

Duytsman altyd kallom: Icke Hottentots doot makom

Ampie Coetzee

The title is a quotation in broken 17th Century Hottentot-Dutch said to be from the Khoikhoi; meaning: Dutchman always says: I kill the Hottentot (Quoted by Willem ten Rhyne, 1686).

This is part of a project on the genealogy of South African literature; and this is no more than an introductory chapter on the 'origins' of this literature.

It is problematic to think about genealogy or beginnings. When Friedrich Nietzsche considered genealogy he used many words: 'Entstehung', 'Herkunft', 'Abkunft', 'Geburt', 'Ursprung', 'Anfang' (Foucault 1977:140). These variations in meaning attempt to create the concept of a beginning. But the extent to which a beginning is dependent on constructs is quite clearly stated by Nietzsche in his 'The Genealogy of Morals':

There is no set of maxims more important for an historian than this: that the actual causes of a thing's origin and its eventual uses, the manner of its incorporation into a system of purposes, are worlds apart; that everything that exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions (Nietzsche 1956:209).

And he goes on:

No matter how well we understand the utility of a certain physiological organ (or of a legal institution, a custom, a political convention, an artistic genre, a cultic trait) we do not thereby understand anything of its origin (Nietzsche 1956:209).

The comments of our major modern literary historians, J.C. Kannemeyer and Michael Chapman, on beginnings are brief. The aim of their endeavour was mainly to identify and canonise literature in South Africa. Chapman:

In relation to European settlement ... it makes sense to discuss the start of written literature among the Xhosa, the earliest indigenous people in southern Africa to en-

counter the colonial and missionary presence in a systematic way. It also makes sense, in the context of European settlement, to consider the beginnings of Afrikaans expression (1996:72).

And Kannemeyer, in writing about early Dutch writing in South Africa: 'This literature one can then consider as the origin of Afrikaans literature' (1978:24).

I have to go beyond what is today considered as Literature. I have to go to a vague place somewhere in an uncertain time where peoples from Europe met and confronted the indigene on the southern shores of Africa. From the conquests that followed our present identities—or dissolution of identities—were constructed: in the texts that intruded and created a South Africa.

The only certain beginnings we have are the texts of these contacts, confrontations and conquests. We also have a methodology for reading them, introduced by Michel Foucault in the Foreword to the English Edition of *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*:

What I wished to do was to present, side by side, a definite number of elements: the knowledge of living beings, the knowledge of the laws of language, and the knowledge of economic facts, and to relate them to the philosophical discourse that was contemporary with them during a period extending from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (1970:x).

To simplify, there was: taxonomy, the theory of wealth, language. A 'network of analogies' existed in the early times of colonisation between classification of nature, the analysis of wealth, and language as representation. In the classification of the indigenous people representations—in language and drawings—were disseminated throughout the 'civilized' world. Of these the Khoikhoi were represented as the most disgusting (Hodgen 1964). As early as 1719 Peter Kolb in his *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum* already complained about the 'falsehoods and imperfection' in the accounts of the people about the Cape of Good Hope. He talks of the 'vanity of travellers, the prostitution of mercenary pens', and that 'the authors we have upon the Hottentots, not only differ widely in the most essential points of history, but hardly have the good luck to hit upon the truth in any one article' (Kolb MDCCXXX1:25). And yet, when *he* represents their language, he says, for instance:

Their language is certainly a composition of the strangest sounds that ever were uttered by any people ... some look upon it as the disgrace of speech; others deny it the name, as having nothing of sound or articulation that is peculiar to man in it (Kolb MDCCXXX1:32).

And, particularly the following:

Hence it is, that they are look'd upon as a whole nation of stammerers ... (and) ... the unaccountable motions and postures of the tongue to which their own language subjects them, renders them, for the most part, hardly intelligible when they come to speak (Kolb MDCCXXXI:32).

In fact the Hottentots have no language. Not only do they struggle to speak the coloniser's language, which already makes of them barbarians, but the language they speak among themselves represent them to the coloniser as mutes¹.

How, then, can we know anything about them from the texts we have?

Seeking the voice of the 'other' has been attempted before in postcolonial times, in other countries, in other contexts. The work of Tzvetan Todorov comes to mind (*The Conquest of America. The Question of the Other* 1984), and the projects of Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (*Selected Subaltern Studies* 1988). But to supplement the old narrative, or to rethink it in terms text and narrative may be a fruitful exercise for the changed South Africa. Perhaps, you may wonder: should it not be a reader from the world of the previously colonised to undertake a task such as this? Why would a descendant of the colonisers be interested in seeking out the voice of the marginalised? Postcolonial correctness?

One could answer in various ways; but for this project the relationship between the marginalised 'other' and the genealogy of a South African literature is the prime motivation. The white literatures in this country could not have come into existence without the colonised 'other'; or: could not have been produced without creating the 'other'. Then the question also has to be asked: to what extent was the 'same' dependent on the creation of the 'other'? What is ultimately the difference between the 'same' and the 'other'? Now that there should in South Africa ideally/idealistically be no more difference in the colonial sense between them and us, we might re-inscribe them into our colonial texts of the past.

If only these texts were monodimensional.

Within the classifications of nature; and this would also include the indigene (for instance: even in Kannemeyer's modern literary history there is a chapter 'Dier, Inboorling en Folklore in die Verhaalkuns' (Animal, Native and Folklore in Narrative Art)—within this classification there is representation: of the traveller-writer, anthropologist, quasi-scientist through his (there are no women in my research so far) particular armed vision, and the representation is descriptive. But sometimes the writer

¹ 'The first, spontaneous reaction with regard to the stranger is to imagine him as inferior, since he is different from us: this is not even a man, or if he is one, an inferior barbarian; if he does not speak our language, it is because he speaks none at all, *cannot* speak, as Columbus still believed' (Todorov 1982:76).

attempts to give voice to the indigene: instead of talking to or about them, he lets them talk. Within his text of course.

I would like, briefly, to examine such an example. The story of Eykamma. But the epistemology of this kind of reading should take not only the contents of a text into account, but also text as discourse. The following is from Olfert Dapper's (1636-1689) *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten* (1668), which was apparently a compilation, from manuscript accounts, as Dapper never, it appears, left Holland. The story he tells here does not agree completely with the official records, and the official records do not agree with each other. A close reading of all the various texts and of their translations to English from 17th century Dutch provides another narrative: that of the text.

Here is a translation of Dapper's version:

One morning in June 1659, after the war had already lasted three months, five Hottentots (including this Doman) were overtaken by five of our horsemen as they were running off with two cattle which they had stolen from a certain free burgher. A sharp skirmish ensued. The Hottentots, seeing no possible means of flight nor desiring any mercy, defended themselves valiantly. They wounded two of the horsemen, one through the arm and under the lower ribs, and the other in the spine. But our countrymen repaid the debt by wounding three of them with the gun, and stabbing the other two dead with their own weapons. One of the three who were shot, a man named Eykamma, was taken to the Fort on a horse, with his neck pierced, his leg shattered, and a severe wound in the head; but Doman, with the other, escaped by jumping over a stream eight feet wide, after which flight proved their best weapon and salvation.

The wounded Eykamma, brought into the Fort, was asked why his people had made war against our countrymen, and tried to cause damage everywhere by killing, plundering and burning. Well-nigh overcome by the pain of his severe wounds, he replied by asking why the Dutch had ploughed over the land of the Hottentots, and sought to take the bread out of their mouth by sowing corn on the lands to which they had to drive their cattle for pasture; adding that they had never had other or better grazing grounds. The reason for all their attacks, he continued, was nothing else than to revenge themselves for the harm and injustice done to them: since they not only were commanded to keep away from certain of their grazing grounds, which they had always possessed undisturbed and only allowed us at first to use as a refreshment station, but they also saw their lands divided out amongst us without their knowledge by the heads of the settlement, and boundaries put up within which they might not pasture. He asked finally what we would have done had the same thing happened to us. Moreover, he added, they observed how we were strengthening ourselves daily with fortifications and bulwarks, which according to their way of thinking could have no other object than to bring them and all that was theirs under our authority and domination. To this our men replied: 'your people have now once for all lost the land around the Cape through war, and you must accordingly never dwell on the idea of getting it back again through peace or through war'.

Eykamma died on the sixth day. His last words were that he was only an insignificant person, but that he thought we should summon his chief to the Fort and discuss with the latter the possibility of restoring to each what was his, or of making whatever arrangement might be found best to put an end to the reciprocal damage and inconvenience. This being approved, two or three Dutchmen were sent to request Chief Gogosoa to come to the Fort so that a mutual treaty of peace could be established. But the attempt was all in vain; for although the blow mentioned above had scared them, they nevertheless carried on fighting with the same vehemence wherever they saw a chance, so that we could think of no means of bringing this dispute to the most suitable close (Schapera 1933: 15-17).

The editor of the collection of essays on the early Cape Hottentots, from which this piece is taken, I. Schapera consistently criticises Dapper for his inaccuracies and deviations from the original records².

There are basically, as far as I can determine at the moment, two texts from which Dapper could have construed his story: the one from a diary inscription of Commander Jan van Riebeeck, dated 19th July 1659, and the other from a letter he sent to the Directors of the VOIC in Holland, on the 29th of July 1659³, reporting the incident (and, perhaps, also from a letter despatched on the 29th of July 1659, as well as a diary inscription on the 12th of Aug. 1659, cf. Schapera 1933: 14 and 16). Without taking the original Dutch versions into account (Van Riebeeck's style is quite complicated and sometimes ambiguous) these two texts differ from Dapper's narrative in the following aspects:

- the name of the wounded Eykamma is not given;
- more detail is given about the skirmish;

² For example: 'Dapper's version of this episode, while substantially accurate, does not agree in every particular with the official records ...'; 'The paragraph is evidently based on van Riebeeck's despatch of July 29, 1659, to Batavia ...'; 'This statement was actually made not to Eykamma but to the Capemen when they came to sue for peace ...'; 'Once more Dapper is inaccurate ...'. *The Early Cape Hottentots*, described in the writings of Olfert Dapper (1668) Willem ten Rhyne (1686) and Johannes Gulielmus de Grevenbroek (1695). The Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1933.

³ Leibbrandt, H.C.V. 1900. *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope. Letters Despatched from the Cape. 1652-1662 Volume III*. Cape Town: W.A. Richard & Sons. And: 1958 *Journal of Jan van Riebeeck. Volume III. 1659-1662. Edited and with an introduction and footnotes by H.B. Thom, for the Van Riebeeck Society*. Cape Town & Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema. And: 1957 *Dagregister gehouden by den Oppercoopan Jan Anthonisz van Riebeeck. Deel III. 1652-1662. Tekstversorging en taalkundige aantekeninge deur Dr. D.B. Bosman. Geskiedkundige aantekeninge deur Dr. H.B. Thom. Uitgawe van die Van Riebeeck-Vereniging. Ter geleentheid van die 300ste Van Riebeeck-dag. Kaapstad: A.A. Balkema.*

- the wounded, captured Hottentot does not say what Eykamma is saying;
 - the reason for the actions of the Hottentots is not given;
- What is particularly significant is a footnote attached by the editor of the text, Schapera:

In the Journal this passage is not clear, but with the help of a description of the fight, which appears in a letter to Batavia dated 29 July 1659, one can easily understand the meaning. Doman, so it is stated, received a shot in the back but nevertheless had a hairbreadth escape. According to the prisoner—a Kaapman who spoke Dutch reasonably well (this would then be Eykamma. AC)—the Hottentots were dissatisfied that the Europeans had taken possession of their land, and Doman had encouraged the Hottentots to set fire to the houses and the grain and to attempt to overpower the fort (1933:101).

Schapera's intervention as editor, two and a half centuries later, adds another text to Dapper's collage; and my tinkering more than half a century later gives consistent life to the text, in that it becomes part of a discourse.

In this matter of the discourse of text we have then in Dapper's narrative a stitching together from various official notices of a skirmish which took place between the Dutch and the Khoikhoi. A narrative and a report. The official diary and letter are the reports submitted to an authority, in this case Van Riebeeck's masters: the Dutch East India Company; and for these reports there were set guidelines, a kind of master-text in a specified form designed to give the necessary information about the indigene and their conditions of existence⁴. This would then be a record: accurate and within spatial and temporal proximity of the indigene and of any events occurring. Memory and reportage reduced to the minimum. The official report would be like a classification—a classification of events. The moment of textualising being the creation of the moment in history.

This kind of report is not intended as a representation of the Khoikhoi: its production was in the service of commerce. Dapper's narrative, however, is part of a description of 'Kaffraria or Land of the Hottentots'—therefore a representation. If one thinks in terms of two of Foucault's three categories for the attainment of knowledge in the Classical Age—language as representation, the classification of nature (the classification of living beings, 'living beings ... viewed through a grid of knowledge constituted by *natural history*' 1970:128) and the analysis of wealth—we have here an example of classification becoming representation. Representation through narrative;

⁴ 'Om ervoor te zorgen dat die informatie adequaat was, werden er richtlijnen meegegeven voor zaken waar de journaalhouder op moest letten. Het pakket met richtlijnen dat voor die eerste expeditie onder leiding van Christian van Hoesugi in februari 1659 werd opgesteld ... bleef vrijwel ongewijzigd in gebruik tot de expeditie van De la Guerre (1663-1664) ...' (Huigen 1996:28). Note the six guidelines Van Riebeeck himself set up (p. 29).

and narrative as construct. The facts we have to take into account in the discourse of the text are: the Khoikhoi were a nation of incomprehensible stutterers, they could not express themselves in another language: they were experienced as mutes; the text Dapper created is made up of bits and pieces: a stuttered text. A stuttered text relating the story of a stutterer.

In the representation of the 'other' in travel writing, classifications, reports, diaries it seems that the genetics of the text has to be taken into account. For whom was it written? Who or what, therefore, controls it, has power over it? What is the determining master text? The discourse of the text is part of the discourse on its beginning—and the beginnings of texts are concurrent, complicit with South African literature. But at the moment I can say no more than quote Foucault:

Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times (1977:140).

Department of Afrikaans
University of the Western Cape

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