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Word from the Editors

In his *Introduction* to the inaugural edition of *Alternation*, Jean-Philippe Wade provided the following interpretation of its title:

the other nation - our democratic, non-racial and non-sexist postcoloniality - (which) positions our rereadings of this region's literary history; ...what is 'other' to the nation, ...the irreducible heterogeneity of our common humanity.

The articles assembled in this second edition of *Alternation* speak in their own way of otherness, tracing the many forms of the epic encounter between 'us' and 'them': French hunter-explorer encounters Khoikhoi hunter-gatherer in Marilei Sienraet's *French Writing in South Africa*, German philologist Bleek encounters /Xam Bushman poet //Kabbo in Helize van Vuuren's *Forgotten Territory: The Oral Tradition of the /Xam*, 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' / 'Countryman-Comes-to-Town' in Tony Voss' *Avatars of Waldo*, (white) Master conflicts with (black) Servant in Percy More's *Hegel, the Black Atlantic and Mphahlele...*

Centrally placed (perhaps) in this variety of interchange is the liberal, concerned as he is with 'truth, justice and compassion'. But ultimately realizing (if not irrevocably part of) the oppressive relationship of finance capital to dispossessed, his real encounter is, in the end, less with the 'other' than with his own conscience. David Hemson's *Cry, the Beloved Country: Land, Segregation and the City* concludes as to Alan Paton's proposed 'moral economy': money is not about power and subjection, it is 'to make happy the lives of children... for security, and for dreams, for hopes...' Is the encounter, *per definition* uncomfortable, not also a refuge?

Included in this issue is a book review section, which we trust will become a regular feature in *Alternation*. Publishers please take note.

We wish, finally, to record our heartfelt gratitude towards The De Beers Chairman's Fund Educational Trust for their generous grant, part of which has been used in funding this edition of *Alternation*. Thank you also to Penny Sanderson and Jean-Philippe Wade for their help in editing.

Jaco Alant

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HEGEL, THE BLACK ATLANTIC AND MPHABHLELE

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Introduction

Hegel's famous 'Lordship and Bondage' dialectic continues to dominate not only philosophical but also political, racial as well as feminist discourses. Conceptualizations, reconstructions and reinterpretations of this allegory have largely been concentrated more at the level of generality than at the level of specificity. Recently, however, women and black people have located the allegory within the specifics of sexual and racial problematics. Black reconstruction of this Hegelian paradigm, for example, has its famous articulation in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967) and, more recently, in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993). The aim of this paper is to contribute to this reconstructive project by examining Es'kia Mphahlele's articulation of the Master/Slave (Servant) relationships in his texts. How different from the general abstract level is the specifically black interpretation of Hegel's paradigm? How helpful is this dialectic in understanding concrete black/white relationships? To provide insight into these questions, I shall firstly give my understanding of the Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic; secondly, proffer a Fanonian perspective; thirdly, review Gilroy's latest version of the dialectic within the framework of what he calls 'The Black Atlantic'; and finally, assess Mphahlele's conceptualization of the Master/Slave dialectic within the Hegelian model and critique his resolution of the tension.

Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic.

Hegel's claim is that there can be no self-consciousness or self-knowledge without the presence of another person to authenticate one's own knowledge or awareness of self. But the Other is given (or appears with) a character of negativity. The Other is the one who is not me. This Other is, however, also a self-consciousness who excludes me by being itself. What we have then is the presence of two independent human beings whose self-consciousness is dependent on and mediated through the Other.

Self-consciousness, Hegel argues, is desire. But human desire, unlike animal desire, can only be satisfied by another human in the form of **recognition**. By this, Hegel does not mean merely being conscious or aware of another's existence: 'the individual ...may, no doubt be recognized as a Person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness' (Hegel, 1939:233). By **recognition** Hegel seems to mean that the Other be regarded as an independent, self-affirming, self-determining free subject. In this sense, to recognize someone as a subject would entail, to use Kant's phrase, treating a person not as a means but as an end *withal*. In fact, to refuse recognition to anyone would amount to treating that person as a means, an object or thing, or an animal. So the desire for **recognition** is basically the desire for respect, to have others affirm one's personhood. The quest for **recognition** is simultaneously a negation of the Other. In order to gain **recognition**, therefore, each consciousness has to impose itself on the Other thus giving rise to a life-and-death struggle. The struggle involves the possibility of death, for 'it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained' (Hegel, 1939:233). But the nature of **recognition** requires that neither of the protagonists should perish because death would defeat the very purpose or reason of the struggle. If both die, there will obviously be no **recognition**. If one dies, the Other remains deprived of **recognition**. Hence one protagonist must overcome the Other dialectically, that is, in the words of Kojève, 'he must leave him life and consciousness and destroy only his autonomy...he must enslave him' (1969:15). With the victory of one over the Other, the **Master/Slave relation is constituted**.

Several consequences arise from this constituted relation. By risking his life, the master achieves two things: **recognition** and freedom; consequently, an apparent higher self-consciousness. But since this **recognition** is accorded by a slave, a less than human animal in Aristotle's terms, it does not constitute an objective confirmation of the master's self-consciousness and thus lacks authenticity. In contrast, by submitting to the master through refusing to risk life for freedom, preferring slavery to death, the slave forfeits the right to **recognition**. Despite this forfeiture, the slave however gains an experience the master has never had: the fear of death. Confronted by fear, the slave has 'melted to its inmost soul, has trembled throughout its very fibre'. This complete perturbation of its entire substance, this absolute dissolution of its stability into fluent continuity, is, however, nothing less than the 'simple, ultimate nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity' (Hegel, 1939:237).

Since the desire for recognition has not been satisfied, the slave has to negate himself as slave. There is absolutely nothing to defend in slavery except to change it. In fact, the very being of slavery is 'change, transcendence and transformation... The slave knows what it is to be free. He also knows that he is not free, and that he wants to become free' (Kojeve, 1969:22). The slave's desire to be free in turn generates fear of the slave in the master. Freedom is realized through labour. In transforming nature through labour the slave simultaneously transforms himself because he acquires knowledge and discipline.

The dialectic reaches a stage where the Master and Slave are each both independent and dependent on the other. This condition creates dissatisfaction, for they are both unable to find objective truth in each other. If, as Kojeve asserts, the opposition of 'thesis' and 'antithesis' is meaningful only in the context of their reconciliation by 'synthesis', then the interaction of Master and Slave must end in the 'dialectical overcoming' of them both (1969:9).

Most western philosophers (including Kojeve but with the exception of Marx, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir¹) do not pay much attention to the applicability of the Master/Slave paradigm to the concrete, empirical situations of oppressed people. They merely ignore the wretched conditions of the oppressed under racism, sexism and colonialism and regard the paradigm as an academic issue only.² On the other hand, it is ironic that Hegel's paradigm is subjectively appropriated and understood by black intellectuals even though Hegel himself is known for his racist views. Informed by material, political as well as existential conditions of their concrete lived experiences in oppressive colonial and racist societies, blacks have constructed critical revisions of Hegel in rather different forms. For most, the necessity of violence in the course of black emancipation is a popular theme. Among the most notable are Frantz Fanon (*Black Skin, White Mask*), Albert Memmi (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*), Mohammed Sahli and Anouar Abdel-Malek.

Frantz Fanon

Although Fanon devotes only five pages to 'The Negro and Hegel' in *Black Skin, White Mask*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* permeates almost the entire text. In this text, Fanon deepens the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness, and also offers a sharp critique of 'recognition' by denying that reciprocity is present when the relationship between the Master and Slave has the additive of colour or race. What appears then, at first glance, as a summation of the 'Lordship and Bondage' section of Hegel's *Phenomenology* actually turns

out to be a brilliant exposition of the concrete application of the dialectical inter-relationship of the independence and dependence of self-consciousness to the black situation in a racist society.

Three elements of the Hegelian paradigm dominate Fanon's Master/Slave analysis: recognition, reciprocity and violent struggle. Like Hegel, Fanon links identity or rather consciousness of self, to recognition. Genuine recognition requires that it be reciprocally constituted. If it is a unilateral process or relationship, a situation of domination and oppression inevitably ensues. In the event of unilateral recognition, Fanon insists, a savage struggle entailing the possibility of the risk of life or 'convulsions of death' becomes necessary.

Fanon sees the situation of Blacks as markedly different from the mythical and metaphysical Hegelian Master and Slave relationship. He argues that in Black and White relationships, the Master (white) never indicates an interest in the consciousness of the Slave (black). What is important for the Master, according to Fanon, is not recognition but the Slave's labour. In a footnote Fanon writes:

For Hegel there is reciprocity; here, the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.

In the same way, the Slave in this case is in no way identifiable with the one who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of his liberation.

The Negro wants to be like the Master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave (1967:220-221).

The above captures in a nutshell the difference between Fanon's and Hegel's interpretations of the Master/Slave relationship. For Hegel, the Slave's freedom is possible only through the mediation of objectification in work. In Fanon liberation for the Slave results from the spontaneous act of violence, for 'to work means to work for the death of the settler' (Fanon, 1968:93).

While Fanon differs radically with Hegel in so far as the paradigm is applied to a racialized context, he none the less concurs with Hegel's view that human beings desire recognition from other human beings and that recognition is unattainable without a 'savage struggle' which entails the risk of life and 'convulsions of death' (1968:218). Further, recognition of a reciprocal nature is a precondition for Fanon. Without reciprocal recognition, there can be no consciousness of self, self-knowledge, human dignity or freedom. In being denied

recognition one is in fact denied humanity, turned into the inessentiality of an object, an animal. It is therefore this denial of recognition by the Master that necessitates a second violent confrontation. This time, the violent struggle is not between two independent self-consciousnesses, but originates from the slave as an act of emancipation from servitude.

The Black Atlantic

In his recent book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* Paul Gilroy argues that Frederick Douglass' narrative in his three autobiographies should be interpreted as an alternative to and an inversion of Hegel's allegorical scheme. While in Hegel the Master emerges from the struggle as the victor possessed of consciousness that exists for itself, in Douglass the Slave is the one who, by preferring death over slavery, by taking a turn towards death, achieves self-consciousness. In this way Douglass transforms Hegel's metanarrative of power into one of emancipation.

Douglass' narrative is about his bitter fight with Covey, the slave breaker to whom he (Douglass) is sent by his slave master, Thomas Auld. After several severe beatings from Covey, Douglass one day resolves, with devastating consequences, to stand up against Covey's brutality in his own defence. The Hegelian struggle ensues, but Douglass discovers an ideal speech situation at the very moment in which he holds his tormentor by the throat:

I held him so firmly by the throat that his blood flowed through my nails....Are you going to resist you scoundrel ... Said he. To which I returned a polite 'Yes, Sir' (quoted in Gilroy, 1993:62).

After a long struggle, Covey gives up and lets Douglass go. The recourse to violence emphasizes the fact that the order of authority, the locus of power on which slavery relies, cannot be undone without recourse to counter-violence of the oppressed. For Douglass, violence is a necessary condition for emancipation. He says:

I was nothing before; I am a man now. It [the fight] recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a free man. A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity... I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I had reached a point at which I was **not afraid to die** (quoted in Gilroy, 1993:63. Emphasis added).

In Hegel, the one consciousness, intimidated by the terror of death, the fear of death, prefers slavery to death. In Douglass, however, the slave actively prefers the possibility of death to the 'continuing condition of inhumanity on which plantation slavery depends' (Gilroy, 1993:63). Death thus presents itself as a release from terror and bondage.

Gilroy suggests that Douglass' autobiographical story can be read intertextually in conjunction with the horrific story of Margaret Garner's attempted escape from slavery. This story, Gilroy says, constitutes part of the African-American literary tradition and part of the black feminist political project. After escaping from the plantation with her family, Margaret Garner, besieged in a house by the slave catchers, kills her three year-old beloved youngest daughter with a butcher's knife and attempts to kill her three remaining children, rather than let them be taken back into slavery by her former master (Gilroy, 1993).

In both these stories, there is a refusal to legitimate slavery, a refusal to initiate the Hegelian conception of the dialectic of intersubjective dependency and recognition characteristic of modernity. As Gilroy aptly puts it:

The repeated choice of death rather than bondage articulates a principle of negativity that is opposed to the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking and expressed in the Hegelian slave preference for bondage rather than death.

Mphahlele and Hegel

In *The African Image* and 'The Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics. The South African Case' Mphahlele probably articulates what is true of most black South Africans of his generation and the one immediately following when he writes:

I first came to know the White man at the point of a boot and then at the point of an index finger - as a servant of him (1962:29).

and

We know Whites as our employers and foremen or managers or supervisors, as our teachers when government permits them to teach in our schools. We also know them in domestic situations where our people work as 'maids' and 'nannies' (1981:48).

The Master and Slave (servant) relationship is the most central feature structuring social life in South Africa, 'that quintessentially South African relationship that so often serves as the model for the whole black/white relationship in this country' (Ruth, 1986:72). In South Africa, therefore, one needs no lesson from Hegel and his disciples to know about the

Master/Servant, white/black dialectic or struggle. Yet it is not unimaginable that Mphahlele might have had some contact with Hegel before he wrote some of the stories we are about to examine given the company he has kept internationally.

The depth of Mphahlele's philosophical interests has either not been appreciated or has been misrepresented by the almost exclusively literary interests that have dominated his writing. There is enough evidence to suggest that by the time the little known collection of short stories entitled *In Corner B* appeared in 1967, Mphahlele was certainly acquainted with, for instance, the German idealist tradition, and therefore (if not directly, through the mediation of people such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire or Frantz Fanon) with Hegel. In 1958, six years after the publication of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask*, Mphahlele was invited by Kwame Nkrumah to the All-African People's conference in Accra. Mphahlele appreciated the intensity of Frantz Fanon who, while delivering a fiery denunciation of colonialism, maintained a remarkably calm face and manner.

In August 1961 Mphahlele found himself in Paris where the intellectual climate was dominated by the Kojvean and Sartrean interpretations of Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic. It seems clear to me that in the midst of such illustrious company Mphahlele must undoubtedly have been aware of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and the Master/Slave dialectic.

Three stories in *In Corner B* focus on the Master/Servant, white/black struggle, namely: *The Living and the Dead*, *The Master of Doornvlei* and *Mrs Plum*. In all of these, three Hegelian categories are dramatized: recognition, reciprocity and struggle. In the *The Living and the Dead* the Hegelian dependence-independence theme and recognition feature prominently. Jackson, the black servant, fails to turn up at work after a previous day off. Because his servant is not there to wake him up, Stoffel Visser, the white master, fails to deliver a letter to a government minister recommending and urging the banishment of black servants from white suburbs. The master, independent as he is, is not only dependent on Jackson to wake him up on time, but also to prepare good meals for him:

'It's all Jackson's fault' Stoffel said. 'He goes out yesterday and instead of being here in the evening to prepare supper he doesn't come. This morning he's still not here, still not here, and I can't get my bloody breakfast in time because I've to do it myself, and you know I must have a good breakfast everyday' (p.81).

Mphahlele also captures the master's dependence on the servant in the following:

Stoffel stepped into the street and got in his car to drive five miles to the nearest police station. For the first time in his life he left his flat to look for a black man because he meant much to him - at any rate as a servant (p.91. Emphasis added).

In Hegel, this is the stage in the dialectic in which both the Master and the Slave are dependent and yet independent on each other. The Master is dependent on the Slave through the latter's labour while the Slave is dependent on the master for livelihood. The Slave is independent to the extent that he can survive without the Master's labour while the Master has gained independence through struggle.

Despite the acknowledgement that the servant 'meant much to him'; despite the shame he experiences after learning about what has happened to Jackson (in essence, shame, as Sartre rightly points out, is shame before somebody), despite in other words reluctantly recognizing the fact of Jackson's humanity, Stoffel Visser is determined not to reciprocate Jackson's recognition. What is the next step? Sack Jackson because he is the source of Visser's shame? 'No. Better continue treating him as a name, not as another human being. Let Jackson continue as a machine to work for him' (p.95). Mphahlele is here reflecting on the utter disdain with which the white master views the black servant, a disdain so totally destructive that it seems to obviate any consideration of the servant except as a 'machine to work'. This attitude is also forcefully reflected in *The Master of Doornvlei*.

In this narrative, the white master, Sarel Britz, is heavily dependent on his black servant Mfukeri (the bossboy) to exact as much labour from the farm labourers as he possibly can. This character, identified by his brutality and callousness towards his own people, immediately reminds the reader of Mtutuzeli Matshoba's character, *Bobbejaan*, in a story with a similar Master/Slave theme, *A Glimpse of Slavery* (Matshoba, 1979). Mphahlele is here dramatizing a significant observation: that in an avid attempt to gain recognition from the Master, a Slave charged with overseeing other slaves becomes more brutal than the Master himself. We see that the black foreman, after a few accolades from the Master, 'felt triumphant. He had never in his life dreamt he would work his way into a white man's trust... At least he could retain a certain amount of self-respect and the feeling that he was a man' (p.105). The master on the other hand, as in Hegel, probably realizing that the recognition accorded him is not from another free self-consciousness but from something less than an animal, seeks reassurance by asking, 'what do you think of me Mfukeri?' (p.104).

The turning point of the story is the brutal and savage struggle to death between Britz and Mfukeri symbolized by their animals, Kaspar (Britz's stallion) and Donker (Mfukeri's bull). When Kaspar gets badly gored by Donker, Britz shoots the stallion and orders Mfukeri to do likewise with his bull or leave the farm. Is Mphahlele here toying with the Fanonian solution of violence for liberation?

Without enunciating it strictly in Hegelian terms, Ruth identifies Hegelian categories in the struggle symbolized by the two animals. The importance of the fact that the struggle is symbolised as a fight between two male animals that are traditional symbols of potency cannot be underestimated. The struggle for the kind of power that the Britzes of South Africa would wield is not couched in terms of a problem in human understanding - it is quite simply a **brutal animalistic** struggle to death, a struggle where the death of one demands the death of another (1986:74).

Mfukeri, however, refuses to shoot his bull, preferring to leave the farm. Mphahlele may thus be interpreted as suggesting that violence is not the right solution for the Master and Slave impasse. This interpretation, I shall argue, seems to accord with Mphahlele's general philosophical outlook.

Mphahlele's concern about white intransigent refusal to recognize blacks as human beings is constantly hinted at in the three stories of *In Corner B*. In *The Living and the Dead* black people are equated to 'simple things' as when Stoffel Visser says some white people 'are so wooden-headed they won't understand simple things like kaffirs' (p.82). He also equates black servants with animals: Jackson has 'the devotion of a trained animal' (p.85). In *Mrs Plum* the refusal to accord recognition to black people is articulated through Mphahlele's concern for names.

Names, particularly among Africans, have not only cultural or social but also ontological significance. In Africa names have definite meanings, they transcend being mere labels or simple tags, they have a social signification. In point of fact, a number of names studied collectively may well express the *Weltanschauung* (world-view) of a people. Karabo, the black maid in *Mrs Plum* is impressed by her employer, Mrs Plum, for insisting on calling her by her African name, because 'I know so many whites who did not care what they called black people as long as it was all right for their tongue' (p.166). To white masters and madams, black servants do not have individual identities or personal names but collective or group identities such as 'boys', 'girls' 'Jims', 'Johns', 'Kaffirs' etc. Karabo feels utmost

resentment when her former Belgravia employers actually encourage their child to call her 'You Black Girl'.

More serious, however, is Karabo's realization that animals are accorded more recognition and respect than black people. Pets are called by their names while black servants are not. Karabo notes this refusal to recognize blacks in a neighbour who has dropped in at Mrs Plum's house to report that Dick, Mrs Plum's gardener, has been very negligent with her dogs in the street: 'When he left, the white man said 'Come on Rusty, the boy is waiting to clean you'. Dogs with names, men without, I thought' (p. 181-2).

This attitude is also evident in Mrs Plum's loving treatment of Monty and Malan, her dogs, while glibly dismissing Dick, the gardener, on their account. Hence the common hatred of black servants for their employers' pets: the latter outdo them in their quest for recognition from the Master.

We see therefore that Mphahlele makes use of the Master/Slave key categories such as recognition, reciprocity, dependence-independence, and struggle. What solution does Mphahlele offer for the liberation of the slave? We have seen that, with Hegel, emancipation comes through the mediation of work, while Fanon emphasizes the necessity of violence as a precondition for liberation in the face of the intransigent inflexibility of the oppressor. Paul Gilroy also argues in favour of the preference for death as a possible option for liberation.

Mphahlele seems to be ambivalent on the question of violent and non-violent means. This ambivalence expresses itself clearly in *The Master of Doornvlei* where the life-and-death struggle is symbolized by the animals and Mfukeri's subsequent refusal to obey the master's demand to kill Donker the bull. Mphahlele acknowledges this ambivalence thus:

Ambivalence, ambivalence. How can Blacks and Whites not be ambivalent toward each other after so many generations of coexistence in which inequalities have been perpetuated? While I appreciate the militant Black attitude against integration in this country, the Bantustan idea disgusts me, infuriates me (1972:103).

The Mphahlelean ambivalence is not only evident in relation to the means but also at the level of the ends, influencing both his universalistic humanism and his particularistic Africanness. He attempts a reconciliation between the specificity of African identity and the sameness of humanistic universalism. The former amounts to a form of cultural imperialism inscribed in European attitudes towards Africans. The latter is predicated on the Senghorian

humanistic conception 'man remains our first consideration: he constitutes our **measure**', and the discourse of non-racialism that he has so vehemently argued for in *The African Image*.

The contradiction in Mphahlele's resolution of the tension between particularistic Africanity on the one hand and humanistic universalism on the other is illustrated by the fact that the universalism he expresses in the concept of non-racialism is conceptualized as a critique of the politics of difference inscribed in the particularistic discourse of the Pan Africanist Congress. (Cf. the section *The Nationalist in The African Image*). Mphahlele acknowledges this seeming contradiction himself when, in consideration of an alternative to non-racialism, he remarks 'could we do this [consolidate African humanism] without running the risk of being called anti-white?... Already the concept of Black Consciousness has suffered a backlash, and is now a synonym (to White authority) of subversion, racism' (1984:157).

In his 'Variations on a Theme: Race and Color', Mphahlele provides us with a glimpse of his response to the Master/Slave relationship:

You could create a poem, or a novel or a play that incites to violence between racial groups, directly or indirectly. I have intimated that this is a waste and a roundabout way of getting people to march against their enemy (1972:100).

In *The Wanderers*, although the victims of Glendale Farm occasionally resort to violence, this is not strong enough to bring about liberation. Almost at the end of the novel, Mphahlele appears to suggest that educational mobilization and self-rediscovery are essential for emancipation, hence we 'need to find ways of decolonizing the mind. This will lead to the liberation of the self, which in turn must be a rediscovery of self' (1982:36). He thus attempts to recommend a rational approach to the universe. This rationalism is expressed through a series of rhetorical questions:

How can I do more than launch the children upon the route to self-discovery? Different times make, and demand, different heroes. How can I make my children understand we have all wandered away from something - all of us Blacks? That we are not in close contact with the spirit of Nature, although we may be with its forces, that growing up for us is no more than integrated process it was for our forebears, but that this is also a universal problem?... How can I make these children understand that the cruelty of the times demands that I recognize the limitations of my traditional humanism, that, if the white world reminds me that I'm black, I must reserve my humanism for those of my colour and fight power with the instruments of its enthronement? How can they understand that the basic truths I'm teaching them only amount to a state of mind that becomes of little immediate import in the face of economic and political power? (Mphahlele, 1973:282-285)

What are we to understand by 'instruments of its [power] enthronement'? Does this refer to violent or ideological instruments employed during the appropriation of power and land? What is 'The cruelty of the times'? Why should the latter demand the recognition of African humanism? It would appear that 'the cruelty of the times', given the nature of the apartheid rule, means violent responses by government forces. Because African humanism excludes violence, it contains serious limitations as an emancipatory philosophy. But does humanism, even of the African kind, exclude violence? Would it be a contradiction for a humanist to espouse violence in defence of human dignity, and against human degradation and servitude as Fanon's humanism³ does? It would therefore appear that there is no necessary contradiction between humanism and violence.

Conclusion

What is the legacy of Hegel's analysis of the Master/Slave dialectic to black people? If, as Fanon has pointed out, his attempt to resolve the problem through the dialectic of labour is unsatisfactory, his emphasis on mutual recognition and reciprocal respect remains central to contemporary discussions of sexual as well as racial equality and anti-discrimination discourse. The different responses indicate the multiplicity of dimensions in which the paradigm can be interpreted. Slavery, for instance, is not merely a physical issue exhausted by chattel slavery, it is as much a moral, social, psychological or theological issue as it is a political and epistemological problem. Hence, any attempt at a one-dimensional resolution without due concern for its multi-dimensionality will invariably produce reductionist resolutions inadequate for addressing the problem. A Fanonian (violent) solution or a Mphahlilean (rationalist) approach alone may not be sufficient. Perhaps a synthetic approach, one that recognises the violence of the relationship while not primordializing it could be a relatively successful approach for gaining reciprocal recognition.

Notes

1. For the application of the Hegelian paradigm to concrete situations see Marx's works in connection with the relations between the capitalist and the workers, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* for relations between individuals, and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* for relations between men and women.
2. See Hussein, A.B. 1985. *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*. New York: Plenum Press, p.103.

3. For Fanon's humanism, see Lou Turner and John Alan 1986. *Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought*. Chicago: News and Letters Publications.

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AVATARS OF WALDO

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Where South African writing has been more than the mere inertia of metropolitan discourse reproducing itself in an exotic place, its narratives have always in effect been allegories of community, strenuous efforts of memory or anticipation that contest by their own example theory's privileging of the present. This writing has since the extraordinarily prefigurative example of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* been for a century at least the critical repository of the lost or imagined times of communities that have been formed by the galloping dynamic of bourgeois modernity to fetishize land and its ownership, space and its occupation. The early documents of South Africa's troubled encounter with capitalist modernization (Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* is another) speak to us not as expressions of liberal ideology more or less ignorant of their own conditions -- but as fissures in the continuous text of our history, priceless resources (Pechey, 1994:166). Schreiner movingly characterises this encounter:

He may grow up without the sight of a city, and beyond the reach of the touch of luxury, but he has in his hand the key to all nineteenth-century civilization. If, at seventeen or eighteen, he tires of the life of the backwood and desires to see the life beyond, he has only to shoulder his bundle, and at the end of a hundred or a thousand miles he finds himself in a city. All about him may be strange at first; he is awkward in act, slow in speech, but there is not a word or a sound in the world around that is not modifying him; the talk of the men in the lodging-house, the arguments of the men in the public-bar, the chatter at the street corners, the newspapers he takes up, the cheap books he buys for a few pence, open the modern world to him (Schreiner, 1976:101).

In 1973, in answer to the question 'What are modern Africans writing about?', Nadine Gordimer identified 'five main African themes' (Gordimer, 1971:8). She called the first of these the Countryman-Comes-to-Town theme. In Lagos, Johannesburg, Cotonou, Accra, all over the continent, the theme is the same, the novels and stories all deal with the impact of contact with the white man's town and white civilization.

Whereas many white writers were turning in disillusion away from modernity, the African hero, a 'Whittington-like figure' was embracing it, while rejecting his own inferior status in

it and holding on to his own traditional values. Ten years later, in 1983, Ursula Barnett wrote of the South African predecessors of Gordimer's 'modern Africans['] less successful encounter with modernity. After R.R.R. Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* of 1931,

[t]he plot of a black man coming to the city and succumbing to its evil ways has been repeated ad nauseam...but rarely by black South Africans writing in English because it was no longer a situation that interested them. Later writers were brought up in the city (Barnett, 1983:113).

By 1985 Stephen Gray could offer a chronological list (from Blackburn's *Leaven* of 1908 to Mzamane's *Mzola* of 1980) of South African English fictional treatments of what he called the 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' theme. Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* of 1946 is the first true 'Whittington-like figure' in the series, the countryman who settles successfully in the city. Gray's essay seems to have formed the basis of the 'Jim Comes to Jo'burg' entry in the *Companion to South African English Literature* of 1986. In 1989, Jane Watts identified 'Peter Abrahams' first two novels' as precursors of 'a series of Jim Comes to Jo'burg novels dealing with the gulf between moral life and existence in the urban ghettos' (Watts, 1989:2), and in the same year Piniel Shava described 'Plaatje's successors', (R.R.R. Dhlomo, Abrahams and Dikobe) as dealing 'with such issues as blacks' economic needs, the conflict between urban and rural values...' (Shava, 1989:15).

While the provenance of the theme, then, is vague (Plaatje and Abrahams seeming to mark generations in its lineage), there is consensus that the story of the country person coming to the city is a central motif of 'the matter of tradition and modernity... the great theme of modern African literature' (Chapman, 1993:8), which in South African fiction has involved black and white, women and men, many languages and many cities. To refer to 'Jim Comes to Jo'burg' as anything more than a late regional variant of that theme is reductive and impoverishing: it prolongs the currency of an opprobrious epithet, it privileges Johannesburg, the Chamber of Mines, and male experience, and it ignores the already mentioned 'extraordinarily prefigurative example of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (Pechey, 1994:166).

Schreiner's extraordinary prefiguration of the condition of modern South Africa springs metonymically from a narrow chronological and geographical base. '...I will not go down country' says Lyndall to her stranger, 'I will not go to Europe. You must take me to the Transvaal. That is out of the world. People we meet there we need not see again in our future

lives' (Schreiner, 1981:223-224). Schreiner was writing in the late 1870's and the discovery of gold in the Transvaal in the 1880's was to change the dimensions of the world as Lyndall saw it, but for the moment of 1883, when *The Story* was published, Lyndall's description of the Transvaal as 'out of the world' is just to the scope of the novel. The historical, geographical and social focus of *The Story of an African Farm* is provincial, and regional.

Part 1 is localised strictly to the farm itself. Every new arrival is a stranger, and the narrative is given structure by the sequence of arrivals, as the regime of Old Otto is undermined and succeeded by that of Bonaparte Blenkins. At the same time, Schreiner's double heroine/hero, Lyndall/Waldo is taking the resources of the farm as far as they will go. In this very structure Schreiner was laying down a motif of South African (colonial) fiction in English.

Part 2 is given its structure by a sequence of departures from (and in some cases, returns to) the farm. The most significant of these quests are, naturally, those of Lyndall and Waldo, between whom the division of narrative and thematic labour is gender-based: Lyndall goes out to bear a child and to die; Waldo goes out to find work, to return and to die. The farm that Waldo returns to however, has changed irrevocably; the drought-stricken, remote, backward economic unit of Book 1 has become a kind of pastoral *locus amoenus* in Waldo's dying vision:

Sitting there with his arms folded on his knees, and his hat slouched down over his face, Waldo looked out into the yellow sunshine that tinted even the very air with the colour of ripe corn, and was happy.

He was an uncouth creature with small learning, and no prospect in the future but that of making endless tables and stone walls, yet it seemed to him as he sat there that life was a rare and very rich thing. He rubbed his hands in the sunshine. Ah, to live on so, year after year, how well! Always in the present; letting each day glide, bringing its own labour, and its own beauty; the gradual lighting up of the hills, night and the stars, firelight and the coals! To live on so, calmly, far from the paths of men... (279-280).

The vision is partly natural: 'Rains had covered the Karoo with a heavy coat of green that hid the red earth everywhere' (273). Schreiner seems to have been precise about climatic history, as in her reference to 'the year of the great drought, the year of 1862' (37). While the transformation of the farm is thus both social and historical, it is also a matter of perspective, a vision that can only be internalised, for although Waldo himself will not live to see it he imagines the redemptive moment within history:

...well to live long, and see the darkness breaking, and the day coming! The day when souls shall not thrust back the soul that would come to it; when men shall not be driven to seek solitude, because of the crying-out of their hearts for love and sympathy. Well to live long and see the new time breaking (280).

For on his journey away from and back to the farm Waldo has learned the significance of the new division between town and country, between work and toil, between *urbs* and *locus amoenus*, that follows on initial industrialisation and incipient urbanisation. In terms of South African history, this is the subject matter of Schreiner's novel, whose action is set precisely in the 1860's and 1870's, when South Africa was undergoing the acceleration, brought on by the discovery of diamonds, of the processes of capitalist colonisation, proletarianisation and dispossession.

Yet in Waldo's dying vision there is also an impulse which, while distinctly modern, links Schreiner to the European pastoral tradition. On the one hand, Waldo's death is the fulfilment of 'a compulsion inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces' (Freud, 1920:47). Waldo, like Freud's organism 'wishes to die only in [his] own fashion' (51). But in the generic terms of the classical tradition, *The Story of an African Farm* makes a pastoral out of an ironic georgic, and this 'low mimetic' (Frye, 1961:34) narrative derives its vision from Hebraic rather than Hellenic sources. In *Genesis* the story begins with the breaking of a law. Without transgression there is no story, and in *Genesis* the story is the human story.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground... (3.19). Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken (3.23).

The expulsion from the Garden divides past from present, Eden from the workplace, 'the Sunday from the week'. The centrifugal aspect of the division, the movement away, is associated with what in later terms of material culture is thought of as progress. Cain, in Milton's words, is the 'sweaty reaper' of 'arable and tilth', while Abel is the 'shepherd...more meek' of 'sheep-walks and folds' (*Paradise Lost*, XI:429-438; Milton:434). And Cain becomes the first builder of a city:

And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

And Cain knew his wife: and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch (Genesis 4, 16-17).

Babel, 'a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven' (11,4), represents the corporate and co-operative physical expression of human imagination: its fulfilment would mean that 'nothing would be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do' (11,6). Its frustration is only possible because the people are scattered and their language confused. From the pastoral point of view, exploitation and lack of restraint continue to sustain the historical city, which becomes also a carnivalesque vortex of opportunity.

The mythopoetic principle of division continues between Egypt and Canaan, and beyond. In the fourth vision of *Paradise Lost*, Book XI, Adam sees a 'wide territory spread Before him', divided among 'towns... rural works... cities' [(345); (Milton:438)]. The manifestation of this division is of course important in South African writing, literary historiography using the division both analytically and chronologically. In the grand narrative to which I am referring, the human story begins in a garden and ends in a city, the new Jerusalem, which represents for Blake, say, the re-integration of the human imagination. There is no Blake in South African writing unless it is the H.I.E. Dhlomo of *The Valley of a Thousand Hills*, but on the level of low mimetic prose narrative rather than that of heroic epic, the new city is represented as the rehabilitation of the work place, and it is towards that possibility that one sequence of South African fictions moves. The rehabilitation represents a kind of reconciliation of two contradictory stories of work: the Edenic, that work is evidence of humanity's loss of its own potential; the Marxian, that work is what distinguishes humanity as such:

the animal merely uses its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; this is the first essential distinction between man and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings about this distinction (Engels, 1973:260).

The Jerusalem of Blake's poem is built expressively rather than functionally, unlike the cities of South Africa whose image in the fiction of the past century, like South African history itself, would bear out Marx's account:

The division of labour inside a nation leads at first to the separation of industrial and commercial from agricultural labour, and hence to the separation of town and country, and a clash of interests between them (Marx, 1966:121).

Urbanization in South Africa, in the account offered by the texts which I discuss, is largely a function of industrialization. Until 1870 towns were largely 'seats of decision-making and action (military villages) from which the Whites imposed their power over most of South

Africa' (Fair:2). This is the *urbs as locus munitus*, that is 'walled place', as against *locus amoenus* or 'place without walls'.

But after 1870, after diamonds, gold and 'the growth of industry and commerce, cities and towns become the focus of economic wealth and the generators of great inequality between rich and poor people and between rich and poor regions' (Fair:2). These are the *urbes* 'built as places of work', as Raymond Williams describes the Northern English cities of the nineteenth century (Williams, 1973:220):

Between 1948 and [1985]... towns and cities [became] vehicles for the containment of the Black population by denying them access to power in these urban areas on the one hand and restraining their flow to them, on the other (Fair:2).

1948 stands for the maturity of secondary industry following World War II, the coming to power of the reformed National Party, the publication of *Cry, the Beloved Country* (and *Time Longer than Rope*), and the production of the Johannesburg Chamber of Mines' recruiting film *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*.

Waldo's is the first South African version of the story of the country person who comes to the city. Schreiner's version, only one element of her novel, although an important one given deep resonance by its context, is told in Waldo's 'unfinished letter' of Chapter 11 of Part 2. As Michael Wade observed, this story is always a picaresque (Wade, 1993:6), but it is crucial that its picaro/picara has not been forever a transient, that he/she make a real beginning from a place to which commitment is authentic. In the opening of Book 1, Chapter 9, Waldo returns from the mill; he has perfected his shearing machine and 'the brown plain' which is 'the home farm' seems like the centre of 'the whole world' (89) to him. Ironically his father has died the previous night, Blenkins will soon crush the shearing machine, and Waldo will seem to have exhausted the possibilities of the farm. In so far, then, as *The Story* is a *bildungsroman*, Waldo's journey begins early in the action. Like Lyndall's movement out into the world (and beyond?), Waldo's departure is triggered by an encounter with a 'stranger'. This occurs in Chapter 2 of Part 2 ('Waldo's Stranger'), a chapter which, with its immediate predecessor ('Times and Seasons') was often dismissed by earlier critics as discursive excrescence on the central narrative of the novel. But as Chapter 1 of Part 2 is a recapitulation of Part 1, Chapter 2 is an anticipation of Part 2. The 'new man' (144), Gregory Rose, has rented half the farm; Waldo is carving a totem for his father's grave. The stranger seems to acknowledge some aesthetic worth in Waldo's work, which the boy attempts to

explicate in a paratactic series of images: 'grotesque little manikin... fantastic figures and mountains, to the crowning bird from whose wing dropped a feather' (148).

The stranger proceeds 'blandly' to translate Waldo's carving into the general terms of the allegory of the white feather of truth, and only then elicits Waldo's 'life story' from him. Laurens van der Post wrote that the 'white feather of truth' story derived from a Khoi folk-tale (van der Post, 1961:180-181): the stranger's allegorization has taken all local colour from the story, processed it for a global, English readership.

Chapter 1 of Part 2 had been a coherent, sequential account of Waldo's growing up, but when he attempts to tell this story to the stranger, it becomes 'A confused, disordered story -- the little made large and the large small, and nothing showing its inward meaning' (160).

This moment of translation from particularity to generality is a moment of encounter between colonial/provincial and metropolitan culture, a moment of transition from tradition to modernity. Yet Waldo loves the stranger for his lack of belief, hope and feeling, and the stranger accepts the gift of Waldo's carving. The two will meet again.

Culturally, Waldo is a 'colonial' whose centre is elsewhere, but a 'provincial' in the sense of offering, *in potentia*, an alternative cultural order to the metropolitan. The contrast is a parallel to the country/city contrast of the pastoral.

Soon after (Chapter 6) Waldo announces his intention to Lyndall: 'I will take the grey mare -- I will travel first -- I will see the world -- then I will find work'. (This comes in immediate response to Lyndall's imaginative seeing of the world in the compression of 'a multitude of disconnected unlike phases of human life' (201)). He leaves 'that old life... that old colourless existence... a dream' in Chapter 7 (to search for his stranger), but his story is only told (can only be told?) after his return to the farm, in the letter he had promised Lyndall, which is picked up at the moment when Waldo moves to 'the next town' (235).

Waldo's first encounter is with commercial work, as a 'salesman'. He sees clerical work as 'the lowest'. Waldo's peasant sensibility is enraged by a fellow clerk's 'murder' of his horse. (The horse is a potent signifier in this story). Experience at this stage aligns commerce with the church as exploitative orders. Waldo's next encounter is with industry, in the form of transport-riding serving the Diamond Fields; here he learns the demands of alienated physical labour, on which the pretentious elegance of shops depends:

... we drove on again all night; so it went, so it went... I thought of nothing; I was like an animal. My body was strong and well to work but my brain was dead. If you have not felt it, Lyndall, you cannot understand it. You may work, and work, and work, till you are only a body, not a soul. Now when I see one of those evil-looking men that come from Europe -- navvies, with the beast-like sunken faces, different from any Kaffir's -- I know what brought that look into their eyes; and if I have only one inch of tobacco I give them half. It is work, grinding, mechanical work, that they or their ancestors have done, that has made them into beasts. You may work a man's body so that his soul dies. Work is good. I have worked at the old farm from the sun's rising till its setting, but I have had time to think, and time to feel. You may work a man so that all but the animal in him is gone; and that grows stronger with physical labour. You may work a man till he is a devil. I know it because I have felt it (238-239).

Here Waldo takes to brandy ('Cape smoke') at the instigation of his master and as a means of coping with dehumanising labour. The Bushman who drags the drunken Waldo from the road seems to say 'You and I are comrades'. This is a turning-point for Waldo: 'I turned my head from him', a gesture which may signify Waldo's refusal of solidarity with the industrial proletariat, strikingly different from his earlier identification with the Bushman as solitary artist (42-43).¹ A vision of his future life comes to Waldo in the contrast between 'the earth, so pure after the rain, so green, so fresh, so blue' (239) and an imagined lurid newspaper report of his death in a drunken accident. At this point Waldo's return journey to 'the old home farm' begins. When the master beats one of the draught-oxen to death, Waldo the peasant revolts, almost kills his employer, and sets out, walking 'back to the town', where a brief interlude combines modest civilization with

work at a wholesale store... I had only to work from six in the morning till six in the evening; so I had plenty of time. I hired a little room, and subscribed to a library, so I had everything I needed; and in the week of Christmas holidays I went to see the sea (241).

But the idyll cannot last. Here, in Grahamstown, in the Botanic Gardens, Waldo meets and is rejected by his stranger and feels his own vulgarity again. For Waldo the locale of industrialization (transport-riding on the road to the Diamond Fields) is separate from that of urbanization.² Waldo's first sight of the sea is as fabulous as any; and two more strong symbolic encounters -- garden, child -- and 'a kind of fever' immediately precede Waldo's continuing on the 'delightful journey... home' (242).

Waldo's return signifies a choice for tradition over modernity but his story has presented a foundational grammar, a typology, of what a South African critic has called 'the central

South African story -- a harsh urbanising story -- in which a retention of ethical justice has functioned in the literature as the principle of the style' (Chapman, 1993:12). An old order passes in the death of a father and the incursion of a 'stranger' or a 'new man': the hero leaves 'the farm' and encounters intensifying varieties of labour, temptation ('Cape Smoke') and betrayal; but there are also new loyalties and a new (sense of) identity, new dimensions to the world (the sea), even a new name: 'The other clerks gave me the name of Old Salvation...' (234). After a crisis of rejection, an epiphanic vision and physical breakdown ('fever'), in Schreiner's *ur* version, the hero returns to the farm to die, looking as he sits out in the sun with his hat over his eyes, for all the modern world, like 'the lazy native'. Although this narrative resolution is repeated, one of the significant revisions of the story, which only appears 63 years after Waldo's, is that which leaves the hero a permanent resident of the city. That is the real 'Dick Whittington' story.

The power of Schreiner's novel is borne out by comparison with some other fictional versions in English of the South African story from the 1880's. In 1883, Mrs. M. Carey-Hobson published *The Farm in the Karoo*, a romance that functions as a handbook on ostrich-farming for prospective settlers, supplying what 'a kind critic' had wished for from Schreiner's -- 'a history of wild adventure' -- and addressed to those seeking 'a life of adventure' (Schreiner: 'Preface') or 'in the genial climate of the Cape a renewal of life and vigour' (Carey-Hobson, 1883:x). Mrs. Carey-Hobson could not see that historic change would require new stories:

...should my young friends feel a sufficient interest in Fred and his friends, I may at some future time conduct them to the Diamond Fields and other less known parts of the country, and describe what they saw there (xi).

Between 1884 and 1897 Rider Haggard published six romances. In 1886 R.D. Ensor, a retired Cape civil servant, published *Sitongo*, a mildly satirical romance, which appears to have been popular, perhaps to a Cape coterie; it was twice printed in that year. Sitongo is a white African, descendant of a white woman shipwrecked on the Kaffrarian coast in the late 18th century and settled among the Xhosa. (Ensor, a Transkei magistrate, based his character on a witness who appeared before the Cape Commission of Enquiry into Native Affairs in 1881). Sitongo is rescued from his kraal by missionaries and after a series of picaresque adventures which take him through colonial South Africa to Cape Town and on to Germany (where he

becomes a music-teacher, since, he tells us, everyone is a music-teacher there) Sitongo returns to his Xhosaland family.

Subsequent examples of the South African story of the country person who comes to the city are well known. Blackburn's *Bulalie* is the first black hero (*Leaven*, 1908). Sol T. Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) epitomises the cruelty of modernity's expulsion of country people from their homes and *Mhudi* (1931), in the flight of the heroine and Ra-Thaga from their 'burnt city' and the Matabele, anticipates the flight of *July's People* (1981) from Johannesburg and *Michael K* (1983) from Cape Town. R.R.R. Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* (1931) is the nadir of the fictional trajectory of the tradition-modernity encounter, although *Mhudi* and Ra-Thaga's confident, if apprehensive, embrace of modernity had already anticipated an upswing.

Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* appeared in 1946. This important text is apparently conventional in a number of respects: in its title; in its epigraph from Kipling; in its degree of idealisation of its hero, Xuma, who goes underground as a boss-boy on only his second day of work on the mine. But in the climax the white miner Paddy accepts the leadership of Xuma. And Abrahams' novel makes a powerful and analytical re-statement of the de-humanising effects of alienated labour: 'And for all their sweating and hard breathing and for the redness of their eyes and the emptiness of their stare there would be nothing to show'. The subversion of the pastoral vision is registered in 'the induna... like a shepherd with a spear' (Abrahams, 1946:65), but Abrahams locates a sense of continuity and community around certain female characters, especially Leah. The distinctive achievement of his novel can be read in a comparison of its closing paragraphs with the end of the novel which for many years largely determined the world's imagination of South Africa. In the last chapter of *Mine Boy* Xuma decides that he must join Paddy in jail. Maisy undertakes to walk with him to the police station:

They went out and walked down the empty street...

*

One by one the lights of Malay Camp were turned out. One by one the lights of Vrededorp and the other dark places of Johannesburg, of South Africa, were turned out.

The streets were empty. The leaning, tired houses were quiet. Only shadows moved everywhere. Only the quiet hum of the night hung over the city. Over Vrededorp. Over Malay Camp (201).

At the end of *Cry, the Beloved Country* Kumalo is home at Ndotsheni, deep in prayer:

...And while he stood there the sun rose in the east.

*

Yes, it is the dawn that has come. The titihoya wakes from sleep, and goes about its work of forlorn crying. The sun tips with light the mountains of Ingeli and East Griqualand. The great valley of the Umzimkulu is still in darkness, but the light will come there also. For it is the dawn that has come, as it has come for a thousand centuries, never failing. But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret (Paton, 1948:253).

There is in Abrahams no hint of return to the farm as *locus amoenus*; the protagonists can see beyond the *locus munitus* and, if my argument is just, the work-place has been, at least potentially, rehabilitated. This is an accepting, unironic, unsentimental picture of Johannesburg. In 1946, the year in which *Mine Boy* was first published, the Fagan Commission reported that South Africa's urban black population could no longer be thought of as migrant, and in 1950 the Tomlinson Commission, which presented the demographic and economic blueprint of apartheid, put a price on the policy which the South African white electorate was never prepared to pay. The 1950's became 'The Drum Decade', in which was heard the voice of black urban 'carnival', opportunism and individualism.

If Olive Schreiner's Waldo is a congener of Blackburn's black hero and heroine, Jochem van Bruggen's Ampic, Dhlomo's Robert Zulu, and Abrahams' Xuma, then literature may be able to give us, at a time when we need it, access to experience beyond our limitations of gender, race and class.

The author wishes to thank Achmat Davids for his response to an earlier and even more primitive version of this article, presented as a paper at the Spring Seminar of the South African Research Programme of Yale University in April 1993.

Notes

1. Graham Pechey describes Waldo as 'proletarianized' (1983:74). Michael Wade's discussion of Waldo deals only in racial terms (Wade, 1994:5-7).
2. For 'Grahamstown' in subsequent editions, Schreiner had 'the town' in the first edition; the more precise localisation is characteristic. Early Afrikaans versions locate the encounter with modernity in both 'die dorp' and 'die stad' (Kannemeyer 1:336).

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CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY: LAND, SEGREGATION AND THE CITY

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The current moment of reconciliation and reconstruction, captured in the language of President Mandela's swearing in, and in the celebration of South Africa's return to the Commonwealth, is saturated with the feelings and themes of the most acknowledged book of South Africa: *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The national compromise between the leadership of the African majority and the old white order, appears at times in direct response to Msimangu's prophesy '...I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they are turned to loving, they will find we are turned to hating.' The present initiatives appear to countermand the fateful destiny of the land. The essential theme of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is of a profound and deeply patriotic sense of inter-racial reconciliation, made possible through the infusion of Christian forgiveness. This script is now being acted out by our central political characters. The healing of the land appears as the human response to divert the tragically beautiful country from its historic logic of division and death. Heroes have arisen to turn the country away from a fateful destiny towards a brighter future. The sword is sheathed, the prophesy loses its sting, and the politics of coalition and compromise is ascendent. A precarious, fragile, but positive outcome arises from the debris of the past.

As no other book on our country, *Cry, the Beloved Country* maintains its inordinate power of symbolising and explaining to an international readership the essential dilemmas, systematic social devastation, and (what appears at times) frail hope for a resolution of South Africa's problems. Sales of the book continue at high levels, reprints are made in India and the United States and market remains solid. Internationally it is regarded as having epic dimensions: it is used in schools in post-independence Zimbabwe, in schools throughout India. It is universally read, a school textbook, and has coloured the approach of millions towards South Africa. In the wider context it has won ascendance as a charter for the conservative liberal, the Christian vision of change.

Cry, the Beloved Country is now a cultural and political landmark; during a recent visit Coretta King mentioned the three individuals who have made Durban internationally recognised: Dube, Ghandi, and Paton. Arising from the work of these personages are the

following institutions: the educational institute Ohlanga, the Phoenix experiment in non-violence, and the cultural achievement of the most famous white liberal. Much has been laid waste by time: the first with apparently dim links to its original emancipatory vision, the Phoenix arising from ashes has returned to the ashes in the bitter armed battles of Bhambayi, but the written word lives on, in some ways with greater strength.

This amazing power is a continuing paradox; sceptical readers find their critical judgment clouded and the heart succumbing to its tragic theme. The black critic scoffing at what might be termed the 'Jim goes to Johannesburg' presentation of black life, discovers a black leadership taking up its language. Its themes appear suddenly rejuvenated and a statement of the present. The beloved face lifts from tears and turns to laughter.

The author and the political task

In assessing Paton's master work, extra-literary criteria are not inappropriate. In his preface Paton makes an extraordinary claim for a novel stating that 'as a social record it is the plain and simple truth'. This is an unusual claim for a literary work and positions it, in one sense, somewhere between high literature and social criticism. As such it attracts a critique or analysis from complementary or antagonistic outlooks. It will be argued that Paton establishes a particular world view of the realities of South Africa which invite a particular outlook.

The book takes up the theme of a softer South African patriotism, the universal idiom of the tragedy of apartheid, and the inexorable tragedy of South Africa itself.

Cry, the Beloved Country is sub-titled 'A story of comfort in desolation'; and here we must examine the practical comfort offered. In his tragic vision is Paton locked into a perspective in which, in Marx's words, (in the *Poverty of Philosophy*) he sees 'in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society'? Does Paton indulge or grapple with the stubborn issues of South Africa's destiny?

Assessed over time, *Cry, the Beloved Country* has many unexpected lasting strengths. Recent reviews have taken up the liberal's misunderstanding of the relationship between ideology and the economy. But a rereading of Paton's work uncovers a surprising understanding of the political economy: at least in the dimension of the relationship between English capitalist and despotic state (including his ambiguous attitude to Oppenheimer), the white arguments for the necessity of the pass laws, and the mining companies use and defence

of the cheap labour system. This is a multi-faceted approach of some sophistication, reflecting in the discourse of white society the rigorous defence of entrenched positions and a certain *realpolitik* missing from subsequent liberal analysis and practice.

Ironically in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, he sees the key relationships between the pass system, the Afrikaner bureaucracy, and big corporations, as he later fiercely defends liberalism against its close relation to big capital and against any relationship with the defence of segregation. Ironically also, this is the fundamental understanding of South African *realpolitik* which Paton and the other liberals in the political field attempt to repudiate: the link of capital to the ideas of segregation, their support for the core apartheid state, the alliance of Afrikaner nationalism and English capitalism, and the conservatism of the English in supporting the pass laws.

But Paton, in conveying the drama of the struggle for individual and national redemption, has to go beyond the liberal understanding and describe what is.

In the book, Harrison (the old man Jarvis's friend in the mining industry in Johannesburg) discusses the struggle for higher wages, providing a bleak outlook if these were conceded, and the cheap labour system abolished:

There wouldn't be any industry... industry depends on the mines to provide the money that will buy its products. And this Government of ours soaks the mines every year for a cool seventy per cent of the profits. And where would they be if there were no mines? Half the Afrikaners in the country would be out of work. There wouldn't be any civil service, either. Half of them would be out of work, too (131).

Here the key relationship is made between English capital, the necessary repression of wage demands of African workers, and the need to sustain a political relationship with an oppressive state. This extends to his understanding of the special pleading, the ideological statement of the spokesman for the Chamber of Mines after the mine strike, asserting its unchallenged hegemony: 'everybody knows that rising costs would threaten the very existence of the mines, and the very existence of South Africa' (163).

To an extraordinary degree Paton succeeds, with a great economy of language, to raise virtually every contradiction still afflicting our lives. He delves into the multitudinous contradictions of our society, traversing the fantastic contrast of wealth and impoverishment; the problems of suppression and freedom; the question of innocence and brutalization; the alternatives of political logic and demagoguery; the life of migrant labour/settled worker; misunderstandings of youth and age, of father and son; the town versus the countryside; the

tyranny of custom and the freedom to act; and the relationship of Africanism to universal human experience.

All this is done with an imaginative recollection of the life of African people with images that reverberate in the mind, such as the dancing boy who salutes Kumalo on his return from Johannesburg: 'He turns away and makes the first slow steps of a dance, for no person at all, but for himself' (189), and the calling of the people from hill to hill.

Paton establishes a magnificent sense of place and time. In his biography Paton records that the 'magic country... laid me under a kind of spell'. Ixopo, where Paton arrived as a teacher at Ixopo High School in 1925, was the centre of a strong white farming community which kept it alive. The labourers were poor but had land. 'All these communities led their own lives and made their own pleasures. History, conquest, and prejudice had separated each from the others.' Yet Paton also remarks upon its inherent peace.²

Much of the beauty has now gone 'because the grass and bracken and the rolling hills and the rich farms have in large part given way to the endless plantations of gum and wattle and pine, and the titihoya does not cry there anymore'. Many farmers have left and farmsteads are now homes and offices of timber managers, and the lowing of cattle has given way to whining of sawmills.

The paralysis of will: a comparison

There is in *Cry the Beloved Country* the fundamental exploration of human interaction in a political society in which the relations between superior and subordinate, master and servant, oppressor and oppressed, are regulated to the minutest degree. Comparisons are often made between racial society in South Africa and other societies characterised by caste and other social systems restrictive of freedom, but it is worth noting that all restriction of freedom is in the last instance based on the degree of control to access to means of life; to land, water, jobs, wages, etc.

Segregation and apartheid were marked by the profound weakness of decent men (and reference is made to men because both black and white South African society are described as very strictly patriarchal). 'It is fear that rules this land' (25). The emotion is pervasive, the corruption of the human spirit inexorable, the paralysis of will almost complete. A suffocating envelope surrounds the individual, an asphyxiation only lifted in the mountains (72).

This paralysis of will expresses essentially the dilemma of the liberal, a privileged individual sustained by the political economy of privilege; earning directly or indirectly the dividends of the sweated labour of the gold mines, served by the black domestic servant, and whose property is defended by a murderous police force. Caught between the volatile black opposition (half understood, half supported, and comprehensively feared) and the obdurate and increasingly oppressive state, the liberal's voice grows faint and weak. Taken as a whole its links to the black nationalist opposition are tenuous and tend to snap time and again under any serious pressure.

This was the fate also of many decent white men and women, attempting to make an act of generosity but paralysed by the opprobrium of white society and fear of 'ingratititude' from blacks. Paton skilfully captures the exaggerated emphasis in the semi-colonial society of segregation and apartheid on tyrannous 'custom', the inhuman exchange between black and white, the dictation of subordination and humiliation. 'Custom' in Paton's language is particularly strongly developed and is raised to the power of *mores*, social rules which are considered so vital to society's well-being that a person who violates them will be judged either as immoral or insane. These *mores* envelop and paralyse the white man, the one with power to make the change, prescribing in the smallest detail the relations of superiority and subordination. The subordinate people are ritually prescribed the daily experience of a conquered people.

It is almost impossible for white and black people to grasp this unspoken power today. Is this inability the result of intense shame or just of the casual attitude towards history of the present generation? Or deeper still, is it based in the humiliation of even acknowledging that such things were ever accepted?

These *mores* have the same intensity as the caste system which is still very much alive in India and also based on material inequality, the same outward appearance, and the same feelings of hatred, fear, and disgust of the superior for the subordinate. The South African context, by contrast, represents the development of a capitalism symbiotically linked to tribal authority, in short, the incomplete operation of the capital relation. The rulers were ruled by the fear of creating a black proletariat severed from the land, and the fear of formal equality. As Legassick has argued, this logical fear of the white rulers first found its expression in segregation which supported the cheap labour system by employing land in the reserves to subsidise wages on the mines and industry. The land was used to shore up the physical and

social divisions between white and black, to sustain cultural differences, and to continue to trap blacks in a state of semi-consciousness of a common destiny and a dual consciousness of tribe and nation.

John Stuart Mill has made the observation that 'propertylessness is not the only factor, or even the crucial one, determining inner-consciousness or political will'. The racial setting in all its pervasive manifestations and the inner-consciousness of its dictatorship, appear brilliantly confirmed in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, but only at the first level of understanding. Mill states only half the truth, namely that the immediate sensuous recollection is not of the determinant of property or the lack of it. It derives, instead, from an understanding of the social setting, of the conquest and impoverishment of the African and of the wealth and accumulation of the 'European', the entire racial relation and its associated inner-consciousness, which is imbued with the determinants of possession or absence of property.

A comparison with, for example, *The Grapes of Wrath*¹ (a novel with many similarities and resonating themes) may be useful in order to illuminate the question. There is evidence that Paton had read Steinbeck's novel before writing, and was influenced by its recording of conversation, and the pithy approximation of the language of the people. More importantly both record the devastation of the countryside and the brutality with which the breaking up of rural communities takes place. In *Grapes of Wrath* this process is strongly identified (albeit only ultimately), as finance capital.

In discussing the effect of companies and banks on the land, Steinbeck writes: 'They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so' (31).

There is the same paralysis of will, an almost literal control of the human individual. The driver could not control the tractor smashing the tenants' shack... 'A twitch at the controls could swerve the car', but the driver's hands could not twitch because the monster that built the tractor, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hand, into his brain and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled him -- goggled his mind, muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, and muzzled his protest' (35).

In maddened desperation the tenants want to shoot the man giving orders: the bank, the president of the bank, the board of directors, the 'east':

'But where does it stop? Who can we shoot? I don't aim to starve to death before I kill the man that's starving me.'

The driver: I don't know. Maybe there's nobody to shoot. Maybe the thing isn't men at all. Maybe, like you said, the property's doing it' (37).

Here there is no ambiguity about the character of the oppressive relationship. Finally in *Cry, the Beloved Country* as in the American novel, humanity is confronted with the tyranny of the invisible. But only after a layered analysis does this appear as the capital relation: the subordination of the individual to an unseen objective and crushing social power devastating the possibility for human existence.

Liberalism, nightmare of segregation, and the leprous city

Cry, the Beloved Country is conceived of as a great emancipatory novel, but it was born in the period of segregation and carries over into its tragic vision many of the beliefs and problems of segregation. Its lingering and powerful themes are those of the moral depravity of the city and the moral durability of the people of the land, and of the need for rural reconstruction rather than urban development. This vision is only partially emancipated from the segregationist paradigm; at times there is an implicit argument that African people are not part of modern society (e.g. as the Reverend Kumalo stumbles around town) and have to be protected from the corrosive effects of modernity.

This extraordinary contradiction can only be explained in terms of the influences on Paton's thought and the conditions of the time. Imagination, facts, and the formidable influence of other people come together in Paton's creative outpouring.

In his autobiography *Towards the Mountain*, Paton lists as some of the great influences in his life Jan Hofmeyr, Clayton, and Hoernle. Each one of these personages was liberal in the sense of being open-minded in the observance of orthodox or traditional forms but certainly not radical -- that is going beyond the orthodox and traditional. Theirs is the reinforcement of a core of values wrapped up in the idea of the traditional which also contain the elements of apartheid tyranny. Paton equivocates between the modification of the traditional and the radical impulses of a Trevor Huddleston.

Jan Hofmeyr, the liberal who rose to the position of acting prime minister during the war years, was in favour of liberal amelioration and administrative reform within the context of segregation. He was linked to the famous statement by Smuts in addressing the Institute of

Race Relations in 1942: 'Isolation has gone and I am afraid segregation has fallen on evil days too.'⁵ Paton's hope was that Hofmeyr, as Smuts' likely successor, could move beyond the orthodoxy of segregation.

At about the same time (1943⁶) there was a crisis in the church with regard to so-called 'qualified' suffrage and the 'gradual removal of the colour-bar'. Rather than support the radical Christians including Father Trevor Huddleston and the Rev Michael Scott, Paton supported Clayton who argued: 'The Church is not here primarily to serve society. Its prime duty is to worship God and obey Him.' He was more patient with those not wanting the church to change its stance, and accepted the opposition of important figures in the mining industry to the question of ending migratory labour on moral grounds: 'They shuddered at what would happen to family life if men were allowed to bring their wives and children to the great city of Johannesburg'. Clayton had substantial financial support from some of the mining houses.⁶

Finally, and most significantly, Paton was influenced by R.F.A. Hoernle, the liberal theorist on race relations. Paton writes in his autobiography that he refused to radiate hope in a 'faith which is unthinking'; his mind was clear, logical, and cold. In a famous set of lectures delivered in 1939, Hoernle sets out three possible 'liberal native policies': race assimilation, parallelism, and total separation. Opposed to 'race fusion', he favoured the idea of total separation: in his terms 'self-government' with mutual cooperation.⁷

This great influence on Paton's life discusses ideas as ideas, failing to recognise in the implantation of these ideas the generation of a racist discourse which has had such horrifying consequences in South Africa. His thinking follows a certain liberal tradition of putting forward ideas which have had appalling results in terms of social policy. Edgar Brookes, later a close friend of Paton and previously Principal of Adams College, supported and developed the policy of segregation in the book *A History of Native Policy in South Africa*, published in 1924. This book would later be used by Hertzog in arguing for segregation, and many of its ideas elaborated further by the ideologists of apartheid.

This apparent incongruity may be explained in a number of ways. Foremost among these must be that the transmutation of clinical and 'pure' ideas into policies with frightful effects are the unintended consequences of our actions. Unfortunately for this argument, it seems as though the liberals, while not in the forefront of implementing policy, did not actually step outside the assumptions of segregationism. In attempting to resolve the problems of

segregation, they were not averse to thinking of themselves as a 'think-tank' for the white government.⁸ More than that, they saw themselves as an integral part of the white establishment. Both Hoernle and Brookes employ the term 'we' and 'us' in reference to the white ruling strata of South Africa, indicating a sense of being close to the centre of power and being influential in shaping the policies of the ruling circles. In these terms liberalism was entirely separated from democracy, because it had no vision of a non-oppressive common society.

The 'liberal spirit' mentioned by Hoernle was not committed to full racial equality and democracy or to a struggle against racial dictatorship, but, in Paton's words, to 'truth, justice and compassion', attributes which could be considered appropriate for a ruling strata rather than a struggle from below.⁹ As Heller explains, these are the virtues of rulers; one cannot expect the ruled to be truthful, just and compassionate with their rulers -- only faithful and obedient.¹⁰

This failure of vision of a common society with a common destiny explains the paralysis of will of the liberal. Even the hero of the book, the anguished liberal young man Arthur Jarvis, implies he is prepared to consider the separation of black and white (127).

The liberals were late converts from segregation, and only partial converts at that. It was only late in Hoernle's life, during the war years, that he conceded that segregation was practically impossible, and he protested against proposals to eliminate Alexandra, the black township adjoining the white northern suburbs. But the primary paradigm for these 'conservative liberals' (Paton's term) was that of development of the rural areas and to rebuild African communities on the land (another utopian goal). The terrifying reality was that the ideas of segregation and separation gained a momentum of their own in the favourable ground of racial politics and finally reaped a bitter harvest.

We are all products of our time and work with the material of our time, although the visionary and the scientist can point to the markers of the future and escape many of the limitations of the time. *Cry, the Beloved Country* only partially escapes the limitations of the time, the influences on the author, and the constrictions of imagination. These features are evidenced not in the grand theme of the reconciliation of man with man, but in man's social context.

The conservative in the liberal paradigm: the countryside, the tribe and the town

The plot of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is of an old man Reverend Kumalo who is seeking his only son swallowed up in the dangerous unknowable city. His painful tracing of his son's movements is soon paralleled by the bloodhounds of the police seeking the same prey. Kumalo's son, Absolom, in search of money, shoots the foremost young liberal of the time, the son of the conservative white farmer Jarvis. He is caught by the police and after a trial sentenced to death. Kumalo returns to Ixopo with the pregnant young wife of his son. After much soul-searching and a revelation that he never knew his son, Jarvis turns towards the old pastor to strive to recreate the land.

An important theme of the book is the countryside versus the town: the story starts and ends in the rural area, the excursion into the city is bewildering and destructive, bringing about the crushing of the human spirit.

Paton describes the degradation of the land and the destruction of the rural communities; the earth is a central image and nature brooding and uncertain; in a frightful image the land is compared to human flesh:

The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. The lightning flashes over them, the clouds pour down upon them, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth (7).

He has a vision of the soil being the basis of the family, but 'The soil cannot keep them (the youth) any more'. Paton's response is almost spiritual: 'Stand unshod on it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed' (7).

Paton's vision of the land and people is connected with a particularly lyrical form of Africanism which constantly surfaces: for example, the calling of voices from hill to hill: 'If you are a Zulu you can hear what they say, but if you are not, even if you know the language, you would find it hard to know what is being called. Some white men call it magic, but it is no magic, only an art perfected. It is Africa, the beloved country' (189).

To some extent the liberal and Africanist have shared the same paradigm, the obsession with the rural and devastated land, while living in the midst of the city full of the promise of radical transformation. There was a similar discourse in the 1920s and 30s over legislation leading to the 'exchange' of the vote for land, and an embroilment in ideas of separation and segregation. This was repeated in the rise of black consciousness on the one hand (with its

preoccupation with attempting to recreate the African presence on the land), and the Bantustans on the other. As early as 1913 Dube had written a letter to South African Prime Minister Botha stating on behalf of the ANC that 'We make no protest against the principle of segregation so far as it can be fairly and practically carried out'.¹¹

It was this seam of thought in African thinking, this reflection of the idea of the ruling strata, that Verwoerd later mined as the African working class developed. When segregation broke down, there was the turn towards retribalisation. The erection of the Bantustans was aimed at trapping the African middle class into collaborative structures which they had an interest in sustaining, a particularly lasting and bitter legacy maintaining a society of semi-segregation, migrant labour and oppression for the majority of the rural people. It institutionalised backwardness and a parasitic bureaucracy. It was the opposite of civil society.

It was a constant theme of segregationary thinking that the city was the focus for the 'demoralisation' and 'disintegration' of African life. A discourse of disgust for the city developed in the language of the missionary, the administrator, and the liberal, stressing the moral decay of African people in the towns. This discourse was particularly hostile to the idea of women coming to the city to live 'dissolute' lives in 'vice' and 'intemperance'.¹² The city was to be a place of work for African males only.

In Paton's evocation of the city we find the petty thief's exploitation of the simple old man, the squalid township life, especially that of the African woman, beerbrewer and prostitute, the corruption of the youth and its criminal direction, and the pathetic attempts at a better life. Essentially the city is the place of personal destruction, criminality and unrelenting poverty. Is this the limit of the 'plain and simple truth'?

But Paton, the man of imagination and insight, also sees the vitality of the ordinary people. In one instance of real insight he describes the spread of the squatter movement, the suffocating overcrowding of existing housing propelling people to occupy land in order to survive.

Still, the African adaptation to the city is somehow faulty. Although we meet the sympathetic politician, Dabula, who represents the heart of the African resistance, patiently explaining the need to hold fast to the bus boycott, the strongest representation of the African national movement is in John Kumalo, an unprincipled, personally treacherous and wild demagogue who is held back only by his fear. Yet it is John Kumalo who makes the telling pronouncement:

It is breaking apart, your tribal society. It is here in Johannesburg that the new society is being built. Something is happening here, my brother (34).

Johannesburg appears as a vastly destructive vortex, corrupting and destroying Blacks and building a veneer of prosperity for whites. In surely one of the harshest statements about South African urban centres, Paton writes, 'No second Johannesburg is needed upon the earth. One is enough' (149). The city is also the place of death of the best white culture has to offer -- the young Jarvis and his attempts at reform.

Finally, one is struck by the deeply conservative portrayal of the city; of the idea of urban development repudiated, of the deadened prospects in the city, in fact, of no prospects at all but for the intelligent social work of an Institute of Race Relations type approach embodied in Arthur Jarvis. Like much of the literature and social concern of the 40s and 50s, the novel turns its back on an exploration of the urban dilemma and returns literally to the rural origins.

The prospect for reconstruction

The book concludes with a powerful image of the strange meeting of two apparent polar opposites: the fathers of the murdered and the murderer. It is the conservative land-owner Jarvis who makes peace with the ageing pastor Kumalo and starts the motion of land reclamation and redevelopment.

In a not entirely utopian vision Paton draws the two men together around the possibility of reclamation. He explores the possibilities and limits of rural reconstruction in the setting of Ixopo through the debates between Kumalo and the agricultural demonstrator. The idyllic belief that the land could be restored and the people possibly attracted back to the land is held in check by the radical and intelligent demonstrator.

Has Paton entirely entrusted the vision of national redemption to the idea of rural reconstruction on the basis of individual responsibility? Yes and no. Jarvis initiates rural reclamation from a sense of Christian duty revived by his reading of his son's papers. But Paton is also sensitive to the dilemmas this opens up; the very distant prospects of the people returning to the land and of the government supporting such action. There are no prescriptions, and the debate between the agricultural demonstrator and Reverend Kumalo shows his awareness of the dilemma. The young man understands that no agricultural reform

will draw people back to the land and sees Jarvis' initiatives as simple repayment for conquest and enforced labour. Seen in its total perspective, however, the reconciliation between individual black and white around the local initiative towards rural reconstruction appears to be his consolation.

Paton also shows an acute perception of chiefly authority making ponderous attempts to change, acquiescing in some reforms while insisting on a colonial-tribal absolutism, characterised by a contempt for subjects and a deep sense of inertia. The rural reformatory impulse is strongly restrained by this institution shored up by the government. In possibly one of the sharpest comments in South African literature he describes how the chiefs sat

with arrogant and bloodshot eyes, rulers of pitiful kingdoms that had no meaning at all. They were not all like this; there were some who had tried to help their people, and who had sent their sons to schools. And the Government had tried to help them too. But they were feeding an old man with milk, and pretending that he would one day grow into a boy (196).

In the end we know, of course, that nothing came of this contemporary vision for rural reconstruction, except for the enforcement of the conservative stranglehold of the tribe which was everywhere the underpinning of the Bantustans. Paton shows great insight into the chief's fear of the youth, their reactionary spirit of traditional authority, and the state's encouragement of this process. The tone is prophetic.

Is Paton ignorant of political economy? I have argued above that Paton shows an insight into the operation of the cheap labour system and the relationship between capital and the ideology of segregation. In contrast to the operations of the cheap labour system and the degradation of human beings in the unrelentingly destructive migrant labour of gold mining, (representing universal money), Paton develops a conception of a moral economy of a new order, counterposing a different conception of money:

For mines are for men, not for money. Money is for food and clothes and comfort, and a visit to the pictures. Money is to make happy the lives of children. Money is for security, and for dreams, for hopes, and for purposes (149).

The question as to how this moral order could become ascendent is left unanswered by Paton, except in the idea of morality. The young man Arthur Jarvis develops a speech (126-127) which divides 'the permissible' from the 'no longer permissible' on the basis of the development of morality deepened by knowledge and the perspective of enlightened self-interest. He turns to confront the question of segregation:

It is true that we hoped to preserve the tribal system by a policy of segregation. That was permissible. But we never did it thoroughly or honestly.

This is the limit set by the liberal dilemma. When it comes to a resolution of the questions, Jarvis' manuscript breaks off as he rises from the table to face his death before an acknowledgement of a common destiny: 'It is time...'.

A conclusion

At one level *Cry, the Beloved Country* is one of a genre of literature which examines the destruction of rural communities in general and the migrant labour system in South Africa in particular. It has a compelling narrative, interspersed with broken vignettes of contemporary issues which illuminate the social setting. The black and white world are almost entirely separate social fields, touching each other only in the Mission House in Sophiatown, in the court room, and in the unequal individual relationships of the countryside.

Paton writes with the intensity of a Morality Play but combines this with, at times, an acute perception of place, colour, and individual character which is indicative of a literary technique. He displays great craftsmanship and a knowing ear in his ability to portray relationships between Africans, in understanding the sensibilities and internal world of the white and African.

But in the final instance Paton chose *Cry, the Beloved Country* to be a political statement: a warning to whites of what was to come, and a plea to blacks for understanding the white predicament. He projects the hope for individual, not social, reconstruction. In this article I have examined the social and historical context of the book, the man and his time. *Cry, the Beloved Country* was written in the interregnum between the falling away of whatever benevolence there was in the old form of segregation and the rise of modern apartheid. It was a time when commissions urging recognition of the need for definite reforms were ignored, when many of the small-scale initiatives such as the Pholela Clinic were allowed to decay, and when the liberals (like the Hofmeyr he admired) were beating a hasty retreat and losing power anyway. There was a preoccupation with a post-war political economy combined with a lack of decision. This was the still water between the turning of the tides.

As a political document in the short term the novel was a colossal failure, as the Nationalist Party government of 1948, in its vision of a completely segregated South Africa, acted to destroy every place of solace for Africans and whites committed to change.

As in the outpourings of his hero, Paton equivocates between the modification of the traditional and the radical impulse of a Trevor Huddleston. The return to the land is in one sense the failure of the liberal to confront the issues of the town. The main characters return to the countryside where the impulse to reform lies atrophied and civil society crushed by oppressive colonial-tribal relations.

Here lies the dark side of liberal imagination: what is missing is the penny whistle, Spokes Mashiyane, the comfort of friends, the dancing, maraba style, the excitement and vitality of the African township, the shebeens, the Trevor Huddleston jazz band, Hugh Masekela, the confidence and self-consciousness of the township working class which vainly penetrates the narrative, and the hard-headed vitality and resistance of *Mine Boy*. None of this is there, and Paton remains trapped within the moralism of the segregationists who saw nothing but death and destruction in African city life. The city with its great potential to intermingle, to encourage cross-currents, to absorb contrasts, to reconcile opposites, allowing for chance meetings and new departures and constituting the civil society for which Socrates would accept death rather than banishment, is a closed book to our author. But as a work of imagination and understanding, what does endure is a brooding awareness of the explosive possibilities of the accumulating social power of the black working class resistance:

In the deserted harbour there is yet water that laps against the quays. In the dark and silent forest there is a leaf that falls. Behind the polished panelling the white ant eats away the wood. Nothing is ever quiet, except for fools (164).

Hoernle, the mentor he adopts, was pessimistic about a change of heart among whites because there was not 'the will or the vision for planning and effecting this change'. He felt that change would be 'forced on us by world-forces and world-events over which humanity has little conscious control'.¹³ If change cannot come from above or by some conscious external intervention, it cannot come at all. And yet it has to come. This is the final enigma, the paradox which concludes the book.

Notes

1. p.38. All references to *Cry, the Beloved Country* are to the Penguin Edition.
2. Alan Paton, 1980. *Towards the Mountain: An Autobiography*. David Philip, pp.84-86.

3. Quotations are from John Steinbeck, 1973, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Penguin Books.

4. 'The Basis of Trusteeship in African Native Policy', SA Institute of Race Relations, 1943, quoted in H.J. and R.E. Simons, 1969, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950*. Penguin, pp.540-541.

5. *Towards the Mountain*, p.248.

6. *Towards the Mountain*, p.248.

7. This very abbreviated discussion of Hoernle is derived from the seminal article on liberalism and segregation by Martin Legassick 1976, 'Race, Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa: The Case of R.F.A. Hoernle', *African Affairs*, 175 (299): pp. 224-239.

8. See Legassick, 'Race, Industrialization and Social Change', pp.237-238.

9. *Towards the Mountain*, p.243.

10. Agnes Heller, 1987. *Beyond Justice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.18.

11. Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, p.47.

12. See J.S. Marwick, 'The Natives in the Larger Towns', Killie Campbell, Durban.

13. Quoted in *Towards the Mountain*, p.243.

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THE TRICKSTER IN ZULU FOLKTALES

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Introduction: The Storytelling Event

In ancient times, before the upheaval caused by white colonization, the main means of intellectual and moral education for a Zulu child consisted of listening to the stories told by his grandmother and to the talk of the elders of the clan. In this way the child learned what his society 'told itself about itself' (Vansina, 1982:143). He also learned the language in all its beautiful nuances, the proverbs according to which to regulate his life as they represented the distillation of that ancient wisdom passed on from generation to generation, and the practical ways in which to take his proper place in society. Mindful that 'in an oral society what cannot be recalled is wasted' (Ong, 1982), the whole communication system was concerned with the creation of 'memorable thoughts' (Ong, 1982), encapsulated in striking images presented in linguistic and structural patterns that helped memorization and recall.

In the evenings, around the fire in winter or under the stars on warm summer nights, the stage was set for a session of entertainment, but also of education, since everybody had the continuation of the clan's life at heart, and nothing came 'free of charge' in a traditional society: there was no conception of 'art for art's sake'. The performance was the product of the co-operation of both the living and the living-dead, whose span of immortality depended on being regularly remembered by the members of the lineage.

Thus the hearth was considered the energetic centre of family life, and the performance acquired a nearly sacred quality, the more so since religious practices were centred on the veneration of the family ancestors, the fathers and the grandfathers who had passed on the gift of life to the present generation.

Donny Mhlongo, a well-known Zulu writer, poignantly expresses the centrality of the hearth in a little poem which serves as an introduction to his book of traditional oral literature, called *Iziko, The Hearth* (1987):

Inaawan'ethe dingilizi maphakathi nendlu: IZIKO.

Kuyabaswa koshiwe kuyo: IZIKO.

Kungaphekwa kudliwe kusuthwe: EZIKO.

Izinkuni zingaphenduka umlotha: EZIKO

Ungashokoshwa ngokwesab'amathongo: EZIKO.

A smallish circle at the centre of the room: the hearth.
Fire is lit, and one warms oneself there: at the hearth.
One cooks, eats and is satisfied: at the hearth.
Firewood is transformed into ashes: at the hearth.
One cowers in veneration of the shades: at the hearth.

Grandmother, the venerated link between the present and the future worlds, as one who has experienced life to the full and spends her days preparing to join the kingdom of the shades, is the centre of attraction. She has the best stories, and the soundest wisdom to impart the knowledge of the past and to comment on the present.

The children come to sit around her after they have finished their house chores. The small circle thus created becomes a living stage on which the main actors are grandmother's hands and fingers - like animate actors in a puppet show - and her whole body, as she impersonates the characters in her stories, their walk and movements, their body position, etc., while also miming their animal calls with subtle fluctuations of her own voice. Some riddles may be thrown about, to sharpen the children's attention. Then the storytelling session begins:

Kwesukesukela! (Once upon a time, it happened!)

Cosu! (Go easy, tell the story drop by drop)

UChakijana neBhubesi. (The small slender mongoose and the lion)

Sumpheka ngogozwana! (We have cooked her in a tiny pot! We have got her cornered)

Trickster folktales

Chakijana is one of the most entertaining characters in Zulu folktales. His name constitutes the diminutive personal form derived from *ichakide*, the slender mongoose, small in body, but fast and determined in his movements, with those intensive eyes that quickly size up any situation. Together with *Nogwaja* the hare, who shares many of the mongoose's characteristics and with whom he is interchangeable, he is the star trickster, self-centred, egotistical, without any real feelings, nor any scruples, but always very entertaining. He represents the victory of intelligence over brute force, of small over big and powerful, brain prevailing over brawn, the extrovert ever ready to test new ways and to take advantage of the

weak points of his opponents, who are thus condemned as stupid and unimaginative. Other animals may also be attributed characteristics normally assigned to the trickster. As in most traditional cultures world-wide, the trickster is physically small, or is an animal taken almost for granted, or even despised by its larger or stronger counterparts.

South African Nguni people divide the world of their experience into three sections: the forest (*ihlathi*), the grassy veld or the savanna (*iithafa*), and the homestead (*umuzi*). The inhabitants of these three zones are also neatly categorized: large carnivore animals, such as lion, leopard, elephant, hyena inhabit the forest; smaller, mostly grass-eating animals, live in the savanna; domestic animals and man live in human settlements (Cf. Prins and Lewis, 1992:135).

The forest is the dark place of evil, where man can get lost or killed, and where large animals prowl especially by night, and the dreaded witches strike up murderous pacts with wild beasts as they go about collecting the various forestal substances to prepare their deadly concoctions.

Chakijana the Slender Mongoose, or Nogwaja the Hare, inhabit the middle ground, the savanna area, which gives them easy access to either side. Prins and Lewis (1992) maintain that Thokoloshe, the river spirit of Nguni mythology who is also a trickster, is often identified with the small Bushman, who also used to live 'outside' the human settlement, in grassy places or in rocky caves. Tricksters live and prosper on the boundaries of animality and humanity, so to speak, and they perform frequent inroads into both realms in order to display their superior intelligence and to perform their tricks (as the Bushman did with his magical medicines). Tricksters are, however, mostly animal figures, and their true or supposed physical characteristics are often sharply defined and made use of in the stories.

In most world literatures animals are used as metaphors, or as figurative representations of human character types. This is why there is a mixture of human and animal qualities and attributes in animal stories. Animals seem to enjoy greater freedom than humans, as their actions are not bound by human social laws; they thus represent a kind of escapism from social restrictions. The trickster can thus speak and interact with both humans and animals, constantly moving from the veld to the forest or from the savanna to the human settlements, transgressing natural boundaries and causing that chaos in which comedy finds its mainspring. His is the art of the unexpected: he sees an opportunity and immediately jumps to it, with a stroke of genius, or simply by posing as the most innocent and helpful creature in the

world. His victims are taken by surprise, as they rely either on their acknowledged strength and size, or on sacrosanct social norms. But nothing is sacred and nothing is impossible for the tricksier, and he seems to enjoy, sometimes rather cruelly, catching his adversaries off guard and throwing them into a whirlpool of confusion and despair.

Let us look at some of the events that form a sort of trickster narrative cycle, as found in the still irreplaceable collection of Bishop Henry Callaway, who published his book with parallel Zulu and English texts in 1868 (*Nursery Tales, Traditions and Histories of the Zulus in their own Words*). Callaway names his tricksier *Hlakanyana*, not *Chakijana* as he is most commonly known. Furthermore he is a semi-human dwarf, not a fully-fledged animal. *Hlakanyana* is also the name given to the Xhosa trickster in Theal's (1886) collection of Xhosa folktales. The name *Hlakanyana* is derived from the ideophone *hlaka*, which has two references: to scatter about in disorder, as in breaking things down or demolishing; and to see things with cleverness and wisdom. The derived verb *ukuhlakanipha* means to develop intelligence, to be wise (Doke and Vilakazi's *Zulu Dictionary*). *Hlakanyana* then is both an agent of confusion, and one who is able to see through things, as an agent of intelligent reconstruction.

Some of the following details are gleaned from other folktale collections, such as *UChakijana Bongololo* by two Durban teachers, Mbatha and Mdladla, published in 1927 by Griggs: or in the unpublished James Stuart Collection, housed in the Killie Campbell Africana Library. Since the introduction of traditional oral literature studies in African school syllabi about 15 years ago, a plethora of modern books of folktales has appeared, where the trickster holds, quite naturally, centre stage.

The Trickster's Birth

Chakijana is born into a royal family. His mother has been pregnant for three years (doesn't every expectant mother think that pregnancy is a never ending period?) when she suddenly feels the stirrings of the baby who starts kicking and telling her that he is ready to come out. But these are not the usual - though marvellous - signs: the baby starts talking: *Mama, mama, ungibelethe!* (Mother, mother, let me be born!). The mother tells the king that the happy event is about to take place, and he is so thrilled that he sends for his counsellors and elders to come and celebrate with his family. The king is the centre of life, the living blood link with the ancestors of the nation, the depository or trustee of the wealth of the tribe,

which he must use for the benefit of all his subjects. The birth of the heir to the throne is always a beautiful and joyful piece of news. The men gather, and a great feast is prepared: cattle are slaughtered, beer is brewed, and the royal village becomes a beehive of feverish activities, with girls and boys collecting firewood, fires burning, women moving about, and the smell of cooking filling the whole valley.

Chakijana speaks again: *Mama, mama, ungibelerhe!* He wants to put a halt to the erosion of the king's wealth by the men who only come when there is meat to eat and beer to drink. After a third appeal, the mother produces the baby. But what a surprise: he has a tiny body, the head of an ugly old man, and a short tail (sign of animality)! Before anyone can recover from the astonishment, Chakijana walks to the back of the hut, where his father keeps his fighting and hunting spears, and he cuts his own umbilical cord. Then, without waiting any further, he goes straight to the cattle kraal, where the king is sitting with his elders. The men are terrified at the appearance of this strange creature and want to fight against it as they consider it the product of witchcraft, but the baby announces himself to his father, and then proposes a test of cunning and strength to prove that he is not a baby, but a grown man. There is a large leg of beef there in the centre of the cattle byre: let the king throw it outside, as far as possible, to see who is fast enough and strong enough to bring it back first. The king obliges, and the men rush towards the byre gate all at once, press against each other in vain, all anxious to be the first one out. But Chakijana slips through a small opening in the wall at the other side of the kraal and retrieves the meat before any of the men is able to get out. Now they are all full of praise for him: 'What a marvellous little man! And he is also so strong! He can carry such a heavy piece of meat!'

The king goes out of his way to cheer up the defrauded and dejected men: he starts distributing portions of meat for them to take home, as a means to reinforce the ties between himself and the various sections of his nation. Chakijana humbly proposes to take the meat to the men's respective huts. His greed for meat becomes a stimulus to his tricking ability: he eats each piece of meat on the way, after having smeared the eating mats with blood. When the men find no meat, they ask the young boy about it: 'Me, I don't know anything! I brought the meat and left it in front of your rooms. The dogs probably took it!' The men sternly reprimand their women because they have not looked after their meat but have let the dogs feast on it. Hlakanyana's mother feels proud of her son, but the royal women express their bewilderment about the day's events: like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, they reflect on

what they have just witnessed and warn the boy's parents about the danger that such extraordinary events may be manifestations of witchcraft, or of the interference of the dark magic forces of the forest into the life of the homestead:

*Namuhla kuzelweni na?
Uzelwa umuntu onjani na?
Ngeke sikubona loku.
Nibe nimthumelani na,
njengoba niyabona ukuthi unguHlakanyana?
Nithi ungumuntu wako wanje
Okwazi ukukhuluma kangaka esemintwana,
aqine kangaka,
ahlule amadoda la amadala.
Nibe ningamboni yini ekuthatheni kwakhe umlenze wenkabi?
Ninganiqondile lapho,
ukuthi lo muntu akamithwanga;
ungene nje lapha enkosikazini;
ungene-nje, akamithwanga.
Nenkosi ayiyena uyise wakhe.
Uzokwenza imihlola, ngoba naye ungumhlola.*

(What was born today? What kind of a person was born? We never saw anything like it. Why did you send him? Don't you see that he is Hlakanyana? What kind of a person would you say he is, who can speak so fluently being just a child, who is so intelligent as to surpass the elders? Did you not realize this by the way he took the leg of beef? Can you not see that this person was not conceived in the normal way? He just entered into his mother; he just entered, he was not conceived. And the king is not his real father. He will work prodigies, because he too is a prodigy).

What had begun as a joyful celebration of a new life, and a ceremony to reinforce the nation's links with their king, ends disastrously, with suspicions, fights and divisions. Hlakanyana's mission of 'scattering about' - sowing confusion - has begun.

Hlakanyana picks up the notion that he is not really the king's son (traditional women indulging in extra-marital relationships used to blame Thokoloshe's surreptitious night visits for unexpected pregnancies) to find an excuse to distance himself from a typical human environment in which he feels ill at ease. He leaves the men to argue and fight, and goes off into the surrounding veld, into his own true element, as he can only cause troubles among people. He finds some bird traps set by herdboys. He can't resist the temptation to steal whatever belongs to others, or what is the result of other people's work. He empties the traps and brings the birds to his mother that she may cook them for his breakfast the next morning. The birds are placed in a pot, and this is covered with a lid. Then Hlakanyana goes to sleep

with the boys, who however belittle him and refuse to accept him as one of their own. He gets up during the night, slips under the door of his mother's hut, eats all the birds, fills the pot with manure and places the birds' heads on top, then slips out of the room again. In the morning he comes to his mother and finds that she is still asleep. 'Why are you so lazy? The sun is already high! I bet your laziness has caused my birds to turn into manure'. And sure enough, only manure is found under the birds' heads. Hlakanyana starts performing like a furious madman. His mother is not trustworthy and he wants to have nothing to do with her! She gives him a milking pail, and he sets off on his wanderings into the veld and the forest.

It might be interesting to make a few observations at the end of this initial section of the Zulu trickster's life:

- a) Hlakanyana's first foray into the world of men has provoked chaos, because his actions are unexpected and contrary to all the rules of human behaviour. He manifests the unbridled confusion proceeding from the interference of the world of veld and forest into the human world, of animality into humanity, of disorder into a strictly regulated society, where any physical abnormality is viewed as a sign of witchcraft.
- (b) Hlakanyana has shown already his ability to turn any situation to his own advantage through fraud and deceit, and also his fantastic greed and unbelievable capacity for devouring any amounts of food, especially meat. This is considered an animal trait, as well-behaved people know when and how to say 'I have had enough', especially in Zulu society where etiquette condemns all excesses.
- (c) There are several parallels between the mythical narratives of the world and the events of Hlakanyana's birth. These may point to the Zulu trickster as part of a higher level of metaphor, that of religious belief or mythology, as are Paul Radin's (1956) Winnebago trickster, or Robert Pelton's (1982) West African Anansi and Legba. Hlakanyana is not considered, however, a demi-god or a Culture Hero, that is, the legendary character responsible for the foundation of the nation and of its socio-political structures. The stories might, however, be an echo of more ancient narratives, possibly connected with ritual forms which have disappeared long ago (cf Lord Raglan's [1936 in Dundes 1965] Hero of Tradition). The Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp wrote, in 1928: 'Everyday life and religion die away, while their content turn into a folktale'.

(d) It is interesting to draw some parallels with narratives referring to the birth of the Greek trickster god Hermes: He too gets out of his mother Maya's room by slipping through the keyhole on the first day of his life. He sees a turtle, kills it and, with some leather strings, invents the musical lyre, which he plays until he tires of it. He then sees Apollo's cattle and drives 50 cows away into a ravine masking their hoof prints by having them walk backwards. He then returns unobserved to his mother's room by slipping through the keyhole again and goes back to sleep.

The Trickster's Travel Adventures

After leaving his parents' village, Chakijana also tries his hand at producing music and at herding the cattle of some chief, normally a highly valued task for any ordinary Zulu boy, as he has the chance of becoming known to the chief and his people, as well as of learning the manners of high society.

After killing a leopard, the trickster makes a flute with its shinbone and walks around playing happily. He meets a rabbit with a flute that sounds better than his own, gets the rabbit to lend it to him and puts the rabbit to sleep by playing the flute. He then builds a mud dome over the sleeping rabbit and lets the animal die there, while he goes off with the latter's flute.

On his wanderings, Chakijana comes across grown men herding cattle. 'Isn't there any boy to fulfil this boyish task? - I am Chakijana Bogcololo. Herding is my middle name. You can trust me with your eyes closed.' The men happily introduce the little dwarf to the chief, who agrees to hire him. Everything goes well as long as there is plenty to eat at the chief's place, but when the meat supply is finished Chakijana does not like to be fed on vegetables only. One night he steals the spear of one of the chief's soldiers and slaughters the chief's prize black bull, which had been reserved for a special ceremony. He then replaces the spear beside the sleeping soldier. There is great commotion in the morning. Nobody has heard or seen anything or anybody. Chakijana suggests that, before going around the countryside to find the culprit, all weapons of war should be checked on the spot. The soldier's bloody spear singles him out as the culprit and he is put to death. The men cut up the bull and the women start the fires to cook the meat. Chakijana does not like to share all that abundance with the whole assembly and comes up with a plan. He goes off with the cattle and drives them into a remote and deep valley where nobody should be able to find them. He then returns home to the chief

and announces that the herd has either been stolen or has gone lost. Mindful of the loss incurred the previous night, all the populace go towards the veld to look for the cattle. Only an old man stays behind, too old to walk any great distance. Chakijana returns to the village unobserved, and sends the old man to fetch fresh water from a river with a large calabash. While the man is away, he steals the meat and hides it in the vicinity of the place where he normally herds the chief's cattle, then puts manure into the cooking pots. When the old man returns, he is so tired that he falls asleep, and Chakijana takes some fat and smears it on the old man's mouth, and leaves some bones at his side, then goes off, retrieves the lost herd and is acclaimed by everybody as a champion shepherd. On their return they notice with consternation that all the meat has disappeared. The old man is accused of the theft, and, in spite of all his protestations of innocence, is put to death.

On his travels Chakijana comes across primitive and unsophisticated people who make use of rudimentary tools to accomplish their tasks: he gives them the proper tools and expects something in return when his tool gets broken or is lost. Thus he meets some herdboys who are milking into pieces of broken pottery, thus spilling most of the precious substance. He lends them the milking pail given him by his mother. They use it, but then allow the last cow to kick and break it.

'Give me back my milking pail
The pail my mother gave me
My mother let my birds turn to manure
The birds I had found in the veld.'

The boys give him an axe. He meets women who are chopping firewood with flintstones and lends them his axe, which the last woman duly breaks. Chakijana is once again furious:

'Give me back my axe;
The axe given me by the boys
The boys I gave the pail to when milking into broken dishes
The pail given me by my mother
My mother who had let my birds turn to manure
The birds I had found in the veld'.

And the formula tale continues with Chakijana accepting newer and newer tools and lending them to careless people who eventually have to give him something more. Here the trickster appears as a teacher and a promoter of progress, an occasional benefactor, but his stories

show that progress can only come about through real costs, and the ambiguous nature of the trickster's actions is further emphasized.

Another popular event concerns Chakijana, or Nogwaja the Hare, offering himself as nursemaid to a lioness with three cubs, or to a gazelle with 7 foals, or to a woman with 10 babies. The trickster promises to look after the young ones, to clean the house, to cook, so as to give time to the mother to attend to the more pressing business, such as hunting for the lioness, pasturing for the gazelle, tilling the family gardens for the woman. The modern problem of a mother's priorities, whether working at a career or looking after her young family, is as old as mankind, and is clearly highlighted here. The mother accepts the offer of services by a complete stranger and goes off to her work. Chakijana cooks one baby per day, shares the meat with the mother in the evening, then brings out one baby at a time for suckling, presenting one baby twice in order to make up the proper number, so that the mother does not realize the cruel ruse except when it is too late and she has lost all her family. No moral code applies to the trickster's actions: he is an outsider, one who lives on the social boundaries and cannot be expected to comply with human norms, and so he makes a mockery of them, even of the most sacred ones, such as the duty of a family to have children and to look after them properly to ensure the continuation of the clan's chain of life.

The trickster often manages to get his victims to perform the most abominable actions (e.g. mother eating her babies, children eating their own mother, etc.), so that they (the victims) become abominable to themselves; they condemn themselves through their own actions. They get the feeling that they are the scum of the earth, unworthy of belonging to the human family, and finally frustrated in their efforts to take revenge and to punish the trickster for something that they have done themselves. They are thus shown as gullible and inferior to their opposition.

One could be tempted here to apply to the Zulu trickster the categories identified by Mary Douglas in 1966 (*Purity and Danger*) or by Barbara Babcock-Abrahams in 1978 (*The Reversible World*). Both authors deal with serious mythological figures whose actions carry a great weight in terms of the symbolic structure of thought and society. The Zulu trickster should rather be seen as an irrepressible character, full of mischief, but cut down to the size expected in young children's stories and in the simple comic system of irony and education. He is the soul of comedy, because he is the master of the unexpected turn of events, the one

who is for ever able to dissect a situation, to see the weak points of his intended victims, and to act decisively and to his own advantage.

He also represents, however, the ambivalence prevalent in society, as well as the indirect African system of castigating the culprit in an indirect way: the depraved person is not attacked directly, but by showing how superior his opponent is. Interestingly this indirect criticism is also apparent in the African attitude towards the white oppressor. Protest has generally been muted in African languages literature. Rather than debating the superiority of one culture over the other, African writers have limited themselves to extolling the positive aspects of their own culture while clearly reflecting the obtuse immorality of the oppressor.

Narrative structures

Most trickster folktales are built on a simple frame, consisting, according to Propp's morphological analysis, of the following 'functions':

- Lack (or Need) either of the trickster or of his intended victim;
- Contract, where the trickster offers help to a needy character;
- Fraud, where the trickster surreptitiously breaks the contract;
- Discovery, where the victim realizes the deception;
- Flight and Pursuit, where the trickster runs off, often gloating about the victim's discomfort and is pursued by the victim's party;
- Escape, where the trickster gets away.

Should the trickster be caught during the chase sequence, the structural formula is repeated, until he finally manages to escape, after having wrought havoc on the whole of society.

An interesting variation of the basic structure is found in stories where the trick-initiator is not the trickster, but some bully trickster imitator. This is often represented by the ogre, the Zulu *izimuzimu*, who is for ever blinded by his greed for food. He also strikes up a contract with Chakijana who quickly finds a way to thwart the contract to his own advantage with serious consequences for the ogre. Thus we find Chakijana caught stealing birds from traps laid by an ogre. Chakijana asks not to be eaten immediately and orders a series of ritual actions to be performed to ensure his conqueror's complete satisfaction. The stupid ogre leaves Chakijana in the care of his (the ogre's) old mother, and the wily one convinces her to play the game of *ukuphekaphekana* (cooking one another), so that she may regain her lost youth.

A fire is made, and Chakijana gets into the pot first, then asks to be taken out. When the old woman gets into the pot, however, the trickster does not remove the lid until she is thoroughly cooked. To add insult to injury, he serves the mother's body to her own children when they return from their daily hunting trip, and then runs away, triumphantly shouting 'You have eaten your own mother! You have eaten your own mother!'

Special narrative patterns in which the trick initiator becomes a victim of his own trick seems to be prevalent in cultures where trickster and anti-trickster are clearly identifiable as two distinct animals in terms of their specific (positive and negative) symbolic characteristics. Thus Beidelman found, among the Kaguru of Tanzania, Hyena and Hare as the negative and positive trickster figures respectively, while Denise Paulme Found Anansi (the Spider) opposed to a number of negative trickster characters.

Anansi, however, is not a constantly successful trickster, but he often appears as the unbridled creative force that becomes a danger to himself. The fumbling inept trickster motifs are also prevalent in Radin's Wajungaka figure among the Winnebago, as well as in Evans-Pritchard's Ture among the Azande of Southern Sudan, or in the Legba of John Argyle and Robert Pelton's Dahomey populations. In Zulu oral traditions one finds *Impene* the baboon or *Impisi* the hyena as stupid and rather innocuous trick initiators. But this wholly negative characteristic is especially the trademark of *Izimuzimu*, the ogre or cannibal, and of *Imbulu*, the monitor lizard. These two characters represent everything that is evil in human society, especially *ubuthakathi* or witchcraft. They mostly interact with human beings, whom they are intent on destroying often for the *izimuzimu*'s pot. The heroine, who is normally the intended victim of such sinister characters, is protected by the good ancestors, who appear in the guise of birds or magic old people to mediate the solution of the crisis.

Also human tricksters, who foolishly initiate a trick sequence to get the better of their opponents, are normally doomed to failure (unless they use trickery as a reaction to a trick unjustly initiated against themselves), both in the traditional oral narratives and in modern fiction. The trick turns on the trickster, except in cases where there is a complete 'conversion' or change of direction and life style.

Conclusion

One could go on and on speaking of the various and interesting adventures of this little creature, whose exploits, in different shapes and details, delight the children's imagination not only in Africa but all over the world. One could also draw parallels to show how most Zulu folktales, even those which are not normally connected with trickster figures, present solutions based on cunning and trickery.

The adventures of the Zulu trickster fill many pages of literature, as well as many evenings of oral narrative around the hearth. As he wanders around the world, in and out of the confines of forest, veld and the human habitat, his quick intelligence and dogged perseverance fire the imagination of his young audience and sharpen their attention to read the characteristic signs of people who are either smooth talkers or very fast actors, and to distinguish between the inveterate pretender and deceiver on the one hand and the benefactor genuinely interested in the welfare of his neighbours on the other. This is the kind of preventive education that trickster folktales intend to impart to the young: be careful to recognize any clever dick; don't trust him as he is bad news, even if he shouts his impressive and impeccable credentials to the four winds.

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FORGOTTEN TERRITORY: THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE /XAM

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Notably absent in South African literary histories is consideration of the oral tradition of the Bushmen. In rethinking South African literature, one of the traditional forms which urgently needs recovery as part of our South African literary and cultural heritage, is the collected narratives and songs/poems of the /Xam (as represented in the Bleek & Lloyd collection, published in 1911, 1924 and 1931-37, and in Von Wielligh and Marais's collections in Afrikaans in the 1920's). These previously marginalised forms need reincorporation into what we consider to be the corpus of South African literature. The recovery of the Bushmen narratives - in a parallel with the recovery of the rock art, some of which dates back to 27,500 B.C. - has serious implications for a new conception not only of our literary history, but for South African history as a whole. At the conference 'People, Power and Politics: representing the Bushmen in Southern Africa' (4-6 August 1994, Wits university) David Lewis-Williams pointed to a need for a unifying 'seamless history' which would be inclusive of all the peoples of South Africa, as distinct from the fragmented 'white' and 'black' histories that we have at the moment.

The publication in 1991 of Pippa Skotnes's *Sound from the Thinking Strings* (containing reproductions of etchings inspired by Bushmen rock art), and Stephen Watson's *Return of the Moon* (a few months later) with the qualifying subtitle, *Versions from the /Xam*, focused the South African reader's attention anew on the culture of this southern Bushman group. I want to stress that the aim of this attempt to (re-)construct the oral tradition of the /Xam, is to rethink what constitutes South African literature. In describing this body of work, contaminated as it has become by endless mediating processes and translation from the oral into the written mode, one is also drawing afresh the borders of our literary history. It is a remarkable phenomenon that, apart from Bleek & Lloyd's extensive work in recording and studying the /Xam language and literature around the turn of the century, the /Xam's transcribed oral texts have received scant attention from South African literary scholars.

In 1987 Voss identified various myths concerning the Bushmen. At first there was Pringle's view of the Bushmen as a 'Noble Savage', followed by 'the dominant image of the Bushman

from about 1850 until the 1920s' as 'a barely human, duplicitous, cruel savage' (1987:26). This is superseded in the late nineteenth century by the neo-Romantic, 'modern' image of the Bushman - 'kind, noble, indomitable, independent, infinitely adaptable to Nature because infinitely wise in her ways. The rise of the modern myth coincided with the rise of industrialization and urbanization' (1987:26). Voss points out that Bleek's linguistic and mythological studies 'led to a conclusion on which the total rehabilitation of the Bushman (...) could proceed' (1987:33). It is clear from the work of anthropologists, sociologists and scholars of Bushman rock art that Bleek & Lloyd's publications form the cornerstone of any scientific work done in the field. Compare Vinnicombe's *People of the Eland* (1976), Lewis-Williams's *Believing and Seeing* (1981), Hewitt's invaluable *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San* (1986), Guenther's *Bushman Folktales* (1989), and Alan Barnard's *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa* (1992). All these authors, working in different disciplines, still make extensive use of Bleek & Lloyd's research.

However, Bleek & Lloyd's project in *Specimens* needs contextualizing. It is highly problematic that the only access we have to the oral tradition of the /Xam is through these rather archaically stilted and belaboured written English texts. The concept of one fixed text is problematic. In oral tradition plot structure is more or less fixed, but the same plot structure can exist in an endless variety of narratives, the nature of the narrative depending on the interest and ability of different narrators.

Wilhelm Bleek, the German philologist who came to South Africa with Bishop Colenso in 1850, became interested in the Bushmen and their language through newspaper reports published in Natal (on Bushmen raiders in the Drakensberg), where he was travelling around on horseback at the time to study Zulu. He was later appointed as librarian at the Cape, custodian of the Grey collection (now the South African Library). During his residence here, at Mowbray, he heard of a group of Bushmen who were brought from up country as prisoners for stock theft and murder, to the Breakwater Prison. He managed to have several of these unfortunate people released and handed over into his care in the role of domestic servants residing with him. Between 1870 and 1875 he and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd (both avid students of the Bushmen language, and in command of /Xam, the northern Cape linguistic group to which most of the prisoners belonged) interviewed and transcribed by hand the narratives and songs told to them by various 'givers of the native literature' (Bleek & Lloyd, 1911). They were /a!kunta (from the Strelitzberge), //kabbo (whose name means 'Dream').

/han=/kasso (or 'klein Jantje'; son-in-law to //kabbo), Dia!kwain (from the Katberge, near Calvinia), !kweiten ta //ken (a sister of Dia!kwain) and /xaken-an (an old Bushman woman). After Bleek's premature death in 1875 Lucy Lloyd carried on the transcription and translation till 1884. She returned to England thereafter, and ultimately published some of the material in 1911 in *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore*. Bleek's daughter, Dorothea, made an anthology of the animal stories which was published in 1923 as *The Mantis and his Friends*. Further material was made available in the journal *Bantu Studies* in the thirties under the title 'Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam Bushmen'.

Clearly the absence of a tape recorder necessitated the mode of laborious transcription by hand, which also dictated the unnaturally slow pace. The narrating situation is also totally artificial: instead of a responsive audience of mother tongue /Xam speakers, seated around a fire, probably after a successful hunt and feast, the narrators had Bleek, the ageing, ailing German linguist and his English sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd. It is a simulated storytelling situation, one of dependency of the storytellers upon the transcribers, influenced by various mediation processes. Factors which play a role are race (black narrators and white listeners/recorders), language (/Xam, German and English) and the necessity of notation (to facilitate later translation).

Not enough is known of the mediation processes. Questions arise about the language proficiency of Bleek and Lloyd: with reference to /Xam (Bleek started a Bushman dictionary which his daughter completed and published in 1956; how much /Xam did Lloyd know?), and with reference to English. She was a mother tongue English speaker, Bleek a mother tongue German speaker who started learning /Xam in 1865. If Bleek translated, one wonders about his proficiency in English (since his *Natal Diaries* dealing with the years 1855-1856 were written in German). If most of the translations were by Lloyd, one wonders about her command of /Xam. It then also means that two mediators, with different language skills and different powers of understanding and different interpretations, were involved in recording the material.

Instead of spontaneous 'performance' in front of a communal /Xam audience, there is an artificial audience consisting of two white foreigners. An estranging new factor is the awesome presence of 'Master' Bleek, as //Kabbo calls him. Bleek changed the course of the narrators' lives by freeing them from the Breakwater prison and taking them to his house in Mowbray to aid him in his study of /Xam language and literature. They have their extremely

relative freedom because of him. But this 'freedom' still means incarceration in the so-called civilized Cape Town, more or less as possessions of Bleek. It is clear from //Kabbo's narratives in the 'personal history' section that Bleek explained to them why they were brought to his house: he was making a book of their stories and about their lives. Having him to thank for their freedom, they would clearly all cooperate in the project - he is the first white person who treats them humanely, and affords them marginal freedom, with promises of (ironically) boots and guns for when they intended to return to their far-flung home districts in the Katkop and Strontberge.

The issue of racial difference between narrator and interlocutor (between //Kabbo on the one side, and Bleek & Lloyd on the other) can be seen as the only plausible explanation for the strange element of racism that enters jarringly into //Kabbo's narrative of his first journey by railway train:

I have said to thee that the train (fire wagon) is nice. I sat nicely in the train. We two sat in (it), we (I) and a black man.

A woman did seize my arm; she drew me inside, because I should have fallen, therefore she drew me in. I sat beside a black man; his face was black; his mouth (was) also black; for they are all black.

White men are those whose faces are red, () for they are handsome. The black man he is ugly, thus his mouth is black, for his face is black.

The black man then asked me: 'Where do thou come from?' I said to the black man: 'I come from this place.' The black man asked me: 'What is its name?' () I said to the black man: 'My place is the Bitterpits.'

The only possible explanation for this racist attitude of //Kabbo in looking at other South Africans lies in a perverse inclination to please his white 'Master' and interviewer.

The researchers are thus the empowered ones, representing the empire's ethnographic and linguistic interests. From Bleek's *Natal Diaries* and his description of Durban as 'an improved edition of a West African town', where 'the streets are covered with drift sand, into which one sinks up to one's knees and which gives many people unpleasant boils' (1965:12) and where 'an unhealthy irritability is the general state of mind' (1965:36), it is clear that he sees South Africa as an exotic, wild and uncivilized habitat. Africa and African languages are his study objects. He is fascinated by what he considers an exotically strange and foreign place, which he wants to comprehend and approach through the medium of its languages. This attitude is reflected in the later situation at the Cape. Bleek is not directly part of the colonizing power game in process. (He was brought to Natal in 1855 by Bishop Colenso). But

he is white, educated, relatively well-off as opposed to //Kabbo, the /Xam Bushman (described in contemporary newspaper reports as 'lower than vermin'), who has no power, is illiterate, uneducated in the western sense, a stranger in the so-called world of civilization, with no political power - totally dependent on the goodwill of Bleek. The narrators are the study objects, the disempowered, the last representatives of a colonized and vanquished minority group, having obtained their amnesty from Bleek in exchange for what must have seemed like endless and tortuous narration. In terms of the relative power relation between researcher and subject, even the relative modesty (by white standards) of Bleek's position leaves unaffected his omnipotence over //Kabbo.

But if there is disjunction, there is also parallel. The position of the /Xam oral narrators versus Bleek and Lloyd as recorders-in-writing and translators is that both parties are from worlds other than the one in which they find themselves during the period 1870-1884 at the Cape. //Kabbo is a man of 60, describing in his oral narratives a precolonial era before the encroachment of the white settler or the African pastoralist into his hunting fields. This world was invaded with violence, by commandos raised in the eighteenth and nineteenth century for the extermination of Bushmen. For //Kabbo the colonial period represents an inversion of the customs and the lifestyle he was accustomed to. He is introduced, through contact with these settlers, to death, extermination and captivity. He is forcibly introduced - via an inverted Great Trek from his home at Bitterpits in the Katberge - to the so-called civilized world: a train journey in what he calls the 'fire wagon', prison ('where the nights are spent in stocks'), other races (a white magistrate and black Koranna policemen), and finally the journey ends at the Breakwater Convict Station (he disdainfully narrates how he has to do 'women's work' there). Soon afterwards he and some others are taken to Bleek's estate and introduced to the world of literacy and education. Thus he was taken from an oral hunter-gatherer community, living in the open veld and mountains, and introduced violently to the confines of city life, literacy, and so-called civilization.

Bleek is at the peak of his career, aged 43, and comes from a highly sophisticated, educated background in Berlin. From this metropolis he moves to the colony, the periphery of the 'civilised world' - from the familiar to the exotic unfamiliarity of Africa.

Bleek is not a local colonist. I have remarked that he is not strictly speaking part of the colonizing power game at the Cape. They meet at a point where the power division is ostensibly totally unequal: the empowered Bleek and those handed over into his power. Yet

from Bleek's point of view //Kabbo and his companions possess intimate knowledge of nature, are the survivors of a society of which the last signs are the language, the rock paintings, and the oral narratives. Bleek is powerless without //Kabbo and company as guides into this world.

This raises a central question. How does one deal methodologically with the /Xam's oral tradition, passed on to us in fixed form in the written circuit? Where does one begin with a reconstruction of the /Xam's oral tradition?

In essence this is a project which is doomed to failure before one even starts. If the /Xam's collected narratives are described as 'oral tradition', it is highly paradoxical that we do not have any possible entry into the 'orality' of the tradition, except by way of analogy with the role of oral tradition in African languages in southern Africa. The project would have to build on an imagined reconstruction of what has been translated by Bleek & Lloyd into a written mode. The elements to be reconstructed would normally have been (a) the narrating situation: where, when, how? (b) the participants, (c) their interaction, the nature of the interaction, (d) the aim of the narratives, (e) the function of oral tradition within the now extinct /Xam society.

Paradoxically the most direct entry into knowledge of the oral tradition of the /Xam (the function of the stories and insight into the nature of the society) is through the narratives recorded in writing by Bleek & Lloyd. By way of analogy one may look at the function of oral literature in other societies, such as those researched by Parry and Lord, Opland, Finnegan and Okpewho and Bieseile's recent study on the Ju/'hoan of the Kalahari. She argues forcibly that oral tradition is central to an understanding of hunter-gatherer societies. It functions as the storehouse of knowledge in an oral, non-literate society:

What I am suggesting is that folklore, far from being a kind of cultural froth, may actually represent an important phase in the systematics of the knowledge of hunter-gatherers. Blurton Jones and Konner (1976:326), writing about the role of expressive forms in the transmission of information among Ju/'hoan hunter-gatherers, make the evolutionary point that successful habits of mind connected with learning, storing, and communicating survival information will have been strongly selected for. This selection pressure has left an imaginative legacy in the expressive forms, strongly imprinted with the attitudes towards work, social life, and the supernatural which all along have been adaptive in the foraging milieu (1993:43).

Related to Bieseile's reading of the narratives as having a serious informative content, Peter Buchholz points out that 'recent publications in literary theory (Santerre 1990, Derive 1993)

emphasize that in many oral or predominantly oral literatures, there exists, contrary to earlier views, 'des théories littéraires locales', a meta-discourse on that culture's own verbal production' (27/4/1994:2). He alerts us to the possible presence contained in narratives themselves of indigenous literary theory.

In *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore* there are two especially relevant passages containing what may be considered 'indigenous literary theory': metatextual comments about the role of letters, or books and stories in /Xam society. Under the heading 'Customs and Superstitions' //Kabbo explains the notion of 'Bushmen Presentiments':

The Bushmen's letters are in their bodies. They (the letters) speak, they move, they make their (the Bushmen's) bodies move. They (the Bushmen) order the others to be silent; a man is altogether still, when he feels that () his body is tapping (inside). A dream speaks falsely, it is (a thing) which deceives. The presentiment is that which speaks the truth; it is that by means of which the Bushman gets (or perceives) meat, when it has tapped (1911:331).

Bleek explains in a footnote that 'the word !ghwe was used by the Bushmen to denote both letters and books (...) the beatings in their bodies (...) resemble the letters which take a message or an account of what happens in another place' (1911:331).

Lloyd sheds some light in the introduction to *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore* on //Kabbo's attitude to the recordings. He was an excellent narrator, and patiently watched until a sentence had been written down, before proceeding with what he was telling. He much enjoyed the thought that the Bushman stories would become known by means of books (1911:x).

It seems that //Kabbo's use of the concept of 'letters' or 'books' (!ghwe), very unusual in an illiterate person, must have come from his interaction with Bleek & Lloyd and their explanation about what they were aiming to achieve - recording the stories of the /Xam in book form for prosperity. The foreignness of the technology of literacy to him, however, is illustrated in the astounding and strikingly poetic statement: 'The Bushmen's letters are in their bodies'. He has comprehended the concept of communication through literacy - literally through 'letters' and 'books'. But his application can at the same time be read as a definition of and translation back into the oral mode of literate communication. How else can one understand these Bushmen's letters which are speaking, moving and making the Bushmen's bodies move, but as a concretization of the process of oral communication? The letters which 'speak' refers to the oral communication process, the actual narration by word of mouth, and gesturality is referred to by the fact that 'they make their bodies move'. Here is a description

of an oral performance in the words of //Kabbo. He also insists on the truth value of such a performance and oral communication: 'The presentiment is that which speaks the truth; it is that by means of which the Bushman gets meat, when it has tapped'. Although //Kabbo (whose name means 'dream', and who was a medicine man, a shaman, according to Hewitt, 1986:125) is also referring to the powers of intuition, this passage can be read on a secondary level as a 'local literary theory', a meta-discourse on the function of oral narration in traditional /Xam society.

In contrast with our modern tendency to view oral narratives as 'stories', to the Bushmen they impart true knowledge, necessary for their survival. If the above interpretation is correct, it confirms the 'evolutionary view of hunter-gatherer communication' which Biesele put forward (1993:43).

In '>//Kabbo's Intended Return Home' he explains something of the communal nature of storytelling, and how the essence of storytelling for him is tied up with the close-knit society he wishes to return to:

Thou knowest that I sit waiting for the moon to turn back for me, that I may return to my place. That I may listen to all the people's stories, when I visit them; that I may listen to their () stories, that which they tell(...) For, I am here; I do not obtain stories; because I do not visit, so that I might hear () stories which float along; while I feel that the people of another place are here; they do not possess my stories. They do not talk my language; for, they visit their like(...)

The Flat Bushmen go to each other's huts; that they may smoking sit in front of them. () Therefore, they obtain stories at them; because they are used to visit; for smoking's people they are. As regards myself I am waiting that the moon may turn back for me; that I may set my feet forward in the path. For, I verily think that I must only await the moon; that I may tell my Master (lit. chief), that I feel this is the time when I should sit among my fellow men (...)for, I do think of visits; (that) I ought to visit; (that) I ought to talk with my fellow men; for, I work here, together with women; and I do not talk with them; for, they merely send me to work.

I must first sit a little, cooling my arms; that the fatigue may go out of them; because I sit. I do merely listen, watching for a story, which I want to hear; while I sit waiting for it; that it may float into my ear (1911: 301-303).

//Kabbo expresses his estrangement and alienation in the Cape Town environment where he misses his people and their stories. He is surrounded by strangers who talk a different language, and because he is absent from his people, he does not hear their stories. He feels it is his duty to return to them: 'I ought to visit' and 'I ought to talk'. The absence of regular oral communication in story form with those who speak one's language, is alienating //Kabbo from his environment. He is expressing deep longing for the communal and verbal community

he left behind. In a footnote Bleek notes 'Kabbo explains that a story is 'like the wind, it comes from a far-off quarter, and we feel it' (1911:301). This explanation bears a remarkable resemblance to the description of presentiments in the later passage ('resemble letters that take a message or an account of what happens in another place' - 1911:331). The close proximity in meaning between a 'story' (which 'comes from a far-off quarter and we can feel it') and a 'presentiment' ('an account of what happens in another place' is significant, for it suggests something of the function of story-telling in /Xam oral tradition. They carry information about distant happenings, and they inform about far-off places. The central function of the narratives and songs can thus be described both as instinctive and intuitive knowledge (presentiments), rather than as pure entertainment. Most importantly, //Kabbo knows they have this dual function and can articulate this knowledge.

Hewitt stresses that 'the fundamental context of the tales as we have them is as written texts' (1992:82; my emphasis). In addition there are the inevitable distortions and loss of the precise spirit of the original, through the process of translation from /Xam into rather archaic English (compare the frequent use of 'thee' and 'thou'). What we have in the Bleek & Lloyd records are but an approximation, albeit the closest we can come, to knowledge of the original. The reader must imagine the original which is always deferred into the mediation of the translation-transmission.

The oral material originated in, and largely represents, the pre-colonial period in Southern African history, before the advent of European settlers (from 1652) or the encroachment on their hunting fields by African tribes (from about 500 A.D., that is 1,500 years ago). Through archaeological research the presence of the Bushmen in Southern Africa is dated to 100,000 to 50,000 years ago. The earliest rock art in Namibia has been dated to 27,000 to 25,000 years ago. Fourteen thousand years ago the Bushmen were widely distributed in Southern Africa. As such they represent the oldest part of South African history and cultural heritage. Parkington observed that:

The history of human settlement in southern Africa is as yet only partly understood. In the absence of written records until a few centuries ago most of the (...) story has to be compiled from the archaeological record of behaviour implicit in assemblages of stone artefacts, bones, ceramics and rock paintings (in Skotnes, 1991:12).

He cautions that although archaeology constructs 'a past form of what has survived into the present, using analogies and models from the present', one should avoid the danger of simply

reading the present back into past, or merely 'presenting the past', because the past 'must have been different from the present' (1991:12).

Part of this problem is that all of our knowledge of hunter gatherers and their worlds comes from archaeology. They (the hunter gatherers) enter the written record in the phrases and sentences of others, often people with whom they are in conflict or with whom they share little ideology or world view (1991:13).

Historical overviews also tend to ignore the prior presence of the hunter gatherers, concentrating instead on the 'dominant notion of white and black settlers arriving in southern Africa more or less simultaneously' (1991:13). When historians fleetingly refer to the presence of the Bushmen, it tends to be within a mythical utopian framework, as of some paradise lost, as is clear in Mostert's descriptions in *Frontiers* (1992:27) of 'these delightful people' and 'the Gentle People'. He describes them in lyrical terms as having lived in 'simple cycles, of continual mobility within their territorial limits to hunt or gather, of close-knit harmonious sociability around the hallowed well-being and good fortune of the communal fire - these cycles maintained millennia after millennia' (1992:29).

In contrast to Mostert, Parkington warns against seeing the Bushman as 'a fossilized reflection of an unchanging past, for such people do not exist' (1991:20). Neither should someone like //Kabbo be seen as an aspirant pastoralist encountered by literate observers at a time when his luck and fortunes were down. Rather he and his family were hunter gatherers struggling to maintain their links to land and other people, using a system of values not shared by their competition. The clash of cultural values is embedded in //Kabbo's comments on his arrest, his journey to Cape Town and the urgency of his anticipated return to the land (1991:20).

The narratives Parkington refers to, gathered in *Specimens* under the heading of 'Personal History', are more clearly located in the colonial period, referring to the disintegration of their pre-colonial life-style after the advent of the colonizers. //Kabbo is the main narrator in such emotive tales as '*//Kabbo's Capture and Journey to Cape Town*' (told in two versions, and thus accentuating the momentous turning point in his life that captivity signified), '*//Kabbo's Journey in the Railway Train*', and the elegiac '*//Kabbo's Intended Return Home*'. The twenty eight-page narrative in *Specimens* in which //Kabbo tells his personal history is one of the first South African oral autobiographies (compare also the death cell conversations of Rooizak

and the missionaries, recorded at Lydenburg at 1876 and published recently by Peter Delius), and as such alone deserves critical attention.

It needs to be stressed also that Bleek & Lloyd did not merely record. Bleek's powerful intervention in his narrators' lives (freeing them from prison), his presence as listener (//Kabbo repeatedly addresses him as 'Master') and //Kabbo's consciousness of the project of recording his people's and his own plight in 'books', influenced the nature of the material.

There are narratives which can be identified as situated in and referring to the pre-colonial period, comprising creation myths, tales from everyday occurrences and practices, such as rain-making, the role of sorcerers and hunting practices. They are juxtaposed with the narratives referring to and set in the later colonial period, dealing with the disintegration of the /Xam hunter-gather society. Characteristic of the difference between the two types of narratives is the use of the first person plural 'we', referring to the communal nature of pre-colonial society, in contrast with the use of the first person singular, 'I', which //Kabbo reverts to in the telling of his personal experiences during the colonial period. Watson takes the title of his 'versions from the /Xam', *Return of the Moon*, from one of the last group of narratives, '>//Kabbo's Intended Return Home':

I am waiting that the moon may turn back for me; that I may set my feet forward in the path (...) that I must only await the moon; that I may tell my Master (lit. chief), that I feel this is the time when I should sit among my fellow men... (1911:303).

Reconstructing the /Xam's oral tradition necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, taking into account anthropological, historical, economic and linguistic studies, as well as those on Bushmen rock art. Parkington clarifies succinctly the relationship between rock art and the collected oral tradition:

the repeated depiction of eland on the cave wall recalls the repeated phrases of a story. The almost ubiquitous use of metaphor permeates both the written and the painted or engraved documents. The fragile, even permeable distinction between people and animals appears in each context. The stories, poems and songs do not, however interpret the paintings, nor do the engravings illustrate stories. Rather they stand as a body of work in which the components reflect on and off one another (1991:20).

Lewis-Williams's *Images of Power* illustrates that shamanism and the centrality of the trance-dance in the shaman's activity was one of the typical aspects of Bushman life. Lewis-Williams claims that the experiences of the shaman-in-trance are the key to understanding their rock art. Only further research will test this hypothesis. It is, however, clear from

surveying the subject matter of the /Xam narratives that the sorcerer, rain-maker or medicine-men did indeed play a central role in their society. Hewitt describes the stability of the oral tradition, as evidenced by the comparison of two or more narratives, told by different narrators, but dealing with the same plot structure. He has also drawn up clear characteristics of the style of the different narrators, based on the narratives in Bleek & Lloyd. At the beginning of each narrative Bleek & Lloyd clearly identified the narrator's name - something regrettably absent in Watson's versions. The lack of identification of the specific narrator speaking in Watson's texts, creates the impression that the texts form a homogenous whole, with anonymous sources. It also foregrounds his name, even if this may be unintentional. Hiding the names at the back of the collection, before the footnotes, is not very helpful. He is literally colonizing the translated /Xam texts.

Typical of /Xam language and speech, according to Hewitt, is 'the marked infrequency of adjectives, and the tendency to repeat sentences and phrases several times with minor modifications in wording' (1986:237). When Watson extensively removes repetitions, he is damaging the character of the original.

A comparison of the original song of 'The Broken String' (- told by Dialkwain (Bleek & Lloyd, 1911:237) with Watson's version (1991:59), illustrates that the poet has taken some liberties with this text which change the meaning considerably. He has imported into his version new concepts - the words 'earth' (in stanza one and two), 'country' and 'dead' (in stanza three) and the phrase 'this earth my place' (in stanza four).

In part VIII of 'Customs and Beliefs' (1937) the context of 'The Broken String' is given in a narrative told by Dialkwain. The song was sung by the sorcerer, !nuin-/kuiten, while dying of a gun shot by a Boer on commando. The Boer had shot him in revenge for killing the Boer's ox while in the form of a lion. This sorcerer had wanted to teach Dialkwain's father, Xaa-tin, the secrets of his magical powers, i.e. how his magical 'strings' worked. But after the death of the magician the 'string' was broken and the 'ringing sound in the sky' was no longer heard. 'Thinking Strings' are equated by Patricia Vinnicombe in *People of the Eland* (1976) with all forms of 'conscious and subconscious perception', the channels of invisible power (1976:352) or 'gi', as possessed in heightened form by the shamans or medicine-men.

The /Xam song, 'The Broken String', thus refers in the first instance to the dying art of the shaman. It is also true that the song comes from a narrative set in colonial times (cf. the

'commando' and the Boer with his gun who avenges the killing of his ox). Therefore Watson's interpretation and the imported concepts of 'this earth' and 'the country' lying 'dead before me' are justified. These new imports do not betray the tone of lament present in the original song, but they make explicit what was implicit in the original. 'The Broken String' is a significant and eloquent text in its own right.

The same can be said for the changes Watson brings about in his almost literal rendering of Dialkwain's remarks about presentiments (in part VII: Sorcerors: 31.). Dialkwain said that 'a presentiment is a thing which we feel'. Watson changes this to 'a thing which we fear'. There is a vast difference between the two concepts. The translated text is subtler, builds up from things we infer the /Xam 'feel' to the knowledge through presentiments of 'danger'. Watson's version takes away the progression, and gradual building up which was part of the /Xam text.

Jan Vansina pointed to the importance of oral traditions 'where there is no writing or almost none' in reconstructing the past and recovering historical evidence (1985:199). We need to set aside our neo-romantic obsession with the so-called impurity of the Bleek & Lloyd collection because these texts have been preserved in a fixated form in the written circuit. Oral and pure, or transcribed and therefore impure in form, these texts do belong to the corpus of what we understand by oral tradition (Van Gorp, 1986:288), and we need to recover them as part of our South African literary history. Bleek & Lloyd's *Specimens* and Von Wielligh's *Boesmanstories* (four volumes, 1919-1921) are valuable and as yet little explored collections of South African narratives and poems which may help us to greater understanding of our own prehistory.

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FRENCH WRITING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

Direct contact between France and the southern tip of Africa goes back more than four hundred years, and this article aims, by way of a general overview, to give some indication of the extent and nature of French writing in Southern Africa. This is not to suggest or foster any kind of cultural segregationism within the study of South African literature, but simply to serve as an introduction to one of the many semiotic practices in this field of study.

There is enough historical evidence to indicate that, as early as 1503, three French merchants from Normandy rounded the Cape on their way to India (Strangman, 1936:1). This was achieved only 15 years after the Portuguese and more than 60 years before the English and the Dutch, but these travellers left no written account of their impressions of the Cape. Although several references to the Cape are found in French logbooks of the subsequent 100 years, the first account of some substance, (which I also take to be the first French writing on South Africa as such), is given by general Augustin de Beaulieu who stayed at Table Bay for a month on his way to India in 1620, and again on his return in 1622. Although some of the French visitors came to South Africa with the intention to stay, (such as the Huguenots and the missionaries), the greater majority were passers-by, and their writing reflects this status. They were early travellers, scientists, hunters, explorers, shipwrecked sailors, and during the Anglo-Boer war, volunteers, whose stay in South Africa varied from a few days to a couple of years. The transition to the twentieth century however, signals a definite change in French interest (and writing) in South Africa: Where anglophobia and the claim of shared Huguenot ancestry had previously offered some common ground with the Dutch colonizers, the attraction of Africa as a hunter and adventurer's paradise faded with the socio-political changes of the twentieth century.

What follows is a brief chronological survey of some French writing to be considered within the context of South African literature, namely **travel writing** of the 17th and 18th centuries, (i.e. relatively brief accounts by traders, scientists, diplomats, shipwrecked sailors),

literary contributions by individuals such as Boniface, the writing of the missionaries, the extensive accounts of 19th century hunter-explorers, as well as Boer War writing.

Travel writing

A post-colonial reading of the early writing by French travellers clearly reveals the way in which the unfamiliar was 'othered' or reduced to silence in the text. Not only are the hunter-gatherers they encountered de-individualised by sweeping generalisations often repeated almost verbatim from one traveller's account to the next, but the visitors clearly only saw what they 'knew', or what their frame of reference had taught them to expect. This is strikingly confirmed by the elaborate engravings which often accompany the texts, (cf Tachard, 1688:74 and 75), where the Khoisan for example are depicted in the classic pose of Greek sculptures, (as was the trend during the Neo-Classical period of art in Europe at the time), thereby clearly illustrating the application of an unchallenged mind-set to all they encountered.

Close analysis and comparison of texts however also reveal a gradual change in attitude and perspective, such as the difference in accounts dating from before and after the French Revolution. By 1789 the Rousseauiste notion of the 'noble savage' was approximately thirty years old, and the stress placed by the early travellers on the Khoikhoi's so-called idleness, lack of hygiene and their 'offensive' eating habits gradually make way for the lyrical accounts which characterize the 19th century writings of Le Vaillant and Delegorgue.

One of the most substantial early accounts is that of Etienne de Flacourt, director-general of the *Compagnie française*, who dropped anchor in Saldanha Bay in October 1648 and again in March, 1655. He comments on the magnificent birdlife of the area, and like De Beaulieu before him, describes the Khoikhoi he encountered and to whom he proceeded to give religious instruction. He writes:

Monsieur Nacquard and I tried to explain to them something about the nature of God. We showed them the way to pray and how we looked upwards, when on our knees. They all marvelled at it and one aged man intimated to us that he was old, that he would soon die, and that he was not without some fear of death. That, at least, is what he seemed to say (De Flacourt, 1661:247).

This encounter between people from totally different cultures led to no satisfactory conclusion, as is evident from the following anecdote:

I asked them for two boys to come with me. I said I would make them brave and that I would bring them back. They would not listen to the suggestion. In order to interest them I showed them our two Madagascar negroes in their uniforms and wearing their swords. They only laughed at them, or perhaps they did not understand what we said (De Flacourt, 1661:562).

The then well-known diamond-expert and dealer of precious stones, Jean Tavernier, made three trips to India more or less at the same time as De Flacourt, and also stayed over at the Cape. An account of these travels published in Paris in 1676, entitled *Les Six Voyages de Jean Tavernier* contains seven pages describing the Khoikhoi. He is the first to comment on their remarkable knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs, and tells of 19 French sailors suffering from festering sores on their legs who were completely cured within 2 weeks of treatment (1679:562). He also refers to the medicinal use of the so-called 'snake stone' in the treatment of poisonous snake-bites, and claims it to be of Oriental origin (Forbes, 1965:321-322).

Although the French never founded a colony as such in Southern Africa they nevertheless occupied and annexed Saldanha Bay for a short period in 1666 (cf De Rennefort, 1710:306). The commander of this expedition, Monsieur Montevergue, was entertained at Table Bay by the Dutch commander Van Quaelberg, who was not informed about the annexation and who unwittingly and in all innocence gave a banquet at the Fort in honour of the French visitors. This was a lavish affair, during which the Fort's canons were fired for the first time, shattering every existing windowpane (De Rennefort, 1710:302-303). Once discovered, the beacon marking the annexation was removed by the Dutch, and nothing more came of this first and only attempt by the French to annex Saldanha Bay (Burman and Levin, 1974:34).

Louis XIV's decision in 1685 to establish diplomatic relations with the Siamese emperor resulted in a major source of 17th century French writing in South Africa. A number of the French delegations who stayed over at the Cape on their way to the East and back, wrote and published accounts of their stay. The delegation of Guy Tachard and the six Jesuit priests who accompanied him is one such example. As astronomers, they were granted permission by Van der Stel and Van Rheede in 1685 to set up an observatory in the Company Gardens (Tachard, 1687:73-74). Besides this scientific work Tachard also wrote extensively on the land and the people and had two works published in Paris. The following quote concerning the Khoikhoi, probably meant condescendingly, nevertheless suggests a shift in the earlier travellers' seeming incapacity to see beyond the European concept of 'idleness':

These people, convinced that there is no other sort of life worth living, only do what is strictly necessary to secure a gentle existence for themselves. According to them, even to such as are in service to earn a little bread, tobacco and brandy, the Dutch are slaves who cultivate the lands which really belong to them, and faint-hearted folk who take shelter from their enemies in forts and houses. They, on the contrary, fearlessly set up their encampments wherever they will, and disdain to plough the land. They maintain that this manner of life denotes that they are the owners of the country and the happiest of men, since they alone live in peace and freedom, and in that, they say, their happiness consists (Tachard, 1687:72).

L'abbé de Choisy, deputy ambassador to Siam, was the author of *Journal de Voyage de Siam* (Paris, 1687), a diary covering the events of his voyage to the East, with an entry made every day. While at the Cape he gave a fine description of the Company Gardens, clearly exposing his Eurocentric vision of all things encountered by commenting on how beautifully it would go in a corner of Versailles... (1687:70). Clearly a gourmet, he enthuses about the abundance encountered at the tables of the Dutch:

I doubt if anywhere in the world there is a better country to live in than the Cape of Good Hope. Everywhere there is excellent beef, mutton, poultry. The game is delicious. Of three kinds of partridges, white, red and grey, there are some as big as fatted chickens. They haven't the flavour of Auvergne partridges, but their meat is short, white and tender, and they are as tasty at least as Hazel-hens. The roe-buck, lambs and turtledoves are very good. I am mentioning only the ones that we have ourselves eaten. All the meats of Europe are found there in abundance besides an infinity of others that you do not know. And the surprising thing is that, in addition to all these creatures, the land teems with deer, wild boars, tigers, leopards, lions, elephants, wild asses, wild dogs without tails and ears which hunt in packs. The wine of the country is white, quite pleasant, has no taste of the soil, and is somewhat like 'genetin'. It improves with each vintage (1687:72).

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, in 1687, the new ambassador to Siam, Simon de la Loubère, also gave a report of his stay at the Cape. Published as *Royaume de Siam* in Paris in 1691, he explained the origin of the word 'Hottentot' as follows:

They are called 'Hottentots' because when they dance they sing nothing but the word 'Hottentot'. They can be made to dance as much as one desires, because of their love for the brandy and tobacco given to them by foreigners: that is to say, they stamp, now with one foot, now with the other, as if treading grapes, and say continually and energetically 'hotantot hotantot', but in quite a low voice, as if they were out of breath or feared to awaken someone. (Translated by Raven-Hart, Part I, 1971:319).

Another important source of French writing of the 17th and 18th centuries is to be found in the accounts of shipwrecked Frenchmen who, after their ordeal, either managed to make their

way to the Cape or were picked up by passing ships and taken back to Europe. One such account is that of the French Protestant Guillaume Chenu de Chalezak, whose ship, after being attacked by pirates, had to drop anchor and take in fresh water on the Transkei coast, near the Urmzimvubu river. Chenu and seven other crew members went ashore to search for fresh water and food. All except Chenu were attacked and killed by a group of Xhosas, whose chief took a liking to the young Frenchman, and with whom Chenu stayed for almost a year before he was picked up by a passing ship and taken back to Europe. On his return he wrote down all that had happened to him, at the same time giving a very detailed account of 17th century Xhosa tribal life. This manuscript, entitled *Voyage a la Coste des Caffres 1686-1689* was published in reworked form by N. Weiss in the *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du Protestantisme Français LXXX*, (1921:40-45; 97-107). It provides invaluable information on the Xhosa rites of circumcision and marriage, on the differing economic roles of men and women within the tribe, on their diet, their religion, their laws, warfare and their hunting techniques.

Equally little-known is the official declaration made in 1752 to the Secretary of the Political Council at the Cape by two French shipwrecked sailors who had made their way there from Algoa Bay on foot - a distance of more than 700 km. This unpublished manuscript (today in the Cape Archives, catalogue number M.P.4), recounts the incredible hardship and misfortune experienced by Jacques Thomas Perrot and François Rubion, the only two survivors of a group of nine French sailors from a ship called *Le Nécessaire*. They had been sent ashore by their captain to get fresh water, but their rowing boat was smashed on the rocks, leaving them stranded. In the manuscript a vivid description is given of the many geographical obstacles they had to overcome, and of the way in which they were driven by constant hunger and fear. One of their comrades fell from a cliff in an epileptic fit, and another died after eating a dead fish (referred to as 'crapaud de mer' in the text) which they had found washed up on a beach. According to the surviving eye-witnesses the victim's body immediately turned black, and another who had also eaten of the poisonous fish became so deranged that he scared wild animals away with his terrible howling. The two survivors eventually individually came to the house of a certain Frederik Zeele who helped them reach the settlement at the Cape.

Numerous French scientists also left written testimonies of their stay at the Cape. Sent by the Académie des Sciences to do astrological research, Nicolas Louis Lacaille stayed at the

Cape from 1751 till 1753. His *Journal Historique du Voyage fait au Cap de Bonne-Espérance* (published in 1776) contains a wealth of cultural-historical material, revealing for example the Dutch community's incapacity to adapt to the land. He is struck by the colonists' preference for smoked or salted fish and meat in spite of the abundant supply of fresh fish and meat available in the area, and describes formal banquets where the main course would invariably be dry and yellowed 'stocfisch' and half putrified hams from Europe, garnished with rancid yellow fat. Fresh meat would also be served, he says, but only to make the tables seem more heavily laden with food, and would generally go untouched.

A critical account of late 18th century conditions at the Cape is given by Joseph O'Hier Degrandpré in his *Le Voyage à la Côte Occidentale d'Afrique fait dans les années 1786-1787*. Degrandpré was a slave-trader who, after disembarking at Mauritius with slaves infected with small-pox, caused an epidemic on the island from which 4000 people died. A price was consequently put on his head by the authorities, and he went into hiding and spent ten months at the Cape in 1793. Obviously not much of a humanist himself, Degrandpré nevertheless comments on the way in which the Bushmen were hunted down 'like vermin' by the Dutch colonists, and how the Cape government chose to turn a blind eye to the matter (1801:108-123).

Another French scientist, the botanist Jacques Julien Houtou de la Billardière, also gives a detailed account of his stay at the Cape in 1792. He tells, among other things, of a slave-trader's ship on its way from Mozambique to America, with 400 slaves on board, huddled into three small holds, most of them suffering from scurvy. According to De la Billardière they had come from a region where dogs were highly valued, and where the trader often succeeded in exchanging a good dog for two or three potential slaves ... (De la Billardière, 1799:78-79). Somewhat prudishly he comments on the love of luxury of the Dutch ladies at the Cape, adding that they go to as much trouble to be as fashionable as those in Europe. It is true that the Cape at this time had become a centre of international commerce. In fact, it was known as 'Le petit Paris' when, from 1781-1783, a strong French garrison was established there for the duration of the American War of Independence, to protect the Dutch colony (an ally of France) from possible British annexation. A section of the barracks was even transformed into a theatre, where the French soldiers performed *Le mariage de Figaro* in 1783, (a year earlier than its première in Paris), as well as *Le Barbier de Séville*.

Literary contributions

It is interesting to note that French theatre persisted well into the 19th century, and Charles Etienne Boniface was an important figure in this regard.

He arrived at the Cape in 1807 as a writer, journalist, and actor for the French Theatrical Company. After its disbandment he became a leading figure in the two subsequent companies, namely *Honni soit qui mal y pense* and *Vlijt en Kunst*. He even wrote a play, called *L'Enragé* which was produced three times, and translated many others, e.g. Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, which was produced several times.

As journalist he was editor of *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, and also wrote poetry, such as *Ode à la paix*, a long tirade against Napoleon, which was published in the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* in 1814. He also produced an historical novel, based on the accounts of survivors of the French ship which sank in 1829 on the Transkei coast, entitled *Relation du Naufrage du Navire Français l'Eole sur la Côte de la Caffrerie en avril 1829*. The novel recounts the eight survivors' trek to the Cape, where they acquire a (fictitious) guide by the name of Mordant. Through him, (his name suggests 'the one who speaks bitingly'), Boniface gets to express his own criticism and grievances concerning the place and its people. In spite of this personal flavour the book offers a powerful social commentary of the time.

Reputed to be a difficult person to get on with, (his personal motto was *nemo me impune lacessit*), Boniface went to live with a slave woman after the death of his own wife in 1835, and had several children with her. Ostracised by the Cape community, he went to live in Natal in 1844, where he worked as a journalist for *De Mediator* with C. Moll as editor. The relationship was strained, and after one year Boniface resigned. In the following year (1846) he published a series of lampoons entitled *Bluettes Franco-Nataliennes* in the *Natal Witness*. These were aimed at Moll and his successor, Arthur Walker. Six of these *bluettes* have survived, one in English, the rest in French. Mostly composed in verse, they were modelled on the fables of Aesop and La Fontaine. In each one of them the villain is clearly recognisable as Moll or Walker, with Boniface portrayed as innocent and long-suffering victim. It seems significant that lampoons were published in *French* in a Natal newspaper as recently as the mid-19th century, the implication being that a sufficient number of readers still knew the language.

In an attempt to earn a living Boniface gave lessons in French, dance, music and fencing, (the latter being advertised as 'the art of fighting in elegant style and killing à la française...').

Totally impoverished and isolated he composed and carved a sad, bitter sonnet in French onto a tree trunk in Albert Park, which can today be seen in the Voortrekker museum in Pietermaritzburg. Boniface committed suicide in 1853.

The writing of the missionaries

The writing of the French missionaries who came to Southern Africa contains a wealth of cultural-historical material. The French Catholics had great difficulty in gaining a foothold, as the Dutch East India company, being of Protestant denomination, did not employ Catholics or even permit Catholics to settle in the colony. In 1685 however, the already mentioned Guy Tachard signalled the presence of some Catholics at Table Bay. They were either slaves or European travellers who came to see the French priest and his Jesuit companions in the dead of night so as not to raise the suspicion of the authorities (Tachard, 1687:85-87). Only in the second half of the 19th century does one find Catholic missionaries openly active in the field, namely in Zululand, and like the Protestants, in Lesotho. The writing of one such missionary, Father Gérard, stands out: his unpublished diary written around 1856, as well as the personal correspondence to his family give a detailed and sometimes very moving account of the hardships and difficulties he encountered.

The first Protestant missionaries came from the *Mission Evangelique de Paris* to Lesotho as early as 1829. Eugène Casalis' *Les Bassoutos ou 23 années au sud de L'Afrique* (Paris, 1922), and the abundantly illustrated works of Frédéric Christol, namely *Au sud de L'Afrique* (1879), *Les Bassoutos* (1898) and *L'Art dans l'Afrique* (1930), are examples of this major source of French writing in South Africa. Casalis claims to have gained the friendship of King Mosjwesjwe, and his book focuses on Basotho life and culture. He also provides an account of the people's transition from orality to literacy, as in the following extract where he describes how the King's aged father was shown how 'words can become visible'. One of the best readers was namely made to withdraw while Mosjwesjwe told the old man to:

think of something, and tell it to this white man; he will draw some marks on the sand, and you will see. The marks being made, the village scholar was called, and very soon made public the thoughts of his Sovereign; the latter, more than stupefied, covered his mouth with his hand, and looked from one to another of those present, as if to assure himself that he had not been transported to an ideal world (Casalis, 1959:83).

This was the time of the Mfecane, and because of severe political pressure and the advance of the whites from the south west, many forced migrations took place and poverty was rife. The ensuing cannibalism, (Ricard - 1992:4 calls it 'stress induced pathology'), is a persistent motif throughout the writing of the missionaries. I will not attempt any detailed analysis of it here, but its persistent presence throughout their writing certainly invites interpretation (cf for example Ricard's - 1992:1-8 - classification of the cannibal motif as either rhetorical, theological or political device in the text).

The writing of 19th century hunter-explorers

Dating from more or less the same period, the many reports of hunters and explorers constitute a significant contribution to French writing in South Africa. A major example would be the rather flamboyant account of seven years' hunting and travelling in Southern Africa by Adulphe Delegorgue, published in Paris in 1847, and entitled *Voyage dans L'Afrique Australe, notamment dans le Territoire du Natal*. The writing of this adventurer is particularly interesting as it incarnates the ambiguous attitude towards Africa which many Europeans of the day seemed to hold. A scientist by his own account - two bird species carry his name, namely *Columba* and *Coturnix Delegorguei* - , he was also a merciless hunter who indulged in butchering game on a wide scale: He shot more than a thousand animals of the larger species within a period of eight months, once shooting a giraffe for the sole purpose of mending a shoe, and two rhinoceros on one day to provide a meal for his nine helpers (1847:480).

His attitude to the people he encountered is equally ambiguous. True to the Jean-Jaques Rousseau 'noble savage' concept of his time, the physical as well as moral attributes of the Zulu-people are described in the most flattering and admiring terms. The Basotho however, are denigratingly referred to as 'the Jews of the black race' (1847:323) and his black assistants are beaten and kicked because, Delegorgue says, 'it is the only treatment they understand' (1847:344). The information he gives on the socio-political, cultural and military life of the Zulus is nevertheless outstanding, and permits the reader an intimate insight into the reign of King Panda, whom Delegorgue befriended.

From 1780 to 1785 the Frenchman François le Vaillant undertook two trips of 16 months each to the north and to the east of the settlement in the Cape. He had three major works published on his return, of which some parts are fictitious, as for example some embellished

hunting tales, and vague or confusing accounts of the actual route followed, often with placenames which cannot be traced. A flamboyant and colourful figure, his writing makes for entertaining reading, and his love-affair with the Khoikhoi woman he called Nerine is well documented.

Le Vaillant's work was published shortly before the French Revolution, and the French exploited to the full his praises of the 'noble savage' as well as his resentment and criticism of European civilisation. Because of his sympathy for the Khoisan and his fearless criticism of the Cape Dutch administration, he was upheld by *Le Moniteur*, (a newspaper siding with the revolutionaries), as a defender of the people against the abuse of power by the authorities. The work of Delegorgue and Le Vaillant dominate French travel accounts of the 19th century, but there are some far-fetched tales of hunting and exploring which should be mentioned, such as Melchior Bourbon's *Deux Années à Natal: Souvenirs d'un Voyageur* (Paris, 1850) and Victor Meunier's *Les Grandes Chasses* (Paris, 1877). Paul Deléage's anglophobic account of the death of the French Imperial Prince in Zululand in 1879 (*Trois Mois chez les Zoulous et les Derniers Jours du Prince Impérial*, (Paris, 1879) also comes to mind, as well as the numerous idealised accounts of the Boers (e.g. De Hogendorp in *Mes Premières Armes*, Den Haag, 1881).

Boer War Writing

These texts prepare the way for the kind of French writing found at the turn of the century, and particularly for the wealth of material pertaining to the Boer War such as the *Carnet de Campagne*, (Paris, 1902) by a French volunteer in the Anglo-Boer War, De Villebois-Mareuil, whose writings make a significant contribution to the military history of the period.

Less well known but nevertheless abundant in volume, is the great collection of pro-Boer poems written and distributed as pamphlets in France between 1899 and 1902, and which is currently housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. There is also a (more limited) number of these pamphlets in the Johannesburg Strange Collection, and some are also published in an illustrated limited edition by Phillippe Deschamps, entitled *Livre d'Or du Transvaal* (Paris, 1901). These texts are overwhelmingly anglophobic in nature, but reveal a seemingly intimate knowledge of the Boer leaders and also of the way in which the war was unfolding. Printed on very thin and inexpensive paper, the poems were distributed or sold to the public for a maximum of 25 centimes, but due to their fragility many were lost, and

the Bibliothèque Nationale does not allow the handling or photocopying of those it holds in stock. It is interesting to note that many of these poems were set to music and must have been sung in public or used as songs in cafes and brasseries at the time of the war.

The cult of Paul Kruger took on monumental proportions, and as illustrated by the poem title *La Marseillaise des Boërs*, French solidarity with the Boer cause seems overwhelming. This can partly be explained by the fact that the French considered the latter to strive for the same ideals of Freedom, Brotherhood and Equality as incarnated by the French Revolution. (See for example Botrel in *Hardi les Boers...* and Alby in *Vivent les Boers*). However, Imperialist England being the common enemy of both the French and the tiny Boer republics appears to have been the strongest incentive to solidarity, and consequently very strong anglophobia is the unifying element in all the poems.

I hope to have illustrated the extent (or abundance) of French writing in South Africa. These texts give *some* idea of the way the country was experienced by one set of visitors, namely the French. What remains to be understood is how contact with these foreigners was perceived by the people of Africa, and how it was taken up in their oral tradition of the time.

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BOOK REVIEWS

J.C. Kannemeyer, *A History of Afrikaans Literature*, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1993

J.C. Kannemeyer established himself as the pre-eminent historian of Afrikaans literature with the publication in 1978 and 1983 of his two-volume *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur* and *Die Afrikaanse literatuur 1652-1987* in 1988. He has now published an English translation of a short history of Afrikaans literature, which should be welcomed as authoritative and as a gesture of courtesy to readers of English. (It is now almost 70 years since the first chapter of Manfred Nathan's *South African Literature: a General Survey* dealt, among other things, with 'The Literary History of Afrikaans'.) Recent South African history has put Afrikaans and its literature in a new light and given it a new interest at home and abroad. As Kannemeyer writes in his 'Introduction',

Afrikaans is a language in which a meaningful discussion about South Africa has been conducted, a debate that is evident from the virtually endless variety and kaleidoscopic variations in approach to the South African reality...

Although in about 170 pages this *History* cannot do justice to the detail and nuance covered by Kannemeyer's original Afrikaans volumes, 'using chronology as far as possible as the basis for demarcation' (Introduction), it covers over 350 years of South African writing. The earliest author is Jan van Riebeeck (1619-1677) and the latest is Pieter van der Lugt (born 1961). The earliest Afrikaans book is Meurant's *Zamenspraak tusschen Klaas Waarzegger en Jan Twyfelaar* (1861) and the latest is Chris Pelser's *Don de Ridder* (1990). Naturally the *History* devotes progressively more space to recent developments, getting quite quickly over 'The Origins of Afrikaans Literature (1652-1875)' (4 pages), 'The Period of the First Afrikaans Language Movement (1875-1900)' (4 pages) and 'The Second Language Movement and Independence (1900-1930)' (19 pages). The bulk of the text is devoted to 'The Thirties and Further Developments' (61 pages), where the stars are the 'Dertigers', the Louws, Uys Krige and Elisabeth Eybers, and then Ernst van Heerden and D.J. Opperman. 'The Sixties and Contemporary Literature' (76 pages) follows, where the stars are Etienne Leroux, André Brink, Breytenbach, Antjie Krog, Sheila Cussons and Wilma Stockenström.

The interest and energy of this *History* lie in the accounts of the work of individual authors. Kannemeyer writes so as to make one want to read further the work of particular writers. He seems to me particularly engaged with Opperman, Peter Blum and Antjie Krog; there are points at which his kind of explication comes alive, more often with poetry, in my impression, than with prose fiction. The English versions of a number of poems in the text make the book a small illustrative anthology of Afrikaans poetry. In this respect the *History* may serve well as a reader's guide, alphabetically indexed according to author; the literary historical explanation is comparatively straightforward (managing without reference to romanticism or modernism), as is the social explanation. So, for example, in Kannemeyer's account of Cape society after Dutch settlement

...there were two parallel groups in the society from a relatively early stage: officials, serving only in a temporary capacity, whose lifestyle and conventions came direct from Europe, and free burghers, who began to develop along their own lines as they adapted to local circumstances, and gradually became less dependent on Europe in social and cultural terms.

In *Die Groot Afrikaanse Woordeboek* 'Afrika' is defined as 'Die groot wêrelddeel wat ten suide van Europa geleë is', but the Africa-Europe relationship might have made a leitmotif for this history. Kannemeyer (or his translator) renders *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* as 'The Afrikaans Patriot', but the ambiguity of 'Afrikaans' (both 'van... Afrika' and 'van... die blanke bevolkingsdeel van Suid-Afrika wat afstam van die Nederlanders...') at least makes 'The African Patriot' a possibility. In *Die Afrikaanse Volkslied*, Pannevis and others wrote 'Ons woon op Afrikaanse strand', and Hoogenhout's 'Ons Toekomstige Volkslied' relies on a contrast between 'Europa' and 'Afrika', as does J.R.L. van Bruggen's sonnet 'Aan die graf van 'n onbekende boerseun in Vlaandere'. Perhaps this tension continues at least until the Sestigers.

It pains me to record my judgment that J.C. Kannemeyer has not been well served by his translator, his editor (if he had the services of a publisher's editor), his proof-reader, and hence his publisher. Starting with the absolute and ambiguous opening sentence ('This book is the first work to contain a complete description of the history of Afrikaans literature in English') and continuing particularly in the first half of the book, there are enough errors and opportunities lost to regret that the work has not been more professionally done. N.P. van Wyk Louw's 'Die Beiteltjie' which gives the *History* its cover and a kind of sub-title, is a metaphor for art, or language itself, which, in a binary split, opens up a whole alternative

reality. The stark binarism of this phase of van Wyk Louw's poetry may not be quite what the new South Africa is looking for, but readers of English will be grateful to Kannemeyer for opening up Afrikaans literature in this way.

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Alan G. Morris, The Skeletons of Contact, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1992

The only useful thing to have emerged from that loathsome disease of intellectual life known as postmodernism - this bug has many guises but can usually be diagnosed by the indiscriminate use of the prefix 'post', as in poststructuralist, postmarxist, postfeminist, and so on - is the notion that writing embraces more than just the graphic representation of the spoken word. In anthropology, where the effects of the 'post' contagion have been particularly nasty, this one redeeming feature of a renewed attention to writing in its many aspects seems to have survived the ravages of the disease. Theory in social anthropology has become dominated by writing about writing, and where this is not self-indulgent it has led to some interesting and fruitful research.

In physical anthropology things are a little different. On the one hand it has been less prone to infection by the postmodern malaise but on the other hand its practitioners seem not to have woken to the possibilities of rethinking their subject in the metaphors of writing. After all, is not physical anthropology the study of that most essential form of writing, namely the inscriptions that time has made on our very flesh and bones? There is however a curious lack of sophistication in the theorising of physical anthropology, and this is made all the more evident by huge and rapid advances in empirical findings and methodology.

Physical anthropology has to be one of the most exciting sciences of our time. Drawing on the technical advances of genetics, archaeology and statistics, it has developed powerful tools to detect and explain patterns of change in the physical characteristics of human populations. We can for instance soon expect to know with a high degree of accuracy exactly when and

where spoken language emerged, and the indications are that the previous chronologies of the origin of language vastly overestimated the length of time that humans have been speaking to each other.

Yet despite these astounding advances there remains a sort of theoretical naïveté in much of the work of physical anthropologists that manifests itself in slightly unhinged speculation. This is probably a consequence of the parasitic relationship of physical anthropology to other sciences and the attempts of theory to keep up with the extraordinary empirical advances in the field. A case in point is the quaint tale of the 'African Eve'. There is evidence that all the mitochondrial DNA in human populations (which is inherited only by women) can be traced back to one African woman who lived less than half a million years ago. The idea was therefore put forward that we are all descended from this one woman - hence the 'African Eve'. However, subsequent statistical analysis indicates that things are a lot more complicated than the geneticists thought and although 'Eve' might have been African, from a statistical point of view she might just as well have been located elsewhere in the world. The African Eve was the product of over ambitious speculation combined with an inadequate understanding of the complexities of statistical analysis and population genetics.

The Skeletons of Contact is an altogether more modest attempt to use skeletal remains found at four sites along the Orange River to reconstruct a profile of the various populations and their interactions in the period just prior to colonisation, when this region constituted the so-called 'Northern Frontier'. This is a timely and important study, published at a moment when the history of South Africa needs to be rethought in a way that is free from the political constraints - of the left as well as the right - that have hampered a really critical reconstruction of our past. It begins to unravel the complex relationships of the different groups in competition for land, resources and power on the margins of European conquest in Southern Africa. These issues have been so densely clouded by propaganda and the various 'histories' of the descendants of these populations, going to the heart as they do of claims to the land, that it will take many more studies of this sort to clear away the fog.

There are however some problems with this study that are symptomatic of the more general ones in physical anthropology that I alluded to above. The main one is the lack of any attempt to critically confront the archaic and often misleading terminology that has become conventional in physical anthropology in Southern Africa. Thus, while the author admits to the inadequacy of terms like Negro, Khoikhoi, San and Caucasoid to describe biological

populations and the further confusion of Bushman, Hottentot and Bantu to designate linguistic groups (with yet more fuzziness when it comes to terms for social groups) he makes no effort to rethink these categories. It is my belief that one way of putting physical anthropology onto a more rigorous and critical theoretical footing would be to conceptualise its task as a sort of grammatology: to interpret the residues of the experiments that time has made upon our bodies.

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