader. The primary and immediate text plays back the former text and the reader feels, ‘I have read this before in ...’ (Barney, 1979:38). A form of *history* is expressed that compares one form of discourse operating at one time, with another discourse operating at a later time (Barney, 1979:38).²⁵

In the Bible, for example, the placid discourse of the Garden of Eden contrasts with the frenetic visions of the apocalypse. Both are commonly understood ways of representing nature, and both are pre-conceived narratives familiar to many westerners that elicit specific feelings (Garrard, 2004:2).²⁶ In relaying the news of environmental hazards in a way that spells impending doom, environmental groups are actually *replaying* the Biblical narrative of the apocalypse in order to spur people to act decisively in ways that achieve certain socio-political outcomes (Garrard, 2004:5).

The manifestation of this kind of discourse in National Geographic is less dramatic. Consider for example, one of the 1969 editions (NG136/4/Oct1969/532-543). Although the feature story reads as, ‘*Adventures with South Africa’s Black Eagles*’ (my emphasis), the other titles on the cover page are more telling and replay biblical narratives of wilderness trials - ‘*Man versus Nature: Southern California’s Trial by mud and water*’, and ‘*Midwest Flood- ‘Not*

²⁵ If one considers the fairly recent example of the film, *Ewan Almighty*, where an ordinary American mutates into a Noah-like character and builds an ark, you can see this idea of how a visual text can, very literally, *replay* the Old Testament for example. The character speaks differently before and after he becomes Noah, indicating the passage of time but also the regression, call it what you will, to an earlier mode of values and thinking. Just as an aside, it is interesting to note that Barney describes the Bible as a ‘model of typological allegory’ (Barney, 1979:40). He maintains that the Bible is myth because it makes representational claims, ‘an allegory which fails to acknowledge its fictionality is not an allegory but a myth’ (Barney, 1979:41).

²⁶ According to Wylie, ‘People often bend facts to suit a narrative that everyone can relate to’ (Wylie, 2006:104).

since *Noah* such *warning*' (my emphasis).²⁷ This framing of natural disasters in biblical terms no longer occurs in the magazine. This discarding of certain discourses in favour of others inadvertently tells us about the different *forms* that the human-nature relationship has taken throughout American *history*.²⁸ As has already been demonstrated, these representations have at different times and in different contexts, employed *discourses* associated with specific *types* of 'natures', like Eden and the apocalypse.²⁹ Discourse is usually closely monitored in National Geographic, and consequently, consciously applied.

Another example, containing a stronger temporal dimension, and concomitantly, a change in discourse, is narrated by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000): as recently as 1953, when the Western Cape's economy was more agrarian based, Cape flora had been described as an '**invader**' that reduced the amount of grassveld available for grazing. The plants were deemed useless, and the soil barren. Scarcely twenty years later, around 1970, this 'invader' had grown worthy of conservation. This development coincided with sky-rocketing international demand for Cape indigenous vegetation. A national association was formed to market it, and the plants were formally renamed *fynbos*. It was around 1970 also, that politicians began to speak of Cape Flora as a '**natural treasure**', and botanists began to motivate for their uniqueness and protection (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:19-20). The historic rise of *fynbos* from obscurity to international fame, and the discourse attached to these shifts (from 'invader' to 'natural treasure', from 'Cape flora' to 'fynbos'), tells us about the shifting human-nature relationship, but also about the way changes in discourse serve shifting commercial interests³⁰ (both terms, my emphasis).

²⁷ The manifestation of biblical discourse in a magazine that aligns itself with science is not completely incongruent. Biblical history provides the West with an, 'ancient framework of belief [that] informs much of the cultural and spiritual backdrop to which we are heir' (Ronge, 2002), and hence its influence is fairly pervasive in western representation.

²⁸ Similarly, typological allegory is concerned with the representations in National Geographic that, in speaking directly about nature in South Africa, inadvertently tell us about the different *forms* that the human-nature relationship has taken throughout American *history*.

²⁹ You will remember that Korfiatis spoke about 'Types of Nature' in the previous section on 'Defining Nature' so this is a fairly legitimate term.

³⁰ In this case, the Comaroffs (2000) seem to imply that when considered a hindrance to economic activity Cape Flora was accordingly labelled an 'invader'. Later when proven to be commercially viable, this disparaging term was replaced with the word 'treasures'. It follows that this new term would encourage people to attach value to the plants and presumably participate in protecting them, hence ensuring a continued supply for international flower markets.

In Barney's (1979) second division, 'psychological allegory', nature is used *metaphorically*. Themes of the *psyche* are explored through nature. In a process called *reification*, abstract ideas materialise in nature or are made tangible in some other hyperbolic way. In simple words – the characters' thoughts and feelings become tangible things in his environment (Byrne: 2006). The category is further sub-divided into 'projection allegory' and 'metamorphosis'.

In the former, 'projection allegory', the character's mental state is *projected* onto nature. If the central character is in love, then he imagines nature accordingly, and uses the language of love to describe it, hence the brooks 'sing' and the leaves 'quiver'.³¹ His description of nature becomes a *literal expression* of his interior state of being. Nature's condition therefore *reifies*,³² illustrates and makes visible, the character's unseen mental and *moral condition*. The central image of this category is a *mirror*, '[t]he image of an image ... where the self is the other' (Barney, 1979:38). Nature in this allegorical mode, is a *reflection* of the character's state of being.

In 'metamorphosis', the whole being of the person, or setting, mutates in tandem with the character's moral growth, in a specific temporal sequence. 'The *moral condition* of the central character enters the fiction as a physical presence' (Barney, 1979:38) (my emphasis). When, for example, the character Pinocchio lies, his nose grows. When he eventually learns to be honest he becomes a real boy, a metamorphosis that *reifies*, or demonstrates his development as a character.

Rather than proceeding to illustrate these two sub-categories, a discussion will ensue in the chapter in the section on the 'elements'. For now it benefits the reader to know that in this report, examples of projection allegory and metamorphosis are not immediately recognisable

³¹ This allegorical technique is still fairly pervasive in popular culture. Movies like *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2003), and *Casino Royale* (2006), both feature two characters declaring their love in a garden in the romantic and natural setting of the Italian Lake District.

³² The word 'reify' means to make something abstract in one's mind appear in a material form externally. It sounds similar to the word 'verify' which has the Latin root – *veritas*, meaning 'truth'. When the character is happy singing birds appear. This natural event verifies that the character is indeed happy. In allegory parlance it would be said that the character's abstract feeling of happiness is made into something material – singing birds, hence his mental state has become tangible, or it has been reified.

as they are in fictional texts. They may be as subtle as a variation in the lighting of the photographs or the change in setting.

To summarise, the two types of allegory, typological and psychological, are embedded in each other, but typological allegory is more concerned with *genre* and its concomitant *discourse*, while psychological allegory's preoccupation is with the *psyche* of the social characters and the way that is projected onto and/or reflected in the environment. To assist the reader with decoding, the words 'type', 'myth', 'alludes', 'discourse', 'replays', 'reveal' or similar forms are employed to signify typology. Signification for the second includes the use of the words 'reify', 'moral condition', 'mirror', 'project', 'metamorphosis', 'literal expression', 'reflect' or derivatives thereof.

1.2. Typological Allegory

1.2.1) Roderick Frazier Nash – Wilderness and the American Mind (2001)

- shifting 'grand narratives' of nature³³

In ... 1960 ... I approached the intellectual historian Merle Curti with the idea of a dissertation about wilderness. Assuming quite logically, that wilderness had nothing to do with human beings, the Pulitzer Prize winner gently suggested that I take my plans to the geology or biology department. But ... I managed to make a case for the concept that if wilderness was really a state of mind, a perceived rather than an actual condition, why not a history of the wilderness idea?

-Roderick Frazier Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, (2001: Preface to the fourth edition).

³³ This is not Nash's term but is derived from other theorists. Coates talks about various conceptualisations of nature as 'meta narratives' and proclaims that urgent environmental issues are 'grand narratives' (Coates, 1998:185). I have opted for the bolder second term and used it in the context here, but fairly cautiously, as the inverted commas have indicated.

The idea of reality as being socially constructed has been widely influential in the humanities. As a result, the human experience of the ‘natural’ world has also been seen as a product of cultural constructions [See for example Nash (2001), Eco (1986), Baudrillard (2001), Lawrence (2001)]. More recent literature [See for example (Garrard, 2004:10) and (Buell, 1995:36)], cautions against this extreme position warning that the actual condition of the physical environment must factor in any analysis of the human-nature relationship. Others rebuke this notion as unrealistic, arguing that ‘the actual condition of the physical environment’ can only ever be a perception. Dudley (2001) contests the veracity of apocalyptic environmental claims altogether, arguing that they are simply impressions steeped in rhetoric. For the purposes of this investigation, however, the report will assume that nature is a human construction. In addition to the cultural dimension, there also is the temporal: the role that the natural environments have played in society has taken on different *forms* in different *historical* periods.³⁴

In terms of this model, the particular cultural legacy of white, middle-class America has had not only several ways of seeing the natural world, but several ways of seeing itself in the natural world. In the process of representation within National Geographic, located within this society, nature gets written over, composed, by these preconceived structures, so that photographs display certain parts of nature, yes, but also in ways that confirm that conceptualisation of nature at that particular time. Consequently, the magazine’s photographic narratives and supporting text can be said to *conceal* or in some cases contain various *genres* of nature and the human-nature experience, so that these form what can be seen as typological allegories.

To unpack these typological allegories, Roderick Frazier’s Nash’s Wilderness and the American Mind (2001), is very useful. It is considered a classic of American historical geography, has been named one of the most influential books,³⁵ and was included by *Outside Magazine* in a survey of ‘books that changed our world’ (Nash, 2001:Cover Blurb). Nash’s response to this last accolade is that if his was one of the books that changed the world, then it was because ‘the world was ready to be changed’ (Nash, 2001:Preface):

³⁴ Following on from Nash’s introductory remarks, other commentators have said that there has not been only one, unchanging ‘nature’ but rather various ‘natures’ (Urry, 1999:44), or even various interpretations of ‘nature’ (Novak, 1995:4).

³⁵ The *Los Angeles Times* listed the book among the one hundred most influential books published in the last quarter century (Nash, 2001: cover blurb).

I caught the wilderness wave as it began to crest. ... Pushing it were broad changes in American values and priorities that we know as 1960s environmentalism ... Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, largely ignored since its 1949 publication, became a best-seller, and Bob Dylan sang about changing times ... This was a period of growing criticism of American culture; it followed that the antipode of civilization, namely wilderness, would attract attention. "Ecology" and "environment" became household words between the first (1967) and second (1973) editions of the book ... This fourth edition also lets the core of the earlier editions stand – although I wish I could have changed all those "mans" to "humans"!

Nash sketches a historical trajectory of the ways in which wilderness has been culturally constructed in America, and the changing attitudes that have come with this. He outlines epochal shifts and identifies key figures within wilderness. While the book, and the literature around it is far more nuanced and comprehensive, for the purposes of this report we will streamline his narrative by isolating and itemising five pivotal conceptual sweeps. These become useful as a basic, if almost crude, ideological rubric for tracking the shifts in the way nature and the human-nature relationship are represented. I will refer to this list as 'Nash's typology'. A list that is admittedly, simplified almost to the point of inaccuracy. In addition to the observations already provided, other critics have pointed out that these ways of human thinking are not mutually exclusive or unrelated. The human attitude to nature is (and let me add) always has been, 'ambivalent' (Knight, 2005:blurb) and 'contradictory' (Buell, 1995:1-2). In addition, it implies a linear progression with the implication that there has been an 'evolution' in thinking, thereby making present-day ideologies more enlightened than those of the past, a scenario that is rather presumptuous.

These concerns aside, it is possible that the average South African reader is generally unfamiliar with these aspects of American history, and so a brief overview is provided in an effort to assist the reader in remembering them. There is some overlap with the more detailed explanations that follow but perhaps that is necessary to consolidate what may well be new concepts for the reader. Only aspects that apply to the concerns of the report have been noted. Nash's contributions have been supplemented with some of my own comments in this overview only. I have inserted these at the end of each paragraph to differentiate them from Nash's.

- **‘Primitivism’** Nash only refers to this phase indirectly, and with the assumption that the reader knows what this is (Nash, 2001:123). People live intimately with nature, and in apparent simplicity, with no distinction between ‘wild’ and occupational areas.

*I have added the idea of ‘animism’, in that generally in cultures that are considered ‘primitive’, people sometimes ‘worship’ nature and the elements in various forms, and may see themselves, as subservient to and dependent on nature in certain ways.
- **The Judaeo-Christian and ‘Pioneer Tradition[s]’ (1650-1890)** (Nash, 2001:1,123,239). ‘Wilderness’ is a domain distinct from man and is seen as being inhabited by ‘savages’ while agrarian and urban economies are ‘civilized’ (Nash, 2001:151). The term has negative connotations. Christianity is attributed with instilling in pioneers in America a belief that God has given them dominion over earth. The ‘conquest of nature is economic necessity’ (Nash, 2001:125), and humans are locked ‘in an adversary relationship’ (Nash, 2001:239) with wilderness, where nature is valued for anthropocentric reasons (Nash, 2001:239).

*Although hunting grounds are set aside and conserved, this phase generally favours pastoralists with predators like wolves for example, who prey on sheep, being shot as “‘vermin”’.
- **‘The Wilderness Cult’ [1872 -]** (Nash, 2001:96). The term ‘wilderness’ acquires positive connotations in this phase. It is in some ways a return to ‘primitivism’ and ‘animism’ with campaigners for wilderness preservation being labelled ‘modern druids’ (Nash, 2001:240). John Muir, most famous of these, vividly ‘preached’ a form of pantheism where wilderness is sacred and a place where one could experience respite from urbanisation. Large periods of his own life followed the idea of returning to some kind of natural, ‘primitive’ state. Muir publicised areas of scenic beauty to attract people there in order to secure protection for those areas. The National Parks movement that followed (Nash, 2001:125-127) endeavoured to separate of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ with nature being presented as ‘pure’, empty, authentic and untouched by humans (Nash, 2001:125-127). Parks were created with distinct, usually fenced boundaries.

*The drive for National Parks coincided with the rise of modernism and its tendency to create divisions.
- **‘[L]oving nature to death’**. This chapter appears for the first time in the fourth edition (published 2001). National Geographic amended these words in a title of one of its articles, ‘Loving our coastlines to death’ (Turner/NG/July2006/60-87). The article dealt with what Nash calls, ‘The Irony of Victory’, that is, the conservation movement had been so successful that national parks are overcrowded and nature has become threatened from the very people wanting to appreciate it (Nash, 2000:316).

‘Primitivism’

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth as ‘wild.’ **Only to the white man was nature a ‘wilderness’** and only to him was the land infested with ‘wild’ animals and ‘savage’ people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with the brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it ‘wild’ for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that the ‘Wild West’ began.

-Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Ogala Band of Sioux, quoted in Touch the Earth: A Self-Portrait of Indian Existence, (McLuhan, 1971:45) (My emphasis).

*The part of this quote that has been highlighted appeared in National Geographic in the article, ‘Wilderness: America’s Lands Apart’ (Mitchell/NG/194/5/Nov1988/20).

The Native American relationship with nature prior to the arrival of the white settlers has been reviewed several times [See for example Garrard (2000) and Nelson (2000)], so it is difficult to provide any statements here that would be considered definitive. Nash himself, only begins with the arrival of the Puritan settlers from England. The reader can therefore only be referred back to the overview for some brief platitudes.

‘Eden’, ‘Wilderness’, the ‘Frontier’ and the ‘Garden’ (Approximately 1650-1890)³⁶

The land is the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them is a desolate Wilderness

JOEL 2:3 (quoted in Nash, 2001:1) (Italics in text).

When the English puritan settlers journeyed to their ‘new’ England in the New World of North America during the seventeenth century, they brought pre-conceptions of nature from the Old World that had been shaped by myths from their literary heritage, of which the Bible was a large part. The wilderness was unknown - perceived as unpeopled, undesirable, fearful, and filled with danger, demons and monsters. Eden, in antipode, was a realm sanctified by God (Nash, 2001:2):

³⁶ This is a very rough approximation, and may well extend a little further on each side.

[T]he living was easy and secure because nature was ordered in the interests of man ... A mild climate constantly prevailed. Ripe fruit dropped from every bough, and there were no thorns to prick reaching hands. The animals in paradise lived in harmony with man. Fear as well as want disappeared in this ideal state of nature (Nash, 2001:2).

Once there, this Eden/wilderness dyad shaped their perceptions of the natural environment irrespective of the actual physical 'realities' encountered (Nash, 2001:2).

Williams has filled in some of the gaps in Nash's study here in his own, Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American Mind (2000). So to pick up the story, the settlers were driven to 'tame' and control the wilderness through ploughing, hunting, mapping, damming and naming, activities generally carried out by men. They believed that by suffering the trials of the wilderness they would be led to 'The Promised Land'. The settlers' industry was in some way both an effort to recreate the Garden of Eden and achieve this 'Promised Land'.

Gradually, an area of safety and order was cultivated that satisfied needs. In this 'garden' nature was valued as a resource to serve 'man'. Whereas before they were struggling for survival in the earlier 'frontier mode', now they assumed a position of dominance that engendered a human sense of superiority over the natural environment, a sense of being separate from and opposed to it, and a sharp distinction between the realms of nature and culture. The wilderness was slowly colonised and gave way to a more pastoral landscape of crops and domestic animals (Wilson, 2000:5-10).³⁷ In this report, when referring to this particular dramatisation of nature, the term 'garden/ wilderness' has been used.³⁸

³⁷ There is another strand of Judaeo-Christian thought, an understated dimension, one which several scholars including Kolodny (1975) and Coetzee (1984) point to, one which saw wilderness in a positive way as a refuge for hermits and Christians. These connotations of redemption and freedom became amplified during John Muir's tenor. Hence, there was essentially an ambivalent view towards wilderness in this era, as well as a common thread through history.

³⁸ In addition, when 'wilderness' appears in inverted commas it has its older, negative connotations, otherwise it is as it is popularly understood in contemporary American society, as areas of 'unspoilt' nature.

Henry David Thoreau: ‘Nature Philosopher’

In wildness is the preservation of the world.

-Thoreau, in his celebrated essay, ‘Walking’ (1951), quoted in Nash (2001:88).

*The line above was quoted in National Geographic in the article, ‘The Natural World of Aldo Leopold: A Durable Scale of Values’ (Gibbons/NG/160/5/Nov1981/690).

Once the American frontier was closed in 1890 and the once vast wilderness became reduced, almost to patches, people began to look at nature differently (Nash, 2001:40-45). Now that the land was known, and urbanisation had reduced economic dependency on nature, a certain nostalgia developed and wilderness became a refuge from city life. Nature-writer, Henry Thoreau emerged in this period. He is best known for the American classic, Walden (1954), the title of which refers to his home in a place in the country called Walden Pond, not far from Boston. In Walden, Thoreau is said to have extolled the wonders of living in the wilderness, and hence giving the wilderness preservation movement its philosophical roots (Nash, 2001:84-95).

The Wilderness Cult and John Muir’s Transcendental Nature (1870s-1914)

These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the Mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar.

-John Muir, commenting on a dam proposal in Hetchy Hetchy Valley, USA, quoted in Nash (2001:161).

* One of Muir’s essays, ‘Our National Parks’, was used as the title for the cover feature for a 1994 edition of National Geographic (Mitchell/NG/186/4/Oct 1994).

One of Thoreau’s most ardent ‘followers’, John Muir, spread a transcendental philosophy that deified nature. His wilderness rhetoric was characterised primarily by reverential awe, and was therefore a direct contrast with the demonisation and ‘demolition’ of wilderness that had been sanctioned by, to borrow Sharpe’s (2000) term, the ‘theological geopolitics’ of the New

Englanders.³⁹ In response to the complete separation of nature and human that Christianity has been blamed for propagating, Muir advocated the perspective of ‘oneness with nature’. Gradually a ‘wilderness cult’ was formed with a strong following. The conceptualisation of nature that grew out of these beginnings, and in a sense outgrew these beginnings, became known as ‘deep ecology’⁴⁰ or ‘ecocentrism’.⁴¹

Muir’s rhetoric contributed to a signification of wilderness as pristine and empty. This signification served to mobilise protection for certain habitats, particularly those with spectacular scenery. Wilderness was recast as a source of rejuvenation for city-dwellers. With the help of John Muir’s publicity, the first national park on the West Coast of the USA was established. According to Nash this event was more than a simple change of attitude. It was a *radical* shift in consciousness (Nash, 2001:90-97).⁴²

Aldo Leopold: respect for the role of the predator (1887-1948)

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes ... I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise.⁴³ But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

-Aldo Leopold, 1887-1948, ‘Thinking like a mountain’, quoted in Nash (2001:161).

³⁹ Sharpe uses the term in relation to the battle of ‘good over evil’ that the USA waged over the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It is appropriate here, because the New Englanders, in some sense, and according to some theorists like Nash, also fought a ‘war’ over the ‘evil’ wilderness (Sharpe, 2000:cover blurb).

⁴⁰ You can read more about deep ecology in American Environmentalism: Readings in Conservation History (Nash, 1990:309).

⁴¹ The poster of the film, *Grizzly Man* (2005/2006) portrays both these ideas. The slogan says, ‘There are boundaries in nature. One man spent his life crossing them’. Another documentary series, *Be the Creature* (2005), epitomises deep ecology ideas of ‘oneness with nature.’ But there were also capitalist imperatives. The nineteenth/early twentieth century railroad companies promoted nature tourism in order to attract Americans to isolated places in order to promote the use of the railway (Withey, 1997:294). Muir’s writings were later complemented by Ansel Adam (1902-1984), whose photographs attracted people to wilderness areas. Like Muir’s writings, ‘Ansel Adam’s photographs of landscapes, frequently untitled, point to his pantheistic view of the world, rather than a specific place’ (Gaule, 1992:109-110).

⁴² Almost ironically, Conservation as it has now developed, holds the values of stewardship, and protection which still form a relation of human dominance over the environment, but in the positive sense that humans should bear responsibility for nature [(Van den Borne, 2001) in (Korfiatis, 2003:78)].

⁴³ In the book, Mapping Paradise, the writer posits that the etymology of the word ‘paradise’ predates Christianity, coming from the ancient Babylon, ‘paradeiza’, ‘an enclosure used for easy hunting’. ‘That idea of abundance, or ‘endless bacon’ ... is a persistent thread’ The Economist, July 1 (2006:79). Other theorists maintain that the word ‘paradise’ hails from the Persian word for ‘luxurious garden’ (see for example Garrard, 2004). Either way, the essential ideas of easiness and abundance are common to the idea of ‘paradise’.

*This paragraph was quoted in National Geographic in the article, 'The Natural World of Aldo Leopold: A Durable Scale of Values' (Gibbons/NG160/5/Nov1981/682).

Naturalist and professional gamekeeper, Aldo Leopold advocated a move away from *anthropocentric* values, from nature as valuable as long as it is useful to humans, to *ecocentric* values, to nature as valuable for its own sake. His most quoted words above narrate his epiphany with a dying wolf that led him to value the role of the predator in what later became known as the ecosystem. At the time wolves and other predators were shot as 'vermin', and seen as a hindrance to farmers and hunters (Nash, 2001:182-199). Both Muir and Leopold were honoured in National Geographic [(Harvey/NG/143/4/April1973/433) and (Gibbons/NG160/5/Nov1981/682)].

These notes complete the itemising of various phases in the human-nature relationship, although as has already been indicated, it is by no means complete. To summarise the span of history these few pages of the report have documented and to draw the reader's attention to the enormous changes that have occurred, this section will close with Nash's words, as quoted in National Geographic,

Today's appreciation of wilderness represents one of the most remarkable intellectual revolutions in the history of human thought about the land ... Wilderness has evolved from an earthly hell to a peaceful sanctuary ... Such a perspective would have been almost incomprehensible ... in the 1650s.

-Nash, quoted in National Geographic (Mitchell/NG/194/5/Nov1998/32).

(i) Barney Nelson - Commentaries and Criticisms

Nash has been broadly criticised, but this report is not so much concerned with what is wrong with his version of history as it is with the phenomena that his ideas are fairly pervasive in popular culture, at least if National Geographic is anything to judge by: he has been quoted in the magazine periodically over the last decade (See for example the quote at the end of the previous section). As a result, not much time has been allocated to attacking *his* version of

history but rather to filling in the spaces that he has left so that the reader gets a more complete picture of what was subsequently seen as some of the problems with the ideologies of the phases that he outlined.⁴⁴ These have been grouped under the banner ‘commentaries and criticisms’. Nash is after all, concerned with documenting the history of the *concept* of nature or rather wilderness, not really with critiquing the precepts of the various protagonists in his historical drama. For the contemporary reader knowledgeable in this field, the most obvious omission in Wilderness and the American Mind is the backlash against the National Parks Movement as it is conceived in deep ecology (ecocentrism) that occurred from the 1980s. Presumably, this is because the first edition of his book, already an epic study, had been published in 1967 before this development occurred.

This ‘backlash’ will form the focus of this section. Although several theorists from several disciplines have researched this phase, the term ‘eco-socialism’ from the title of geographer David Pepper’s book, Eco-socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice (1993), is the one that has been employed to describe it.⁴⁵ Despite Pepper’s denial that “current radical green politics ... are largely ‘socialist’ ”(1993:204), his use of the term emanates from his strong Marxist stance so it is not quite accurate to use this label for the ideological period, hence the use of inverted commas.

I have opted for the term anyway, quite simply, for want of a better one. Thus far, none of the other commentators on this development in conservation have provided any suitable alternatives (See for example, Garrard, 2000 and Cock, 2008).⁴⁶ While Pepper’s term has been used however, and a synopsis of a few of his observations provided below, it is Barney Nelson’s work that will provide most of the critique of Nash and other related works. Pepper’s work deals with very broad issues of capitalism and environmentalism that go way beyond the concerns of this report, and so will not be embraced by this report. In terms of the

⁴⁴ David Williams builds on Nash’s original garden/wilderness dichotomy by incorporating a psychological reading of the theology of the settlers, in, Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American Mind (2000). Ruth Bellin, in her lyrical essay, ‘Cultivating the Global Garden’ (1999), explores the garden/wilderness divide in agricultural land in Australia. She updates Nash’s typology by arguing that space exploration has seeded a global garden, ‘in the wilderness of space - the new frontier’.⁴⁴ Both Nash and Williams belong to a group of historians who have been referred to as ‘American Mind’. Although seen as ‘pioneers of American intellectual thought, they were accused of holistic thinking and then holistically grouped for the purpose of dismissal’ (Novak, 1995:Preface). Novak exposes a rather harsh criticism that nevertheless does not discount Nash’s contribution to the formation of ideas about the history of the wilderness idea in America.

⁴⁵ A South African work with a similar ideological stance is Jacklyn Cock’s, The War Against Ourselves: Nature, Power and Justice (2008).

⁴⁶ Garrard’s (2000) use of the term ‘dwelling’ does not seem descriptive enough.

previous listing, referred to as ‘Nash’s typology’, the ideology I have represented as ‘eco-socialism’ would fit neatly between the headings ‘The Wilderness Cult’ and ‘[L]oving nature to death’ in the following way:

- **‘Primitivism’.**
- **The Judeo-Christian and ‘Pioneer Tradition[s]’.**
- **‘The Wilderness Cult’.**
- **‘Eco-socialism’.** Despite the eco-fever generated by the National Parks movement, eventually, questions arose about whether a concern for nature had taken priority over a concern for people. This debate is sometimes framed as ‘parks versus people’⁴⁷, that is, catering to the needs of wildlife and wilderness as opposed to fulfilling the needs of people. What followed were attempts to integrate these needs, and to move away from nature appreciation as a relatively expensive commodity for a white, middle-class elite. As a result, there was a drive towards providing limited grazing and land rights to people who had previously occupied the land but who had been displaced as a result of the formation of National Parks. Some physical boundaries like fences, shark nets etc. Start being removed, and Transfrontier Parks become more common. This swing in ideology holds a view of history that nature was never un-peopled or untouched by the human footprint and adopts the idea that ‘wilderness’ was a place where people lived and interacted with the environment. This philosophy is compatible with postmodernism that seeks to dissolve the boundaries between nature and culture. It advocates a shift from ecocentrism (deep ecology) to anthropocentrism, in the sense of allowing local and disadvantaged people to benefit from the wilderness areas near them.
- **‘[L]oving nature to death’.**

Barney Nelson’s take on ‘eco-socialism’ is situated within the context of rural America and the effect of the National Parks Movement on pastoral animals and rural people. Operating within the same postmodern era as Pepper, Nelson’s iconoclastic The Wild and the Domestic: Animal Representation, Ecocriticism and Western Literature (2000), critiques, among others, the Puritan settlers, Thoreau, Muir, and Nash.

Her argument against the conceptualisation of ‘Eden’ and ‘Wilderness’, as Nash has presented it, is bitter. Barney maintains that the ‘howling wilderness’ reported by the Puritan

⁴⁷ This debate is tackled in an article in National Geographic (Quammen/NG/Oct2006).

settlers of the *Mayflower* when they arrived was a perception only created years later in retrospect, rather than an actual record of their experience.⁴⁸ It is nature-writer Henry David Thoreau who seems, by comparison, to get the mildest critique. Nash has credited Thoreau with laying the foundations of the wilderness preservation movement, an accolade that Nelson considers undeserved. By writing his famous Walden (Thoreau, 1951) in which he vaunted the glories of wilderness in rural Walden Pond, Nelson complains that Thoreau needs to take some of the responsibility for fostering the idea that nature appreciation was a (largely white, middle-class and urban) leisure pursuit. This notion discriminated against local and disadvantaged people that could not afford this luxury, and/or who worked in nature.⁴⁹

Nash and Muir, on the other hand, are dealt with rather brutally: the impassioned Nelson accuses Nash of editing Thoreau's essay, 'Walking', in such a manner so as to delete all his references to domestic animals. The version of the essay that resulted from this process misconstrued Thoreau's message and translated it into what Nelson refers to as 'preservationist propaganda' that is 'anti-agricultural' (Nelson, 2000:1-3). It is this notion of wilderness preservation as 'anti-agricultural' that Nelson takes umbridge to, but first her counterattack on this form of eco-propaganda will be outlined.

She begins by citing William Cronon's collection of essays titled, Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature (1995) as being possibly the first stirring of the problems that the National Parks Movement had created. Also in this group of essays, is Richard White's, '“Are you an environmentalist or do you work for a living?” Work and nature'. Both Cronon and White point out how a national park is viewed as a place of leisure which is incompatible with work by indigenous or other people. It serves a largely white, middle-class, urban elite that travel to these areas, while the local communities struggle to gain a share of the material benefits accrued through tourism. The privileged group of urban dwellers hold the belief that

⁴⁸ Lawrence Buell adds to this challenge against the supposed garden/wilderness dichotomy by saying that the idea that 'man' was given dominion over the earth is an inaccurate interpretation of the bible, and that Christianity has been falsely blamed for purporting this idea, whereas what was actually suggested was 'pious stewardship' (1995:1).

⁴⁹ Ewan (2000), in reviewing Nelson's book comments that this seemingly remote wilderness had a noisy railway running through it! Something that Thoreau forgot to mention in the book.

wilderness is and always has been un-peopled, and is only pure and authentic if indeed perceived to be like this.

The unpublicised 'realities' were that in creating Yosemite National Park, the Indians, shepherds and gold-miners resident there were displaced, and some of this history removed. While denying this history, deep ecology (ecocentrism) also, and almost ironically, highly romanticised the relationship that indigenous people had had with nature. Nelson dismisses this idealisation with sarcasm (Nelson, 2000:3-15).

To return to Nelson's issues with all that is 'anti-agricultural', she accuses John Muir of discriminating towards domesticated animals. In what she describes as a 'troublesome dichotomy', Nelson contests the division between the traditional classifications of 'wild' and 'domestic' and, 'rancher' and 'environmentalist', and calls for a blurring of these boundaries. Wild animals, she argues, have become domesticated to some extent, while domestic animals often behave in wild ways. Similarly, ranchers need to conserve the environment in order to sustain their herds, and so are also in some way, 'environmentalists' (Nelson, 2000:130-140). The best example of this is her anecdote about an acquaintance:

One border rancher who likes to test boundaries is raising a small band of sheep in his open flat country – just to prove he can attract eagles again and defy environmentalists. **He blames the lack of eagles on their protection.** He says the sky here used to be full of eagles until local sheepmen were put out of business. With no prey base, the eagles disappeared. So, he wants to feed eagles again, and somehow he thinks that will make "those damn environmentalists" mad (Nelson, 2000:119) (My emphasis).

When taken together, most of the criticisms of deep ecology (ecocentrism) can be summarised in Barney's commentary on American author, Mary Austin's experience in California:

Around the turn of the century [1900] ... Mary Austin ... watched as John Muir led a push to expand Yosemite Valley's boundaries, taking extensive lands away from rural people in order to "preserve" and "protect" those lands inside the new national park's boundary. She watched as some of those newly "protected" lands quietly became railroad right-of-way, laying the foundation for the most lucrative big business the West ever produced: tourism. Finally, she watched as the new national park closed thousands of acres of high Sierra meadows to summer sheep grazing, putting many of her Owens Valley neighbours out of business (Nelson, 2000:74).

Far from the neutral position that Muir's wilderness seems to occupy, Nelson's wilderness is ideological in many senses, and perhaps even prejudicial.

(ii) South African Context

His baby cry
was of a cub
tearing the neck
of the lioness
because he was fatherless.

- Oswald Mtshali, 'The birth of Shaka'.

Before continuing with the main argument of the report, some notes on the relevance of this model to South Africa will be provided. This will take the form of a literature review with the writers roughly cited in accordance with the order presented in 'Nash's typology' – frontier, garden/wilderness, the national park and 'eco-socialism', and what better way to introduce the discussion than Andre Brink's article in National Geographic, 'The Afrikaners' (Brink/NG/174/4/Oct1988/575). Brink narrates a story to illustrate the love of the land in the Afrikaner collective consciousness. It takes place toward the end of the 19th century, at the time when the Afrikaners were fighting for independence against British colonialism, in what the main character calls the 'frontier wars'. *Oom Karel Neem Sy Geweer Saam* – 'Uncle Karel Takes Along His Gun', is a classic tale of an old Boer whose life had been occupied

with hunting and war. As he lies dying, he consoles himself that he will be allowed to take his gun to heaven:

His life has been filled with hunting and war. He has helped clear the land; he's been in most of the frontier wars; he was in every battle against the English. How would he feel in heaven without a gun? Surely there must be something to hunt over there? The devil isn't dead yet. Somewhere beyond our known world there must still be places to be cleared; places where one would find dangerous animals and kinds of savages and kinds of English to fight against?

-Andre Brink, 'The Afrikaners' (Brink/NG/174/4/Oct1988/575).

Notice how clearly the strong masculine discourse replays the adversarial human-nature relationship Nash reports as being present in the initial stages of western settlement, albeit in a manner that deems this heroic. And, more importantly for the arguments of this report, how it encodes the settler survival mode that characterised the garden/wilderness dichotomy in a similar manner to what has already been described. The South African terrain is 'dangerous' and needs to be 'cleared', while hunting is necessary for survival.

- **J.M. Coetzee, White Writing (1984)**

Brink's contemporary, JM Coetzee and Rhodes scholar, Dan Wylie, have also offered some ideas on the garden/wilderness stage in Nash's typology but within academic texts. Coetzee writes relatively soon after Nash's third edition (1967, 1973 and 1982 respectively), indicating that his work may, in some ways, be a response to this seminal text. He examines the construction of nature within South Africa. White Writing is very possibly South Africa's first ecocritical work, although the term did not even exist then. In an historical analysis of early South African (white) literary texts, Coetzee considers a variety of landscape traditions, including the garden, the pastoral, and European aesthetic schemas like the picturesque and the sublime, and examines how they manifest in these texts.

The entire first chapter is devoted to the exploration of the garden/wilderness polarisation in early white settlement in the Cape. Coetzee sees 'the topos of the garden' (Coetzee, 1984:1)

as extending beyond the Judeo-Christian myth of Eden. He argues that the depiction of landscape as empty, and scattered farms as heroically independent, supported a mythology in favour of colonialism. But although conceding some applicability, he takes the position, from the very beginning, that there is no historical place for this standard trajectory in South Africa. Beginning in 1652, he states that the settlement 'planted' at the Cape never became a mythical 'garden', and that 'the only myth that came to exert comparable force was the story of the ... Israelites in search of a Promised Land, a story ... appropriated as their own by the wandering Afrikaner tribes' (Coetzee, 1984:2). Once settled, the tribulations of the wilderness over, the land did not become edenic in any way.

- **Dan Wylie, Myth of Iron: Shaka in History (2006)**

Wylie's epic history examines the geo-political context of polity-formation of the Zulu in South Africa in the nineteenth century. Wylie writes more recently, and so we can expect that his reconstruction of history, and the documentation of the human-nature relationship within that has been influenced by the postmodern ideas of mutable boundaries between humans and nature. In keeping with these expectations, Wylie is quick to dismiss the idea of the tensions of a garden/wilderness division and tersely contests the simplicity of a sterile garden/wilderness binary, declaring wilderness both evil and beneficial:

[I]t is a peculiarly Western idea that a 'state' could or should be carved out of 'raw bush'... It's also an error to think of a rigid distinction between 'wild' and 'tamed'. The bush was as much a resource as a threat. It provided wood for furnaces, monkey tails for soldiers' regalia, tusks for trade, and roots for essential medicines. Forests harboured leopards, but were also refuges in times of flight. Mountains hindered trade but were also great for defence (Wylie, 2006: 180)

Wylie maintains that by Shaka's time there was, 'still more bush than there is today', and that this was, 'already *criss-crossed* and *patched* with human *influences*, *scarred* and *thinned* by axe-blade, hoof and tooth. The people lived *with* and *through* nature' (Wylie, 2006:179) (my emphasis). He concludes that the progressive conquest of 'wild' terrain was not a factor in Shaka's rise to power. Furthermore, in describing the relationship between indigenous people and nature as symbiotic, Wylie is very careful in his use of diction not to fall into the modes

of discourse that characterise the garden/wilderness binary, that is, domination over and appropriation of nature.⁵⁰

His rejection of a European model to explain a specific Southern African geo-political historical context, may also be an attempt to move away from histories that have been bent into well-worked and familiar narratives, and are therefore actually more like ‘white mythologies’ or even ‘seductive anecdotes’. Wylie may very well argue that Nash’s historiography falls into grouping. The Bible, for example (and consequently the biblical historical trajectory and biblical imagery), is a story, a ‘grand narrative’, and for Wylie, “Stories ‘cast their shadow’ over facts” (Wylie, 2006:104).⁵¹

- **Jane Carruthers, The Kruger National Park. A Social and Political History (1995)**

Carruthers deals with the formation of the Kruger National Park. As with Wylie, the timing of Carruthers’s work indicates that she is also likely to have been influenced by postmodern ideas of nature as having been embroidered with human footprints. She does indeed strike a balance between presenting the romantic Afrikaner views of what Americans would call ‘wilderness’, as well as the more pressing social and indigenous history of the park that was largely undocumented. In the course of completing this task, Carruthers acknowledges the earlier semi-autobiographical text, South Africa’s Eden, in which the park’s first warden, James Stevenson Hamilton, narrates his life’s journey as it criss-crosses with that of the parks. Neither author says much about developments in the USA regarding National Parks.

⁵⁰ Wylie is also careful not to go to the other colonial extreme of depicting indigenous people as being ‘part of nature’ (Lutz, 1993:89,110,117).

⁵¹ Savage Delight: White Myths of Shaka (2000) is the title of Wylie’s first book. It deals with these ideas. A good example of this kind of construction would be *Shaka Zulu*, the series made for American television by the SABC in the late 1980s. It replays some standard biblical narratives. Shaka and his mother, for example, extensively endure the trials of the wilderness before finding the safety of Dingaan’s kraal.

- **William Beinart and Peter Coates, Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa (1995)**

Suffice to say, neither Coetzee nor Wylie appears to find Nash's taxonomy very useful in the South African setting. Another South African academic, this one resident in England, William Beinart, pairs up with Peter Coates, author of Nature: Western Attitudes since Ancient Times (1998). This work draws several parallels between the two countries in the particular 'frontier' phase, while still noting points of departure. Utilising a comparative mode, Beinart records the impact of cultures and economies, on the environments of the frontier nations of South Africa and America, as a result of settler expansion in these countries.⁵² The book spans a broad period of history, from changes in indigenous practices to today's modern environmentalism. Only a faint outline of that entire historical trajectory is given here. Beinart's study takes as its premise the idea that, '[c]oncepts of nature are always cultural statements' (Beinart, 1995:3).⁵³ In documenting the latter, the study includes the shift in popular consciousness from animals as 'game', to animals as 'wildlife' to be protected, from the 'Nature Reserve' to the 'National Park', and from 'preservation' to 'conservation'.

After sharing some ideas about the frontier stage of European expansion, when hunting was necessary for subsistence and trade, Beinart records the emergence of a more stable agrarian society. Farmers in South Africa saw predators of livestock, like large cats, as *ongedierte* (non-animals). Similarly, coyotes, eagles and grizzlies, were classified as 'vermin' in North America. Both were shot indiscriminately. Although sports hunting had been a fervent pursuit among more privileged British males, it only spread into the USA and then South Africa, much later: 'The status of wild animals [in these countries] was yet again recast this time in

⁵² On the cover of the book an American bison faces to the right, and a springbok is superimposed to the left. The positioning of these nationally iconic wild animals in a binary opposition would seem to suggest that the historical trajectories of the environment in the USA and South Africa run in counterpoint rather than in parallel. This is not entirely the case because the book notes both similarities and differences.

⁵³ Beinart points out that scholarship in environmental history, has (as at 1995) come largely from 'Americans [like Nash] studying their own national experience' (1995:1) (my insert). Note how applicable his comments are to Nash's book, outlined earlier: 'Initially, North American writers were mainly concerned with the despoliation of nature and the heroic rise of conservation. They were absorbed with the institutions and agencies of natural resource policy and protection, and with the great thinkers and actors such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Aldo Leopold. It is no accident that this coincided with the rise of the modern environmental movement and the emergence of environmental issues as a major concern in the late 1960s and early 1970s' (1995:1-2). Since then, Beinart continues, and since Nash's epic work, environmental history has developed from the history of environmentalism to the history of the *environment*.

less monetary terms' (Beinart, 1995:25 (my insert)).⁵⁴ Beinart, however, cautions against seeing 'sports' hunting as an entirely imperialistic phenomena: '... while Africans and Native Americans had a different concept of sport, they undoubtedly also enjoyed their hunting - and the status they derived from it. So did the pioneers' (Beinart, 1995:26).

From here, the book goes on to describe the crude beginnings and development of the national park, or wilderness area, as we know it today. Separate and distinct historical trajectories are plotted for the two countries, with both displaying unique motivations for conservation, and in some cases, showing differences in topography.

In the USA, game reserves of the 1880s continued with the extermination of predators like the cougar and wolf. Certain animals, like antelope, were privileged, partly because of their value to the hunter. The wilderness movement in North America, however, did not evolve from these game reserves. In a chapter titled, 'Nature Reserves and National Parks, revaluing and renaturing the wild', Beinart documents that the preservationists primary impetus for the establishment of the nature reserve, was the desire to save spectacular scenery, like Yosemite Valley, from private enterprises (Beinart, 1995:75).⁵⁵ Only much later, did concern for the protection of biodiversity and endangered species become major interests. In the interim, a stronger nationalistic element emerged. The protection and apotheosis of these beautiful landscapes became part of an effort to create a national identity 'out of natural grandeur'. The United States could not compete with the cultural and architectural heritage of Europe, and so, in the absence of ancient cathedrals, mountains peaks became 'our cathedrals' (Beinart, 1995:75).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ North American terrain, however, did not quite inspire the same bloodlust, as other territories: 'Cumming apparently found North American hunting too tame. Like many British bluebloods who had toured the empire, he lamented the absence of lions and tigers and considered buffalo an unchallenging adversary ... Like most Victorians, he was attracted by the celebration of savagery and believed he would enter into a more visceral relationship with the primitive through the act of killing' (1995:26).

⁵⁵ For Congress, Beinart notes, these areas were dispensable to the economy, because they did not have the necessary natural resources. As a result there was not much resistance to ceding these areas.

⁵⁶ Later, resonances of this were to be heard in the South African anthem, 'ewige gebergte waar die kranse antwoord gee' - 'the echoing ravines of everlasting mountains' (Beinart, 1995:74-75).

Over time, and after the frontier had closed, when only stretches of wilderness were left, the motivations for conservation burgeoned to include the predators that had previously been persecuted: ‘No longer a threat to civilization, these survivors could be spared as an expression of the generous ethics of a higher civilization’ (Beinart, 1995:31).

In South Africa, the first game reserves were also officially established in 1880s, as a result of the failure of hunting regulations. They were likewise concerned with the preservation of ‘game as an isolated species’. Unlike the early American nature reserves, however, these were not generally accessible to the public, neither were they spectacularly scenic in any way. Rather, they were composed of bushveld that held appeal because of its variety of plants, birds and animals. And unlike the USA, South African game reserves tended to evolve into Nature Reserves, as happened with the Kruger National Park. Its official designation as a national park, however, was prompted by the rise of white nationalism, rather than public enthusiasm for conservation. This rhetoric maintained that while pioneers had viewed game as food, “ ‘the value of wildlife could be re-interpreted for a new generation who would be able to see the landscape ‘just as the Voortrekkers saw it’ ” [(Reitz, quoted in Carruthers, 1989: 208) in Beinart, 1995:75]. James Stevenson-Hamilton, the first warden of this iconic park, initially favoured the shooting of predators, and did not grant all animals equal status, but managed to achieve government protection for wildlife as a whole, rather than just for ‘game’ (Beinart, 1995:75). This ‘re-valuing of wildlife’ found its way into the public and **symbolic** spheres as well:

Intriguingly, game animals became a recurrent motif in white South Africans conception and **projection** of itself. Assorted wildlife were emblazoned on postage stamps ... The springbok sold almost everything from cigarettes to the national airline. ... American publicists offered their parks in like style as places for vicarious pioneering in pristine landscape redolent of the continent on the eve of white settlement. A thick cultural mantle clothed nature’s naked contours (Beinart, 1995:77) (My emphasis).

The ‘re-valuing of wildlife’ also coincided with the rise of tourism globally, which although not originally a feature in the campaign for parks in either country, became a major force:

Beauty and value were easily associated ... The region's scenic 'grandeur', American geographer Henry Gannet exclaimed of Alaska in the National Geographic *Magazine* (1901), 'measured in direct returns in money received from tourists ... is more valuable than the gold or the fish or the timber, for it will never be exhausted' (Nash, 1982;283). Tourism, it was soon recognized, provided a pay-off for the investment in protected national areas (Beinart, 1995:75) (My emphasis).

From about 1930, the advent of mass tourism brought about bigger changes in South African attitudes to wildlife: 'Southern African tourism was beginning to resemble the American popular mode, rather than the elite imperial safari that clung on in East Africa' (Beinart, 1995:78). Nevertheless, the colonial literary legacy of exciting encounters with animals still played a powerful part in this fascination with wildlife. The heroic individual in these adventures was not always a fictitious character. Real-life white males who toiled in the outdoors, or hunted far and wide, and hence acquired both physical strength and skill, were sometimes also greatly admired. Their vigour and adeptness also inflected positively on the nation from whence they came: 'Like the model of muscular Christianity and the Etonian playing fields, the Rooseveltian celebration of the strenuous life promoted an association between personal virility and national prowess'.⁵⁷

In summarising, the developments of nature reserves in the two regions until the 1950s, Beinart observes that American efforts were largely focussed on extravagant scenery whereas South Africans were more wildlife-oriented (Beinart, 1995:81). In essence, though, citizens of both countries loved 'untouched frontier landscapes' (Beinart, 1995:87). If previously there had been different emphases, from this point on, conservation policies in America and South African began to converge. Both shifted to the preservation of habitat rather than of particular species.⁵⁸ This modern environmentalist perspective also held that not only select

⁵⁷ Beinart goes on to say that the legacy of the 'literary hunting saga' continued in American film-making from about 1912 to the 1920s, which was characterised by 'thrills and spills', and where wild animals were sometimes induced to charge at the camera: '[t]hundering waterfalls were an even bigger selling point than turbulent sex in the roaring twenties' (Beinart, 1995:80-81). Note how this suggests that wildlife documenting, even on the pages of National Geographic, are the remains of a colonial inheritance.

⁵⁸ This was paralleled by the American move away from awesome topography to ordinary topography like the prairie grasslands. As at the publication of this book in 1995, Beinart observed that, '[t]his latest conservationist thrust has been less successful in the USA than in South Africa – a testament to the limits of federal power and the obduracy of farmers' (1995:87).

species, but the entire system of species in a particular habitat, have ecological value (Beinart, 1995:25).

Beinart concludes this chapter with a reminder that parks are, and always have been, ‘a powerful cultural statement fusing notions of nature and nation’, but warns us that their future prosperity is dependent on ‘the universalization both of a set of environmental values and a non-racial sense of nature’s heritage’ (Beinart, 1995:90).

- **Jacklyn Cock, The War Against Ourselves: Nature, Power and Justice (2007)**

It is Jacklyn Cock, Professor emeritus of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, who has provided what are perhaps the most comprehensive studies on the human-nature relationship in South Africa. Cock has published two books in the field of Environmental Sociology, Going Green: People, Politics and the Environment in South Africa (1991), and The War Against Ourselves: Nature, Power and Justice (2007). The latter is a call to arms in which Cock echoes the postmodernist view of what has been called ‘eco-socialism’ (in this report), and its socialist concerns with nature as a site of ideological, political and racial struggle in South Africa. As well as the national park experience, she is concerned with the way that capitalist imperatives have impacted on the way natural resources are managed, and how this has disadvantaged local communities. Cock looks at all facets of the South African daily experience including electricity, advertising, pollution, water management and the military experience. She presents case-studies in settings as diverse as Orange Farm, Vanderbijlpark and the Kruger National Park.

Cock begins by drawing our attention to how nature is intertwined in our daily lives, in ways we are not even aware of. She notes how we are totally unaware of natural events happening right outside our doorstep like the full moon, or the sources of our food, electricity and water. “Most urban South Africans who consume meat in the form of beef, pork or chicken have never known an actual cow or pig or hen’ (Cock, 2007:9). Similarly, we merrily utilise electricity without an awareness of the coal burning stations needed to produce this, and the resultant impact on the environment of our daily, seemingly innocent actions. As a result, we are actually contributing to the environmental crisis without actually being aware of it. Cock

states that the reason for this is that we have become alienated from nature, not just from wild animals, but as we encounter it in our daily lives. Hence, the way we understand nature needs to change. It is not something external and far away that we need to travel to, but something that is inextricably intertwined with our lives irrespective of how modern our lifestyle seems to be. Nature is becoming increasingly commodified and images of nature are used to market a whole range of consumer products. Even television documentaries that appear authentic ‘reduce[s] nature to entertainment’ (Cock, 2007:3).

Cock then moves briefly onto debates about what is ‘natural’ and how this is used to legitimate views of homosexuality as being ‘unnatural’ (Cock, 2007:3-4), but quickly returns to the literal environment in the form of discussions about pollution and abuse that involves case-studies from places as diverse as Vanderbijlpark and New York. Rather than focussing on the abuse of a pristine nature far, far away, Cock considers the abattoir as a place that people are often unaware of, even those claiming to be nature-lovers. She exposes how, even though we may think that we value nature, it is only parts of nature that we value. With animals that are slaughtered for food, for example, we have an attitude that nature exists for our benefit.

The national park experience is also tackled in terms of the social justice issues that both Nelson (2000) and Pepper (1993) have raised, except that Cock explores these within the local context of the Kruger National Park, noting that local communities struggle to benefit from conservation. She calls for the public to take a more personal sense of responsibility in ensuring that communities who have suffered as a result of the ‘commercialisation and commodification’⁵⁹ of nature, can now reap some of the benefits that had accrued under capitalist globalisation. A number of South African environmentalists who have campaigned for the redress of these inequalities are interviewed, and their comments about sustainable development noted. Cock demonstrates, through this and further arguments in the book, how issues of power, globalisation and war may seem unconnected with a concern for nature but are actually deeply implicated in it.

⁵⁹ These words were taken directly out of a review of the book in the WITS Review (2008). No author was cited.

To conclude, she quotes appropriately from Rachel Carson, whose book Silent Spring is credited with launching the environmental movement in the public imagination in 1962. In doing so the genesis of the title of the book is revealed: “Alone we are powerless, but together we can develop our collective strength to end what Rachel Carson called ‘the war against ourselves’ ” (Cock, 2007:227).

- American theory and South African context

In applying theory from a US context to a South African it is useful to pause to consider how this integration can be resolved. Context-specific questions of representation and discourse analysis are best handled in the chapters that discuss the articles in the sample. For now some thoughts on the matter will need to suffice.

Whatever the South African perceptions of the South African historical experience of nature are, it is likely that representations of South African nature within National Geographic are influenced by the cultural context that the magazine is situated in. Several writers besides Nash confirm this idea. Ewan, for example, in reviewing Nelson’s The Wild and the Domestic: Animal Representation, Ecocriticism, and Western American Literature (2000), concedes the pervasiveness of the conceptual shifts outlined by Nash for the American nation’s vision and understanding of nature: ‘I too was raised on the wilderness ideal that Nash promulgates- the unpeopled land where thoughtful men seek refuge from society... the myth of pristine and unworked wilderness’ (Ewan: 2000: 2). It is this commentary about the impact of Ewan’s socialisation in American nature ideology that is fundamental to the concerns of this report, and not the actual relevance of the model to a South African context.

The legacy of Nash’s typology and the relatively newer ideas of ‘eco-socialism’ have been infused into National Geographic’s shifting visions of nature, and as a result, this framework has been projected onto visual representations of South Africa. There is sufficient evidence in the body of literature about American wilderness to vouch for the ease of transference of this legacy. Bellin (1999), talks about the ‘tribal memory’ of the garden, while Williams (2000) argues that the New Englanders experience of nature persists in the American collective

consciousness today and speaks in terms of mythologies and universal symbols. This being so because he takes a more psychological view of Nash's initial garden/wilderness stage in Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American mind.

In each individual American's consciousness, exist attitudes and feelings, the products of unconscious beliefs, that shape the American character. Both our politics and our literature are influenced by forces from the 'invisible world' of our history, and the language in which those beliefs were first articulated (Williams, 2000:13).

Lawrence (2001) views representation in popular culture with a sociological eye. She embraces writer, Jean Baudrillard's postmodern vision of nature:

All description of human interaction with nature is mediated by language, and, because culture structures language, culture is a mediating factor as well. Quite simply what this means is that when we see nature we do not see nature itself but rather a lifelong series of cultural representations from which we learned to apprehend it (Lawrence, 2001:362).

While the psychological factor features more in psychological allegory, it is the Lawrence's sociological perspective that dominates typological allegory. To conclude then, as National Geographic is situated in American society, the American experience, and theories of the human-nature relationship, factor strongly in the representation of South African nature.

1.2.2.) Tropes of nature

Nash's typology lays out various shifts in the way parts of American society have interacted with their respective physical environments. It is reasonable to expect then, given these changing ways of seeing nature, that there would be an 'evolution' in National Geographic in terms of the way nature is represented, and this 'evolution' would express a form of history. In typological allegory, the primary way of detecting this is through a comparison of the discourses used in relation to nature at various periods in history (Barney, 1979:5-9). Discourses of nature are a way of representing beliefs about nature. 'Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world' (Fairclough, 2003:128). Different conceptualisations of nature also imply

varying visual structures of 'the *nature* experience' (Urry, 1999:39). Imagery is therefore just as important an index of the human-nature-relationship, as discourse.

Garrard (2004) has described some of the 'pre-determined' ways of seeing nature already in circulation in western imagery and discourse. This section cites various ideas from Garrard, as well as a range of other theorists, about how nature has been typecast. It also looks at some of the ways these ideas have materialised in texts that incorporate nature, but this list is by no means comprehensive. I have roughly followed the same trajectory as Nash (2001) in order for the reader to make links between the phases that Nash has outlined and the tropes provided. The first part details 'Edenic Narratives' as conceptualised by Candice Slater (1995). This correlates with the ideas about Eden that the settlers would have carried with them to the New World. Descriptions of the 'Pastoral' are laid out as Garrard has sub-divided it, in the form of the 'Classical Pastoral', 'Romantic Pastoral' and 'Pastoral Ecology'. Annette Kolodny's (1974) classic critique follows with the 'American Pastoral'. Apart from the pastoral ecology that pervades an article on Aldo Leopold in National Geographic, the other manifestations of the pastoral are of tropes that people are likely to employ in their evocation of an idealised frontier or agrarian past. The notes on the European aesthetic schemas of the 'Picturesque' and the 'Romantic Sublime' provide clues on western conceptions of beautiful scenery: in the 18th century areas once not useful for humans began to be seen as worthy of nature-appreciation. This contrived way of seeing still has an influence in popular culture today. The section closes with some observations of how the 'Romantic Sublime' dovetails with John Muir's Transcendental Philosophy to produce a unique way of representing American wilderness.

The discourses of nature that have been featured throughout this chapter are sharply distinguished from each other to assist in aid identification, but in the magazine as in other forms of popular culture, discourses usually occur in hybrid form with other discourses (Fairclough, 2003:128). In addition, the occurrence of these particular discourses, and ways of writing about and illustrating these articles do not necessarily occur in the sequence or contexts depicted here.

- **‘Edenic Narratives’: Carolyn Slater (1995)**

“Edenic narratives,” as I would call them, are presentations of a natural or seemingly natural landscape in terms that consciously- or, more often unconsciously – evoke the biblical account of Eden. These narratives underlie and color much of what we accept as fact about particular people and places. Because of Amazonia’s spectacular topography and immense biological variety, it is especially likely to generate these sorts of Edenic accounts.⁶⁰ And yet, while my focus here is on a very specific corner of the globe, **the dynamic I describe in the following pages is by no means limited to an Amazonia that is both geographic entity and province of the imagination.**

- Candice Slater, ‘Amazonia as Edenic Narrative’ (1995:115) (My Emphasis).

The subject of ‘Eden’ or ‘Paradise’ has been very popular as a topic of research both literally and metaphorically. National Geographic itself demonstrates a fairly widespread use of the metaphor in the titles of articles. ‘Saving Africa’s Eden’ (NG/Sept2003) and ‘Indonesia’s Undersea Eden’ (NG/Sept2007) are just two examples. To assist in the investigation of this trope, William Cronon’s paradigm-shifting collection of essays, UncommonGround: Getting back to the Wrong Nature (1995), includes two papers that look at how the concept of an untainted land, that is present in many cultures, still has an influence on human perceptions today. One of these papers is titled, ‘Reinventing Eden: Western culture as a Recovery Narrative’ (Merchant, 1995:132-170), while the other has already been cited above. It is Slater’s work that will be utilised here, although Merchant’s is used no less. Slater provides an exposition of the term and its related constructs.

‘Edenic’⁶¹ stories fall into two categories. One is directly related to the Biblical Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve, and its positioning of humans as having dominion over nature. The subsequent fall and expulsion from Eden follow. The other recalls some aspects of the narrative structure of the original version, but is a more loose interpretation with many different forms, what Slater calls ‘quasi-Edenic’ (1995:116). It may carry some nostalgia for an unspoiled past, and/or have hopes for a restoration of ‘an original state of innocence and

⁶⁰ Slater makes this footnote – ‘The European explorers were wont to conceive of the Americas as a kind of Eden’ (448) and cites some references that include Baudet (1965) and Campbell (1988).

⁶¹ I have used ‘Edenic’ with the capital letter here because Slater does, but elsewhere in the report it is spelt with an in lower case.

plenty through a return to nature' (1995:116). But not all 'Edenic' stories fit even in this broad categorization.

'[D]ifferent sorts of natural spaces may be 'Edenic' (or 'non-Edenic') in different ways (1995:116). The terms most often used to describe Amazonia are 'wilderness' and 'jungle'. Although both have 'Edenic' connotations, they are different. Despite its narrow interpretation in American culture, the term 'wilderness' can and does still paint an image of a primeval land in the mode of 'a world before the Fall' (1995:117). 'Jungle', in the popular imagination, is a place where one goes to explore and adventure, not to contemplate. It has a sense of savagery, complexity and disorder. 'Both the wilderness and jungle possess strong moral connotations' (1995:117). While the term 'wilderness' has undergone a transformation in American culture, and carries the appeal of original and untouched nature, the 'jungle' has kept its negative codings, particularly as '[a] figurative as well as literal maze' (1995:118).

In this way Slater demonstrates that there is no single sign in the word 'Eden'. In the postmodern imagination it is pluralistic. She goes on to stress that 'Edenic' elements appear in a multitude of discussions of nature and environmental issues, as well as those that seem to have nothing to do with them. A detailed analysis of Amazonia and its indigenous inhabitants follows, that leads Slater to say that it is important to be aware of 'the power and depth of 'Edenic' thinking, but [also] of our susceptibility to paradisaal images that speak to our own needs and desires' (1995:131). She concludes that it is important to see the wood from the trees or in 'Slater-speak', paradise from the place:

It is my hope that if an interest in Amazonia can prompt a growing concern for, and engagement in, a whole range of environmental problems, the opposite also can occur. The individual who begins to recognise Edenic narratives in many different places will necessarily see Amazonia with new eyes. And in place of paradise, there will be – among many other things – the child, the boat, the river (Slater, 1995:131).

- **The Pastoral: Greg Garrard (2004)**

The pastoral conception of nature has perhaps been the most influential trope in shaping western constructions of nature.

-Greg Garrard, Ecocriticism (2004:33).

Titled simply – Ecocriticism, Garrard’s comprehensive work assigns a chapter to different ‘tropes’ that are widely employed in the way nature is popularly framed. These include ‘pollution’, ‘the pastoral’, ‘wilderness’, ‘apocalypse’, ‘dwelling’, ‘animals’ and ‘the earth’. Some of these, like the ‘apocalypse’ and ‘the pastoral’, are well-known literary genres with ancient origins which have found their way into public discourse. These ‘tropes’, are ‘pre-existing ways of imagining the place of humans in nature’ (Garrard, 2004:2). They manifest in public rhetoric and can be deployed by various social or political interest groups to create a certain *effect* on the public.

An environmental issue, for example, would be ecological, but the way that the issue ‘has been refracted through apocalyptic rhetoric’ would be Ecocriticism (Garrard, 2004:5). One of the effects that apocalyptic rhetoric has, is mobilising people to action within a short space of time. It therefore serves certain interests. In this way, Garrard suggests that various environmental debates, like the imminent depletion of resources, are ‘examples of rhetoric’ (Garrard, 2004:5).

‘The pastoral’, could almost be an oppositional trope to apocalypse. As it is the theme that will most inform the report, it will dominate the discussion in this section. Building on Terry Gifford’s (1999) ideas, Garrard identifies three types of pastoral – ‘the Classical’, ‘the Romantic’ and ‘the Ecological’. The *Classical* pastoral involves the literature and culture that came to prominence in poetry, particularly by Virgil, during the Hellenistic Period, when increased urbanisation resulted in a desire for return to and repose in the country. This difference between urban and rural became even more pronounced during the *Romantic* period. Once the Industrial Revolution had urbanised masses of people on a bigger scale than ever before, people longed even more for the respite of the country. Relatively recently,

writers have started using the pastoral mode for conservationist discourse, for many reasons, including that it evokes feelings of compassion. This is what Garrard has termed, 'Ecological Pastoral'. These are now each taken up separately.

-The Classical Pastoral

This mode of representation first appeared when the successful expansion of the Roman Empire had resulted in relatively massive urbanisation of certain areas. As a result nostalgia emerged for the declining rural way of life, and lost connection with nature. These sentiments were most famously expressed in the poetry of Virgil, who desired a return to nature. In this mode of expression, nature was backgrounded. There was no interest in nature itself (Garrard, 2004:35), but in nature as a setting for reflection about the ills of urbanised society and the virtues of rural living.

The Classical Pastoral had both spatial and temporal dimensions. With regards to the former, it distinguished between rural and urban areas. In terms of the latter, three types of pastoral have been listed. These were concerned with the past, present and future respectively: the *elegy* which conveys nostalgia about the past; the *idyll* which celebrates an abundant present and the *utopia* which looks forward to a good future (Garrard, 2004:33). The pastoral *elegy* laments the vanished past and so sits very easily with representations of vanishing wildlife or endangered wilderness areas. The *idyll* is usually the easiest to identify. It manifests in images of cultivated rural areas that show workers effortlessly engaged, using only manual tools, with no evidence of mechanisation visible. The pace of life is slow, the mood gentle and placid. This representation invokes a specific connotative code – contentment, peace and harmony.

Garrard has further sub-divided the idyll into the 'bucolic idyll' and the 'rural idyll'. The 'bucolic idyll' (Garrard, 2004:35) is usually a rural setting that includes sheep, goats or cattle and their attendants. The 'rural idyll' (Garrard, 2004:1) is the aesthetic schema that Rachel Carson adopts in Silent Spring. She begins with a placid description of rural America, 'There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings' (Garrard, 2004:1). Carson then changes to apocalyptic mode, in order to

subsequently contrast, highlight and dramatised the destruction that pesticides have wreaked: 'Then a strange blight crept over the area ... the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death' (Garrard, 2004:1).⁶² Carson effectively mobilises the pastoral and literary genres for what would become known as the environmental cause. Today, conservationist discourse still replays the pastoral narrative (Garrard, 2004:56), while the mainstream media often creates a sense of 'environmental apocalypse' (Garrard, 2004:2). This is evidenced in the films, *An Inconvenient Truth* (Al Gore), and *The Eleventh Hour* (Leonardo di Caprio).

-The Romantic Pastoral

The Industrial Revolution resulted in urbanisation on a grander scale than ever before. During the Romantic period that followed, people began to feel alienated from nature, and so longed to return to it. The difference between urban and rural areas became much more accentuated, and more apparent to masses of people. Wordsworth became Britain's most prominent, nature poet although, admittedly, he was more concerned with his and others' reactions to nature rather than descriptions of it (Garrard, 2004:40-41). Wordsworth's use of, among others, the *sublime* aesthetic schema favoured mountainous landscapes, and overlooked areas like wetlands, that were not as picturesque. The imagery, discourse and settings from Romantic poetry found their way into a multitude of visual, textual and cultural forms, and are still very prevalent today in modern media like television. 'Modern advertisements for wholewheat bread featuring idyllic, rolling fields of grain in the sunshine, populated by ruddy farmers and backed by classical music, would offer one example' (Garrard, 2004:34). While the pastoral originally referred to a specific literary tradition that contrasted the urban and the country, and advocated an escape from the city, it later acquired a pejorative sense: the idealisation of rural life was seen to mask the harsh realities of labour. In addition, it was viewed as a 'ratification of an oppressive social order, identified with a landed aristocracy' (Garrard, 2004:49).

⁶² Garrard does not include the accompanying illustration in his discussion but it suffices to say that it depicts a beautiful, feminine spring blossom with the threatening phallus of a pesticide pistol directed at it, a symbolic juxtaposition of male and female (Carson, 1962:1-2). Nature is rendered female, vulnerable and even helpless, while science is white and male.

The pastoral then, as has been demonstrated, was a unique ‘Old World construction of nature’, suitable for long-established, domesticated landscapes. ‘Wilderness’, on the other hand, pertained specifically to the settler experience of the New World (Garrard, 2004:59-60), particularly the USA, Canada and Australia. Wilderness narratives, like the pastoral, embraced the idea of a return to nature, but proposed a completely different concept - that of nature as empty, pristine, and untouched by humans (Garrard, 2004:59-60). We will now look at the way the pastoral evolved in the American context and found its way into ‘scientific’ discourse.

-Pastoral Ecology

It may be that one contemporary pastoral refuge lies within the discourse of ecology itself. At the root of pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies.

-Greg Garrard, Ecocriticism (2004:56).

The idea of nature being in balance and predation being a necessary element to preserve this balance, lends itself to the belief that there is a certain sense of harmony in the natural world. This form of scientific representation replays the pastoral narrative. Rather than an agrarian setting, the setting for this pastoral tale is wilderness (Garrard, 2004:56). The balance-of-nature scientific paradigm is no longer popular in representations of nature, but it does influence the visual representation in the article, ‘The Natural World of Aldo Leopold: A Durable Scale of Values’ (Gibbons/NG/Nov1981:682-708). Pastoral Ecology is particularly suited to a tribute to Leopold’s life, because it sits comfortably with the essential tenets of his philosophy: community, stability, harmony and peace (Garrard, 2004:56). Conservation, as Leopold saw it, should be a form of protection of the environment in the positive sense that humans should bear responsibility for nature.⁶³ Photographs of the hunt then, would not really epitomise this gentle stance, as they rely on a sense of drama and intensity, lacking in

⁶³ Korfiatis sees this concept as reflecting ‘stewardship values’ [(Van den Borne, 2001) in (Korfiatis, 2003:78)].

Leopold's quiet writing.⁶⁴ This indeed proves to be the case in the abovementioned article, as there are no images of predation or other forms of violence.

- **The American Pastoral: Annette Kolodny (1975)**

From accounts of the earliest explorers onward, then, a uniquely American pastoral vocabulary began to show itself, releasing and emphasizing some facets of the traditional European mode and all but ignoring others. At its core lay a yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine, a yearning that I have labeled as the uniquely American "pastoral impulse".

-Annette Kolodny, The Lay of the Land (1975:8).

Europe was the Old World, and the U.S.A. the new. Because of the physical differences in the lands between them, as well as their history, geography, human migratory patterns and demographics, their pastoral conception developed differently (Garrard, 2004:49). Annette Kolodny's groundbreaking work, The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (1975) is a study of male forms of writing that reveals how the male relationship to the land in the early days of settlement in America was gendered. The land was often represented as female through the use of metaphors that could be loosely grouped into those that likened the earth to a mother, and those that were more related to the earth as being a mistress, for example, 'virgin land'. Accompanying the former, the earth as mother, was the idea of the retiring to nature as a means to escape the cares of the world: breast, womb, fertility, fruitfulness, nurturance and plenitude. Accompanying the latter, the earth as a mistress, were, amongst others, phallic verbs with sexual connotations like 'rape', 'strip', 'conquered', 'penetration'. Both satisfaction and despoliation, tended to follow as a result of these activities. Despoliation formed a masculinised, colonial discourse and attitude to nature that were associated with aggressive actions toward the land, and also to the women and native inhabitants of that land. It is this mode of thinking that has evolved into the exploitative ethos toward the land and concomitantly toward nature, that we are witness to

⁶⁴ 'The Natural World of Aldo Leopold' (Gibbons/NG/160/5/Nov1981), was illustrated completely with images of the American pastoral, illustrating the grafting of conservation and the pastoral trope.

today. Kolodny, herself, concedes that this conceptualisation is not a comprehensive historical explanation:

That that symbolization [land-as-woman] appears to have had important consequences for both our history and our literature should not suggest, however, that it accounts for everything, or that to it alone, we must attribute all our current ecological and environmental ills. No such simplistically reductive thesis is intended. At best, I am examining here only a link in a much larger and much more complex whole; but it is vital and, in some cases, a structuring link – and one that has been for too long ignored (Kolodny, 1975: ix).

For Kolodny, the promise of the pastoral for the settlers, lay forever behind the ever advancing frontier, and that abusive relationships with the land and the native inhabitants were linked to the anger of this unfulfilled promise, which has continued today. The vision of the pastoral in American literature has taken many forms in the U.S.A. but the one that Kolodny takes the most pains with is the Agrarian ideal propagated by American President, Thomas Jefferson.⁶⁵ Even today, in the era of wilderness appreciation, this gendered, psychological factor still underwrites the relationship with land: nature as a ‘mother’ from which one can retreat or even psychoanalytically ‘regress’, from the cares of the world. As a result, one can not only experience pleasure, but also rejuvenation as one is ‘reborn’ in the birthplace of nature.

- **The Picturesque: J.M.Coetzee (1983)**

Picturesque landscape is, in effect, landscape reconstituted in the eye of the imagination according to acquired principles of composition

-J.M.Coetzee, White Writing (1983:41).

One of the chapters in J.M. Coetzee’s White Writing, is titled, ‘The Picturesque, the Sublime, and the South African Landscape’ (1983:36-49). As would be expected, Coetzee defines the

⁶⁵ Marx, in his exploration, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral (1964), sees it as a ‘middle landscape’ between areas of settlement and the wild.

terms, *Landscape* and *Picturesque*. 'Landscape' has twin topographical and aesthetic dimensions. It was originally part of the terminology of painting, but entered the English language in the sixteenth century: 'landscapes were pictures of stretches of countryside' (Coetzee, 1983:37). Today it used to refer to a specific area, as well as the characteristics of that area.

Like the beautiful and the sublime (the romantic sublime is discussed shortly), the picturesque was an aesthetic category originally used in Italian art. It became popular as a way of viewing and appreciating landscape after 1713 when it became common for Englishmen to travel in Europe to enjoy natural scenery. The picturesque, therefore, is a term linked to both nature and art, that is, 'to physical landscape conceived of pictorially' (Coetzee, 1983:40). The ideal picturesque scene was composed in the following way: a background of mountains in the distance, a lake about middle ground and a foreground consisting of aspects of nature with a rough texture. This could include ruins, rocks or woods.

Although this practice no longer exists, Coetzee speaks of its influence in terms of William Burchell's, Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa (1822). Burchell was a botanist as well as a keen amateur painter, and so spends time in his work convincing the reader that the South African landscape, that does not qualify as picturesque, is worthy of appreciation. To this end he argues that 'European standards of beauty are linked too closely to the picturesque, which is only one of several varieties of the beautiful' (Coetzee, 1983:39). He urges the reader not to look with the 'European eye' (Coetzee, 1983:39) for aspects and colours that are typical of the European environment. He assures readers that the landscape has a 'harmonious beauty' worthy of study. In addition, he proposes a transformation of the ways of seeing nature that will render the African environment beautiful: the creation of a 'uniquely African aesthetic schema' (Coetzee, 1983:41) that would gain ground in the way the picturesque did, and hence provide the same kind of satisfaction. But this, as it turns out, is just a 'modified' version of the European picturesque (Coetzee, 1983:41). Suffice to say, European painters also found that the African landscape resisted 'being composed according to the picturesque schema' (Coetzee, 1983:43).

The term, picturesque, is today, another term that has outgrown the boundaries of art history. In its informal usage it has now become so broad, and the skill of the photographers of National Geographic photographers so refined, that there is very little that cannot be imaged in a way that would be considered 'picturesque'. The main way this term affects us is in the way people understand what beautiful landscape is, and the way western tropes, even old ones, affect the framing of images. National Geographic *Traveller* aside, National Geographic is also in some aspects, a way in which westerners can vicariously travel to other places to enjoy and consume beautiful scenery, or simply beauty. What is essentially, an 18th century English tradition, still lives on in popular culture. Just as Englishmen travelled to Europe to view scenic wonders, so too does the reading public of the National Geographic go on a journey through its pages to 'experience' the esoteric pleasures of nature.

- **The Romantic Sublime**

John Muir's transcendental philosophy, as it relates to the representation of landscape is reserved largely for American wilderness⁶⁶ articles and is best epitomised by a series on *American Landscapes* begun in September 1996 with, 'Hawk High over Four Corners' (Watkins/NG/190/3/Sep1996), and continuing till the ceiling of this study in 2006. It is an interesting observation on the relationship of wilderness to American national identity that this treatment is reserved only for American landscapes, indicating the use of nature in the construction of a particular national identity through images of nature.

This series draws heavily but not exclusively, from an aesthetic schema in nineteenth century American landscape painting that was inherited from the European category- the 'Romantic Sublime'. Its emphasis on towering mountains and verticality was in direct contrast with the gentle, 'rolling hills' of the English pastoral tradition (Coetzee, 1984:52-61). Through dramatic visual treatment nature is apotheosised, thereby evoking strong emotions, or what Wilson has called - 'that cathedral feeling' (Wilson, 1984:27). But Wilson only operationalises a metaphor that had already been widely employed on a national level for a long time in the description of such vistas. By comparing nature with a place of worship, an

⁶⁶ Garrard calls the signification for wilderness as an unpeopled, pristine state of nature 'the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism (2004:58) 'Wilderness narratives share the motif of escape and return with the typical pastoral narrative but the construction of nature they propose is fundamentally different' (2004:19).

architectural form, with a particular meaning, becomes mapped onto a landscape that may actually have multiple meanings, but whose meaning becomes nationally directed through the use of this specific figurative device (Lawrence, 2001:371). The images thus emphasise heights and depths and may note theatrical effects from the elements - light, water and weather. Hence, the aerial photograph, taken from a god-like position, and the high-angle photograph taken from the 'detached Olympian position' of a promontory, (van Eeden, 2004:26) are staples in this series of American landscapes.

This visual representation of majesty is supported by the discourse of the written part of the article. In Urry's taxonomy of photographic images, the 'Romantic Sublime' is linked to the 'Romantic' category, characterised by the words- 'solitary', 'sense of awe', and 'auratic landscape' (Urry, 1999:39). Similarly, in this series, a religious schema collocates words like 'sacred', 'sublime', 'light', and 'reverent' in the discourse that frames these images. The writer and photographer alone in nature, become surrogate John Muirs, pilgrims re-enacting his spiritual sojourn in a vast, uninhabited and empty land.⁶⁷ A land that is for the most, even free of animals.

As high value is ascribed to wilderness, the general treatment of nature reflects arcadian values - emotional feelings of reverence for the environment (Korfiatis, 2003:77). This series is arguably National Geographic's most overtly and consciously stylised visual representation of nature.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Coetzee sees this representation of land as empty, as embodying an ethos of American expansionism: 'In these respects, first the United States and then South Africa rehearse familiar themes from the ideological repertoire of Western colonialism' (Coetzee, 1984:61). He speaks in the context of American Landscape painting, and questions the representation of America's landscapes as 'gargantuan': 'It is impossible to say whether American landscape emerges so dramatically on canvas because the topography "is" dramatic, or whether features of landscape are emphasised that invite dramatic treatment' (Coetzee, 1984:58). In terms of the projection of national ideals onto nature, that is, the use of nature as an allegory, Coetzee comments: 'The sublimity that American art discovers in (or *projects* into) the landscape is of course a *reflection* (or *projection*) of an ethos of progress and expansion' (Coetzee, 1984:60) (my emphasis).

⁶⁸ In keeping with National Geographic's principle of 'balance', the magnificent panoramas are counter poised with images noting tiny elements in the landscape like single flowers. Hence, the notes here do not constitute the entirety of these articles but rather their most striking features.

1.3. Psychological Allegory

- **A theoretical gambit.**

We have already learnt that Psychological allegory is composed of projection allegory and metamorphosis. Both have long been comfortable in the natural world depicted in the realms of art, religion and literature. To illustrate how psychological allegory can occur in the natural world of National Geographic, that world will first be dissected into three parts – the elements, the floral realm and the animal world. Each of these parts will command a separate discussion of the ways that nature can act as allegory in that part of the environment. The first, ‘the elements’, looks at how allegory operates within Shakespeare’s and Shaka Zulu’s worlds, while the second, ‘the kingdom of plants’, relies on sociological work by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000). The triad ends with a synopsis of some of Mackenzie’s (1988) insights into the British hunting experience in India and Africa, and Ritvo’s (1987) study of zoos.

1.3.1.) ‘Nature as Allegory’ and the elements

MACBETH

ACT ONE:

SCENE ONE

Thunder and Lightning. Enter three Witches.

FIRST WITCH: When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning or in rain?

SECOND WITCH: When the hurlyburly’s done,

When the battle’s lost and won...

ALL: Fair is Foul, and Foul is fair,

hover through the fog and filthy air.

[exeunt]

- The Kennet Shakespeare: Macbeth (1988:9).

The opening scene of Macbeth, captured above, demonstrates the use of ‘nature as allegory’ in the setting of a fictional work. The turbulent elements and overcast weather not only mirror

the clamour of the real life human battle concurrently playing itself out nearby, but are also a literal expression of the ‘witches’ dark and evil collective consciousness, and the havoc that this is about to wreak. King Duncan’s court, by contrast, is calm and rational: a contrast in setting that is an evocation of the simple tensions of the garden/wilderness dyad.

If we come forward some 350 years to the 1980s, a scene in a completely different context replays this narrative. The TV series of *Shaka Zulu* was made for American television during the mid-eighties and clearly demonstrates the way nature, or rather South African nature, can be tailored to fit a code that would be fairly familiar to its western audience. In one, almost frightening scene the audience is introduced to the *isangoma* that Shaka consults. The scene is given similar dramatic treatment to the opening scene of *Macbeth* just described. The clip involves only a few minutes of the androgynous figure of the main *isangoma*, Sitayi, whose visage is hidden by the dark of a primitive night, and only dramatically revealed by flashes of lightning. What the viewer just manages to glimpse is a grotesque and ancient face that seems hundreds of years old. Sitayi becomes an ominous presence that is almost a part of the foreboding forest she stands in silently. The resultant representation of nature that Sitayi helps create is almost a primordial wilderness - out of control and tempestuous.

This vision of Zulu nature is contrasted, in the next frame, with the sun drenched, organised, fruitful vineyards of the Cape that the British Colonisers occupy. We are reminded of Urry’s words that the physical garden as we know it, represents a people’s ability to domesticate and appropriate nature. It is essentially an ordered, moral space, a civilising image of tamed nature (1999;35). The Cape, in this case, as a ‘colonial garden’, a controlled landscape that is a visual and spatial metaphor for the British as Christian civilising elements. Nature, in Shaka’s kingdom, in sterile opposition, is a wilderness symbolic of African supernatural, primeval and dark forces.⁶⁹

The contrast of the Cape with the forest of the Zulu kingdom draws on, amongst other things, the common associations of good and evil with differences in lighting, and differences in

⁶⁹ Of course there are other western mechanisms at play here, like representing ‘witches’, English or otherwise as being ‘part of nature’, but that is another matter not within the parameters of this study.

weather conditions. What emerges is the role of nature, or more particularly, the elements, in establishing the *moral condition* of the players. The elements can be similarly manipulated to reflect the emotional state of the characters. A happy state of mind materialises in brightness, and an unhappy one in darker light. In this way the use of the elements of nature in a mis-en-scene becomes part of a projection allegory, one that can be decoded through a reversal of the writer's process.

An example of how these representational elements can be utilised in a National Geographic mis-en-scene as described above, can be found in the article, 'Living with Aids' (NG/Sept2005) that locates the Aids struggle in rural South Africa. The third frame shows a mother and her two children alone (NG/Sept2005/69-70). We have already learned that theirs is a single parent household. We see them walking against a strong wind on a desolate, unpaved, rural lane on an overcast day. The sky seems to threaten rain. Overpowered by the elements, nature plays a role in portraying the family as victims of the Aids scourge. It reflects their struggle, unhappiness and anguish. On a broader level as well, it is the materialization of abstract ideas in the external environment, in this case, the battle of Aids victims in Africa.

But one photograph cannot act alone to create an impression. It acts in concert with others in the photographic narrative, and the editorial policy of the magazine at various times, to enhance or neutralise its effect. Other mechanisms like scaling, placement, and the collocation of other related images also affect one photograph's weighting in the overall photographic selection. In this article this means that other images ensure that the portrait of Aids in South Africa is not overwhelmingly tragic but that there are some glimmers of warmth.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The other two images are taken in dark light, and display dark and dull colours. Altogether a fairly sombre but respectful mood is created, appropriately so. But the tone is not overwhelmingly low. It is brightened a bit by the expositioning frame that shows the victim's family holding a night vigil for her with candles. The light and support of the family provide some glimmers of hope. So, the use of elements of nature as allegory, like lighting and colour, must intersect with the particular style of National Geographic. In this case, the principle of 'balance' necessitates that effect of potentially negative elements be subdued by another. A more detailed discussion of the magazine's principles occurs in Section 1.4.

The second component of psychological allegory is metamorphosis. This sub-division requires a passage of time in order for the transformation to be apparent. Again, a fictional example that tracks the metamorphosis of nature seems the best place to start: in Francis Hodgson Burnett's Victorian novel, The Secret Garden, some children discover an enclosed garden that has become overgrown. For the purposes of this report it can be seen as a small 'wilderness', a metaphor for the disintegrated social relations of the household. The children work hard to restore the garden to an orderly cornucopia and are rewarded by a renewed social order (the invalid child recovers his health and his relationship with his estranged father is rehabilitated). The metamorphosis of nature mirrors the processes of familial transformation and ratifies their successful outcome.

A similar, if less noticeable trajectory can be witnessed in National Geographic. It concerns two representations of what is essentially the same scene – a family affected by migrant labour, sitting around a hearth in a hut in one of the 'homelands'. The reasons for the stark difference in representation is also because of the editorial changes that occurred over this time, but for the sake of the argument we will just isolate one factor and that is nature as allegory.

In the 1971 article on the Zulu, we are shown the interior of a hut (NG/140/6/Dec1971/745) in a rural area in what was then a 'homeland'⁷¹ known as KwaZulu. A family huddle around a bright, well-tended fire. We hear about migrant labour in the caption of the photograph. Migrant labour was commonly understood, as a phenomenon that split up families and caused suffering, as some of the male members journeyed far away to urban areas to find work. These males were not allowed to take their families with and were not considered permanent residents but had to return periodically to their 'homelands'. One would expect, then, that the image presented would be more of an unhappy one. Instead, the photograph plays the role in the photographic narrative of demonstrating warmth, togetherness, and bustling activity. The family who have been left at home, 'keep the home fires burning' literally, at what *may* have

⁷¹ The homeland policy of the apartheid government required that black people of various ethnicities stay within areas that were seen as being their traditional home territory. These were granted 'independence'.

seemed to an American audience like a relatively calm time for South Africa politically, certainly if the content and extent of news coverage is anything to judge by.⁷²

After 1976, once the South African political landscape had exploded, this image reincarnated in the 1977 article somewhat metamorphosed (NG/151/6/June1977/813). Now set in the Transkei, the family members are sedate, sad and scattered around a dead hearth (Beaudreau, 2002:518). What is essentially the very same scenario as the previous image mentioned above, is now represented as dismal rather than bright. The same setting and social characters now play the role of revealing the unhappy and fragmented consequences of apartheid. This difference reflects the change in the political situation as would probably have been *perceived* by an international audience. From the mid-seventies, the political climate became more troubled, drawing international media attention, and concomitantly, a heightened *awareness* of the suffering of black people under the apartheid regime. Hence the need for there to be images of unhappiness and impoverishment in the black community for the article to be seen as realistic. On an even deeper level, the second image and the dead fire reify the sorrow and division created by migrant labour as *perceived* by National Geographic, in South Africa's post 1976 condition of 'moral decay'.⁷³

1.3.2.) 'Nature as Allegory' and the 'kingdom of plants'

Dealing with the idea of allegory on a broader, contemporary and non-fictional level, the Comaroffs, in their incendiary 'Nurturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse, and the Postcolonial State' (2000:7-40), explore the demonising of alien plants through the hyperbolic public discourse following the massive Cape fires in 2000. They question what this could imply about 'the ecology of nationhood' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:6), that is,

⁷² It is easier to understand this when you understand National Geographic's principle of balance (see 1.4. page 73). The magazine avoids a monotone presentation, seeking instead to provide a multi-faceted perspective. Together with relatively 'positive' images then, there would also be those that show isolation. Given this scenario, the photograph above can be said to be playing a relatively more optimistic part in the story.

⁷³ Again, the interpretation is not uni-dimensional. Changes in National Geographic editorial policy were also a factor in the metamorphosis of these images. The first image has been influenced by the older editorial policy that was criticised for idealising problematic issues and places whereas the changes in the 1970s sought to present a portrait that was more compatible with news reporting. You can read more about this in the section, 'Nature, Allegory and National Geographic', a bit later on. For now the element of allegory has been isolated to enable comparison on one dimension.

the ways in which the role of nature in configuring national identity has changed in Post-apartheid South Africa.

The essay begins by analysing the troubled public discourse over the few weeks after the fires, and the concerns this raised about the survival of indigenous vegetation. They draw from theoretical work done on 'the dialectic of disaster' to demonstrate how one particular succinct and believable explanation (although there were a few), that reduced multi-dimensional causes to one agent, became the dominant interpretation presented in the news, and then became fact. This interpretation claimed that the infiltration of highly flammable alien vegetation had rendered the Cape floral kingdom more vulnerable to natural disasters, hence the unprecedented scale of the fires. Out of this furore, an almost obsessive need arose to mobilise and act to curb this invasion. Government involvement soon followed.

The Comaroffs go on to narrate the drama that ensued in the emotionally-charged discourse of the English press that implicitly linked 'alien' vegetation to broader issues of national being. This was framed as an 'indigenous' vegetation versus 'alien' vegetation debate. While Cape Flora is uniquely associated with the Western Cape, and is considered 'indigenous', 'alien' plants were, in contrast, 'intruders' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:9) that had breached 'sovereign borders' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:9), and were monopolising the Cape Peninsula, systematically reducing its natural 'riches' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:10). This public discourse couched a moral panic that seemed out of proportion to the actual, mundane occurrence of vegetation in the areas concerned. At about the same time, heightened emotion around efforts to rid South Africa of illegal immigrants also emerged in the media. The Comaroffs claim that these two parallel strands, 'alien vegetation' and 'illegal immigrants' are links in a 'chain of consciousness' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:11). They argue that 'concealed' in the language of botany was discrimination against the millions of illegal and other immigrants who may not be welcome within its borders. Rather than natural facts, this was a case of political anxieties being *presented* as natural facts. The denigration of alien-nature permitted a vocalisation of racism that might otherwise not have been acceptable in everyday discourse.

The framing of the Cape fires in this way was not an isolated event, but a part of a worldwide trend towards the depoliticising of, and redirection of socio-political debates into other arenas, like nature. By this, the writers mean, that thorny issues like racism, xenophobia, and homosexuality (see Cock, 2007) are not spoken about directly, but indirectly under the guise of crusades against alien vegetation, for example. ‘Barely displaced in the kingdom of plants is a distressingly familiar crusade: the demonization of migrants and refugees by the state and its citizenry alike’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:29). In Comaroff terms, this is a ‘naturalisation of xenophobia’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:29). Not ‘naturalisation’ in its dictionary definition of the incorporation of alien people, signs, people and practices into a particular place, but in quite another mode. The commentary below makes their more literal conceptualisation of the word clearer:

The other (definition of naturalisation) whose genealogy stretches from Marx through Gramsci to Foucault, is the deployment of **nature** as alibi, **as** a fertile **allegory** for rendering some people and objects strange, thereby to authenticate the limits of the (‘natural’) order of things; also to interpolate within it new social and political distinctions. It is tempting in the South African case, to invoke yet another connotation - one owed to Durkheim - according to which processes in nature are taken to be a direct reflection of processes in society. Some local commentators did precisely this ... finding in the panic about invasive plants a mirror for the angst about immigrants. But such a reading of the events in question is insufficient. Nature is everywhere more directly, more dynamically implicated in the social practices by which history and ideology make each other (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:36) (My emphasis).

In questioning why autochthony has become so crucial to nationhood at this point in historical time, the Comaroffs present an overview of general developments in the contemporary nation-state. Foremost among them, are the dilemmas of constructing a national identity in an era of globalisation. They suggest that autochthony has emerged as the most authentic marker of national being, and hence a way to resolve this crisis. In linking this essay to the concerns of this report, we extract the basic idea that a representation of nature in a media form (like National Geographic), can consciously or not, reflect a national socio-political context at any given time. This context has been elongated to extend from 1960 to 2006, rather than being at one particular historical moment.

-Lawrence Buell: Criticisms and Commentaries

The Comaroff's argument clearly illustrates how nature can be an allegory for social processes, and therefore provides the theoretical foundation for this report as a whole. This 'armchair' approach to environmental observations, has drawn sarcasm from people like Lawrence Buell who view themselves as having had first-hand experience with the nature they critique. Buell actually writes five years earlier so his comments are not directly in response to the Comaroff's arguments, or anybody else's, but rather a general critique on the constructivist type of approach to viewing nature which this report also employs.

First, I would question the increasing marginalization of the literal environment in the exploration of what is the most decisive and important among the agendas of American naturism. The conception of represented nature as an ideological screen becomes unfruitful if it is used to portray the green world as nothing more than **projective fantasy** or **social allegory**, as if *Walden*⁷⁴ were to be read in the same way as ... George Orwell's *Animal Farm* ... It then becomes impossible to differentiate between a descriptive poem by Robert Frost ... and an eclogue by Virgil ... These are characteristic results of academic criticism for which it easily becomes second nature to read literature about nature for its structural or ideological properties rather than for its experiential or referential aspects. -Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature-Writing, and the formation of American Culture* (1995:36) (My emphasis).

Rather than using Buell's perspective to completely discount the Comaroff's argument for the South African campaign against alien vegetation as social allegory, and the more comprehensive approach of the report, it is more productive to view his emphasis on the experiential aspect in context.⁷⁵ It came at a time (1995) when it was becoming popular for academics to present 'anecdotal evidence' in their work in the form of their personal interactions with nature, and to record the informal observations that they made. This is perhaps just another ideology at play. Buell himself goes on to write a chapter titled 'Pastoral Ideology', indicating that he recognises this approach. In addition, although Buell's work is

⁷⁴ Walden is a book by Henry David Thoreau that is considered a classic of nature-writing. It details his stay near Walden Pond, a 'rural' area near Boston. It extols the value of wildness and living in the wild.

⁷⁵ Buell continues, 'These are characteristic results of academic criticism for which it easily becomes second nature to read literature about nature for its structural or ideological properties rather than for its experiential or referential aspects'.

not really an example of this, the period following his work saw the line between creative and academic writing becoming less rigid, creative writing being more embracing of anecdotal and informal experience. This development is clearer when it is contrasted with the era of modernism when impartiality and impersonality in writing were valued. A clinical approach and a sterile separation between academic writer and script was not only in vogue but was considered necessary for an accurate assessment of the subject matter.

Therefore, Buell's sarcasm need not frighten the reader off, or discredit the specific argument of the Comoroffs, or the more broad reaching argument of this report. It should rather inform the way they are received. To this end, Annette Kolodny's (1975) preface to her own seminal study, noted earlier in the section on 'American Pastoral', is also applicable. In applying her statements here let it be said that this report agrees with Buell's stance that 'represented nature' cannot only be a social construction. On the other hand, National Geographic does intend to represent the 'literal environment'. Rather than totally ignoring this dimension then, or worse, negating it, the report is simply choosing to cast the focus on how nature could operate as 'social allegory' in the magazine, since this has been an area in the magazine that has not received much academic attention.

1.3.3.) 'Nature as Allegory' and 'megafauna'

Until lions have their own 'story tellers', tales of a lion hunt will always glorify the hunter.

– 'Kenyan Proverb'

To project a feeling of power and speed, automobile manufacturers name their products Jaguar, Mustang, and Falcon, even though the clientele they wish to attract has no personal knowledge of these animals. Somehow jaguars and mustangs still project an image of power in a man-made world full of engines and machines that ought to convey energy in their own right, without borrowed feathers and claws from nature.

Yi-Fu Tuan, Dominance and Affection (1984:72).

The way in which animals have operated as an allegory for human power has been commented on largely in the context of British colonialism. The aspects that have drawn the most academic attention include hunting, zoos, menageries, iconography and natural history. The two scholars that will form the caucus of the discussion here will be Mackenzie(1988), who documents a history of hunting and to a lesser extent, Ritvo (1987). While Ritvo deals with a wide spectrum of human-animal interaction in the Victorian era, only her comments on zoos and menageries will be considered.

Writing about hunting in the imperial setting of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, historian, John Mackenzie's Empire and Nature (1988), focuses on the British male's experience of wild animals in the British colonies. Nevertheless, aspects of the European model that feature so prevalently in Nash's typology also appear here:

In many areas of the world, the colonial **frontier** was also a hunting **frontier** and the animal resource contributed to the expansionist urge. In the era of **conquest** and settlement animals sometimes constituted a vital subsidy to an often precarious imperial enterprise, while in the high noon of empire hunting became a ritualised and occasionally spectacular display of white **dominance**. European world supremacy coincided with the peak of the hunting and shooting craze (Mackenzie, 1988:7) (My emphasis).

Mackenzie tracks a distinct shift in the human-hunting relationship. In the first, the frontier mode, hunting is a practicality. Later, in the more established, or 'garden-like' phase, hunting becomes sport and *symbolic* of human prowess within nature and of power over nature. It is in this 'garden-like' phase that it acquires 'class and moral overtones' (Mackenzie, 1988:12). Allegory, as has already been agreed on, subsumes symbol. Hence the symbolic value of hunting in this mode indicates a projection onto nature of white masculinity as well as of profoundly political ideas. Mackenzie documents other cultural forms like art where the symbolism of animals has materialised:

Images of the Hunt are everywhere in Eastern and European art. As each culture and each medium has successively turned to man's relationship with wild animals as a central theme first of human *survival* then of human *dominance*, the art has become more self-conscious, more overlaid with symbolic meaning (Mackenzie, 1988:8) (My emphasis).

Mackenzie points to the *vocalising* of human superiority through images and description of animals, and the way these images become a *reification* of the hunter's prowess, and even as Mackenzie later points out, his *moral condition*. The Hunt was valued, 'as the promoter of distinctive male virtues' (Mackenzie, 1988:21). Mackenzie provides some examples of the way this has operated through from ancient times to the age of British colonialism. A brief overview of this follows.

In many ancient societies, the virtues of both the dead and the living were represented in heroic hunting enterprises. These usually involved only a certain range of animals which predominantly included what today would be described as 'megafauna' – big cats, mythical dragons, bears, whales etc. Hunting images 'ritualised the protective role of the monarch' (Mackenzie, 1988:17) portraying rulers as 'brave protectors of their people against the ferocious animals that beset them' [(Anderson, 1985) in (Mackenzie, 1988:12)]. 'In the late Roman Empire hunting scenes became an *allegory* of Christian virtue and a symbol of the victory of Christ over the forces of darkness' [(Anderson, 1985:30) in (Mackenzie, 1988:8)] (my emphasis). The Romantic period was more ambivalent: man⁷⁶ is still represented in the natural world in a way that exerted his authority over it, but in a more subtle manner. Despite this Mackenzie maintains that these images are alike in important ways:

[T]he attraction of movement, drama, the combination of human and natural elements, and the opportunity for **allegorical meaning** clearly attracted the artist in all these cases. They were also attracted by patronage. Each elite seemed to find this the most powerful and appealing way to present itself. The Hunt, in short constituted propaganda: it showed emperor, king, or lord exhibiting power, enjoying the privilege that went with it and asserting prestige within widespread territorial bounds (Mackenzie, 1988:10) (My emphasis).

⁷⁶ I am using the term 'man' with conscious intent here, rather than human, because it was mostly, if not exclusively men who were represented in this way.

The extract also reveals the phenomenon of the image of the Hunt as a largely male endeavour reserved for the wealthier classes who controlled access to hunting grounds. As the Hunt spread into colonial territories, it acquired colonial overtones. Its, “alleged character-forming qualities were depicted as being ‘manly’, a masculine training for imperial rule and racial domination” (Mackenzie, 1988:22). In twentieth century contexts, this notion of manliness coupled with colonial domination persists in photographs of the white male hunter presiding over a dead animal that he has killed, accompanied by non-western assistants, other companions, and sometimes auxiliary animals like elephants. Mackenzie goes on to demonstrate colonial domination over the natural environment as an extension of domination over the human-made environment. We learn that the tiger and the British Raj ‘were locked in deadly combat for control of the Indian environment’ (Mackenzie, 1988:180).

Ritvo (1987) approaches this imperial theme within a different but related context, that of the zoo as a historical spectacle of colonial power. She cites, as an example, Sir Stamford Raffles who had been instrumental in setting up and stocking zoos and menageries in England on return from the East Indies in 1824:

Raffles activities as a naturalist echoed his concerns as a colonial administrator: he made discoveries, imposed order, and carried off whatever seemed particularly valuable or interesting. The maintenance and study of captive wild animals, **simultaneous emblems of human mastery over the natural world and of English dominion over remote territories**, offered an especially vivid rhetorical means of re-enacting and extending the work of empire, and Raffles intended to continue his colonial pursuit in this **figurative form** after returning to the centre of English power and enterprise [in England] [(Brayley, 1827:382-406) in (Ritvo, 1987:205)] (My emphasis).

The zoo was thus not only an educational and recreational facility but also a symbol of British rule over foreign lands that the public could participate in, and join in celebrating. Although a colonial context has been cited here, Ritvo, like MacKenzie, demonstrates in her

comprehensive work, The Animal Estate: The English and other creatures in the Victorian Age, an understanding that the metonymic use of animals for individual and political glorification was not a product only of colonialism, but a practice that receded way back in history. She draws on work by Yi-Fu Tuan in Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets to comment that,

The use of wild animals as tokens of political submission had ancient roots; for millennia kings and emperors had maintained menageries to symbolise the extent of their sway (Ritvo, 1987:206).

If animals and that spectacular subset called ‘megafauna’ have been used allegorically since the first recordings of human history, and have continued through a plethora of phases of human history, then it is reasonable to presume that this is a practice that has continued till today. Admittedly though, the allegorical forms that it takes may have evolved in relation to the way the modes of representation have evolved.⁷⁷

The allegorical concerns raised in Mackenzie, Ritvo and Tuan’s work, however, occur only sparsely in this report. Other allegorical dimensions that utilise flora and the elements occur more frequently, which implies that animals are used less often allegorically over this period in the representations of South Africa in National Geographic.

⁷⁷ National Geographic has printed photograph/s of ex-President Teddy Roosevelt standing over a wild animal that he has just shot. The ex-President had embarked on a year-long safari to East and West Africa to hunt and kill wild animals for the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. These were treated by the taxidermist and exhibited, where they can still be seen today.

1.4. Nature, Allegory and National Geographic

I have been a member of the National Geographic Society in Washington DC for close to 20 years. The wondrous articles, the explorations, the inventions they showcase are a wonder to behold. It is a joy to go behind the scenes to see what a remarkable universe we occupy.

-Sol Makgabutlane, 'Of tusks and of elephants' in *The Star*, Johannesburg: October 19, 2004.

At first glance Disney, the Reader's Digest, Sea World and National Geographic Magazine, or as I have also referred to it here, National Geographic, do not seem to have much in common. A closer postmodern look reveals that at the very least, they are all generally considered innocuous American family fare.⁷⁸ It is no wonder, then, that academics commenting on these other institutions all make mention of National Geographic. These include Smoodin (1994), Sharpe (2000), and Davis (1997). Sharpe observes that subscriptions to the Reader's Digest 'like National Geographic' (Sharpe, 2000:47), are usually a gift from a family member: 'As such it comes to stand for that relationship in many peoples' minds' [Lutz, 1993 in (Sharpe, 2000:47)]. Smoodin and Davis's reports are a little more similar. Smoodin says:

Disney's re-creation of various historical epochs and geographical regions in his theme parks, and his saturation of world markets with his various products, were hardly different from *National Geographic's* monthly production of the world in the space of three hundred pages. Rather than standing for an overt ideological position, as in the 1940s when Disney clearly worked to advance the Allied cause, this new Disney (and the *Geographic*, too) indicate a commitment to the benefits of mass education, objective knowledge, and honest fun (Smoodin, 1994:7) (My emphasis).

⁷⁸ This conclusion is based on personal observations as well as the critiques of the academics subsequently cited. These are Smoodin (1994), Sharpe (2000), Davis (1997), and Lutz (1993).

Susan Davis speaks in, Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience. It is her analysis of the entrance to the marine theme park in San Diego that strikes an association for her with the magazine:

Indeed, the handheld map of the “world,” the tower’s overview, the division of the park into regions, and the stress on encounter and adventure are similar to the experience offered by other mass media, most famously *National Geographic magazine*, and strongly suggest the long history of European meetings with the non-European world ... the theme park offers its customers an implicit identification with the colonial “discoveries.” And ... the role of the European mappers of the non-European world ... But while adventurers might sally forth to help survey and conquer the globe, Sea World’s nature views and landscape structures suggest a different kind of conquest, one accomplished aesthetically through visual intimacy (Davis, 1997:98) (My emphasis).

Davis’s critique points to the experience of nature constructed by institutions like Sea World and National Geographic as being indirectly, albeit rather remotely, implicated with colonialism. Adding to their culpability is the demographics of their clientele, mostly white and middle-class, mainstream Americans [See (Lutz, 1993:1-14) and (Davis, 1997:3-4). Pauly gives us a historical perspective that also supports this conclusion - the magazine, in its early days, was the ‘direct and lively descendent of the cabinet of curiosities, a close cousin of the natural history diorama’ (Pauly, 1979:527). Both these collections are a little notorious in the academic world for their associations with colonialism [See for example, Pauly (1979), Buckley (1970), Pratt (1982) and Lutz (1993)], for many reasons including that items or specimens in these displays were usually appropriated from non-European terrain by Europeans, and that in its early definition, natural history included both wild animals and primitive peoples (Pauly, 1979:527). Indigenous people were seen as being part of nature, hence primitive in some way, and perhaps even sub-human. In its heyday, the natural history diorama was, like National Geographic and Sea World, considered ‘educational’, and perhaps even ‘scientific’.⁷⁹ Until fairly recently, both of these ‘topics’ - nature and indigenous people - were staples of National Geographic (Pauly, 1979:527). Although coverage of both may have declined in the parent magazine, particularly the latter, they both still feature prominently in National Geographic Kids Magazine.

⁷⁹ Although the natural history diorama is not common, it does still occur, most notably at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C.

While Sea World and National Geographic share a rather remote connection with colonialism, Sea World, Reader's Digest and Disney are all very visibly located within the realms of capitalism and commercialism, with one student commenting that Sea World is 'like a mall with fish' (Davis, 1987:3), a connection that would seem to exclude the magazine. Their loose grouping with National Geographic, however, as suggested by Smoodin (1994:7), Sharpe (2000:47) and Davis (1997:98), implies that the magazine, although registered as a non-profit imperative, does, and must have, at least some of these business imperatives in order to sell its product to a mass market. To support this direction of thought let us consider Pauly's notes on the formative years of the magazine around the turn of the century:

Grosvenor's priority and the main business of the Society was to interest large masses of people in the Geographic. Yet the NGS was not a journalistic enterprise that merely used the cover of a scientific organisation to promote a magazine. It was an institution which sought to realize a set of ideals that have generally been considered incompatible in the modern context of science and its popularization (Pauly, 1979:527).

Hence, the magazine, since its inception, has sought to present, for the most, a science that is popular (Pauly, 1979),⁸⁰ but also a science and vision of nature that is honest, authentic and not contrived.⁸¹

But if there are similarities, there are also differences. It is far more difficult to see the magazine as a form of recreation, as the type of education it imparts seems 'serious'. Furthermore, National Geographic - has pedigree: it was first published in 1898 with the patronage of that rather famous Bostonian, Alexander Graham Bell. Its first editor, Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor married Bell's daughter. He belonged to a group of American self-made

⁸⁰ To be fair, Lutz (1993) notes that the magazine does run articles, on Africa, for example, that they know are not popular, but that they publish as part of their social commitment (119-125).

⁸¹ Mitten (1999:26-58) gives a variety of examples of situations in nature that were contrived for American wildlife films over the twentieth century. In some cases it was thought to be the only way to acquire desired effects. National Geographic sought to document nature as it really was.

people, like Walt Disney, who rose from humble beginnings and relative obscurity to create mega-institutions.

It was Gilbert H. Grosvenor that set up the founding principles of the magazine in 1915, parameters that the magazine proudly claims from time to time that it is still operating within. These guidelines include: timeliness, topicality, absolute accuracy, balance, permanent value,⁸² an abundance of beautiful and educational photographs and avoidance of topics of a partisan, controversial, critical or unpleasant nature (Grosvenor in Pauly, 1979:528). These guidelines have been interpreted differently as the magazine has changed, as the world has transformed, as photography and other media forms have evolved, as the world's moral threshold is progressively lowered (Sontag, 1977), as people have become more visually orientated (unpublished thesis, Duncan, 2003), and according to the different editors that it has had. These editorial principles are best understood in terms of the way the magazine has differentiated itself to mainstream media.

Rather than being event-focussed, the magazine looks at what 'daily life' in an area might be. Writers and Photographers work separately and spend a long time in the field to ensure exactness and breadth of coverage, hence an article on a topic that has appeared in the newspaper might only appear in the magazine quite a while later. Almost ironically, coverage must also correlate in some way with strategic events, so as to appear topical. It must also avoid controversy, not offend anyone, and be politically correct. This may mean that the publication of the article may be delayed until the political climate is calmer, or more appropriate. The article, 'South Africa's Lonely Ordeal' (Ellis/NG/151/6/June1977), for example, brings all these elements together. It was published in the month of the one-year anniversary of June 16, 1976. Over the years the magazine has become progressively bolder, narrowing the gap it had originally created between itself and mainstream media, and so highly-emotive issues appear more often than they did in 1977, for example. Since the millennium, sections dealing with current affairs and people in the news, particularly

⁸² In terms of permanent value, it is useful to think in terms of a newspaper. Newspapers are usually thrown away at the end of the day. If it is kept for a while the pages yellow and tear easily. Similarly some of the content quickly becomes outdated. Copies of National Geographic are usually kept and often used for reference or resold or donated to a library or school. One can get second-hand copies from the 1960s. The magazine aims to print content that stays relevant for a longer period of time than the content of newspapers.

environmental issues, have been added in order for the magazine to appear more topical and in touch with the world. Coupled with this development are some articles that carry a newsroom feel [See for example ‘Saving Africa’s Eden’ (NG/Sept2003)], and may have been given top priority in publication.⁸³

Nevertheless, the rush for the press, prevalent in mainstream media like newspapers, is still not present, to the same extent, in National Geographic. For the most, articles are usually slow-brewed with time taken for thoroughness. Precision is more valued than immediacy and its related problems, like inattention to correct details, something the tabloids sometimes get themselves into trouble over. Both written and photographic content goes through a stringent system of checks and balances by National Geographic staff for ‘*absolute* accuracy’.

To give the reader some idea of just how seriously the magazine believes it exercises this value of veracity, it is useful to consider an editorial that appeared in the October 2004 issue. It apologised for photographs that had been printed in an article in an earlier issue. Apparently, as it turned out, these photographs were not accurate recordings of the events the article purported to be documenting. Some had actually been taken in another country on a previous occasion, while another had been contrived. Editor, William Allen, wrote: ‘On rare occasions we can’t get independent verification of the circumstances in which a photograph is made. This story was one of those cases’ (Allen/NG/Oct2004/editorial). Allen went on to rebuke, albeit gently, the photographer involved. South African journalist Sol Makgabutlane responded to this in a tiny article in a Johannesburg daily newspaper, *The Star* (his opening statement has already been previewed at the beginning of this section): ‘In journalism, it is an honour to be accepted by National Geographic. To be repudiated by it must be like a death sentence’ (Makgabutlane, 2004:14). In this, his closing comment, Makgabutlane also alludes to the prestige that the magazine seems to have for many writers and possibly for people in other circles.

⁸³ These observations about the application of the principles of the magazine, as with most of the others, are based on my informal observations over the past few years.

In terms of the magazine's aim to be 'non-partisan', potentially negative aspects in an article are usually presented as impartial, non-judgmental and unbiased observations made by the magazine itself or by others. These are usually articulated in a subtle and polite manner that is, by comparison with mainstream media, *relatively* unemotive and milder in expression, one of the reasons why the magazine has drawn criticism at various times for being conservative [See for example (Lutz, 1990), (Bryan, 1987), (Pauly, 1979) and Buckley (1970)]. There is a measure of sensationalism, but in general, the discourse tends to be 'quieter' in relation to the excitement and exclamations that texts in the mainstream media tend to thrive on. This could also involve downsizing or darkening photographs to lessen their emotional, disturbing or negative impact. Another way this negative impact is diluted is through the principle of 'balance'. Positive aspects of an issue are balanced by negative aspects, and predatorial images, for example, are balanced by gentler images. In some features both sides of a story may be clearly presented [See for example ((Ellis/NG/151/6/June1977))].

When sensationalism is more pronounced, it is usually in parts of the natural world where humans may encounter danger and adventure but have not been completely overwhelmed by that danger. Humans are never shown completely out of control in relation to nature, not even in the event of natural disasters. Biophobic attitudes toward nature, that as fear of nature (Korfiatis, 2003), are either absent, light-heartedly voiced or employed largely but not solely for the purpose of dramatisation. 'Inside the Great White' (Bentley/NG/197/4/April2000), a spectacular portrait of the shark, is one such example.

National Geographic, as it stands now, enhances its scientific authority in numerous ways. The writers commissioned include acclaimed authors, academics, scientists, and those who are considered specialists, and have already established their credibility in their field. In layman's terms - 'not just anyone'. National Geographic often touts these credentials, as would other magazines. It was an author and biologist, Doug Chadwick who wrote the article, 'A Place for Parks in South Africa' (1996) that is scrutinised in Chapter 5. Grants are also provided for scientific research that may involve intimate interaction with nature, and the investigators involved usually then provide the magazine with the spoils of their research.

Specialists write with the academic ideas that are not only in currency at the time of publication, but that are also watered down to a level that the average National Geographic leader will understand. What some would call ‘colloquial science’, or even ‘eloquent science’. Articles may therefore have a splattering of academic buzzwords, or even incorporate the titles of widely acclaimed academic books like Landscape and Memory (Quammen/Oct2006/42). This approach ensures that there is a heightened sensitivity to issues of representation within the magazine, but it is still not without problems: the scientific meta-commentary of the magazine infers that its representation of nature is unneutered and hence ‘uncomplicated’, ‘neutral’, ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’,⁸⁴ impressions that obscure the difference between nature and ideology.

Other ways the magazine’s authority is amplified is through reference to, quoting and/or interviewing famous people associated with philosophising about nature. These include Harvard socio-biologist E.O. Wilson, and perennial favourites – John Muir, Ansel Adams, Henry Thoreau and Roderick Nash. But as has already been outlined at length, National Geographic’s nature is a mirror for ideologies currently in vogue, rather than unmitigated reality.

-the wildlife documentary genre

To help peel away the apolitical veneer of nature representation it is useful to consider studies done on the wildlife film or wildlife documentary. Garrard highlights the influence of this genre of film on mass audiences:

For most modern readers, it is not the zoo but the wildlife documentary or movie that predominantly shapes their perceptions of wild animals. Informed critique of the way these productions shape our ideas is perhaps the most important way that we can enhance our ecocritical awareness beyond the realms of literature (Garrard, 2004:15).

⁸⁴ Pauly (1979:520) supports this conclusion in his discussion of two of the original patrons of National Geographic Society, ‘In the 1880s the two of them ... promoted *Science* as an American emulator of *Nature*’.

Commentary on the wildlife stars of the film and television industries can be transferred to some of the articles of National Geographic, particularly as some of the photographic essays that feature wild or marine life have documentary counter parts. Others are actual stills from documentaries that have been made [See for example (Warner/NG/Aug2002)]. Four aspects of wildlife representation will be discussed – popular culture, ideology, allegory and socio-political factors.

With regards to the first aspect of popular culture, Wilson has observed that the rise of '[m]ovies, television and amateur photography introduced a new populist imperative for nature: it had to entertain' (Wilson, 1992:125). This development meant that those media forms involved in the 'business' of television and photography, like National Geographic, have had to co-evolve by presenting nature as entertainment (Mitten, 1999:27). As with many things in the media this usually means a strong dosage of 'sex and violence' (Mitten, 1999:27), twin elements that in any other media form would provoke PG ratings, but which sit comfortably and acceptably in representations of the natural world. An article very clearly illustrating this had as its blurb, 'Shore Leave: A rough and randy mating season for the elephant seals of South Georgia Island' (Casey/NG/Nov2008/130). The feature begins eloquently and poetically, and proceeds to give us a very intimate look at this unique ocean predator. Yet despite the visual and verbal intimacy that we are witness to, Cock (2006) complains that this form of 'entertainment' alienates people even further from nature (60-69), one of the ironies of postmodern life.

Nature documentaries also employ other popular dramatic devices like storylines that can blur the line between fact and fiction. Baker quotes Ingold (1988:12) in confirmation, directing us to incarnations of theatre in the documentary genre:

For the Western television viewer, observing the antics of a strange and exotic animal on his screen, he might as well be watching a work of science fiction as a nature documentary (Baker, 1993:194).

This use of dramatisation and narrative within what appear to be scientific contexts is fairly well-supported in the literature of National Geographic, as well as that of nature documenting [see for example, (Pauly 1979), (Gero 1990), (Baker 1993), (Cock, 2007)].

Theatrical elements in representation assist in procuring audiences but may also assist in securing a place in the market for National Geographic and other educational materials. Gero notes that a long serving editor of the magazine had long ‘recognized the power of glamourised knowledge’ (Gero, 1990:26). In short, National Geographic, as with other nature films, is part science and part ‘show business’ (Mitten, 1999:26).⁸⁵

Another dimension of nature documenting is the effect on representation of different ideologies of nature, at play at different times. Mitten relates an experience he had in his compelling work, Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on Film (1999), where he witnessed a hawk catching a starling over a fence. The anecdote nicely ties all four factors just mentioned together – science, nature, entertainment and ideology.

Captivated by the hawk’s power and by the starling’s suffering, I thought about how this scene would have been framed in nature films. In the sentimental nature films of the 1950s, the violence would have been tempered by reference to the harmonious web of life. The individual struggle and suffering would have been resolved into one of beneficence, as each species helped keep nature in balance, testimony to the wonder of nature’s grand design. In the animal snuff films of the 1990s, the choice shot would be a close up of the hawk tearing the flesh of the starling, with an amplified audio-track of the starling’s shrieks. This scene would be made more intense than my actual experience could be (Mitten, 1999:208).

Mitten (1999) goes on to note that his analysis of nature films above, results in a contrast of sentimental and violent portrayals. He then adds that what would have been consistent in both, was the exclusion of any human elements, including the fence, although these were actually also a part of the hawk’s natural environment. What Mitten’s comments mean for

⁸⁵ Mitten speaks in a chapter titled, ‘Science versus Showmanship on the Silent Screen’ (1999) and so strictly speaking his comments apply only to the period of silent film. Nevertheless I think a sufficient case has been made for nature and science as entertainment to justify this transference to the, also silent, photographic images of National Geographic.

National Geographic is that the malleability of the visual medium, and the ways in which nature is refracted through an ideological lens, create an experience for the reader that is not necessarily as authentic as it may first appear. He implies further that nature films in some way cater to changing tastes, and that representations, will inevitably also shift accordingly. Another good demonstration of this phenomenon was cited a bit earlier in the book:

Only a decade earlier the law of the jungle had pervaded the presentation of nature in natural history museums, zoos and travelogue-expedition film. Filmmakers had portrayed the spectacle of death and the struggle for existence as life's central drama in part to attract box-office crowds. But in the midst of the Second World War, a more peaceful side to nature appealed to both scientists and the public. The human aspects provided enough violent drama. Nature offered a reprieve from a war-torn world [(Bodry-Sanders, 1991:209) in (Mitten, 1999:86)].

The report has already shown how Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) connect drama and sensationalism in the discourse of nature, to allegory. In terms of Mitten's case-study just given we are reminded of Jameson's (1986) concept of national allegory, that is, that texts of the 'third world' are also stories of the nation's struggle against some form of oppression. The story of the representation of wildlife in American film is, in some small way, very possibly also a 'national allegory' of a part of America's history. This interpretation of the term, however, is more in tandem with Ahmed's (1987) view, that any (fictional) text can be allegorical in a variety of ways.⁸⁶

Armbruster (1998) provides a piece of history that is more overtly political than the one just discussed, and hence more obviously a national allegory. It concerns the process of American expansion into the West, mythologically remembered as the conquest of an un-peopled land. This win was, according to academics like Armbruster, a victory over *both* wildlife and savages, so often co-features of representation, but not often noted as such. In discussing the documentary *Wild America* that describes ways in which American culture has endangered wildlife and natural areas, Armbruster (1998) draws our attention to one of these in particular:

⁸⁶As I have already argued, both Ahmed's and Jameson's ideas can be applied to 'non-fictional' texts like National Geographic.

In a move notable for its venture into the territory of linking the oppression of indigenous cultures and non-human nature, Mary Stouffer (the narrator) even explains that bison became extinct in the area of the South Dakota Badlands National Park because they were shot by whites not only for meat and hides but also as a part of a strategy to drive Indians on to reservations (Armbruster, 1998:235).

The story of the extinction of bison in this area is also the story of white-Indian relations in the area. On the basis of Armbruster's observations, it is possible to suggest that this 'frontier' phase of the human-nature relationship,⁸⁷ is the one most overtly and intimately, intertwined with colonialism in its various forms. Armbruster further demonstrates the role that nature documentary, and by extension, a magazine like National Geographic, can play in revealing socio-political issues like the one revealed in the extract above. National Geographic does indeed rise to this challenge in the article, 'A Place for Parks in the New South Africa' (NG/190/1/July1996), by documenting the impact of apartheid on conservation policy and practice in the country.⁸⁸

This last example completes the discussion of the four aspects of nature documentary and how they apply to National Geographic. These were – popular culture, ideology, allegory and

⁸⁷ ... and the garden/wilderness conceptualisation of nature that tends to accompany it ...

⁸⁸ Thus far, this section has only discussed nature in terms of one part of Korfiatis's (2003) binary, as laid out in the section on 'Defining Nature' at the beginning of the chapter: nature as a 'natural environment' that people perceive as unsullied and hence, still 'wild'. Gilbert H. Grosvenor, the first editor of the magazine, also demonstrated this understanding of what nature is in his comments in an early editorial of the magazine:

The subject matter covers almost the entire range of Nature, from the ant to the elephant ... It deals with nearly every part of the earth, from the teeming pavements of New York ... to polar wastes [(Grosvenor, 124-128) in (Pauly, 1979:527)].

For Grosvenor, the pavements of New York are not 'nature' but 'earth'. This thinking may have been a product of its time, but the postmodern age demands that we understand nature as being integrated in our lives. This is the other part to Korfiatis's binary that considers nature as it interacts with culture, or rather, with humans. An example of this would be a picture of some children in a park for example. To give us an overview of these two parts of Korfiatis's definition and how they contrast with each other, Cock's words are useful:

For many people 'nature' means wilderness and wild animals. It is experienced indirectly through magazines and television programmes or through visiting the highly managed environments of national parks. Nature, however, is not external, separate from the world of people – we live in nature and interact with it daily (Cock, 2006:9).

This second part to the definition, the kind of nature that might only form a backdrop for pictures is touched on in Lutz's study (1993), but forms part of the kernel of this report. However, because of the dearth of research in this sphere of nature representation, very little can be said about this 'type of nature' in National Geographic. There are not many pointers, as yet, for this direction of study. It is left for the reader to understand this by journeying through the text.

social politics. Like nature documentary the magazine operates simultaneously in the realms of 'commercialism, mass entertainment and nature entertainment' (Mitten, 1999:31). But even within this framework, ideologies prevailing at various times will affect the way the nature experience is framed for the viewer. Changes in popular taste usually pre-empt changes in representation, although this order of events could probably also occur in reverse. If socio-political factors play a part in the representation of nature then this representation also forms a national allegory, as it informs us about the evolving state of the nation. The documentation of nature can play a role in demonstrating racial and ideological tensions that may underlie human-nature interactions.

To conclude, it suffices to say that to completely comprehend the visual representation of nature within National Geographic, the various ways of defining nature, the tropes, dramatic strategies and mechanisms that shape its scientific material must be revealed. This is the primary aim of the forthcoming chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the theoretical framework necessary to prepare the reader for the in-depth analysis of discourse and imagery that follows. The three main constructs that have been defined are Ecocriticism, Nature and Allegory. Ecocriticism is an 'increasingly heterogeneous movement' (Buell, 1995:1) that explores the way that nature has been represented literally and metaphorically in a variety of texts. To effectively do this requires a cross-fertilisation of fields of study that may not have previously have exhibited any connection before. These include literature, cultural studies, colonial discourse studies, ecology, geography, social biology and environmental studies. More recently eco-feminism has created a conjunct between Ecocriticism and Gender Studies. There has been a great deal of academic activity in the field and as a result it has developed very quickly.

With all these areas of interaction one must wonder how to define nature. More importantly, what exactly is the scope of a study of the representation of nature? 'Nature', from the end of

the nineteenth century till relatively recently, referred to a realm that was perceived to be unsullied by humans and hence separate from them. It was a place one needed to travel to. In the U.S.A, this meant 'wilderness' areas. As it stands now, however, the term, nature, has become so increasingly inclusive that it includes almost every living, physical form. In addition, pressure from environmental concerns has necessitated a push towards a sense of personal responsibility and individual accountability that has also affected the way nature has been defined [See for example (Cock, 2006)]. For the purposes of this report, the definition of nature has been capped in terms of Korfiatis's categorisation of 'Types of Nature' (2000), although, admittedly, even this postmodern definition is still quite broad and encompassing. Korfiatis (2000) identifies a binary that is made up of the sub-categories, 'natural environment' and the 'human-made environment'. The former is the way nature is commonly understood, as separate and devoid of human influence. The latter consists of areas where the human factor is more evident. These would include parks, trees in a city, dams, atriums, farms, rural areas like the homelands etc.

Nature's twin element in this investigation, allegory, was not as straightforward to conceptualise as there were no precedents. Allegory, in its essence, requires two parallel strands of meaning to exist: The literal story or object, and the secondary meaning that the first story implies. This basic idea has been used in a multitude of contexts, ancient and modern. Fletcher (1964) provides a detailed analysis of allegory as it can apply to a wide range of visual texts that includes objects and landscape. More recently, academics like Jameson (1986) have moved away from the ideological level that stories like Animal Farm have made popular, to emphasise the sociological level. What the contributions of these writers point to is the versatility of the medium of allegory. Therefore, with some leeway, it is possible to for this term to migrate comfortably in a seemingly scientific context as it has already travelled so far from its original fictional beginnings into history and iconography etc.

Allegory was further sub-divided into 'typological' and 'psychological', using Barney's schema (1979). Typological refers quite simply to *genre*, while Psychological Allegory can again be further broken down into 'projection allegory' and 'metamorphosis'. The first involves the way nature mirrors the social character's inner mental state. The second, 'metamorphosis', is differentiated from the first by its temporal dimension. A passage of time

is required for a physical change in the character or setting to occur, and this transformation is usually indicative of a transformation in the moral condition of the social character/s.

How all this applies to the study here of National Geographic, is that the way the magazine has represented the human-nature relationship is according to various ideologies and the tropes that tend to accompany them in discourse and imagery. These form typological allegories. Nash has identified various phases in the human-nature relationship in the U.S.A. These, together with input from other academics, have been greatly simplified to form a trajectory that runs from 'frontier', 'garden/wilderness', 'wilderness cult', 'eco-socialism' to the irony of 'loving nature to death'. In some ways the simplified stages seem to be a swing from one extreme to the other. Some of the aesthetic schemas that are sometimes found in descriptions of nature in hybrid form are – the pastoral, the American pastoral and its gendering of the land, apocalyptic rhetoric, the romantic sublime and the picturesque. Colonialism, as it impacts on nature representation, tends towards the idea of the conquest of nature and is the period of nature history that appears to have been the most studied. Mackenzie's and Ritvo's work both testify to this and demonstrate how animals have been used as an allegory for man's prowess and power since recorded history. Other ways in which nature has operated as an allegory, for socio-political ideas, have been through the elements and through plants. This commentary forms the discussion of the psychological allegorical element in the magazine and will be applied in a scrutiny of National Geographic's vision of South African nature and what this reveals about its perception of the socio-political conditions of the country at the time in history that the article appears.

National Geographic operates at the cross-roads of nature reproduction, popular culture, entertainment and education. Factors that affect its representation of nature as it is commonly understood are ideology, historical circumstances, colonialism and commercialism. The magazine is highly reputable and still holds the principles set up in 1915. These include balance, non-partisanship, topicality, beautiful illustration and permanent value.

Thus far the report has mainly considered academic work done by American scholars and this will continue to be the case, but just to provide the reader with a glimpse of what South

African commentary there is in this arena, a section on the South African context was provided that was presented as a literature review. The work reviewed included J.M. Coetzee, Jane Carruthers and Jacklyn Cock.

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