



# Place & Imagination

16 - 17 July 2015

Annual English Department Conference

# Day 1: 16 July 2015

Venue: Public Health 1C

## Session 1 CHAIR: Hermann Wittenberg

09:00-09:30 **Duncan Brown:** Reimagining the 'Literary' in South African Literary Studies

In a review article published previously in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, entitled "Reimagining South African Literature" (2014), I argued that most of the attention to the probing question which Leon de Kock asked in 2005, "Does South African literature still exist?", has focused on the qualifier "South African", and less on the noun "literature". It remains a powerful question – deceptively simple, but concealing in its formulation several depth charges: questions of literary value; modes of reading; literary historiography; national/transnational identities; translation; readership; institutional location; and so on. In this article, I want to focus more on the notion of the 'literary' in literary studies in universities in South Africa (and elsewhere). It is to me perhaps the most challenging aspect of De Kock's interrogative.

Some reflection on the recent constitution of the discipline is helpful in making sense of its current and future trajectories, particularly in understanding why South African literary studies seems, as De Kock suggests, to be so far behind the game (2005: 77). The reasons are no doubt multiple, including the complexities of negotiating the unstable terrain of the post-apartheid and the transnational, the rapid expansion of cultural, media and communication studies, the proliferation of electronic publishing platforms, and so on. But I would point to a more fundamental problem: a discomfort with the notion of the literary, or the judgement of literary value. Since at least the mid-1980s, South African literary criticism, partly under the influence of Marxism, post-structuralism, post-structural Marxism, deconstruction and critical theory, has retreated from the literary and more broadly the aesthetic, which – in the absence of a compelling social subject like apartheid or colonialism – leaves it singularly unable to deal with the complexities of a context in which literature as literature is flourishing.

09:30-09:50 **Wendy Woodward:** From Sapa to Siem Reap: places in poetry

How can a westerner on a brief visit to Vietnam and Cambodia, countries mired in histories of war and genocide, even begin to respond to these places? Poetry facilitates a recording of sense impressions, a documenting of experience and allows the writer to focus on the particular, on the "small things" rather than on the "big things" (to use Arundhati Roy's terms). These histories are undeniable, however, whether they manifest in a photograph of Uncle Ho next to a Buddhist Shrine in Hanoi, in the music-playing amputees in the Angkor Wat jungle or in the prejudice of a guide against Vietnamese fisher-folk on a Cambodian lake.

09:50-10:10 **Kate Highman:** Place and Imagination: English Literature at the University of the Western Cape in Zoe Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*

This paper takes its cue from the story 'A Clearing in the Bush' in Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* in order to think about the 'place' of English Literature at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), situated on the southern tip of Africa.

Wicomb's story – which is set in 1966, on the day after Verwoerd's assassination, invites us to think about place and literature by invoking both geographical place and literary allusion in its title, 'A Clearing in the Bush'. For the title evokes both UWC – sometimes dismissively described as a 'bush' university, and set on the scrubby Cape Flats – and the clearing in the bush, a scene of rape, at the centre of Thomas Hardy's novel, *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, a novel which Wicomb's protagonist, Frieda, is struggling to complete an essay on. Wicomb thus overlays two seemingly disparate settings, bringing them into the same literary space. In so doing, she is one step ahead of her protagonist. For Frieda is constrained by the manner of the novel's teaching from making connections between Hardy's novel and her own situation (there are parallels: for instance, both she and Tess go on to suffer unwanted pregnancies) and using reading and writing as tools of both personal 'bildung' and sociopolitical critique (Frieda is encouraged to view murder, including Tess's of her rapist, Alec, and Tsaefendas's of Verwoerd, as always simply wrong, regardless of context). The unimaginative manner in which the text is taught – by a white Afrikaans man who dictates notes that he expects to be parroted in essays – effectively alienates her from the discipline, and from understanding and trying to establish her own 'place' in the world.

Wicomb's 1987 story raises questions about canonicity, pedagogy and literary education as a socio-political tool that are increasingly topical with the current movement to 'decolonise the university', a movement which the paper seeks to engage. The paper is part of what is envisaged as a larger project of exploring the history and politics of English Literature as a university discipline in South Africa, and I would appreciate the chance to receive input from UWC English Department faculty and students on their own thoughts and experiences concerning the 'place' of English Literature at the university.

10:10-10:30 **Roger Field: 'Cavafy and Dangor: A Return'**

Few articles are the last word. After publishing on this topic (2011), I find there is still more to explore: more of and in Dangor's allusions to the poetry of Constantin Cavafy in his own poetry and fiction, and more to meditate on the notion of repetition, of returning home, and of creating a new or false past for oneself. In this paper I will examine poems from Dangor's collection *Bulldozer* (1983) that develop fragments from his earlier short stories 'Waiting for Leila' and 'The Homecoming' (1979), and which appear in his novel *Bitter Fruit* (2000).

10:30-11:00 Tea

**Session 2 CHAIR: Wendy Woodward**

11:00-11:20 **Michael Wessels: Violence in Indian Literature in English: Representations of the Spaces of Misrule and Resistance**

A number of India's best known writers of fiction in English explore the anatomy of both systemic and revolutionary violence in their novels. The oppressive control of the reproductive and labour power of women through marriage and caste rules is a pervasive theme as is the institutionalised racism and economic exploitation that is inherent in the caste system. The religious ideology that underpins the unequal distribution of power is another recurring theme. Many of the best known postcolonial novels – *Midnight's Children*, *God of Small Things*, *A Fine Balance* and *White Tiger* among them – detail the violent response elicited by the rejection of the limitations on identity and agency that gender, caste, class, religion and tradition impose. Less common, but a recurring theme, nevertheless, is the theme of organised violent resistance to both state oppression and more local sites of power. A number of novels by Indian or Indian diasporic writers refer in passing to the Naxalite insurrections while several feature the movement more centrally: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* and Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* among them. The revolutionary activities of separatist and nationalist movements also feature in works such as Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*, which examines the revolutionary movement for Gorkha independence. This paper will investigate the representations of modes of resistance, particularly revolutionary violence, in postcolonial fiction by Indian writers, noting that a general sympathy for the need for political and social transformation is accompanied by an ambivalence about revolutionary violence itself, especially insofar as it compromises individual integrity and the cohesion of the families of the revolutionaries, an ambivalence that finds its appropriate vehicle in the novel with its dialogical and multivocal possibilities and its ability to chart individual consciousness and stories. The discussion will focus on *Inheritance of Loss*, *The Lowland* and *The Lives of Others* but will refer to other Indian fiction as well in order to supply a broader context for the analysis. The paper will conclude with some remarks about the representation of political violence in postcolonial/post-apartheid South African literature by way of comparison.

11:20-11:40 **Lucy Valerie Graham: Representing Marikana**

This paper examines three representations of Marikana as place and event: Rehad Desai's *Miners Shot Down*, a highly acclaimed documentary that carefully traces events leading up to the massacre of striking mine workers by police that occurred at Marikana in August 2012; Aryan Kaganof's *Night is Coming: A Threnody for the Victims of Marikana*, an unconventional cinematic response to Marikana that raises questions of seeing and not seeing, not only in relation to the Marikana massacre and contemporary South Africa, but also to academic discourse on landscape; and Ayanda Mabulu's "Yakhal'inkomo", a controversial painting of Marikana that was "banned" from the Johannesburg Art Fair and then reinstated. What do we see - and also not see - when we, like Desai and Kaganof, compare Marikana to Sharpeville? What kinds of historical links between places, geographical features of landscape and events are suggested and/or occluded in these different representations of Marikana? What does it mean to frame Marikana and economies of extraction within academic discourse on land and landscape?

11:40-12:00 **Cecilia Addei: Fantasising the Unspeakable: War and Disrupted Childhoods in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated***

Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* is a fiction based on the civil wars in the West African countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone. It employs the adventurous quest of an insulated child narrator to chronicle the events of wars, warlords, histories, peacekeeping agents, regional bodies and international bodies. This novel, even though employs real historical figures and events, is narrated through fantasy. This paper investigates how Kourouma fantasises real events and how fantasy allows him to represent the unspeakable experiences of the West African child soldier.

12h:10-12:30 **Annel Pieterse:** 'The Danger Inside': Witchcraft and Community in South African Literature

How has South African literature conceived of a commonality that includes multiple relations with the phenomenal world? My paper addresses this question by tracing the representation of witchcraft and the supernatural in a selection of key South African literary texts, namely Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*, Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. I proceed from the assumption that a belief in occult powers is often central to local knowledge systems in South Africa, and that this belief should be acknowledged as a commonplace feature of life in South Africa if one is to understand certain aspects of the social, political and, by extension, literary landscape.

12:30-12:50 **Sinethemba Bizela:** The Spectre(s) of Sycorax: Imagining the Island as a Place of Abjection in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Cesaire's *Une Tempest* and Fugard's *The Island*

In this paper I seek to suggest that Sycorax, as the present absence in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, haunts the Island and Prospero respectively. I then consider Cesaire's adaptation of Shakespeare's play by looking at how Sycorax develops as a character in relation to the spirit of the place. In both plays it seems to be Caliban who articulates space, by showing his master the "qualities o' th' isle": "fresh springs, brine pits, barren places and fertile" and the like. And also, I explore Fugard's imaginative Robben Island, as the place for political prisoners, and the implication of incorporating Antigone. Here, I examine Winston's attitude towards the idea of playing a female role and what does it tell us about the space of female in considered fictional islands which seem to defer, if not to refuse, housing women. I want to suggest that the island is the metaphor for abjection due to its locatedness as the isolated place, outside the terrestrial and yet the piece of land amidst the sea. Lastly, I propose that the idea of abjection resonates with orality as the presence of the absence in literature.

13:00-14:00 **Lunch**

**Session 3 CHAIR: Mark Espin**

14:00-14:20 **Fiona Moolla:** Island Places, Island Spaces: Cultural Imaginings of Self and World in Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

This comparison of the medieval philosophical tale by Ibn Tufayl and the narrative by Defoe, often considered the originary novel, foregrounds the locale inhabited by the respective heroes, and shuttles between the island experienced as place and the island conceived as space. Tufayl's desert island novel charts the formation of the boy-child Hayy, whose origins on an equatorial island off the coast of India are in doubt, but who is nurtured to strength by a doe. Defoe's *Robinson* is shipwrecked off the coast of the Americas and constructs an island domain on which he is sovereign. The paper will analyse and compare the formative influence of the island as place and space on the imagined nature of the subject and the world in these two desert island narratives.

14:20-14:40 **Andrew Matthews:** The Short Story and the Dialogic Imagination

A central aspect of the short story – and the story in general – is that of time. The story is defined by its relation to chronology. Time is sequentially and logically arranged in that one event follows another. In Mikhail Bakhtin's epistemology of dialogism time similarly features prominently. His notion of the Chronotope posits that time (chronos) and place (topos) are in an equal and reciprocal relation: one is not considered independent to the other. Moreover, time and place are always the time and place of a specific situation or event. In this paper I will discuss the story and how time figures in narrative discourse in relation to Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope.

14:40-15:00 **Kareesha Naidoo:** Between Text and Stage: The Theatrical Adaptations of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*

This paper will critically analyse two theatrical adaptations of J.M Coetzee's *Foe*. One of the key ideas in adaptation theory is that adaptive fidelity to the source text is neither possible nor desirable, but that adaptation is a more complex, multi-layered intertextual and intermedial interplay of fictional material. I will study the two adaptations by discussing various aspects such as the way lighting is used with in the plays, the way sound is translated from the novel to the stage and also what constraints and limitations the adaptors ran into when adapting *Foe*. Subsequent chapters of my thesis will take a more creative approach as I will be taking an in-depth look not only into the two adaptations, but also re-reading *Foe*. This research will contribute a new approach to Coetzee studies and to this novel in particular by exploring how these texts can lead to a new understanding of Coetzee's work.

15:00-15:30 Tea

**Session 4 CHAIR: Roger Field**

15:30-15:50 **Julia Martin:** The Oak Tree was Huge: Reading Koppie's *Story at the Hoek*

Koppie's *Story* is the unpublished manuscript of a 400 page novel written by Frances Cope, a colonial farmer's wife, in the early 1880's. The narrative begins in 1879, a pivotal year in terms of the catastrophic socio-environmental impact of the colonial Government's invasion of Zululand, and it ends in 1880 when the railway line from Durban reached Pietermaritzburg on its way into the Interior. By this time the imperialists had effectively won against the local inhabitants, and as the territory started to be opened up for industry and agriculture, things were in place to do battle with the land. In the novel, this framing story is seen from a domestic vantage point. Koppie, the protagonist, is primarily concerned with home, that complex world of eco-social relationships that her family built. Reading my ring-bound copy of the manuscript 130 years later on the verandah of the farmhouse in the KZN Midlands where it was written, I'm drawn into the contemplation of animals wild and domesticated, the intimacy of a path through the veld, the resilience and tenderness of people, and of seeds. I imagine that each particular thing in this world of the farm bears the imprint of wars of occupation. But how?

15:50-16:10 **Courtney Davids:** Transatlantic Observations and Lived Experience in Catherine Hubback's Letters

This paper explores Catherine Hubback's letters written from 1871-1876 following her emigration to Oakland, California at the beginning of 1871. The letters, rich in their observations and experience of American domesticity and its domestic affairs, also provide insight into Californian history when discrimination against Chinese immigrants escalated from the 1870s onwards. Hubback employed Chinese servants, and her descriptions of her interactions with them in her domestic space can be read as providing a sympathetic perspective on their contested presence in California that resonates with her treatment of national, domestic issues in her novels. This paper argues that Hubback's letters validates English domestic ideology in her criticism of American domesticity and femininity. Despite her ambivalent position as both outsider and insider, adapting to her new context and critical of it, her transatlantic writing makes a persuasive argument for the pre-eminence of English domesticity.

15:10-16:30 **Susan Ntete:** 'Where are they ten years later?'

Ten years ago 81 teenage high school learners wrote an essay titled 'Where I see myself in ten years' time'. This work in progress reports on a follow-up study that uses a life history calendar to determine the level at which some of these young adults have been un/able to realize their dreams; and hopes to establish why this is the case.

16:30-16:50 **Grant Andrews:** Shifting Paternal Narratives in South African Fiction

Many works of fiction have focused on the symbolic power of the father or on the stories that the father tells. Using a constructivist approach, narrative will be shown to inform societal power-structures, and the narratives related to the father, referred to as paternal narratives, are shown to be dominant in this regard. In South African fiction, paternal narratives are linked to the major shifts in society, from early reliance on the father as arbiter of wisdom and values as in Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* to recent novels which show the ailing father whose narratives are ill-at-ease with broader society, as in Mark Behr's *The Kings of the Water*. My discussion will briefly explore these trends and explain how they are dealt with in my doctoral dissertation.

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{End of Day 1}

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## Day 2: 17 July 2015

Venue: The Hive

### Session 1 CHAIR: Julia Martin

09:00-09:30 **Peter Kohler:** Dance to the New Empire

This paper is concerned with storytelling, and its focus will be on the re-enactment of a particular story. To re-enact means, of course, to modify, alter, or even change, but it can also mean to redo, recreate, or re-perform. Re-performance, the ability to perform a work at multiple venues at a single moment, is associated with the body art of Marina Abramovic, while her methods are better known through her equally odd follower, Lady Gaga. The paper, I assume could be read as an interest in detaching a performance, an idea, a gesture, from the sanctuary of the so-called original or authentic act. This paper does experiment with repetition, re-enact ion, or recreation.

The assumption, following Derrida, is that pure repetition, reiteration, does not exist. Even the most faithful copy, for example, a photostat machine duplicating, replicating, an image, multiple times, is never completely accurate or without alteration – even if that alteration is registered as no more than a shift in the moment (time) of the act or performance. The paper, then, must invariably touch on what it means to be original, unique, particular, and raises doubts, I assume, about whether the distinction between authenticity (as originality) and imitation (as mere copy) is sustainable.

Part of my interest here is with byzantine forms or institutions, which we associate with Empires – Chinese, Greek, Roman, for example. The question I am probably asking myself is whether the collective Empire is always a reaction to the threat of its own dissipation, disappearance, and by implication, disillusion. Does Empire-building begin with the threat (and fear) of its demise, and, equally, not with confidence but with disenchantment? This sense of building an edifice on weak foundations can be extended to the resurrection of other social forms, other texts, which we associate with writing and education. My question then would be: do texts invariably threaten themselves? Are authors endangered not by non-authors or amateurs, but by the institution of authorship itself? What can challenge and disturb the teacher more than the institution of education itself? Likewise is the new not also produced, or enabled, by its fear of the old, the modern in terror of the traditional, which could also be read as the old coming into being with the spectacle, the future thought, of the new on the rim of its consciousness? Does the silence of the story call the story into question, while enabling it at the same time? In another context this would mean the need to revisit tradition, originality and the classic once more. Added to this, we would need to think about whether it is possible even to talk about constructions, productions, performances, edifices, without some understanding of the imagination (including the psyche), and without some grasp of what it means to paint, write, sing, and dance.

09:30-09:50 **Kenneth Goodman:** The Use of Concept Mapping as a formative assessment tool in the cycle of learning at the University of the Western Cape

The scholarship of teaching affirms the fact that the work of the professor is consequential only as it is understood by others. Lecturers often know how they learn best, but do not necessarily consider how their students learn or if the way they teach is predicated on enabling learning to happen. This places the focus squarely on students and emphasizes that they must be active participants in constructing their own knowledge (Biggs, 1996). Teaching involves helping students to know something not known before; it constitutes a process of change with the intentions behind this change implicit or inferred. The conscious planning of teaching and learning makes these intentions explicit and by making them more explicit improves the learning experience of the student.

All knowledge is built from concepts and propositions and Ausubel's assimilation theory where meaningful learning involves changing one's current knowledge as a result of the comprehension of new knowledge, implies the assimilation of new concepts and propositions into existing cognitive structures" (Novak & Gowin, 1984). To facilitate this each student must construct their own meanings for concepts and propositions from experiences over time, building their own knowledge structure.

Concept mapping, free open source software, is a form of graphic organizer that enhances contextual learning through visually arranging aspects of concepts or associated terms to demonstrate relationships and dynamics underlying the concept. This technique to establish what is being learned is a quick and easy method for establishing exactly what students are learning without resorting to time consuming testing. The quick turnaround allows lecturers to deal with areas of difficulty students are experiencing and adapt both their content and teaching to maximize learning on a daily basis. This paper focuses on the use of this software as a tool of formative assessment in the EED Science Course at the University of the Western Cape.

09:50-10:10

**Mahmoud Patel:** Seeking to be precise, we become redundant: 'Sprache und Recht' in the context of resisting the logic of legal fictions

The legal implications of language and the application of law in the context of legal fictions continue to extend far beyond the lecture hall. These extensions of interactions between the State and its citizens, between educators and learners, law enforcement and suspects, to conversations between legal practitioners and their clients, and to such unlawful speech acts as offering a bribe, or issuing a threat, or making a defamatory statement. More importantly, the construction of one's conduct in a transitional state becomes challenged by the inability of law and language converging between law as a form and law as a substantive means to social justice. Therefore, as citizens we become redundant. Resistance must of necessity be the logic against legal fictions. This paper will locate itself in the theoretical frameworks of McLaren, Giroux, Shor, Hooks and legal theorists Mellinkoff, Tiesmar and Kennedy amongst others.

10:10-10:30

**Martina van Heerden:** 'What Lies Beneath': Gauging Students' Access to, Understanding of and Interaction with the Discourses Underpinning Feedback in English Studies

Feedback is an integral part of student learning and plays an important role in developing students' academic literacies. In English Studies, part of feedback's purpose is to induct students into the 'language' (or discourse) of English literary practices; yet, by framing feedback within this language (discourse), lecturers/tutors (inadvertently) alienate students from the language (discourse) that students need to access. For purpose of this paper, I will draw on conceptual tools from Bernstein's work on educational knowledge and pedagogy, in order to discuss factors that could potentially hamper students' ability to use/navigate feedback and, consequently, their ability to successfully access the discourse that underpins feedback, and, in turn, English Studies, for feedback is an essential part of pedagogy that helps students to find a place in their discipline as knowers.

**10:30-11:00 Tea**

**Session 2 CHAIR: Peter Kohler**

11:00-11:20

**Hermann Wittenberg:** Photography and Reflexivity in J.M. Coetzee

In this paper I will look at J.M. Coetzee's as yet unknown early photographic work and his experimentation with the techne of image-making and dark-room processing, and examine the impact and influence of a photographic aesthetic on his writing. It has been known that some of Coetzee's fictions, especially the novel *In the Heart of The Country* (1977), have been strongly influenced by cinema, especially auteurs of the French nouveau vague like Jean Luc Godard. But it is evident that rather than film, photography, or the still image, is much more foundational to Coetzee's oeuvre. Like Barthes, who commented, "I decided I liked Photography in opposition to the Cinema, from which I nonetheless failed to separate it", Coetzee is recurrently absorbed in the arrested photographic image, but also drawn to its potential in crafting montage-like cinematic narration. The paper will show how images are frequently encoded in Coetzee's prose, and connected to the thematics of absence, loss and traumatic memory. Coetzee's photography will also be used as a lens to explore the autobiographical and self-reflexive gestures in his writing.

11:20-11:40

**Lannie Birch:** Wyndham Lewis' colliding geometries

This paper will consider certain writings and paintings by one of the most notorious modernist ideologues, Wyndham Lewis, paying particular attention to the ways in which cubist and futurist elements of his practice spatialize both places and selves; a practice he refers to as "burying Euclid deep in the living flesh". The paper attempts to enter into Lewis' critique of both redemptive and critical modes of representation and uses his practices to re-open modernist engagements with notions of "subjectivity". Lewis' World War I paintings will be considered to explore his peculiarly "anti-essentialist" vision of the interactions between human beings and landscapes. This paper is an exorcism.

11:40-12:00

**Cheryl-Ann Michael and Alastair Whitton:** Glimpse

Alastair Whitton's photographs of objects (books, tools, clothing), and of landscape engage questions about the reception of photographs as a technology which documents. Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', notes that photography calls for a new aesthetics in terms of how we look at a work of art. Cheryl-Ann Michael's essay is based on a series of conversations with the artist over a period of more than a year, and on observations of the process of printing, and participation in the hanging of the exhibition

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*Glimpse*. The title *Glimpse* draws attention to the elusive quality of Whitton's photographs, with their strong references to the history of painting. Michael's extensive use of literary quotations "in conversation" with the images invite exploration of the equally elusive nature of personal memory for both the artist and the viewer of the works.

**12:10-12:30 Iona Gilbert: Exploring Theories of Photography through the Fictions of J.M. Coetzee**

This paper explores the treatment of photographs in the fictions of J.M. Coetzee in order to question the nature of the photographic image. What qualities, if any, make a photograph unique? I examine this question by discussing examples from *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Age of Iron* (1990) and *Slow Man* (2006) alongside theories of photography proposed by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

**12:30-12:50 Mark Espin: 'A Barricade of Words': Fiction, History and Modes of Representation in John Berger's *G***

*G.* is commonly regarded as the most popular of John Berger's works of fiction. Published in 1972, it was a controversial choice for the Booker Prize of the same year. Loosely following the pattern of a Bildungsroman, the novel depicts the life experiences of the titular character and his involvement in a number of historical events in Europe that preceded the First World War. The narrative strategies employed by Berger eschew the linear, realist mode of representation and instead appears to imitate a style heavily influenced by Cubism. This paper examines this approach to narrative and considers how it may affect the depiction of the historical, especially as this form of representation may further complicate the already troubled intersections between fiction and history.

**13:00-14:00 Lunch**

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**{End of Day 2}**

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