

# A critical reassessment of the explorer artist Charles Davidson Bell's (1813-1882) *Cattle Boers' Outspan* (n.d.)

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This article investigates the depiction of Afrikaner ancestry in Charles Davidson Bell's (1813-1882) *Cattle boers' outspan* (s.a.) (fig. 1) within the genre of explorer art. This critical revisiting of Bell – better known to philatelists as the designer of the much sought-after Cape triangular stamp – is regarded as important because it give rise to questions such as how Bell and his contemporaries employs critical devices and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of the subjects of their depictions. It is argued that Bell's work within the genre explorer art generally falls distinctly within the category of social documentation, which served the purpose of illustrating the curious and exotic within a South African historical context for a European audience. We also suggest that in the light of the scientific bias during the Victorian age that underpinned the depiction of colonised peoples, the notion of persuasive imaging is not only confined to the depiction of landscape but also to colonial depictions of Lacanian notions of *O/other*s and *O/otherness*.

**Key words:** Charles Davidson Bell, *Cattle Boers' Outspan*, explorer art, *O/other*, *O/otherness*, Lacan, Victorian age, social documentation.

## 'n Kritiese herbesoek van die Ontdekkerskunstenaar Charles Davidson Bell (1813-1882)

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die uitbeelding van Afrikanervoorgeslagte in Charles Davidson Bell (1813-1882) se *Trekboere wat uitspan* (*Cattle Boers' Oustpan*) (s.a.) binne die ontdekkerskunsgenre. Hierdie kritiese herbesoek van Bell – beter bekend as die ontwerper van die gesogte Kaapse driehoekseël – word as belangrik geag omdat dit vrae ontlok oor hoe Bell en sy tydgenote gebruik gemaak het van piktorale ontwerp en visuele kodes om verskansde en “vernatuurliking” van persepsies van minderwaardigheid van subjekte wat uitgebeeld is, te versterk. Ons argumenteer dat Bell se werk binne die genre van Ontdekkerskuns terselfdertyd geplaas kan word binne die kategorie, sosiale dokumentasie ten einde die eienaardige en die eksotiese binne die Suid-Afrikaanse historiese en koloniale konteks aan 'n Europese gehoor te bied. Terselfdertyd is ons van mening dat in die lig van die wetenskaplike vooropgesteldheid van die Victoriaanse era wat onderliggend was aan die uitbeelding van die gekoloniseerdes, nie net betrekking het op die uitbeelding van landskappe nie, maar ook op die koloniale uitbeelding van Lacan se beskouing van *A/ander* en *A/andersheid*.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Charles Davidson Bell, *Trekboere wat uitspan*, ontdekkerskuns, *A/ander*, *A/andersheid*, Lacan, Victoriaanse era, sosiale dokumentasie.

**T**his article investigates the depiction of Afrikaner ancestry in Charles Davidson Bell's (1813-1882) *Cattle boers' outspan* (s.a.) (figure 1) within the genre of explorer art. With explorer art considered to be outside the canon of European high art, the critical reassessment of explorer artists and their work has long been neglected (cf. Bradlow, 1998:10). Similarly the name and legacy of Bell have until fairly recently been generally overlooked in artistic circles, being better known to philatelists as the designer of the much sought-after Cape triangular stamp (Bradlow 1998: 10). Therefore a critical revisiting of Bell as an explorer artist is regarded as important. This revisiting gives rise to questions such as how Bell employs pictorial devices and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of the subjects of their depictions.

It is argued that Bell's work within the genre explorer art generally falls distinctly within the category of social documentation, which served the purpose of illustrating the curious and exotic within a South African historical context for a European audience. We also suggest that in the light of the scientific bias that underpinned the depiction of colonised peoples, the notion of persuasive imaging is not only confined to the depiction of landscape but also to colonial depictions of *others* and *otherness*.



**Figure 1**  
Bell, C.D., *Cattle boers' outspan*, n.d., 800x472 cm, watercolour,  
MuseumAfrica (source: Cameron & Spies. 1987:128).

The work is discussed from a conventional perspective in order to describe the artwork's formal qualities, subject matter, and thematic content. The reading is then extended by employing the Lacanian notion of the *Other/other* and contextualized by considering Victorian ideological frameworks, social realities and authoring strategies of the artwork (Lacan 1986: 94-95, 31-37, 140-154). What we mean by this is that Bell employs the European notion of the "noble savage" (Godby 1998: 146). Related to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) "back to nature" rally call, the noble savage represented an individual who was redeemed on the basis that he/she shunned society in favour of communing with nature (Fleming & Marien 2005: 504). This was a feature of much European art during nineteenth century, where the *other* was often conceived of as savages but depicted in the manner of ancient Greeks and Romans (Jacobs 1995: 10), and can be seen in the works in a number of authors and artists working in South Africa at the time such as Frederic l'Ons and Thomas Baines (Godby 1998: 146, 153).

We set off with a discussion of a postcolonial theoretical framework in which the Lacanian notion of the *Other/other* is emphasized. The postcolonial ability to combine "history with a theorised account of contemporary culture" (Young 2001: 61), and accompanying debunking of the universalist liberal humanist claims of the Western canon, serves to provide a new perspective on Bell's work and his depiction of Afrikaner ancestry in *Cattle Boers' Outspan* (Barry 1995: 191). This is followed by a discussion of the notion of explorer art in which Bell's oeuvre within this genre is described. Thereafter a reading of Bell's *Cattle Boers' Outspan* follows.

### ***Other/other* in a postcolonial framework**

One of the major concerns prevalent in postcolonial criticism is the European concept of the *other* (Ghandi 1998: 8-9, Said 1995: 78, JanMohamed 2006: 20). Thus, a postcolonial reading of colonial artworks, combined with the Lacanian notion of the *Other/other*, would serve to expose notions of colonial power as well as the demarcation between the European *Self* and the African *other*. As a mode of cultural analysis, postcolonialism has succeeded in making visible the history and legacy of European imperialism that are represented in, and by such colonial

representations (Loomba 2005: 2). It also highlights the interconnectedness between cultural production and issues such as race, ethnicity, nationhood, class, status and empire (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 6, 8).

The concept of the *Other/other* is concerned with representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral (Bhabha 1985: 155, Ghandi 1998: 8-9). As a category, the *other* is unstable and mutable and is informed by culturally and historically discursive practices. In this context the construction of the *other* represents the norms and values of the entity that constructs it, as opposed to the actual qualities of this *other* (Childs & Fowler 2006: 164).

According to Fanon (2006: 291-294) the use of the term *other* in a postcolonial context derives from Freudian and post-Freudian analysis regarding the shaping of subjectivities, predominantly via the work of Lacan (1986: 31-37). In Lacanian terms, the *other* signifies one opposite of a subject-object dialectic. The opposition between *self* and *other* is never neutral but rather hierarchical, with the self representing the positive<sup>1</sup> to the alterity of the other. The power balance in this binary construction favours the *self* and subjugates the *other* as inferior. Such constructions of the *other* may crystallise into a cultural projection of negative concepts that justify and naturalise a number of material practices such as colonisation (Childs & Fowler, 2006: 165, Edgar & Sedgwick 2006: 266).

Regarding the *other*, Lacan distinguishes between the capital letter *Other* and the *other*. Lacan (1986: 31-37) suggests that the lower case *other* identifies the *other* that represents the *self*, yet at the same time is sufficiently disconnected to be separate. In a Freudian analogy it is compared to a child looking in a mirror at the moment of becoming aware of her-/himself as an autonomous entity. This encounter with the reflection of the self elicits an imagined “anticipated mastery” that is to form the basis of the ego, and as such this *other* is instrumental in defining the identity of the subject (Freud 1937: 215ff). Ashcroft *et al.* (1998: 170) further expands this notion of the *other*, suggesting that:

In postcolonial theory, it can refer to the colonised *others* who are marginalised by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ‘ego’.

The term *Other* refers to the symbolic and the unconscious (Payne 2000: 392). For Lacan (1986:94; 143-154) this *Other* is a *grande-autre*, or grand *Other*. It is within the gaze of this grand *Other* that the subject acquires identity. As such “...in colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonised is continually located in the gaze of the imperial *Other*, the ‘*grande-autre*’” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 171).

According to McFarlane (2004: 175,176), the colonial gaze serves to denigrate and objectify the colonial *other*. Furthermore, it essentialises and fixes the identity of the colonised according to an entrenched European hierarchy of same-other/coloniser-colonised dialectics. This dialectic of difference is based on pre-existing racial categories propped up by European myths and beliefs regarding the *other* (Yancy 2008:2-4). In turn, the colonial gaze reinforced these racial categories, and the racial categories, again, served to reinforce the colonial gaze (Yancy 2008: 2).

## Explorer art

The origins of explorer art date back to the fifteenth century and its purpose were to provide objective records of a specific terrain. The first examples were sketches made at sea with the

intention to supplement nautical records. These sketches were not highly regarded or prized as artworks, but were rather regarded as scientific illustrations. However, from the sixteenth century onwards, the travelling artist was indispensable to most European scientific and diplomatic missions abroad. Therefore, it could be regarded as a form of documentation intended for an educated, middle-class and post-industrial revolution European audience, often depicting events related to aspects of behaviour of indigenous peoples (Record 1994: 64).

The eighteenth century saw an increased demand for travelling artists due to, amongst other factors, the rise of empirical and encyclopaedic curiosity in the world. In Britain newly founded institutions such as the Society of Dilettanti and the Society of Arts sent artists and scientists to record unexplored corners of the earth (Jacobs 1995: 10).

Encountering the unfamiliar was a social reality that many colonial artists had to face since the age of discovery. With the age of mercantilism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, came more sustained contact with other peoples through commerce, expansionism and settlement in foreign colonies (McLeod 2000: 7-8). Artists' aesthetic sensibilities and modes of representation were challenged by "the mixture of unfamiliar facts and ideal fictions, of conventional structures and unconventional narratives" (Rosenblum & Janson 2005: 17).

### *Aesthetic principles*

In order to present a seemingly objective account, European artists relied on a linear style so as to describe the topographic features of the landscape, depicting the scene from a higher vantage point to allow for greater scope in the foreground plane (Godby 1998: 142). Pictorial devices such as linear perspective, elevated vantage points and other illusionistic artifices (Ashcroft, 2001:15, 141) served as strategies that abetted these artists' persuasive imaging of the colonised landscape. 'Persuasive imaging' is a term used by Hills (1991: 100) to describe ways in which the viewer may be convinced of the reality of a particular depiction through the artist's employment of the conventions of naturalism, in spite of the fact that the pictorial information in question is mediated by the artist's selection and manipulation of aesthetic principles and depiction.

Representations made by artist travellers were generally intended as objective records (Godby 1998: 142). Carruthers and Arnold (2000: 14) suggest that these genre paintings were normally regarded as social documents serving to illustrate written historical records. Whether or not these works could be considered authentic fact-based depictions of reality or not, they were still employed to sustain certain interpretations and to cement hegemonic accounts of reality. Complicit in this way of thinking was the notion of the 'innocent eye', which Brown (2001: 23) describes as, "one of the most powerful Romantic myths".

This notion was particularly applied to depictions of nature and landscapes. The general conception is that an artist's innate instinctive vision would guarantee a truthful, objective depiction regardless of his or her own academic artistic training or external factors such as social, cultural, political or economic contexts. In practice, however, artists' depictions reflected their own cultural milieu and artistic imagination (Brown 2001: 24) which through established modes and conventions also supplied them their means of articulation:

The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what might be called *the innocence of the eye*; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat strains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify ... (Ruskin, in Forrest 1985: 103).

Aesthetically speaking, Boehmer (1995: 92) suggests that Europeans relied on notions of

topography familiar to them and tended to seek out those features that conformed to their own aesthetic schemes. As Boime (1990: 113) points out, the innocent eye is prejudiced, and is tainted by the artist's social position.

In support of persuasive imaging, European artists also employed pictorial devices and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of the subjects of their depictions. According to Barrell (1992: 1) particular aesthetic protocols existed that determined the depiction of specific classes and these restraints were also indicative of social and moral protocols. On a basic technical level, the use of colour, rendering of light and shadow, and composition may all be employed to codify power relations. This is eloquently illustrated in the description of Wa Thiongo'o (1993: 43) of conventional colonialist painting:

In many paintings of the colonial period, the white adventurer was always at the centre of the action with rays of light radiating outwards from him. Africans were background shadows merging with the outer darkness and the natural landscape.

The judgement of Wa Thiongo'o is supported by Boime's (1990: 2) suggestion that *chiaroscuro* transcends the mere modelling of light and shadow; that as a polarity it represents the religious dualism of Good versus Evil. Therefore, the manner in which *chiaroscuro* is employed, may also be read in terms of the Manichean allegory which itself illustrates the way in which all aspects regarding the relationship between coloniser and colonised are polarised through imperial discourse to create a binary opposition that pits good against evil and superior against inferior and, ultimately, European against *other*. The practice of distinguishing between certain groups of people by depicting one in an area of light and the other in shadow areas is, not restricted to the colonised or to race, but was also employed to illustrate other forms of social difference (cf. Barrell, 1992: 22), such as social status, and inferiority of for example, white women according to white men.

With regard to composition both Barrell (1992: 123) and Boime (1990: 95) agree that a triangle or pyramidal composition may be utilised to delineate exclusive social hierarchies within a picture, often employing a hierarchical descending order from top to bottom. Similarly, the division of the picture in different planes from top to bottom and foreground to background may be used to indicate not only the physical, but also the social position of a figure, with those regarded as inferior or subordinate relegated to the lowest register or point of the composition (Boime 1990: 19, 92, 183-209). Other devices used to signify social standing include posture and material markers such as clothing. Subordinates tend to be depicted in crouching or kneeling positions and are often shabbily dressed, in contrast to the upright poses and regal dress of élite (Barrell 1992:44, Boime 1990: 103,170,179).

Race served the purpose of more extreme juxtapositioning, as indigenous people were often employed in sixteenth-century European portraits of the upper classes to draw attention to the white complexion (Honour & Fleming 1999: 27). Such authoring devices relate to the diverse strategies and methods of control and representation of the *other* as suggested by Loomba (2005: 19), and as such – with regard to the representation of the colonies – were complicit in advancing the colonial gaze. This gives credence to Boime's (1990:6-8, 11, 155) suggestions that art can serve to define social position as well as expose the artist's role in codifying racism.

Through surveillance and documentation the explorer artist casts the "possessive gaze" of the imperial eye on all it observes, rendering it available for imperial control. By the nature of their endeavour, explorer artists, were instrumental in the process of enframing the colonial landscape and the peoples who inhabited it (Fabian, 1986: 24), thus giving credence to the

myth of a supposed empty, unused land (Van Eeden 2004: 25-26). With regard to the African continent and its inhabitants, European explorer artists played an important role in promoting the popular view that it was the duty of colonisers to bring the light of civilisation to the “dark continent”, as stated by Hoskins (1982: 248):

Eurocentric history deliberately promulgated the myth that Africa was a ‘dark continent’ replete with cannibals, savages, and inferior, uncivilised, backward, primitive peoples, devoid of knowledge and culture....(Bhabha 1991: 53).

### *Bell’s contextual background and oeuvre*

Bell first set foot in South Africa when he arrived in Cape Town in 1830. As a British settler, he represented a distinctly different community [that of Victorian England] from the local white population (Brooke Simons 1998: 17).

Even though Bell was physically removed from the metropolitan centre, he nonetheless remained an agent of the Empire, being employed by the British Cape administration and also contributing to the imperial discourse through his art-making. His ethnographic drawings from an 1834 expedition into the South African hinterland reflect the European prejudice of the day regarding Africans’ inferiority as a race (Godby, 1998: 145-146).

*The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850) (figure 2) and Thomas Baines’ *The Dispersal of Hostile Tribes near Baines River* (c.1820-75) (figure 3) are cogent examples of Bell’s manipulation of different modes of depiction employed to frame aspects that will appeal to his presumed rationalist European audience’s sense of the primitive and the ridiculous in contrast to the European colonial people.



**Figure 2**  
Bell, C.D., *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, 1850, oil on canvas, 75.9x92 cm, (source: Brooke Simons, 1998:156).



**Figure 3**  
Baines, T., *Dispersal of Hostile Tribes near Baines River*, circa 1820-1875, 600x403cm, oil on canvas (source: artclon.com).

The depiction of various racial groups as particular ‘types’ is consistent with the scientific racial discourse of the time, when it was conceived that physiognomical distinctions such as race could determine a person or a group’s social and psychological character and traits (Godby 1998: 150).

In keeping with his amateur beginnings, Bell’s early works can be subdivided into two categories within the explorer art genre, namely landscape and caricature. An example of the latter is a picture entitled *The Boer* (s.a.) (figure 4).



**Figure 4**  
Bell, C.D., *The Boer*, n.d., ink and wash, 108x167cm,  
Brenthurt Library (source: Brooke Simons, 1998:141).

According to Godby (1998: 141) this image is a caricature of the “obese and indolent ‘Boer’”, which portrays the conventional view of the Dutch-speaking farmers in the Cape Colony at that time (Moodie 1835: 169-170). Many of Bell’s caricatures can be placed in the genre of ‘native scenes’. Such depictions were inevitably stereotypical and generally intended as illustrated souvenirs for foreign visitors (Godby, 1998:148). It is noted that stereotypical representations such as these informed and legitimised colonial processes and conduct, thus positioning the colonised as marginal and inferior (Boehmer 1995: 80, Ashcroft 2001: 5). Accordingly, the British did not consider the Afrikaners, especially those in rural areas, as being of the “same order of civilisation” (Steyn 2001: 26).

### **Conventional reading of Bell’s *Cattle Boers’ Outspan***

Bell’s watercolour *Cattle Boer’s Outspan* depicts a scene that represents part of the everyday lifestyle of a *trekboer*<sup>2</sup> community. The centre of the picture plane is occupied by a white female figure sitting next to a table in front of an ox-wagon, her feet resting on a footstool. She is surrounded by various domestic objects such as a kettle and cups on the table to her left and a wooden vat to her right. A dog sitting at the foot of the table stares up at her. Left of the ox-wagon, a white male – presumably her husband, the patriarch – is standing, smoking a pipe in a leisurely manner whilst resting the barrel of a rifle on his left shoulder. He is facing away from the seated female figure towards the figure of an indigenous man busy fixing knee-halters to two horses who appear at the bottom left corner of the picture plane. The European male, female and the ox-wagon form an enclosed pyramidal unit that dominates the composition, simultaneously excluding all the other figures in the composition. In the bottom right corner of the picture are three indigenous male figures<sup>3</sup> seated around a campfire, preparing food. The landscape appears to function only as a backdrop for the human activity. Apart from the presence of the six human figures and the herd of cattle in the middle ground, the landscape – which resembles the Karoo

– appears barren and uninhabited, extending towards a mountain range on the horizon, with an outcrop of boulders in the left foreground and a clump of bushes behind the ox-wagon providing scant geographical characteristics.

### **Extended reading of Bell's *Cattle Boers' Outspan***

#### *Victorian ideological framework*

According to Lambourne (1999: 7) the term Victorian refers to the epoch spanning the life of Queen Victoria i.e. 1819 -1901. Chu (2003: 311) further states that the term at the same time refers to the social customs, moral values, literature, art and architecture of this epoch, and is often used synonymously with the nineteenth century. Accordingly Guy (2002: 314) posits that the reception of much of Victorian art was centred on the notion of artworks' representational qualities and verisimilitude.

A primary function of Victorian art was to socialise individual viewers into the moral values of their culture (Guy 2002: 314). The first half of the nineteenth century also witnessed a deliberate attempt by artists to create national mythologies to captivate the minds of the masses (Strong 2004: 21).

Reading *Cattle Boer's outspan* within the ideological framework of its time one needs to consider how this watercolour reflects Bell's bequeathed Victorian cultural values. It was previously indicated that Bell could be considered a product of his time and cultural milieu, sharing the ideologies of imperialism, industrialism and progress, implying Victorian cultural attributes, assumptions and prejudices as well. *Cattle Boers' Outspan* depicts the descendants of early Dutch settlers as simple folk on the edges of the Empire, cut off from civilisation, and lost in Africa for more than six generations:

In the judgement of English-speaking Victorians, the rural Afrikaners, apart from being white, were almost everything they themselves were not: ignorant, superstitious and conservative and not interested in 'progress' (Giliomee 2003: 202).

By depicting the Boer as indolent, Bell strikes a chord with his audience, as industriousness was regarded one of the most important Victorian virtues, along with good morals and decency. The accusation of indolence is serious, considering that the British regarded labour as a civilising force and indolence as a threat to economic progress (Barrell, 1992: 32,38,80,87). The *trekboers* in this painting are depicted as shiftless individuals at the centre of the scene. The only labour-related activities are performed by their black servants. The inactivity of the *trekboer* couple becomes even more pronounced when comparing their static postures with the group of servants idling around the cooking fire in the right foreground. Bell's *Cattle boer's outspan* can, indeed, be read as a monument to *trekboer* idleness, with the *trekboer* lifestyle and pre-industrial economy portrayed as evidence of the consequences of having gone native, thus echoing Menzel's denunciation of *trekboer* way of life, which reads:

Some of the Boors [sic] have accustomed themselves to such an extent with the carefree life, the indifference, the lazy days and the association with slaves and Hottentots that not much difference may be discerned between the former and the latter (in Giliomee 2003: 33).

Concerning the question of the *other*, *Cattle Boer's Outspan* presents an interesting dialogue regarding race, class and culture. If, in colonialist terms, the *other* represents the negative aspects of the *self*, then the English-speaking settlers' view of the Afrikaners as culturally and socially



backwards, together with the Afrikaners' deculturation and their identification with the African continent and adoption of African lifestyle, would cast them in the role of the cultural *other* to the nineteenth-century European (Spivak 1997: 24). In addition, indigenous people occupied the position of both cultural and racial *other* to both the *trekboers* and the nineteenth-century European colonist, who in turn was *Other* to both the indigenous peoples and the *trekboers*.

British colonisers regarded Afrikaners as being backwards, uneducated, illiterate eccentrics (Sparks 1990: 60). This together with their nomadic lifestyle and subsistence economy necessarily relegated them to a lower social and economic class than their fellow British settlers. Therefore it seems plausible that the British found the *trekboers* as exotic and foreign as they did the indigenous peoples, although of a slightly higher order. This was due to the fast socio-economic and cultural differences between themselves and the *trekboers*, whom due to deculturation had become sociologically indigenous. Hence the *trekboer* as represented in this artwork, in spite of their somatic difference casting them as *Other* in relation to the native peoples depicted alongside them, also represents the *other*, i.e. those who are marginalised due to their difference from the European self. Hence, Bell's depiction of the scene in this work not only reflects the interaction between the *self* and the *other*, it also implies the *Other's* framing of his cultural and somatic *others*.

The European notion of race did however, extend beyond the somatic. The word 'race' often denoted various forms of consanguinity such as 'linage', 'kinsfolk', 'family' and 'home', and in other instances it became synonymous with 'caste' - thus relating to Benedict Anderson's concept of 'race' as marker for an 'imagined community' (Loomba 2005: 102). Loomba (2005: 109-113) suggests that the European discourse of race, propped up by an ideology of racial superiority, easily translated into class terms, as the latter was shaped by racial ideologies and representations. Leatt *et al.* (1986: 77) further propound that race is not only a biological concept, but also a social psychological term that engenders a "genetically derived group consciousness". Loomba (2005: 109-113) further states that the European discourse of race translated into class terms, as the latter was shaped by racial ideologies and representations. Therefore Loomba's (2005: 98) assertion that "colonial discourses fluctuated in tandem with changes in political situations within the same place over time" can be understood to include the discourse of race.

### *Social realities*

As indicated, the British regarded the Cape Dutch community as distinct from their own race, considering them on a lower order of civilisation, and thus treating them much the same as they did the indigenous black peoples (Giliomee 2003: 149, Steyn 2001: 26) because a great contrast existed between the enlightened metropolitan Europe of the nineteenth century and the largely isolated rural societies of the Cape. This largely rural people's language, social matrixes, religious persuasion and historical consensus were foreign enough to warrant a disregard of Cape Dutch accomplishments to the British, leading the British to harbour disdain for the Cape Dutch language and culture (Thompson 2006: 109-110). In addition, the English and Cape Dutch persisted in regarding each other as separate groups, with the latter viewing the British as foreign conquerors (Giliomee 2003: 195).

Of the Cape Dutch population, the *trekboers* were the most isolated group. As indicated, the *trekboers* became deculturated by altering their material culture in order to adapt successfully to their changed environment, and this process of becoming indigenous and Africanised found expression in the moniker *Afrikaner* (Sparks 1990: 43, Giliomee 2003: 31). Sparks (1990: 43)

states that, due to their isolation and relative distance from the Cape, *trekboers* became more like indigenous Africans as their lifestyle started to echo that of local tribesmen. Like their indigenous neighbours, the *trekboers* now favoured a pastoral lifestyle above agriculture, establishing them as semi-nomadic cattle herders with a subsistence economy and materially meagre existence. They tended to live in temporary dwellings such as tented wagons or simple mud-walled cottages similar to those of the surrounding black tribes. By the time Bell encountered the *trekboers* their nomadic pastoral lifestyle had already become entrenched. The *trekboers*' practices of settlement and land occupation further mimicked that of the Khoikhoi, as both groups regarded land as inalienable, as opposed to the imperialists who saw land as a commodity with associated realty rights.

The *trekboers*' process of deculturation meant that they had become a fragmented culture disengaged from their European origins and way of life. According to Giliomee (Leatt *et al.*, 1986: 70), "the process of becoming indigenous or Africanised found expression in the term "Afrikaner", by which the colonists came to call themselves" Over time these rural Afrikaners' isolation resulted in fervent independence and intolerance to any form of governance (Giliomee 2003: 189). To outsiders like Bell, they appeared as feckless individuals who had shunned modern society, with one account describing them as, "... ignorant, unprogressive and in most respects two centuries behind European nations" (Giliomee 2003: 189). According to Sparks (1990: 43) the Afrikaners had become a "white tribe of Africa". This process of deculturation happened slowly and unselfconsciously, as most of these schismatic people were largely illiterate with no organised social structures or community base. In spite of this, however, this community still considered themselves superior to the local indigenous peoples, whom they regarded as heathens (Thompson 2006: 51). The *trekboers* therefore occupied a somewhat nondescript, in the middle or degenerate position as being both coloniser and colonised, dominated and dominator.

Colonial prejudice further ascribed particular associations to *others*. The Khoikhoi were for instance regarded as quarrelsome, down-at-heel inebriated sloths, whereas the local Afrikaners were seen to be obese and boorish sloths (Godby 1998: 147). Godby (1998: 147) states that Bell often tended to depict his subjects accordingly, as can be seen in his *The Boer* and in "the appearance of steatopygia in his 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman' subjects".

Menzel's description echoed other eighteenth-century first-hand accounts, corroborating fears of the *trekboers* 'going native' (Giliomee 2003: 33-35, Lichtenstein 1928: 446-8, Sparrman 1971: 122). Furthermore, Europeans' fear of 'going native' needs to be discussed. This fear barred Europeans from participating in local native ceremonies and adopting native customs and lifestyles. Since the *trekboers* adopted many aspects of Khoikhoi culture, including a topophilic relationship with the African continent, their adopted lifestyle disturbed Cape Town residents and enhanced the latter's fear of cultural contamination. Bell's depiction of *trekboer* lifestyle in *Cattle Boer's Outspan* was staged against this backdrop. Given English-speaking settlers' perception of themselves and their disregard of the Cape Dutch, it can be assumed that Bell approached his subject in *Cattle Boer's Outspan* with a degree of moral ambivalence further complicated by his Eurocentric perception with its preconceived idea of *otherness* and concept of the exotic *other*.

### *Authoring strategies*

Bell adopted certain European picturesque stylistic and topographical conventions. In his depictions of the South African landscape and in this he artwork employs a naturalistic

approach, which assumes that the picture is a faithful and believable depiction of the subject matter, and in turn implies objective empirical observation by the artist. On a formal level, the use of perspective in *Cattle Boer's Outspan* is characterised by a single controlling viewpoint, receding from the foreground to middle ground and distant background. Apart from a diagonal at low gradient leading from bottom left to centre right of the picture plane, the composition of *Cattle Boer's Outspan* is static and dominated by strong horizontal planes. The Claudian<sup>4</sup> principles of pictorial arrangement used by Bell separate the picture plane into foreground, middle ground and background. This is further achieved through the use of light and tonal perspective, resulting in the suggestion of a deep spatial effect. With a patch of bright light at the centre of the format surrounded by shadow areas in both the foreground and background, the use of light in *Cattle Boer's Outspan* is dramatic, employing *chiaroscuro* as device. In Claudian fashion, the outcropping of boulders in the left foreground and a clump of bushes behind the ox-wagon serve to frame the focal point of the picture.

A triangle or pyramidal composition with a hierarchical descending order from top to bottom delineates exclusive social hierarchies within this painting. The *trekboer* family occupies the highest rung of the hierarchical descending order from top to bottom, thus suggesting superiority that is normally associated with the *self*. In this artwork the use of a pyramidal structure serves to enclose the *trekboer* family, and thus excludes all the other figures in the composition, framing the *trekboers* as *Other*. The hierarchical descending order from top to bottom within the pyramidal unit further cuts along gender lines. Apart from looking away from the matriarch, the patriarch occupies a higher register, the matriarch being depicted on a register closer, although elevated, to the workers. This may be viewed in light of Loomba's claim (2005: 58-59) that in the colonial context both racial and gender biases were presented as objective truths, as theories regarding these two classifications were often used for mutual justification with Caucasian women – during the mid-nineteenth century, for example – deemed closer to Africans than to white men. Consequently, during the same period, feminine characteristics were often assigned to so-called 'lower races', and in other instances even to the colonised landscape. This notion supports Hall's claim (in Wiesner-Hanks 2001: 159) that hierarchies of categories such as race and gender were often reinscribed by what she terms the "rule of difference". Considering the British view of the Cape Dutch as an inferior race, it could thus be argued that Bell's placing of the already stereotypically depicted stout *trekboer* matriarch at the centre of the composition may have been an attempt to draw attention to the practice of assigning feminine characteristics to imperial *others*. Bell's depiction of a virgin yet barren landscape seems to further suggest similar connotations.

#### *Other observations*

Bell's *trekboers* may also be related to aspects of the conventions by which the English rural poor were depicted in nineteenth-century British landscape painting, even though in terms of the conventions of bucolic landscape the topographical setting of *Cattle Boer's Outspan* is very different (Barrell 1992: 71,81). Barrell (1992:3,76) suggests that the poor were generally regarded as a feared object, but that a distinction was made between what were considered the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. The deserving poor were shown to possess reasonable material goods and espoused neatness and spiritual well-being, whereas the undeserving poor were generally depicted as being degenerate in terms of manners, countenance and attire.

Bell's depiction of *trekboers* with their meagre possessions, makeshift lodgings, shabby clothing and austere lifestyle, clearly relates to the latter. The notion of the undeserving poor is

further associated with indolence, a characteristic the British often equated with the Cape Dutch (Barrell 1992: 36,76). By depicting the Boer as indolent, Bell strikes a chord with his audience, as industriousness was regarded one of the most important Victorian virtues, along with good morals and decency. The accusation of indolence is serious, considering that the British regarded labour as a civilising force and indolence as a threat to economic progress (Barrell, 1992: 32,38,80,87). The *trekboers* in this painting are depicted as shiftless individuals at the centre of the scene. The only labour-related activities are performed by their black servants. The inactivity of the *trekboer* couple becomes even more pronounced when comparing their static postures with the group of servants idling around the cooking fire in the right foreground. Bell's *Cattle boer's outspan* can, indeed, be read as a monument to *trekboer* idleness, with the *trekboer* lifestyle and pre-industrial economy portrayed as evidence of the consequences of having gone native, thus echoing Menzel's denunciation of *trekboer* way of life, which reads:

Some of the Boors [sic] have accustomed themselves to such an extent with the carefree life, the indifference, the lazy days and the association with slaves and Hottentots that not much difference may be discerned between the former and the latter (in Giliomee 2003: 33).

## Conclusion

In this article Bell's (1813-1882) *Cattle Boers' Outspan* (s.a.) has been situated within the genre of explorer art. As such, the work has been read and interpreted according to the Lacanian notion of the *Other/other* and contextualized in Victorian ideological frameworks, taking the social realities and aesthetic authoring strategies into account.

In light of the above-mentioned reading we conclude that *Cattle boers' outspan* presents an interesting dialogue regarding race, class and culture, especially concerning the notion the *other*. If, in colonialist terms, the *other* represents the negative aspects of the *self*, then the English-speaking settlers' view of the Afrikaners as culturally and socially backward, together with the Afrikaners' deculturation and their identification with the African continent and adoption of an African lifestyle, would cast them in the role of the cultural *other* to the nineteenth-century European.

At the same time *trekboer* practices of clientage and tenancy involving the indigenous pastoralists and hunter-gatherers meant that these groups were already under some degree of subjugation. In this context indigenous people occupied the position of both cultural and racial *other* to both the *trekboers* and the nineteenth-century European colonist, who in turn was *Other* to both the indigenous peoples and the *trekboers*. A hierarchical power structure emerges with the ruling British colonist at the top and the indigenous peoples at the lower end.

Considering Bell's position as *grande-auteur* author, his framing of these power relations between two groups of *others* in a single image, and thus casting its subjects in a negative light, imply the Empire's superior position of power in this hierarchical order. As stated, the *trekboers* occupied the somewhat degenerate position in the middle, being both coloniser and colonised, dominated and dominator. *Trekboers*, although racially akin to the British colonisers, were regarded as being backwards, uneducated, illiterate eccentrics. This, together with their nomadic lifestyle and subsistence economy, necessarily relegated the sociologically indigenous *trekboers* to a lower social and economic class than their fellow British settlers.

Due to these significant differences, it would seem plausible that the *trekboers* were as exotic and foreign to British settlers as the indigenous peoples. Hence the *trekboer* as represented in this artwork, in spite of their somatic difference casting them as *Other* in relation to the indigenous

peoples depicted alongside them, also represents the *other*, i.e. those who are marginalised due to their difference from the European self. Hence, Bell's depiction of the scene in this work not only reflects the interaction between the *self* and the *other*, it also implies the *Other's* framing of his cultural and somatic *others*. It is clear that Bell's depiction of *trekboers* in *Cattle Boer's Outspan* reflect his own foreignness and adherence to European aesthetic conventions and is testimony to his cultural bias.

## Notes

- 1 The self as representative of the positive in the self-other binary may be conceived of as representing the male, white, European and heterosexual position (Childs & Fowler, 2006:165).
- 2 The term *trekboer* denotes white Afrikaner migrant subsistence farmers during the late eighteenth century (Giliomee 2003: 31).
- 3 The ethnic identification of these figures are not supported by historical records. They are probably KhoiKhoi or San extraction, since it was *trekboer* practice to engage or subject the indigenous pastoralists and hunter gatherers to various degrees of clientage or tenancy (Thompson 2006: 48).
- 4 In Britain landscape painting was strongly influenced by the work of French born artist Claude Lorraine (1640/5-1682). As a painter of 'ideal' landscapes, Claude was much revered in Britain with his reputation enduring for much of the nineteenth century. (Chilvers 2004: 154-155)

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