

The Interface of History and Fiction in Russel Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues*, Ingrid Winterbach's *To Hell With Cronjé*, and Etienne van Heerden's *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*.

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Abstract

Both historiographical and literary practices have undergone revision in recent years in attempting to address the inheritance of nineteenth-century realism. Since the object of realist stylistics, employed in both the writing of fiction and history, is to render authorship authoritative or even invisible, the ideological import of these narratives is often such that the constructedness of the historical record and its absences are veiled. In developments beginning in the 1980s with the advent of 'New Historicism' and with the emergence of postmodern literary techniques, the interface of literature and history became of seminal importance, since both were now credited as being products of narrative and discourse, and hence, to varying degrees, of the literary imagination.

This movement intersects interestingly with developments in postcolonial studies, since it is the voices of the marginalized and disempowered colonized peoples that are routinely co-opted and excised from nineteenth-century realist histories. These concerns are now being fully explored in the literature of the contemporary post-transitional South African moment, since authors in this country seemingly now feel freed up to look back to histories that precede the immediate traumas of apartheid. The concern, in relation to apartheid developments but also on a broader universal scale, is this: if history is viewed as perpetual emergences of modernities, then one of the great absences in the record is the historical determinants of any given epistemology. The attempt to recreate such an epistemological genealogy is thus simultaneously postcolonial, historiographical, and literary.

Russel Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues* (2005), Ingrid Winterbach's *To Hell with Cronjé* (2010), and Etienne van Heerden's *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* (2002) attempt to bridge this gap in the recorded sensibilities of any historical moment by representing a 'lived experience' of the past, and in the process imaginatively recreating the cultural, historical and psychological locations of the proponents of an emerging modernity. This study concerns itself with the ways in which these authors address the influence of realist historiography through the use of literary innovations that allow for the departure from realist stylistics. Most commonly, all three authors draw on forms of magic realism, but multiple refigurings and recombinations of notions of temporality, narrative, and characterization likewise work to defamiliarize the once stable discourse of history.

Contents

Introduction and Theoretical Framework	1
Making a Start: From History to Historiographic Metafiction	1
Looking at the Past from the Present: The Positioning of the Subject	2
History and its Representation: The Legacy of Hayden White	5
Polyvocality and Intertextuality: Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogical Imagination	9
The Frontier as Concept: From 'Contact Zone' to 'Entanglement'	14
Revisionist Historiography: Rethinking Postcolonial Methodologies	19
The Novels in Question: Russel Brownlee's <i>Garden of the Plagues</i> , Ingrid Winterbach's <i>To Hell with Cronjé</i> , and Etienne van Heerden's <i>The Long Silence of Mario Salviati</i> .	21
Chapter 1: Emerging Modernities in Russel Brownlee's <i>Garden of the Plagues</i>	23
Emergence of a Modernity	25
In Dialogue with Absence: The Silences in <i>Garden of the Plagues</i>	35
The Colonial Subject	41
A Structural Staging of the Contact Zone	45
The Curiosity Cabinet	50
Chapter 2: Darwinism and Occultism in Ingrid Winterbach's <i>To Hell with Cronjé</i>	53
Darwinism, Evolution and the Modern Subject	55
Intertextuality and the Trickster Figure	67
The Absence of Women	74
Collecting and Recording in the Word Games and the Journals	79
Chapter 3: Meditations on Failure, Artistry, and the Angel of History in Etienne Van Heerden's <i>The Long Silence of Mario Salviati</i>	84
Challenging Unified Subjectivity	86
Temporal Overlap	90
The Artist's Tools: Stone, Water, Feathers, Gold	97
Art in Post-Apartheid Society	102
The Angel of History	110
Conclusion: Literature and History in Contemporary South Africa	114
Historiography, Postcolonialism, and Historiographic Metafiction	115

Tracking Historical Epistemologies: Enlightenment, Darwinism, and Ecosophy	117
Destabilizing Realism	120
Strategies of Defamiliarization	123
Bibliography	126

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The purely rational has come to be seen as a limited technique for understanding reality.

(Gaylard, *After Colonialism* 33)

Thus postcolonialism is a pause which has been created by uncertainty as to how to respond to history. Self-reflection's moment of pause is reciprocally intertwined with postcolonialism, for not only does it provide part of the reason for the development of postcolonialism, but it is also a result or symptom of postcolonialism's aesthetic of hesitation or circularity.

(50)

Making a Start: From History to Historiographic Metafiction

Within the second half of the twentieth century it became increasingly obvious to scholars in the humanities that a reconfiguration of our attempts to access and represent the past was required. As the postmodernist movement gained momentum, historian and scientific philosopher Thomas Kuhn, coiner of the term "paradigm shift" (64), pointed out that the writing of history cannot present a single authoritative narrative when history comprises "claims, counter claims and debates over fundamentals" (6). The field of revisionist historiography was born, in which researchers became increasingly interested in the ideologies which informed the processes of historical data collection and writing. The discipline of history in its traditional sense had relied heavily on documentary data collection, and had presented its findings in a realist, positivist mode whereby authorship was veiled as far as possible. The self-reflexive move to reveal the subject positioning of the author of histories, unpacked primarily by the New Historicists, had obvious repercussions in the literary field. In 1988 Linda Hutcheon described literature's response to this development, and subsequent move away from realist stylistics, as historiographic metafiction.

Informing this move to reconfigure historiographical practise were developments in contemporary cultural theory that destabilised the traditionally concrete notions of subject, discourse, and narrative. Thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, who led the post-structuralist movement to destabilise the sign, showed language to be neither transparent nor capable of totalized meaning. 'Discourse' came to signify an ideologically loaded communicative practice, produced by social structures now to be viewed critically rather than accepted as given. 'Narratives' were shown to comprise discursive positions, and the identity of

the 'subject' was shown to be constructed rather than innate – both acted upon and producer of cultural discourses and narratives. Literature and history (traditionally stable terms) were destabilised because now they were considered to be informed by discourse and to be made up of narratives of one form or another. Consequently, these three terms ('subject,' 'discourse,' and 'narrative') have become interlinked in contemporary cultural theory, and it is this process of entwinement with which this study is concerned.

Saussure, a structuralist, whose schematization of the signifier and the signified was so valuable to subsequent post-structuralist developments, says that speech, which might for the purposes of this study be specified as historical narrative, “always implies both an established system and an evolution; at every moment it is an existing institution and a product of the past” (8). This establishes the overlay of present and past in the production of all narratives, because of the mutability of language. It is at the interface of historical narrative and present reconfiguration that our interest lies, as it has coincided with a very interesting moment in postcolonial literature in a South African context.

Looking at the Past from the Present: The Positioning of the Subject

Adorno and Horkheimer are useful in delineating the Enlightenment project that has informed the positivist development of traditional historiography. In their estimation, Enlightenment thinking is deductive, and works from an advance set of rules, so that “the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows” (200). This means that the kinds of inductive world views that allow for a more animistic sensibility are ruled out. The Enlightenment project as a whole excludes mythic or animistic sensibilities; indeed, it considers all manifestations of myth to be anthropomorphic and therefore necessarily prohibited from positivist thinking. In fact, “Enlightenment had put aside the classic requirement of thinking about thought. [. . .] Mathematical procedure became, so to speak, the ritual of thinking” (204). Adorno and Horkheimer show that this reduces cognition to “apprehension, classification, and calculation” and the “determinate negation of each immediacy” (205). This formulation can be easily applied to the field of traditional historical writings. The problems with orthodox historiography, namely the loss of a sense of the lived moment, and the realist stylistics which engender the veiling of

authorship, all stem from this process of “apprehension, classification, and calculation” (205). It is from this point that a revisionary historiography, and its overlap into the literary field of historiographic metafiction, becomes possible.

André Brink and J.M. Coetzee, arguably South Africa’s heavyweights in the field of historiographic metafiction, have differing views on the way in which history and literature interact. Brink conceives of historical fiction as a reimagining of history that “paves the way for [. . .] revisitings of the past in order to evoke it, not as fact but as metaphor” (“Reinventing a Continent” 18). His use of historical fiction is aimed, then, not at providing a more accurate representation of the past, but at reconceptualising the past in a way that changes the understanding of the present. This is interesting, because it forces the reader to think about their subjective positioning, something that Brink considers important to South African culture, not only in a socio-political but also an epistemological sense. In an interview for the *Cape Argus*, he says: “By retelling or reimagining those histories, one changes one’s concept of where one is. If your trajectory of the past is changed, obviously your conception of where you are now must change, and that inevitably also impacts on the possibilities for the future” (Morris 12). Here, the past is re-imagined so that the present may be reconceived. Brink takes a similarly postmodern approach to the discipline of historiography, arguing that “the very notion of ‘historical origins,’ of an ur-text, of a reality behind the textualizing process of a self-inventing narrative is left open-ended” (“Revisiting a Continent” 18). He thus conflates fictional and historiographical narratives, seeing both as “invented” (17).

Coetzee, on the other hand, is careful in maintaining a separation between the writing of history and the writing of fiction, and describes the tensions arising between orthodox historiography and historically conscious fictional writings as a “battlefield” (“The Novel Today” 3) between different ways of knowing. He argues that fiction should not be subsumed by the “hard facts” (2) offered by traditional historians, as novels can do something that contemporary orthodox historiography cannot do, which is to produce a sense of the lived moment. What writers of history lack, according to Coetzee, is “the formal means to explore, except clumsily and ‘from the outside,’ the individual experience of historical time, particularly the time of historical crisis” (2). This is important when applied to the novels at hand, all of which deal with frontier situations, because Coetzee posits that literature is better equipped to produce a felt sense of the processes of cultural exchange at work. Unlike writers of history,

writers of fiction have at their disposal a range of literary conventions other than the conventions employed by realism. This self-conscious literariness of fiction – the way in which it announces itself as a product of the literary imagination – draws attention to the act of writing and renders authorship visible. So, while both Brink and Coetzee are interested in the interface of history and literature, Brink offers an account of the mutually influential forces of past and present, whereas Coetzee celebrates the specificity of fiction and the role it plays in rendering the past accessible from standpoints other than that of a positivist, realist logic.

Michael Green considers how traditional historical writing tends to produce totalizing narratives. He explains that these narratives are prolific now more than ever in South Africa, because of the political imperative to foster a new nationalism in the wake of apartheid. He shows that “the absence of the once defining essences of the nation state and the overtly fabricated nature of contemporary coming to nationhood make narrative the very ‘essence’ of the process” (123). Thus Green outlines a correlation between emergent nationalism and historical fiction, both orthodox and revisionary. This serves to emphasise that the authors of the novels at hand, namely Brownlee, Winterbach and Van Heerden, are themselves historically located, and that their texts are produced out of a specific mix of contemporary sensibilities and epistemologies.

With this in mind we arrive at our particular contemporary position from which the postcolonial, non-realist texts of Van Heerden, Winterbach and Brownlee are produced. It has been said, perhaps most lucidly by Gerald Gaylard, author of *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism* (2005), that postcolonial literature is a specifically third-world adaptation of the postmodern project. Both schools of writing are concerned with “creative approaches to new issues within power, desire, the ‘global village’ and social divisions within the nation” (52), but what differentiates postcolonial fiction from that being produced by the Western ‘lost generation’ of postmodernists is that the third-world fiction remains situational. David Attwell terms this “situational metafiction” (20). It is this locatedness that allows for these writers to come up with, if not a solution, then at least an ethical response to the dilemma of traditional realist historical metanarratives. The moment of uncertainty created by each of the writers’ defamiliarizing techniques – the point at which each text departs from straight realism – creates a discontinuity or pause in which the reader must consider, to recall Green, their own positionality. Gaylard is particularly interested in this pause:

Postcolonialism's moment is a discontinuity or pause that encourages the expansion of perception, but also tends to force a wrestle with ethics. This moment, the pause of the undecidability of ethics, insists on a reconceptualisation of hybridity, marginality, connectedness and fictionality within a particular context. Any such pause is akin to the hesitation that accompanies the magical moment of wonder, a moment that is beyond the real as we have come to know it.
(52–3)

By making use of defamiliarizing techniques, the authors at hand all create pauses in the perception of traditional historical narratives. It is precisely because of these authors' and readers' present positionality that such an ethical imperative to reconsider historical representation has come about in South Africa at this time.

History and its Representation: The Legacy of Hayden White

Perhaps one of the most influential twentieth-century historiographers is Hayden White, whose views on the inherent fictional characteristics of historical narratives are famously laid out in his seminal text *Metahistory* (1973). Herman Paul considers White's entire oeuvre, and comes up with some valuable assessments on the import of White's thinking throughout his career. To begin with, Paul shows the importance of an awareness of historical location. In a sentiment that recalls what we have encountered in Green and Brink, he pinpoints White's *modus operandi* as essentially ethical: "White was not primarily interested in the historical profession *per se*, but in what it meant to live in a historical world, to orientate oneself in the present and to envision a morally responsible future" (11). Paul sees White's project as understanding the "historical imagination" (71) – a concern so great that it features in the title of Paul's book. For Paul, White is not engaging simply in dry historiography, but delving into "that realm of thinking and dreaming in which people form their 'precritical' ideas of what history is" (71). Paul brings to light White's belief in the ability of people to endow the past and the present with "self-won meanings," as well as White's insistence that "every historical interpretation entails a moral judgement" (11). In this vein, nineteenth-century historiography, informed by positivist values, is rejected as a "narrative of decline" because of the refusal of this historiography to accept, as Adorno and Horkheimer have pointed out, that "professional history" is just as value laden as

historical philosophy, and to deny as much results, according to Paul, in “moral agnosticism” (60).

In a direct inversion of the kind of historical narrative that White rejects, art (within which one can include literature) becomes reinvested with value and agency in the modern world. Quoting White, Paul says: “When history itself shows the historical origins of a historical culture,” then the way will be open for “the myth-making powers of art [to] do their work” (64). What he is highlighting here are the mutually cooperative roles of fiction (art) and history. By Paul’s estimation, White is suggesting that art is involved in myth-making, and that when the realist veil is drawn back, myth is as much a part of historical narration as are documentary facts. The delinking of reason from unreason is shown to be absurd – and White connects the two in a synecdochic or part-to-whole relationship (64; 67).

The act of thinking tropologically in this way, in terms of the narrative structures of synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor, shows very clearly the interface of fiction with White’s conception of historical writing. As Paul shows, White is outlining, in his study of the use of fictive tropes in the writing of positivist histories, the fictive qualities with which all historical narratives are endowed, going so far as to argue that both analytic and narrative historical modes are in fact drawing on “traditional story models” (85). According to Paul, he shows, speaking on historical narratology specifically, that “a plot-structure is imposed on the story to encode it in such a way that the reader recognised the story as a romance, tragedy, comedy or satire” (85–6) – genre applies both to historical and fictional writings.

It is from White that Ricoeur takes his cue, at least in part. In the final installation of his series *Time and Narrative* (1991), he invokes White’s notion of an “analogous apprehension” (181) of the past (which White outlines as narrative tropes) in order to consider the interweaving of history and fiction. However, whereas White is primarily interested in the use of tropes and analogy in the *writing* of history, thus likening it to fiction, Ricoeur locates his argument in the phenomenological instant of apprehension by the *reader*:

We [act] as though reading concern[s] only the reception of literary texts. Yet we are readers of history just as much as we are readers of novels. All forms of writing, including historiography, take their place within an extended theory of reading. As a result, the operation of mutually encompassing one another [. . .] is rooted in reading. In this sense, the analysis of the interweaving of history and

fiction that will be sketched out here belong to an extended theory of reception, within which the act of reading is considered as the phenomenological moment.
(180–1)

Ricoeur's notion of the historical imagination differs slightly from White's. He sees the imagination as that which bridges the gap between what we know (what is) and what we can no longer know (what was). Historical narratives require fictionalization in order to "keep otherness from slipping into the unsayable" (184). He posits that a new hermeneutics is required for a reconfiguration of historical consciousness and, more than a change in vocabulary, this hermeneutics would enable an "open-ended, incomplete, imperfect mediation" (207). This mediation would avoid collapsing the distinction between historical time and present time. It is this gap – between the known and the unknown, or as the Enlightenmenters would put it, between reason and unreason, and according to Ricoeur, between present and past – which gives rise to the dialectics of magical realism and the "pause" (50) of which Gaylard speaks – a gap that is bridged in different ways by the authors under consideration.

Linda Hutcheon would posit that a successful way of engaging with this problematic can be found in historiographic metafiction. She shows, in her text *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), that this particular genre has been born out of the renewed interest in the problematization of historiography and historical literature in the postmodern era. She takes pains to defend this exercise against criticisms that postmodern historiography shows a tendency to collapse into endless relativism, or as she quotes Gerald Graff as saying; "a dishonest refuge from the truth" (89). Of course, postmodern meaning making is a function of discourse and historical locatedness, and both historical and fictional narratives are created out of such discourses, but, crucially, these shifting notions are found "not in the *events*[of history], but *in the systems* which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'" (89). Hutcheon later explains herself: "The past really did exist. The question is: *how* can we know that past today – and *what* can we know of it?" (92) The nuances of this position are important, because while sense can be made of history only from a discursive, subjective position, this is not to say that history is purely discursive. Thus "To elevate 'private experience to public consciousness' in postmodern historiographic metafiction is not really to expand the subjective; it is to render inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical" (95). This results in the need for a literature that is interested in provisionality and irony (visible in the crucial element of

self-reflexivity), that problematizes the traditional canonical parameters of history and historical fiction, and that abandons the third person narrative stance typical of the realist mode of nineteenth-century history and fiction. In Hutcheon's estimation, historiographic metafiction addresses this need.

Hutcheon's insistence on the unassailable truths of historical events, and the discursive practices inherent in making meaning out of such events in the present, or turning these 'events' into 'facts,' means that historiographic metafiction is less interested in the validation of historical truths than in how these truths are signified. Hutcheon quotes White on this point:

A specifically *historical* inquiry is born less of the necessity to establish *that* certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might *mean* for a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present tasks and future prospects.

(96)

This, for Hutcheon, implies a pluralist view of history – one interested in multiple specificities rather than a totalizing metanarrative: “To speak of discursive practices is not to reduce everything to a global essentialized textuality, but to reassert the specific and the plural, the particular and the dispersed. [. . .] The particular, the local, and the specific replace the general, the universal and the eternal” (98–9). It is this attention to the particular and the local that is of specific importance to Van Heerden, Winterbach and Brownlee and can be seen in such specificity in each of their novels. It is perhaps this that allows them to maintain a tension between a historiographically ethical approach, and a sense of the lived moment in frontier situations.

The interface of history and fiction consists, then, in the narrativization of both. Hutcheon invokes Ricoeur on this point, saying that his argument that time only becomes human time by being narrated “belong[s] to the general postmodern process of cross-fertilization that leads to problematizing. Historiography and fiction are seen as sharing the same act of refiguration, of reshaping our experience of time through plot configurations; they are complementary activities” (100). This also gives rise to a contradiction: formalism and history (by which Hutcheon means the representation of history and the actual lived moment respectively) coexist, but “there is no dialectic” (100). This is the essential postmodern paradox. Because historical fiction “keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context” (106), it becomes difficult to

confront the paradoxes inherent in trying to represent history fictionally, to single out particularities in the wake of the general, or to understand the past in the time of the present. It is here that historiographic metafiction steps in. Umberto Eco lists three ways of narrating the past: the romance, the “swashbuckling tale” (113), and the historical novel. To this Hutcheon would add historiographic metafiction as a fourth. Her argument for this is based on the specific ways in which historiographic metafiction departs from Lukács’ definition of the historical novel. Where Lukács says that there should be a representative type as a protagonist, historiographic metafiction deals with the eccentric and the marginal. Where Lukács’ historical novel uses detail “only as a means of achieving historical faithfulness” (114), in other words, of rendering the seam between fiction and history invisible, historiographic metafiction concerns itself primarily with details and renders this seam visible. Indeed, “[the] metafictional self reflexivity of postmodern novels prevents any such subterfuge, and poses that ontological join as a problem: how do we know the past? What do (what can) we know of it?” (114–5). This is made abundantly clear in some of the tropes Hutcheon identifies in the postmodern novel, namely the insertion of subjectivity into history through unreliable narrators, the overt allusion to intertexts, the problematization of historical reference, and the consideration of ideology.

Polyvocality and Intertextuality: Mikhail Bakhtin’s Dialogical Imagination

The idea of the existence of multiple discourses that form the social context for any writer, reader or fictional character is closely associated with the work of Bakhtin, the most comprehensive theorist of the plurality of discourses available in the act of communication, both within and external to the literary context. Todorov writes lucidly on Bakhtin’s oeuvre, and makes clear his general social philosophy. For Bakhtin, says Todorov, “culture consists in the discourses retained by collective memory (the commonplaces and stereotypes just as much as the exceptional words), discourses in relation to which every uttering subject must situate himself or herself” (x). It is because of this ‘collective memory’ that in fact all discourse is inextricable from its social context: “intentionally or not, all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as discourses yet to come, which it foresees and anticipates” (x). Todorov names this the “dialogical principle” (13). This means that expression is never

individual, but is always socially located. It comprises a set of conditions on which its production is contingent.

In order to comprehend this fully, it is necessary to understand what Bakhtin means by “utterance” (qtd. in Todorov 42). An utterance consists of much more than simple enunciation, for Bakhtin shows that speech (or text) is shaped by the context from which it is produced. Thus, utterance includes both enunciation and contextual influence (Todorov 43). Moreover, a listener, be it present or imagined, is always implied by an utterance, and this further impacts on the form of expression (43). As Bakhtin puts it, “[even] the baby’s crying is ‘oriented’ towards the mother” (qtd. in Todorov 44). Bakhtin calls the linguistic element of the utterance (the words spoken) signification, and the social context, theme. An utterance is always a combination of the two, and it is only through this combination that expression can become endowed with value: “Only the utterance can be beautiful, just as only the utterance can be sincere or false, courageous or timid, etc” (qtd. in Todorov 45). This has obvious ramifications in the field of literature, because it means that the writer does not work just with words, but with a set of social conditions and discourses in dialogue with one another. Bakhtin explains how this both expands and limits the number of ways in which an expression can be interpreted:

The artist receives no word in linguistically virginal form. The word is already impregnated by the practical situations and the poetic contexts in which he has encountered it. ... That is why the work of the poet, just as that of any artist, can only effect a few transvaluations, a few displacements in intonations, that the poet and the audience perceive against a background of previous evaluations and previous intonations.

(qtd. in Todorov 49)

Of course, it is not the individual utterance, but rather a set of utterances, each produced by both a verbal expression and an ideological context, that constitutes a community. Bakhtin asserts that there are a limited number of types of utterances which he names discourses. The coexistence of these discourses is named ‘heterology,’ a term that inserts itself next to other Bakhtinian coinages: ‘heteroglossia,’ meaning a diversity of languages, and ‘heterophony,’ meaning a diversity of voices (Todorov 56). Interestingly, he posits that the novel form reinforces heterology, and asserts that “the genres of literary prose that are bound to [the novel] have historically taken form in the current of decentralizing, centrifugal forces” (qtd. in Todorov 58). The novel form is able to represent competing discourses beside one another in ways that

other modes of representation cannot. Thus, the ability to allow for heterology through the novel form is essential to an ethical representation of a frontier space, because of the multiplicity of discursive sets arising from the contact zone.

Todorov devotes an entire chapter to Bakhtin's theory of intertextuality, and a fuller examination of the workings of heterology, intertextuality and polyvocality can be found here. It is now clear that all utterances work in relation to others, and that this process endows the expression with meaning – it cannot exist outside of this context. As Bakhtin writes: “The dialogical reaction endows with personhood the utterance to which it reacts” (qtd. in Todorov 61). In response, Todorov makes a salient point: “This does not mean [. . .] that the utterance gives expression to the inimitable individuality of its author. The utterance at hand is perceived rather as a conception of the world, while the absent one as that of another conception: the dialogue takes place between the two” (61). In other words, the utterance which is expressed is as instructive as that which is not – the silences are as important as the words. Against the background of traditional historiography, this is groundbreaking. It shows that all historical writings constitute a process of selection and exclusion, and whereas traditional historiography chooses a direct voice in which to present its utterance, our novels are responding polyvocally. Moreover, all historical writings are in dialogue with previous writings on the same object (62). The difference between Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and traditional realist historiography is that the former makes this explicit through the tropes typical of postmodernism. Bakhtin makes clear that this intertextuality reaches its height in the prose of novels – he views poetry *as* an “uttering act whereas the novel *represents* one” (qtd. in Todorov 65). For this reason, the act of uttering in the novel is doubled: “In the novel, language does not merely represent: it is itself an object of representation” (qtd. in Todorov 66).

Within this doubled mode of utterance that is found in the novel, a number of subdivisions are available. Bakhtin calls these typologies, and they form the basis of what is now referred to as ‘polyvocality’ (Todorov 68). His concept of ‘single-voiced’ (or direct) discourse may be applied to traditional realist historiography (Todorov 70). In ‘single-voiced’ texts, “the relations between the discourse of the narrator and the discourse of the character begin to resemble those between the replies of a dialogue” (qtd. in Todorov 71). It is important to note that Bakhtin here uses the word ‘dialogue’ in its accepted sense, rather than as he means it when he invokes the term ‘dialogism.’ By contrast, a many-voiced or polyvocal discourse “is characterized by the fact that

not only is [the discourse] represented but it also refers simultaneously to two contexts of enunciation: that of the present enunciation and that of a previous one” (qtd. in Todorov 71). Within this polyvocal form, there can be variations in how other discourses are encountered – be it active, passive or implied representation. Todorov includes as a side note that there is another possible encounter: “this time with the potential discourse of the interlocutor [reader]” (qtd. in Todorov 72). These differentiated discourses may take various forms, for example delivered implicitly through the unreliable narrator, directly delivered by the narrator, through what Bakhtin calls “character zones” (Todorov 71) and through embedded genres. It is worth quoting Bakhtin at length on the subject of ‘character zones,’ for it is here that his, and our, particular interest lies:

Heteroglossia [multiple languages] is also diffused in the authorial discourse that surrounds the characters, creating very specific *character zones*. These zones are formed from the characters’ semi-discourses, from various forms of hidden transmission for the discourse of the other, by the words and expressions scattered in this discourse, and from the interruption of alien expressive elements into authorial discourse (ellipsis, questions, exclamation). Such a zone is the range of action of the character’s voice, intermingling in one way or another with the author’s voice.

(Todorov 73)

Finally, it is possible to vary the degree to which the discourse, or discourses, of the other is present. In the first “degree,” the competing discourse is given “full presence,” and at the opposite end of the scale, the opposing discourse receives no “material corroboration,” but is summoned forth implicitly (73). Between these poles is a hybrid form, of the type that contains “two utterances, two manners of speaking, two styles, two ‘languages’, two semantic and axiological horizons” (73). This plurality of voices will become important when considering Winterbach’s, Van Heerden’s and Brownlee’s specific modes of historical representation. Their discursive dialogism allows them to create richer, more nuanced frontiers of literary expression than would be possible in a realist text.

The concept of dialogism is particularly important to African postcolonial writing. Gaylard unpacks how the stylistics of magic realism in an African postcolonial, postmodern context have become so popular. He posits, quoting Jackson and drawing on Bakhtin directly, that it is “a mode of writing which *enters a dialogue with the ‘real’* and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure” (*After Colonialism* 77). In this light, magic realism can be seen as a

manifestation of Bakhtin's hybridized discourse. Whether or not Brownlee, Winterbach and Van Heerden classify themselves as African magic realists is irrelevant – what is important is the presentation of oppositional discourses within one narrative. Further, this has implications for the politics of historical representation. Gaylard shows that the stylistic tropes of postcolonialism allow for “one way of keeping that history open, *a* history rather than *the* history, of attempting to keep the future possible without idealism” (84). This negates the traditional tendency to offer historical narratives in what Bakhtin would call a direct, ‘single-voiced’ discourse – that which is found in empirical realist texts. Instead, simplistic causal explanations of historical progression are replaced by those engaged in “de-evolutionising history and opening it up to the ‘new,’ and historicising the present” (83). By this, Gaylard means examining our present historical locatedness, a point on which he invokes Green who speaks of the necessity to examine “our present positionality” (131).

Of the many techniques employed by postcolonial African writers so as to achieve this polyvocality, Gaylard considers defamiliarization to be the most important. A term originally coined by Shklovsky, of the Russian formalists, Gaylard explains this technique as “the production of enchanting newness and surprise through ‘de-automized perception’” (72). Clearly this is only achieved when one discursive culture encounters another. Bakhtin's theory of utterance is echoed again when Gaylard concedes that “the ‘new’ is a matter of both context and perception” (73). He quotes Kundera on the effects of this startling newness: “As in another phrase dear to surrealists, Lautréamont's, about the beauty in a chance encounter between an umbrella and a sewing machine: the more alien things are from one another, the more magical the light that springs from their contact (73). This results, according to Gaylard, in the “selection and intensification of meaning” (76). The disparity between the two sensibilities presented in *Garden of the Plagues*, for example, are intensified in one of the opening images in the novel. The garden of Commander Van der Stel, which contains “trees and flowers and herbs from every corner of the world” (13), is surrounded by “a solid brick wall with a proper gate and its bold sign of the VOC [Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, Dutch East India Company] and the date – 1679” (15). Here the positivist sensibility of the collection (the walled garden) is offset by a mysterious visual impression (the profusion of growth). The image is suggestive of the curiosity cabinet of early colonial history and provides a useful way of looking at the kinds of

sensibilities that are brought together through the stylistics of magic realism not only in this novel but also in the others under consideration in this study.

The Frontier as Concept: From ‘Contact Zone’ to ‘Entanglement’

The concept of the Southern African frontier has always been fraught with tension and violence. To clarify, the term ‘frontier’ is used here to denote the historical point at which European exploration and expansion initiatives came into contact with Southern African populations. It is specifically the point of ‘contact’ at which the tension, violence, and cultural exchange took place on the South African Frontier, and it is for this reason that Mary Louise Pratt, author of *Imperial Eyes: Transculturation and Travel Writing* (1992), chooses to theorize this space as a ‘contact zone’ (8). In *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa’s Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (1992), Noel Mostert records the earliest interactions between the Portuguese and Khoikhoi at Mossel Bay as violent. Having described two skirmishes between explorers and local inhabitants, he notes that this site “was never to be quite so important again. What it had witnessed on two occasions, however, was significant enough. The first blood had been drawn there, by crossbow; the first cannon fired in South Africa and on the Indian Ocean” (39). The end of Portuguese conquest is narrated in a similar vein: “As always with this Cape of symbols, there is a powerful and ironic one here: that at this long-sought marker to the East the first of the empire builders who followed the path to oceanic conquest beyond it should have found their grave” (87). The narrative moves from one of fear to one of violence, and eventually to racial aversion: “Nakedness and lack of permanent dwelling structures were always to strike Europeans as proof positive of an inherent lack of morals and of unmitigated backwardness respectively. [. . .] But what affronted them most of all was what the Khoikhoi were willing to eat and what they did to their bodies” (35).

From the very first, the Cape is described by Portuguese chronicler Camoens as monstrous. His creation of the Adamastor myth is dealt with extensively by Stephen Gray in his seminal work *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (1979), and is also mentioned by Mostert. The discourse of danger and epic bravery is evident as Portuguese explorers lay eyes on the Cape:

A figure took shape in the air before our gaze. It was of fantastic form and size and powerful build, with a heavy jowl, unkempt beard and sunken eyes. Its expression was evil and terrifying, its complexion of an earthly pallor. Yellow teeth showed in its cavernous mouth and its crisp hair was matted with clay [. . .]. And then it spoke in a mighty, terrifying voice that seemed to come from the depths of the sea [. . .]. “So, you daring race,” it said, “bolder in enterprise than any the world has yet seen, tireless in the waging of cruel wars as in the pursuit of hopeless undertaking: so you have crossed the forbidden portals and presumed to sail on these seas of mine, that I have held and guarded for so long against all comers [. . .].

(3)

Mostert interprets this literature as more than a celebration of rounding the Cape, which it undoubtedly is, and posits that something “much more moving” (7) is underway, namely “acknowledgement of the price of connecting the hemispheres with regular, predatory passage, a sadness, a sense of which one feels in the Portuguese soul to this day, as if there existed a stigma and burden for releasing so vast a proportion of the diverse fates of humankind during the last five hundred years” (7). This kind of discursive imbalance – whereby the colonizer/colonized relationship is described as ‘predatory’ – is precisely what is overturned by theorists Mary Louise Pratt and Sarah Nuttall, who argue for a more nuanced theory of contact and exchange.

Mostert himself buys into this discourse at points as he describes the Sahara: “A place so magnificently violent, such a petrified clamour, all so endlessly dead to living sound and human hope, has a terrible feeling of loss that stays with you, as though you have been offered a premonitory view of what this earth will eventually be when it goes on spinning through that timeless void when human time upon it has ceased to be” (55). This discourse of timelessness is noted by Mostert when speaking on the difficulty of producing alternative histories for sub-Saharan Africa. He points out that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the general perception was that Africa and its “negroid peoples” were the only ones “unburdened by a past” (43). He laments that the revisions in post-war historiography were most difficult to effect in Africa, because the first basic challenge was to establish the very idea of an African history (44).

In reporting on the one sided nature of traditional Southern African histories, it might be argued that Mostert continues to work within the same paradigm, and that even though his narrative draws on multiple sources, it constitutes an example of Bakhtin’s single voiced discourse. Because *Frontiers* is authorially monolithic, the multiple sources on which he draws are all discursively complementary, meaning that they form a single, rather than multiple,

‘voice.’ Bakhtin comes to this conclusion on Tolstoy’s writing: “In his universe, there is no second voice alongside that of the author; hence, no problem of the combining of voices, or of a special status for the author’s viewpoint” (qtd. in Todorov 63). Similarly with Mostert; because all the sources are secondary to the unseen organising logic of the author, they are organised into a single argumentative strand that creates a monological, rather than dialogical, text (although, confusingly, according to Bakhtin’s broader conception of dialogism, even monological texts are dialogic. It is for this reason that I mainly use Todorov’s term ‘single-voiced,’ in order to make the distinction clear). This is why a fictional engagement with history is becoming so significant – it can offer something different to traditional historical offerings such as these. In fact, Coetzee would argue that fiction is better equipped to represent the specificities of these early political and cultural stresses.

Also significant in shaping traditional ideologies about South African frontiers is the eighteenth-century classificatory system typical of empire. In fact, the polyvocal utterances characteristic of magic realism frequently work in direct reaction to this system. Pratt explains that this discursive system owed its birth in large part to Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1735), which was the most widely adopted of the “totalizing classificatory schemas that coalesced in the mid-eighteenth century into the discipline of ‘natural history’” (Pratt 28). The political, cultural and epistemological impact of this was immense. In the same way that Linnaeus’s classificatory system could be applied identically to any site, on any continent, so it came about that European discourses were used to describe and to systematise diverse non-European worlds. Pratt quotes Foucault on the verbal character of the enterprise, which, as he puts it

has as a condition of its possibility the common affinity of things and language with representation; but it exists as a task only in so far as things and language happen to be separate. It must therefore reduce this distance between them so as to bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as possible to words.

(28)

In this way, the ordering capacities of the gaze and language create a particular world view that is intrinsically wrapped up with natural history. It “conceived of the world as a chaos out of which the scientist *produced* an order” (30). Significantly, Pratt also emphasises the transformative, appropriative dimensions of such a world view: “One by one the planet’s life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into

European based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize ('naturalize') the new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system" (31). It is this familiarizing discourse that the postcolonial stylistics and polyvocal discourses of Winterbach, Van Heerden and Brownlee work to destabilise.

Pratt is also particularly useful in conceiving of a different approach to frontier histories, which is useful to this study. Her term 'contact zone' will be indispensable. It refers to the "space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (8). This is one of her ways of addressing "the huge gap in the archive" (5), by which she means the silence of the local inhabitants of colonised countries in the official historical record. To illustrate this, Pratt compares the early travel writings of Peter Kolb with the later, post-Linnaean writings of Anders Sparrman and William Paterson. While Kolb wrote about the Khoikhoi "primarily as cultural beings, these two texts of the 1780s produce them above all as bodies and appendages" (51). Significantly, "Kolb's ethnographic question-and-answer is replaced in Sparrman and Paterson by visual scrutiny as the means of knowledge" (51). In response, Pratt poses a series of questions: "How have Europe's subordinated others shaped Europeans' constructions of them and the places they inhabit? Or Europe's understanding of itself? While the imperial metropole tends to imagine itself as determining the periphery [. . .] it habitually blinds itself to the reverse dynamic, the powers colonies have over their 'mother' countries" (4). It is these problematics surrounding the shifting constructions of centre and periphery, and often self and other, that the novels at hand seek to address in a specifically historical context.

When engaging with the notion of a 'contact zone' in a specifically South African context, it is useful also to consider Nuttall's work on creolization and entanglement. In a 2004 article entitled "City Forms and Writing the 'Now' in South Africa," she 'rescues' the term 'creolization' from Marxist criticisms that it is devoid of conflict and, therefore, not grounded in material circumstances. In fact, Nuttall argues the exact opposite, pointing out that the term has its origins in the historical experience of slavery. The processes of mimicry, imitation and exchange between the slavers and the slaves obviously took place in a deeply traumatic context (733). Nuttall quotes Zimitri Erasmus on the subject, positing instead that it refers to "cultural

creativity under conditions of marginality” (733). This implies that creolization is to be regarded primarily as a practice, rather than a passive state of being. Nuttall refers here to apartheid, but the argument can as readily be applied to colonial histories, so that “even within this most violent of systems, as recent studies are showing, cultural traffic occurs – mutual mimics, border crossings, mutabilities. The notion itself, therefore, does not foreclose the possibilities of ‘resistance,’ nor does it deny the material fact of subjection” (734). Significantly, Nuttall highlights the historiographical implications for such a claim: “It directly faces the issue of our management of the historical record” (734). The resonances here with Pratt’s work on the contact zone are clear. Both render traditional representations of South Africa’s colonial history deficient, and show that new historiography needs to address the tendency to view these histories within the oppressor/oppressed paradigm.

Nuttall expands some of the ideas she introduces here in her more recent, and seminal, publication *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (2009). She problematizes ordinary colonial histories in much the same way; however, this time she does so with the aid of her fully fleshed out definition of entanglement. She defines the concept thus:

Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored, or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication.

(1)

This notion speaks directly to authors who are attempting to engage with the historical record, ask questions of it, and produce in response a set of texts which answer empirical discourses with “difference and sameness [and] also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication.” Nuttall draws on the work of Carolyn Hamilton, whom she quotes as saying that “categories and institutions forged under colonial rule should not be viewed as the wholesale creation of white authorities” (2), but instead are the result of historical entanglement of indigenous and colonial sensibilities and practices. Put simply, the goal of an ‘entanglement’ critical paradigm is to “enable us to elucidate the diverse and shifting interests that fuelled colonial politics, and to reveal that it was never simply about colonial subjugation and anti-colonial resistance” (2).

Revisionist Historiography: Rethinking Postcolonial Methodologies

The interest in, and inescapable importance of, postcolonial and historiographic studies came to a head during the 1980s and 1990s, when historiography as a field began to undergo major revision. Stephen Greenblatt coined the term ‘New Historicism’ to describe the increasing tendency for historians to be self-reflexive about their authorship and plural in their narrative threads. What may seem like a fictionalization of history was deemed a more ethical methodology by the New Historicists. Greenblatt follows Jameson in his materialist conception of history; one which considers capitalism to govern historical production. But he nevertheless differentiates his position from that of Jameson’s in explaining the agenda of the New Historicists:

Methodological self-consciousness is one of the distinguishing marks of the new historicism in cultural studies as opposed to a historicism based upon faith in the transparency of signs and interpretive procedures – but it must be supplemented by an understanding that the work of art is not itself a pure flame that lies at the source of our speculations [. . .]. That is, the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society.

(12)

Jana Gohrisch, similarly, outlines the need for the reformed historiographical methodology by posing a series of questions. She asks “how can we conceptualise and study literary representations of history after chronology and causality have been revealed as supporting existing power relations? Is it enough to replace the grand narratives with powerful local stories? Does anything come after the diversified accounts of history focussing on the perspective of disadvantaged social groups?” (233). The problem, it would seem, is that moving from sweeping meta-histories to individualised local stories, and from narrating the history of the conquerors to narrating the history of the conquered, remains within a very narrow paradigm that still operates within the same binary codes. Gohrisch’s tentative solution is to move towards the methodologies of cultural exchange studies. If we are not to be enveloped by postmodern historiography which, she posits, renders all knowledge insecure and relative, then we might instead look to the processes of transculturation at work in modern society. Attention must

instead be paid to mediators, agents, locales, social contexts and reception processes. Louis Montrose, noting that Greenblatt has replaced the term ‘new historicism’ with ‘cultural poetics’ in recent work, redefines the intertextual and polyvocal objective of this project: it “reorientates the axis of intertextuality, substituting for the diachronic text of an autonomous literary history the synchronic text of a cultural system” (17). The insistence on the need to establish an awareness of our historical locatedness, as both authors and readers, is made clear.

At this time, South African author J.M. Coetzee was growing in fame for his acclaimed debut novel, *Dusklands* (1974). The first in a genre that self-reflexively considers South Africa’s colonial history and the notion of frontiers, Coetzee’s novel portrays a number of techniques that insist on authorial and reader self-awareness. Jane Poyner describes the narrative strands as follows:

The relation in the first section between the author (Dawn), text (the report), and world (the military and the Vietnamese) is paralleled with the second, ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ – Jacobus (author) is dictating his annals (text) of colonial exploration (world) – a strategy that invites the reader to draw some obvious comparisons between the two main narrators or ‘author functions,’ in Foucauldian terms.

(15–16)

Authorial complicity in the perpetuating of colonial ideologies thus becomes a theme in the novel. Poyner continues by pointing out that the “pseudo-rational discourse” that masks colonial oppression is “undercut by the madness of these two myth-makers and of the ideologies they expound to reveal the madness of so-called civilization” (16). This intersects significantly with Coetzee’s famous address “The Novel Today,” referred to earlier (see pg 3), where he explores the relation between historical writings and historical fiction. He asserts that the two narrative modes rival rather than supplement one another:

A novel operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history. [. . .] In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process (and here is the point at which true rivalry, even enmity, perhaps enters the picture) perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history – in other words, demythologising history.

(3)

In this way, and at this time, fiction begins to reveal a different historical truth, made all the more potent by the simultaneous revisions to the academy of historiography. When Aram Veesser, editor of a collection on the New Historicists, points out the “sheer intricacy and unavoidability of exchanges between culture and power” (xi) in the modern era, it might be noted that fiction is fortuitously placed to engage in such a conversation. Montrose notes that the various modes of post-structuralist historical criticism, in any critical field, are increasingly being defined by a shift “from History to histories” (20). Fiction, working as it does with a range of narrative and fictive tools at its disposal, is able to rise beautifully to the challenge. The fiction that has begun to be produced in South Africa in this historical moment, located in this particular nexus of postcolonial and postmodern concerns, is certainly doing just that.

The Novels in Question: Russel Brownlee’s *Garden of the Plagues*, Ingrid Winterbach’s *To Hell with Cronjé*, and Etienne van Heerden’s *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*.

The concerns outlined here are all interwoven into the three novels chosen for the purposes of this study. All three display evidence of magic realist influence, however, many South African novelists are rewriting histories within the genre of magic realism, Mda perhaps foremost among them. The specificity of these novels lies in the ways in which the historical narrative, stylistic choices and thematic concerns are overlaid in all three texts. Particular to all the novels is the trope of the bounded space, from which can be drawn a useful metaphor for the colonizing project – the appropriation and organization of cultural artefacts according to a logic not their own. In this way, all three novels are concerned with exploring sensibilities and epistemologies different to those held by the implied reader.

These bounded spaces are also all surprising and unexpected – be it Brownlee’s hanging garden, Winterbach’s Darwinian sample trunk, or Van Heerden’s sculpture garden in the mountains – and this links all three of the novels to the notion of discontinuity or pause in which Gaylard is so interested. All three novels, rather than being faithful examples of the magic realist genre, instead use magic realist stylistics as a tool through which to create this moment of ‘de-automized perception.’ Other thematic and stylistic tools, such as the rendering of historical time in spatial rather than chronological terms, and the creation of inaccessible, fractured characters, are used to the same end. It is the pause that this defamiliarization creates that is of utmost

importance, because it is only by pausing, and taking a moment to reconsider, that the reader may perceive history differently.

Gaylard theorizes the moment of pause as springing from the juxtaposition of two seemingly irreconcilable realities. This notion of discontinuity, or perhaps misalignment, is essential, as it presents a useful analogy for the coexistence of multiple discourses present in each of the texts – what Bakhtin calls heterology. In *Garden of the Plagues* (2005), early Enlightenment sciences are juxtaposed with herbalism and the fantastic, and in *To Hell with Cronjé* (2010), Darwinian sensibilities are mingled with occult impressions. Van Heerden locates his heterology in his representations of artist figures in *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* (2002), as the discourse of bureaucracy and petty transitional politics is considered alongside the freedom engendered by authentic, entropic artistry. These multiple discourses are never intangibly philosophical – they are embodied in contact zones in the earlier narrative time frames (Pratt), and the subsequent entanglements that remain in later eras (Nuttall). In these ways, the epistemological emergence of multiple modernities are tracked through each of the novels, so that the time span of the study takes in the appearance of Enlightenment knowledges at the Cape of Good Hope, through to the comparable shift and flux catalysed by the emergence of a democratic government in contemporary South Africa.

A final note: the notion of the bounded space as *metaphor* for colonialism, and the pause created by defamiliarizing juxtapositions as *analogous* to heterology, are suggestive of the methodology for this study, which is textual rather than scientific. By this I mean that the argument for the interfacing of literature and history takes its cue from the narrativised products it investigates, and frequently operates according to the logic of comparison, metaphor, and analogy. In referencing novels that are always self-reflexively conscious of their methodological agenda, it seems appropriate to draw attention to the workings of this argument at the outset.

Chapter 1: Emerging Modernities in Russel Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues*

Russel Brownlee's debut novel, *Garden of the Plagues* (2005) demonstrates successfully the state of being in-between. With his rich cast of characters, Brownlee feelingly evokes early colonial settlement at the Cape of Good Hope in 1685 and shows, through his microcosm of outcasts, the changing global epistemologies as felt at a frontier zone. Through the many threads of the various sub-plots, Brownlee is able to recreate the range of sensibilities present in his chosen historical moment without ever losing track of the wider significance of his project. Broadly speaking, this is a novel about the emergence of Enlightenment thinking, and this process is tracked through the ideologies and world-views of Brownlee's various characters. The novel is set at the southernmost tip of Africa, in a country the colonizers frequently describe as "a dark and ignorant place" (12). It skillfully juxtaposes notions of modernity and pre-Enlightenment sensibilities and has ambivalence and liminality at its core. In struggling to lead their lives in a climactically challenging and geographically remote world, the characters must also contend with one another, and in this way an epistemological contact zone is established. Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality is endlessly applicable among the contesting and disputing voices that make up the text and even, paradoxically, in the characters that are noticeable only through their silence. In these ways Brownlee's text presents instances of many of the conceptual tropes central to the project of historical writing and postcolonial studies.

Garden of the Plagues, Brownlee's third novel and his first to be published, was written during his Master's course in creative writing, under the supervision of André Brink, and its connection to Brink's concerns with fiction and history are clear. Brink's primary argument in the writing of historical fiction is that the creative reconstruction of the past opens up possibilities for the present, and that in looking back, one can more clearly locate oneself in the present and look forward to the future (Morris 18). This is a sentiment echoed in Brownlee's novel through the evident preoccupation with social change and flux. In fact, Shaun de Waal places Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues* and one of Brink's recent offerings, *Praying Mantis* (2005), side by side in an article considering the connections between the two. He points out that "Brownlee is able to examine how it was at the start of the period now ending – the Enlightenment" (1). He goes on to point out that the "end of the Enlightenment" has been critically pertinent since the advent of

postmodernism in the late 1960s, and that Brink, himself a *Sestiger* (an Afrikaans writer of the sixties), echoes these overlaps and interconnections in *Praying Mantis*. So it is that both of these novels, set in the distant past, encourage the reader to question their own historical location because of the changes they see occurring through the course of the novel. In *Garden of the Plagues*, the introduction of Enlightenment knowledges is tracked through the medical advances made by the Jesuit characters, and in Wijk's discovery of the importance of "animalcules" (194) in the transmission of disease. As readers imagine a time in which disease was treated according to practices different to those accepted today, they come to understand something of the nature of epistemological positioning. Enlightenment knowledges shifted prevailing historical sensibilities in the same way that one's own present epistemological grounding might one day be rendered unstable. This implies both a backward and forward gaze. The human topography of *Garden of the Plagues* ties these concerns together by juxtaposing competing value systems and considering the trickledown effect of Enlightenment knowledges to the Cape Colony of the time.

The novel begins with the arrival of the Tulp in the harbour at the Cape of Good Hope, carrying three dead passengers and the threat of the plague. The Commander of the colony, Van der Stel, whose main aim is to instill order at this dark outpost at the tip of the African continent, enlists the expertise of the physician turned botanist Wijk. Wijk is presently engaged as Van der Stel's head gardener but has a shadowy past of his own in London researching and treating the plague. He has given up the uncertainty of medical investigation in the seventeenth century for a quieter life as the colony's resident herbalist and botanist, making him an interesting case study through which to consider the interface of Enlightenment and medieval medical practices. The critically ill girl (the Girl) found aboard the Tulp is promptly declared plague-free and recovers under Wijk's care, but the tensions surrounding this deaf and silent, and ultimately, unknowable character are only to heighten when it is discovered that the Meyers, mercenary owners of the local taven, wish to install her as a prostitute and create for themselves a side business. Meanwhile, a further attraction for the tavern is procured in the purchase of the 'bosjeman,' Voog, captured in the interior by one of the tavern's clients, effectively demonstrating the violence inherent in colonial contact. The Girl is subsequently married to the same man in a financial transaction that benefits all parties except herself, and which reveals the gendered and material nature of power dialectics in this historical moment. Wijk, who was offered the Girl in marriage before she was removed to the tavern, falls ill and subsequently recovers, and the

novelistic concern with the spread of disease is explored further, aided by the arrival of a group of travelling Jesuits at the colony, who carry with them new technology in the form of a microscope and talk of the discovery of ‘animalcules.’ At the close of the novel it transpires that the Girl and Wijk are in love, and that his falling ill was from poison – a small revenge for his inability to act on the lovers’ behalf. She frees herself of her undesired husband in the same way and the novel closes with her bound for the Meyers’ dubious protection at the Tavern of the Green Door. Wijk, upon her leaving, wryly wonders if the “Lord and Lady of the Strand” (221) are aware of the danger they are inviting back into their home. He muses on the silent power of this disenfranchised character.

Published in 2006, the novel won the English Academy Olive Schreiner Prize for Prose of that year, along with Jane Taylor’s *Of Wild Dogs* (2005). A flurry of reviews and interviews followed Brownlee’s success, in which he speaks candidly about his influences, Brink’s mentorship, and his ambivalent relationship with rationalism. The novel’s projection of variety is most often commented upon, with Bill Krige calling it “a crucible of both people and ideas” (5), and Michiel Heyns celebrating a cast of characters “containing more unredeemed scoundrels that you could shake a stick at, [but] yet [who] seem, in all their petty vulnerabilities, quite human, even humane” (“Men of Science” 18). In an interview with Tom Eaton, Brownlee names a sense of homelessness, the arrival of the Enlightenment, and a preoccupation with naming as his three primary concerns in the writing of the novel. The second of these proves a useful entry point for its theoretical contextualization.

Tracing the Emergence of a Modernity

If perpetual emergence characterizes modernity, then, in keeping with Pratt’s idea of the colonial contact zone, it might be useful to regard modernity as a ‘zone of emergence,’ which would encompass the geographical, epistemological, and historical factors present in the evolution of an Enlightenment, positivist mode of thinking. This concern with understanding the dialectic between emergent modernity and what has come before can be found in Pratt’s delineation of the developing “classificatory schemes of natural history in relation to the vernacular peasant knowledges they sought to displace” (Pratt 4). Her text is useful because she unpacks the way that “empire was coded by those in whose lives it intervened – coded in ceremony, sculpture and

painting, in dance, parody, philosophy and history; in expressions unwitnessed, suppressed, lost, or simply overlaid with repetition and unreality” (5). She locates her ‘contact zone’ in this space: a space where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other” (7). Her comments on the system of natural history as an organizing logic are telling:

Natural history asserted an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; it elaborated a rationalizing, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants and animals [. . .]. At the same time, in and of itself, the system of nature as a descriptive paradigm was an utterly benign and abstract appropriation of the planet.

(37)

The emergent knowledge of natural history is considered by Pratt to be benign, ‘in and of itself.’ Where it takes on cultural power is in the assumption of its superiority as an organizing system. She stresses that this particular kind of knowledge, which has emerged to form a new modernity as many have before it, ‘overlaid’ rather than replaced its predecessors, now considered pre-modern. If both knowledge systems exist during the period of emergence, their relation to one another must be considered as dialogic rather than dualistic, as the sensibilities held by the proponents of modernity and pre-modernity cannot be considered as mutually exclusive, and the process of overlay was not uniform. Simon Gikandi warns against conceptualizing imperial incursions into Africa in terms of binary distinctions. Instead of subscribing to the view that colonialism consisted of an imperial culture being forced, wholesale, onto an African indigene to the detriment of their traditional, idealized cultural systems, Gikandi opts for a more complicated view. He posits that “colonial subjects also manufactured their own identities, processes, and versions of the colonial process,” that they were “involved in multiple acts of translation and cultural transportation,” and that they “were simultaneously celebrating the modernity of colonialism and questioning it” (358). In fact, Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore argue just this some decades earlier. In an article on South Africa’s colonial history, they make the point that “a major reason for the inadequacy of the ‘liberal’ interpretation of the role of the imperial factor in South Africa lies in its generally unquestioned assumption that ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’ were incompatible with the independence of either African chiefdoms or Afrikaner republics” (108).

If Pratt’s notion of the ‘contact zone’ and Gikandi’s notion of postcolonial translation provide a more nuanced way of looking at colonial frontiers, then a ‘zone of emergence’ might work in a similar way to help us understand the way one world-view articulates with another, in uneasy

coexistence rather than absolute exclusion. Every person's world view feels essentially natural to them. It is difficult to understand that one's particular sensibility is as abstract as the next person's, and so what is often lost in the historical consciousness is a felt remembrance of what came before, and the historical factors that brought about a particular epistemology.

Gikandi spends much time considering how traditional African tribal culture comes to be represented by the colonized subject. To open his article which uses Jomo Kenyatta as a case study, he poses a series of questions: “[If] Kenyatta's life was a continuous process of cultivating a modern self, what technologies did he use? How could the modern self ensure its autonomy and integrity, its purity as it were, when it was surrounded by the danger of what colonialism was keen to posit as African barbarism?” (358). These questions seem to speak to a gap in the historical record, a gap in the representation of the complex, modern colonial subject. This is why the absences and silences in Brownlee's novel are so interesting, because they seem to represent these lost historical mindsets – but more on this subject later.

Brownlee's novel presents the emergence of the Enlightenment in a particularly holistic way through a set of interesting characters. This movement towards an Enlightenment sensibility is palpable from the first pages of the novel with the arrival of a whale in the bay. The whale is figured in sinister, primeval language as a “great beast” that causes the townsfolk to feel “the eye of the devil upon them” (11). Van der Stel deals with the situation by dissecting and barreling up the whale, to await the next ship out: “In such a way is the Devil dealt with” (11). In contradiction to the superstitious quality established in the description of the whale, the introduction of Commander Van der Stel is conducted in a brisk, if ironic, tone:

There is a new spirit alive in the world and the Commander is its prophet. He is a man of Reason, a man of Science. For the Commander of the settlement at the Cape of Good Hope there is no questioning of the task at hand. He is a bearer of light in a dark and ignorant place. He is an agent of Civilisation.

(11–12)

Also unavoidable are the religious overtones – if God's hand is weak at the Cape of Good Hope, then Van der Stel's deities (Reason, Science and Civilization) are a force to be reckoned with. Ashraf Jamal, in writing on the early figuring of Southern Africa as a superfluous littoral, refers to this positivist sensibility in the novel as a “newfound paganism” (9) which seems to signal an almost spiritual connection to the new Linnaean science of Naturalism. However, despite Van

der Stel's insistence that it is possible to "render [the whale] to its elements" (11), Jamal insists that the Cape "persists as a place in which the pursuit of objective correlatives are preceded and exceeded by a haunting" (8). Indeed, the narrator later muses; "For who knows what spirits have followed these specimens across the waters" (100). It is these two contrasting sensibilities – those who follow the spirits on the one hand, and those who believe in science's specimens on the other – that mingle and clash in this seventeenth-century colonial outpost. Even Van der Stel, follower of reason and prodigy of the Enlightenment, cannot dismiss the nagging sensations that "there is something missing" (15).

The best demonstration of the convergence of these values – spiritualism and modern science – can be seen in the character of Adam Wijk, who classifies himself a man of evidence, and whose primary interests are medical and botanical. For Wijk, the uncertain discourse of medicine leaves much to be desired and so he has given it up for the surer science of Botany. This conflict is introduced as the reader meets Wijk for the first time, in Van der Stel's garden where he is "hard at work attempting to save the lives of fifty new rose bushes recently received from China" (13). Wijk has discarded his ambitions to save the lives of people because of the unknowable nature of the plague. This sets up one of the central tensions in the novel, between medical discourse emerging as a rational science, and its roots in traditional herbalism. Wijk's single room is dominated by a "black pot suspended by a metal hook over the coals" (31). Brownlee's diction here is intentionally reminiscent of witchcraft, and the content of the pot is "composed of a bitter green mixture that nobody – not even an ageing bachelor – would be tempted to consume" (31). However, it is from these ingredients that Wijk is working on his "compendium of native flora. Already it has a name: the *Hortus Africanus*" (31). This sets up a paradox, between Wijk the aging medicine man and Wijk the modern man of science.

The paradoxical juxtaposition of discourses to create a dialogic conception of the contact zone is recalled in the novel's language, which frequently invokes both paradox and oxymoron. Oxymoron works, at a grammatical level, by combining two terms with apparently exclusive meaning, to create a new, coherent meaning. It might be argued that seemingly paradoxical discourses are juxtaposed and combined in a similar way in the novel. It is one of the ways that the novel manages to avoid operating according to a binary logic, without attempting to collapse binaries altogether – the novel is discursively analogous to the grammatical workings of the oxymoron, which uses contradiction to achieve coherence. This process of recombination to

create new meaning is not always figured in celebratory terms, just as the ‘entanglements’ that occur through contact and exchange in frontier zones are never without violence (see Nuttall’s *Entanglement*). Gaylard says of the use of oxymoron in magic realist texts that they provide “a hesitating ‘but’ to the idealistic, a linguistic manifestation of doubt” (*After Colonialism* 81). Wijk, certainly, is grim about his prospects in uncovering the secret of contagion. He predicts that the “scrap of cloth he took from the girl will not find its way into some ingenious experiment to prove a theory on contagion. It is taken merely as a memento, as *evidence of things lost*” (51 emphasis added). Gaylard asserts that this “oxymoronic yoking” provides the impetus of the narration, and “enables the new via recombination” so that the writer may render “complex new situations in a resonant way” (81). According to Gaylard, this technique “gives us pause to imagine and imagine differently” (82).

The recombination of seemingly disparate realities to invoke a new way of thinking, or to enable one to ‘imagine differently,’ in the words of Gaylard, speaks to the historical project which Brink and Green outline – that the past must be reimagined so that one’s present positioning can be reconceived. Gaylard has already shown how this project is embodied both discursively and at a textual level in the use of paradox and oxymoron, and he continues by showing that this notion can also manifest in the grammatical technique of irrealism. He quotes Gaik and Quirk et al. on the precise meaning of the term: “Irrealis, as grammarians use the term, refers to such modal verbs as *could, would, might, can, and may* that point toward ‘possibility, epistemic necessity (tentative inference), prediction, and which do not typically involve human judgment about what is likely to happen’” (82). This technique can be found all over the novel. In this representative passage, Wijk’s repetition of “perhaps” and posing of rhetorical questions function as an example of irrealism:

Perhaps, he thinks, he should go down to the Commander and tell him the good news. But, on second thoughts, he cannot be sure. Just because she has recovered does not mean the danger is over. Who knows, perhaps he himself will now be struck down [. . .]. Had he really thought himself above the blind workings of nature, that merely because he had once made himself a student of the plagues, that he would somehow be spared? What an irony.

But perhaps it is not this at all.

(Brownlee 55)

This works by “de-evolutionising history” (Gaylard 83), meaning that when the causal succession of a chain of events is rendered unstable, the notion of history as chronological and linear must be reconsidered. Gaylard draws on Green here, noting that the use of irrealism can give meaning back to the past, which in these instances is “ruled by the future tense and the subjunctive mood . . . the grammar of desire” (83). Wijk’s nod to his medical past indicates a reversal of expectations typical of irrealis: he mocks himself for believing that “because he had once made himself a student of the plagues, [. . .] he would somehow be spared” (55). The truth of the novel, despite his pessimism, is that Wijk will be spared, and that students of the plague do make medical advances in the field of contagion. The colonial settler does, to an extent, manage to raise himself above “the blind workings of nature” (55). Brownlee’s use of irrealism, however, renders this outcome uncertain for the lived reality of Wijk, and seventeenth-century contemporaries like him. As Gaylard avers, “imminent expectation in the form of skeptical irrealism [. . .] is one way of keeping that history open, *a* history rather than *the* history, of attempting to keep the future possible without idealism” (84). It is through Brownlee’s combination of oxymoron, paradox and irrealism that his herbalist physician signals the emergence of a new modernity, replete with all the emotional uncertainties and anxieties these transitions must have generated. In so doing, Brownlee casts doubt on traditional historiography and nudges the reader towards a reconsideration of their own historical location.

Wijk’s paradoxical nature leaves him in a liminal state – betwixt and between one world view and another. This is a useful way of looking at the subjective experience of emerging modernities. Pratt essentially draws on this liminal theory in her theorization of the contact zone, but while Pratt applies it to cultural studies, it might be useful to unpack what it means for the historical, and historicized, subject to experience liminality. Perhaps one of the most important theorists of liminality is Victor Turner, who essentially argues that the transformative, mythical nature of initiation rituals (replaced, as he sees it, in modern societies by various forms of art) is to be located in the liminal phase of experience. Turner asserts early on in the preface to *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974) that “social actions of various kinds acquire form through the metaphors and paradigms in their actors’ heads (put there by explicit teaching and implicit generalization from social experience) and, in certain circumstances, generate unprecedented forms that bequeath history new metaphors and paradigms” (13). He also specifies that “[l]iving action, for the human species, can never be the

logical consequence of any grand design” (13). For Colin Graham, writing on postcolonial Ireland, this means that the liminal can be identified in those “areas of colonial discourse where the apparently monolithic, stifling and dis-articulating presence of the colonizer is refuted by evidence of the colonized speaking back,” and in those instances where “imperialist ideology [is] figured as neurotic and uncertain rather than bombastic and unshakeable” (32). One thinks immediately of Wijk describing Van der Stel, inspecting the summer gardens in full European winter regalia, as “every bit a peacock in a stewpot” (13). Steele Nowlin, who writes on liminality with regard to Chaucer, accepts that Turner’s work has come under fire in recent years for being essentialist, but posits that the idea still has agency. In the end, “the idea of liminality is itself extremely useful for investigating a literary work [. . .] that consciously engages an in-between space to illustrate larger cultural and ideological paradigms. Liminality is a space in which cultural paradigms can be engaged, explained, and re-conceived” (49). Similarly, Lionnet’s conception of liminality has to do with displacement for the purposes of reimagination, specifically to escape binaric distinctions (113).

All of this can be filtered into a renewed consideration of Wijk’s position. His hanging garden presents a strange visual mixture of the mythic and the scientific, as a kind of metaphor for the enactment of liminality. The scene is described thus:

For there, hanging from the rafters by wires or threads, is a forest of small glass jars, each of them, as far as Piet can see, containing some artefact of human origin. The light from the window catches the glass vessels in ghostly outline against the darkness of the roof, their strange contents floating above the world in a supernatural suspension. Buttons, scraps of cloth, a bone with withered flesh still clinging to it, all these things swing musically in the draughts above Piet’s head.

(57)

Wijk inhabits a paradigm somewhere between tradition and scientific advance. His hanging garden is an inventory of medical specimens, but they are figured by Brownlee with such adjectives as ‘ghostly’ and ‘supernatural.’ In this scene, Wijk’s liminal garden – literally suspended – is bequeathing history new metaphors and paradigms, à la Turner. This notion of suspension is important: Wijk’s hanging garden works as a visual embodiment of his personal suspension between two sensibilities, just as the novel represents a historical moment suspended between the pre-colonial and the modern. Gikandi invokes just such a condition of suspension

when, on the subject of Kenyatta's ambivalent relationship with the church, he poses the following questions on the colonial subject: "What did this act of being inside and outside a colonial institution imply? Was it itself part of the technology of self that the colonial subject needed in order to be both traditional and modern?" (364). He goes on to assert that "rehearsing modernity meant being neither here nor there, in between the spaces of what was seen and represented as the traditional and the modern" (368). Wijk certainly seems to be availing himself of this 'technology of the self' in his inhabiting liminal spaces, and in his contradictory rejection of the field of medicine, and acceptance of naturalism in its place. In this way Brownlee complicates the emergence of a new modernity, and refutes the notion of a straightforward chronological progression of history.

Another character group who represent competing discourses are the Jesuits. While Wijk's musings locate him simultaneously in the worlds of tradition and scientific advance, the Jesuits' narrative combines religious, scientific and even political values all at once. Thus Pastor Tachard's loyalties are first to God, then to his French King, and finally to Science. Although "[t]he country of Knowledge is a free land that cares not for the common rivalries of mankind," the "state" has enemies: "those nations not built upon the same rational and reasonable constitution" (106). Brownlee is certainly tongue in cheek when his narrator muses that "it is not considered war to destroy their adherents, merely progress" (106). This casual line highlights the power and potential danger of discourse. Historically, imperial discourse was also couched in these non-threatening terms. Religious idiosyncrasies are treated similarly by Tachard's colleague, the Abbé de Choisy. Considering Galileo's excommunication, he notes: "Ah yes. As the Church teaches, it is one thing to observe the planets moving around the sun – it is another to believe that they actually do" (109). These competing concerns of religious doctrine, political maneuvering and scientific advance are shown to be wrapped up in one another. Tachard is exemplary in attempting to reconcile the three. At de Choisy's goading on the subject of science ("Dreams, Scripture, holy visions – all can be doubted. [. . . T]he only world that can be taken seriously is the world of measurement and force"), Tachard responds:

"Proof, dearest Abbé, is a thing invented by the clockmakers of this world. It is a requirement for certain categories of endeavour that was never meant to be applied universally. It was never meant to deny the worlds that weren't accessible to its methods. This is why I say, let not the world of measurement deny a world

in which there is no length and breadth and time. Let not the articulate deny the inarticulate.”

(110–11)

This recalls, almost precisely, Brownlee’s words on his chief interest in writing the novel: “We have lost the art of living in paradox and uncertainty, in a world that is not ‘either/or,’ but ‘yes and yes,’ or ‘perhaps/maybe.’ This was my project for *Plagues*, to recreate a world in which mystery and rationalism could exist in balance, a world where silence was as valid an expression as speech” (qtd. in Heyns, “ABSA Chain” par. 8).

Bakhtin calls this ability heterology, and argues for the novel’s specific ability to represent competing discourses together. His view is that heterology runs counter to constraining politics: “Heterology is, in a way, natural to all society; it arises spontaneously from social diversity. But just as the latter is constrained by the rules imposed by the single State, the diversity of discourses is fought against by the aspiration, correlative to all power, to institute a common language (or rather a speech)” (57). This is perhaps what Tachard is warning against when he says, “let not the articulate deny the inarticulate” (111). The silent characters are not erased from the novel in the way that their real life counterparts were from the historical record. In fact, their relationship with the articulate characters is dialogic. The novel is capable of such heterology by way of its literary tools: those of competing and complementary narrative strands. This shows how historiographical metafiction, to use Hutcheon’s term, might present one of the most effective ways of representing these contact zones of emerging modernities.

Hutcheon’s theoretical understanding of historiographic metafiction is particularly pertinent to the diary sections of *Garden of the Plagues*, whereby Wijk’s personal history is rendered accessible to the reader. There is a doubling of historical investigation in the novel: on one level, Brownlee’s and the reader’s communal investigation into seventeenth-century colonial history at the Cape Colony, and on the other hand, the reader’s investigation into Wijk’s closely guarded past. Hutcheon shows that this doubling is typical of postmodern texts, and serves a purpose other than that of literary play. These self-conscious and self-reflexive literary choices foreground the text as a product of discourse, and force the reader to think about historiography in a similar way.

The diary sections raise this issue, and make the novel critically useful both at the primary level of the representation of contact zones, but also at the secondary level of the act of recording

and writing histories. Primary sources (such as diaries), official histories (as compiled by historians), and novels all work to textualise and record experience, and Brownlee is playing with the notion of documentary records in the opening of Wijk's journal. It is headed

“Notes of an Ordinary Doctor in the Year of the Plague 1665 (For his own use, personal, and not for printing, even if this were to fall into unauthorized hands by theft, misplacement, &c.)

(144)

In these short lines, the narrator is effectively incriminated along with the reader. One might go so far as to speculate that these lines render all readers and writers of history as guilty of theft at some level, for trying to make personal experience public. Brownlee raises the question of whether a personal diary (a primary source, as we are taught at school) is a reliable record of history or a pseudo fiction itself. Despite the authority attributed to the primary source, it must be remembered that diaries are particularly subjective by nature, and so reveal the fictive nature of historical writing well. Brownlee creates a fictitious historical document to debate these concerns. It announces itself with quite a different tone and rhetoric to that used by Wijk in the main course of the narrative. In fact, it is more reminiscent of the language of seventeenth-century prose, perhaps a nod to the intertexts with which this novel engages. For example, consider this extract from a diary section:

June 16

Ventured not far abroad this day but stayed close about. To my apothecary B— on the matter of preparations and there a pleasant discourse on this thing which vexes us both – the composition of True remedies and False; and how a man may make a greater profit from a lie than from what he knows to be real.

(150)

At the close of the passage quoted above, truth and reality, and falsehoods and lies, are yoked together in a chiasmic structure, for the purpose of emphasizing and balancing the oppositional phrase. The object of such an exercise is traditionally to create symmetry in classical writings, and was adopted for this reason in many Enlightenment literatures which valued the formalism of the classical period. The inclusion of such clever truisms and chiasmi is, therefore, more reminiscent of seventeenth-century poets than of the character the reader knows as Wijk in the present narrative of the novel. This means that Brownlee is quite evidently setting these sections

apart from the main course of the narrative, as though he were including a ‘real’ historical source. This is not an unusual technique. Many authors of historiographic metafiction do much the same thing, often in the form of footnoting. Peter Carey is a prime example. What this does, is “deliberately confuses the notion that history’s problem is verification, while fiction’s is veracity” (Hutcheon 112). In fact, “[b]oth forms of narrative are signifying systems in our culture” (112). In the end, Hutcheon reconciles all to narrative:

[...M]any theorists today have pointed to narrative as the one concern that envelops all of these, for the process of narrativization has come to be seen as a central form of human comprehension, of imposition of meaning and formal coherence on the chaos of events. [. . .] Narrative is what translates knowing into telling, and it is precisely this translation that obsesses postmodern fiction.

(121)

Wijk’s diary narrative links his past to his present, and signals the mutation and contestation of his life’s work in his own eyes. In his diary we learn of his “RESOLUTION: To find sure methods by which a person may be cured of this ill” (146). This contrasts with the ‘present-day’ Wijk, who frequently “reminds himself that he is no longer trying to find his answer. He has given up on it” (51). This internal split is as much a contact zone (albeit on a personal level) as those represented at a further remove in the epistemological structuring of the novel, which consider the micro and macro effects of an emerging modernity. Brownlee does this through his creation of paradoxical, polyvocal characters. What becomes interesting at this point is those characters who create holes in the narrative, the silent characters who are narrated by others.

In Dialogue with Absence: The Silences in *Garden of the Plagues*

The disenfranchised and disempowered in Brownlee’s novel are characterized in an interesting fashion – they are quite literally silent. This section will consider the impact made by Voog, Hester and “[t]he woman [with] four names and none” (124). Their haunting presence in the novel raises pertinent concerns about absences in the historical record, and the ways in which the characters are narrativized, through the voices of others, points to the problematics of the discursive practices employed by historiography.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of a documented determinant for any given sensibility is one of the great absences that can be noted in the historical record. So it is that while the causes of

historical *events* are painstakingly charted through our school history books, the same care is not given for the emergence of discursive practices and sensibilities. In fact, these are the epistemologies that have shaped the writing of our history books in the first place. In this way, history is then constituted by an absent cause. Speaking on the Enlightenment specifically, Adorno and Horkheimer point out this idiosyncrasy: “Ruthlessly, in spite of itself, the Enlightenment has extinguished any trace of its own self-consciousness” (199). Their argument posits that by nature of its epistemological ordering, the “Enlightenment is totalitarian” (199), so that “what was different is equalized. That is the verdict which critically determines the limits of possible experience” (201). This means that we are faced with a self-perpetuating sensibility, the main project of which is the exclusion of myth and the reduction of reality to its calculable constituents. This works to exclude all outsiders, everything that cannot be understood. In this way, the Enlightenment wipes out the ideologies and sensibilities of its predecessors, working as it does from a deductive, rather than inductive standpoint.

There is also a power dynamic at work here, because “Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own ends” (200). Enlightenment is all consuming and restrictive. Gaylard’s conception of African magic realism works in contrast to this notion. He asserts that “the purely rational has come to be seen as a limited technique for understanding reality” (*After Colonialism* 33). Authors such as Brownlee work instead to expand our concept of reality, a reality which “is inclusive of many propinquitous levels and contradictory tensions” (Gaylard 64) and which celebrates “the ability of the imagination to structure and hence understand and invigorate experience” (48). While the two sensibilities appear to be at odds, one celebrating that which is outside of its cognition, and the other denying all that remains outside, Adorno and Horkheimer show that in fact,

[m]an imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course of demythologization, of enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the animate with the inanimate. Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical.

(201)

This means that although the Enlightenment denies the existence of anything outside of itself, rationality and the mythic must coexist because “outsiderness is the very source of fear” (201). Brownlee’s Commander Van der Stel illustrates this idea beautifully in his treatment of the whale in the bay:

If ever somebody were to say to you: See over there, see that black thing that lies upon the beach, that thing that fills my dreams with its vastness, that wakens me with the echoes of terrible depths in the waters of my brain, what is that thing? – then you would say to them how simple it is and how clear – that thing is called a Whale. Observe how we dismember it, how we count the tons of its flesh and number its bones. In the end we have the whole of it there in our barrels. We have the sum of this whale, and there is nothing at all that can be said to be missing.
(66–7)

Voog, Hester and the character I shall forthwith refer to as ‘the Girl’ resist this treatment and so represent an essential sensibility in this novel of contact zones.

Brownlee’s concern with the missing or the absent is introduced in one of the opening scenes in the novel, in a conversation between Wijk and Commander van der Stel. Even Van der Stel, the champion of rational empiricism, cannot escape the sense of absence: “I have been thinking that there is something missing from this garden. Something . . . I cannot say what, but something not yet present” (15). He goes on to foreshadow the arrival of the Girl, who, deaf and mute, is representative of mystery and absence in the novel. He muses: “Perhaps it is a thing that will arrive on a ship or be blown here, or perhaps it is a thing that we will never find. Perhaps it is the thing that is always missing. There is always something missing, don’t you think, Mr Wijk?” (15). Of course, the Girl is blown in on a ship, and the Rukh, a mythical bird specially requested by Wijk’s benefactor for his curiosity cabinet, is never found. This is to introduce one of Brownlee’s most interesting tropes, which is expanded through the development of the cluster of what may be called ‘absent’ characters. Hester, the orphan living at the Tavern of the Green Door, is considered to be a simpleton because of her sparse use of language, but it transpires for the reader that she inhabits a much more intuitive, ethical mental space than that of her custodians. There is something otherworldly about her internal monologues, for example her thoughts on seeing the Girl disembark from the ship: “*Colours. When I am big I will have a dress like the one that came from the sea. I saw him bringing it with the whale girl. He carried her and the black men carried the blue robe and the shimmering green*” (62). Her reality appears to form

a contact zone between her existence as “the mad girl Hester” (17), and something altogether more magical. Brownlee points to this in her alliance with Cardamom, the “lapsed Englishman” (102) and producer of magic tricks for Hester’s delight. Cardamom, for instance, believes in the existence of the Rukh, when evidence would tell him otherwise.

Voog, the “*bosjeman*” (120) purchased by the Meyers for the entertainment of their clientele, is similarly silent under the persecution of his owners. The reader is granted the least access to his consciousness out of all the characters in the novel, but he remains one of the most poignant and moving personalities. Both Hester and Voog have connections with birds, and in this way are linked to the mythical Rukh – all are misunderstood and absent from the reality inhabited by their persecutors. Hester plays at being a Rukh in a game with Cardamom, and Voog’s name comes from “Vogelmannetje [birdman]” (120). In fact, Hester finds the company of Voog comforting. She resolves to “learn how to speak his language. Perhaps this is the language she was meant to speak all along, the one that makes people sound as though they are birds” (125). The plight of these disenfranchised characters is made all the more touching by their juxtaposition with the ultimate symbol of freedom.

The third member of this grouping of characters is of course the Girl herself. Not only is her ability to hear and speak absent, but she arrives without a name and is branded, for the first half of the narrative, a woman with “four names and none” (124) (the four possible names are reported by the Captain of the ship which carried her to the Cape). Wijk is consequently forced to consider the importance of naming and categorization, specifically with the work in which he is currently involved for the compilation of his “*Hortus Africanus*” (31):

He shakes his head and goes inside. He sits down at his table with his heaps of plants, both known and unknown. In the end the problem is names. What are the names of these herbs? What are they good for? Are people who they say they are? And what is the name of this creature that has come into his life, this woman who cannot speak, who comes to him with no history at all?

(124)

In clustering these three characters together in the attic of the Meyers, Brownlee is making pointed remarks about the power dynamics inherent in the traditional historical record. These three, without voices and without history – we know nothing of their prior lives – also represent the disempowered and the persecuted. Brownlee is not so straightforward as to allow this to be the end of it, however. Although Voog is tragically, cruelly murdered, the Girl becomes a

symbol of self-empowerment towards the end of the novel as, through her poisoning of Wijk, she exacts her revenge on those who have betrayed her. In this way as well as a multitude of others, Brownlee complicates the colonial historical record, and blurs the bloodied line between colonizer and colonized.

All of this shows, quite clearly, that Brownlee is engaged in the writing of historiographical metafiction. By highlighting the gaps in the standard historical record, he is as much debating the philosophical grounds on which traditional historiography stands as he is mapping the contact zone of the seventeenth-century Cape of Good Hope. It might be said that to choose to write historiographical metafiction is to acknowledge the perceived gaps in other forms of historical writing. Brownlee's choice of genre (historiographic metafiction rather than historical novel or even, straight history) tells us much about our contemporary historical location. It speaks to a contemporary resistance to notions of absolute truth and a postmodern suspicion of the transparency of language. As we have already seen, Hayden White, too, is interested in exposing the ways history might be textually rendered, as he "[is] not primarily interested in the historical profession *per se*, but in what it [means] to live in a historical world, to orientate oneself in the present and to envision a morally responsible future" (Paul 11). White says that the process of building traditional histories can be mapped at four levels. First comes the collection of what he calls "atomic events" (Paul 85) by which he seems to mean raw data, in the classic empiricist sense. Next, the organization of this data into a "rough chronicle" (85) – the word is used here to indicate chronology and is not to be confused with the medieval genre. This transforms the "'events' (in the past) into 'facts' (in historical discourse, that is to say, in any verbal composition longer than a sentence)" (85). It is worth remembering that Hutcheon also points out the distinction between events and facts. The way she sees it, "a 'fact' is discourse defined; an 'event' is not" (119), and so the text has already moved into the realm of ideology and will be chronologically ordered in such a way that reflects the social desires and requirements of the writers. White then moves on to the production of a "story" (Paul 85), whereby the chronicle is organized thematically. At this level, a narrative voice is adopted. Finally, the story forms the basis "for either an 'argument' or a 'plot'" (85).

These modes of emplotment may follow the convention of a number of genres, and so White makes the point that history and literature are essentially created by the same tools. In other words, the text is conditioned by its genre, and genre is determined by the historical and social

make-up of the age. This means that Brownlee's choice of historiographical metafiction is indicative of the contemporary reaction to traditional progressive historiography, in just the same way as his characters map out the emergence of a new modernity within the world of his novel. In fact, his choice of genre places the novel within a contemporary philosophical emergence, in movement away from the positivist sensibility whose origins he is tracking in *Garden of the Plagues*. His invocation of magic realist tendencies backs this up.

This passage, apparently addressed at the reader, indicates both levels of emergence that have been identified above:

You are on the side of order and logic; in all likelihood you are a follower of Science. It is clear that within you dwells an unshakeable certainty that all things in creation are knowable if only you possess the right tool of apprehension. And you know what that tool is. It is reason. It is the ability to name a thing and number it, it is the ability to define the limits – the beginning and the end of a thing – and to know that those classes of phenomenon that resist such process, that prove to have no beginning and end, no girth and height, these things are the stuff of illusion and must be discounted from serious regard.

(66)

On a surface level, this excerpt speaks in the voice of the emerging Enlightenment being tracked through the text. It speaks of the ability to measure and number that was introduced by Linnaeus's influential work. But, on a secondary level, it also speaks of the contemporary resistance to such estimations of value. The irony with which the passage is treated, as well as the contrast it forms with the body of the narrative, peopled as it is with many characters such as Voog, Hester and the Girl, who belong to 'the classes of phenomena that resist such process,' speaks volumes about the philosophical underpinnings of the text. This is a novel that demands: "Let not the articulate deny the inarticulate" (111). It is interesting to note that Brownlee's acceptance speech for the Olive Schreiner Prize focuses on a contemporary corollary to Linnaeus's naming obsession. He applies the possessive logic of categorization to South Africa's tendency to rename roads and cities according to political favour. Brownlee muses:

If I were an autocratic yet benevolent president I would abolish all place names that had anything to do with a person and invite the public to submit more intimate names. I would say to the people, go out into your streets and stand there for a moment and be silent, or walk up and down them a while and see if some name comes to you that speaks of the stories of the past or of the present that are connected with these spaces.

In this novel, Brownlee attempts this embodiment of plural and interconnected histories by resisting imposed categorization in favour of a more organic organizing system. Through his use of literary tools, the philosophies of epistemology with which he is preoccupied are rendered so that their implications have a felt importance for his readers.

The Colonial Subject

Even when writing with Pratt's work on transculturation in mind, it is difficult to ignore the temptation to apply a binary analysis to these colonial problematics. There is a tendency to think in terms of *the* modernity imposed by colonial administrators and institutions, rather than considering colonialism as a particular figuring of modernity. Brownlee's narrative attempts to resist this kind of teleology. By virtue of its fragmentary narrative and polyvocal character cast, the novel can be seen to succeed, but nevertheless it is important to make clear the kinds of processes that are being resisted here.

Simon Gikandi's work is particularly useful on this point, as he lucidly unpacks the postcolonial tendency to represent pre-colonial African civilization as either destroyed by an imposed modern logic which the culture was unable to assimilate or, alternatively, as an idyllic pastoral society that would have been better left alone. Gikandi echoes Pratt's work on the contact zone:

Postmodern theorists seemed to be interested in the production of colonial subjects as effects of the imperial exercise of hegemony and power, but they were not keen to understand the existence of these subjects as active agents in the making and remaking of their colonial worlds. [. . .] [Colonial subjects] were not mute subalterns in the colonial encounter; they may have dwelled on the shadows of imperial discourses, but they were still able to speak through the European text; [and] their telling of stories of self through the text of the other did not necessarily negate the agency of the colonized.

(356)

It is in just such a way that the silent characters in *Garden of the Plagues* speak through the text – their agency is embodied if not articulated. Gikandi argues, indeed, for the essential modernity of the pre-colonial subject. He takes Kenyatta's most comprehensive biographer, Jeremy

Murray-Brown, to task on his conception of pre-colonial Gikuyu culture. Murray-Brown represents pre-colonial culture as “a world existing outside four integers of modernity – temporality, subjectivity, reason and agency” (360), making “precoloniality a code word for premodernity” (361). The doubling inherent in modern metafictional texts, an example of which can be seen in the double layer of historical investigation mentioned earlier in *Garden of the Plagues*, is echoed here in Gikandi’s characterization of self under, or in reaction to, imperial rule. He argues that Kenyatta “seemed to speak a double language, to live a dual existence” (372), between Englishness and Gikuyu culture. Gikandi argues that this doubling, which Hutcheon picks up in the stylistics of postmodernism, is, in fact, the “key to understanding [Kenyatta’s] oxymoronic identity as a traditional, yet cosmopolitan, subject, a master of English ways and a defender of the usable past” (373). Bakhtin would call this polyvocality; the way in which utterances (shaped by discourse, cultural context and material conditions) are able to speak to one another across ages within the pages of the novel, or indeed within the perceived personality of the colonial subject. So, for example, Wijk’s Pepys-like diary sections from his closely guarded past as a doctor during the London plague speak to his ‘present’ utterances as an ageing, curmudgeonly botanist, and in so doing point to both his implied personal history as well as the historical processes of which he is a part. Gikandi would contend that the distinction and overlap must be understood in the case of Kenyatta as well.

To relate this to the conceptual framework of historiographical metafiction: there is no doubt that events in history happened, just as it is obvious to the reader of Brownlee’s text that his narrative is fictional, but nevertheless there is an essential overlap that occurs here. Hutcheon terms it the problem of reference, and sums it up thus: “The issue is no longer ‘to what empirically real object in the past does the language of history refer?’; it is more ‘to which discursive context could this language belong? To which prior textualisations must we refer?’” (119). For, if we take the import of history to be discursive rather than factual, then we must also take it as true that “fiction [is] historically conditioned and history [is] discursively structured” (120). Gikandi would contend that the discursive inconsistencies inherent in the writing of history are also applicable to the colonial subject. Pre-colonial Africa *was* modernizing, and engaged with colonial institutions in an active and meaningful way. The first problem with Murray-Brown’s view is that it conceives of modernity as “a culture of time,” so that it becomes figured “in the grammar of the pre-modern and the modern divide” (362), evidencing a reliance

on the binary logic that Gikandi, and indeed Brownlee, through his rejection of a teleological narrative, takes pains to avoid.

It is useful to refer to Ricoeur here as his discussion of narrative time shows the different ways in which fiction and history deal with this ‘grammar’ of chronology. Ricoeur links the overlaps between historiographical and fictional writings to his understanding of the phenomenology of time, and in this way shows that the narrative of each form relies upon the techniques of the other. In historical writings, he attributes the imaginative leap, or the ways in which the past is depicted or figured, to fiction. In the same breath he attributes the fictive text’s reliance on an imagined past within the world of the narrative to the verisimilitude of historiography. Ricoeur’s conception of the phenomenology of time brings the two modes even closer. As he understands it, “history and fiction each concretize their respective intentionalities only by borrowing from the intentionality of the other” (*Time and Narrative* 181). History “reinscribes the time of the narrative within the time of the universe” (181), meaning that the historiographical narrative is located within the chronological scale of the universe. This is termed the “‘realist’ thesis” (182). In order to conceive of this chronology, we require an imaginary leap, between our experiential concept of lived time and a history which can only be accessed imaginatively. Ricoeur names the calendar as the most influential of these imaginative connectors. As we venture into the realm of the imagination, it becomes clear that fiction conversely borrows historiographical techniques. Ricoeur claims that any narrative recounted in the past tense, “as if past,” or any narrative that relies on an imagined past for its fictive coherence, is borrowing from the mimetic features of historical narratives. This is the “‘pastlike’ note that resonates in every claim to verisimilitude, outside of any mirroring of the past” so that “the quasi-past of fiction [. . .] becomes the detector of possibilities buried in the actual past” (191–2). Once again, Wijk’s diary sections, which differ so vastly in tone and call attention to themselves as belonging to his fictive past, are a case in point. These sections are written to mimic primary historical sources. This perhaps sums up the goal of historiographical metafiction – using the self-conscious quasi-history in the created text to illuminate ‘possibilities buried in the actual past.’

To return to Gikandi, then, this would show that this “culture of time” that is figured “in the grammar of the pre-modern and the modern divide” (362) is as much a cognitive construct as is any cultural structure inherent in pre-colonial societies. The naturalization of imperial structures,

couched as they were in the discourse of science, hides the fact that the ‘integers of modernity’ are as mythically constructed as any Gikuyu preoccupation with witchcraft or the like. Further, Gikandi argues that to assume that Gikuyu culture (and I use Gikuyu culture here to stand for pre-colonial societies in general) was incapable of cognition of these pillars of modernity is a mistake. This goes to show the import of Pratt’s theory of transculturation (or Nuttall’s work on entanglement) to the interpretation of historical writings both historiographical and fictive.

Despite its suspicion of binaries, *Garden of the Plagues* is full of structural and philosophical contradictions. It might be noted that it is not the aim of post-structuralism to synthesize these opposites, but rather to expose their production of values and create new notions in their stead. For example, even with all the transculturation and entanglements that are written into Brownlee’s narrative, he does not collapse the ‘civilised/heathen’ dichotomy so central to imperial conquest, but rather exposes it for all its brutality and violence. Voog is not given a voice, he does not claim his cultural power over his colonizers; however, the reader is much more inclined to value his emotional range, particularly in the poignant moment where he weeps silently into Hester’s hair at night, than that of his captors, who consider him to be “‘not a man’” (120) at all. Certainly, Brownlee includes various nods to deconstructive philosophy. Wijk’s musings on language when he discovers he cannot communicate with the Girl pokes holes in Saussurean theory:

How much easier it would be if they shared a common language. He has been thinking on the problem these last few days. It all begins, he assumes, with sounds. There is an alphabet that stands for sounds, and sounds stand for things in the real world. If a thing has a name, then everybody has to agree on what that thing is, or what is encompassed by that name. Luckily some things are easy, for instance a tree. There can be little dispute about the beginning and ending of such a thing. There it is: roots, stem and branches. If you stumble over a root you will know the cause of the pain in your toe and you will curse the tree. Or will you? Maybe you will curse God as well, or fate. But does this make the tree more than a thing of wood and shade; does it make the tree an agent of the fates, and thus a thing about which you cannot say with certainty that it begins at the tips of its roots and ends at the leaves of its crown. Wijk thinks not. That is a dangerous line of enquiry. A tree is a tree, and that is that.

(121–2)

This desire to share a common language applies more broadly across the novel, but of course is never realized. This ranges from Hester deciding she would like to learn Voog’s language in

preference to that of the colonizers, to Van der Stel feeling that he cannot communicate his problems to the directors at the VOC, and lamenting his lack of a person he could address as “*My Dearest X*” (161). Even so, while the silent characters are not connected by a common language, they do share a different kind of connection:

For a while they live all three of them up in the attic – Hester, the mute woman, and the little brown man. [...] For this brief time the world is not quite so strange. Even the man in the corner who watches them with his sad eyes is not strange. Like them, he too cannot speak. He makes a sound like birds make.

(125)

Hester’s desire to speak Voog’s bird language has obvious symbolic overtones. If birds are representative of freedom, then Hester, Voog and the ‘mute woman,’ while physically confined, attempt discursive escape. Although these characters come from opposing sides of the colonial divide, they are connected by their persecution. This conscious grouping of characters, as well as the various outcomes of each character’s plot, complicates and exposes this kind of binary logic without attempting to collapse it. These intersections and complications – ‘entanglements’, as Nuttall would phrase it (see *Entanglements*) – form the textual embodiment of a transcultural frontier history.

A Structural Staging of the Contact Zone

Just as the frontier zone is exemplified in the content of *Garden of the Plagues*, it is also echoed in the structure of the novel. It has been shown how encounters with absence are thematically pertinent to the text, but it is just as interesting to look at how they are staged structurally. The multiplicity of the text in terms of narrative focalisers reflects Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism and polyvocality, and Pratt picks up on the notion of dialogism to unpack representations of South Africa’s early contact zones in selected seminal literatures from the period (*Imperial Eyes*). She shows how the idea of the frontier is represented ideologically in the writing of the time, and this can be seen to be mirrored even at the level of form in *Garden of the Plagues*. The ability to dramatise conflicting discourses is, as Hutcheon has shown in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, the sole domain of literature, and this dramatization of the dialogical is evident in this text in large part due to the fragmented and thoughtfully constructed form of the novel. In this way, form can

come to be seen as the ‘facticity’ of the text, in the same way that the material events of the past form the building blocks of what later becomes representational history.

Pratt makes an interesting point about the writing of Peter Kolb, a seventeenth-century humanist who sought to document the lives and culture of the indigenous Khoikhoi at the Cape. She notes that his writing, occurring as it does before “the Linnaean watershed” (38), treats landscape in the traditional composite sense. She quotes James Turner’s characterization of seventeenth-century landscape as typically “not a portrait of an individual place, but an ideal construction of particular motifs. Its purpose is to express the character of a region, or a general idea of the good land” (44). This is to contrast with post-Linnaean representations of landscape, which are classificatory and differentiated, rather than celebratory and homogenizing. This is Kolb’s account of the Cape interior:

“The Plains and Valleys are all lovely Meadow-Lands, where Nature appears in such a Profusion of Charms as to ravish the Eye that beholds her. They everywhere smile; are everywhere adorned with beautiful Trees, Plants and Flowers, some of them so singular and of so attractive a Shape and Beauty, all of them so fragrant, that they fill the Eye with incredible Delight, and the Air with the sweetest Odours.”

(qtd. in Pratt 44)

Brownlee can be seen to set up both types of landscape representations beside one another. The soon to emerge Linnaean classificatory system is represented in Commander Van der Stel’s garden, while the more mystical location of “the thing that is always missing” (15), or the embodiment of absence, is ascribed the vaguer seventeenth-century representation. In the passage where we first meet Van der Stel and Wijk, these two notions of landscape – the scientific classificatory garden and the mysterious, as yet unknown interior – are placed side by side, setting up the ideological contact zone formed by the emergence of the Enlightenment in the structure of the passage.

[Van der Stel] does not engage with Wijk but continues to look around him at the landscape, as if searching for something in the ordered geometry of the garden. He gazes down the straight avenues of young oak and citrus, he lets his eye wander over the hedged squares of guava and quince, the experiments in cinnamon and vanilla, the fragrant bays of rosemary, lavender and wormwood [. . .]. As far as the eye can see is a perfect flourishing of every example of beauty and usefulness. And round about it all is a solid brick wall with a proper gate and its bold sign of the VOC and

the date – 1679. The Commander counts these things he has caused to come to pass in the garden and then admits a sigh.

(15)

The cause of the sigh, the reader finds out, is “the thing that is always missing” (15). Subsequently, “Van der Stel looks southwards towards the mountain. His vision scales its heights as if this missing thing is perhaps sitting up there, smoking a pipe in a crevice where he cannot be seen” (15). This effectively sets up the tension in the novel between that which can be accounted for and visually comprehended, and that which cannot. Another instance sees Van der Stel’s mind wandering while he deals with the administration of the colony. The description of Africa’s unknown interior is figured much more in Kolb’s terms: “that name, the one that sounds like the breath of wind in the grass, or like the soft beating of a drum: Monomopata!” (116). Unlike when his eyes calculate and comprehend his garden,

[t]he Commander’s eyes grow distant now. He is not here in this fortress, he is out there on the plains, marching onward through the dark body of Africa to its golden, Christian heart. Mo-no-mo-ta-pa . . . Mo-no-mo-ta-pa . . .

Ah yes, there are words that sing and there are words that are short and very much to the point.

(116)

A number of tensions are set up in this passage that are to be played out in the alternating chapters of the novel, between enclosure and freedom, presence and absence, the known and the unknown. Monomotapa is to Van der Stel what the Rukh is to Wijk’s benefactor – that thing which is missing and unattainable. That which cannot be comprehended by Van der Stel’s totalizing view must be regarded as lacking, as Pratt shows. While Kolb’s account of the Khoikhoi is “strikingly dialogic” in character, it still falls within the parameters of the European concept of culture, so that “differences that fall outside the paradigms are inaccessible to the discourse or can be expressed only as absences and lacks” (43). Brownlee’s preoccupation with absences is, then, indicative. It might also be noted that in attempting to find Africa’s El Dorado, Van der Stel becomes disillusioned, and so perhaps Brownlee presents a compelling argument here for the coexistence of the known and the unknown. It is through his artfully structured narrative that Brownlee so effectively sets up these tensions.

The structure of this novel is also ‘energized’ by its inherent dialogism (Todorov 65). Bakhtin’s theory of utterance and polyvocality is particularly pertinent here, as the fragmentary

nature of the narrative shows. While Bakhtin argues that all novels are intertextual (by which he means discursively dialogical), Brownlee's novel is arguably self-consciously and intentionally so. It is not Brownlee's voice, in fact not even a stable or identifiable speaker's voice, through which the narrative is delivered, but rather a combination of voices. The omniscient narration shifts in focalizer through a range of characters with differing world views and sensibilities. Moreover, these shifts are arranged so that contrasting sensibilities are often placed one after another, to highlight the disjunctures. The opening scene is focalized through Van der Stel, who is representative in the novel of Linnaean, classificatory rationalism. The focalization then shifts immediately to Wijk, who reduces Van der Stel to "a peacock in a stewpot" (13), casting a different perspective on these imported European value systems, despite the fact that Wijk, too, acts as a purveyor of modern science in the novel. His travelled, inquisitive (despite himself) and kind (again, despite himself) characterization is immediately followed by that of the parochial, closed minded and particularly cruel Meyers, focalized through the silenced "mad girl" (17) Hester, a recipient of their violence.

The novel carries on in this fashion. These sections are also interspersed with more abstract, philosophical sections where the plot does not move forward but the ideological layers of the text are developed. For example, at the opening of the chapter titled "Curious Things," there are two pages of abstract musing that are without any form of focalization. The narrator appears to be imminent rather than omniscient in these instances, commenting on the emergence of a new sensibility as Enlightenment thinking begins to filter through to South Africa. Such sections describe "a new species of man" who "has come to take the measure of the world, to name and describe hitherto nameless things, to push back the blank spaces where the *dracones* skulk and make their mischief" (99). These observations are notable because it is the novel form that allows for this kind of chronological and narrative flexibility. Bakhtin celebrates this flexibility. In the novel, "the dialogical reciprocal orientation becomes, so to speak, an event of discourse itself, animating it and dramatizing it from within in all of its aspects" (65). This is why, in the novel, language does not only represent, it is also an object of representation.

A further demonstration of polyvocality in the structure of *Garden of the Plagues* can be found in the fact that the diary sections, or sections considering letters and articulation, are often juxtaposed with appearances of the silent characters: Hester, Voog and the Girl. In the section describing the Girl's marriage to Herman Block, the narrative places articulate characters next to

inarticulate ones, just as dreams turn to disillusionment. This is wrapped up in a section that simultaneously considers the ability to communicate. In a succession of six paragraphs, the wedding of the Girl, and Commander Van der Stel's return to the Cape of Good Hope, are described. Hester, preparing for the arrival of the wedding party at the Tavern of the Green Door, expresses her concern at the deteriorating state of Voog with the single word, "Sad" (159) in the first paragraph. Upon the arrival of the bridal couple in the following paragraph, Hester presents the Girl with a bunch of wild flowers and pronounces the occasion "Happy" (160). The third paragraph sees Block on the way home with his bride: "the husband takes his wife around to the far side of the cart and pushes her up against the wheel with her face away from him. Then he lifts up her skirts and he fucks her. Now the marriage is consummated" (160). Thereafter the focalization shifts to Van der Stel, who in the fourth paragraph considers his disillusionment with his discovery at Monomopata. All that remains of "the fabled Camissa and the road to Monomopata" is a "joke" (161). After a return to business and a consideration of the successful resolution of his problem of the Girl, in the fifth paragraph, he finally lets the failure of the expedition wash over him in the sixth paragraph under consideration. He considers that "if he had someone whom he could address as *My Dearest X*, he could say what is in his heart, which is that it is a shame that a dream should be sold for a few bars of copper" (161).

It is useful to detail the progression of events in this short section only to show how the narrative swings from Voog's desperate state, to the Girl's supposed hopeful one. This is immediately undercut as she is raped by her new husband. Similarly with Van der Stel, he expresses disillusionment at the failure of his dream, returns to administrative matters, and then considers Monomotapa again. It is interesting that not only is the silenced girl placed next to the articulate and lettered Van der Stel, but also that he appears no more able to communicate his unhappiness than she, for he does not have anyone to address as '*My Dearest X*.' Bakhtin might consider this a true embodiment of his polyvocal theory, for the utterances made by the Girl and Van der Stel speak to one another, and work against each other, despite the fact that the Girl is silenced and Van der Stel, articulate. Van der Stel's conclusion at the end of the six paragraphs is that "the missing thing is gone. Time to put away childish things [. . .]. No more will [he] play the fool to hopeless dreams" (161). This conclusion is broadly pertinent because of the structural enactment of dialogism that has preceded it.

The Curiosity Cabinet

This structural dialogism could be said to be distilled in the tropes of bounded spaces that occur in each of the novels in question. Winterbach's *To Hell With Cronjé* uses the textual space of the diary to record this, and the garden of discarded sculptures acts in much the same fashion in Van Heerden's *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*. In *Garden of the Plagues*, this bounded space is represented by both Van der Stel's colonial garden in which Wijk is employed, and Wijk's own hanging garden which functions for him as a memorial of his work on the plague. Brownlee's novel is more explicit about linking these bounded spaces to the seventeenth-century phenomenon of the curiosity cabinet, and explicit reference is made to Wijk's benefactor's cabinet overseas. The idea encapsulated by each of these bounded spaces can be summed up in the ideology of the curiosity cabinet, which makes for a wonderful metaphor for colonialism as a whole. It embodies the act of finding and taking something for one's own, removing it from its original context, and rehomeing it elsewhere. It is out of these cabinets of imperial artefacts that the first museums grew, and these are also physical spaces, much like the colonies, where Linnaeus's theories on naturalism and categorization could be rigorously enforced, but enforced according to a logic not coherent with the artefact's original context. It is easy to see how the idea has become a potent one for postcolonial studies generally, but it is also stylistically fitting within the magic realist genre because of the element of surprise that comes about from being forced to view objects in a new light, or from a new perspective. Brownlee plays with this idea throughout the novel.

Gaylard paraphrases Dean Irvine's description of the way magic realism functions in contemporary African literature. He compares it to

a double helix, with postcolonialism as one genetic strand, postmodernism as the other. According to Irvine, the narrative strategies deployed by the practitioners of magical realism attempt to anneal (the term "anneal" describes a genetic engineering process in which the genetic components are recombined to form new DNA molecules) the irresolvable dualities of the worlds in which they live.

(*After Colonialism* 47)

If one were to extend the metaphor, these bounded spaces that mimic curiosity cabinets might be said to function as one of the narrative strategies that recombines the 'irresolvable dualities' to form new perceptiveness. There is more than a little of the Russian Formalists in this idea, as it

was originally Shklovsky who detailed the narrative function of defamiliarization. Directly translated, Shklovsky calls this process “making strange” (4), and he posits that art in general works to “[remove] objects from the automatism of perception” (12). Gaylard quotes Kundera on the same subject, who focuses on the aesthetics of the defamiliarized moment: “I’d like to call it a poetics of surprise; or beauty as perpetual astonishment” (73). This best describes the effect of Wijk’s hanging garden in the novel – beauty as surprise.

These bounded spaces – by which I mean specifically Wijk’s hanging garden, his benefactor’s curiosity cabinet, and Van der Stel’s Company Gardens – act as conceptual accelerators for *Garden of the Plagues*. Some of the most important theoretical points in the text are embodied here. Bakhtin’s dialogism, which I have linked to emerging modernities, for example, can be viewed in Wijk’s selection of medical samples. The realm of medical advance which he has abandoned has its remnants stored here according to an unusual logic. The idea of scientific specimens arranged in something as organic as a hanging garden is certainly aesthetically defamiliarizing, but more importantly it visually enacts the contact zone between two world views. The organic and the scientific are contrasted as each specimen, carefully preserved in a glass bottle, is transformed collectively into “a forest of small glass jars,” each holding an “artefact of human origin.” The hanging garden appears in “ghostly outline” against the roof, with its “strange contents” held in “supernatural suspension” (57). The combination of supernatural and medical discourses here enacts Bakhtin’s dialogism and Pratt’s transcultural contact zone beautifully – the ideas are almost distilled in the scene. The benefactor’s curiosity cabinet is described in a similar manner, and its characteristics are named simultaneously as an “experiment,” “claimed,” “imposing,” “strange,” and “magical” (99–100). The ambiguity of such a space is finally attributed thus: “So, in the end, the curiosity cabinet is an artefact of contradictions. On the one hand it stands for things extracted, divided, denatured. On the other it affords to those with sufficient imagination a sense of the magical, it provides a portal to a world of dreams” (100).

All three bounded spaces also embody the conversations with absence discussed above. On a simple level, projects such as gardening and curiosity collecting imply, much like historical writings, a process of selection and exclusion. The artefacts in the gardens and cabinets are always naturally in conversation with those which have been excluded – the contexts from whence they came, perhaps. On a more specific textual note, each of these bounded spaces is the

location in which its organizer bemoans the lack of the ‘missing thing,’ first introduced to us by Van der Stel in his garden in the opening scenes of the novel. For Wijk, it is the cure to the plague, and for the benefactor, it is the egg of the Rukh. Ben Okri is quoted on the back cover of Gaylard’s book as saying that “[i]t is precisely in a broken age that we need mystery and a re-awakened sense of wonder: we need them in order to be whole again.” This is much like the contradictory project of the novel, which represents absences, silences and incomplete collections in such a magical light as to gesture towards wholeness once more.

It is clear from this that Russel Brownlee’s debut novel is a gem in its field. It is philosophical without being overwrought, and ethical without being aggressive. The poetic, lyrical quality of his prose carries the conceptual implications of his story lightly along. It is a novel that expresses a variety of contemporary concerns central to postcolonial scholarship. Most significantly, it embodies Pratt’s notion of transculturation in its broad spectrum of ideologies and sensibilities represented, and is very interesting in its consideration of the value of silence in relation to articulation. These are the specificities of the novel that make it an important contemporary read. In the final pages of the novel, the mystery is revealed. The silent Girl, victim to the plans of the more powerful, has found the means to make her own way through the world, by poisoning those who obstruct her. Suddenly it is clear to Wijk: “The death of Block. The death of the four upon the *Tulp*. No plague or twist of fate is necessary to account for any of these. And no old woman with a collar of poisons is needed to explain his own poisoning – that small revenge for a betrayal” (221). This, perhaps, is the greatest celebration of unpredictability – the secret, dangerous power of the mute, victimized Girl. Wijk closes his own narrative with these words:

Yes, there has come something for them from beyond the edge; there it lies within their sanctuary, nameless, terrible in its purity, utterly incapable of accepting anything less than freedom. So let them try to get the measure of this creature, let them decide what are the sum of its parts and what its name should be. Let them savour their short victory. The gardener, for his part, will remain silent.

(221)

Perhaps through these characters more than any others, Brownlee complicates the binaric biases of postcolonial historiography. The Girl is unnamed and immeasurable, and Wijk, the articulate naturalist and disenchanting physician, decides in the end to embrace her code of silence.

Chapter 2: Darwinism and Occultism in Ingrid Winterbach's *To Hell with Cronjé*

Ingrid Winterbach's novel *To Hell with Cronjé* (2002) has received significantly more critical attention than Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues*, and has been hailed by academics as an alternative, subversive reading of the South African War. Set chronologically later than *Garden of the Plagues*, this novel can be read epistemologically as a Darwinian offering that complements and expands the insights about the Enlightenment that Brownlee's novel provides. The dualistic structure of the novel sets out an opposition between what Craig MacKenzie calls "the world of the father," characterized by external, action-oriented activities, and an obverse, contemplative existence dominated by irrationality and "heterodox or subversive views [that] undermine official dogma" (108). If Brownlee's novel is in dialogue with absence in places, as in the cluster of silent characters at the core of the narrative, then Winterbach's novel may be said to point to women as an absent cause of the haunting, animistic sections of the book. The dualistic structure cannot be read simplistically, however, because the trickster figure which appears like a refrain in various guises throughout the text is often presented as androgynous, and so represents the collapse of certainties, categorization and binary organisation. Finally, the concept of a bounded collection makes an appearance again, this time in two forms: Ben and Reitz's journals which record their war experiences, and the word games the two play which appear to be linked associatively rather than by any scientific ordering and so mimic the bounded collections represented in *Garden of the Plagues*. In these ways the text can be read as a nexus of all the concerns already established in this study, as well as a path by which to consider the environment as a final, postcolonial frontier, fraught with its own set of contact zones.

To Hell with Cronjé details the journey of two soldier scientists, Ben Maritz and Reitz Steyn, as they accompany a young soldier suffering acute psychological trauma to his family home in Ladybrand. Set in the final months of the South African War, the novel tracks the disillusionment of its characters as they await the end of a war they know they have lost. Upon departure for Ladybrand, Ben and Reitz's company leader, Commandant Senekal, charges them with the delivery of a letter, en route, to General Bergh's commando. The General and his commando, it transpires, are out on patrol and the two protagonists are forced to await his return

in the ‘transit camp’ Bergh has left behind, headed up by a strange and brutal man, Gert Smal. As Ben and Reitz resume their civilian research activities by day, and listen to the group’s respective war stories around the campfire by night, they begin to reflect on the nature of their losses. Women haunt this section of the novel by their absence, and when Reitz acquires the means to connect with his dead wife from local herbalist Oompie, he nearly loses his hold on reality altogether. This stagnation is interrupted, finally, by the return of Bergh, who tasks the scientists with preparing lectures on their fields of study. The presentation of their controversial material forms a watershed moment in the narrative, and creates a tense meeting point between Christian and Darwinian beliefs. Following an ambush under suspicious conditions, Smal is shot dead, and Ben and Reitz are wounded – significantly, Ben loses his ability to speak and so the novel’s consideration of loss and absence, as set against Ben’s previously articulate self, is compounded. At this late stage in the novel, women enter the narrative, as Ben and Reitz are found and nursed back to health by a family of women, including Niggie and her cousin, Anna. Reitz initiates a relationship with Anna which is terminated when her husband, presumed dead, returns at the close of the war, and so hope of growth and healing is once again extinguished. Ben, upon discovering the death of his wife, succeeds in building a new life with the enigmatic Niggie – a character who has been linked to the unknowable trickster figure. The novel closes, as it opened, with a description of the trickster in a shifting, feminine world in which the certainties of a male-dominated, scientific, articulate existence are routinely undercut.

The English translation of the original Afrikaans version, *Niggie*, retains the sparseness of Winterbach’s style, which complements the plain beauty of the Karoo setting wonderfully. Critics are largely unanimous on this point, celebrating Winterbach’s “apocalyptic vision” (Tepper par. 3), and the “relentlessly plain, but breathtakingly agile” (Berold 17) prose. Most reviewers also appear interested in the combination of “scientific method, shamanism, and introspection [which] offer paths for the main characters to preserve their integrity as an alternative to acquiescing to the violence of their social environment” (Berold 17). The Hertzog Prize winning Afrikaans original is said to have been faithfully translated by Elsa Silke, with only one reviewer taking exception. Cecil Abrahams declares the translation “wooden” and “uninteresting,” however, his other lament, that “the history of the Anglo-South African War is largely ignored even though the events occur during it” (103), seems rather to miss the point of this subversive war novel, which actively counters historical metanarratives with individual

psychologies. Riaan Oppelt, too, notes the “lack of movement and activity,” but adds that this is where much of “the novel’s drawing power lies” (par. 2). Berold, likewise, is struck by the “Beckett-like world where very little happens” (17). This stasis is accepted by these critics as a sign of narrative mastery rather than authorial incompetence, because despite the stilted plot, used consciously to “mimic the boredom at the margins of the war,” still “there is much to hold the reader’s attention” (17). Oppelt’s conclusion lauds the novel as “invaluable to a general canon of South African literature” (par. 6). It might be added that *To Hell with Cronjé* is also, for these reasons among others, essential to a study of contemporary South African historiographical metafiction.

Darwinism, Evolution and the Modern Subject

The inclusion of Darwinian philosophies in Winterbach’s *To Hell with Cronjé* is as evident and compelling as the exploration of the Enlightenment in Brownlee’s *Garden of the Plagues*. To this end, it is useful to begin here with a contextualisation of Darwinian thought as a profound influence on modern epistemologies in the same way that Linnaeus changed the course of seventeenth-century philosophy and science. The implications of Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) are of central importance for South Africa, not least since the development of South African racism drew on Social Darwinism for pseudoscientific support. Thus, the repercussions of Darwinism are still contested today, perhaps more for philosophical and psychological scholars than those of science, apart from in a small number of states in America where Creationism is still taught in school science curriculums. The tension created by the coexistence of evolutionary world-views (which propagate natural selection as their founding principle) and epistemologies founded on mythic, non-positivist thought (including but not limited to Judeo-Christianity) has given rise to controversial debate and the proliferation of fundamentalists on both sides.

As an illustration of this point, it is interesting to note that Robert Young, a leading Darwin scholar, is ambivalent about what he calls the “celebratory furore” (95) Darwinism has generated. In article titled: “The Meanings of Darwinism: Then and Now” (2002), and speaking specifically about the development of Darwinian Psychology, he denigrates figures such as Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion* (2006), for “delighting in putting people down

whose disciplines they assert are made less important and even a waste of time” (98). The disciplines that figures such as Dawkins are referring to – “philosophy, history and philosophy of science, cultural studies” (98) – are considered to be pointless because of the deductive logic according to which Darwinism works. Such figures, according to Young, believe that “since evolution can, in principle, explain everything human, then evolutionists [. . .] have special insights and authority across all of knowledge” (98). This kind of thinking cannot be applied to many of the disciplines encompassed within the humanities, because of their predilection for studying the *inexplicable*. This means that, in this statement, Young effectively sets up the main tension that has grown out of Darwin studies – positivism versus the arts. In response, Young propagates a peaceful coexistence. He sees the valuing of positivism over culture, arts, and the mythic as arrogant and reminds his reader that “[w]e continue to turn to literature, the theatre, music and story-telling to edify and to reflect upon human nature. [. . .] We need a psychology and therapies that resonate with lived experience, and Darwinian psychology is so far a very long way from providing one” (101). To illustrate this, he points out that “behaviour and motivation are multi-layered, just as physics, chemistry and biology are” (100). He continues:

[T]he layers of historical explanation in evolution and the layers of causal explanation in behaviour do not all reduce to the struggle for existence. [. . .] When I ask someone why he has done something, I do not want to hear about his serotonin levels. [. . .] [I]n most cases I want a reply that informs me about his motivations, one that includes a moral dimension.

(100)

Not only does this highlight the worth of historiographic metafiction, because it values the importance of representations of lived experience as equal to those grounded in scientific methodology (Hutcheon’s sentiments precisely in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*), it also provides a direct contrast to another Darwinist, this time a philosopher himself, Paul Schafer.

Schafer’s oppositional stance can be seen at a basic level in his celebration of Dawkins as “one of the best scientists writing on evolutionary theory” (79). He distinguishes human subjectivity before Darwin from after it by pointing out that “before Darwin human beings thought of themselves as having existed in that same basic form since the beginning of time” (80). This makes Darwin a useful watershed figure in this study about the absence of epistemological genealogies, which is what Schafer is indicating. However, Schafer contends that any contemporary consideration has to take into account the notion of an evolving

subjectivity, in the same way that developments in the human skull shape can be tracked through the ages. Certainly, his position – that “while we have gained by unleashing the concept of human nature from its metaphysical fixity, we seem to have forgotten one of the basic lessons of Aristotle [. . . that] we are not fundamentally distinct from nature at all, but are every bit as ‘natural’ as the mould collecting at the moment on my windowsill” (82) – is neither new nor problematic. His views become contentious only where he starts trying to explain the human mind:

Given the very odd ways that we have found reason to express ourselves culturally, intellectually, and otherwise in our brief history, it seems to me unwise to deny the possibility that the human mind, as the author of these expressions, is more than empirical. What is undeniable, however, is the evolved character of the mind; in this respect the mind is no different from the eye or the hand – it too has an empirical history.

(88)

Surely, we do not yet have the skills or understanding to make claims for the empirical evolution of an entity that has become “more than empirical” (88)? This seems inherently contradictory. Despite this, Schafer castigates the mythic (specifically in this case Christianity but it seems safe to broaden his argument by implication) as “fabrications that have no central place in our philosophical worldview” (87). These conflicting extrapolations on the application of Darwinian thought to epistemic matters – for they are extrapolations since Darwin himself wrote very little on the subject (Young 101) – illustrate the ongoing impact that the invocation of Darwin’s name continues to have on contemporary thought, and so Winterbach’s novel could be said to be operating at two levels: one documenting the emergence of both Social Darwinism in support of the colonial project and scientific Darwinism as it is applied by Ben and Reitz, and one contemplating its application today.

What is interesting about the ongoing application of Darwinian philosophy is that instead of culture being set up in *relation* to nature, the notion of culture *as part of* nature is established. Vassos Argyrou, in delineating the purpose of his book in tracking the development of an environmentalist epistemology, compares contemporary views on the natural world to those of the Enlightenment period. He claims that the fundamental transformation in the way nature is viewed has also affected our conception of self: “‘Man’ too is no longer the Subject of the world and indisputable master of nature, but a cautious, sensible and responsible steward. He has been

drastically reduced in size and now emerges as the ‘human being,’ a being among other beings in the world and dependent on nature for his very survival” (vii-viii). This would suggest that Argyrou can be read alongside Pratt, because while Pratt argues that empire defines itself in response to colonized cultures, and vice versa, Argyrou extends this idea to contend that historically, selfhood is defined in response to epistemologies surrounding the natural world.

Pratt makes much of travel writers’ descriptions of natural vistas in which the project of colonial incursion is reflected. She describes Richard Burton’s passage on his ‘discovery’ of Lake Tanganyika in Central Africa as one such example of what she terms the “monarch-of-all-I-survey scene” (197), arguing that by coding the scene using certain strategies, he is engaging in a specific “meaning-making task” (198). She identifies the strategies as the aesthetic rendering of the scene, the density of meaning created by the use of adjectival modifiers – “snowy foam,” “steel-coloured mountain,” “pearly mist” – which scatter the narrative with “little bits of England,” and finally the “relation of mastery predicated between the seer and the seen” (200). These combine, according to Pratt, to suggest that “Burton has the power if not to possess, at least to evaluate this scene” (201). Argyrou works from this conceptual history, acknowledging that:

Beyond the history of the idea of nature and the history of its mastery by European ‘Man’, then, there is another story to be told. This is the story of the mastery of the rest of the world by a handful of European nations in which both the idea of nature and the mastery of the entity to which the idea refers are deeply implicated.

(5)

Argyrou uses this example to consider the genealogy of epistemologies surrounding environmentalism. He continues:

These stories must be told for the same reason that all stories are usually told – because we should not forget to remember. We should not forget to remember, to begin with, that the modernist perception of nature and humanity was held to be a true representation of reality with as much conviction and certainty as environmentalists hold their own views today.

(5)

His oddly formulated insistence that “we should not forget to remember” seems to point to the tendency to lose epistemological histories more quickly than physical events-based ones. Argyrou shows the broad implications of this fact.

Both Pratt’s exploration of the construction of self in relation to landscape in colonial travel writing, and Argyrou’s reminder about the historical processes of naturalising epistemologies, help to place the descriptions of natural scenes in *To Hell with Cronjé* in context. Reitz, a geologist, clearly codes the landscape according to his naturalist Darwinian outlook. The first description of the natural world in the novel runs as follows:

After a while they reach a narrow pass where they are able to cross the mountain. The narrow track is flanked on either side by a sheer cliff. Thick sedimentary layers of mudstone and sandstone are clearly visible, Reitz notices, with dolerite sills. A mountain range of the Karoo system, with the rock formations strikingly different from the dramatic undulations of the Cape fold mountains.

(Winterbach 6)

Where Pratt’s example of early nineteenth-century, pre-Darwinian travel writing is overloaded with adjectival modifiers and devoid of scientific terminology, Reitz’s observations are minimalist and documentary in style. The only rhetorical flourish is attributed to the ‘dramatic’ Cape, heightening the sense of barren hopelessness in the Karoo. This reveals both his emotional response to the situation in which he finds himself – wandering the desolate Karoo in the midst of the South African War – and his occupation as a scientist which discourages such emotional responses. This brief example also shows where the novel’s temporal setting fits into the history of thinking about nature. Ben and Reitz do not subscribe to the Enlightenment-legacy ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey scene’ described by Pratt, but neither are they at a point of contemporary holistic environmental consciousness. As neither masters of, nor subject to the natural world, Ben and Reitz represent Darwinian documentarians. If our trajectory of environmental consciousness runs from the Enlightenment through to present day environmentalism, then Ben and Reitz fall mid-way along this epistemological history, since they ascribe to Darwin’s scientific philosophies.

Argyrou is, of course, also engaging himself in the process of historical documentation, and he is fully aware of this fact. In relating the history of the development of environmental thought, he summarizes R.G. Collingwood’s *The Idea of Nature* (1945), in order to demonstrate some crucial gaps in the record. Collingwood’s history notes three stages in the development of environmentalism. First, he lists the Greek view, which analogises the earth as an organism,

namely Gaia. This is replaced by the Renaissance view, which contends that nature is mechanical, insofar as “nature [is] God’s artefact in much the same way as a clock is a clockmaker’s creation” (qtd in Argyrou 2). Finally, Collingwood describes the “modern” (2) period. He draws on another analogy, this time “between the ‘processes of the natural world as studied by natural scientists and the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by historians’” (2). Thus the Darwinian model is “a terrain ‘of an endless succession of experiments [. . .] to produce organisms more and more intensely and effectively alive,’ but an entity nonetheless ‘wholly devoid of conscious purpose’” (2).

Argyrou takes issue with this history on three counts: firstly that it presents a teleological history of progress, and for this reason completely ignores “the yawning gap between the age of classical Greece and the Renaissance” (2), namely the history of Christianity and the ‘Dark Ages.’ Secondly, he posits that Classical Greece has only been included as a stage so that “the age of ‘the Europe’ that Europe wishes to project for itself is [not] reduced to a mere four centuries” (4). This is doing more to justify the development of European identity than to document the development of the idea of nature. Lastly, the “modern” idea of nature is still implicated in Europe’s ideological construction of self more than anything else because, if nature is “‘devoid of conscious purpose’” (2), it can also be read as “an intractable domain of danger, and, above all, utility to be mastered by ‘man’ and brought under his control” (4). Argyrou links this epistemology to justifications for colonial exploration and incursion. All of this goes to disprove, primarily, “the fanciful expectation that the latest incarnation of the idea of nature, the environmentalist idea itself, can pass as the only true picture of reality” (3).

The other useful thing to note about Collingwood’s history of ‘the idea of nature’ is that all three of the modes he notes are instrumentalist. The Greek ‘organism’ strives to “achieve its own end or *telos*” (2), the Renaissance model is mechanical, and assumes the existence of a master mechanic, God, and the modern phase takes on the linear notion of Darwinian development. This instrumentalism is contested by Guattari, another philosopher of environmentalism, who proposes a politics of “*dissensus*” (33) as the only possible solution to the present ecological crisis. This distinction will prove critical when unpacking the instrumental and non-instrumental epistemologies at work in *To Hell with Cronjé*.

Guattari’s version of environmentalist philosophy combines these approaches into what he terms an “ecosophy” (10). His world view comprises three components: individual psychology,

the social, and the environmental. These are the “Three Ecologies” referred to in the title of his book. It is modelled in opposition to the erosion of life at all three of these levels by “Integrated World Capitalism” (4) (referred to hereafter as IWC), whose influence is disseminated, according to Guattari, by globalized media systems. Indeed, IWC can be intricately linked to the causes of the South African War in which Winterbach’s characters fight. These are most clearly laid out in Geoffrey Blainey’s “Lost Causes of the Jameson Raid” (1964/65) in which he proves that Rhodes’s instigation of the Jameson Raid was to preserve personal mining interests: “consciously or unconsciously, he risked political power in order to preserve economic power” (366). Guattari’s “ecosophy” requires a fundamental paradigm shift away from IWC-centric thinking because it is characterised not by the replacement of “one model or way of life for another, but by ‘respond[ing] to the event as the potential bearer of new constellations of Universes of reference’” (Pindar and Sutton 6). Unlike Young, who calls for the peaceful coexistence of artistic and scientific discourses, Guattari supports subjective, artistic discourses *above* scientific methodologies when it comes to the implementation of his ecosophy. This grows out of his assertion that when it comes to the creation of systemic infrastructures, “subjectivity still gets a bad press” (25), and that those involved in these processes will almost always draw on the pseudo-scientific paradigms of “information theory, systems theory, [or] linguistics” instead (25). According to ecosophy, “it is quite wrong to make a distinction between action on the psyche, the *socius* and the environment” (27), and Guattari, therefore, calls for a different kind of methodology:

It is as though a scientific superego demands that psychic entities are reified and insists that they are only understood by means of extrinsic coordinates. Under such conditions, it is no surprise that the human and social sciences have condemned themselves to missing the intrinsically progressive, creative and auto-positioning dimensions of processes of subjectification. In this context it appears crucial to me that we rid ourselves of all scientific references and metaphors in order to form new paradigms that are instead ethico-aesthetic in inspiration.

(25)

He goes on, as an illustration of this point, to claim that literary figures such as Goethe, Proust, Joyce, Artaud and Beckett produce better “cartographies of the psyche” (25) than Freud, Jung or Lacan. His position is radical, but he is essentially making the same argument as Young, one that favours a consideration of subjective, lived experience in our tracking of historical process, and

(in Guattari's case) in the creation of a platform from which to calibrate future configurations of ecosophical thought.

One of Guattari's responses to the degeneration of "the three ecologies" by IWC is his call for the stimulation of "singularity" (explained in an introduction by Pindar and Sutton as "human subjectivity in all its uniqueness"), a state of mind that he posits is as endangered as our fragile environment (4). This constitutes Guattari's "mental ecology" (4) and it is perhaps this plane of ecosophy which is most pertinent to the novel *To Hell with Cronjé*. That Guattari appears to be drawing on a form of dialogical thinking is evident when he explains his approach to the mapping out his three ecologies. He posits that "the three ecologies are governed by a *different logic* to that of ordinary communication between speakers and listeners which has nothing to do with the intelligibility of discursive sets, or the indeterminate interlocking of fields of signification" (30). Like Bakhtin, who argues against the unidirectional implications of traditional linguistics with his theory of utterance, Guattari's governing logic for *The Three Ecologies* is "a logic of intensities, of auto-referential existential assemblages" (30). These are 'auto-referential' because the logic of self is directed as much inwards as outwards, so that it "will simultaneously analyse and produce subjectivity" (44). Further, Guattari's thinking comprises 'existential assemblages' because the logic of ecosophy would be able to "install itself simultaneously in the realms of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically in the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual" (45). It is easy to see the connection between this and Bakhtin's argument that all utterance is discursively dialogical, because Bakhtin, it may be argued, shows how discourse can be 'auto-referential.' Bakhtin also rejects the idea that information can be unidirectionally exchanged, situating each utterance in "a complex choir of other voices already in place" (Todorov x). Thus, Guattari's 'auto-referential existential assemblages' are connected, in important ways, to Bakhtin's heterology. Both of these theories have useful implications for the ways in which subjective characterization might be read in Winterbach's novel, which deals extensively in questioning discursive binaries.

The useful connections that can be drawn between Bakhtin and Guattari do not end there. It is not too much of a stretch to connect Guattari's argument for dissensus with Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality. Guattari's specifically Marxist approach argues that IWC must be defeated at all levels of the mental ecology: "individual, domestic, material, neighbourly, creative or one's personal ethics" (33). However, rather than "looking for a stupefying and infantilizing consensus,

it will be a question in the future of cultivating a *dissensus* and the singular production of existence” (33). Bakhtin’s approach to the intertextuality of the novel complicates language in a similar manner. He compares “novelistic discourse” to myth to illustrate his point: while myth “implies a transparency of language, a coincidence of words and things, the novel starts out with plurality of languages, discourses and voices, and the inevitable awareness of language as such; in this sense the novel is a basically self-reflexive genre” (Todorov 66). The significance of these connections between Guattari and Bakhtin, then, are twofold. Both theorists show how the novel form may be seen as a useful way of complicating the sometimes ‘infantalizing’ master narratives presented by traditional historical narratives. Simultaneously, the tracking of historical epistemological developments through these pluralistic novels, all of which consider attitudes to the natural world through different epistemological lenses, might be a useful way of achieving a form of ecosophy.

To Hell with Cronjé demonstrates this process of complication and the resistance of ‘infantalizing’ master narratives through the multiple and competing discourses presented in the text. Characters think, speak and operate within the contexts of, at different stages of the novel, war, Christianity, Darwinism, and forms of occultism. While the Darwinist and war strands of the narrative may be viewed as instrumentalist, the spiritual and occult threads subvert such attempts at teleology. The contradictory and simultaneously enfolded philosophies displayed in the novel present a form of the “*dissensus*” (33) towards which Guattari argues. Much of the novel’s conceptual interrogation of war – a discourse that Winterbach argues belongs to “the world of the father” (MacKenzie 108) – is presented in the characterization of Gert Smal. Smal, the leader of the transit camp which Reitz and Ben join, is an egotistical autocrat whose philosophical offerings the reader instinctively resists. The narrator’s first description of him presents him as a kind of South African Kurtz, with the “face of a thug: head thrust forward challengingly – belligerent, brutal. His frayed jacket is fastened at the front with spike-thorns” (28). Every evening, after passing around the whiskey, Smal proceeds with a “sneering exposition of the battlefield and everything pertaining to it. He lays it out like a corpse” (54). It is from these nightly tirades that the novel derives its name – Cronjé being one of the generals towards whom Smal displays particular antipathy. This dictatorial engagement with the discourses of war and politics are countered by the philosophical offerings from Ben and Reitz.

Although a participant, Ben questions the usefulness of the fighting by laying out the bare facts of his experience in disinterested, scientific language:

“Consider this,” Ben says, staring into the fire. “Two and a half years ago we were called up in the name of the president. We joined our commandos because it was our patriotic duty.” [. . .]

“At Boskop Frederik Botha was shot in the head,” Ben says. “Our fathers knew each other well. At Elandsjaagte my cousin Johannes was struck in the side by shrapnel; he died three days later. At Nicholson’s Nek Frans Bothma and Kleinjan Beukes fell side by side. Wounded in the liver and stomach respectively. I knew them both well.

(18)

The litany of dead continues, with Ben concluding quietly ““I knew right from the start [. . .] that no good would come of this war”” (19). This contrasts diametrically with Smal’s ranting. While Ben “consider[s]” (18), Smal “proclaims” (41). What makes one set of characters protagonists, and ethically informed, while Smal is certainly set up as an antagonist, is not their position with regard to the war, or on Christianity, or their occupation as scientists, necessarily, but their ability to entertain multilayered discursive positions as opposed to an inability to allow for ‘dissensus.’ Smal “makes a point of not answering questions” (49), and, in the following extract, his single worded responses to the conversation around the camp fire are met with the multiple discursive positions offered by the other characters:

“Even *then* the burghers had had enough,” Japie Stilgemoed continues. “Our predikant believed that Mauser and canon would not help us regain our independence; he believed instead in the weapons of faith, love, hope and prayer. Unfortunately some men saw this as an opportunity to make a run for it.”

“Probably thought they might as well pray at home,” Ben says.

Gert Smal snorts. “Deserters,” he says, looking at Ben and Reitz, who make a point of not reacting to his taunt.

“No war can be won with deserters,” Gert Smal declares bitterly, and Ben and Reitz glance at each other surreptitiously.

The owl hoots again. “Spotted eagle-owl,” says Ben.

(49)

Here, Japie Stilgemoed combines the instrumentalism of war with the discourse of spirituality. ‘[F]aith, love, hope and prayer’ become ‘weapons,’ considered by the predikant as superior to ‘Mauser and canon.’ Smal responds with the single word ‘Deserters,’ and forecloses on any

further recombination of discourse by reverting to a monological, teleological, war narrative: “No war can be won with deserters” (49). Smal is of course implying that he believes Ben and Reitz to be deserters, and they respond with a shift in discourse once more, this time to observational Darwinism, with Ben identifying the owl they are hearing. Earlier, in response to more of Smal’s aggressive monologism, (“‘My *arse!*’ Gert Smal shouts. ‘Commemorate, my *arse!* Cronjé can go to *hell!*’”), Abraham responds with nonsense – the gibberish that has resulted from his encounter with the aggression and violence of war: “Fooking! Fooking!” (48). In fact, all of the maimed characters at the transit camp operate according to an epistemology other than Smal’s pointed instrumentalism. Looking at the narratives of the South African War in this way, according to sensibilities other than the historically common patriarchal and nationalistic metanarrative, might be said to function as an example of the paradigm shift that Guattari calls for, in order to encourage a more polyvocal, Bakhtinian, response of ‘dissensus.’

Reitz and Ben continually combine and overlay the discourse of science with an interrogation of their existential positioning. Their conversations at the riverbed near Smal’s camp are typical of this movement. After Reitz “shows Ben the horizontal and vertical dolerite sills clearly visible between the successive sedimentary layers of khaki-coloured shales,” and imagines that the area “will also be an ideal place to look for fossils,” his attention begins to be “engaged in a different, less definable manner” (44–5). After a moment, he asks Ben, “‘who and what have we got here, do you think? Where have we landed?’” (45). Although Ben replies with a factual assessment of their situation, the question “‘Where have we landed?’” (45) has broader implications for both of the characters, who have been moved about relentlessly in a hostile environment for years. It implies a lack of agency, which is confirmed in a similar manner, as “Ben lifts a small plant from the water by its roots. ‘Let’s count our blessings for now, Reitz,’ he says, ‘until in due course our fate is determined’” (45).

Reitz’s initial consideration of occult happenings is inserted into the conversation too. He says he “‘feel[s] uneasy. There’s something in the air that makes my hair stand on end’” (45). He persists, “‘but it’s also this *place*’” (46). The highlighting of ‘*place*’ indicates that his conversation has moved from external reflection on his surroundings, to an appraisal of his existential positioning – a movement in which Argyrou is particularly interested. In tracking the history of environmentalist thought, he considers how, historically, people have connected on an epistemological level with their physical surroundings. Ben and Reitz are able to overlay these

discursive types seamlessly, and possess the ability to switch their line of investigation from the natural world to their own subjectivity (however stilted their actual conversation becomes on this front) with ease. In fact, this stiltedness has a stichomythic quality, a style usually used in theatre to convey intense emotion. Reitz's repressed emotion surrounding his dead wife is thus effectively expressed in this style. Similarly, it might be argued that the stichomythic, emotive quality of the word play surrounding "kaffir" in the second chapter serves to underline its opposing scientific and political (racist) uses. By contrast, Smal's world view is far more unidirectional, and less emotionally layered. It is this plurality that the implied author seems to value, more than any singular set of beliefs, and so this passage intersects well with Guattari's call for a new kind of epistemology – one that focuses as much on self-reflexive subject analysis as on a dismantling of external, systemic structures in challenging the stultifying ideologies of IWC. Winterbach's decision to characterize the intricacies and varieties of the subject in response to the systemic violence of the war machine, and to represent the traditionally monologic South African War history narrative polyvocally, thus signalling a paradigm shift, is perhaps comparable to Guattari's philosophy.

A similar point is made when Ben and Reitz give their lectures on Natural History and Geology respectively. Pandemonium breaks out over the matter of an evolutionary timeframe, and the early reception of Darwinian theory is shown compellingly in this section. Although Willem, who acts as Ben and Reitz's companion and Abraham's stand-in guardian, is conceptually in agreement with the majority of the audience, and hostile towards the evolutionary map being presented, he is torn by his loyalty to Ben and Reitz, and his attempt to entertain both sides of the argument results in him being presented as a largely sympathetic character, whereas General Bergh's contingent are presented as brash and dangerous:

Willem's face is ashen, with a glowing red spot on either cheek. He is clearly torn between his view of the truth and his feelings of friendship and loyalty. "One day after the fishes," he says. "The fishes and fowl on the fifth day – the beasts of the earth and man on the sixth day."

Blackpiet Petoors cries: "Yes! Blasphemy! Man was created on the sixth day to have dominion over the animals!"

"In the likeness of God," Willem says softly.

"God Almighty, no!" Oom Mannes says indignantly, and knocks on the ground with his rifle butt.

(136)

It seems that the real importance lies not in the conceptual positioning, but in Willem's ability to speak softly while Oom Mannes "knocks on the ground with his rifle butt." What is significant here is that Winterbach is steering clear of conceptual and discursive certainties. As Riaan Oppelt puts it in his review, "the lack of conclusions that these topics are deliberately shown to come to is in itself where much of the novel's drawing power lies" (par. 3). Within all three of these discourses, namely war, Darwinism and Christianity, Winterbach sets up ethical and moral conundrums, which are played out in the subtleties of characterization at work in the novel. These discursive boundaries are stretched further in the novel's consideration of the occult, and the androgynous role of the trickster figure.

Intertextuality and the Trickster Figure

Winterbach's use of the trickster is emblematic of her tendency to blur discursive boundaries. It is useful to look at her deployment of the trickster figure in the context of Gaylard's argument on the role of defamiliarization in the work of African postcolonial writers. Winterbach's trickster is defamiliarized and defamiliarizing: defamiliarized because she presents her trickster as androgynous when, according to the farmer who first encounters it in the novel, "he's always thought of the trickster as a man" (4), and defamiliarizing because its effects work alongside the scientific, empirical realm inhabited by the two main characters, Ben and Reitz. Gaylard says that defamiliarization in contemporary African writing is achieved by a number of poetic techniques, "all of which tend to encourage the ability of words or symbols to suggest that which lies beyond the empirical" (*After Colonialism* 76). This is clearly displayed in Winterbach's juxtaposition of the empirical with the occult. Gaylard continues: "[as] with all metaphor, this means the selection and intensification of meaning, effect and affect, so that postcolonialism tends to be symbolically dense, and to dwell at least partially in the realm of imagination and dream" (76). It is, therefore, particularly pertinent that Winterbach sets up her trickster as explicitly symbolic in the opening scene of the novel, and that the trickster is introduced through the recounting of a dream. The use of defamiliarizing symbols in the novel places it, according to Gaylard's criteria, firmly within the African postcolonial canon, suggesting that this history of the South African War will necessarily be subversive.

The symbolic potential of the trickster figure is signified through the foreshadowing evident in the opening scene. Reitz signals the foreshadowing at work in the scene when he “feels a chill, and a premonition of woe such as he has seldom felt of late” (4). This scene introduces and prefigures the novel’s central concerns with the absence of women, loss, and the interruption of reality with dreams and occultist characters. The travellers, granted food and board at a homestead one evening, notice the palpable absence of the farmer’s recently deceased wife. They notice the neatness of the house, as though “a woman has very recently taken pity on it – before she left. A woman whose half-faded fragrance still clings to each object” (5). This immediately links the novel’s interrogation of haunting and longing to the absence of women, extensively dealt with in Reitz’s encounters with Oompie (another figuring of the trickster) and his disastrous attempt to connect with his dead wife. During the night, Reitz himself makes the connection between the absence of women and the haunting that is to occur later in the narrative. His “premonition of woe” is “because of the silence. Or perhaps the orderliness of the yard, or the symmetry of the flowerbeds in front of the house” (4).

Also significant about this scene is that the trickster is figured as androgynous right from the beginning, signalling a resistance to the historical categorization of gender. The farmer’s dream consists of him recognising a woman at church and taking her to bed, when “a strange man was suddenly in her place and he heard *her* laughing on the stoep outside. It was then that he realized she was the trickster” (4). The farmer reiterates the androgyny when he asks if any of the party have ever encountered the trickster, ““in any of his or her guises?”” (4). Gaylard calls this particular form of defamiliarization “oxymoronic yoking” (81) and argues that, as evidenced in the term ‘magic realism,’ it forms “the language of partially failed idealism, the logic of expected disillusionment” (81). He draws on the opening lines of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) to exemplify his meaning:

“I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time”. The apparently contradictory social realism of the nineteenth century *bildungsroman* and the fairy tale are brought into propinquity, suggesting that the protagonist narrator and the reader will need both forms to make sense of the world.

(81)

Accordingly, it is suggested throughout the course of *To Hell with Cronjé* that Ben and Reitz will need to draw on the conflicting discourses of instrumentalism (the empirical, the religious, and

the discourse of war) and occultism (seen in the consideration of dreams and in the use of the trickster) to make sense of their experiences of loss. This is their ‘expected disillusionment.’ Similarly, they will need to draw on the worlds inhabited by both men and women in order to gesture towards the possibility of healing – their ‘partially failed idealism.’ Chris van der Merwe hints at something like this when he discusses the simultaneous manifestation of loss and hope in the novel. He points out that by the end of the novel, “[the] reader is left with two contrasting realities of life: that of Reitz devastated by sorrow, and that of Ben, heroically making a new start” (96). Thus, ‘oxymoronic yoking’ occurs both at a symbolic and plot level within the narrative.

The trickster is encountered again in the form of the Khoikhoi men that Ben, Reitz and Willem meet on their travels. They are descriptively connected to the initial figuring of the trickster by the feathers they wear, as the most distinctive feature in the farmer’s description of his trickster is her feathered hat: “He can’t even begin, the farmer says, to describe how becoming that little hat was. Soft as the wings of a bateleur, with a flash of blue-green light” (4). One of the group reintroduces the theme of androgyny when Ben asks later: “‘one of those men yesterday. One of the men we met. The one with the tame mongoose. Could it perhaps have been a woman?’” (19). Van der Merwe deals with the trickster archetype extensively in his article “Surviving a Lost War.” He explains that the Jungian trickster is “both a deceiving and a healing figure” (94). Ben and Willem’s respective reactions to the Khoikhoi men confirm this – “Ben is delighted, Willem deeply worried” (16).

Van der Merwe goes on to detail the manifestations of loss and hope throughout the novel in connection to this archetypal figure, but it is his commentary on the symbolic potential of the feathers that is particularly interesting. He translates an interview with Winterbach as follows: “the structuring principle in this text is the interaction between feather and in-between space, the pterylae and the apteria. The latter, the featherless areas, are linked to Barthes’s statement about the essence of sensuality: ‘where the garment gapes’” (95). In light of this, Van der Merwe suggests that the feathers on the trickster’s hat “is a cover as well as an invitation to uncover” which is played out in a game “in which the dreamer is drawn to the trickster, hoping to uncover her; but it is a fatal attraction, leading to delusion and betrayal” (95). Importantly, though, the feathers are also symbolic of positive attributes, such as creativity, flight and transcendence. Van der Merwe concludes, in a point that echoes Gaylard, that this oxymoronic yoking “points to the

trickster as a destroyer of certainties and stereotypes” (95), making this figure an essential symbol of the discursive plurality displayed by all three of the authors under consideration – a plurality which ties in with Guattari’s ecosophy, and which is essential to a consideration of lived experience within the contact zone.

Winterbach’s specific deployment of occultism in the text also points to the importance of liminality in her reimagining of the South African War, because her trickster figures inhabit the traditionally liminal spaces of dreams. Turner, the original theorist of liminality, locates it in an anthropological sense in enactments of ritual in society. He argues that rituals can be viewed as symbolically important as they are indicative of

[...] the ways a society finds in these public rituals of commenting on and critiquing itself. Here there is not so much the symbolism of birth, maturation, death and rebirth – that is, of linear developments – but rather the continuous presence of a metalanguage – that is, codes or presentation and expression which enable participants and spectators to realize just how far they have fallen short of or transgressed their own ideal standards, or even, in some kinds of ritual, to call those very ideals into question under conditions of sharp social change.

(Frame, Flow and Reflection 467)

This connects to Winterbach’s project in two significant ways. First, as many critics have pointed out, her project of reimagining one of the founding historical events in Afrikaner cultural memory hints at a broader literary project of recalibrating the social positioning of Afrikanerdom in a post-transitional South African society (Van der Merwe 87, Tepper par. 4). Isabel Hofmeyr traces the ways in which the South African War has been ideologically created and recreated in public memory, and shows the intricate links between this and the founding of Afrikaner Nationalism. In “Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity 1902–1924” (1987), she “locate[s] the fabrication of an Afrikaans language and literature in the changing social relationships surrounding the spread of capitalism in South Africa” (96). Winterbach’s text continues this engagement with Afrikaner cultural construction in the contemporary moment. Additionally, the ‘metalanguage’ enabled by the enactment of ritual in liminal spaces shies away from ‘linear developments,’ just as Winterbach’s text queries the celebration of instrumentalist ideologies over animistic, spiritual ones.

When Turner states that in order to “look at itself a society must cut out a piece of itself for inspection” (468), it might be argued that Winterbach’s project of historical reimagination is doing just that. Turner continues:

To do this [a society] must set up a frame within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be scrutinized, assessed, and, if need be, remodelled and rearranged. In ritual, what is inside the frame is what is often called the ‘sacred,’ what is outside, the ‘profane,’ ‘secular,’ or ‘mundane.’
(468)

By Turner’s definition, Winterbach’s project of subverting the rhetoric of Afrikaner nationalism through her use of historiographic metafiction could be termed ritualistic – particularly when placed within the public context of much contemporary (or post-transitional) Afrikaner writing engaging in similar projects. Certainly, her investigation of the mythic, and of ritualized action intersects interestingly with Chait’s article on “Mythology, Magic-Realism and White Writing after Apartheid.” Chait argues that writers who consciously acknowledge the burden of white domination in their past (Winterbach among them), “plumb the mythological depths for signs and symptoms to explain what went wrong” (17). The South African War may be referred to as one of the founding myths of contemporary Afrikaner culture, not because its veracity is questionable – which is to say there is no doubt that the event took place in history - but because the metanarrative of this history is so culturally embedded as to have taken on mythic proportions. Accordingly, what is within Winterbach’s ‘frame,’ then, is a profound questioning of what may be considered ‘sacred,’ and what should be castigated as ‘profane.’ Winterbach’s figurations of the trickster routinely subvert notions of white supremacy and heteronormativity in order to pose these questions so that her conception of this Afrikaner founding myth can be ‘remodelled and rearranged.’

When the farmer encounters the trickster in the opening scene, the woman is replaced by a man in his bed. In Ben’s case, it is made clear that he is dreaming of the same figure by Reitz’s questions about her feathered hat: “[w]as it a little like the hat the farmer had seen in the dream he described to us? For the first time Ben looks up. There is an astonished look on his face. ‘Yes,’ he says, ‘yes it was!’” (144) This time, the “ordinary woman,” who, it can be assumed, is white, turns black – “burnished black. Black like ebony” (144). Ben interprets his dream as the temptation to succumb to death, but although death is traditionally linked to the colour black, the

use of descriptors such as “burnished” and “ebony” seem to fit within the lexicon of exoticization and fetishization (144). Van der Merwe translates Lenelle Foster on the subject, showing that the trickster “cheats his/her victims regarding race as well as sex [. . .]. Thus the attitude of the white, heterosexual man concerning sexual relationships is undermined, since he is confronted with the possibility of sexual intimacy with someone of a different race, or someone of the same sex” (95–6).

Winterbach’s subversive writing of the South African War stretches beyond the sexual. She writes about the war from the margins, reporting it from the dissatisfied and the dispossessed, who by and large are shown to come to the conclusion, like Ben, that “it has all been in vain” (148). She also considers, as has been mentioned before, the ramifications of an instrumental, externalised discourse such as that of war, by probing internalised subjectivities. All of these can be considered subversive, but her use of the trickster within the liminal spaces of the subconscious dream world lends this mode an element of the ritual, as Turner shows.

Winterbach’s invocation of the South African War is also, of course, intertextual. Hutcheon uses America’s fascination with the Western as a genre to illustrate her point, but the same might be said of writing on the South African War in South Africa. Hutcheon argues that the repeated return to this intertext signals “a coming to terms with the existing traditions of earlier historical and literary articulations of American-ness” (133). This is just what Winterbach is gesturing towards when she says in an interview, quoted by MacKenzie, that

“For my generation, the South African War is still an important landmark. For me it’s still a pivotal point in the history of the Afrikaner and in the history of South Africa [. . .]. My mother was a city girl; my father came from a family that had experienced the war first-hand [. . .]. So in a sense I would like to think it’s entering the domain of the father; it’s trying to recover the lost world of the father.”

(106–7)

MacKenzie follows with a brief description of the existing traditional histories of the South African War, notably Deneys Reitz’s *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (1929), and some of Jan Smut’s comments on the same in its preface. Smuts celebrates it as “an accurate description of life among the Boer forces” which reveals “‘how human beings react under the most terrible stresses to the passion of patriotism,’ and how ‘the most ordinary human material rings true and rises superior to all danger and suffering and privation’ when people are under the

influence of ‘the ideal of freedom’” (qtd in MacKenzie 108). MacKenzie concludes, broadly, that this externalised, action oriented view of the world is counterpoised by the narrative presented in *To Hell with Cronjé*. Much as MacKenzie has used intertexts here to generate this comparison, it might be argued that Winterbach consciously draws on a number of intertexts in order to subvert the world view presented in Smuts’s comments.

Among the most obvious intertexts visible in the novel are the Bible – directly referred to in the characters’ nightly devotions – and the historical happenings of the South African War in the form of Smal’s tirades against tactical and political decision makers. From this, a date and location laden ‘real’ history can be pieced together by the reader, with the finite facts supplied by Ezekiel, Smal’s servant. Hutcheon’s discussion of the inclusion of ‘official history’ in historiographic metafictional texts has already been considered, however, Ezekiel provides a less direct but fruitful intertext. “[R]eared by hand” (42), Smal trots Ezekiel out periodically rather like a circus performer. In this, it seems that Ezekiel echoes Lucky in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1952). The performative aspect of Ezekiel’s delivery of required facts indicates as much. When questioned, he “throws back his head, his eyeballs gleaming in the dark. For a few moments his lips move in a wordless litany before he proceeds to recite. When he is done, there is a deathly silence” (42). This is comparable to Pozzo’s treatment of Lucky.

The insertion of an Absurdist style into the sections detailing the South African War metanarrative says much about the discursive plurality of the novel. The connection is significant, because while “there’s nothing you can’t ask [Ezekiel] about history and the Bible” (42), if he is viewed as a descendent of Lucky, the implication is that his monologues are rhetorically sophisticated but essentially meaningless. Certainly, Boer culture is meaningless to Ezekiel, who can’t “make head or tail of what we find funny” (42). Cultural intertexts, such as the appearance of the trickster, abound. At one stage Reitz wonders if Oompie is a relative of “Oom Paul” (80), referring to the then president of the South African Republic and face of the Boer resistance against the British, Paul Kruger. This notion is as challenging to conceptions of Afrikaans whiteness as the trickster dreams, because Oompie’s race is indeterminate – he has a “swarthy” (36) complexion and there is “something Oriental about him” (37). Regardless, he has clearly ‘gone native,’ for he lives in a hut, brews sour milk and “[e]very so often he takes himself a new wife” (39). As a communicator with the dead and herbalist, among his other occupations, he inhabits a world opposed to that represented by Paul Kruger. MacKenzie suggests that Oompie

“must surely be a jab at the legendary figure of Boer lore, ‘Siener’ van Rensburg” (111). These examples force the reader “to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitation of the inescapably discursive form of that knowledge” (Hutcheon 127). In this way, Winterbach’s intertextual referencing clearly supports her discursive plurality.

The Absence of Women

One of the clearest links that can be made between *To Hell with Cronjé* and *Garden of the Plagues* is the concern with various forms of absence. Both novels seem to use tropes of this kind to direct the reader to absences in the historical record, which the discursive plurality employed by the authors attempts to address. In *Garden of the Plagues*, this concept is embodied in the three silent characters at the centre of the text – Voog, Hester, and “the girl with four names and none” (124). In Winterbach’s text, absence is deployed in a different manner. There are perhaps three ‘absences’ worth discussing. First, there is linguistic absence, or the absence of meaning, characterized in the same manner as in Brownlee’s text, by characters who have lost the ability to speak. Mackenzie explores this in detail, but it is a useful entry point into this study’s consideration of the absence of women from the majority of this novel. Second, Gaylard’s consideration of marginality in contemporary South African writing pertains also to *To Hell with Cronjé*, as women are physically absent from the centralised war narrative, and so they work to distinguish the male ‘centre’ from marginalised feminine spaces. Gaylard shows how the experience of marginality, whether in the form of femininity or other minority associations, is common in post-transitional South African writing. Finally, it is fruitful to consider women as an absent cause of the haunting, occult occurrences in the novel, and to this end it is useful to read these sections alongside Jane Marcus’s consideration of women, war and madness. Marcus applies her argument to Britain during the First World War, but many of the same observations regarding the pigeonholing of women into roles necessitated by a male-centric war apply to the South African War narrative too. Those that fall outside of the roles delineated by the patriarchal war machine are considered mad, in Marcus’s account, and this sets up a boundary between the rational and empirical, and anything that falls outside of this framework – variously termed

occult, naturalist, and spiritualist. Many of these boundaries are successfully blurred by Winterbach in *To Hell with Cronjé*.

One of the central legacies of the metanarrative of the South African War is the solidification of an Afrikaner identity. The patriotic, God-fearing Boer archetype is counterpoised against the enemy in this history – the hated ‘Khakis.’ It is significant, then, that the British are entirely absent from Winterbach’s war novel, and so this crucial and obvious absence immediately announces it as a subversive account. MacKenzie outlines the primary world-views explored in the novel as “empirical-scientific, post-Darwinian,” “biblical-literalist,” and “preternatural [or] occult” (112). We might argue that Ben and Reitz inhabit the first of these worlds, Willem and Smal the second, and the final world-view is encountered in the characters of Oompie, Niggie and the Trickster figure. Since Darwinism deals in the realm of rationality and categorization, it is easy to see how it might be classified as an instrumental discourse, because it works methodically and teleologically to tell a certain kind of story about the ordering of the natural world. Although religion deals in the realm of spirituality, the biblical-literalism that MacKenzie invokes might be similarly designated, since the following of textual instructions to the letter so that the soul might arrive in heaven after death certainly displays a linear kind of goal-oriented progression. By contrast, the occultism that he mentions resists this kind of instrumentalism, and so works to subvert the assumptions the other discourses make about the ordering of the world. As mentioned earlier, MacKenzie attributes the instrumental discursive positions to “the world of the father,” but argues that, although the scientific Darwinism and biblical-literalism are played off against one another, neither is a match for “the dark powers of Niggie in her various guises” (113). – Through her connection with the trickster figure, Niggie signifies the occult. In many crucial situations, it is made clear that the men in the novel are traversing “an unknown and threatening landscape in which the unpredictable happens and in which Ben and Reitz’s science is of little use” (113).

These discursive variants might be linked to MacKenzie’s more general consideration of the role of language. He points to the scene detailing the shell of a looted wagon with “the skeletal remains of three people underneath” (20). Ben responds empirically: “Vulture eats the flesh, jackal eats the flesh and bones, crow waits for vulture to open up the carcass, bearded vulture eats the marrow in the bones, bluebottle lays her eggs in the flesh, and ant eats the scraps that have remained” (20). MacKenzie wonders, “[is] there more to be said?” concluding that “Ben’s

scientific discourse accurately describes empirical reality, but cannot infuse it with any deeper significance” (115) in the face of such inexplicable devastation. MacKenzie argues that Winterbach’s project is to show that lives are constructed in the form of narratives. If this is so, then it is significant that although women are absent from the war, and thus marginalised in the historical war narrative, it is the men who are silenced – their narratives are revealed as constructed rather than naturalised when their ability to speak (and hence verbally order their surroundings) is removed. The men in the novel are routinely shown to be incapable of attributing meaning to the events they experience – Ben’s science and Willem’s religion both fail. Kosie Rijpma loses his faith because of his inability to impose narrative order on the chaos of his wartime existence. Abraham has been so severely traumatised that he has literally lost his ability to converse sensibly, and Ben eventually loses his verbal capacity through injury. This silencing of the ‘world of the father’ is a crucial way in which Winterbach subverts traditional South African War historiography. She chooses instead to invest agency and power in her marginal figures.

Gaylard writes in his introduction to a volume of collected essays on Vladislavić that concerns with marginality and stylistic minimalism are indicative of a new wave of South African writing. Here, the aesthetic is inherently political because it constitutes “resistance to monumental power, whether it be the ‘big stories’ of apartheid in the past or globalisation today. It suggests a radical notion of democracy, namely that nothing – human or otherwise – is too small to be disenfranchised” (*Marginal Spaces* 2). The ‘big story’ that Winterbach takes on is the narrative of the South African War. She chooses to enfranchise those whose voices have been previously obliterated by this “overdetermined” (MacKenzie 116) history. Crucially, Gaylard says of this minimalist aesthetic and discursive democracy that it “resists ideological generalisations [and] anthropocentric assumptions” so that “it might be regarded as the margins resisting the centripetal forces of centralisation” (7). This echoes Bakhtin’s claim that the polyvocality of the novel genre means it is ideally placed for celebrating marginality. He describes prose writing (as opposed to poetry) as constituting “decentralising, centrifugal forces” (Todorov 58). In turn, opposition to centralization is also the principal tenant of Guattari’s call for the creation of “singularity” (9) as a resistance point to IWC. All three philosophies (namely Gaylard’s focus on marginality, Bakhtin’s theorization of polyvocality, and Guattari’s notion of singularity in the creation of ecosophy) overlap in interesting ways in *To Hell with Cronjé*. Winterbach’s subversion of the

instrumental discourses typical of conventional South African War historiography, combined with her minimalist aesthetic which points to a concern with marginality, mean that her novel may be read with the above-mentioned theoretical concerns in mind.

Her decision to write “the periphery of the Boer War” (MacKenzie 107) is also feminist, because one of the driving forces of her narrative is the absence of women. In a historical context in which women’s narratives are largely ignored, Winterbach’s women are agents. In the nightly story-telling around the fire, any mention of the world of domesticity renders the group mute. Without fail, “[a]t the mention of loved ones a great silence falls upon everyone” (50). In a way, this silencing of the men forms a direct inversion of traditional wartime histories, in which the narratives of women are traditionally ignored. As an example of this, Jane Marcus shows how women’s suffrage history in Britain is still temporally defined by male epochs, specifically at the onset of First World War. Marcus claims that instead of seeing women’s pre-war political progress as *suspended* in the famous propaganda poster campaigns, in which “nurses, mothers, and wives [send] their men to war” (140) the propaganda campaign should be seen as *necessitated* by these feminist achievements. The “[p]sychologically sophisticated” (141) images offered by the War Office operated as a “*response* to the overwhelming powerful public iconography of the women’s suffrage movement” (140). This tension between patriotism and activism is played out in Marcus’s argument that when women are cast as nurses and mothers in wartime histories, the line between “she gives life and heals wounds” and “men die for her; she caused the wounds” (135) can become blurred. This constitutes a double narrative that Winterbach explores in her dualistically structured novel, which sets up clear distinctions between a world inhabited by women, and a world devoid of their presence.

Winterbach’s nurse and mother figures are far from passively patriotic. Although Anna and Niggie heal Ben and Reitz’s wounds and provide respite from their wartime existence, they do not consider it their national duty to do so. Niggie hails from the Cape Colony, and is of the opinion that the war should not apply to her or her people: “In the Cape Colony we wouldn’t have become embroiled in such a barbaric struggle so easily – not even for the sake of the freedom of our people” (181). Similarly, although Anna is fulfilling a maternal role to the children of her sister, she is childless and seemingly husbandless herself, and so she is not clearly defined in terms of the conventional gender roles in which women are cast in the literature of the South African War. Initially she offers herself sexually but not emotionally to Reitz, and the pace

at which their love affair develops is dictated by her. The double narrative that Marcus identifies in the nurse/mother casting of women in war is perhaps enacted by Niggie in Winterbach's text. Although Niggie is physically representative of the domesticity the men have so missed – they are “overwhelmed by the candlelight, the steaming dishes, the women, and especially by Niggie's dark ardour” (187), she is also a clear incarnation of the destructive trickster introduced in the opening scene. Her skin “is like marble,” and her hair “has a deep coppery sheen” (187), much like the “red hair” and “powdered white face” (4) of the dream trickster. MacKenzie makes the point that it is due to Niggie that Reitz begins the ultimately disastrous relationship with Anna. Her intimation that Anna is “in touch with the dead” (175) is interpreted by MacKenzie as one of her “strategic remarks that lodge thoughts in the right places – in order ultimately to triumph, to turn her inferior status to her advantage” (116). It might be argued, however, that it is not just Niggie who “salvages something from the wreckage” (116), because Ben finds respite in her careful ministrations.

This double narrative is also enacted structurally, as the text is clearly divided into two sections: the majority of the novel, which is set at Smal's transit camp and is devoid of the physical presence of women, and the concluding section where the men are nursed back to health by a family of women who have been living without men. In the first section, the women could be considered as a kind of absent cause, because much of the driving force of the narrative is the men's longing for the women they have left behind. Reitz feels his dead wife as “[a] presence: behind the rocks, behind the daily bustle, and at night behind the dreams and the night smells and the soft calls and scurrying of small animals. He thinks: They are separated by a membrane and she is pushing against it, pushing, trying to penetrate to where he is” (18). It is this that leads Reitz to attempt to connect with her by enlisting the help of Oompie, with life-threatening consequences. Similarly, the usually even-tempered Ben reacts with “an expression [Reitz] has never seen before” (77) when questioned on his wife. As usual, the mention of the world of women renders the men “silent for a while” (77). It is this, it seems, that prompts MacKenzie's observation that “[w]hat's most important has remained unsaid” (116). This means that much of the conceptual import of the novel – the considerations of loss and the ability of the characters' chosen discourses to articulate ‘[w]hat's most important,’ is supported at the level of form by the structure of the novel.

When the women finally do appear in the novel, the verbal Ben has been silenced and, therefore, it is up to Reitz to consolidate their psychological trauma for both of them. It is significant that upon leaving the women, the scientific world-view that they used as a bulwark against the encroachment of the occult is no longer effective. It is apparent “how little interest the two of them show in their surroundings” (230). However, if Winterbach uses this structural division to highlight and so subvert traditional figurations of war wives, widows and mothers, it is not clear what she is casting them as instead. Silence pervades the entire novel, and is always located in and around women, whether they are physically present or not. This means that the text, conceptually at least, portrays but does not always wholly subscribe to Marcus’s double narrative because often the characters resist subscription to any discursive position at all. This resistance is possible only by reverting to silence, and this makes it difficult to determine perpetrators from victims with any clarity. Perhaps this uncertainty is the point. Hutcheon points out, and it is worth quoting again, that “Historiographic metafiction [. . .] keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here – just unresolved contradiction [...]” (106). When Ben is finally reunited with his only surviving family, his daughter, she “speaks so little that her muteness is like a reproach” (231). Is Ben a perpetrator rather than a victim for leaving his daughter and enacting his patriotic duty? Crucially, the use of silence as trope manages to raise these questions but not to answer them – a decision that fits well with the problematizing logic of the genre, indicated by Hutcheon above.

Collecting and Recording in the Word Games and the Journals

The plurality of discursive types and world views evident in *To Hell with Cronjé* are emblemized in the instances of collection in the novel – most notably the word games played by Ben and Reitz, and the journals in which they notate their surroundings. Gaylard quotes Olatubosun Ogunsanwo on the effects of Okri’s rewriting of African myth, and the argument is applicable to Winterbach’s rewriting of myths of Afrikanerdom in the word game sections. Ogunsanwo says of the mixing of discursive types that,

[r]emarkably, there is no simple unproblematic merging into one single monolithic discourse, as they remain distinct even while intermingling. In other

words, there is no assimilation of one narrative mode by the other, or of one genre by the other. In short, no centralized sameness. The narrative technique does not seek any oppositional stance: the intertexts assume parallel status in the parodic re-working of the narrative modes, debunking the mutual exclusivity of center and margin.

(qtd in Gaylard, *After Colonialism* 98)

The lists of words offered in the word games are always linked associatively rather than conceptually, so that in some instances an alphabetical order governs, or at other times a root word forms the basis of a strange new lexicon. When the travellers produce as many words as they can from the root word ‘kaffir,’ Winterbach creates an interesting linguistic artefact. The distinct discursive positions from which Willem, and Ben and Reitz are operating are grimly highlighted here:

“Kaffir chief,” says Ben, “bird with an extremely long tail.”

“Kaffir captain,” says Willem, “chief of a Kaffir tribe.”

“Kaffir pebble,” says Reitz, “pebble found in gravel to indicate the presence of diamonds.”

“Kaffirboom leaf miner,” says Ben, “insect found on the kaffirboom.”

“Kaffir grave,” says Reitz, “hump across a road to prevent water erosion.”

(25)

While Ben and Reitz use “kaffir” in an empirical Darwinian sense, Willem foregrounds a Social Darwinist perspective. The list continues in this manner, with the term used in both scientific and social contexts. Winterbach appears to be foregrounding the arbitrariness and pervasiveness of the application of racist terminology by presenting these words as a kind of lexical set, and in so doing subverts the historical Afrikaner myth of white supremacy. Because the organising logic of this collection is arbitrary, she manages to avoid “centralized sameness” (Ogunsanwo qtd in Gaylard 98). As in *Garden of the Plagues*, where the hanging garden is organised by an epistemology now lost to readers, the world-view that accepted ‘kaffir’ as a commonplace and unoffensive prefix is now lost. It is the arbitrariness of the organising logic of these collections that signals this. The multiplicity of discourses are held in tension so well in these sections specifically because the words are linked associatively rather than by either a Darwinian or Christian framework. In this way, it could even be argued that the word games provide a sort of coda for reading the rest of the novel, suggesting a formal, structural role for the word lists.

Both Gaylard and Hutcheon note the importance of resisting the assimilation of historical data of this kind. For Ogunsanwo, if myth is to be reworked in a postcolonial context, “there can be no assimilation of one narrative mode by another” (qtd in Gaylard 98). According to Hutcheon, the presence of unassimilated material signals that a text may be considered as historiographical metafiction rather than historical fiction. She writes that “[h]istorical fiction [. . .] usually incorporates and assimilates these data in order to lend a feeling of verifiability (or an air of dense specificity and particularity) to the fictional world” (114). The deployment of ‘kaffir’ in the fireside dialogue, for example, works in this way. It is the *unassimilated* nature of the word games that sets their content up for interrogation, so that “[a]s readers, we see both the collecting and the attempts to make narrative order. Historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today” (Hutcheon 114).

In a similar way, Ben and Reitz collect their scientific observations in their journals, and so the journals might be considered another example of unassimilated historical data, but unlike the diary entries in *Garden of the Plagues*, the reader is never allowed direct access to the content of Ben and Reitz’s journals. These journals seem rather to function symbolically, as talismans of rationality. Ben and Reitz hope desperately that General Bergh is a “reasonable” (64) man, and the word choice is significant. If he does not display sufficient reason, then he may not understand these emblems of rational thought. Even being parted from the journals momentarily causes Reitz severe discomfort: “[He] feels dizzy. This is the end, he thinks. It is the tragic end. [. . .] There is an uncontrollable crawling sensation in his armpits and groin” (63). Immediately, the diction signals a discursive shift to a world not organised according to a Darwinian logic. Reitz is now forced to deal in “sensation” rather than fact, and the result sets him off balance, and makes him feel “dizzy” because without his scientific ordering, his world is “uncontrollable” (63).

The journals contain empirical information organised, presumably, according to a post-Linnaean, Darwinian system; however the characters’ connection to them is profoundly emotional, even spiritual. This echoes Argyrou’s argument about the naturalisation of epistemologies of environmentalism. Because such philosophies relate to physical, tangible surroundings, it is difficult to remember that the human perception of such a sense of place is constructed, shifting and unstable. This is a realization that Ben and Reitz come to, when their Darwinist outlook is threatened. Argyrou describes the contemporary radical resistance to historical notions of the natural world as a “phenomenon of change” (73), thus locating his

argument not in the validity or otherwise of environmentalist claims, but in revealing the shifting sensibilities which have given rise to such a movement. In fact, Argyrou shows the environmentalist movement to subscribe to the same unifying epistemologies that began with the Enlightenment, despite claiming otherwise, because of its subscription to a “logic of sameness” (73) (if humanity is no longer separable from the natural world, then both are being governed by a master logic). The “change” then, is located in the response to and rhetoric surrounding environmentalism, which figures it as fundamentally different from its historical epistemological predecessors.

By the time Ben enters the domestic realm of women, without his journal (the journal might be considered symbolic of the Darwinist outlook on the natural world), he has lost the ability to communicate, both physically and emotionally. Reitz feels the loss of the journals too, and attempts to remember their contents to ward off his nightmares. These Linnaean collections encompass Reitz’s *Geology* and Ben’s *Natural History*. Reitz also mentally lists the geographical locations they have passed through, as well as the names of the dead, in a kind of litany. These instrumental lexicons, which were collected together in the journals and which Reitz now attempts to recall in his head, are “his bastion and defence against the dark, desperate clustering and knotting of his feelings” (194). However, “sometimes no names, no knowledge can shield him from the repeated horrors of his dreams” (196). Slowly, inexorably, the necessity of facing his psychological injuries in the form of his occult dealings begins to dawn on Reitz. Finally, the reader’s inability to access the content of the journals, and their eventual loss, possibly signifies the inevitable inaccessibility of the past, and the need to entertain, and hold in tension, various epistemologies in order to attempt to bridge this gap. This is the project of all historiographical metafiction, and this is what the project of collection, evident in each of the novels, displays so well.

In these ways, *To Hell with Cronjé* manages to skilfully entertain opposing world-views without collapsing into a postmodern miasma, devoid of value judgements. In her unobtrusive manner, Winterbach manages to write emotionally convincing characters without losing sight of their textual and historical significance. The novel makes palpable the arrival of Darwinian epistemologies in a God-fearing community, and, through the sensitive characterisation of figures such as Willem, maintains the integrity of both pre and post-Darwinian thought. The novel might

also be read as an important feminist offering, as Winterbach's portrayal of women during wartime works to complicate traditional representations. Although the novel considers silence and loss in various guises, and women are often figured as the site and source of these silences, Winterbach's female characters are far from passive. Rather, the silences and occultism considered through the course of the narrative create space for an alternative construction of "the world of the father" (MacKenzie 108). It is this consideration of interiority that makes her rethinking of the South African War so important, and so intrinsic to the study of the role of fiction in historiography.

Chapter 3: Meditations on Failure, Artistry, and the Angel of History in Etienne van Heerden's *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*

If Brownlee and Winterbach have been implicit in suggesting the presence of historical influence in the contemporary moment, Etienne van Heerden makes this notion explicit in *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* (2002). His skilful overlay of three temporal narratives means that his characters commune with their collective and individual histories in a tangible manner, bringing to mind the palimpsests that are explored visually in the work of South African artist William Kentridge. Although, like the two previously discussed novels, this work debates the metatextual historical account, it also considers the role of art in society, and so it places strong emphasis on the visual and material elements of its content. Because of this, it may be helpful to think of Van Heerden's tale as an attempt to rewrite history in spatial rather than linear terms. The foregrounding of the physicality of the landscape, emphasised in the conceptual focal points of water, gold, stone and feathers, as set against Van Heerden's tendency to "[deal] rather liberally with time and place", in the words of one reviewer, Larsen (par. 7), seems to corroborate this stance. The enduring presence of stone in the lives of multiple generations of Yearsonenders is far more concrete than any temporal chronology, for example. This meditation on material permanence, in the form of the rocky Karoo setting, is countered by the impermanence of human endeavour, artistic or otherwise. The continuing inaccessibility of the sought-after Kruger gold links up well with the absences discussed in *Garden of the Plagues* and *To Hell with Cronjé*. Also present is a new example of the fractured subject, with Mario Salviati, the deaf-mute Italian Stonemason, providing a direct correlation to the unnamed Girl in Brownlee's text. The driving force behind the novel's plot, namely the attempt to remove the Staggering Merman from Jonty Jack's care and fix it in permanence in a gallery, constitutes an active resistance to the entropy which Jonty's other work undergoes in his sculpture garden. Here the gallery and the garden appear as conceptually charged, bounded spaces in the contemporary thread of the novel's multiple narratives, and this serves to bring many of the historical concerns of this study into the present moment.

The central plot thread of *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* is an attempt by city-bred Ingi Friedländer to acquire a sculpture, ostensibly by little known Karoo artist Jonty Jack, for a

gallery in Cape Town. Jonty Jack denies being the creator of the Staggering Merman, claiming that it simply appeared one morning, “just as though it had sprouted from the ground overnight” (5). Thus, in the first lines of the novel, a meditation on origins is announced. There is considerable slippage between the temporal narratives of the novel, just as the three distinct clans of the village – the Pistoriuses, the Berghs and the Molois – are proven to share ancestral bloodlines. In fact, these slippages are a central feature of the novel. Ingi’s mission to procure the sculpture quickly becomes forgotten as the town’s communal gold lust is revealed, and its historical secrets are prised open in the process. The novel is peopled with characters both dead and alive, across three generations, which means that the action spans from the close of the South African War to the post-apartheid transition period. Watching over it all is a very earthy angel who seems a wonderfully irreverent echo of Walter Benjamin’s ‘angel of history.’ The cumulative effect is strange, as this sustained meditation on failure is delivered in a magic realist text whose language is rich, even fantastical. The resultant tone is quite celebratory, and it is perhaps this paradox that has left critical judgements on the text divided.

Christopher Hope, particularly, takes issue with this tone which he sees as tantamount to South African exceptionalism: “[the] idea that anything or anyone is ‘special’ has been a one-way ticket to disaster in South Africa” (par. 7). However, in the same breath, he concedes: “it would simply be over the top, without Van Heerden’s happy discovery that flights of fancy are precisely what South Africa lacked in the drear years of racial obsession” (par. 6). Michiel Heyns praises the “narrative vigour and the richness of the imagination” (“Review” par. 8), while Peter Terry, speaking on SAFM’s “The Bookshelf” review panel, called the novel “turgid, clumsy, pointless, pretentious and unbelievable” (5). Opinion is similarly contradictory on the use of magic realism, with *Publishers Weekly* convinced that “the bloom may be off the rose with regard to magic realism as a genre, but Van Heerden proves that there’s plenty of life in the form” (45), while a *Kirkus Reviews* writer calls it “a laboured magic realism [. . .]. Ambitious but diffuse” (par. 3). A similar pattern emerges on the perceived quality of the translation. Perhaps all this speaks less to the inherent worth of the novel – it is, after all, widely acclaimed and winner of an M-Net Literary Award – than it does to Van Heerden’s willingness to frustrate his reader with his tendency to mix up, rather than keep distinct, his three temporal narratives. Terry makes a telling comment in this regard, lamenting that “Etienne van Heerden keeps pulling the rug out from under my feet! I keep losing my balance! He seems not to be respecting his own

conventions,” and later: “[b]reaking the rules of realism in novels is very tricky stuff, in my opinion. I think it’s dangerous hop, skip and jumping between realism and allegory or fantasy at will – and all without giving the reader some clues, which is what I think Van Heerden is guilty of” (5).

Happily, this study is primarily concerned with novels which break the rules of realism. Hutcheon identifies that “postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest. It uses and abuses the very structures and values it takes to task” (106). If Terry feels that he is ‘losing [his] balance,’ it is potentially because Van Heerden is writing a historical novel in a style that, like both Brownlee and Winterbach’s texts, “problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge” (Hutcheon 106). One of the ways this realization typically manifests is in the fracturing of the traditionally unified, humanist subject. In *Garden of the Plagues*, this was seen in the competing discourses voiced through Wijk, and the epistemological inaccessibility of the silent Girl. In *To Hell with Cronjé*, the loss of the diary and trunk is figured metaphorically as a loss of some integral part of Ben and Reitz’s selves, because these items represent the rationalist, Darwinian logic according to which they can no longer operate. At this point Ben, too, is physically silenced. It might be useful then, in light of the contradictory reception of *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*, to begin by considering the ways in which the depiction of the title character is unconventional.

Challenging Unified Subjectivity

In her attempt to define the revisions currently being enacted in the writing of historical fiction, Hutcheon draws on Kaja Silverman to argue that “we cannot isolate language from discourse or discourse from subjectivity” (168). This has obvious repercussions for revisionist historiography, which deals so extensively with the authoritative, teleological, empirical discourses that it identifies as constitutive of traditional historiographical practice. It means that the creation of alternative subjects is central to the project of the writer of historiographical metafiction, since this allows the reader of history to

understand the subject in more culturally and historically specific ways [. . .]. i.e. in terms of a range of discursive positions available at a given time, which reflect

all sorts of economic, political, sexual, artistic, and other determinants, instead of in terms of a monolithic symbolic order.

(Silverman qtd. in Hutcheon, 170).

Mario Salviati most obviously defies traditional subject characterization in his silence. Language is widely accepted as one of the formative components of the subject because “language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality” (Benveniste qtd. in Hutcheon 168). Since Salviati is without language, he must find other, more material means of communication and self-identification. Upon arrival at Yearsonend, he holds a stone above his head as a symbol of his trade and, ironically, is the only Italian prisoner of war to be assigned appropriately that day, because translation errors mean that language fails the other immigrants. Big Karel Bergh and Mario Salviati (also known as Dumb Eyetie) consider their contract, unlike those conducted through language, to be “chiselled in stone; an understanding of certainty and durability” (Van Heerden 59). Thus is Mario Salviati introduced, and he continues to identify with stone for the rest of the novel. This grasping after permanence is a trait shared by many of the characters, and all ultimately fail. In the end Mario Salviati appears to identify more with stone than an external, animate, social self, and this seems directly linked to his linguistic separation from the world. In his old age, a joyful moment is compared to “a stone with water spilling over it; but he did not laugh, because he’d long since forgotten that he had a face” (198). This also connects him, of course, to the other character imprisoned at the Drostdy, the woman without a face, trapped in time in the same way that Salviati is trapped in his body. Van Heerden identifies Mario Salviati with the permanence and solidity of stone, when in fact his body is frail and displays the passage of time. Just as his body is prone to change, so too are the historical locations from which we know and retell stories – a realist historical methodology might portray its knowledge as ‘rock solid,’ but in fact, Salviati’s characterization exposes “the realist assumption of the transitivity of language and of narrative as an unmediated way to represent history (or some reality that exists outside of discourse)” (Hutcheon 177). Salviati is without language, and so his inner self must be imagined, guessed at, and actively interpreted by the reader. Historical subjectivity, Van Heerden shows, is as inaccessible to objective, empirical comprehension as is Mario Salviati. If an imaginative leap is necessary for historical representation, then making this process visible, according to Hutcheon, presents the only ethical methodology for an engagement with the past.

Salviati's silence can also, obviously, be analogized as the traditionally silenced histories which are being emphasised through the text. By making the unknown (and unknowable) characters inaccessible, just as Brownlee does with the Girl and Winterbach does with young Abraham, both victims of historical traumas, Van Heerden avoids attempting to impose narratives on these silenced figures, which would be to mimic the methodologies of historical fiction. Instead, Salviati is cut off from the reader and the narrative is only focalised through him for fleeting, abstract moments. Yearsonend, too, is emphasised as a space that is not entirely knowable. The reader is introduced to the town in a section focalized by Ingi, the outsider, and much emphasis is placed on missing archives (in the form of the lost maps leading to Gold Pit), misunderstanding, secrecy and silence. Ingi's curiosity about the history of the town (even the town's name signals an engagement with historical time) is received with animosity, particularly by Jonty Jack, inheritor of the town's entangled past:

She was finding out more all over the place, he knew. About him. About his father Karel Thin Air. About his mother Lettie Pistorius. About all the things that should be left unspoken and worked into sculptures instead. Because art can capture the past so much better than the writings of historians.

How can you ever comprehend a community like Yearsonend if you look only at dates and forced removals and statutes and facts?

(171)

For Jonty Jack, and at this moment of metatextual reflection, one assumes for Van Heerden, too, the history of Yearsonend is comprised of the subjective histories of its constituents. This means that the efforts on Van Heerden's part to destabilize the notion of a unified subject in his characterization of Salviati also works to comment on literature's role (analogous to the artistry in the above extract) in historiographical representation.

Mario Salviati is not the only character upon whose body the destabilizing forces of history are enacted. In fact, the narrative is full of maimed and physically deformed characters. Referring to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* specifically, Hutcheon notes that "nothing, not even the self's physical body, survives the instability caused by the rethinking of the past in non-developmental terms" (118). Catholic Lorenzo's birth mark is understood according to a Calvinist historical discourse, and so he becomes Lorenzo 'Devil-Slap.' One-legged Meerlust Bergh, of mixed race heritage, also falls outside of normative discursive conventions. Despite his respectability, the Yearsonenders resist integrating the family fully into the community: "Doing

business with Meerlust Bergh was all very well, but he was still a half-breed. And his wife, beautiful though she may be, is not one of us, it was said” (Van Heerden 119). His physical difference becomes the site at which he constructs his narrative of self, so that his collection of false legs play into his aura of flamboyance and material success. Upon his first encounter with Redbeard Pistorius, Pistorius is surprised to see Meerlust swapping his ivory leg for a wooden one: “‘This one,’ Meerlust indicated, with a smile, as he fastened the wooden leg and the servant stored the ivory leg in a special case, ‘is more comfortable than that elephant’s tusk. I wear the ivory when I go out. It just makes a better show’” (173). Meerlust points here to the constructed nature of his identity, as he negotiates being both a benefactor and victim of colonial governance and ideology. Simon Gikandi says of his work on the postcolonial subject that his goal is

to try and understand what happens when we read Africa – and the African – through acts of cultural translation and negotiation, using a lexicon that was produced not simply by the opposition between colonial modernity and African traditionalism, but one that had been produced at that liminal scene where the self becomes the other and the lines between the two were blurred or folded into one another.

(357)

Van Heerden appears to be using a lexicon of physicality to understand the entangled colonial subject. The ‘blurred’ and ‘folded’ distinctions between self and other are written onto the characters’ bodies. In this way, the intangible effects of ideology and discourse are rendered physically immediate. This seems to be a trope in which Van Heerden is particularly interested.

Another marker of traditionally unified subjectivity is the practice of naming. Naming, in this study, has been shown to be intricately connected to the rationalist project of categorization, and in *Mario Salviati*, characters often go by multiple names, creating slippage between times, places and people, and resisting the categorical impulse of the imperial project. Salviati himself is referred to as ‘Dumb Eyetie’ by the Yearsonenders, Ingi Friedländer becomes simply ‘Miss Lander,’ ‘Field Cornet’ Pistorius becomes ‘Redbeard’ Pistorius, and ‘Big’ Karel Bergh becomes Karel ‘Thin Air’ after his disappearance (this is interesting as the name shift suggests that his materiality has diminished after the failure of his project). Names in the novel are loudly symbolic: the town name “Yearsonend” suggests the indeterminacy and inescapability of history, whose “stories are carried forward by the wind, from yard to yard, from doorstep to doorstep, from year to year” (188), which Van Heerden works so hard to convey. Names are also,

however, often historically significant. Ingi's surname 'Friedländer' locates her in the contemporary narrative of the setting, at the forefront of transitional politics as 'Friedländer' directly translates as 'peaceful land,' in contrast with the violence occasioned by the apartheid regime. Place markers such as "Blood Tree" and "Little Hands" (where the hands of five children killed in concentration camps during the South African War, and destined for the Queen as evidence of English brutality, are finally buried), remind the reader of some of the violence out of which this political shift has emerged. This collection of names which all inhabit the contemporary narrative strand illustrate Van Heerden's technique of overlaying past traumas with present developments in a palimpsestic fashion. This is also evident in his narrative structure, and the way he deals with time in the novel to achieve this end deserves attention.

Temporal Overlap

One of the most potent epistemic influences of the empirical project is the naturalization of a chronological, teleological conception of time, history, and progress. In unpacking this notion, Gikandi illustrates how a binary is often established in postcolonial discourse, which separates precolonial culture from a culture 'eroded' by colonialism. To this end, pre-colonial culture is represented as "a world existing outside four integers of modernity – temporality, subjectivity, reason and agency" (360). This has already been discussed in this study with regard to Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues*, where the essential modernity (according to these criteria) of pre-colonial cultures was argued. It is worth mentioning again, however, because it seems plausible that Yearsonend and its inhabitants fall outside of these four integers. Temporality is treated palimpsestically rather than teleologically; unified subjectivity is fractured, reason is undermined by, among other things, Van Heerden's use of magic realism, and the characters are frequently portrayed as victims of, rather than agents in, their own historical locations. Gikandi shows the dangers inherent in a "conception of temporality in the colonial zone [that is figured] in the grammar of the pre-modern and the modern divide; their operative premise is that modernity [is] essentially a culture of time, that its informing category [is] what one philosopher of the politics of time in modernity has called a 'temporal dialectic'" (362). *Mario Salviati* resists this 'temporal dialectic' by enacting a pre-modern temporality in the contemporary moment,

conflating present and past and moving away from a developmental conception of historical progress.

There is another way of interpreting this treatment of time. Granny Siela Pedi, a character whose agency is violently removed, muses that perhaps it is a good thing that “we don’t always know which part of our sorrowful history has gone before us and which is still to come” (60). The notion that one’s history is already mapped out, and that one unknowingly lives through a pre-existing life trajectory, lends a note of predestination to this line which is characteristic of the way Van Heerden writes about history, dealing as he does with circuitous syntaxes and palimpsestic temporalities. This is a tendency that Gikandi warns against. Using Kenyatta as a case study, Gikandi shows up the colonial implications of the pre-existing narrative into which he is written by his biographer, Murray-Brown:

The precolonial Gikuyu world, as Murray-Brown understood it, was incapable of the sociological imagination, that is, the capacity to differentiate between levels of knowledge, and understand the process of rationalization, otherwise known as modernization. Without much evidence or demonstration, Murray-Brown asserted that the Gikuyu mind was frightened of rationality, which it constructed as a threat to the harmony “between human life and nature with a single created whole”
(361)

Yearsonend’s inhabitants *do* appear to have a difficult time differentiating between levels of knowledge, and the harmony between human life and nature *is* depicted in Jonty Jack’s art. This might be where Van Heerden comes close to celebrating South Africans as essentially un-western and somehow outside of a globalised modernity, and it is perhaps to this that Christopher Hope refers when he bemoans the “hot bundling of black and white, good and bad, African landscape and wildlife, into a soupy brew that those who drink it feel has changed them, set them apart, made them ‘special’” (par. 7). Hope identifies a note that “is hit again and again – deep down we are interrelated in a rainbow coalition of talented souls, reaching from the Bushmen to the Boers to the new black government of liberation. It is the same old tosh – brilliantly updated, but still tosh” (par. 7). For Hope, this amounts to dangerous South African exceptionalism.

So, while the palimpsestic overlay of temporality in the narrative does work against the traditional impulse to view history as progressive, it also sets up the possibility for painting all historical situations and characters with the same brush, and foreshortening the span of time that separates the contemporary moment from the historical one, an acknowledgement that is

essential if one is to recognise the difficulty of accessing or representing any kind of historical experience. Van Heerden is defensible for the following reason: his subtle variations in tone, whereby historical characters are often treated irreverently, I would argue, sets South Africans up as different but perhaps not ‘special.’ His representation of artists through the ages is quite cynical, and speaks as much to the way art becomes co-opted by political regimes as it does represent some kind of historical truth. Hope’s criticism, however, remains valid.

Thus far, the term ‘temporal narrative’ has been used fairly loosely to differentiate the different historical plot strands that are present in *Mario Salviati*. It might be useful, however, to consider the concepts of time and narrative more formally in a novel that insists on defying convention in their deployment. Ricoeur illustrates the connection between lived time and narrative as follows: “narrativity is the mode of discourse through which the mode of being which we call temporality, or temporal being, is brought to language” (*A Ricoeur Reader* 99). So, self-narration as connected to subjectivity, and temporal narration as connected to plot, can be paralleled in their reliance on language and discourse. Ricoeur shows, further, that the ‘temporal being’ to which he refers is ill-served if it is expressed in purely chronological terms. This is because chronology “takes into account neither the centrality of the present as an *actual* now nor the primacy of the future as the main orientation of human desire, nor the fundamental capacity of recollecting the past in the present” (100). Heidegger, says Ricoeur, calls this a “dialectic of intentionalities,” which describes a “threefold present: a present about the future, a present about the past, and a present about the present” (100). The following paragraph, which signals a structural shift between one temporal narrative and another in *Mario Salviati*, is worth quoting at length, because it illustrates this dialectic exactly:

[Ingi] walked in the tracks of the black ox-wagon, and she didn’t know that – yet again – it was trekking up the road she was on; and that Meerlust was waiting with the black field cornet, Moloi; and that Redbeard Pistorius was looking up, narrowing his eyes because he could see a man with a wooden leg and a wide hat with a shadowy plume, but he could also vaguely make out another figure. Perhaps it was the sun in his eyes, he thought, but, no, it was definitely a young woman in strange clothes. He shook his head and thought: it was too much, more than a year out in the wind and the weather. And he looked at Ingi walking down the dusty road, and at Meerlust bowing with a flourish of his hat and he thought: Up to here, dear God, and no further.

(267)

Preceding this paragraph, the reader has been immersed in Ingi's contemporary narrative. Following it, we shift to Redbeard Pistorius's historical one. Ingi belongs to one narrative strand, and the ox-wagon, Moloï, Pistorius, and Meerlust, to another. By merging the two strands here, the historical and the contemporary both inhabit a single present. Ingi inhabits the future of the place that she and Pistorius both occupy. Their shared physical location constitutes Pistorius's "present about the future" and Ingi's "present about the past" (Ricoeur 100). It is the location of Yearsonend that belongs to all three narrative strands, and so it might be argued that in this way Van Heerden is reimagining history in spatial, layered terms rather than linear, chronological ones.

Ricoeur takes as the starting point for his analysis a meditation on time by Augustine: "If nobody asks me, I know; but if I were desirous to explain it to one that should ask me, plainly I know not" (qtd. in Ricoeur 103). This paradox, which plagues the experience of time in day-to-day living (Ricoeur chooses *within-timeness* as a term for "that 'in' which events occur"), is often addressed, if not resolved, by narrative discourse (100). The two are intrinsically linked because narrative is the mode of discourse by which we express experiential time, while temporality is the ultimate referent of the narrative mode. What makes narrative able to engage with the difficulties of experiential time is that while "time experience is *mute*, narrating is *eloquent*" (100). Ricoeur takes as one example of temporality that narrative makes explicit, chronology. He shows that

[a]ll narratives combine in various proportions, two dimensions – one chronological and the other non-chronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension. This dimension characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events.

(106)

This might be said to be applicable both to traditional historiographical and literary writings. What *Mario Salviati* does is to make the configurational dimension of its narrative (for example, as seen in the passage quoted above) *explicit*, so as to make the often veiled narrative impulse of historical writings, which focus on the episodic dimension but are of course governed by both, *implicit*.

Because of this, story-telling, particularly of the metatextual kind exemplified in this study, allows us to distinguish between the "*abstract representation* of time as linear [and] the *existential interpretation* of temporality. Story-telling achieves that in a fundamental way by

revealing the existential traits of within-timeness over and against the abstraction of linear time” (Ricoeur 108–9). It must be assumed that Ricoeur uses ‘story-telling’ here instead of narrative as he means it to apply to ‘literary’ rather than ‘scientific’ (historical) narrative formation. Van Heerden’s magic realist style allows him to overlay the past onto the present palimpsestically, so that the black ox-wagon, whose drivers and oxen are long dead, treks up the road of Ingi’s narrative “yet again” (Van Heerden 267). This forms one of many examples of Van Heerden’s ability to consider the existential properties of historical time “over and against” (Ricoeur 109) teleological chronology. Interestingly, in trying to move away from a linear temporal epistemology, Ricoeur too draws on spatial diction – prepositions such as ‘over,’ ‘inter,’ ‘paralleled’ and ‘within’ proliferate – in the same way that Van Heerden’s historical narrative appears dimensional rather than progressive.

Emplotment, a function of narrative which Hayden White shows to be applicable to both historiographical and literary writings, does not escape Ricoeur’s attention either. Emplotment is the mechanism that binds the narrative episode to its configuration, since it “superimposes ‘the sense of an ending’ – to use Kermode’s expression – on the open-endedness of mere succession” (110). Compounding this, is the fact that once a story becomes well known, “retelling takes the place of telling. Then the following story is less important than apprehending the well-known end as implied in the beginning and the well-known episodes as leading to the end” (110). In other words, as in the case of popular histories and founding myths such as the ones being dealt with here, chronology is overturned because the ending is implicit in the beginning, and so the succession of events is read from the perspective of the end point – ‘backwards’ according to a chronological sensibility. This circularity and repetition is emphasised again and again in *Mario Salviati*, and is what lends the text its note of predestination. The text *is* predestined, according to this narrative theory, because the tales of the South African War and the post-apartheid transition around which it orientates itself have become national founding myths, the endings of which are implied in every retelling. Jonty Jack’s sculpture garden seems to be treated similarly: in trying to tell the history of the country and community, his art ends before it is even birthed; he refers to his incomplete sculptures as “aborted” early on in the novel (93). Ingi muses that the troubling history of Yearsonend is

like Jonty’s sculpture garden [. . .]. In his own way Jonty was carving his people’s history up there in his sculpture garden. Every totem or image was trying to tell a

different story; in the night winds and in the heat of the day the sculptures stood motionless, staring at each other, bound to one another over time and distance. And they had nowhere else to go: this was their preordained place.

(250–1)

This conversation between past and present is enabled by the mechanics of narrative, as illustrated by Ricoeur. Van Heerden illustrates this conversation by making the influences of history visible through this use of temporal overlap. However, a geographical overlap is also taking place.

Irene Lampak, wife of Meerlust Bergh and partner in the business that finances the Feather Palace, could perhaps be thought of as representative of the Indonesian slave influence in South Africa's history. However, whereas the import of Malay slaves into the Cape by the Dutch East India Company speaks to the violent and oppressive colonial regime of the seventeenth century, Irene Lampak is a figure of material and cultural wealth in *Mario Salviati*. In fact, Amsterdam provides the backdrop for the meeting between Irene Lampak and Meerlust Bergh. Since places are usually symbolically significant in this novel, this seems more than coincidence. Irene is also “newly divorced from her husband, Anton Doubell, a Dutch civil servant in Indonesia” (296). So, contact zones between the Netherlands and Indonesia are played out here in Indonesia, Amsterdam and South Africa. Lampak appears to be a representative product of this entangled history because, because while she is certainly an agent in her hybrid identity construction, she is also confined to the margins of the Yearsonend community because of it. She resolves, upon arriving in Amsterdam, to “reject the advances of all men and focus on her career” (296). The resolution crumbles upon meeting Meerlust, but she remains an empowered female character through the course of their narrative. None of this changes the fact that she is also maligned because of her difference. The tension between economic power and social acceptability are played out in Irene's immodest habit of bathing in Lampak's dam on Sundays, titillating the men of the town: “Of course, they'd never acknowledge it to anyone – officially she was a coolie or a Chinky and off-limits. However, Meerlust's money and status, her beauty and refined manners led to a kind of acceptance: a precarious balance between friendliness and distance” (311).

The historical permutations of the contact zones described above manifest in “entanglements” according to Sarah Nuttall (*Entanglement* 1). She theorizes creolization as active rather than inherited, so that, while creolization certainly originally grows out of the enforced cultural proximity necessitated by slavery, and thus happens “in a context of deep loss: loss of a home,

loss of rights and political status, and overall terror” (*City Forms* 733), this acknowledgement must coexist with a recognition that creolized subjects are agents in their own cultural production:

[Even] within this most violent of systems, as recent studies are showing, cultural traffic occurs – mutual mimeries, border crossings, mutabilities. The notion itself, therefore, does not foreclose possibilities of ‘resistance’, nor does it deny the material fact of subjection. It signals a register of actions and performances that may be embodied in a multiplicity of repertoires. In this sense, creolization is first and foremost a *practice*.

(734)

Further, “[if] slavery and the creolization it produced were crucial to early modernity, it was also crucial to the formation of diasporic communities. The articulation of race to space and motion is an integral part even of Marxist readings of early modern forms of racial identity making” (734). It might be said that, in a structural echoing of these contact zones, entanglements and creolizations, Van Heerden organises the spatial and temporal narratives of his novel to reflect this meeting of materialist philosophy, empiricism and mysticism, figured in the exotic characterization of the oriental Lampak.

If Van Heerden’s representation of historical time is to be imagined in spatial terms, then Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope must be mentioned. The chronotope is, according to Todorov, a “spatiotemporal complex characteristic of every novelistic subgenre” (14). In Bakhtin’s text *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981), the chronotope is described as a space in which “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (84). This seems to describe accurately Van Heerden’s style, in which the temporality of the novel ‘thickens’ as its characters inhabit multiple temporalities simultaneously. Ricoeur conceives of “within-timeness” (or, primary temporal experience) as “mute” because it is inexpressible and narrative temporality (or, secondary temporal experience, perhaps, since it is expressed at a remove) as “eloquent” (100). In a parallel fashion, Bakhtin considers the difference between natural and human sciences, with his chronotope being applicable to the human sciences only.

He explains that the human sciences “are the sciences of man in his specificity, and not the sciences of a *voiceless* thing and a natural phenomenon. Man, in his human specificity, is always

expressing himself (speaking), that is always creating a text (though it may remain *in potential*)” (qtd. in Todorov 17). So, the human sciences, because they are interested in “not just man, but man as producer of texts” (17), deal always with narrative, and, therefore, take as the subject of their study an expressive and expressing object, as opposed to the natural sciences, whose subject of study are mute objects. This is interesting because in Van Heerden’s novel, natural objects and physical materials are animate – the gold “calls out” (135), the water “refuses” (90), and the Karoo stones “sing” (188). Even the ostrich feathers “undulat[e]” (300). This might be because all these inanimate materials are animated by their inclusion in the human artistic project, or the production of texts. This includes them in Bakhtin’s chronotope, as relating to the dialogical subject, rather than the monological ‘*thing*,’ because these are things represented within the dialogical text. So, the dialogism between silence and permanence on the one hand, and expression and impermanence on the other, can be paralleled with the narrative mechanics that Van Heerden utilises. Both of these elements are embodied in Van Heerden’s text.

The Artist’s Tools: Stone, Water, Feathers, Gold

The dialogic relationship between that which is present and that which is missing was discussed in detail in relation to Brownlee’s text, *Garden of the Plagues* and Winterbach’s *To Hell with Cronjé*. This analogy might be extended to discuss the relationship between permanence and impermanence in *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*. Bakhtin contends that utterance is always already doubled in the context of the novel, because the novel’s ability to draw attention to itself as a product of the literary imagination means that language becomes not only a signifier, but also the signified (Todorov 66). However, novelistic discourse is capable of still more variation. Bakhtin differentiates between single-voiced and two-voiced discourse in the novel, with the former presenting a unidirectional semantic orientation, and the latter two different contexts of enunciation (71). So, for example, when the inhabitants of Yearsonend call Irene Lampak “a coolie or a Chinky” (Van Heerden 311), two contexts are implied – the context in which this mode of reference to the Other was acceptable, and a more modern context, written into the contemporary narrative inhabited by Ingi, in which it is not. This constitutes “two contexts of enunciation: that of the present enunciation and that of a previous one” (Todorov 71). It is to be

assumed that the narrator of *Mario Salviati*, since he (or she) narrates omnisciently and in the past tense, occupies the present moment.

It is useful to bear this in mind when approaching the scene in which the shadows are described at the Feather Palace:

Yes, the dead are long gone, but their shadows still go about their daily tasks. In the morning you can see a hasty shadow move across the yard to the well. You can't see the handle turn or the bucket go down into the depths, or hear the handle's complaining squeak, but you can see the shadow of someone working, and the shadow of a bucket, and of water splashing on to the dust from the full bucket on the way back to the house, though no drops hit the ground.

(273)

The scene carries on for some time, detailing the movements of Lampak, Bergh and their servants in the form of their shadows. All that tangibly remains are the material remnants of the prolific business they shared: the feathers still sewn into the “rows of hats in all shapes and sizes [. . .] displayed on the shelves” (282). The lingering shadows speak to the impermanence of the human lives that once cast them. So, the historic narratives in the novel provide one context of enunciation, and the contemporary placement of the omniscient narrator, another. These historical and contemporary discourses are in dialogue with each other – the utterances of the historical characters now only visible in the influence they have on future generations. Only the shadows remain.

The same meditations on permanence can be applied to Karel Bergh's life work. His chosen material is stone, rather than feathers, and while his lightning water channel survives and nourishes the town of Yearsonend into perpetuity, the monumentally named ‘Big Karel Bergh’ vanishes upon the perceived failure of his project, and henceforth becomes ‘Karel Thin Air.’ Mario Salviati's communion with his natural material also transforms him. While Karel Bergh is made insubstantial by his failure to set his legacy into permanence, Salviati becomes *more* substantial; however, he is still figured in terms departing from the human. The more he works with his beloved stone, the more he comes to resemble a creature of the natural world. He is compared at different points to both a lizard and then a crustacean. The intense labour starts transforming his hands so that they “resemble a crab's pincers” (76). Eventually he can “scarcely still hold a knife and fork” (76). Similarly, the lightning channel itself is, in places, “as sinuous as

a snake slithering across the landscape in lazy curves” (75). A way of reading this departure from the human might be offered by Karen Jennings’ exploration of the palm stone in *Mario Salviati*.

Jennings, interestingly, interprets Salviati’s palm stone, the stone he picked up to communicate his profession upon arrival, and which eventually grows into his hand, as “a means of rationalizing the vastness of a landscape in abstract form, while still showing an awareness of its limitlessness” (7). To do this, she draws on the notion of the sublime which cannot be fully expressed because “[a]ny discourse of the sublime also embodies, paradoxically, its own representational failure as the immensity of the sublime object or experience exceeds the capacity of language to represent it” (Wittenberg qtd. in Jennings 1). Because the palm stone is both part of the landscape, and part of Salviati, it represents a non-site, and complicates the divide between human and landscape. If the Karoo landscape is conceived of as sublime here, then the construction of the lightning water channel might be considered Karel Bergh’s attempt to impose a logic on the irrationality of the sublime. The sensibility that enables the building of the channel is a positivist one – it is the mathematical law of Bernoulli that ensures that the water will make its way over Mount Improbable and down into the town of Yearsonend. However, it is a natural element, intangible, imperceptible dust, that causes the water to “refuse” (90). Karel’s attempt to impose reason on the infinity of the Karoo landscape is the root of his failure – “[f]ailure like you’ve never seen it before” (90). Salviati’s palm stone, upon which the map to Gold Pit is recorded, becomes “‘a 3-dimensional perspective that has broken away from the whole’ [. . .]. The stone has become a tool not only for communication, but also for representing, or rationalizing, the sublime” (Jennings 8). Towards the end of the novel, the ageing Salviati dies, but the sublimely aged palm stone (stone in the Karoo is so old and prolific as to seem almost ageless) remains and is cast back into the landscape. It seems representative of the permanence of the rock which characterizes the landscape, in contrast to the impermanence of human efforts at historical legacy.

Stone and water are symbolically bound in the novel. If stone is made to seem ageless in contrast to the vitality and impermanence of human endeavour, water is viewed as a life bringer. Historically, water is symbolically significant to the arid Karoo. Mario Salviati is characterized according to both elements, so that after the secret location of Gold Pit is revealed to him, “there was something in him so big that he felt it was going to burst out past his dumb tongue. It was like a dam of water in his breast, and his disability was a stubborn wall with no floodgate: the

silence of Mario Salviati” (92). In this way, Salviati becomes a part of the Karoo landscape – his fractured and inaccessible subjectivity means that Van Heerden is able to alter the historically binaric relationship between subjectivity and the natural world. Argyrou shows that modernity has comprised a process of conceptual unification through which everything in existence is incorporated into a single logic, ending with the environmentalist movement abstracting the natural world (the final frontier of difference, unknowableness, specificity as it were) so that it fits within this reductive epistemology of sameness (ix–x). He draws on the critique of Richard North to show that some consider environmentalism to be “‘a dangerous idealism about the relations between human beings and nature’, an idealism which is explicitly linked to ideas of secular salvation in a this-worldly Garden of Eden,” which, like the idealization of indigenous populations living happily in a state of nature, is “‘a myth, ‘a largely invented idea’” (77). The environmentalist movement views this collapse of distinction between people and environment as humanity getting somehow closer to nature, but Argyrou shows such an epistemology of sameness to require increased distance, rather than proximity, from which to view all the phenomena of the earth. He takes as his watershed moment for the environmentalist movement the ability to view the earth from outer space, in its totality (39). Salviati’s immersion in the landscape by taking on physical elements of the natural world defamiliarizes the contemporary environmentalist position of human being as part of nature. Speaking broadly about the use of the magic realist mode in Afrikaans fiction, Sheila Roberts points out that, in the shadow of the testimonies revealed at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, transitional novels often “‘reach their own moment of reconciliation, however open-ended” (88). While it is evident that this novel deals with this legacy metatextually, by presenting variations on historical truth, and amplifying the importance of personal memory, an internal reconciliation between humanity and landscape is reached in the title character of Mario Salviati. It might be argued that the ‘myth’ Argyrou shows such a reconciliation to be is displayed in the defamiliarizing techniques Van Heerden uses to characterize Salviati, who is materially and physically a part of the elements, rather than discursively or conceptually, as contemporary environmentalists are. He becomes representative both of the stone into which he pours his life-force, and the vitality and fragility of the human condition. This is, significantly, all the novel offers in the way of resolution, and the mysteries of the plot are never solved.

Perhaps the most enduring symbolic material presented in the novel is gold, as it forms the driving force behind the actions of many of the characters and links all three temporal strands together. Gold is unrelenting in its undiscovered presence, and it is the continued failure to acquire the gold that appears to keep Yearsonend trapped in its own history. This is compounded in the scenes at the Drosdty, where the uncanny longevity of General Taljaard seems attributable only to the continued absence of the gold. It is here that audible echoes of the past are often heard, and here that the woman without a face is imprisoned. The gold comes, variously, to symbolise different desires for different characters. Taljaard is ruled by an unwholesome greed, and desires material wealth for its own sake, reflected in his grim characterization: Ingi smells “garlic on his breath, and old wounds” (235). The Edenville residents plan to divide it among themselves in more socialist fashion, and so the modest desires of the poor (situated ironically, in the allegorically named suburb) are expressed as follows:

If you share it out surely everyone will get a bucketful? And just think of what you could do with that. Clothes for the children, a new lintel for the door, now that the ants have eaten the old one right through; a new stove, perhaps a bicycle, or – no harm in dreaming! – an old Ford or some other wreck as long as it has an engine and four wheels; a new hat to wear on Sundays, white gloves for the wedding!
(209)

However, the Edenville contingent also, in this moment, grow uneasy about the Xhosa labour imported for the building of the lightning water channel: “What would these new people, so foreign in the Karoo, bring with them? Say the gold was found, what would they demand for themselves? And were they going to settle here in Yearsonend?” (209). In the same breath, the gold is the site at which xenophobia is articulated.

In a more abstract sense, the gold represents self-discovery for Ingi. Musing upon Yearsonend’s historical obsession with the metal, she thinks, “I’ll investigate this story and take from it whatever’s important to me. I’ll find my own gold – perhaps not the Kruger coins, but something worth so much more: my features, my vision” (277–8). One senses that couched in Ingi’s search for her own features and vision is Van Heerden’s identification of the same processes being enacted at a national level in the transitional period. As Ingi tries to find her artistic vision, Van Heerden attempts to consider the role to be played by art in the new South Africa. Later in her article, Roberts identifies two themes common to South African magic realist transitional literature. First is the notion of South Africa “as a life-giving country, capable of

bestowing material and spiritual wealth to its multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan population” (95). Second is the “equally powerful theme [of] how to live so that dying on South African soil provides a meaning that reflects back over the lived life and forward into future generations” (95). The first of these trends speaks to the material permanence represented in Mario Salviati as an articulation of desire. The second, to the impermanence of human life and endeavour as set against the South African landscape.

Art in Post-Apartheid Society

In a review of *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*, Brendon Nicholls shows that the argument of Gaylard’s text locates itself in both imaginative aesthetics and politics, and that in fact the two are inseparable:

The logical conclusions [of African modernism] follow inevitably – the rational imperative to be politically committed often fails because it is unable to imagine social alternatives. In short, Gaylard argues for the crucial role played by the imagination, and the literary fiction that enlivens it, to progressive political projects.

(1)

Such a statement might be applied to the artistic project in a changing South Africa. This means that Van Heerden’s text is self-reflexively doubled – it is consciously an example of the subject matter it represents. When Jonty Jack muses on the ability of art to produce the imaginative leap that history books cannot, it is clear that Van Heerden is also considering his role as documentarian of a changing country. Thus, Jonty makes a distinction between art that tells a “true” history and art that is co-opted by politics for symbolic purposes; the kind of art to be found in “journals and fashionable theories” (171). “Come to my sculpture garden,” Jonty implores, “and you will find the grief, the tears, the blood, yes: all those old-fashioned things” (171). Interestingly, Gaylard calls for a “parapolitical” or “infrapolitical” (*After Colonialism* 244) relationship between the spheres of art and politics, because while both spheres enact a political objective in encouraging a collective to imagine “social alternatives,” they should also be able “not to oppose but to highlight and balance the tensions emerging from within political opposition and hybrid subjectivities” (Nicholls 2). This presents a framework in which to view

Ingi's personal narrative, whereby she moves from being a "pen-pusher" (171), in Jonty's estimation, to an artist in the true sense of the word once more.

Upon first arrival, Ingi's presence in Yearsonend is purposeful and well delineated. The object of her visit is to purchase Jonty Jack's Staggering Merman for display in a gallery in Cape Town. She never doubts her ability to buy the piece; "she'd never experienced that kind of failure; in all her undertakings, in and around Cape Town, no artist had ever turned her down" (24). By the time she finally sets eyes on the sculpture, however, she has already failed, and it is this failure that liberates her artistry. Jonty tells her "[y]our heart isn't in the deal. And never will be" (199). Consequently, Ingi is able to appreciate the Staggering Merman organically. This moment of recognition is crucial for both Ingi's character development and the expression of this trope in the novel, and so is worth quoting at some length:

The sculpture is already so much more than I see before me here, she thought. It has grown: not just miraculously out of the earth, but also in the imaginations of people in the remotest corners of the country. In her mind's eye she saw the sculpture, bought and standing in a small cordoned-off space with gilt-framed paintings hanging on the walls around it. She saw Madam Speaker posing beside the minister with a glass of wine, the arts journalists, the critics and the arts dealers circling each other, and she smelt the stink of money and sparkling wine and savoury snacks and envy.

'And are you absolutely certain that the gentleman is . . . not white?' the museum director had asked.

And Ingi's answer had clinched the museum's decision to acquire the sculpture: 'I believe he's of mixed origin.'

(200)

This enforced hybridity runs counter to the organic hybridity of the Staggering Merman. Ingi describes it as having been carved from two trees, "twinned together as they grew: a tree of shadows and a tree of light. [. . .] Here the sculpture had overcome its gloomy side, she saw: it thrust up, reaching for liberation, as though the darker side had been vanquished and the Staggering Merman was breaking free into the blue sky above" (199–200). To relegate this sculpture to a gallery, Ingi realizes, would be to "tangle ourselves up in gestures and symbols that in the long run don't . . ." she searched for words, gesticulating wildly ". . . that don't *smell* of anything" (201). Here, the Karoo setting is linked to sensory vitality, while the gallery space stagnates – the smell of wood shavings and cow's urine that Ingi associates with the sculpture would be replaced by "the stink of money and sparkling wine and savoury snacks and envy"

(200). This point is reinforced over and over: “The mountain veld lay wide before them and they looked out over the landscape, the blue Karoo hills and the horizon. ‘This is my gallery,’ cried Jonty Jack, throwing his arms wide in the wind” (201).

This presents another example of the bounded spaces which have been explored in Brownlee’s and Winterbach’s work already. Here, Jonty Jack’s organic sculpture garden, known as “[t]he cemetery” (93) is contrasted directly with the gallery which Ingi has in mind as the destination for the Staggering Merman. Entropy is set against preservation in these scenes. Jonty’s works are perpetually unfinished, and are often referred to as “aborted,” even “crippled” (93). When “a piece of wood [goes] dead under his hands,” it must be disposed of, “consigned to the place where wind and weather [will] take its course; where termites and small scurrying creatures [will] do what need[s] to be done with the old wood; working it over, devouring and digesting it and ultimately converting it into something else” (93). Entropy can perhaps be aligned here with chaos, and permanence, perfection, with rationality. Jonty denies being the creator of his only perfect piece of work, and it is perhaps in this acceptance of failure that his creative ethic can be found.

The empirical categorizing impulse found in the gallery is critiqued again too – the Staggering Merman would have no meaning once “cordoned-off” (200). Instead, Jonty Jack offers a garden filled with pieces of “tin and metal and ostrich feather, and plastic junk and scrap iron, and wood and paint, and kitsch and earnestness, and sadness and imperfection” (171). This is argued over and over as a more ethical mode of representation than any attempt at permanence, which is ironic, given Van Heerden’s chosen method of creative output. The irony is announced in what the reader senses may be a metatextual conclusion to the passage. Jonty shrugs: “And my, how the brandy inspires me to pontificate about my art!” (171). Van Heerden’s argument seems to be that bureaucracy, linked here to empirical rationalism, is a deadening force no matter the regime – “these days you don’t join the liberation movement, you throw in your lot with the pen-pushers – that’s all that’s left of the struggle” (171), moans Jonty. His garden, in protest, perhaps, is contrastingly chaotic. It represents the lack of definition that Van Heerden embraces in a number of ways in his text. Foremost among them is his deployment of magic realism.

According to Gaylard, one of the most substantial effects of the use of magic realist aesthetics by postcolonial African writers is the production of a defamiliarized moment, giving rise to a pause that allows for a different perception of reality. This defamiliarization is evident in all

three of the texts under consideration in this study, and particular attention has been paid to the use of oxymoronic juxtaposition as a function of defamiliarization. At a conceptual level, the juxtaposition of rationalism with a more spiritualist animism has formed one such oxymoron. In *Mario Salviati*, for example, the rational Redbeard Pistorius, who ends his days as the town lawyer, tries to rid himself of his desire for Siela Pedi by consulting a Sangoma. However, these oxymoronic juxtapositions are also evident at a textual level. Ingi's teleological narrative – evidenced both in her initial goal of purchasing the Staggering Merman, and in her subsequent detective work in trying to string together a coherent version of Yearsonend's history – is thwarted by the iterative, palimpsestic structure of the text.

Jonty Jack, purveyor of artistic rather than rationalist truths, mentors Ingi in this rejection of instrumentalism. He says of one of her daily walks up Cave Gorge that “‘You’ve just taken twenty minutes to walk from here,’ he indicated the front end of the telescope, ‘to here,’ and then the other end with the eyepiece” (290). His consideration of the nature of her journey takes on a metaphysical significance:

‘I’m not joking,’ Jonty continued. ‘Listen again. As far as I’m concerned, you walked from here to here.’ He gestured at the front and back ends of the telescope again. ‘And as far as you’re concerned, you walked along the path, from down at the gate, through under the trees, to here with me.’

‘So what?’ asked Ingi, uncertainly.

‘That, Miss Friedlander, is your lesson for the day!’

‘My lesson?’ She laughed, and took a mock swing at him.

‘Yes,’ Jonty replied playfully. ‘I want to teach you to be curious about the right things.’

‘Is that so?’

‘Yes – because which of your two journeys is the real one?’

(209)

So, in the juxtaposition of Ingi's two journeys, Jonty Jack defamiliarizes the automatically perceived notion of the journey and creates a moment of pause. Postmodern writers do this routinely by undermining the traditional realist narrative. Gaylard shows that by using certain techniques, such as authorial interjection, for example, these writers manage to make the reader simultaneously aware of both their imaginative journey through the narrative with the characters, and their journey through the physical text as they read. Narrative time and the reader's lived time are often juxtaposed in this manner too, as the author successfully “violates narrative linearity and the suspension of disbelief” (Gaylard 115). As for the purpose of all this, Gaylard

suggests that, as with the role of artistry, this works to reinvigorate the African imaginary, a process that is crucial in the wake of so many failed independent states.

In the same vein, Gaylard asserts that the kind of temporal narrative that is employed by Van Heerden, which moves in “epicycles,” “tends to bring strange bedfellows into synchronic propinquity or parallel” (117). So, in *Mario Salviati*, it is the iterative circularity of the narrative that allows for the paralleling of the apartheid regime’s manipulation of Arts and Culture with the post-apartheid government’s attempts to co-opt artists such as Jonty Jack. The new regime’s interest in the arts is viewed cynically by Ingi, as the replacement of national cultural symbols gets underway:

The air was filled with a musty, dreary smell, and the cleaners’ cheers echoed through the corridors: they’d stood behind the rope railings waiting until the last of the enormous oil paintings – a massive work depicting the last apartheid cabinet – was taken down and lugged off to a cellar. Ingi pointed out that the cellar was no place to store paintings: the air was too damp. Everything is being done too hastily, was her objection. These things may refer to a distasteful period of history, but they are still artefacts from the past. But the Speaker explained that other arrangements would be made – a museum of neglect and transgressions perhaps.

(164)

Van Heerden appears humorously distrustful of the whole curatorial enterprise here, whereby the organising logic of the day dictates the value of the artefacts being archived. In this extract, an obsession with the monumental, the traditional, stable, and paternal, is reacted against with a desire for visible diversity and hybridity. The President requires a new parliamentary mace, “without the colonial connotations of the existing one,” and so the Speaker wonders, ““can the art museum organise something for us? Perhaps an outstanding artist from a rural area? A Black woman, ideally, who has a way with a knife and an instinct for national symbols?”” (164) For Jonty Jack, the artistic project lies in the unfinished process rather than the resultant object, and so even the Staggering Merman, Jonty’s only finished piece to whose creation he never admits, must be relegated to the sculpture garden. It is the process of removal, of cordoning off, that Jonty can’t stand, as it gets in the way of becoming “one with all things” (370) – an echo of the contemporary holistic conception of environmentalism described by Argyrou. Jonty can thus be seen to fully embrace a new epistemology of place and ecology, one that rejects the Enlightenment penchant for categorization that has preceded it. Of course, the consideration of the role of artistry in society has obvious parallels with Van Heerden’s own writerly project.

Gaylard suggests that self-reflexivity works to “expose and demystify authorship, suggesting not only the creative brilliance of the writer, but also the limits of creativity and selfhood as partial and inchoate” (116). Certainly, Jonty Jack is painfully aware of his own artistic limitations, and is shown again and again to descend from a long line of fractured subjects; it is eventually revealed that he believes the woman without a face to be his mother, Lettie Pistorius. Hans Ester, similarly, says of Van Heerden’s particular brand of postmodern self-reflexivity that it “criticizes the hierarchies of power not only in society but also within literature itself. This type of postmodernism acquires an ethical dimension because of its questioning of the conventions we use to order the world in systematic patterns” (177). Gaylard concludes that in this way, “postcolonialism reminds us that narrative conventions are not only literary tricks, but are part and parcel of the way in which we humans understand our own existence in time which is via narrative” (116).

The same might be said for the historical project the novel undertakes. Van Heerden applies these ‘literary tricks’ to his historical narrative as a way of understanding his own familial history as part of a communal narrative of the past. In his acknowledgements, he cites as inspiration both a personal anecdote and a collective history:

Jose Burman’s account of the Thornton ostrich expedition to North Africa in her book *The Little Karoo* (Human and Rousseau, 1981) was of considerable assistance. My mother sent me the book years ago with the suggestion that I use the information in a novel. Together with a plaited leather belt given to my father by an unknown Italian prisoner of war who worked at our farm in Doornbosch during the Second World War, the book provided seminal inspiration for this novel.

(438)

Paul Murray comes to a similar conclusion in his thesis on “The Historiographic Metafiction of Etienne van Heerden.” Although authorial biography shouldn’t be relied upon too heavily in any literary interpretation, it is interesting to note that in the family tree presented in the opening page of the novel, “Van Heerden’s line features strongly [. . .]. [A]s a writer, he inscribes himself into the past and thus into the text – all three lines feature; Huguenot, Dutch and English” (67). Murray goes so far as to assert that Van Heerden “chose the word “Bloedboom [Bloodtree in the English text] for the very reason that he involves himself in a personal history of the past” (67).

Eventually, Jonty decides to confront his personal history, which coincides with the town's communal history, and access the remains of his father, which have until now been out of reach. This presents a danger, however, because "in a strange way we're afraid of finding the gold, because then we'll only have the future" (387). The gold represents, simultaneously, the past and the desire to be free of history. If the gold were to be found, "[w]e'd be able to leave the past where it belongs – with yesterday, with what is gone." However, "we know there'll be a huge fight once we find it – we'll have to decide who gets what" (387). Only a partial resolution is offered, so that the past is confronted but the gold remains elusive. Sheila Roberts concludes her thoughts on Afrikaans writers' use of magic realism by responding to a statement by Malvern van Wyk Smith. Van Wyk Smith asserts that "[i]n the space, the liberated zone, left free or wrenched from the oppressor, the imagination of the oppressed can only repeat, like a litany, its own history" (qtd. in Roberts 96). This echoes directly the sense of predestination and circularity that haunts Van Heerden's narrative, and speaks to Ingi's conclusion: "[t]he past, she thought, that's your prison, all of you" (138). To this, Roberts adds that "a liberated zone has opened up for Afrikaners (inevitably regarded wholesale as oppressors) in which their writers can rewrite mythologically (even as a litany) their past history and their future in South Africa" (96). This seems to resonate with the project of *Mario Salviati*.

What is crucial here, is that the problem of the gold is never solved, or rather, Ingi solves it by returning Salviati's palm stone (the only remaining copy of the third map) to the landscape, thus rendering it forever absent and unknowable. This can perhaps be fruitfully paralleled with Sandra Young's take on alterity in the post-apartheid archive. Speaking on the testimony of Mrs Konile, mother of a murdered ANC activist, she meditates on the perceived incoherence of her testimony, and suggests that "[g]reater openness may call for a relinquishing of certainty and sovereignty, and a willingness *not* to comprehend" (115). Mrs Konile's testimony is incomprehensible because it falls outside the framework of reconciliation set up by the TRC. Young looks instead at attempts to read Mrs Konile's incoherence – the frequent punctuation of her speech by sighs and pauses, for example – as a "radical step" (118). By "refusing catharsis in favour of insisting on her devastation at not being able to be a 'person,'" Mrs Konile makes evident the fact that personhood is defined by "the terms prescribed not only under apartheid but also within the post-apartheid moment of TRC-style politics" (118). Young shows that the incomprehensibility of Mrs Konile's testimony must be understood "as a product of the limitation of the TRC's particular

archival endeavour” (118), so that the importance of refraining from translating the strange into knowable terms is emphasised. Similarly, Van Heerden’s characters often refuse comprehension and reconciliation is denied at the close of the novel. Mario Salviati, as previously discussed, is a largely inaccessible character, and his strange relationship with Ingi, which develops into a quasi-romantic attachment that leaves the reader feeling distinctly uncomfortable, defies understanding. Van Heerden offers no moralistic resolution to these inconsistencies, and closes his novel by stressing the vitality and singularity of the Karoo landscape of which Salviati was so inseparably a part:

She took Mario Salviati’s palm stone from her jeans pocket and, without looking at it properly, flung it as far as she could into the plains, among the other stones and low shrubs. Then she climbed back into her yellow Peugeot, and when she came to a slight rise, she saw a herd of springboks prancing, those ballerina leaps. ‘Mario Salviati,’ she whispered to them, as they raced over the rocky plains, free, exuberant, fleet of foot and fired with the joy of being alive.

(434–5)

Of course, this also encloses the circular movement of the narrative. The passage above occurs as Ingi leaves Yearsonend without the sculpture which she came to acquire. It forms a direct echo of Ingi’s observations on her entry into Yearsonend, when, “[a] hundred metres from the vehicle, a herd of springbok took to their heels, bounding into the air, leaping like ballerinas” (9). Ingi doesn’t progress teleologically – she leaves having failed in her mission to purchase the Staggering Merman, literally where she began.

Young shows how a commitment to accommodating the strange in this way is challenging, because “the ‘strange’ almost by definition, resists assimilation and comprehensibility within the given interpretive frame” (119). She goes on to assert that the TRC translators’ “evidentiary and interpretive practices as committed investigators/intellectuals threatened to become ineffective and irrelevant to their own purposes” (119). This directly correlates to the attempt to represent unknowable or “strange” micro-histories using a realist framework, when the realities being presented ought not to be assimilated into a rationalist, empirical logic.

Young engages critically with the TRC project of unification, and shows how this requires the remaking of a cultural archive for political ends. She defines the archive of TRC testimonies here as having a shifting signification, “which bears relevance to a much larger political project that has, at its root, the remaking of history and public life in South Africa [so that] [. . .] the

reading of an individual testimony carries this national and political frame” (120). In other words, despite the inclusiveness that this politics of unity encourages, it results in “un-strange-ing the strange” (118), which runs counter to hospitality’s demand for engaging with alterity. This, perhaps, is the conundrum that the magic realist genre attempts to address, and this is why Jonty Jack’s sculpture garden allows for alterity and entropy in a way that the gallery space would not.

The Angel of History

In addressing alterity in the post-apartheid archive, Young calls for “a more open methodology” in order to approach the material of the TRC “responsibly” (121). The same might be said for the political appropriation of art – as discussed in the previous section – and for the documentation of history. It has already been noted that Van Heerden offers a radical interpretation of history as spatial and palimpsestic rather than linear and progressive, and this is perhaps best encompassed by his inclusion of the angel figure. Not only does this figure present a strange temporal link between the layers of narrative, which structurally binds the magic realist text effectively, it also offers an irreverent take on the notion of historical documentation generally.

Van Heerden’s angel character observes the goings-on in Yearsonend without intervention. He is described as part bird, part human, and although he isn’t an agent, he is distinctly material, leaving feathers, bird droppings and the smell of cinnamon in his wake. At the opening of the novel, when the Italian prisoners of war arrive at the Yearsonend station, he takes apparent delight in the missteps and blunderings of the live characters as their communal history unfolds. Some characters, such as Captain Gird, who records the goings on of subsequent generations in his paintings, and the Matron – daughter of Edit Bergh and Mario Salviati – are able to see the angel, while others only sense his presence. Captain Gird “[carries] with him the restlessness and nomadic habits of his life into death; he [is] still in a hurry to capture everything” (60). In this scene, although long dead, he captures the angel at the arrival party for the Italians:

And there on the red-hot boiler of the black steam engine, next to the funnel still spewing out wisps of smoke, the angel lounged at ease, his large wings relaxed and slightly spread as he surveyed the scene. He poked about catching fleas under his feathers and a thin white trickle ran from under his buttocks round the curve of the engine’s boiler.

Both Captain Gird and the angel deserve attention – Gird because he represents a meeting point between an imperial categorical logic and the fantastic, and the angel because he observes history without being able to alter its course, and so serves as an echo of Walter Benjamin’s ‘angel of history’. Both watch, but cannot intervene.

In attempting to capture a giraffe’s measurements perfectly, Gird kills it in order to ascertain “the distance between hoof and knee, knee and groin, between shoulder and neck, between chest and head” (18–19). The cruelty of this action causes him to repeat it, like a litany, in death. His painting style develops, however, into one less constrained by the strictures of realism. Eventually, in an attempt to pander to his English audience and exoticize his subject matter, he begins adding extra trunks, eyes and heads to his animal studies. And while he is an inflictor of violence and represents the harsh colonial regime of his day, he is simultaneously a figure of fun, observed with amusement by his guide, Slingshot X!am, as he leaves colourful fingerprints on his trousers when he scratches his buttocks. He is also an artist figure, who at the end of the novel raises his hat in acknowledgement of mutuality with Ingi and Jonty Jack, and he is shown to have fathered Sara Bruin, who contributes to the matrilineal line of the coloured Bergh family. In these ways he is an obvious representation of Pratt’s contact zone, and while he is more of a symbolic character than a fully fleshed out actor in the narrative, he certainly isn’t one-dimensional.

The angel also plays a symbolic role in the novel, and he is similarly unconventional. It is useful to quote Walter Benjamin’s passage in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” describing the ‘angel of history’ at this point:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress.

(257–8)

The parallels between Benjamin's and Van Heerden's respective angels are unmissable. In fact, on the night that the gold is buried in the surrounds of Yearsonend, arguably the epicentre of the plot, the angel tracks the ox-wagon's progress across the Plains of Melancholy with increasing distress as a storm brews: "Gulping at the gusts, hovering on wings as strong as men's backs, his buttocks straining together against a wind that chased black storm clouds over the naked plains, the angel kept an eye on developments" (228–9). Later, the angel flees:

Caught in disbelief, the angel strained against the wind and then, making a decision with a sound between a whinny and a coo, between that of a horse, a dove, and a man, he dived away and disappeared, leaving all of them behind, because there was nothing to be done; there was only the unfolding of the story, the horror that was taking its course as though it had been predestined.

(230)

While Benjamin's 'angel of history' is treated with gravity, Van Heerden's angel picks at his fleas and leaves droppings on the head of the Staggering Merman, one of his favourite roosting perches. He is immensely beautiful, but also solidly material – an "African angel" (132), in the words of Matron Taljaard.

Benjamin writes of his angel from a historical materialist perspective, and argues that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. [. . .] [Barbarism] taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another" (256–7). According to this philosophy, "cultural treasures" such as those produced by Captain Gird (his paintings end up in the royal palaces of Europe), owe their existence "not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries" (Benjamin 256). The implied lament is that the histories of the contemporaries of great historical actors are not recorded. As a result of this inequality of representation, it is the task of the historical materialist, according to Benjamin, to dissociate himself from the traditional historiographical process. Instead, "[h]e regards it as his task to brush history against the grain" (257). Accordingly, Van Heerden writes in a history for Slingshot X!am, the guide on whom Gird relies so heavily. In fact, this is the project in which all the novels studied here are engaged, and, ironically, Van Heerden brushes Benjamin's own 'angel of history' 'against the grain' by representing it as irreverently material.

Van Heerden routinely uses irony to as a tool for meditating on failure and in this way his angel figure seems to encapsulate the stylistic and philosophical centre of his novel. In response to opponents of the brand of reflexive postmodernism that Van Heerden uses, Hutcheon argues that in historiographical metafiction

there is no lack of concern for history or any radical relativism or subjectivism (Lentricchia 1980, xiv). Instead there is a view of the past, both recent and remote, that takes the present powers and limitations of the writing of that past into account. And the result is often a certain avowed provisionality and irony.

(90)

Perhaps this, more than anything else, presents a useful summation of Van Heerden's magic realist Karoo history. It is this use of irony that allows a novel whose characters' desires remain unfulfilled, and whose action is cyclical and predetermined rather than progressive, to maintain an engaging pace. All of his conceptual focal points, from characterization to the treatment of temporality and narrative, are painted 'against the grain,' in the words of Benjamin. He does this by rooting his history in material and spatial rather than chronological terms, and in the process reflects self-consciously on the artist's role in society. *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* thus threads together many of the concerns of historiographical representation in a novel that makes history palpable in the contemporary moment.

Conclusion: Literature and History in Contemporary South Africa

A few interlocking constellations of ideas have emerged through the course of this study. It has been the project of literary philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century to destabilize the notion of a fixed or transparent discourse. To this end it is evident that the postcolonial, historiographical, and literary concerns elucidated by the theorists and authors under consideration display considerable intersection, and articulate with one another in what may be envisioned as a three dimensional relationship. A separate, but linked, nexus of thought pertains to the different epistemologies studied in each of the novels at hand. We began with the Enlightenment, as represented in Brownlee's *Garden of the Plagues*, and considered how the categorical impulse of the natural historian developed into the Darwinist philosophies on offer in Winterbach's *To Hell with Cronjé*. Van Heerden's novel occupies three temporal strands, and brings the study into the contemporary moment, from which we might contemplate the natural world as the 'final frontier' of the global sphere.

The way the novels deal with these entanglements of philosophies and temporalities is, perhaps foremost, to be found in their united resistance to a realist methodology. The ingenuity of realism is that it effaces itself as style almost entirely, making the resultant narrative seemingly authoritative and transparent. Both realism as an artistic force, and what we think we mean by realism (a 'realistic' representation gains power because of its claim to verisimilitude), might be considered stable and stabilizing. It is, thus, essential that the sensibilities employed by the novels to counter realism's stronghold, namely occultism, expressionism, animism, and magic, remain explicitly *unstable*, both in deployment in this study, and in literary effect in the texts at hand. This creates the defamiliarized pause that is so crucial in a narrative that encourages self-reflexivity – a pause that gives readers space to consider their own positioning in relation to the historical narrative. For this reason, the strategies of defamiliarization employed by Brownlee, Winterbach, and Van Heerden have also been of particular interest to this study. It is by way of these literary tactics that these authors embody the concepts outlined here, and it is for this reason that literature is singular in its ability to establish a felt experience of the historical moment.

Historiography, Postcolonialism, and Historiographic Metafiction

The relationship between the disciplines of history and fiction is traditionally a fraught one, primarily, as Michael Green demonstrates, because “they are so closely related. As a result they are antagonists in a kind of civil war all the more bitter for their – often repressed – affiliation” (122). The interfaced nature of this relationship has been explored in detail by countless theorists, and these studies focus in large part, as this one has, on the shifting boundaries between the two discursive forms caused by their mutual roots in narrative structures. However, this project is worth further exploration as it is particularly pertinent to contemporary South Africa, not least because of the implications such discourses have for imagining and creating nationalism. Green is particularly useful in illuminating the essentially political nature of the literary historical project:

None of the principles of coherence (language, geography, religion, ethnicity, shared temporality and literacy) usually considered necessary for the construction of the modern nation state hold for this purpose in South Africa, which makes the way in which all nations are narrated into being an infinitely more exposed issue in South Africa. South Africa’s status as a nation, then, can be nothing if not naked in its constructedness.

(122)

Further, “the new South Africa is nothing if not its own new story, in whatever way one story may be said to hold together the many and often conflicting stories making up a nation in the wake of the forced imposition of the state” (122). This brings into propinquity the concerns of contemporary historiography, literary engagements with such historiography, and the postcolonial implications for both disciplines since both are engaged in rethinking the narratives that make up nationhood.

Green draws on the inheritance of the nineteenth-century historical literary genre – the classical historical novel – and displays its interconnection with social history. He quotes Lukács on the subject, who points out that “[o]ne could go through all the problems of content and form in the novel [. . .] without lighting upon a single question of importance which applied to the historical novel alone. The classical historical novel arose out of the social novel and, having enriched and raised it to a higher level, passed back into it” (qtd. in Green 124). According to Lukács, there is no separable historical novel, since all authors are historically positioned and find meanings for

the present by drawing on the past, whether consciously or unconsciously. So, if there is no historical novel that is singularly discernible from other literary genres, we have developed a narrative self-awareness that has led to the growth of a kind of novel concerned with revealing the innate and inescapable historicity of our contemporary positioning. Hutcheon has theorized this type of novel as historiographic metafiction. What contemporary postmodern historiography has done, Green points out, is to create a pervasive suspicion towards metanarratives, which are now “considered positively scandalous [. . .] primarily because of their totalizing and appropriative properties” (124). The potential for totalizing narratives still remains, however, since the project of revealing historical influence in the present opens writing up to the danger of collapsing the specificity of the historical moment into a notion of “continuous processes” (Green 124). So, the challenge in writing historical fiction is to “hold off as long as possible the almost inevitable tendency to become *totalizing*” (128):

can it manage to keep alive the validity of the different perspectives without collapsing into mundane pluralism; can it balance contemporary critique against a lived sense of the moment of confrontation; and, most crucially, can it make history out of its subject without appropriating that subject entirely into that history?

(128)

Brownlee, Winterbach, and Van Heerden meet these challenges by embodying, in their characters, historical epistemologies, thus “keep[ing] alive the validity of the different perspectives” (128). They produce a “lived sense” (128) of the frontier spaces by representing the contact zone as replete with uncertainties and entanglements, rather than foreshadowing the historical outcome that the reader knows to be true. Finally, they avoid appropriating their subjects into their chosen historical narrative by creating them as unknowable – they are cut off from the reader by their fractured subjectivity (primary characters are deaf, or mute, or both). This project of representing a lived sense of the historical moment without appropriating that moment by collapsing the past into the present is undertaken by the authors in a number of ways. The methods by which Brownlee, Winterbach and Van Heerden defamiliarize their narratives contribute to their ability to maintain the tension between past and present, and between understanding and appropriation, that Green calls for.

The movement to challenge meta-historical narrative is also intensely political, because, “particularly in South Africa today, it is difficult to separate nationalism from narrative” (127). Colonial and postcolonial constructions of nationhood are embedded in narrative, a point that Gaylard makes repeatedly. This brings Green back to the interfacing of literary and historiographical techniques, and he expresses the hope that “if nationhood can be described effectively in narratological terms, [then] these terms must be oriented towards some kind of openness and multiplicity” (128). Thus, the interconnected nature of postcolonial nation building, contemporary historiographical practice, and literature’s response in the form of historiographical metafiction, gives rise to the need for “openness and multiplicity” (128), seen in our author’s self-referential methodologies and polyvocal use of discourse. Further, he makes the point that “the impulse towards constructing national identities (the essence of post-colonialism) in the present climate is itself suspect, in South Africa more because of the fractured politics on the ground than the anti-totalizing spirit of postmodernity” (128). The forms that we are finding in contemporary South African historical fiction articulate with both political developments and the theories of historicism that have gained agency in recent times.

Tracking Historical Epistemologies: Enlightenment, Darwinism, and Ecosophy

In his acceptance speech for the Olive Schreiner Prize – awarded in 2008 for *Garden of the Plagues* – Brownlee describes his concern with historical epistemologies. He shows how his project is both historical and postcolonial, noting that “[t]hose men of science who set foot in Table Bay were colonizers both of a land and of a mental realm. Colonization and science are both endeavours that engage in naming the world, and this became my basic theme” (6). Importantly, he also locates this epistemological reimagining in the present moment, showing that the thought processes that govern contemporary historicizing must also be made subject to such artistic analysis. Thus, his project is political and contemporary, as much as historical and epistemological. He uses the example of the renaming of roads and buildings in transitional and post-transitional South Africa to elucidate his point:

I think that it is actually of some importance that writers and artists do begin to account more for the past and make it accessible to the greater public. It is not merely an idle wish on the part of someone who has an affinity for history – I see

it as a balance to the official, symbolic, reworking of the past that is being driven by political imperatives. For many of us now, history seems simply to be a case of removing labels and replacing them with other labels. So we think we are bringing the past to life by changing the names of streets and towns and buildings. This task is a necessary one, but in many cases it seems to me that we are merely replacing proper nouns with other proper nouns. [. . .] There is something about these names that seeks to lay claim to a past, to possess it. They are all denotation with no connotation.

(7)

The desire to deal in ‘proper nouns’ that exist in the realm of ‘denotation with no connotation’ is a distinctly Enlightenment one. Thus, Brownlee is tracing the colonial origins of the Enlightenment movement in South Africa through to the present day. In this way, by considering the ‘validity’ of historical perspectives, to draw on Green, he is investing the present with new political meanings, rather than viewing the past entirely through the lens of the present. Brownlee’s use of magic realist stylistics helps to reinstate connotative connections between historical perspectives, a methodology that resists and calls into question the totalizing power of the Enlightenment.

Winterbach picks up this trend at a different historical moment with the introduction of Darwinist, and, in the case of some characters, Social Darwinist, thought during the South African War. The radicalism of considering humanity as part of, rather than master of, the natural world, cannot be underestimated. The resistance to such an idea is memorably depicted in *To Hell with Cronjé*, in the scene in which Ben and Reitz present their lectures to General Bergh:

Does he understand correctly, Gif Luttig interrupts, that Ben says man is part of the animal kingdom?

That’s correct, Ben replies (slightly taken aback); in the animal kingdom man belongs to the class Mammalia and the order Primates. With a piece of charcoal – that he specifically prepared for the purpose – he sketches a simplified diagram of Linnaeus’s classification on the rock face behind him.

The men regard the diagram with clear mistrust.

(131)

Darwinism’s grounding in Linnaean thought is clear, and the developments of such an idea are still explosive, even in the early 1900s. The decision to write an epistemological history of the South African War is crucial. Winterbach’s war is written from marginal spaces – direct action is never depicted, in fact the despised ‘Khakis’ never feature at all. The novel is set at a transit camp

for the wounded, and then a homestead. Instead of the war being depicted along the lines of traditional discursive sets – Christian fortitude against the forces of evil, or even Englishman against Afrikaner – Winterbach differentiates her Afrikaans characters into a polyvocal and heterogenous group. Reactions to Ben’s Linnaean diagram, for example, are varied:

some shift restlessly and voice their dismay in furtive murmurs. The general listens with a neutral expression, young Abraham remains rigid, Kosie Rijpma seems immersed in his own thoughts and Japie Stilgemoed and Jaanie Neethling nod at regular intervals to affirm their interest and agreement.

(131)

Winterbach is detailing the negotiation that takes place between subject and concept – each character’s reaction depends on their personal historical positioning – a point that is similarly applicable, as Brink and Green show, for contemporary readers. Indeed, “all novels are historical, in that in keeping faith with the present their object is just as profoundly historical as any moment from the distant past” (Jameson qtd. in Green 129). If Winterbach’s disparate and historically positioned characterization mirrors the processes contemporary readers are faced with, how then to respond to Green’s challenge to “balance contemporary critique against a lived sense of the moment of confrontation” (128)? The problem lies in the fact that “[s]tressing the historicity of the present moves quickly into the politics of reconstructing the past” and that “making this move too quickly [. . .] risks effacing the historical almost entirely” (129). At the risk of repeating myself, Winterbach’s attempt at negotiating these problematics lies in her magical stylistics. Simply, maintaining the strangeness (as perceived by the reader) of the historical moment is central. Winterbach manages to achieve this by her departure from the form of realism.

The Long Silence of Mario Salviati brings the study to the most recent historical period – that of the post-apartheid transitional era. In this study, the categorical impulse of the natural historian, depicted in the character of Captain William Gird, an artist and explorer whose documentation process is both creative and violent (he must kill the animal whose image he has recorded in order to take its measurements) gives way to the more integrated relationship with the natural world that Jonty Jack displays. This indicates a third, contemporary epistemology that is gaining cogency, the notion of environmentalism. Argyrou shows this sensibility to be as

powerful, but similarly as constructed, as those according to which previous generations have lived:

[u]nless one is prepared to argue, as environmentalists often do, that the modernist perception was a fateful ‘misconception’ of reality [. . .], recalling the modernist certainties may bring once again into the ‘focus of thought’ the role that history and culture play in shaping any perception of the world, including, no doubt, the environmentalist.

(5)

By this reasoning, one historical sensibility is being replaced by another and Argyrou’s book details this progression. Guattari, however, calls not for the replacement of one ordering system for another – a notion analogous to Brownlee’s lament that we are “replacing proper nouns with other proper nouns” which are “all denotation with no connotation” (7) – but for a new form of mental ecology, ecosophy, in which a politics of ‘dissensus’ is called for. In this, Van Heerden’s novel is instructive, because instead of charting a progression from one historical sensibility to another, he overlays and interlocks them in a spatial rather than chronological progression, so that the many voices of historical thought are simultaneously apparent in the present narrative thread.

Destabilizing Realism

There is some dispute about when, precisely, realism as a pervasive and comprehensive mode of signification started to falter. Gaylard contends that it has been under threat for at least a hundred years, possibly as long as four hundred. It is indisputable, however, that the advent of postmodernism saw the realist mode being challenged on a popular level in a concentrated fashion. Rushdie describes the shift as follows:

The fiction of the Victorian age, which was realist, has to my way of thinking been inadequate as a description of the world for some time now [. . .]. After that, I suppose, the 1960s represented a kind of shift in people’s perceptions. The simplest of these was the perception that reality was no longer something on which everyone could agree, which it *had* been at the time of the great age of the realist novel. For realism to convince, there must be a fairly broad agreement between the author and the reader about the nature of the world that is being described [. . .]. But now we don’t have that kind of consensus about the world.

(qtd. in Gaylard, *After Colonialism* 34)

Gaylard identifies the forces that have undermined consensus on what constitutes reality as fivefold. He lists industrial and technological developments, which have led to “an increased pace, loss of control and even vertigo” (33), the shattering of progressive notions of human achievement given the potential for “self-immolation” (33) discovered during the world wars, the acceleration of Giddens’s detraditionalization which has given rise to a human society that is “fragmented, hybrid, globalized, decentred” (33), scientific indeterminacy manifested in the work of Heisenberg and Einstein, and finally, “cyberspace, virtuality, and the rise of a number of sceptical movements” (34). These, according to Gaylard, are the primary actors in extinguishing realism as a trustworthy mode of representation.

The cumulative effect of such forces may be seen in what Gaylard terms the “popularity of non-realisms” (34), which have come to fruition under the philosophy that encapsulates such scepticism towards singular rationality – postmodernism. Crucially, Gaylard describes the development of this incredulity towards signifying systems as particularly pertinent to Africa, and as specifically postcolonial, because “these global forces [. . .] have been exacerbated by local postcolonial sociohistorical changes in the last twenty years of the twentieth century and have prompted correspondingly substantial challenges to both nationalism and realism” (34). Both nationalism and realism deal in the metanarratives so readily dispensed by the realist mode, so an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard qtd. in Gaylard 34) is not only postmodern but also postcolonial. This, then, constitutes the movement away from the stabilizing, stultifying forces of realism which depend on coherence and mutuality rather than disparity and fragmentation. Less clear is how, precisely, to challenge such a system.

If realism offers a comprehensive philosophy by which all in existence may be apprehended, a challenge to such a system would have to deal in plural, coexistent modes of signification in order to acknowledge the variegated realities that are jostling for representation. Such a process would require a movement from a stable epistemology to a destabilized one. This, of course, makes the quantification and description of such an alternative a difficult task. Words such as ‘occultism,’ ‘animism,’ ‘spiritualism,’ and ‘magic’ have been used variously in this study, but all hold together in an uneasy, shifting relationship because of the nature of the project they are engaged in describing. If metanarratives “flatten agency and iron out the incommensurable” (Gaylard 35), then the stylistics and ideologies deployed in a postmodern, postcolonial response

are often necessarily indeterminate. Gaylard identifies that one of the ways postmodernism undermines the authority of the realist mode is in its “parodic and defamiliarising use of the past, either in terms of textuality or history” (34), or, it might be added, in the unveiling of history as textual by way of being invariably narrated, and texts as inescapably historically positioned.

Bakhtin’s theory of polyvocality and utterance is crucial in delineating the postmodern and postcolonial response to metanarratives. He reveals that all novels, whether self-reflexively suspicious of realism and metanarrative or not, are made up of both direct discourse and implied contextual discourse. Because all authors are historically positioned in a pluralized existence, and because authors always orientate their writing, even if subconsciously, toward a reader, for whom the same interactive existential positioning applies, the number of discourses involved in the creation and reception of a text is always multiple and unstable, and these discourses are always related dialogically. Bakhtin’s response to structuralism is indicative of this, as he argues that multiple subjects are always implied in the text:

“In structuralism, there is but one subject: the scholar himself. Things are changed into *notions* (of variable abstraction); but the subject can never become a notion (he speaks and answers for himself). Meaning is personal: there is always within it a question, an appeal to, and an anticipation of, the answer; there are always two subjects in it (the dialogical minimum).”

(qtd. in Todorov 21)

He adds separately:

“My relation to Structuralism. Against shutting oneself in the text. . . . The resulting formalization and depersonalization: all relations are of a logical nature (in the broad sense of the term). I, on the other hand, hear *voices* everywhere, and dialogical relations among them.”

(qtd. in Todorov 21)

Postmodernism has not only destabilized the writing of novels, it has destabilized our reading of them. In fact, the novel form has always been unstable. It is perhaps for this reason that Gaylard can trace the roots of the undermining of the realist mode as far back as four hundred years. What is singular about postmodern writing, then, is the stylistic techniques used to intensify self-reflection and self-reflexivity. Together, by way of their defamiliarizing effects, they encourage a pause on the part of the reader in order to allow for a consideration of these incomprehensible elements in the historical moment.

Strategies of Defamiliarization

Sandra Young considers the challenge of accommodating “strangeness” (116) in her writing on the TRC. She shows how the downfalls of the TRC model stemmed from approaching the archival evidence and narratives of history from a realist, rationalist perspective, saying “[r]estoration could only begin when the testimonies were ‘heard’ and ‘understood,’ particularly those that fell outside the ‘norm’ of a framework that derives, at Mrs Konile’s expense, from a Western model of subjectivity and citizenship” (117). *There Was This Goat* (2009), from whence the engagement with Mrs Konile’s testimony stems, recognizes that “narratives are ‘rooted’ and suggests that the archivist needs to attend to the ‘ground’ of Mrs Konile’s narrative, and read her life, as a dispossessed, impoverished, rural woman devastated by loss, not just in her words but also in her silences, her sighs, her fantastical metaphors” (118). Young’s insistence that it is crucial to retain Mrs Konile’s ‘silences,’ ‘sighs,’ and ‘fantastical metaphors’ in the TRC archive prompts us to think about the role defamiliarization might play in a historical narrative. Mrs Konile’s silences create a literal pause that causes readers of her transcript to “imagine differently” (82) in the words of Gaylard. It is for this reason that he argues that the stylistic techniques that authors of magic realist texts use to create this pause are of the utmost importance, because the ability to accommodate the strangeness of the narratives of others is crucial both to contemporary post-transitional politics and also to the representation of a distant and incomprehensible historical moment.

Brownlee, Winterbach and Van Heerden all employ silences as defamiliarizing techniques, and they work, as in Mrs Konile’s testimony, to place the hegemonic discourse of authority in juxtaposition with that which cannot be expressed according to a rationalist logic. In *Garden of the Plagues*, this works to highlight, in a typically postcolonial manner, those peoples who have not been represented in the existing historical archive; the dispossessed include women and the original inhabitants of the colonized zone. In *To Hell with Cronjé*, Ben’s loss of his articulating, categorizing voice indicates the uselessness of such a project in the face of the irrational losses suffered during the South African War. Van Heerden’s characterization of the silent Mario Salviati places emphasis on the materiality of his craft, making the point that it is only the

material remainders of the historical moment that enter the archive, and that historical subjectivities, for the most part, remain unknown and unknowable.

Another defamiliarizing method used by all three of the authors is the oxymoronic yoking described by Gaylard, in which seemingly irreconcilable concepts are placed in juxtaposition, so that the meaning of each becomes changed. In each of the novels, various discursive and ideological positions are entangled in this way in order to gesture towards the plurality of the historical moment. All three authors gesture towards the magical or fantastical to varying degrees. Both Brownlee and Van Heerden's characters coexist in space with previous generations, now long dead, and Winterbach's character Reitz manages to reconnect with his deceased wife. This also points to a strategy that Van Heerden develops fully, but that Winterbach and Brownlee gesture towards as well, that of temporal defamiliarization. Time is viewed in all three novels not as progressive or linear, but rather as spatial and entangled. In *Garden of the Plagues* and *To Hell with Cronjé*, this becomes evident from the lack of plot progression and resolution, and in *Mario Salviati*, this is physically embodied in the topographical rendering of temporality.

Finally, all three authors make use of a trope of 'bounded spaces' in which the conceptual import of the colonial tendency to categorize and reorganize space is encapsulated. These bounded spaces, importantly, always present material objects organised according to an arbitrarily imposed logic, so that the contents appear magical by way of their unexpected juxtaposition. The materiality of such spaces (the hanging garden in *Garden of the Plagues*, the trunk in *To Hell with Cronjé*, and the sculpture garden in *Mario Salviati*) is important, because it makes concrete the intangible imaginary leap required for an engagement with the past. The point is that, in fact, each of the authors' projects is textual, rather than material, and so representing such material spaces *in* a text brings to mind the project of early colonial museums, whereby *tangible* objects arranged according to a logic not consistent with the artefact's original context are displayed so that the viewer might make *intangible* imaginative connections, as they are encouraged to do by reading the novels at hand. This point is made again and again, particularly in *Mario Salviati* with its emphasis on materiality and sensory apprehension.

Although this list could go on, and does in the body of this study, these form the primary methods by which the authors at hand deal with the challenges set out for historians and writers of fiction in the postmodern, postcolonial, and post-transitional contemporary South African

space. The particular offerings by Brownlee, Winterbach, and Van Heerden might be considered as representative of interesting and necessary developments in South Africa's engagement with notions of historiography and its collective past.

In *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*, Ingi Friedländer comes to a seminal realization. It is worth quoting again here in closing because of its broad applicability to this study: "In the city we live as though there's no time to think. We argue about Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism and tangle ourselves up in gestures and symbols that in the long run don't . . .' she searched for words, gesticulating wildly ' . . . that don't *smell* of anything" (201). In recreating an embodied representation of the historical moment, and in allowing the reader "time to think," most eloquently expressed in the ellipses indicating Ingi's search for the right words, the authors of these novels gesture towards a more tangible imagining of history – histories that *smell* of something. This is the greatest challenge presented by the discipline of historical writing, and in this we can locate Brownlee, Winterbach, and Van Heerden's greatest successes.

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Note: While I have tried, as far as possible, to adhere to the MLA bibliography style format, there have been some anomalous sources for which formatting instructions were unavailable. I have attempted to cite these sources logically, and have maintained a standard style throughout.