"To Learn How to Speak": A Study of Jeremy Cronin's Poetry

by

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DECLARATION

I, William Keith Pinnock, student number 206038194, hereby declare that this dissertation for Magister Artium (English Literature) is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

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ii.   ABSTRACT

In the chapters that follow, the porous boundary between the public and the private in Jeremy Cronin's poetry is investigated in his three collections, *Inside* (1983), *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad* (1996) and *More Than a Casual Contact* (2006). I argue two particular Marxist theorists are central to reading Cronin's poetry: Bertolt Brecht, and his notion of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, and Walter Benjamin and his work on historical materialism, primarily the essay *On the Concept of History / Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940). Both theorists focus on the work of art in a historically contextualized manner, which extends the challenge to the boundary between the public and the private. Their work is underpinned by the desire to draw out hidden narratives occluded under the grand narratives of history and capitalist ideas of progress. I argue that these are the major preoccupations in Cronin's oeuvre as well. As such Cronin's poetry may be seen to write against a perspective that proposes a linear conceptualisation of history. The poetry therefore challenges the notion that art speaks of 'universal truths.' Such ideas of History and Truth, if viewed uncritically, allow for a tendency to conceive of the past as unchanging, which subconsciously promotes the idea that social and political realities are merely logical evolutionary steps. I argue that Cronin's poetry is thus purposefully interruptive in the way that it confronts the damaging consequences of the linear conceptualisation of history and the universal truth it promotes. His work attempts to find new ways of connection and expression through learning from South Africa's violent past. The significance of understanding each other and the historical environment as opposed to imposing perspectives that underwrite the symbolic order requires the transformation rather than the simple transferral of power, and is a central focus throughout Cronin's oeuvre. This position suggests that while the struggle for political freedom may be over, the necessity to rethink how South Africans relate to each other is only beginning.

Chapter One will focus on positioning Cronin, the poet and public figure, in South African literature and literary criticism. In this regard, two general trends have operated as critical paradigms in the study of South African poetry, namely Formalism (or 'prac crit') and a Marxist inflected materialism, which have in many ways perpetuated the division between the private and the public. This has resulted in poetry being read with an exclusive focus on either one of these two aspects, overlooking the possibilities of dialogue that may take place between them. Cronin's perspective on these polarised responses will be discussed, which will illustrate the similarity of his position to Ndebele's notion of the 'ordinary' which suggests a way beyond these binaries. This will lead to a discussion of how South African poets responded to the transition phase, suggesting that the elements of the polarisation still remained. Considering the major influences and paradigms when reading Cronin's oeuvre provides a foundation for the following three chapters. These include Cronin's use of Romanticism, Bertolt Brecht and the *V-Effekt* and Walter Benjamin's perspectives

on historical materialism. In addition to these three theoretical paradigms, the relevance of Pablo Neruda's poetry to Cronin's work is also foregrounded.   In Chapter Two, the focus will be on Cronin's first collection of poetry, *Inside*, concentrating on Cronin's use of language as a way of constructing poetry in the sparseness of the prison experience. This will show an abiding preoccupation of learning to speak in a language that considers the material context out of which it emerges. In this regard, the poems "Poem-Shrike" "Prologue" and "Cave-site" are analysed. In addition, one of the central poems in Cronin's oeuvre, "To learn how to speak […]," will be examined in order to illustrate how the poet extends this project on a meta-poetic level, asking for South African poets to 'learn how to speak' in the voices of South African experience and histories. I will show how this is linked to Cronin's "Walking on Air" which illustrates how the *V-Effeckt* recovers the small private histories through re-telling the life story of James Matthews, a fellow prisoner incarcerated for his anti-apartheid activism, revealing how this story is intimately connected to the public sphere.

In Chapter Three, Cronin's second collection: *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad* will be examined. In the poem "Three Reasons for a Mixed, Umrabulo, Round-the-Corner Poetry" Cronin resists inherited Western poetic conventions by incorporating and subverting versions of the Romantic aesthetic, arguing for poetry to be immersed in South African multi-lingual and multi-cultural experiences. "Even the Dead" reveals how Cronin uses Walter Benjamin's perspectives on historical materialism to confront amnesia. In terms of the themes established in "To learn how to speak […]", the poem "Moorage" demonstrates how the public and private can never be separated in Cronin's work. The final section of this chapter will examine how Cronin responds to Pablo Neruda's poems "I am explaining a few things" and "The Education of a Chieftain," and how these poems challenge narratives that privilege the 'great leader' instead of the so-called smaller individuals' stories.

Chapter Four examines selections from Cronin's third collection, focusing on Cronin's use of the automobile, charting an ambiguous trajectory through the 'new' South Africa. The examination of the poems "Where to begin?", "Switchback" and "End of the century - which is why wipers," all attempt to include individuals left on the margins of the narrative of global freeways and neo-liberal capitalist progress. The poems present an interrogation of how 'vision' is constructed. This will show that the poetry responds to the experiences of the marginalised under these grand narratives in a primarily fragmentary and interruptive manner. This in effect constitutes the culmination of Cronin's poetic journey and the search for new ways of envisaging South Africa's future and finding a new language with which to speak it.

1. Chapter One: An Overview of Jeremy Cronin: a poet of the public and private

Introduction

Jeremy Cronin, activist, politician, poet. These designations comment on the broad engagement with South African culture that Cronin has embarked on throughout his career as a poet, Marxist and politician. Foregrounding these diverse roles suggests that one of the key elements in the study of Jeremy Cronin's poetry will need to take into account the interrelationship between the public and the private. Cronin's poetry from *Inside* (1983) to the later two collections, *Even The Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad* (1997) and *More Than a Casual Contact* (2006), consistently juxtapose the individual and the historical, placing these two spheres in tension with each other. The poetry that will be examined reinforces the ambivalent nature of Cronin's public and private existence in relation to South Africa's past.

Revolutionary politics formed a large portion of Cronin's life during the apartheid period both as a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress. He was charged under the Treason Act, and imprisoned from 1976 to 1983 for the distribution of anti-government propaganda. A key participant in the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the mid-eighties, Cronin also spent a period in exile in London and Lusaka. His engagement with politics continued through to the transition period[1], as a member of the ANC's negotiation team, as well as continuing as a ranking member of the SACP. Currently, he is Deputy Secretary General of the SACP as well as the Deputy Minister of Public Works.[2]

Cronin's political aesthetic thus forms a significant context in any engagement with his poetry. Cronin is a Marxist, and the poetry contains elements of the class struggle, tied as it was to the struggle against apartheid up to the 1994 elections. The use of Marxism as a critical paradigm has continued in Cronin's post-apartheid poetry, where sustained criticism is leveled at the impact of neo-liberal capitalism on South Africa, both in its effect on human relations and on individuals and groups marginalised by this discourse.[3] Of particular interest, however, is how these tensions play out in the

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[1] I use the phrase 'transition' to bookend the 1990 to 1994 period from then state president FW de Klerk's announcement of the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) the Pan African Congress (PAC) and the release of Nelson Mandela in early February 1990, to the first multiparty elections on the 27th April 1994. This includes the 'negotiated transition' in which the National Party (NP) and the representatives of anti-apartheid forces (predominantly the ANC) entered into a series of talks to negotiate the shift from apartheid to a new, post-apartheid dispensation. It is important to note that the above in no way summarises the events of this tumultuous period of South African history, but merely serves to indicate the general shift from legislated apartheid dominance before the 1990's to a legislated multiparty, multi-ethnic state after 1994.

[2] Cronin held the post of Deputy Minister of Transport from 2009 to mid 2012.

[3] The term Neo-liberal capitalism describes a particular economic policy or perspective that privileges open markets and a non-interventionist stance on the part of governments toward the market and the imposition of legislation to ensure the free flow of capital.

poetry of a white, English-speaking, African nationalist and Communist Party member who is also a father, husband and citizen of South Africa, elements that could too easily be elided due to his overt public political persona.

This dissertation offers a reading of Cronin's poetry that takes cognisance of how the anti-apartheid struggle and the forces of African nationalism shaped his poetry. Emerging from the apartheid era is a poetic voice aligning with African nationalism and the anti-apartheid struggle and is generally represented by the collection *Inside*. The latter two collections present a more overtly ironic and self-reflexive stance in relation to *Inside*. The thread that continues through all three collections, however, is the consistent blurring of the private and the public. The questions posed in the below extract form "Where to begin?" the opening poem of Cronin's most recent collection, begins to illustrate the contradictory elements that have been suggested thus far. The poet delivers a kind of poetic biography cheekily referring to his life as a 'shopping list,' commenting:

> Slovo the person […] wasn't a / poet, more a raconteur with a string of
> jokes about socialisms fallibilities
>
> But Neruda was.
>
> Brecht, Hikmet, Mayakovsky, Eluard, Ritsos— all communists (all
> male) … but wonderful poets.
>
> Because of some inherent virtue in the cause?
>
> Or to break a calamitous silence in the party line?
>
> Is poetry the irruption of the suppressed? Or is it a holding onto the
> faith? (ll. 32-39).[4]

Through these questions Cronin begins to explore the limitations of poetry in a highly politicised environment, speculating whether these poets wrote only to highlight their commitment to socialist values, uncritically 'holding onto the faith' of communist ideals. It may be argued that the questions form an important backdrop to Cronin's poetic oeuvre, and arguably provide a kind of poetic manifesto. In his invocation of these poets, Cronin aligns himself with a tradition of Marxist inflected poetry. All the poets cited had a clear commitment to communism and social justice evident in their work.[5] The German poet and dramatist Bertolt Brecht, and Chilean poet Pablo Neruda are central to

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[4] I examine this "shopping-list" in a more in depth manner in the final chapter of this dissertation.
[5] Yannis Ritsos (Greek), Nazim Hikmet (Turkish) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (Russian) all spent periods as political prisoner's linked to their commitment to communism, while Bertolt Brecht spent some 16 years from 1933 in exile

this investigation, as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter. In the above context, Neruda's famous remark to soldiers loyal to General Pinochet entering his house shortly before his death, "Look around—there's only one thing of danger for you here—poetry" (Feinstein, 2004: 413), is interesting to note. The comment suggests that these poets' view of poetry is not only aesthetic. Rather, poetry presented a danger to the status quo and a vital 'irruption of the suppressed' and subjugated. This suggests a belief in the interruptive nature of poetry, and its ability to inspire and create the spaces for the interrogation of repression and oppression.

The invocation also hints at a perspective that values Marxist critique as a necessary challenge to a world orientated towards a capitalist paradigm. Marxist criticism, as a force that attempts to expose the exploitation necessary to sustain capitalism in its various guises is useful in highlighting these injustices. While the overt confrontation with capitalism forms an essential backdrop to Cronin's poetic and literary-critical contribution to South African writing, it is important to reiterate the questions regarding "the inherent virtue of the cause" (l. 37) or the attempt to "break calamitous silences in the party line" (l. 38). These indicate a self-reflexive response to the precarious position that Cronin finds himself in as both a poet and a public figure. Moreover, they suggest an individual seeking to explore his commitment to the politics of social justice, as well as the politics of poetry. As such, the questions provide a useful entry point into the false dichotomy between poetry of the public sphere and the poetry of the self that has concerned South African literary investigations during both the apartheid period and beyond. If poetry can indeed offer the irruption of the suppressed, and present a danger to the status quo, it would need to move beyond the polarities of what is considered to be purely political or aesthetic concerns, as discussed in 1.3 below. Cronin's poetry can be read in the light of this debate and his own critical responses reinforce his stance in relation to it. The constant interchange of the public and private evident in Cronin's poetic and public interventions stages the opportunity for a 'border crossing' to take place, where one paradigm can inform the other.

1.1 Cronin's lyrical politics: Cronin's critical reception

Michael Chapman, in the chapter entitled "Poetry and Prose in the 1980s: the High Word to the Low Mimetic"[6] contained in the study *Southern African Literatures* (1996[2003]), makes an important point about Jeremy Cronin's poetry. Referring to *Inside* in particular, Chapman argues that Cronin is an

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(returning to East Germany in 1947), escaping persecution from the Nazis for his writings leading up to World War 2. Paul Eluard (French), one of the founders of the Surrealist movement, from which he was later expelled from after joining the French Communist Party, spent the war as a member of the French Resistance. Neruda was heavily influenced by his experiences during the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939), joining the communist movement shortly thereafter.
[6] Chapman's title (and chapter) here is a reflection of the contrasting critical stand points, pitting the notion of the "high word" or the poetry of the individual against the "low mimetic" of the political or public poetry of the period.

example of a generation of writers from the 1980s who gave "the impression of having shed the anxious allegiances to 'great art,'" yet whose work did not involve "any actual rejection of artistry" (412). Basing their "choice of thought, language and style on considered theories of society and literature" these writers had little tendency to "appease great traditions abroad" (413). Chapman asserts that Cronin "firmly learnt something from the oral rhythms of local black poets," resulting in a "remarkably 'unauthoritative' voice in an English stripped of its layers of conquest, occupation, and even literary derivation" (413). This allowed the poetry "in quite ordinary ways [to] affirm the humanity of people rather than their victimization" suggesting a path through the "bifurcated society towards an emerging culture with a common core" (414).[7] Chapman's position here provides a point of departure into my investigation of Cronin's work, which I argue rests on three key foundations: firstly, it offers a challenge to the 'great poetic traditions'; secondly, there is a desire to *learn* from other voices, and not to impose a literary and cultural position; and finally, an appeal to recognise connection and similarity in *opposition* to difference as key fundamentals in human relations. Throughout the course of this dissertation these core issues revolve around the interaction of the public and private spheres, or put differently, a clear focus on the relationship between the individual and history.

Literary examinations into Cronin's poetry have been limited. Post-graduate investigations have tended to position Cronin's *Inside* as forming part of a tradition of South African prison writing.[8] This situates Cronin as part of a rich repertoire of prison writings in South Africa from authors and poets such as Herman Charles Bosman and Breyten Breytenbach. The poetry has thus been marked with a strong sense of the autobiographical, closely linking the poetry to the individual. Katina Chronia's Masters "'The Making and Fixing of Things…'": Aesthetics and ideology in the work of Jeremy Cronin" (1999), is currently the only post-graduate work on Cronin that shifts the focus away from his composition of *Inside* in prison. In this particular investigation, the focus is Derrida's notion of *différance* and investigates *Inside* in a postmodern deconstructive manner. It essentially argues for a reading of Cronin's work primarily on linguistic lines, concentrating on the ambiguous nature of the

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[7] Peter Anderson's "Essential Gestures: Gordimer, Cronin and Identity Paradigms in White South African Writing", published in 1990 in *English in Africa* Vol 17, No 2, similarly reflects upon Cronin's 'essential gesture' towards linguistically bridging the divide between black and white writing (and by extension the legislated spatial controls enforced) during this period, suggesting that by "[t]alking – simply making contact and communicating – affirms in quite an everyday way [a prisoner's] identity as a [person] rather than a victim of a dehumanising system, and can amount to a political act of solidarity, imparting the strength to resist" (Anderson, 1990: 49).

[8] This corpus of 'prison literature' referencing Cronin includes Peter Anderson's doctorate "Against Silence: Poetry in Prison under Apartheid" (2002), which examines aspects of the collection *Inside*. Three MAs by L.R. Mpahlele's "The Prisoner as the Poet: Strategies of the poem and the art of Survival: Jeremy Cronin's 'Inside' Dikobe wa Mogale's 'Prison Poems'" (1991), R.A. Folli's "A Tent of Blue and Souls in Pain: Creative Responses to Prison Experience with emphasis upon existential and autobiographical elements within selected South African prison writings" (1994) and E.E. Oswald's "Writing in Hostile Places: A Critical Examination of South African prison Literature" (2005), have also used Cronin's prison poetry as part of their investigations.

sign and the signifier. MC Maschinge's doctorate, "Identity, Culture and Contemporary South African Poetry" (2004) investigates Cronin's poetic work in a chapter entitled 'The poetry of revolution.' While *Inside* forms the bulk of Maschinge's chapter, it also features poems from *Even the Dead*. One of the most important arguments that I draw from is noted in his final chapter called 'Towards a New Aesthetics.' Here Maschinge argues that it is "crucial to interrogate and then factor into the broader equation of poetic output the various interpersonal, social and political dynamics that go into shaping a *particular poetic identity*" (Mashinge, 2004: 190, emphasis mine). This 'new aesthetic' asserts that the socio-cultural milieu from which the work emerges is a fundamental aspect of the poetic work.

There have been few contemporary studies into Jeremy Cronin's poetry in academic journals, and these have also concentrated on Cronin's *Inside*.[9] One of the most important in the context of this study is Rita Barnard's "Speaking Places: Prison, Poetry and the South African Nation" (2001). Barnard hails *Inside* as a linguistic liberatory event in its foregrounding of 'liberated zones' that offer "symbolic and experimental sites in which one may imagine and act out the possibility of a wholly liberated land" (Barnard, 2001: 159). I include Barnard to think through the potential of poetry to linguistically usher in sites of contention and connection in contemporary South Africa. Cronin's later work emerges at the conclusion of Barnard's article where she suggests that in:

> Cronin's new poems … the performative aesthetic developed in "Inside", an aesthetic grounded in language, invocation, and in place, has not been relinquished. But it has yet to be transformed and reconceptualised in such a way as to seem persuasive in the vast and disorientating political geography of contemporary multinational capitalism. (Barnard, 2001:173).

Whereas Barnard seems to suggest that Cronin's later poetry is not persuasive, I argue that Cronin's sustained focus on learning how to speak a new vocabulary offers a path through the 'vast and disorientating' cultural milieu from apartheid to the 'new' South Africa.

A number of presentations from past AUETSA (Association of University English Teachers of South Africa) conferences are also relevant. Duncan Brown's paper entitled "Contextual re-evaluation of previous texts: the political implications of poetic voice" (1987) argues that "the authority of context over text, of the authenticity of the experience over the resultant artifact, presents important challenges to literary criticism, not least of which is the need for renewed attention to the social responsibility of

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[9] Further studies of Cronin's "Inside" include Peter Horn's "The self-presence of the poet inside: Jeremy Cronin's 'Inside'" (1992), and David Schalkwyk's "Confession and Solidarity in the prison writing of Breyten Breytenbach and Jeremy Cronin" (1994). The only journal article currently on the NELM (The National English Literature Museum) database dedicated to Cronin's later poetic work is Julia Martin's "A poem about a bird can be a picture of the world: Reading "Heron's Place" by Jeremy Cronin" (2007). "Heron's Place" is contained in Cronin's latest collection *More Than a Casual Contact*.

poetry" (1987: 56). While the presentation is situated within the context and debate surrounding South African literary criticism in the 80's, which will be dealt with in the next section, Brown importantly identifies Cronin's "project of 'nationalising the English language'" (58). Cronin's poetry, Brown suggests, persistently "assumes a binding power, drawing together its audience" (28). This further suggests a framework in which Cronin's poetry attempts to learn how to speak with the many voices and experiences of contemporary South Africa.

Peter Pluddeman's 1991 paper, "Poetry, Politics and the English Language: Some Aspects of Jeremy Cronin's *Inside*" sought to "explore the relationship between personal and social history" (1991: 266) in Cronin's poetry. This continues the theme of examining the intersections between the public and private. What is particularly important in Pluddeman's paper is his identification of Julia Kristeva's work in Cronin's poetry. He notes that Cronin "finds an enabling first-world feminist discourse that engages in psychoanalysis and Marxism in an exploration of language and subjectivity" (267). Significant in this regard is Cronin's own description of Kristeva's work on semiotics which Pluddeman references. Cronin differentiates between the 'semiotic order' and the 'symbolic order,' where the semiotic is the "pre-thetic, or prelinguistic domain of tonal, rhythmic, gestural vocalizations associated with bodily drives" (268). The symbolic order is described as "the social [system] into which the individual enters with the acquisition of language and the assumption of subjectivity" (268). In this dissertation I plot the significance of the semiotic evident in Cronin's poetic language. Cronin's description suggests that there is a necessary linguistic border that needs to be crossed in order to navigate the dangers of the symbolic system.[10] Essentially, Kristeva's exploration on the infiltration of the semiotic into the symbolic builds on Bahktin's notion of heteroglossia, and celebrates the existence of multiple inflections and ways of speaking to challenge the dominance of a rigid symbolic order. Body language, gesture and pre-linguistic utterances, such as the clicking of tongues and the stomping of feet are evident in Cronin's work and serve to uncover multiple meanings and a wider vocabulary in which to articulate South African experiences.

Contemporary investigations of Cronin's work have thus identified a number of key concerns: firstly, the interaction between the public and the private spheres; secondly, the focus on poetic language as a way to explore the interactions of the semiotic and symbolic order; as well as, thirdly, an attempt to find ways to encourage the possibility of learning how to speak in a language does not function by 'othering.' In the next section, a description of the various ways critics have engaged with

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[10] Kristeva's reflections on the symbolic first appear in her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1969), while Bahktin's notion of heteroglossia appears in the essay "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981) first published in 1975.

South African poetry in English will be discussed in order to illustrate the key literary debate during the apartheid era: the impact of politics on art in South African literature.

1.2 The Public versus Private Aesthetic: The Politics of Reception

Since the explosion of the so-called Black Consciousness/Soweto[11] poets in the early 1970s the notion of history has had a checkered past in the study of South African English poetry. Thengani H. Ngwenya in the chapter entitled "Black Consciousness poetry: writing against apartheid" (2012) in the *Cambridge History of South African Literature* (2012) provides a useful entry point into the debate regarding art versus politics. He notes that the so-called Black Consciousness/Soweto poets exemplified in a "direct and graphic way the complex interconnections between literature, history and politics" (2012: 505). The poetry "constantly reminds the reader of its status as both 'literary' and 'historical' text" and eschews the predominantly Western "formalist conception of poetry as marked by technical complexity, a predetermined structure and sometimes obscure imagery and structure" (505). He contrasts this highly individualised version of poetry with the "communal self-respect and rejection of imposed identities and roles" (509) present in Black Consciousness poetry. The rise of this form of poetry, which focused both on the interrelationship between the public and private and the recovery of occluded histories, exposed a number of critical lacunae in the study of English poetry in South Africa. Outrage from critics against the excessive public character of the poetry of Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla, et al, resulted in a conflict around artistic values. It may be argued that Cronin's poetry also focuses on the intersection of literature, history and politics, and therefore this period informs his poetry.

1.2.1 Cronin's reading of the art versus politics debate

Jeremy Cronin's 1985 AUETSA conference paper "Ideology and Literary Studies in South Africa: The Case of Black English Poetry" (1985) offers a concentrated example of the division between the public and private aesthetic. In the article Cronin encapsulates what he calls the main "antinomies" (Cronin, 1985: 86) between various polarised responses by South African literary critics attempting to account for the rise of the Soweto poets. This polarisation is understood to be an example "of the ideological

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[11]There is a large degree of discomfort in the use of the term 'Black Consciousness/Soweto poets' as a descriptive for the wide range of poets and poetry that this period represented. The overt homogenisation implied by the use of the term erroneously simplifies this wide range of poetic expression, and points to the false dichotomy in the examination of the poetry that will be discussed in this section. I therefore use the term merely in an attempt to periodise rather than homogenise.

assumptions within the discipline of literary studies" (84). Critical engagement with the Soweto poets at that time had primarily taken two forms. On the one hand, the more Formalist (or 'prac crit') literary investigations, focused almost entirely on the so-called 'quality' of the poetry, "couched in the terms and categorisations of an aesthetic ideology" (87). These interventions attacked the "'formlessness,' the 'excessive particularisation' and the 'excessive public character'" (87) of the poetry. This overtly privileges Western poetic notions of form and content as the primary evaluative criteria. On the other hand, were the materialist (or generally Marxist) "defensive attempts at rehabilitating this literature" where the readings were "dominated by socio-political criteria" (87). Socio-political criteria focused on the social content, and the potential to raise consciousness regarding the injustices of apartheid. These antinomies, Cronin argues, fall into mutually reinforcing positions, which he later characterises as "being trapped in an ideological vicious circle" (90), from which there seemed no escape.[12]

Cronin begins to challenge this partisan engagement by examining the opposition between form and content as one of the major concerns in Formalist / 'prac crit' investigations. He argues that it was not a question of "black experience being poured into European literary containers" or using a Western poetic framework to identify a "synthesis of European traditions (forms), and African experience (the bulk of the content)" (1985: 89). On the contrary, the interaction between form and content offered an opportunity to identify a wide variety of other traditions at play within the formal considerations of Black Consciousness poetry. These included the 'oral' or performative dimension and the use of "'eulogues' … syntactic and semantic parallelism … work chants … winding circular patterns of development and heavily syncopated speech" (89).[13] Cronin suggests that it is useful "neither to dismiss form as the shibboleth of the formalists, nor to portray poetic form as necessarily European,

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[12]It is interesting to note an important extension to Cronin's assertion found in Derek Barker and Leon de Kock's article "Don't Go Wessa: Doctrinal Groups in SA Literary Discourse" (2007), where they argue "that academics in South Africa … have called the propositions of fellow academics into question indirectly: through the imputing of the speaking subject to a prior allegiance" (Barker & De Kock, 2007: 21). They go on: "instead of confronting or taking issue with the actual propositions made … the propositions are dismissed or brought into question on the basis of the speaking subjects purported allegiance to a particular group (race, nationality, social status, class, interest group)" (21-22). The article is culled from Barker's Doctoral Thesis (supervised by Leon De Kock) *English Academic Literary Discourse in South Africa 1958 – 2004: a review of 11 academic journals* (2006). The notion of a 'doctrinal group' is taken from Michel Foucault and is described as a group "formed through allegiance to 'one and the same discursive ensemble'" (21). Essentially, any statement that does not conform to the group's position is heretical and grounds for "exclusion," or, more importantly, the explanatory value of the argument is discarded because it does not conform to a particular ideological agenda (21).

[13]Duncan Brown's book *Voicing the Text: South African oral poetry and performance* (1998) is one of the major critical studies focusing on the oral dimension in South African poetry, contending that "a vigorous oral tradition has existed throughout South African history, and in many ways represents our truly original contribution to world literature" (Brown, 1998: 1). In his book Brown attempts to trace the oral form, from the San, through the praise poems of the African chiefdoms, to the development of the Christianised oral form to the adaptation of the oral tradition in 'Soweto' poetry of the 1970s and the performance of poems on political platforms in the 1980s (1). One of the key elements that Brown characterises as a particular disjuncture in the evaluation of the Soweto Poets is the focus on the printed form of the poetry on the page. Poetry is thus conceived as a "'product' rather than a process, as 'object' rather than 'practice'" (181).

and, therefore, culturally extrinsic to the content" (90). This implies a need to view South African poetry with a new lens, thereby celebrating the admixture, or hybridity, that the clash of differing formal methods reveals.

The disjuncture between form and content is broadened when the "topical versus the timeless, the particular versus the universal" (90) is identified as another antinomy. Cronin recognises the key issue of Western poetic traditions, and their content, offering both examples of universal human experience and evaluative positions, and points out that "what is allegedly universal is often more culturally specific than is apparent" (90). This ambiguity is reinforced when he comments that often the more "private the concern the more universal it becomes" (91). Cronin's argument exposes the paradigm that canonised poetic works, such as Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," offers a condensed insight into the human condition. Ironically, this insight is in many ways derived from a literary perspective that privileges the European or Western context or experience, which excludes a wide range of other circumstances.

The universal/particular dichotomy is further merged into a third antinomy: the disjuncture between public and private concerns. Cronin suggests that it is the black poets who are "held to be largely public in their concerns" as opposed to the poets of the "'lyrical impulse'" expressing "private" concerns (91). This cul de sac is a reinforcement of the division between political content and private individual concerns, which is extended into an overtly black and white polarity. Cronin counters this by suggesting that these two facets *inform* each other. Aesthetic works reflect reality by "bringing *together* these two aspects, by investing the general with particularity, and the particular with generality" enabling "a many-sided interrelationship between the general and the particular" (my italics, 91) to emerge. Cronin's suggestion also comments on an important blind spot: the tendency to view all Black poetry as primarily communally orientated. This act of ghettoisation is suggested in the very naming of the diverse range of poetic expression falling under the banner of 'Soweto' poetry. While a convenient periodisation, the potential to ignore the specifics of the individual poets' concerns is obvious, which suggests the tendency to ignore *what* was said by focusing only on *who* said it. Cronin therefore draws attention to the "aesthetic slackness" (93) that can arise in investigations privileging a partisan critical position. Endorsing Eurocentric models and perspectives ad hoc results in criteria that privilege Western poetic traditions. Readings dominated by socio-political positions flatten the analysis of the poetic work by authorising the statements merely because they represent the so-called 'black' oppressed perspective. In both instances key opportunities to examine the literary output as a hybrid expression of South African-ness are lost.

It is apparent in Cronin's reading of the debate that a 'border crossing' between Western and local poetic traditions is necessary. In many respects Cronin's attitude reflects a concern that forms a major preoccupation in his poetry: a desire to reflect an open-ended perspective that includes the poetic expression of a broad range of poetry and traditions, both South African and Western. This results in a desire to cross these borders.

1.2.2 Ndebele and the Rediscovery of the Ordinary

The work of Njabulo Ndebele explores the relationship between politics and art. In a similar manner to Cronin's proposition regarding a multi-faceted relationship between form and content, Ndebele also challenges this binary. Literary works, in his view, are mediated by a reflection on the dialectic contained *between* politics and art. The distinction therefore does not:

> necessarily enable a mechanical choice between politics and art: rather, it enables us to participate in the dialectic between the two. To understand this is to understand the creative possibilities of both. (66).

Ndebele's position begins to chart a move away from the stark polarities of Formalist versus materialist criteria by considering the interrelationship between the public and the private. The key element of Ndebele's thought is what he terms the "challenge to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society" (Ndebele, 1989[2006]: 63).

In "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" (1986[2006]). Ndebele identifies the "history of black South African literature" as a product "of the representation of the spectacle" (31). This Ndebele suggests is a highly "demonstrative form of literary representation" (31) which paralleled the stark polarities of apartheid society. Instead of focusing on simplified binaries such as black/white, township/urban and, ultimately, good/evil, writers needed to recognise that these forms of narratives only perpetuate:

> a society of posturing and sloganeering; one that frowns upon subtlety of thought and feeling, and never permits the sobering power of contemplation, of close analysis, and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness, and limitations. (42).

As a panacea to this malaise he posits a rediscovery of the 'ordinary' as a counter to the spectacular. In Ndebele's essay the 'ordinary' is not a specific set of 'rules' for the literary work, where the 'spectacular' is X and the 'ordinary' is 'Y.' Rather, the 'ordinary' is the accumulation of *detail* in the work, which can be extended to how the public impacts on the private and vice versa. Ndebele's insight navigates through the complex dialectic between the interior emotions and thoughts of the poet/narrator

and the exterior, social conditions. It suggests a way to critically evaluate literary works that includes the considerations that Cronin highlighted in his paper. In conjunction with the 'ordinary,' Ndebele also notes the importance of irony: "the literary manifestation of the principle of contradiction" (66). Irony, as it appears in the literary work, foregrounds a formal self-reflexivity by both the poet and the attentive reader. Literature is thus framed as an imaginative "occasion within which the vistas of inner capacity are opened up" which contributes "to the development of this subjective [inner] capacity of the people to be committed" (52). In order to dissect the 'abstractions' of a simplified good/evil dialectic, a literary focus on "the ordinary daily lives of people" was necessary. The 'ordinary' he notes "should be the direct focus of political interest because this constitutes the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions" (52, italics in original).

Both Cronin and Ndebele view the interaction between the public and the private as essential aspects in literary works, and thus approach the value-laden debate of politics versus art from a different angle; investing hope in the 'ordinary' to challenge oppression. In a recent speech delivered at the Edinburgh Book Festival in October 2012, Ndebele discusses the question of whether "literature should be political."[14] He comments that "there isn't a great deal in South Africa that can be called 'political literature' in the sense of a literature that dramatises political activism. We are more likely to see literature that 'politicises' by deepening of awareness." The notion of creating awareness is important in relation to the poetic models referred to in the above section. Ndebele challenges literature that enacts an "imaginative displacement" which leads to "public blindness" or amnesia. Ndebele comments:

> To counter such contemporary tendencies, we need writing that explodes willed invisibility so that we can see with an awareness that recognises the dangerous present, and at the same time enables us to project our minds and our imaginations far into the future to prevent current trends from turning into tragedy in the long term. (www.guardian.co.uk).

The importance of a literature that embraces the contradictions in order to challenge them is foregrounded here. It also suggests the importance of literature creating opportunities to think through the impact of the public sphere on the lives of the 'ordinary,' and offer alternatives to the current direction currently followed. Politically, economically, poetically or otherwise. Michael Chapman notes in the introduction to the book *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and*

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[14] The speech can be accessed on: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/oct/04/njabulo-s-ndebele-should-literature-be-political (Accessed on 10 June 2013). All subsequent quotes are taken from this speech.

Culture (1991 [2006]), that Ndebele's critique of the "over-determined" politics of the spectacular was possibly assessed too hastily by critics favouring the autonomy of art, who interpreted his concern "as an implicit endorsement of … the psychological mind-set of Western-style individualism" (viii). The endorsement of individualism was never the intention. Rather, Ndebele was consolidating the necessity of reading literary texts as a set of social relations. The crux of Ndebele's aim was for literature to "contribute to bringing about a highly conscious, sensitive new person in a new society" (71), which, for him, was "the function of art in, and its contribution to, the ongoing revolution in South Africa" (71). This contribution thus rests on the many-sided relationship between the public and private.

1.2.3 Poetry of the 'new' South Africa: Perspectives from the transition and beyond

The elections of April 1994, with the ANC taking political power in South Africa, was a dramatic turning point in South African history. This shift also had implications for the literature emerging from the 'new' South Africa, which is akin to Ndebele's recent speech highlighted above.[15] Kelwyn Sole notes of the poetic expression during the transition period the attempt by the majority of poets to "move beyond the confines of both the ungainly platitudes and sloganizing of a certain amount of political poetry, and the sterile aestheticism and mimicking provincialism of a dated, predominantly Eurocentric, liberal poetic tradition" (Sole, 1996: 24). He argues that this resulted in an attempt to combine sociopolitical commitment, or content, with a concern for an appropriate poetic form that recognised that the "realities of contemporary South Africa are too complex to allow for a retreat into either a blinkered public, or private, poetry" (24). In a more contemporary article he notes how certain poets still "reflected upon, and tried to influence ongoing processes in the country's wider sociocultural and political life" (Sole, 2008: 135).[16] Poetry here is also considered dangerous and an interruptive, social force, which negotiates and responds to politics and the public sphere. It also suggests the necessity of alternative ways of assessing South African poetry that challenge received, established and inherited, Western poetic conventions.

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[15] Michael Chapman writing recently of this period succinctly presents a continuation of the aesthetic versus the political binary above. He broaches the debate when he asks: "could colors, rhyming, the private experience, all replace the dour inartistic speechscapes of political commitment?" (Chapman, 2009: 174). For Chapman, there was an expectation that a new literary trajectory could be charted in post-apartheid South Africa. Ironically, this view perpetuates the boundary between the public and the private, promoting once again a mechanical choice of aesthetics over politics. Viewing the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid in this manner carries within it another false premise: that the socio-economic landscape had also shifted to allow for a literature that turns a blind eye to the consequences of colonialism and apartheid.

[16] See Kelwyn Sole's article "'Licking the Stage Clean or Hauling Down the Sky?': The profile of the Poet and the Politics of Poetry in Contemporary South Africa" for a more recent overview of the political aesthetic in contemporary South African poetry. Michael Chapman's article "Sequestered from the winds of history': Poetry and Politics beyond 2000" concentrates on the private, more modernist aesthetic. When positioned together, the articles illustrate that the binaries described in the section 1.2.1 are still major considerations in South African poetry.

Ingrid de Kok, during the same period, also refers to the necessity of taking cognisance of the public sphere. She warns that a blinkered perspective centering on the 'normalisation' of South Africa that neglects the residues of the social impact of colonial and apartheid practices, "may be less of a linear journey than anticipated" (5). She suggests that literature found "itself with a creased Janus face, vigilant of the past, watchful of the future" (5). In light of this, De Kok encourages a literary project that "revisits history … not to produce an authorised account … [or] to resolve history" (5), but attempts to:

> unwrite, retell and reorganise the nature of the record, investigating the relationships between stories and history, staging the drama of individual and collective experiences and perspectives, examining discontinuities and lacunae. (5).

Like Ndebele, De Kok recognises the importance of re-examining history and the interaction of the public and private spheres as a way to problematise what Ndebele earlier referred to as 'public blindness' or amnesia.

De Kok uses poet Derek Walcott's metaphor of the 'cracked heirloom' (contained in his 1992 Nobel prize-winning speech) to reinforce this position. Following Walcott, she likens the literary project to the re-assembling of a broken vase, pieced together, where "the visible scars contain more love than the unbroken one that is taken for granted on the shelf" (Attwell, 1999: 18).[17] The challenge is thus for a literary project that does not offer a complete break with the past, but rather undertakes a critical re-engagement with it. In the context of the metaphor it is an art that acknowledges the scars of the past. The metaphor also has implications for reading poetry in a manner that negates the notions of poetry in a Western tradition. By challenging a Western tradition that sees poetry with the fullness of Keats' 'Grecian Urn' in mind, the 'cracked hierloom' offers the possibility to reconstruct the fragments of a repressed culture. An example of this appears in the second section of Cronin's *Inside* entitled "The Naval Base" which consists of poems that reflect on the poet's childhood, Cronin's father being a naval officer in the South African Navy. The poem entitled "1" compares the experiences of adulthood with the innocence of childhood where the child, playing a game of hide-and-seek, lies:

> hidden in the deepest ignorance
> of the bulldozers moving on the zinc camp,

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[17]In his speech Walcott suggests: "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape … the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is …the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its "making" but its remaking, the fragmented memory." The full speech can be obtained from: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html (Accessed 25th October 2011).

of the trek fishermen group area'd" (ll. 29-37).

The childhood self's blissful "ignorance" of the implications of his cloistered experience as a white child under apartheid is evident here, and is contrasted with the images of forced removals enacted by the apartheid state under the Group Areas Act. This suggests the necessity of confronting historical complicity and privilege on the part of individuals who were not "group area'd." The implications of the cracked hierloom De Kok refers to is acknowledged by the adult poet:

> There is
> between the two of us, in this
> necessary space, nothing,
> nothing that could be learned,
> or forgotten now
> by backing off (ll. 45-50).

Here, creating a "necessary space" to face the past is foregrounded as the adult poet acknowledges the need to learn from the past, or reflect on the implications of privilege. Not "backing off" from confronting history and past complicities is required to "unwrite, retell and reorganise the nature of the record." The fragmentation of narrative continuity affords the opportunity to tackle history directly, both in terms of what was hidden in South Africa's narrative of democracy, and a poetic tradition privileging the idea of beauty and form.

The next section will analyse the main points of departure in this reading of Cronin's poetry: the elements of Romanticism that evidence a focus on writing and speaking the 'land' through South African culture and 'nationhood'; the implications of Pablo Neruda's poetry; the presence of Bertolt Brecht's *V-Effekt*; and, finally, Walter Benjamin's reflections on how the narratives of history are constructed.

1.3 Cronin's Influences

1.3.1   Cronin and Romanticism: Learning how to speak with the voices of this land

Cronin's poetry and literary criticism attempts to express a newer, more South African vocabulary, implicitly linked to the land and the people who inhabit it. This will be explored in Chapter Two when Cronin's "To learn how to speak […]" is discussed in depth. In this poem it becomes apparent that Cronin is arguing for a broader conceptualisation of Romantic poetry. MH Abrams notes that the general subject matter of Romantic poetry took "to a remarkable degree external nature—the

landscape, together with its flora and fauna—[as] a persistent subject of poetry" (1999: 178).[18] In Cronin's poem 'the land' is initially presented with this more traditional Romantic inflection, where the poet foregrounds the desire to "learn to speak / With the voices of the land" (ll. 1-2). But as the poem develops it is clear that it is not only the 'natural' elements that offer sustenance. Rather, it is the reciprocal relationship between human interaction *and* the environment that is an essential part of this circle. The poem concludes with the professed desire to "learn how to speak / with the voices of *this* land" (ll.32-33, emphasis mine), advancing the need to write and think in a language that is as inclusive, and as South African, as possible. In the context of the 1980s, the era in which the poem was written, it proposes a tentative step towards re-connecting people previously separated politically, culturally and economically under the policies of apartheid. I argue that the implications of this poem remain a central preoccupation in Cronin's later work.

Dirk Klopper writes about Romanticism during the apartheid era in the chapter entitled "The lyric poem during and after apartheid" (2012) in the *Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Here he implies a less reciprocal view of the Romantic lyric in South African poetry when he discusses the poetry of Douglas Livingston, Sydney Clouts and Ruth Miller. He comments that white English poetry was unable to identify with either the Afrikaner *or* African nationalisms of the time. This disconnection resulted in the poets seeking to "imagine an alternative order of existence located not in nation, but in nature, [and] not in political relations but in interpersonal relations" (Klopper, 2012: 590).[19] But, are there other aspects of Romanticism capable of including the public sphere? Abrams suggests that:

> [i]t is a mistake, however, to describe the romantic poets as simply "nature poets."
> While many major poems … set out from and return to an aspect or change of aspect
> in the landscape, the outer scene is not presented for its own sake but only as a
> stimulus for the poet to engage in the most characteristic human activity, that of
> thinking. Representative romantic works are, in fact, poems of feelingful meditation
> which, though often stimulated by a natural phenomenon, are concerned with central
> human experiences and problems. (178).

Here Abrams is suggesting that natural phenomena were not the sole focus. Rather, the poetry encouraged a reciprocal relationship between human subjectivity and human activity, which would include the public/political sphere, through the metaphorical use of natural phenomena. Klopper

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[18] While this quotation is taken from MH Abrams' "A Glossary of Literary Terms" ([1957] 1999), he has also published extensively on Romantic Literature. See *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953) among others.

[19] It is also interesting to note that Jeremy Cronin, and many other 'white' poets (Kelwyn Sole and Peter Horn among others) did not seem to suffer the indecisiveness related to supporting African nationalism during the anti-apartheid struggle.

identifies the liminal space occupied by white English poetry of the period, and Cronin also refers to this in an interview, commenting that "being a white South African, in the midst of cities in which there is a black majority, there has been an inevitable sense of belonging and not belonging" (Cronin in Van der Vlies: 2008: 527). This sense of disconnection is, however, confronted in Cronin's attempt to explore new ways of speaking through language and place.

It may be argued that Cronin takes his cue from William Wordsworth's key Romantic text *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802) where Wordsworth was responding to the emergence of Modernity and rapid urbanisation taking place during the Industrial Revolution in England. The return to 'natural phenomena' offered a corrective to a rapidly changing social milieu in the sense that Klopper proposes above. But, this vision of Romanticism hides another important preoccupation. Wordsworth was, like Cronin in the poem noted above, attempting to 'learn how to speak' with both the voices of *the* land and *this* land. Wordsworth writes that the "principal object … which I proposed to myself was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them throughout, as far was possible, in a selection of language really used by men" (Wordsworth in Trilling and Bloom, 1802 [1973]: 595). This, he asserts, would provide better "soil" for his poetry, as:

> a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets, who think they are conferring honour upon themselves, and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men. (596).

Wordsworth gestures towards a poetic language divested of abstraction in a similar manner to Ndebele's desire for a return to the 'ordinary.' This also provides the opportunity to contemplate the interrelationship between the public and the private, and in many ways connects poetry to a material, lived existence. The attempt to speak the language of the land in Cronin's poetry is imbricated with the desire to include other voices and is similar to Wordsworth's poetic manifesto. This suggests a revitalisation of a Romantic aesthetic that has been, in many South African critical engagements such as Klopper's above, too focused on individualism.[20]

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[20] Ironically, Dirk Klopper's article, "Ideology and the Study of White South African English Poetry" (1990) argues for a critical departure from the "Romantic aestheticism" (Klopper, 1990: 291) or tradition. He describes the 'Romantic poet' as an "artist [who] is deemed a highly developed and attuned individual who is in a position of privileged insight and uncommon talent vis-à-vis his society" (289). The 'Romantic' poet accordingly adopts a "form of individualistic response which is directed at the discovery of universal (rather than historically specific) truths" (289). Klopper therefore suggests that "divorc[ing] the study of South African English poetry from a broader study of South African culture is to enclose the poetry in an idealist cocoon … depriv[ing] it of its diverse material levels of significance" (289). This argument seems to align with Maschinge's assertion noted earlier, as well as presenting a further example of materialist criticism discussed in relation to Cronin's AUETSA paper.

1.3.2   Cronin and Neruda: Crossing borders

Pablo Neruda's biography has certain similarities with Cronin's. On the simplest level, there is the implicit connection with socialism in both poets' lives. Furthermore, both entered public office and served in their respective national governments. It is, however, the connection to the poetry that is the focal point here. Specific intertextual references to Neruada are examined at the end of Chapter Three. In this chapter I discuss Cronin's allusion to Neruda's poem "I'm Explaining Some Things," which serves as the title of the first section of the collection *Even the Dead*, as well as Cronin rethinking the implications of Neruda's "The Education of a Chieftain" in "A reply to Pablo Neruda."

These specific references aside, it may be argued that Neruda serves as a significant poetic inspiration throughout Cronin's career. When Cronin is asked to "comment on [his] need to negotiate … [the] sense of an ambivalent placement between public and private in all spheres" (Van der Vlies, 2008: 527) he invokes Neruda's 1971 Nobel Prize acceptance speech in his response. Cronin answers: "Pablo Neruda says somewhere that lyrical poetry is born in the tension between solitude and solidarity" (527), referring to the section in the speech where the Chilean speaks of crossing the Andes from Chile to Argentina to escape persecution. Neruda speaks of how this passage informed his view of poetry:

> During this long journey I found the necessary components for the making of the poem. There I received contributions from the earth and from the soul. And I believe that poetry is an action, ephemeral or solemn, in which there enter as equal partners solitude and solidarity, emotion and action, the nearness to oneself, the nearness to mankind and to the secret manifestations of nature. (Neruda, www.nobelprize.org).[21]

Neruda considers poetry to be a vital resource in the attempt to connect the individual to society and nature. While this overt linking the public and the private is significant, equally important is the idea that the human beings are fundamentally alike. In order to bring people closer together Neruda considers that "the poet must learn through other people," which is an issue sharing similarities with Ndebele's 'ordinary' and Cronin's "To learn how to speak […]." The desire to learn from the environment and the various cultures and languages that exist side by side in South Africa becomes the one of the most important subtexts in Cronin's oeuvre.

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[21] The full speech can be accessed on http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel prizes/literature/laureates/1971/neruda-lecture.html where all subsequent references are to be found (Accessed on 22 December 2012).

Neruda attempts to de-mystify the role of the poet (and art) in this process of learning: "the poet is not a 'little god' … picked out by a mystical destiny in preference to those who follow other crafts and professions." Like Wordsworth, Neruda instead foregrounds the ordinary "baker" preparing the "daily bread" as touchstones of the "duty of fellowship" and "tenderness" necessary to create solidarity. The poet, by "being ordinary" restores a "mighty breadth" to poetry, suggesting the necessity to create a vocabulary that is as inclusive as possible.

The speech concludes with the notion of the 'border crossing.' Neruda notes that he "chose the way of divided responsibility and, rather than repeat the worship of the individual as the sun and center of the system" he preferred to offer his "services in all modesty to an honourable army which may from time to time commit mistakes but which moves forward unceasingly and struggles." This implies a conscious choice to align with the powerless, and presents poetry as a challenge to the power of the symbolic. Neruda foregrounds his belief that his "duties as a poet involve friendship not only with the rose and with symmetry, with exalted love and endless longing, but also with unrelenting human occupations." Neruda here highlights the 'divided responsibility' of the poet, straddling the boundary between 'great art' and 'the ordinary,' attempting to create a bridge between the two. The above represents the importance of Neruda to Cronin. Moreover, the statement reinforces the necessity for a constant re-engagement with notions of what 'great art' is. For both Neruda and Cronin this seems to lie primarily in the desire to learn from the 'ordinary' and the acknowledgement that the needs of the many outweigh the desires of the few.

1.3.3   Cronin and Bertolt Brecht: The *V-Effekt* and a language of contradictions

Cronin's connection with Bertolt Brecht is highlighted in Rita Barnard's article, "Speaking Places: Prison, Poetry, and the South African Nation" (2001), where she identifies an important link between Cronin's poetry and Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*.[22] In the article Barnard cites Frederic Jameson, who notes the political implications behind the *V-Effekt* rests in terms of an "overarching ethics of production" (Jameson in Barnard, 2001: 163).[23] This productive ethic is linked to "a formal self-

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[22] Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* or 'alienation effect,' which I refer to as the *V-Effekt*, should not be conflated with the Russian Formalist notion of 'estrangement' or 'defamiliarisation' in artistic works. Formalists argue that literary language "'deformed' … [and] intensified" ordinary language, consequently making the "everyday world … seem unfamiliar" (Eagleton: 1983 [1996]: 3). In Formalism, ordinary language reflects a routinized, habitual response to everyday reality, and thus only literary language, "by forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language, refreshes these habitualised responses and renders objects more 'perceptible'" (Eagleton, 1983 [1996]: 3). We should note that the focus here is generally is on language itself, and not the particular context the poem or text emerges from. The *V-Effekt*, on the other hand, attempts to 'defamiliarise' the social conditions in an attempt to awaken the reader to silences in historical narratives.
[23] Barnard refers to this ethics of production in terms of Brecht's own analogy for the workings of the *V-Effekt*: that of the experience of driving an old model-T Ford vehicle. Brecht describes how this vehicle's "stuttering and backfiring [engine]

reflexivity" that marks within the work itself the "labour of its production" (Barnard, 2001: 163). The *V-Effekt* is intended to foreground the "analytical fragmentation of the textual units" which allows for "historical narratives [to be] broken up into their constituent parts" (163). In doing so the constructed nature of social relations is positioned in stark relief to a perspective that views history as *fait accompli*. This action encourages an *active* participation on the part of the viewer/reader in the reconstruction of the work of art, and, by extension, historical narratives presented by the poet's reconstruction. Ultimately, the artistic production is intended to "provoke the audience to want to change the social reality" (Wright, 1989: 24) by attempting to enable a perspective that views the work of art, culture or society, as a fundamentally *human* orientated production; something that can be changed, altered and re-interpreted. In this way, the *V-Effekt* encourages the reader to examine her or his own position in discourse as a set of *social* relations, intended to undermine the conceptualisation of the human being as an autonomous individual.

The *V-Effekt* is evident in Brecht's poem "Questions from a Worker who Reads" (Brecht in Moffat, et al 2002: 128). The act of critical reading is foregrounded in the title, suggesting the importance of continually questioning the status quo. The poem begins with the question: "Who built Thebes of the seven gates?" (l. 1). The response is interesting in light of the intention of the *V-Effekt*: "In the books you will find the names of kings. / Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?" (ll. 2-3). Brecht's question immediately foregrounds the fact that history focuses upon the narratives of 'great men,' stories that tend to gloss over the importance of the individuals who did the work. Another example is Brecht humorously noting "Caesar beat the Gauls. / Did he not have a cook with him?" (ll. 16-17) reinforcing the idea that it is not only famous leaders who create history. Brecht's conclusion to the poem returns to the implications of the title. He writes: "So many reports. / So many questions" (ll. 26-27). Here, Brecht reinforces the idea that historical narratives are merely perspectives on events, which deserve critical examination in order to explore the power relations that consolidate a particular viewpoint. This enactment in a poem is important in light of the debate regarding the impact of politics on art, as it suggests that poetry *can* be an interruptive platform from which to launch an assault on "willed invisibility."

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allows one to grasp again the strange wonder of the internal combustion engine" which foregrounds that the engine is, in fact, functions a series of small explosions (163). This functioning is, however, lost to drivers of modern automobiles accustomed to the silent operation of the engine. This is interesting in light of the discussion in Chapter Four of the importance of the automobile in *More Than a Casual Contact*.

Examples of this perspective abound throughout Cronin's poetry. An instance of the *V-Effekt* in action can be illustrated in "The Miracle of Fishes." (1999: 112).[24] The poem comments on the notion of inclusion/exclusion central to the system of apartheid, where the Group Areas Act created areas demarcated for individuals based on race. In spite of this enforced cultural, political and economic separation, communities across many cultural and linguistic barriers united, and the apartheid state was unable to contain the spiralling actions against it during the 80s. The poet notes how communities were:

> settled, unsettled, resettled beyond your horizons,
> Beyond the rail-tracks and the ring of freeways.
>
> Far enough, but close enough,
> To be labourers, domestic workers, Pep store consumers. (ll. 7-10).

The injustice of the apartheid system is clear here. Even as entire communities were "group area'd" and expelled from where they lived, the apartheid (and capitalist) economy still depended on the labour of the displaced.[25] Despite participating, in a sense, with their own oppression, the ironic benefit of separate development was that communities were able to turn "these exclusions into places of empowerment" (ll. 14-15), where the "Township, the bush college, even the prison yard / Became / School for cadres" (ll. 16-17).[26] Here we have the explicit foregrounding of a communal response to apartheid. Instead of elevating a leader or a particular movement in agitating for change, it is "We, the great majority, the excluded-included became / 30 million local councilors, / 30 million parliamentarians, / 30 million agitators" (ll. 59-62). The celebration of the *communal* response against apartheid during the 80s is important to note, and it has implications for contemporary South African society. The act of mythologising the ANC's role as the primary force in the anti-apartheid struggle has, in many ways, resulted in the airbrushing of the South African struggle history. This has caused the dilution of the significant role other organisations played, such as the Black Sash and the conglomeration of civil society groupings represented by the UDF. The use of the *V-Effekt* re-positions

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[24] The title refers to the Biblical story of Jesus feeding the multitude of 5 000 on the Galilean shore with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (see Matthew Chapter 15; esp verses 32 to 39). This reference also appears in Cronin's poem "Moorage" which is discussed in Chapter Three.

[25] It could be suggested that this is also the hypocrisy of capitalism, dependent on the labour and consumption of the lower income groups to function.

[26] This is a theme that Cronin returns to in one of his later poems "End of the century … which is why wipers" (2006: 16) discussed in Chapter 4, where this element of inclusion/exclusion is described as enforced "strategems of non-hegemony" (l. 81). While "The Miracle of Fishes" is a product of apartheid, the contemporary poem is firmly situated in the post-apartheid era, reinforcing the continuing importance of community, and the 'ordinary' in Cronin's work.

the narrative of the apartheid struggle to be as inclusive as possible, incorporating the wide range of South African society united against an oppressive system.

Brecht's *V-Effekt*, while primarily a dramaturgical device, can be usefully employed in reading Cronin's poetry. This strategy endeavours to foreground the 'small' narratives of history to undermine the focus on the narratives of 'Great Men' in the construction of History. As a result, history is conceived of as fluid and provisional, which gives voice to other, equally important 'smaller' narratives. This permits the past to be reconstructed to challenge a linear view of history. If Ingrid de Kok's terms are used in relation to this strategy, the *V-Effekt* shows how the heirloom, or history, is pieced together

1.3.4 Cronin and Walter Benjamin: The dialectical image and Jeremy Cronin's poetry

The repeated citation of Walter Benjamin's writings in Jeremy Cronin's poetry is significant. From allusions to various images that Benjamin deploys, the most important being 'the Angel of History' in the poem "Switchback" examined in Chapter Four and the title of Cronin's second collection (*Even the Dead*), Benjamin is central in Cronin's poetry. "Even The Dead" (1999: 131) is a specific example of Cronin's use invocation of Walter Benjamin and his version of historical materialism. For the purposes of this introduction, it is important to trace Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image' and the montage form, which is especially prevalent in Cronin's last two collections. This will also serve to illustrate the relationship between Benjamin's work and Brecht's *V-Effekt*.

Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (2009) is central to the notion of the 'dialectical image.' Benjamin described the formulation of the Arcades Project in this manner:

> Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall
> purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse -
> these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own:
> by making use of them. (Benjamin, [1999], 2004: 460).

Benjamin's literary montage with its "philosophic play of distances, transitions and intersections" and "perpetually shifting contexts and ironic juxtapositions" (Eiland & McLaughlin, 1999: xi) allows for a multiplicity of meanings to resonate through its fragmentary form. JM Coetzee writes in a review of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* that it "suggests a new way of writing about a civilisation using its rubbish as materials rather that its artworks: history from below rather than above" (Coetzee, 2007: 64).[27]

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[27] It is noteworthy to consider Coetzee's phrasing in the context of post-colonial recovery of the lost histories of the colonised, and the concomitant act of re-writing colonial historical narratives to include the marginalised. The review can also be found on: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2001/jan/11/the-marvels-of-walter-benjamin/?pagination=false (Accessed 14 September 2012).

Coetzee comments: "the great innovation of the *Arcades Project* would be its form … work[ing] on the principle of montage, juxtaposing textual fragments from the past and present in the expectation that they would strike sparks from and illuminate each other" (54). Benjamin's intention was to position these fragments of the past in the "charged field of the historical present," where they would interact and form a "dialectical image" (57). This, Coetzee notes, resulted in a "dialectical movement frozen for a moment" (57).[28] The "shock-like montage" of the materials placed before the reader (Tiedemann in Eiland& McLaughlin, 2009: 1013) would accordingly be an interruptive force in the linear flow of the history of 'great men.' The dialectical image thus attempts to shock the reader into recognising the past, as it resonates in the present.

The importance of the dialectical image in Cronin's poetry rests in his use of this montage form, where the form and content of the poem purposefully juxtapose the past and the present. A prime example of this strategy is the poem "The Time of the Prophets" (1999: 128) in *Even the Dead*. In it the poet links the tragic narrative of Nonqawuse, who during the nineteenth century prophesied that all Xhosa cattle should be killed and the land uncultivated in order for the spirits of the Xhosa dead to rise up and destroy the colonial oppressor. This prophecy is purposely linked to the imposition of the tenets of neo-liberal capitalism in South Africa during the transition period. Nonqawuse's 1856 prophesy resulted in great suffering for most of the Xhosa nation when they heeded her call to kill their main source of food and wealth, and in many ways signalled the end of the almost one hundred year resistance to British colonial expansion on the Eastern frontier. The prophets of this terrible period are linked in the poem to more contemporary diviners, who "scanned the banking journals … // and tut-tutted over our latest world competitive ratings" (ll. 44, 46). As a result of the number-crunching, a decision that the "cosmology of the / World Bank prevailed" (l. 75-76) and post-apartheid South Africa was firmly embedded into the world market in order to become more globally "competitive" (l. 78). The montage form here allows for the events to be displayed alongside each other without any mediation, framing the cattle-killing in a contemporary moment. In deliberately juxtaposing disparate moments, the colonial imperative for financial gain is highlighted in both Nonqawuse's and contemporary times; the trajectory of elevating the economic comfort of the West in relation to local necessities is reinforced.

The idea that "historical meaning is transient, depending not so much on the past as on the present" (Buck-Morss, [Rev Time]: 213) is important in the recognition that history is not an "'eternal image' of the past" (Benjamin, [1940] 1999: 262). Instead Benjamin suggests an alternative

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[28] Benjamin describes this moment as the "dialectic … at a standstill" (Benjamin in Buck-Morss, 1981: 58).

"constructive principle," where "thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their *arrest* as well" (262, my italics). The arrested thought that is intended to challenge amnesia is evident in both the use of the montage form and the *V-Effekt*. Like De Kok's favouring of the 'cracked heirloom,' fragments of history and past complicities are placed in a 'charged present.'

1.5 Conclusion

Much of Cronin's poetry stems from a desire to foreground the interaction between the public and private and this interface has been an important concern in South African literary criticism for several decades. The 'politics of reception' has perpetuated two paradigms. The first considers poetry as a genre of the private sphere, independent of history and socio-cultural contexts. The second paradigm, the poetry of public commitment, foregrounds contextual concerns over the formal issues. Cronin resists this division. He does so by using both Brecht's *V-Effekt* and Benjamin's version of historical materialism to rediscover the interruptive power of poetry. This results in a poetry that challenges amnesia by often focusing on demythologising historical narratives in terms of content, as well as being formally fragmentative. In addition to this overtly Marxist framework, Cronin also privileges the 'ordinary' in terms of Njabulo Ndebele's understanding of the term as an opportunity to negotiate the public and private, and a focal point for the struggle for a more inclusive society. The notion of the 'ordinary' is also related to Wordsworth's intentions with regard to a Romantic aesthetic: learning how to speak with the voices of the land, in terms of *both* the natural environment and the people who live in it.

2. Chapter Two: *Inside*: the Prison and the Word

2.1 Introduction

The title of Cronin's first collection, *Inside*, is indicative of the concerns contained in the collection and much of Cronin's oeuvre in general. The word suggests two interrelated aspects: the poet inside the prison, as well as the notion of words and poetry emerging from within the poet's thoughts to the outside world. This presents a condensed example of 'border crossing,' where the poet consistently blurs the boundaries between the public and the private. It also demonstrates the power of poetry in re-writing the world. The poetry is thus not intended to be read as an art form loftily separated from the culture or particular history from which it arises, encompassed in the notion of 'art for art's sake.' Rather, the poet's relationship to culture and history is paramount in reading the poetry.

Inside is divided into six sections, 'Inside,' 'The Naval Base,' Venture to the Interior,' 'Some Uncertain Wires,' 'Love Poems' and 'Isiququmadevu.' If we take the above sections as an indicator of the collection's narrative, the first section ('Inside') is generally focalised from the prison and concentrates on the poet's experience of prison. Key to this section is the notion of solidarity between prisoners, and the important element of recognising the humanity that links individuals together. Cronin, speaking shortly after his release from prison in 1984 comments that the collection, "rather than treating prison as if it were exceptional," the experience of incarceration was purposefully used "as a focused situation which was 'exemplary' of the wider society" (Cronin in Gardener, 1984: 23). For Cronin the "subjective" experience of prison could be placed in a "dialectical relationship" with the realities of South African apartheid. South Africa would thus be viewed as a "prison society, redolent with spatial controls of all kinds" (23), enabling the interrelationship between the public and the private to be highlighted. Cronin's assertion is an extension of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' here. Apartheid society is metaphorically presented as a culture of contradictions, where incarceration is both experienced behind the walls of a security prison as well as in the spatial segregation enacted by the apartheid government. The inclusion/exclusion or inside/outside metaphor is therefore underlined. The title also demonstrates the powerful matrix of alienation and belonging that arose as a result of this reality. The second section, 'The Naval Base,' contains the poem "1" discussed in relation to De Kok's 'cracked heirloom', and deviates from the overt context of the prison to shift its focus to the poet's childhood. The poems in this section also reflect the innocence and insulated experience of the poet's white South African childhood.

The third section, called 'Venture to the Interior', consolidates the notion of inside/outside. The section focuses on two interrelated inward journeys: the excavation of language to discover the hidden meaning of words, as well as an attempt to explore the colonial process of renaming the land. This

section centers on the major task of reinvesting and reworking language as a means of escaping the confines of the prison: both literally and figuratively. Language is considered a prison and an awareness of its oppressive and ideological powers needs to be created in order to escape and challenge oppression. Writing offers a form of escape, however tenuous, from these impoverished material conditions. The poems "Poem-Shrike" and "Walking on Air" from the first section, as well as three poems ("Prologue," "Cave-Site" and "To learn how to speak […]") from the third cycle 'Venture to the Interior' will be discussed. These poems demonstrate Cronin's focus on language and the interrelationship between the public and private. Moreover they display his propensity to place history and language in a constant tension with each other so as to discover new ways of relating to the world around us.

The following section of the collection, 'Some Uncertain Wires,' is an examination of the process of linking South Africa to a communication network through the development of a telegraph system. It is ironic that this process, ostensibly designed to facilitate communication in South Africa, only benefited the white privileged sector of South African society. The poems examine the poet's own historical complicity in the perpetuation of oppressive systems by focusing on his grandparents. Of particular interest is how his Grandpa Kemp had been a foreman in charge of Xhosa workmen who dug telegraph poles at the beginning of the development of telecommunications in South Africa. The poet describes how his grandfather "bothered to speak / a few bastardised words of Xhosa – for command, / while every new pole carried / the pulse of colonialism in its overhead wires" (ll. 13-16). These wires become a kind of totem for the poet in the final untitled poem of this cycle, as he begins to view these telegraph poles from the vantage point of his older self, reflecting on his childhood visits to his grandparents. The poet notes: "Listen between Cape Town / past shanty towns, up to the Boland, over dried flats, the road signs, the Riviersonderend, / to those thin telegraph wires" where he begins to connect how "my family, / between generations is all space / … joined / by some uncertain wires" (ll. 23-26, 33-36). The past and present is interlinked through the symbol of the telegraph poles, which still connect South Africa. It implicitly recognises how this connection came about: through colonialism, and the role his family played in this era. This is an uncomfortable recognition of historical complicity, especially by those privileged by their skin colour during the apartheid era. It also illustrates what Ingrid De Kok highlights as a re-remembering and piecing together of the 'cracked heirloom,' where the scars of the past are not merely swept aside but acknowledged.

The penultimate section, entitled 'Love Poems' is, as the title suggests, the imprisoned poet invoking his love for his wife from within the prison walls. Cronin's first wife died while he was in prison, which lends certain poignancy to the act of recreating her memory as the poems reflect his love

for her, as well as his inability to be with her in the final days before her death. The importance of language as offering an 'escape' from prison is significant. Cronin notes that in an attempt to reconstruct "a sense of the reality outside" the "concrete reality" of prison, the "rest of reality had to be recovered by naming and invoking" (20). It is also an important signifier of the power of language.

The final section of the collection is entitled 'Isiququmadevu.'[29] The title is taken from the Zulu legend of the Isisqumadevu, the squatting monster that swallows souls and, when he is eventually slain, releases these captured individuals. It is important that a traditional mythological figure from South African folklore is foregrounded, specifically situating the poetry. This reinforces an awareness of the stories that are entwined with the cultures in South Africa. In this section the poems shift from a reworking of Franz Fanon ("White Face, Black Mask'), the poet musing about the event that led to his imprisonment ("One Particular Day. 1975") and poetic observations of the behaviour of some animals in the prison's surrounds ("Chameleon" and "Kwikkie"). The poetry thus invokes the distinctive local flavour by focusing on South African phenomena. The more diverse content of this section is linked to its title, where the metaphor suggests that the poems provide avenues, as well as examples, of escape and release from prison; in a sense attempting to kill the squatting monster of apartheid, thereby freeing all who were swallowed up in its narrative. Importantly, the escape is achieved through observation and creativity in the form of poetry.

Cronin, when asked in an interview conducted by Robert Berold to comment on the potential anarchistic function of being a poet, responds: "the anarchism inherent in poetry is located in the stance it adopts to language" (2001: 129). In Cronin's view, poetry "bites at the heels of discourse" and makes "visible hidden assumptions and assumed hierarchies embodied in our ways of speaking" (129). In a similar vein, regarding the democratisation of English in a post-apartheid society, Cronin noted that "regicide" needed to be practiced, where "the Queen in the Queen's English will have to be dethroned and beheaded" (Cronin, 1988: 12). The poetry examined attempts to disrupt received linguistic and poetic conventions and may also be seen as an attempt to excavate the hidden stories of history. Through the process of naming, invocation and recovery, both linguistic and historical, a vocabulary is sought to challenge the symbolic. In the first part of the chapter Cronin's "Poem-shrike," "Prologue" and "Cave-site" are examined in an effort to illustrate how Cronin begins constructing a language marked by a social conscience. This demonstrates how his poetry does not avoid politics, but

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[29] The 'Isiququmadevu' is the Zulu legend of the bloated 'swallowing monster' who, when finally slain, released all those he had swallowed. This full legend can be accessed from http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/mlb/mlb16.htm (accessed on 1 May 2013).

rather reflects on the dialectic between the public and the private. Next I analyse "To learn how to speak […]," which reflects a desire for South African poets to create a speaking position that confronts South African history and attempts to 'learn' from both the physical and historical environment through language. In the final section, the poem "Walking on Air" demonstrates how the strategy of historical recovery and the foregrounding of the interrelationship between the public and the private uses Brecht's *V-Effekt* to highlight the smaller narratives of the South African struggle.

2.2 "Poem-Shrike": Language and words as material

"Poem-Shrike," is the opening salvo of the first cycle of poems in the collection *Inside*. It is important to note my preference for the term 'poet' rather than 'speaker' since there is very little distinction between the voice of the speaker and the voice of the poet in Cronin's poetry. This also extends into the general project of blurring the distinction between the public and private. In any case much of his poetry emerges from a highly self-conscious and self-reflective writing position.

In "Poem-Shrike" the poet combines a whole range of articles found in prison in order to construct 'shrike.' The physical composition of the 'shrike' is paralleled by the poet creating a poem from a description of how the 'shrike' is constructed. The language of the poem is constructed from physical surroundings, overtly linking the process of writing poetry with the material world, presenting an exercise in the creation of poetry from the barest of resources: the prison floor. The creative act of making the 'poem-shrike' reduces language to its bare functional parts, highlighting its constructedness. This is also demonstrated in the construction of the title: "Poem-Shrike." The compound noun welds the word 'poem' to 'shrike,' reinforcing the link between the act of naming and the material environment. The use of a bird of prey is also interesting, as it could refer to the mode of hunting employed by the Shrike. Roberts's *The Birds of South Africa* (1949) describes this hunting method: "a habit of impaling some of its prey on thorns … [and] on the barbs of wire fences" (1949: 298). Specific reference is made to barbed wires and therefore prison in this description, which is even further consolidated by the Shrikes' nick-name of 'Jackie Hangman,' and so the figurative potential of the bird is garnered.

The composition of his poem-shrike serves as the beginning to the poem: "For a body I've rolled up / inventory item six two three: one pair / socks short prisoner's European" (ll. 1-3). The language of prison authority is invoked in simple cataloguing, creating the impression that items have

been checked off an inventory list by the prison authorities as they hand out the prison issue items.[30] To this embryonic body, the poet supplements: "for a tail / a tight hand from a scuffed / awaiting trial pack and added / 50 finest quality / Rizla gummed / cigarette blaadjies scorched black" (ll. 3-9). The poet purposefully "scorched" the "Rizla … blaadjies … black" indicating the care taken to construct and piece the shrike together.[31] The poet is beginning to craft the 'shrike' out of these small, insignificant prison items, and in so doing brings life to the shrike and the poem through both language and the careful creation of his hands. The materiality and power of language to symbolically build something out of nothing, using the most basic of resources available, is foregrounded. Significantly, this is an act of creation that is both figurative and material.

The collection of insignificant materials, which playfully challenges what constitutes the proper subject matter of 'great' poetry, continues as further fragments taken from the "prison cell floor" (l. 10) become a skeletal "barred" (l. 10) spine and a "beak" (l. 11). The poet begins to address this object, intimating a sense of affection for his Frankenstein. Repeating the possessive pronoun "your" (l. 11) suggests a form of identification with the item, both poem and shrike. The sense of intimacy is further heightened by this admission: "your call with its / inner-side scratch I've rasped' (l. 14). In this moment, the poet is not only rasping a fragment of metal to create a beak, he is also, as suggested by the pun on 'rasp,' attempting to give voice to the hand-made shrike through the writing of the poem. The shift between the 'I' and 'your' reinforces that a form of transference is taking place between the poet and the hand-made shrike. The shrike, as a powerful symbol of freedom, acts as a catalyst in the attempt to escape confinement through the act of creation. The transformative power of language can, at least for the briefest moment, allow for the potential to break out of prison.

The intimate connection between the words on the page and the hand-made shrike is further demonstrated when the poet moves on from the description of the beak, and refers to the "eyes / sharpened on the grindstone / down in the prisoners workshop" (ll. 14 – 16). These "sharpened" eyes are manufactured after being "dipped / in an old Koo tin of water" (ll. 16-17), and now emerge "dripping light / nail sharp, tense, each as an i-dot" (ll. 18-19). Together, the careful pairing of the voice and the eyes "sharpened on the grindstone" foreground key tools in the poet's armoury. The poem is a product of vision *and* voice, and is constructed from the small, insignificant items that the poet sees, contemplates, and constructs, both in the material world and through language. Language and writing, extending to acts of the imagination, are shown to be capable of recreating the world. The

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[30] Even a simple pair of short socks was designated 'European' in the apartheid prison, suggesting divisions based on skin colour over this period extended to the pettiest of items.

[31] The use of the Afrikaans colloquial word "blaadjies" lends a South African-ness to the speech which is important to note in my discussion of Cronin's "To learn how to speak […]" in the next section.

emphasis on the written word is reinforced by the "sharp" dotting of an "i" where the construction of the poem is as exacting as the proverbial 'crossing the t's' and 'dotting the i's' in language.

Addressing the handmade shrike, the poet checks "your / hungry parts / over and over again" (ll. 21-23), and "longing by longing" (l. 23), underlining his own desire for freedom, throws the creation:

> out
>
> over the high walls I launch you now …
>
> sshrike! (ll. 23-25).

In the last line of the poem the object is flung over the boundaries of the prison walls with an emphatic onomatopoeic "sshrike!" (l. 25). The isolation of the word emphasises that the shrike, and the poem, is freed from the confines of the prison. The assonance contained in the word "sshrike!" and its similarity to the word 'strike,' underlines the intended challenge to the poet's imprisonment. It also mimics the sound of air rushing, suggesting that the poem, and language, have the velocity to mitigate both confinement and exclusion. Even though the poet is incarcerated, poetry offers at least some form of revolt or an "eruption of the suppressed." The conclusion can also be read as a form of escape from the limitations of received poetic conventions.

In Barnard's short description of "Poem-Shrike" in her article "Speaking Places: Prison, Poetry, and the South African Nation" (2001), she comments that the piecemeal construction of the poem "out of the unprepossessing items of prison life" represents a "painstaking reconstruction of his world out of the minimal scraps at hand: re-remembering in love and comradeship what has been broken, smashed and shattered" (Barnard, 2001: 161). Barnard's statement echoes De Kok's 'cracked heirloom' here. Barnard provides a further nuance to this metaphor by describing this gathering together of "inauspicious materials" as the "solidarity of bricoleurs" (161). *Bricolage* is defined by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as "the construction or creation from whatever is available for use" or "an assemblage of haphazard or incongruous elements" (Stevenson, et al, 2007: 291). This gathering of inauspicious material—both in language and the physical environment—suggests a new way of representing South Africa in poetry. "Poem-Shrike" succeeds in invoking the language of the *material* environs, however impoverished it may be, by reaching for a form of solidarity or connection with bricoleurs: the unwanted and discarded. Throughout his oeuvre, Cronin's poetry enacts this desire for establishing a relationship with the castaways, be it the oppressed during apartheid, those marginalised under colonial narratives or poetry struggling to find new forms to challenge the confines of the 'great tradition. "Poem-Shrike" is the first poem in the collection *Inside*, and the first poem in Cronin's

publication history in book form. It serves as an entry point into Cronin's poetic practice, demonstrating a number of major concerns that will be highlighted during the course of this dissertation. A general strategy can be observed which foregrounds an expressive link with the material environment and its impact on the language of the poem. Moreover, there is the challenge to the notion of 'high' art. Throwing the handmade-shrike over the prison walls suggests the poet's attempt at escaping both his physical incarceration *and* the reading of poetry that privileges the abstract.

2.3 Venturing into the Interior: Language, Naming and Colonisation

Cronin's "Prologue" (1999: 36) is the first poem from the third section of *Inside,* entitled 'Venture into the Interior.' The section's title recalls the colonial mission into Africa as a continual exploration into the 'dark undiscovered continent.' The trope of the colonial figure journeying into the so-called 'heart of darkness' is, however, inverted and instead of a journey of discovery linked to the expansion of imperialism, the exploration turns towards another significant imperialism: that of language.

The section primarily thematises the poet's attempt to learn how to speak, which in the poem "Prologue" (1999: 36) commences with the most basic of actions, that of breathing in and out. The poem begins with the poet testing the "distant parts of this machine" and taking his "tongue-tip" (l. 4) to "feel up / t-t-t-t-t" (ll. 4-5) the interior of his mouth. Returning to the most simple of sound-making actions, the poet moves his tongue around the palate and begins to make phonetic sounds. Kristeva's notion of the pre-thetic, where the power of the bodily drives to challenge the dominant linguistic symbolic order, is important to note. The exploration of the interior of his mouth continues until the discovery of "the stem from which depends / a strange / perhaps forbidden fruit aaaaah!" (ll. 13-15). The encounter with the vocal chords is linked to the act of speech as a source of nourishment, echoed in the onomatopoeic 'aaaaah" phonetic sound, repeated in the next line. The onset of the communicative act is broadened from a simple "t-t-t-t-t" sound to the "aaaaah" of air rushing outwards, which suggests the potential liberation at being able to allow the air contained inside his body to escape. There is a palpable sense of relief at discovering the ability to make sounds, which affords the potential for communication and expression. The invocation of the 'forbidden fruit,' which resulted in the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, suggests the discovery of speech contains the potential for the first and most basic seeds of revolt against authority.[32] Moreover, the poet is mimicking a medical doctor examining an individual, instructing them to open their mouth so that she can examine the throat to check for any

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[32] Significantly in the historical context, it was the 'forbidden' act of speech and protest that resulted in the imprisonment of political prisoners during the apartheid era.

infections. This suggests that the poet is undertaking a scientific scrutiny of language to search for diseases.

The expulsion of breath allows for the possibility to "let the tongue untwine" (l. 20) and the potential to speak. The tongue continues to move and flicking the "switch to In / then Out: these / being the two prevailing winds" (ll. 24-26), thereby allowing air to move freely in both directions. Both these actions begin to create the conditions for communication. The continual inside/outside breathing movement necessary to sustain human life is implicitly linked to the act of learning how to speak and communicate. The poem concludes with the poet asking: "Are all systems go? / - Good. / Then let flesh be made words" (ll. 27-29). The medical exploration of the tongue and mouth thus prepares for the act of speech, which allows the 'inside' thoughts and flesh to be made into an act of communication and poetry.

Rita Barnard's interpretation of this poem suggests that this almost mechanical "cranking up of the speech organs" insists that "we *make* freedom, that we fabricate significance from the material 'resources' of our bodies and breath" (Barnard, 2001: 163, emphasis in original). Barnard highlights the inversion of the biblical narrative contained in John Chapter 1, verse 14, which Cronin foregrounds: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." She suggests that this reversal, where flesh can be made into words "affirms the creative, incantatory power of speech—and poetry" (163). Cronin is thus foregrounding the power of language to both embody and construct perspectives. Language is conceived of as dangerous and the 'forbidden fruit' of speech offers the potential to create new meaning.

"Cave-Site" (1999: 37) extends the exploration of language and speech privileged in "Prologue." The title refers to an area undergoing exploration by archaeologists or geologists, who forensically examine the cave for either traces of human history or the earth's geological past. Here a form of recovery is taking place in the oldest and most basic of human shelters. The cave-site becomes a metonym for the mouth and the act of speaking, which similarly suggest a return to the most basic building blocks of language to challenge the symbolic.

The mouth becomes a site of struggle, and it is the reader who is asked to become the scientist, tasked with exploring their own connection to the hidden implications of language and how we speak:

> I want you
> to prise carefully
> sound
>   from sound
> to honour by speaking
> (and sometimes to discard)

to lift, cough,
      breccia, rock, sediment
Layer through layer
        in this
  mouth or
      cave-site of word. (ll. 1-12)

The reader is asked to delicately "prise" open their mouth to "carefully" examine "sound from sound," suggesting vigilant examination of what is said. Words need to be isolated and separated from each other in order for their full implications to be revealed. The careful prising open of meaning can also be linked to the reading of poetry, a form of writing that demands close attention to language. The 'anarchistic function' of poetry noted earlier is foregrounded, as the vigilant separation of sound/words is necessary to confront the symbolic order. The haphazard formal characteristic of the line organisation mimics this searching, exploratory pattern across the page. The necessity of carefully examining the word is reinforced in the parenthesis "(and sometimes to discard")". Despite the elevation of the speech act contained in the phrase "to honour by speaking," the active engagement with language may require the flesh, or sedimented meanings of the word to be either "discard[ed]" or, at the very least, its meaning re-examined. Breaking open the bed-rock of language to discover hidden meaning and histories in this manner is analogous to the scientist investigating the building blocks of the world.

The paleontological sifting through traces of language and meaning on the floor of the metaphorical mouth/cave-site, result in the discovery of "root, birdbone / shells of meaning" (ll. 13-14). Language is expressly linked to the archaeological remains of ancient human settlements, which begins to blur the apparent opposition between an artistic and scientific world-view. The archeological investigation is coupled purposefully with the organs of speech in the concluding three lines of the poem, where the detritus of meaning is:

left in our mouths
by thousands of years of
      human occupation. (ll. 15-17).

The use of the word "occupation" reinforces the oppressive nature of language, which is tellingly linked to "human." Responsibility for the reinvigoration of language is purposefully depicted as a wide-ranging project, cutting across all layers of history. It may be argued that the poem could also represent the desire to actively chip away at the bedrock of the poetic tradition, perhaps finding a reinvigorated language with which to express a multi-layered South African experience in the shards

left on the cave-floor. "Cave-site" expresses the need to be actively responsible for the choice of language used, suggesting the necessity for constant vigilance and re-examination of the inherited meanings that construct perspectives on the world. The poem thus reflects the constant search for a new vocabulary that is more appropriate to interrogate what it means to be a South African, both linguistically and historically. The poet becomes the archeologist, digging through the detritus of history to discover new meaning in the present. The next section discusses "To learn how to speak […]" where the quest to discover a new vocabulary is further reinforced.

2.4 "To *Learn* How to Speak … ": Language and history

The italicisation of the verb 'learn' in the above title suggests one of the key trajectories in Cronin's poetic oeuvre: the desire to discover poetic expression that is connected to, not only language and history, but inherited Western poetic forms. It also foregrounds the willingness to learn from the environment and people, as well as the necessity to accept that ongoing education is always necessary to learn how to think and speak anew. Language, as has been demonstrated in the preceding sections, is conceived, and fabricated, as a social and historical construct in Cronin's poetry. Cronin's "To learn how to speak [...]" offers a sustained engagement with the language used in South African poetry, and suggests that it is necessary to immerse poetic responses in the terms, and forms, that relate to South African experience. The poem is untitled, but has been generally named "To learn how to speak [...]" taken from the first line of the poem. The fact that it is untitled suggests that the narrative of the poem allows for a more open-ended reading to emerge, and implies a willingness to start from scratch. The key imperative in this makeshift title is the injunction '*to learn*,' which is set in opposition to the notion of 'to impose': imposition being a key throughout South African history where the 'powerful' enforced their own belief systems on the so-called 'weaker' and 'less civilised.' The open-ended nature of the infinitive 'to' reinforces the idea that learning is an ongoing process.

This poem is the most readily cited in Cronin's oeuvre, with Stephen Watson suggesting that it "has justly become one of the most famous — if not *the* most famous — of all poems written by South Africans in the last decade" (1990: 97, emphasis in original). Watson, writing on the cusp of the transition period in the early 90s, suggests that the content of the poem makes an appeal "to all members of this nation to visualise a future in which all voices, in all various language groups, have their rightful say" (98). Watson is responding to the apartheid national anthem of the time, "The Voice of South Africa,"[33] which was a singular, monolithic expression of South African white culture.

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[33] The Afrikaans source for this title is "Die Stem."

Watson juxtaposes the monolithic voice of the anthem against the more pluralised connotations present in Cronin's poem.[34]

Rita Barnard also positions Cronin's poem in these terms pointing out that the content of the apartheid national anthem emphasises a list of "emblematic natural objects ... from which 'The Voice' singular and authoritarian, seems to arise directly, without human mediation" (2001: 166). The converse of Barnard's statement suggests that Cronin's poem calls for the recognition of the role of human mediation in the construction of place by carefully examining how we speak. Again, the infinitive verb 'to learn' in the title becomes the key point of departure in analysing the poem. There is the inherent implication of having to *un-learn* the symbolic: the dominant, singular 'white voice' of apartheid South Africa. This is intended to challenge the notion of separate development based upon skin colour, and the project of retaining cultural and linguistic 'purity' among these racial groupings. The poem is directed at *learning* from other cultures, and not imposing. [35]

"To learn how to speak [...]" is divided into two stanzas, the first consisting of 31 lines, with a concluding two-line couplet. A circular movement is foregrounded in the formal construction of the poem, as the isolated, final couplet is a variation of the first two lines. The emphasis of the initial call "To learn how to speak / With the voices of the land" (ll. 1-2) is amended to read "To learn how to speak / With the voices of *this* land" (l. 33, my emphasis). The poem suggests that a more specific context for the writing of poetry is indispensable. The act of learning emerges from not only the voices of the land or nature, in a more popularised Romantic conceptualisation, but the sum of the human voices across the breadth the land. The land is purposefully shifted from the general, perhaps more abstracted concept, to the particular. The reciprocity[36] of nature is broadened to include the notion of human subjectivity. Significantly it places emphasis on the local and specific South African context

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[34] The current South African national anthem consists of the hymn "NkosiSikelel' iAfrika" (translated as "God Bless Africa' in English) divided into Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho sections, and concluding with the first verse of "The Voice of South Africa," further divided into Afrikaans and English sections. This provides a representation of the five major language groups in South Africa, and symbolically defines, to a degree, a new national unified culture.

[35] An example of an artist who has attempted to learn how to speak, as well as attempted to understand multi-lingual and cultural expression would be Johnny Clegg. Clegg, throughout his musical and intellectual career, presents an illustration of an artist willing to cross linguistic and cultural borders in an effort to connect different South African experience together. One of Clegg's most famous songs "Asimbonanga" (translated from isiZulu as 'we have not seen him') also contains a reflection on language and communication, when he asks, "who has the words to close the distance between you and me." While the song in the main revolves around Mandela's imprisonment on Robben Island, with the attendant implication of the power of Mandela's image to speak and draw people together, the importance of learning new words to cross the borders of misunderstanding is implicit. The full lyrics to this song can be found on the internet at http://inmyafricandream.free.fr/songs/s_asimbonanga_uk.htm (Accessed 15 September 2013).

[36] MH Abrams describes the Romantic notion of reciprocity between man and nature as the sharing or "'reciprocity between the external world and [the poet's] own mind' in which the two agents are equal in initiative and power"(20). It is important to note the level of equilibrium that is sought here.

where the poetic expression can explore new ways of speaking in a similar manner to archeological undertaking discussed in "Cave-site."

A limited reading of the Romantic desire to "learn how to speak / with speak the voices of *the* land" (ll. 1-2, my emphasis) serves as the point of departure. The re-examination of language is initially undertaken through emblematic images of nature:

> To parse the speech in its rivers,
> To catch in the inarticulate grunt,
> Stammer, call, cry, babble, tongue's knot
> A sense of the stoneness of these stones
> From which all words are cut. (ll. 3-7).

The image of flowing water is intended to "parse," or breakdown, language so that a closer "sense" of the words that link humanity to nature and to the land is foregrounded. The sound of the river's 'inarticulate grunt', expressly linked to 'speech' through the flowing movement of the water, seems to carve out of the river bedrock 'words.' This begins to reinforce the reciprocity between language and nature. The repetition of the difficulty of speech is indicated through the use of the words 'inarticulate,' 'stammer' and 'babble,'[37] which suggests the complexity of speaking with the voices of the land. The 'babble' of the river's flow could be linked via assonance to the similar sounding word 'Babel,' referring to the Biblical story where the Lord confused the language of the earth, scattering the builders of the Tower of Babel to all ends of the earth, which further strengthens the poem's linguistic attempt 'to learn how to speak.'[38]

In order to counteract the inarticulacy, 'venturing into the interior' of South Africa to discover new ways of speaking is required in order to connect history and language together. In order to trace this linkage, the poet proleptically desires:

> To trace with the tongue wagon-trails
> Saying the suffix of their aches in -kuil, -pan, -fontein,
> In watery names that confirm

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[37] "Babble" is etymologically derived from Middle Low German (Dutch) and refers to "parallel native imitative" sounds.

[38] 'Babel' refers to the biblical story in Genesis Chapter 11, where the "whole earth had one language and a few words." A decision was made by 'men' to build a tower into the heavens in order to "let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The story continues where the Lord came down to see this tower being built and said: "Behold they are one people, and they have one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do." Thus the Lord made a decision to come down from heaven and "confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech," scattering the tower builders "abroad … all over the face of the earth." Thus, "the city was called Babel because the Lord confused the language of the earth." There is a sense that Cronin's poem can be read as an attempt to re-connect the 'scattered' individuals under apartheid through a recognition of the intimate connection to place and experience through language.

<div align="center">The dryness of their ways. (ll. 8-11).[39]</div>

The intimacy of the words cut out by the river's movement is extended by foregrounding acts of place-naming undertaken by the Trek-Boers, who from the 1800s 'ventured into the interior' during the so-called Great Trek. The tongue begins to 'trace' this movement in both a figurative and literal manner and begins to voice or vocalise the map of South Africa like a finger following a route on a map. The poem is therefore not only about 'nature's' influence on language and naming, but on human intervention. Moreover it is an attempt to historicise, and trace the history of the land through these discursive acts of naming, and by extension, ownership. This underlines that naming is not an innocent enterprise, but is mired in an unpleasant history that needs to be excavated and not ignored. The poet continues after the ironic assonance of 'watery names' confirming the 'dryness of their ways' by suggesting that this movement would necessitate the tongue "To visit the places of occlusion" (l. 12). This implies that the dry authoritarian 'voice' of South Africa during the apartheid era, also linked to the Boer's own colonising Trek, expressly hid aspects of history which need to be parsed by learning 'how to speak with the voices of land.' The need for an active engagement with language to unearth a new 'national anthem' to challenge the elisions is paramount. Moreover, the act of recovery is essential in bringing about a more inclusive perspective, foregrounding the importance of drawing from the narratives of South African history those who were discarded during colonialism.

The act of voicing which is central to the poem emphasises what Barnard calls the "materiality of the spoken word and its connection to human experience" (Barnard, 2001: 167) that, like "Poem-Shrike", is painfully reconstructed from the surrounding environment. This also offers a perspective that allows the land and 'nation' to be conceived as a discursive creation: a creation that can be re-imagined in a way that counters the monolithic, and singular, 'Voice of South Africa.' In desiring a more inclusive view of history and language, the poem hints at a more "capacious, unifying vision" for South Africa, where it is not only about language, but "a collective experience of the land" (167). The poet links the 'collective experience of the land' to South African 'Black' poetry of the 1970s when he expresses the desire "to feel / the full moon as it drums / At the back of my throat / Its cow-skinned vowel" (ll. 17-20). This is a clear reference to the title of Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's collection of poetry, *Sounds of a cowhide drum* (1971). Mtshali's poem of the same name shares similarities with Cronin's poem. In Mtshali's poem the repetitive "Boom! Boom! Boom!" (1971, l. 1, 6, 13, 30) onomatopoeic sound of a person hitting a "cow-hide drum" (1971, l. 31) is the central motif.[40] The

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[39]These suffixes are all derived from Afrikaans words for, respectively, 'dam,' 'small lake' and 'fountain.'
[40] Interestingly, Mtshali's poem also consists of 32 lines, but is divided into 10 stanzas, perhaps mimicking the striking of the eponymous drum in the title.

sound of the drum functions in a similar manner to the tongue tracing along the linguistic map of South Africa. The symbol of the drum and its percussive sound links Mtshali's vocal poetic intervention to African tribal forms of communication and cultural signification. Mtshali's speaker "drum[s] on your dormant soul" (1971, l. 14) to awaken his audience to their own history: the "precious heritage, / of your glorious past trampled by the conqueror, / destroyed by the zeal of a missionary" (1971, ll. 18-20). The recovery of occluded histories that is implied by the yearning to "lay bare facts for scrutiny / by your searching mind, / all declarations and dogmas" (1971, ll. 21-23), is directed primarily at black African colonial, and by extension, apartheid experience. The poem highlights the impact of oppression on 'Black' experience and the concomitant erosion of these emotional and cultural ties to the past suffered under the monolithic impact of Western colonialism. This impact resulted in the reification of European ideals and history as the acme of progress and enlightenment. Therefore, in order to parse the discourse of Western linguistic and cultural oppression, the speaker directs his audience to the percussive sound 'of a cowhide drum,' which is "the Voice of Mother Africa" (1971, l. 32) as a symbol of Africa's own rich histories overwritten by colonial expansion.

Cronin's poem also attempts to beat a wider rhythm into history. In an interview conducted by Susan Gardiner in 1984, Cronin suggests that "experimenting with local idiom … form[s] part of a wider political, ideological and cultural program which informs my writing," adding that this was done "with a view to moving in the direction of a shared national culture" (Cronin in Gardiner, 1984:17). The inclusion of Mtshali's 'cow-skinned vowel' results in the poet wanting:

> To write a poem with words like:
> I'm telling you,
> Stompie, stickfast, golovan,
> Songololo, just boombang, just
> To understand the least inflections,
> To voice without swallowing
> Syllables born in tin shacks. (ll. 21-27).

Idiomatic language, such as 'I'm telling you' and 'stompie,' is explicitly connected to South African experience by purposefully invoking these 'South Africanisms,' resulting in a poetics that emerges from *this* land. The act of learning *from* these voices highlighted over the course of the poem can be read in relation to Wordsworth's Preface in which he highlights the reciprocal act of speaking in a language "really used by men", as well as Njabulo Ndebele's call to 'rediscover the ordinary.'[41] The

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[41] While Ndebele's challenge is primarily content driven, it may be argued that his concern could be linked to poetic diction in English language poetry.

poet wishes to "understand the least inflections" of these voices, and by invoking Mtshali, recognises the necessity of learning from Black poetic voices. The continual use of the infinitive 'to' before the verb 'learn' throughout the poem reinforces the open-endedness of the process of learning. This culminates in a desire to consciously acknowledge and include in the hallowed halls of poetry these voices and perspectives, and not swallow, or overwhelm, these "syllables born in tin shacks."

The poem concludes in the final isolated two line stanza, where the desire is expressed "To learn how to speak / With the voices of this land" (ll. 32-33). The preposition 'with' is given the status of the first word of the final line, emphasising the need for inclusivity and creating poetry that focuses on the inflections of language and place. "To learn how to speak […]" demonstrates a number of major themes in Cronin's poetry: the desire to connect language to a specific social and historical context; the notion of the materiality of language; and a yearning to connect with poetic voices outside of a more 'traditional' conception of poetry in a 'Western' framework. One of the most important implications is the need to create a new language that reflects a multilingual and multicultural South Africa. While Cronin is writing in English, which is largely linked to the colonial experience in Africa, the attempt to learn from other languages and experiences is a vital step towards achieving a form of reciprocity.[42] A 'border crossing' is required to allow for other voices, languages and literary forms to merge.

2.5 "Walking on Air": Language, the *V-Effekt* and the clash of public and private histories

"Walking on Air" (1999: 4) demonstrates how Cronin employs the *V-Effekt* to indicate the impact of the interrelationship between the public and private on society. The poem narrates the story of James Matthews, a white male imprisoned under the Suppression of Communism Act promulgated by the apartheid government in 1950, where membership of this organisation became "a punishable crime" (l. 56). It offers "one comrade's story" (l. 40) as another perspective from which to view the grand narrative of the apartheid struggle. The poem is similar to Brecht's questions discussed in section 1.3.3 asking who has been was left out of the narrative of historical events, in this case the People's Congress held in Kliptown in 1955. Matthews is asked if "he was present / on the two days of Kliptown … 1955? … when the People's Congress adopted the Freedom Charter?" (ll. 27-29).[43] Matthews' answer is reflected in this way:

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[42] The consistent use of the English language could be viewed as marginalising other African languages.
[43] For information on this conference see: http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/campaign-congress-people-and-freedom-charter (Accessed 27 July 2011). The Freedom Charter famously argued for equal rights for all South Africans, regardless of race, under the headings: "The People Shall Govern!"; "All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights!"; "The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!"; "The Land Shall be Shared among those that Work It!"; All Shall Be Equal Before

Actually

No he wasn't

He was there the day before, he built the platform. (ll. 30-32).

The anticipated response to this question would be to acknowledge being at the adoption of the Freedom Charter, confirming solidarity with the discussions and speeches held there at the time. Employing bathos, the poet instead foregrounds the individuals who facilitated the event. The focus of the narrative is on those builders of the literal platform for this highly charged symbolic event in South African history. This reminds the reader of the range of people needed to enable the historical events to happen, drawing the forgotten into the narrative, reinforcing the desire to write from a more inclusionary position.

The poem is divided into two sections, with a 13 stanza prologue, followed by the narration of Matthews' story. The prologue reveals how the poet, while working in the "prison workshop" (l. 1), listens attentively to John Matthews, and eventually composes his life story in poetic form. This is a painstaking task undertaken over a period of time, suggesting both the fragmentary and non-linear nature of existence. Matthews "speaks by snatches" (l. 36) and "much, never, much you won't catch him speaking" (l. 37), which is reflected in the form of the poem. In the prologue the paragraphs are written in short, descriptive clauses, regularly punctuated by commas. In addition to mimicking Matthews' way of speaking, it also reinforces the repetitive and fragmentary nature of prison life regimented into rigid schedules. The "prison workshop" is also ironically referred to as the "seminar room" (l. 2), suggesting that this area "where work is done / by enforced dosage" (l. 6-7) creates a space for interaction among the prisoners. The "seminar room" is perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to workshops designed to teach   employees correct marketing etiquette in order to increase profit. In this instance, however, it is one of the few spaces of communal interaction available to prisoners. The 'workshop' is an ironic opportunity for "political discussion, theoretical discussion, [and] tactical discussion" for the prisoners. This is also an opportunity to transform places of exclusion into spaces of empowerment and community.

The poet thus "piece[s] together" (l. 38) the story over "many months" (l. 38) of "snatches" (l. 36) of conversation over the "grindstone" (l. 14) on the "prison workshop" floor. Significantly, the act of constructing the shrike in "Poem-Shrike" is similar to the way Matthews' biography is assembled. Interestingly, the phrase "the making and fixing of things he likes" (l. 25, 36) appears twice in the

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the Law!" The socialist inflected Freedom Charter is invoked consistently as one of the bedrocks of the 'new' South African Constitution to contrast the imposition of the overt capitalist orientation of contemporary South African socio-political realities.

prologue, providing a marker for Matthews' love for "making contraband / goeters, boxes, ashtrays" (ll. 19-20). The phrase also suggests the poet engaging in an attempt to make a new, less oppressive language.

The second part narrates Matthews' biography and begins: "Born to Bez Valley, Joburg / into the last of his jail term / stooped he has now grown" (ll. 41-43)[44] immediately connecting Matthews' birth to his final years in jail, thereby disrupting a linear conception of time. This collapsing of the past into the present is reinforced when it is revealed how Matthews has grown "In this undernourished frame / that dates back to those first years of his life" (ll. 45-46). This links the prison and undernourishment experienced in his formative years after his "never again to be employed" (l. 54) father returns from the Rand Revolt.[45] The public and the private are purposefully interwoven in other moments in the poem. The shift from more passive forms of resistance to apartheid during the 1950s is noted after: "1960 the massacre / Sharpeville / and Langa" (l. 167-169). This resulted in apartheid's opponents declaring: "'Enough, / our patience, it has limits'" (ll. 70-71), which intensified resistance. Matthews, who had in the interim learnt to fix "typewriters" (l. 128) after joining the Communist Party, realised that "it was no longer just typewriters" that needed to be fixed (l. 173). The impact of the move from passive resistance to the armed struggle resulted in Matthews making ignitors for bombs "to be / delivered to X" (ll. 176-177) in the dead of night. The construction of the ignitors is purposely juxtaposed with what Matthews reads in the "bourgeoisie press" (l. 182) a few days later: "MIDNIGHT PASS OFFICE BLAST" (l. 183), which leads him to "sigh a small sigh / - Hadn't been sure / those damned ignitors would work" (ll. 184-186). Matthews' life impacted on the public sphere, which links the public, symbolic event to the actions of many individuals, similar to the intentions behind Brecht's *V-Effekt*.

The attempt to learn how to speak in the 'making' of Matthews' narrative is also central. The poet details Matthews' employment as a telegram operator at "Katzenellengogen's / cnr. Von Wielligh" (ll. 69-70), where "he learned that: // Good spelling doesn't always count" (ll. 73-74) and that:

> You have to drop ONE *l* from KatzenellenbogenInc or
> HEAR ME BOY?! nex' time
> YOU'S gonna pay extra one word

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[44]Bez Valley (also known as Bezuidenhout Valley after the farmer who initially owned the area) is a suburb in Johannesburg. During the time of Matthews' birth it was primarily occupied by white mine workers.

[45] The poem refers to Matthews' father, who was employed in the mines, returning home "blacklisted" (l. 49) after "the 1922 / Rand Revolt" (ll. 50-51). A drop in the price of gold sparked off the Rand Revolt, resulting in the mining companies laying off white miners and employing cheaper black labour. This resulted in massive protests, which were violently quelled by the Smuts government at the time.

There is a sense that we are reading how Matthews related this story verbatim. The precision of the observation of Matthews' speech patterns, as well as the authority admonishing Matthews are textually mimicked. In translating the speech patterns as carefully as possible, Mathews' presence in language is made that much more palpable. The use of both the capitalisation to imply the volume of the voice and the inclusion of the colloquialisms reinforces this. There is a link made between language and profit in the above, suggesting that there is a price to be paid for rethinking language. Cronin and Matthews were imprisoned for this dangerous, but essential, undertaking.

The keenness of observation on the part of the poet also extends to the attempt to reflect Matthews' gait in language, reinforcing the link to Kristeva's semiotic challenge to the symbolic. The poet describes:

> WEEKENDS IN THE THIRTIES:
> church and picnics
> by Zoo Lake
>
> And later, deedle-deedle
> — Dulcie, heel-toe
> his future wife
>
> Whom he courted with
> (he can still do it)
> Diddle-diddle: the cake-walk (ll. 94-101).

By using alliteration and assonance the poet mimics the deedle-deedle and diddle-diddle sound of music John Matthews describes as he dances with his "future wife." The 'cake-walk' body movement is also significant how the narrative is concluded. Shortly after his arrest after "a quarter century in the struggle" (ll. 189) in 1964, the authorities attempted to convince Matthews to turn state witness. After weeks of state pressure, Matthews finally said: "Okay, agreed. // – But first I must speak with my wife" (ll. 221-222). The prison authorities rushed to bring his wife to the jail where the freshly "shaven and combed, John Matthews got led out to his wife" (l. 229). Matthews, after asking if Dulcie knew why she was there (to which she replied "I do"), emphatically states that he would "never betray my comrades" (l. 235). To this Dulcie replies "I'm behind you, One hundred percent" (ll. 235, 237). This results in Matthews being hauled back to the cells, but with the knowledge that he is understood and supported by his loved ones. The poet relates this from the perspective of a prisoner who was watching at the time while Matthews was dancing the "cake-walk":

all the way down the passage
toe-heel, heel-toe, diddle-diddle
ONE HUNDRED PERCENT
I mean, he was high
Off the ground, man.

He was walking on air. (ll. 241-246).

The poet purposefully shares his narrative authority among multiple voices. Moreover, the choice of one of his fellow prisoners as the narrative voice reinforces Matthews's dance as becoming part of this prison's mythology. There is a sense that this also serves as inspiration for the inmates when this story is repeated, encouraging solidarity and connectivity with each other. The focus on the "cake-walk" in language demonstrates the power of physical movement to challenge oppression, where Matthews's joy cannot be contained, even by the prison authorities. "Walking on Air" displays all the strategies highlighted in the poems examined thus far: a focus on the contructedness of language, and an exploration of the smaller narratives of history. By emphasizing the smaller sites of struggle the various 'reports' on history can be broadened to provide for a fuller narrative to emerge.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated Cronin's perspective on language. It was shown that Cronin links language and history to the material environment as a means to challenge the symbolic order. In order to learn how to speak anew, an historical act of excavation is required chip away at the bedrock of accepted linguistic conventions. The implication is that words carry hidden assumptions that require careful scrutiny in order to uncover the history of oppression. This discovery enables us to challenge the hegemonic power of language. In "To learn how to speak […]," the implications of which echo throughout his oeuvre, language and history are purposefully intertwined, which foregrounds the desire for South African poetry to uncover a shared linguistic heritage and culture. In this regard, it becomes necessary for South Africans to learn from each other in order to resist the imposition of a particular worldview or experience, a hallmark of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. The poem attempts to expose this closed system of engagement, creating possibilities for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, underlining the need for localised expression. Brecht's *V-Effekt* extends the careful examination of language by focusing on an interruptive poetic strategy to find new connections, linking the individual to the public sphere and history.

Chapter Three: *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad*: **transitions to a post-apartheid South Africa**

3.1 Introduction

Cronin's second collection *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad* (1997) contains 21 poems compared to the lengthier first collection consisting of 67 poems. Kelwyn Sole notes that Cronin "by his own admission … [had] not had much time to write much poetry in the last decade and a half" (1997: 78), commenting that the second collection "demonstrates forcefully that the South African Communist Party's gain has been literature's loss" (78). This again highlights the many registers in which Cronin operates. In light of this, Sole contends that it is "difficult, perhaps fruitless to try an separate his art (whether formally or as regards to subject matter) from the social and political world in which he acts," suggesting that this inseparability "is strengthened by the degree to which the personal and the political intertwine in his poetry" (78). Sole reflects on the form and content of the collection by noting its "piecemeal" characteristics, where the poet "touches on a number of issues and experiences that South Africa" (79) had undergone. These experiences run the gamut of the "burgeoning of the mass struggle during the 80s" to the "radically shifted perspectives of the post-1990 settlement and its compromises" (79). The schizophrenic nature of this period forms an essential backdrop to the collection.

Rita Barnard describes Cronin writing against the "rhetoric of amnesia" (1998: 2) that underpinned the transition period. Barnard's reference to amnesia supports what Ingrid de Kok noted as the danger of the 'normalisation' in South Africa resulting in overlooking the social impact of colonial and apartheid practices in favour of 'rainbow nationalism.' Cronin deliberately challenges this rhetoric of amnesia throughout this collection. An example of this confrontation is the poem "Running Towards Us" (1999: 93) in the section entitled "Explaining Some Things."[46] The poem reflects upon a trip undertaken by the poet "to have a look" (l. 3) with "eyes unpeeled" (l. 5) at a township during the height of the State of Emergency in the mid-80s. A key moment occurs when the poet observes an individual whom the community has identified as a "black vigilante" (l. 14), described as one of the "(witdoeke)" (l. 16) that the "apartheid police and army" (l. 15) "unleashed" to "perform / much of the dirty work" (l. 16-17) of destabilising township life.[47] The individual is left for dead in an open field where a macabre ritual occurs. Members of the township community leisurely walk over to the body.

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[46] The section's title is taken from Pablo Neruda's poem "I'm Explaining a Few Things" discussed in the final section of this chapter.

[47] The "witdoeke" were black individuals employed by the apartheid state to, among other things, infiltrate anti-apartheid organisations. Interestingly, the poet refers to these individuals as "victims themselves turned perpetrators" (l. 16), suggesting the desperate nature of apartheid oppression, where individuals would act in concert with the authority that oppresses them.

Petrol is then dumped over the almost dead "corpse" (l. 32) and a car tyre "that will burn and burn" (l 46) is "rolled out" (l. 47) "unhurriedly" (l. 37) and placed upon the body. Before the body is lit, the "corpse in the middle of the field" (l. 49) gets up and begins running, causing the poet to reflect that this unfortunate victim:

> […] is running towards us. Into our exile. Into the return of
> exiles. Running towards the negotiated settlement. Towards the
> democratic elections. He is running sore, into the new South
> Africa. Into our rainbow nation, in desperation, one shoe on,
> one shoe off. Into our midst. Running. (ll. 72-76).

The victim-cum-perpetrator becomes a symbol of the elisions perpetuated in the shift to the 'new' South Africa. The justifiable joy of the 'negotiated settlement' would need to be tempered by the inclusion of the memory of this unfortunate man who is also victim. Barnard notes of the poem that the "costly claims of the past will not be dodged" (3), suggesting that "the figure is transformed into a troubling emblem of the recent past" which raises "unsettling questions about how the 'rainbow nation' will accommodate the memories of the traumatised and often morally dubious citizens" (1998: 3). The violence of betrayal cannot be overlooked in the grand narrative of the apartheid struggle. In light of South Africa's violent history, an abstracted notion of a 'Rainbow Nation' magically coming into being with the end of apartheid seems false, and this collection responds to, and challenges, this form of individual and collective amnesia.

The collection is divided into three sections: 'Explaining Some Things,' 'Moorage' and 'Even the Dead.' The first section's title is linked to Neruda's poem "I'm Explaining Some Things," which will be examined in 3.4 below. 'Moorage' consists of dated poems from the period 1987 to 1997, including "Poem in a Small Fist" (1999: 114) which foregrounds the tension between the public and private. The poet observes his newborn son's hand as it "clasps and unclasps" (l. 6) during the "depths of their emergency" (l. 20)[48] where the poet's "mug shot" is on the "charge-office walls" (ll. 18, 19). The baby's act of fist raising becomes for the poet (and father) a "flag // Our own in its way / Raised up to say / This is a people's war. // We shall wage it as people" (ll. 21-27). His child strengthens his resolve to continue the struggle against apartheid, as well as foregrounding the necessity of communal action against oppression. Interestingly, the notion of family versus participation in the struggle is a theme that is referred to again in the poem "Moorage." Here, the consistent juxtaposition of the private

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[48] The "emergency" refers to the apartheid government's imposition of a State of Emergency during the 1980s. I refer to this more in my examination of the poem "Moorage."

marital discussions regarding divorce and the public presence of a "state of emergency" (l. 57) emphasises the difficulty in separating the two.

The title of the final section, 'Even the Dead,' is culled from Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History / Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940 [1999]). The section demonstrates Cronin playing with many varieties of form, with is both reminiscent of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' and Brecht's *V-Effekt*. In the poem "Epitaphs" (1999: 126) the poet invokes words etched on a gravestone[49] to describe a number of political themes:

> *For a recently Departed*
> *Soul from the new Patriotic Bourgeoisie*
> Hey, man, don't weep
> I can't take your call presently,
> As I am upwardly mobile
>
> Please leave your prayer
> After the beep. (ll. 25-31, italics in original).[50]

The poet presents a member of the political elite leaving an answering service message to the ordinary individual, satirizing the ubiquity of cellular phones in modern society, as well as the perception of them as status symbols. These items ostensibly afford the ability to 'connect' all, but ironically allow the chance for this particular elite to avoid answering the caller's "prayer" all together. The satire invokes Franz Fanon's assertion in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) that, in the newly independent African country, the "national bourgeoisie … is completely canalised into the activities of the intermediary type" (Fanon in Leitch, 2001: 1578 – 79). Fanon suggests that the newly formed "Patriotic Bourgeoisie" piggybacks onto the oppressor's structures, resulting in a middle class whose value system, "instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people" (Fanon, 2001: 1578), allow for a structural repetition of the system. The ultimate consequence of this is the *re*-marginalisation of the subjugated.[51] The words on the gravestone powerfully assert the dangers of separating the elite and the 'ordinary' and suggest that the once present connection between leaders and the ordinary has passed away.

The poems selected below reflect Ndebele's 'dialectic' between the public and the private, as well as challenging the "willed invisibility" of contemporary South African discourse. The attempt is

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[49] This series of epitaphs is contrasted in "Moorage" with what appears on Sakkie Peterson's gravestone which notes that he was a "Man / Who would Give / His last Fish / RIP" (ll. 34-37).

[50] The term "upwardly mobile" also appears in the poem "Even the Dead" examined later.

[51] Fanon continues that the national bourgeoisie essentially perpetuate, and become, "the transmission line between the nation and … capitalism", which had very little "to do with transforming the nation" (Fanon, 2001:1580). Fanon's choice of word "transmission" here echoes Cronin's use of the image of the automobile and 'changing gears' examined in Chapter Four.

made to chip away at the bedrock of the symbolic by focusing on the narratives that aid amnesia, drawing them into the light. In the first section of the chapter I examine "Three Reasons for a Mixed, Umrabulo, Round-The-Corner Poetry" (1999: 92), which demonstrates Cronin's continued concern with learning how to speak with the voices of South Africa. "Even the Dead" will then be discussed to illustrate the influence of Walter Benjamin's historical materialism on Cronin's work. The use of the 'dialectical image' undermines historical narratives and is intended to shock the reader to consider their own complicity with oppressive systems. I then examine Cronin's "Moorage" which focuses on the interrelationship between the public on the private and the importance of language and place to reconnect community and solidarity. The chapter concludes by focusing on Cronin's "A reply to Pablo Neruda" which uses Neruda's "An Education of a Chieftain" to analyse the dangers of mythologising the 'leaders' during the South African transition.

3.2 Umrabulo: Sipping from the communal cup

'Umrabulo' in "Three Reasons for a Mixed, Umrabulo, Round-The-Corner Poetry" (1999: 92) foregrounds the isi-Xhosa word for 'to sip,' emphasising the passing of knowledge around a table.[52] It was the word used by political prisoners on Robben Island to describe and "inspire political debate and discussion"[53] and it may be argued that it represents a continuation of the concerns foregrounded in "To learn how to speak [...]." This "mixed" and "round the corner" poetic expression is presented as a challenge to poetry concerned with the 'great tradition.' The process of learning, the poet suggests, can only result in a mixed hybrid poetic expression along the lines of Cronin's AUETSA paper discussed earlier, and ultimately implies that mixing forms and language allows the poetry to express more of the diverse cultural spaces that exist in South Africa.

The poem begins by alluding to John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" ([1819] 1973: 541): "A poem is meant to stand upon its own / Like a Grecian urn in some colonial museum" (ll. 1-2). This beginning suggests that the poem is meant to stand alone, removed from any particular context in the Formalist / 'prac crit' sense. The word 'museum' suggests it is an artifact, relegated to represent the past; an object of contemplation that is archived, and therefore historical rather than relevant in the present. The allusion to John Keats comments on the power of the poet's Romantic Imagination to observe life, and therefore history, depicted on the engravings of a Grecian urn. This vision turns the

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[52] This meaning is taken from http://albanymuseum.blogspot.com/2010/robben-island-museum-spring-school.html (Accessed 7 March 2011). This also has religious undertones with regard to the Communion rite.
[53] See www.anc.org.za/list.php?t=Umrabulo. Umrabulo is also the name of the ANC's quarterly journal whose "mission" is described on the website as "to encourage debate and rigorous discussions at all levels of the movement." (Accessed 7 March 2011).

urn into an object of aesthetic 'beauty' rather than an opportunity to challenge how the 'Grecian Urn' found itself in the 'colonial museum': stolen from the culture in which it was created. We are thus reminded that this objectification results in an:

> object of a contemplation […] that obscures:
> The mud of its production;
>
> The complicity in our gaze. (ll. 3-6).

The word 'obscures' casts a shadow over the poet's main proposition: the processes by which the *object d'art* is elevated, conceals the mechanics of its production. This suggests that a poem cannot be contemplated without an awareness of the social and historical forces that underpin it. It is therefore necessary to consider the 'mud of its production' to mold the aesthetic into an object that bears witness to the complicity in our gaze.[54] This consideration assists in unpicking notions of artistic beauty, offering an inversion to Keats's conclusion that "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'" (ll. 49-50).

The art object in Keats's Ode forecloses the human cost of placing the Grecian Urn on the shelf at the British Museum. In the same vein as Cronin's AUETSA paper, the suggestion is that the elevation of 'high' art, something that Keats's poem represents, overwrites marginalised poetic voices in favour of an English poetic tradition. This problematises the validity of poetic expression that falls outside the 'tradition,' which has had a profound effect on how South African poetry has been read. Literary canons, anthologies and the like are formulated in an exclusionary way, universalising certain notions of 'high' art, which sustain the idea that history and language is unable to be altered or reimagined. Debates on the notion of artistic worth, beauty and form, can conceal the human production of history, and it may be argued that by 'learning how to speak with the voices of *this* land,' criticism may be able to cross the strict border controls placed upon how poetry is received. This perspective allows for the interrogation of whose truths we are invested in.

Cronin's poem therefore juxtaposes the so-called innate characteristics of the great object of contemplation (both Keats's poem and the urn) with the need to learn how to speak. Section iii begins: "Our contemporary, the great northern Ireland poet / Writes from within and for / A culture that assumes Homer, Spenser, Yeats" (ll. 12-14). The word 'assumes' suggests that this literary tradition

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[54] This is similar to post-colonial re-engagement with novels such as Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) where deconstructive reading of the text brought to light the horrors of the slave trade in Jamaica during the period.

informs the literary history of this unnamed poet.[55] In South Africa the numerous languages and cultures preclude the focus on a singular tradition, as emphasised in the next utterance:

> I live in a country with eleven official languages,
> Mass illiteracy, and a shaky memory.
>
> Here it is safe to assume
> Nothing at all. **Niks.**(ll. 15-18).

The lines above are indicative of a poetic identity struggling for moorage in a country undergoing rapid shifts in social organisation. The uncritical assumption of any paradigm is fraught with ambiguity, especially in relation to a country re-examining with a 'shaky,' provisional 'memory,' the implications of the past. The poem acknowledges the difficulty of communication in a country where there are not only severe crises in education and a prevalence of "mass illiteracy," but also where many languages proliferate. The themes rendered poetically in contemporary South Africa would need to explore the intersection of the hybridised melting pot of many culture(s) and subjectivities, underlining that the need to learn not only *how* to speak, but attempt to *understand*. The injunction that it is 'safe to assume nothing' is reinforced by the embolding of the Afrikaans word for 'nothing': "**Niks**."[56] The poem thus begins to re-enact the concept of 'Umrabulo' by including other South African languages in its form, content and title. Sharing a drink from the urn of many different languages and cultural positions may therefore challenge South Africa's shaky memory of the past. "Even the Dead" explicitly focuses on this precarious memory, and challenges the "rhetoric of amnesia" by invoking Walter Benjamin's perspectives on the narratives of history.

3.3 "Even the Dead": Jeremy Cronin's post-apartheid Jeremiad

"Even the Dead" is the 'Jeremiad' in the collection. A 'Jeremiad' is defined as a lamentation or a list of woes and complaints, and is a pun on the poet's name. The poem therefore acts as Cronin's grouse against the hypocrisies of the transition period, where the poet takes on the role of Jeremiah, who is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a "denouncer of the times." Benjamin's "On the Concept of History / Theses on the Philosophy of History" ([1940] 1999) serves as the centerpiece to the poem.

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[55] We can in all likelihood assume that the poet is referring to the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney. Heaney's literary tradition is viewed as being informed by Homer, the writer of the Greek epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Edmund Spenser, the Renaissance poet of, most famously, *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and the Irish poet William Butler Yeats. Ironically, it is also a tradition that informs Cronin's own poetic foundation, and a tradition that he is also writing "from, within … for" and, around. It is interesting to note the reductiveness here, as the Homer-Spenser-Yeats tradition influences both the Irish poet and the standards of poetic practice as far away as the shores of South Africa.

[56] The inclusion is interesting in that Afrikaans has perhaps been primarily viewed as the language of the 'white' oppressor. It is important to note that Afrikaans is spoken and understood across most cultural groupings in South Africa, and should therefore be considered a major African language.

The poem's structure allows for the rapid juxtaposition of the argument similar manner to the formal construction of Benjamin's essay (consisting of 20 numbered paragraphs). Cronin's invocation of Benjamin reveals a concern with recovering small histories. This recuperation is aided by using the 'dialectical image' to juxtapose events that took place during South Africa's transition from apartheid with the past in order to expose the damaging consequences of amnesia.

The poet cites Benjamin from the onset with a fragment from part II of "On the Concept of History":

> Walter Benjamin:
> *'There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every gen-eration that preceded us, we have been endowed with a form of messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.* (ll. 1-6, italics in original).

There is an overt linkage of the past and the present in this extract, suggesting a movement in history that foregrounds a circular as opposed to a linear narrative. The past generation has an expectation of the coming of the next generation emphasising the need to contribute to the realisation of life in the future. David Ferris argues that, for Benjamin, "when the present recognises itself as intended" it grasps its "historical significance as the moment that *arrests* the historical illusions present in ideas such as progress and so on" (Ferris, 2008: 131, my emphasis). "This recognition" he goes on to suggest, "makes the present stand out from the course of history since it is the *one place where history occurs in a meaningful way*" (131, my italics). The present thus serves as the opportunity to change direction. When this is comprehended, the hesitation of thought potentialises the desire "to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history" (Benjamin, [1940] 1999: 263), with the verb "blasting" further implying that an urgent and radical intervention is necessary. Ferris notes that Benjamin offers "a restructuring of history that seeks to preserve the objects it attends to while allowing the emergence of what has been oppressed in the past" (Ferris, 2008: 131). For Benjamin, the materialist historian "records the constellation in which his own epoch comes into contact with that of an earlier one" (Benjamin, [1940] 1999: 263). It thus requires active engagement with history, and an opportunity to re-evaluate how the status quo is perpetuated. Cronin's invocation of Benjamin begins to rethink the role of the poet: arguing for the importance of the *poet-historian* in verse.

After the invocation of Benjamin at the outset, the poet refers to a "business profile" read on "the back page of Martin Creamer's / Engineering News" (ll. 7-8). The profile notes the particulars of

"Joggie Heuser"[57] and the value of assets under his control, and ends with his "**Hope for the future: For all South Africans to bury the past unconditionally**" (ll. 15-16). The business leader's "hope" forms the backdrop to the poem, as the unconditional burial of South Africa's past is what Cronin undermines.

> Poetry is accorded an important, interruptive role in this task:

> > I am not sure what poetry is. I am not sure what aesthetic is.
> > Perhaps the aesthetic should be defined in opposition to
> > anaesthetic.
> >
> > Art is the struggle to stay awake.
> >
> > Which makes amnesia the true and proper subject of
> > poetry. (ll. 43-48).

The poet challenges an aesthetic that considers the private sphere as the 'proper' subject of poetry, which implicitly refuses the strict boundaries discussed in relation to South African poetry in 1.2.1. By playing with anaesthetic as the antonym of aesthetic in this manner the separation from the social context is undermined, which reinforces that it is safe to "assume nothing" in a country that is multilingual with varied cultures. Uncertainty and learning are again favoured as more suitable paradigms for expression. Instead of concretised notions of any formal or aesthetic paradigm, art for Cronin involves a specific struggle against *forgetting*.[58] Importantly, the word 'anaesthetic' is isolated, foregrounding the disarticulation of the word as '*an* aesthetic.' The use of anaesthetic in opposition to the aesthetic foregrounds the numbness experienced towards the social being if poetry focuses wholly upon technique as defined by the 'great tradition.' Thus, rather than the aesthetic dominating the discussion, what is left out, or the "mud" of the poem's "production," is foregrounded. Poetry therefore can awaken the reader from the slumber of unconscious complicity in the narratives of history.

Through the course of the Jeremiad various instances of amnesia are identified, which forces the reader to not only engage with what has been purposefully omitted from the narrative, but place themselves in relation to it. The poet sardonically notes:

> > the Little Maestro, who acknowledged his
> > British Open victory, saying South Africa's sporting achievements are

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[57] At the time of publication of the volume, Joggie Heuser was the CEO of Soekor, a petro chemical company that first extracted gas from drilling of the South African coast at Mossel Bay. The fact that Cronin directs the attention to a real-life public figure complements his focus on the tension between the public and private.

[58] This is very similar to the opening of the second chapter of Milan Kundera's novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1982 [1992]) where the central protagonist Mirek notes "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (1992: 3).

impressive indeed considering 'we only have three million people' (ll. 67-70).[59]

Here we have an illustration of the refusal on the part of 'white' South Africa, insulated in racially ordered privilege, to take cognisance of the greater majority of people in the same country. Another more contemporary example cited by the poet occurs when the poet observes the 'new' South Africa's "winning-nation amnesia" where "It summits Everest and forgets to name all but one / Of the sherpas who carried us up" (129, 131-132).[60] Similar to Player's outrageous presumption above, the overt exclusion of the individuals who effectively created the conditions for the success of the summit up Everest is purposefully drawn into the narrative. Again, this highlights the implications of Brecht's poem discussed in section 1.3.3, where it was suggested that the clear focus on the 'great' individuals' narrative often occludes the most important contribution. It is interesting to note the relative glorification of individualism in these examples, synecdochically suggesting the success of the country as a whole. The success of one individual suddenly becomes the success of all, which perpetuates prevalence of the "winning-nation amnesia" to the exclusion of real socio-economic problems that are still present in South Africa.

These overt South African instances of 'amnesia' are extended into a more globalised arena:

> Amnesia embraces the global reality of 23 million per annum
> dead of hunger and hunger-related disease
> That's a daily average equivalent, in fatalities, of one Hiroshima
>> Buried each day
> Under the cloud of amnesia. (ll. 114-118).

The dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima at the conclusion of the Second World War is equated to the daily effect of hunger on habitants of the Third World. The iconic image of the giant 'mushroom cloud' that followed the detonation suggests the daily occurrence of this horrific instantaneous loss of human life under a different cloud: 'the cloud of amnesia.' Cronin is not making any causal links here, but is rather using the dialectical image to suggest *relations* between an historical event and the daily impact of individuals succumbing to hunger are made. The active instances of amnesia are drawn into sharp relief here: the hidden narratives that remain occluded in the grand narratives of progress. The rethinking of the aesthetic awakens readers to the 'other side' of the dialectic and 'shocks' them into re-examining hidden realities.

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[59] Gary Player won the British Open golf championships in 1958, 1968 & 1974. (Information obtained at http://garyplayer.com/legend/the_majors Accessed 7 October 2012).
[60] The first successful South African expedition to climb Mount Everest occurred in 1996. See http://www.everesthistory.com/everestsummits/summits96.htm for further details. Accessed 7 October 2012.

Cronin also targets his own political affiliations engaging in the act of amnesia, reinforcing the necessity of self-reflexive engagement across all sectors of society. He notes that:

> There is upwardly mobile amnesia
> Affirmative action amnesia
> Black economic empowerment, the world owes
> me one, Dr Motlana[61], give me a slice of it amnesia
> (syntagmatic amnesia – an elite for the whole) (ll. 124-128).

Cronin identifies the tendency in the post-apartheid era towards using legislation to de-racialise capital from white ownership to empower the black educated middle-class. By insisting on the appointment of 'previously disadvantaged' individuals to high-powered board positions, power in not transformed, but merely transferred.[62] This attempt at economic redress was ostensibly intended to uplift the black majority economically, but in effect actualised only a small percentage. The idea that the upliftment of the "elite" be taken as evidence "for the whole" of black society is problematised. This perspective is evident in the final poem of the collection *More Than a Casual Contact* (2006) entitled "After more than a casual contact" (2006: 62) which notes:

> In this era of slippage
> from transforming power to
>
> Transferring
> some of the same, which is not the same
>
> Mass action becoming
> transaction
>
> Liberation
> liberalisation
>
> Equality
> equity
>
> Sharing
> shares on the Joburg Securities Exchange. (ll. 8-19).

The importance of the notions of "Liberation," "Equality" and "Sharing" during the anti-apartheid struggle, reinforced by their capitalization, are placed in sharp relief to what these ideals have metamorphosed into in the 'new' South Africa: "liberalisation" of the economy, "equity" in the market and "shares" on the stock exchange. These business or capitalist terms are all considered antithetical "slippages" to the intended ideals of the struggle against apartheid. Akin to the focus on historical

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[61] Dr Motlana refers to Dr Nthato Motlana, prominent Black ANC activist during the apartheid era, turned businessman and major supporter of the policies of Black Economic Empowerment and Affirmative Action in the post-apartheid period.

[62] This also relates to the discussion of Franz Fanon noted in the introduction to this section.

amnesia in "Even the Dead", it suggests that focusing on the "slice" of the economic pie has resulted in little material change for a large percentage of the population.

Cronin's continual focus on amnesia in "Even the Dead" draws the contradictions of South African society and the transition to a 'new' South Africa into a dialogue with each other. The poem concludes with a reflection on the possibilities of lifting the cloud of amnesia by using another of Benjamin's fragments:

It's great, its easier, I promise you, so lets hear it again from ...

Walter Benjamin:
'In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest
tradition away from a conformism that is about to overwhelm it
... Only that historian will have the gift of fanning some sparks
of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead
will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has
not ceased to be victorious' (ll. 157-164, italics in original).

The language of consumer television is employed here, suggesting that the "milk of amnesia" (l. 113), a play on the laxative milk of magnesia, is ironically an "easier" medicine to swallow. Taking the laxative of amnesia simply expels the constipation from the body, ignoring the underlying cause. By contrast, challenging amnesia, and taking ownership of these contradictions, is much more difficult. The use of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' is intended to 'blast' the reader out of their comfort zone, fusing Benjamin's historical materialism to the task of fighting the anaesthetic qualities of amnesia. 'Tradition,' or the past, requires constant vigilance on the part of the poet-historian. Hope is therefore placed upon a form of poetry, and counter-narratives, to give oxygen to fan the flames of memory to ensure that 'even the dead' will not be forgotten. On the other hand, conformity is conceived as aiding amnesia, perpetuating mythologies about the past (and historical events). The obvious link between the poet and the historian throughout suggests that poetry participates in the 'struggle to stay awake' against the forces of 'conformity,' reinforcing the commitment to the task of the poet as 'new' historian.

Cronin clearly shares Benjamin's concern that "neither the past nor the dead are safe from an enemy whose victories give it the right to determine the past and what it means" (Ferris, 2008:133). Accordingly, the significance in Cronin exploiting the interruptive power of Benjamin's dialectical image, or montage form, is its ability to illuminate these historical forces for a greater critical understanding. History exists in the now, and the opportunity to learn how to speak from a historical materialist position, as well as with poetry of social context and consciousness, is invested with a prophetic urgency. It is thus necessary to renew tradition, to rescue history (or critical readings of

poems) from a staid reflection of the past. This will assist in creating the self-reflexive conditions for individuals to re-examine their own complicity in sustaining oppression.

3.4 "Moorage": Holding onto place

"Moorage" is a significant meditation on the language of place and the interrelationship between the public and private spheres. It is also a paean to the vulnerability and possibility of love in extraordinary times. The narrative takes place at an unnamed sea shore village on a week-end away during a "State of Emergency" (l. 57)[63] where there is domestic tension between the poet and his partner. As the narrative develops, it becomes clear that the poet is responding to his partner's concerns about their participation in the 'struggle' against apartheid and its effect on the family unit. The poem has further implications with regard to Romanticism, especially in relation to the reciprocity of nature which throughout the poem provide examples of ways to sustain communal bonds. Due to the length and complexity of the poem, the primary concern will be Cronin's continued exploration of language and the aforementioned tension between the poet and his partner, which becomes an analogy for the interrelationship between the public and the private.

The title "Moorage" provides an important indicator of the thematic concerns of the poem. The verb 'moor' implies the act of 'mooring,' or the anchoring of a ship (or body) to a particular place.[64] A second definition refers to the exact opposite: the feeling of being alone and unconnected. "Moorage" explores the notion of belonging/unbelonging and the questions as to what or who *anchors* the poet. The section entitled 'Moorage,' in which the poem appears, contains an epigraph by Adrienne Rich from her poem "X" in the collection *Twenty-one love poems* (1976) that reads: "without tenderness, it is hell." The epigram suggests that without tenderness and connection, existence can be torturous. Rich's poem in its entirety reads:

> Your dog, tranquil and innocent, dozes through
> our cries, our murmured dawn conspiracies
> our telephone calls. She knows—what can she know?
> If in my human arrogance I claim to read
> her eyes, I find there only my own animal thoughts:
> *that creatures must find each other for bodily comfort,*

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[63] A State of Emergency was declared by PW Botha, the then State President of the apartheid state, on the 20th July 1986. While initially limited to 36 magisterial districts, it was extended almost a year later to cover the entire country, and was continually renewed until it was lifted by FW De Klerk at the onset of the negotiated transition in 1990.
[64] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definitions of "Moor." As a verb it means to "secure (a ship, buoy, etc) in a particular place with a cable or rope fastened to the shore or of an anchor." The noun refers to "the act of mooring" which denotes the place where the ship is anchored or tied to. (2007: 1833).

that voices of the psyche drive through the flesh
further than the dense brain could have foretold,
that the planetary nights are growing cold for those
on the same journey, *who want to touch*
one creature-traveler clear to the end;
that without tenderness, we are in hell. (1976: 27, my italics).

The portions italicised present some of the key elements that maintain a consistent thread throughout "Moorage": the desire for physical and mental connection with the 'other,' be it 'nature' or 'humankind' (a distinction as porous as the ostensible boundary between the two terms). In Rich's poem there is a clear "want to touch" in this desire for connection, a wanting that is both tactile and physical. This desire manifests itself "through the flesh," suggesting that through a close intimate connection (or engagement with each other) we can potentially find something to hold onto. In "Moorage," the poet recognises that there are other fellow "creature traveler[s]" "on the same journey" who *must* be considered. This then becomes the main reason in the struggle "to make / The too good to be true be true" (ll. 225-226) as it is framed in the poem: the argument that a community is only formed through undertaking the difficult tasks of speaking to and learning from each other. "Moorage" consistently includes a 'living' dialogue with both the human individuals that populate the shoreline, as well as the physical environment in the attempt to learn how to speak with the voices of the land, and equally important, the voices of *this* land.

Part i of "Moorage" begins with the poet observing how a "duck drops asleep / in the wind that rootles in thorn scrub" (ll. 1-3). The key transitive verb is 'rootles,' taken from the verb 'to *root*,' which emphasises place, as well as the word 'moor' in the title. The poet refers to this wind as the "*duiwel se grraan*" (l. 3), transposing the "brayed words" (l. 4) of "Seventy-year old, *visterman*" (l. 5) Jorrie Barsby, a "Lifelong inhabitant of this shore" (l. 6).[65] The words are articulated through the 'rolling' focus on the consonant 'r' of Jorrie Barsby's speech (which is also replicated in his name) and represent the living language of the individuals who populate this shoreline. The performance of Barsby's localised speech here, effectively 'rooting' it to a South African linguistic context, serves as a further example of Cronin's attempts "To learn how to speak […]."

Barsby is then asked: "Were you born here?" to which he replies "No … You see / That house down the road / I was born *there*" (ll. 7-10, italics in original). This humorous response, symptomatic

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[65] "*Duiwel se grraan*," translated into English from the Afrikaans source is 'the Devil's grain.' "Visterman" is a patois derivative of the Afrikaans word 'Viserman,' which translates into 'Fisherman' in English. The choice of the noun Fisherman is significant in terms of both place (as the poems narrative takes place along an unidentified South African shoreline), as well as Jesus Christ being termed as a 'fisher of men' in the New Testament Biblical narratives of Christian mythology.

of an uncomplicated attitude towards life, convinces the poet that this "makes distance relative" (l. 11). Barsby has a clear idea of his origins, in both place and time, on "this sparse shore" (l. 15). Space assumes a particularly 'rooted' position, relativised to the individual. Barsby's anchored position is further rooted to "a tree / 'Planted'" as "'Shade for my old age'" (ll. 13-14). The tree metaphor has implications of 'growing roots' in/at a particular place, as a tree is planted in a specific area and will remain anchored there as it grows steadily over the course of the seasons. Barsby, by growing the tree for his "old age," is acknowledging that he is intimately connected to *this* place: *his* moorage. Moreover, this connection necessitates a nurturing and *attentive* attitude towards his place, as "on this / Sparse shore where trees do not / Easily grow, and those that manage / Are soon eaten down by cows" (ll. 15-17). In order to ensure that the tree will survive and provide shade (and by extension protection from the harsh sun's rays), Barsby has to protect it over the course of many seasons. This is "why, years off from any shade, / Jorrie Barsby's hope / Struggles towards old age / knee high inside of its cow proof / Fish-net cage." (ll. 18-22). Barsby's simple investment in the growing and protection of the tree focuses on nurturing and the reproduction of life that is implicitly interconnected with people and nature.

The dialogic interaction with both Barsby's speech and what his tree represents to him, intimates a more cyclical connection with place, and, by extension, time. Moreover, there is the further implication of *responsibility* for this 'moorage' point. This leads the poet to consider:

> To live close to every tree you had ever planted
>
> Our century has been the great destructor of that,
> The small continuous community, lived in solidarity
> With seasons, its life eked out around
> Your fore-mothers' and –fathers' burial ground. (ll. 23-27).

In this section, the poet's consciousness reviews the implications in Barsby's narrative resulting in the conclusion that this "century" has resulted in the destruction of the "small continuous community" that live side by side in "solidarity with [the] seasons" of 'nature.' This, by implication, is linked to the fellow 'creature travelers' (human and non-human) referred to in Rich's poem. The ancestral "burial ground" forming part of the cyclical turn of life and death reinforces this link. The emphasis shifts towards an inclusive paradigm, as it is, tellingly, '*your*' continuous community that is in jeopardy. The possessive pronoun 'our' linked to 'century' underlines the communal responsibility required to counter the breakdown in community (or 'moorage' point). It would imply that the attempt to re-

connect this form of community is a collective responsibility, which is similar to Benjamin's expectation of the coming of the next generation.

The next section begins: "Where the graveyard tilts up / For the headstones to see, stone brows / Of the dead to watch / Eastwards across their lagoon" (ll. 28-31). The continuous cycle of life and death is vital to the existence of the community, so much so that even the site of the burial ground affords the opportunity for the dead to *participate* in the daily actions occurring "across *their* lagoon." The connection between the living and the dead is further emphasised when the poet notices "inscribed among" (l. 34) the gravestones, the name of one "Cornelius ('Sakkie') Petersen" who "was a Man / Who would Give / His last Fish / RIP" (ll. 34-37). Through these words "Engraved as Galilee on the Sunday / Mind's eye of the fisherfolk" (l. 39-43) a simple sharing and self-less attitude survives on this sparse shore. The allusion to Galilee refers to the Biblical story of Jesus feeding the multitude of 4000 individuals on the Galilean shore from seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (see Matthew Chapter 15; esp verses 32 to 39), which reinforces the notion of a community living in both solidarity with the seasons *and* each other. The gravestone thus serves as a constant reminder of the solidarity and caring communal ethics that Petersen and the community lives by. This offers a variation of the Biblical myth, which could be read as giving the power to feed the multitude into the hands of the few and powerful. However, the poet is promoting the reconnection of communal bonds to challenge individuals seeking only their own slice of the pie. The possibility of love and intimacy in a harsh environment is privileged, which contests the primarily dog-eat-dog individualistic world-view diagnosed in the poem "Even the Dead."

In Part iv, learning from the examples of Jorrie Barsby's brayed words and Cornelius ('Sakkie') Petersen's gravestone, results in the poet thinking through the implications of nature, both human and elemental:

> We call 'nature' something,
> Frail as we know it, too, to be,
> (A punctured ozone over ravished landscapes),
> Something, nonetheless, more permanent,
> Cyclical, more anchored, anchoring us,
> The world in our minds, our minds in our bodies,
> Our bodies in the world – something like this. (ll. 47-53).

A more cyclical perspective, where humans experience the anchor of "the world in our minds, our minds in our bodies" and "our bodies in the world," is reinforced here. Nature is perceived as a moorage point that connects human thought and experience to both the individual and social body,

challenging the Cartesian dualism of 'I think therefore I am,' which limits 'our bodies in the world' primarily to the act of thought: a body separated from the mind. This perspective thus challenges a linear view of history and progress. The continual foregrounding of interconnectedness serves to contest the notion of a single body moored, in the alienated sense, from the rest of nature and society. The poem therefore demonstrates the act of intimacy required in learning how to speak by staging a constant interaction with the linguistic and social environment on the shoreline. The interrelationship between biological and human forms of nature is thus consistently reinforced.

In Part v of the poem, another relationship is included that needs to be considered: the historical context of the weekend away during "another / State of Emergency" (ll. 56-57). As the poet and his partner walk along the beach, they begin to wonder about "'Nature?' […] / What does that mean?" (ll. 66-67). His partner's response to the question is important: "'It's too good to be true'" (ll. 68). In a Romantic sense, the peaceful environment, linked to the interconnected 'continuous community,' is placed in relation to the perpetual 'State of Emergency.' This context provides an especially paradoxical situation, where the public issues appear to be separated from the private sphere:

> We have come to reflect
> On struggles in places
> We have left behind
> And end up speaking
> Mostly of here and things (ll. 71-75)

Nature was supposed to provide an escape from the political turmoil of the 'struggle' against apartheid or 'separateness,' and a conceptual space for reflection on its consequences. But, another important encounter in the poem provides the impetus for the poet to turn this perspective on its head. As the two walk along the beach they come across:

> […] a dark
>
> Woman, like an apparition, it's true
>
> Emerges, she asks, earnestly,
>
> Hoping, I guess, against hope
>
> Two older companions, women, laughing behind her,
>
> She asks: Excuse me, we were arguing,
>
> It's too good to be true, they say.
>
> So are you:

<center>Illicit lovers, newlyweds, or on a weekend fling (ll.84-92).</center>

The women's hopeful enquiry turns on the contrast between weekends away during a State of Emergency and the possibility of the two being "illicit lovers, newlyweds" or enjoying "a weekend fling" in the context of such a dire time. It is ironic that that ghostly image of the "dark women" presents these possibilities to the two, white individuals who are afforded the space to take 'time off' from the 'struggle.' There is the sense that the ghost of these women and their inability to escape the overall machine of apartheid haunts the poet; a sobering fact that offers an opportunity to learn or re-evaluate the "week-end away." This leads the poet to "ask the stream of conscience" (l. 93), which is described as "hope, sweet water" (l. 96), in response to the women's query at the start of the next section. The "sweet" water of conscience is "rinsed, wrung, spilling" through the poet's inner thoughts, and a tentative decision is reached: "Stay true, true, being / the hardest of struggles, stay true to your hopes" (ll. 107-108).   As the poem's narrative develops from this point on, the poet attempts to navigate through various the implications of the apparition's questions.

The space for reflection, removed from the reflection on the struggles in "places we have left behind," discloses a private, domestic tension between the poet and his partner. It may be argued that the public sphere is placing a severe strain on their private lives, ironically reinforcing the interrelationship between the two spheres. Thus:

> Gulled to disputation
> Into every footprint we press
> Some anger
> Into the headwind,
> As we track in confusion, along the beach
> Our separate, together, unreconciled ways (ll. 167-172).

The fluid space of the beach and the sea serve as a metonym for the tumultuous domestic interaction, where the shifting beach sand and the buffeting winds link the physical environment with their acrimonious inward states. Nature provides a liminal space for contemplation, where the continuous ebb and flow reinforces the challenges of living together, in a partnership like marriage, or as a society generally. The force with which the two stamp down on the sand reinforces this, and the moorage point of community, so carefully observed by the poet at the beginning of the poem, is in danger of being lost. As the two "unreconciled" individuals come across a "rock pool" that is "Chock full, / With hidden motive" (ll. 188-191), the elements of nature reflect their domestic tension. Waves crash into the pool, "overspilling" onto the "barnacles," described as the perpetual "Hard-case … recidivists" who "knuckle down" (ll. 192-194) against the forces of the continual flow of the water. The barnacles cling

tenaciously, knuckling down to their respective positions similarly to the two tracking their "unreconciled ways." But at each caress of the wave cast as 'hope,' the barnacle's "eyes" close, causing them "to make a clean breast of it" (ll. 195-196). The ebb and flow of nature provides an example for human interaction here, foregrounding dialogue as a means to air their differences and find some way through their issues. The connection to the movements of nature acting as an analogue for their dialogue is strengthened when "the whelk" on the beach "proclaims / Though the shell be firm / The flesh is willing" (ll. 198-200). This reinforces the willingness to undertake the journey with the other "creature-travellers" that Rich refers to earlier. Thus, even though the perspectives (the shell) may seem inflexible, the flesh constantly reaches for understanding and reciprocity.

The clearest articulation of the domestic tension is revealed in part xii of the poem, where the poet asks:

> So what are we attempting in this inter-tidal place
> Of infatuation, erotic love, comradeship, quarrelling,
> Companionship, back to infatuation again, or
> All the way down to some future low water mark of
> For the sake of our kids? (ll. 201-205).

The above questions illustrate the tumultuous interaction of the private sphere through the metaphor of the "inter-tidal place" where the consistent shifting emotional sands drag the two from one extreme to the other.[66] The questions are also the product of the initial questions posed by the "dark … apparition" earlier, underlining the fact that both nature and human interaction can result in the re-evaluation of how life is being conducted. The examples offered by nature offer a conceptual space for intervention. The phrase "some future low water mark of / For the sake of our kids" is important in unpacking the domestic tension. The phrase implies the common cliché where actions are defended purely on the need to ensure the survival of the individual family or children. It can also be extended into a desire to defend and retain a particular position or belief. This individualistic position is countered by the interaction with Barsby and the shoreline community and what the poet observes in nature as a cyclical perspective: the ebb and flow of give and take and the tenderness of understanding. There is thus also the question of survival implied. Do the needs of the individual outweigh the needs of the community? The individualism is thus confronted in the next stanza when the poet argues that "For the record, / Without irony nor sense of moralizing, / This IS the notion / We are attempting to live" (ll. 213-216). This notion is defined by what the poet learns along this shoreline: "A small community at a biological moorage" (l. 217), which provides the basis for family to be re-inserted into the *broader* community. In

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[66] It may be argued that these images could also be read as an analogue of the negotiated transition.

order to discover a 'moorage' point that secures the future for 'the kids' that will be free from a State of Emergency, the sacrifice of the individuals' needs for the survival of the community is implied.

The final phase in the argument for a broader conceptualisation for community or 'moorage' point begins in part xiii, the final section of the poem. It begins: "Because the struggle we haven't, in fact / Left behind" (ll. 222-223) implying that public sphere impacts the private. While the intention was to "reflect" upon the turmoil's of the "State of Emergency," the two end up "speaking / mostly of here and things." The discussion regarding the "here and things" results in a personal 'struggle,' which manifests in the poet and his partner's engagement with their own biological 'moorage': the struggle to hold the family unit (and possibly their marriage union) together. But it also reveals that the personal struggle is intimately connected to the wider implications of restoring communal bonds in a society ruptured by the system of apartheid. The consistent foregrounding of the verb 'struggle' in this particular poem (as well as many others in Cronin's oeuvre) suggests that this 'moorage' point, be it biological or discursive, requires *active participation* for it to be achieved (or understood). Through the relationship with the 'natural,' physical environment, including a dialogic interaction with the human individuals (both alive and dead) in the area, the fluid 'inter-tidal place' represents something that has been lost: the idea that fellow-creature travelers are all undertaking the same journey, and that there is a responsibility to ensure the reproduction of life together. This suggests an ethical turn toward the understanding that we are all responsible for how we choose to conduct our relations with the 'other'. The poet thus concludes:

> As we walk in our bodies.
>
> Our biological moorage
> To birth, love, death, that we push
> In time always, and yet
> Through all human times, stretched out
> From toe to lip,
> Like conjugal bodies
> Affirming, something, moving now towards
> Unabashed romantic closure,
> Lagoon and land lie alive to and
> Touching each other every
> Inch of the way. (ll. 230-241).

Here the poet presents the body as the initial moorage point. This point of departure is then extended to include other human beings lying "toe to lip" throughout the course of history, painting a 'moorage' point of community, history and nature that is as intimate as two lovers. The passionate connectivity is

underlined by the use of the noun 'conjugal,' expressly linked to the act of kissing foregrounded by the words 'toe to lip.' This, for the poet, 'affirms' a movement that is unashamed to recognise the interconnectivity of 'nature' and 'human'; the interconnectivity of place and time to the inhabitants of the shore; and the interconnectivity of the individual to History. This, fundamentally, is the tenderness of recognition that is implied throughout the poem; without which results in the 'hell' of isolation of the individual in relation to each other and to history.

3.5 Cronin and Pablo Neruda: Seeing the Blood on the Streets

The works of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda are an important intertextual reference in the collection. Cronin names the first section of the collection 'Explaining Some Things,' which is an allusion to the title of Pablo Neruda's poem "I'm Explaining a Few Things" (Neruda, 1970:151-155) written during the height of the Spanish Civil War. In the first stanza of this poem Neruda probes the readers expectations of poetry:

> You are going to ask: and where are the lilacs?
> And the poppy-petaled metaphysics? (ll. 1-2).

Here the more parochial subject matter of poetry is foregrounded, referring to the notion that descriptions of flowers or metaphysical considerations are poetry's primary concerns. This abstracted perspective is shifted in the next isolated stanza, where the reader is emphatically told not to expect any meditations on flowers in this poem. Rather, the poet is going to "tell you all the news" (l. 6):

> one morning the bonfires
> leapt out of the earth
> devouring human beings —
> from then on fire,
> gunpowder from then on
> and from then on blood (ll. 41-46).

The sobering experience of a nation undergoing violent internal conflict is the counterpoint to poetry concerning itself with flowers. The reader is again probed: "And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry speak of dreams and leaves / and the great volcanoes of his native land?" (ll. 72-74). The readers' expectations of poetry are contrasted with the desire to explore the real conflicts that are taking place on the streets at the time. Neruda therefore concludes by imploring the reader to:

> Come and see the blood in the streets.
> Come and see
> The blood in the streets
> Come and see the blood

In the streets. (ll. 75-79).

The need to closely observe the social environment is emphasised here, and individuals are implored to get up off their comfortable seats to see the results of violent oppression occurring before their eyes.[67] Neruda's poem serves as a significant poetic manifesto for the social function of poetry, which alludes to the debates over the prevalence of political content matter in South African poetry. Cronin's explicit reference to Neruda's poem as the point of departure for the collection thus invokes the desire to challenge amnesia. Moreover, it foregrounds the need to consider the consequences of apartheid on South African culture.

The second major intertextual reference to Neruda's work is the poem "A Reply to Pablo Neruda" (1999: 123). This poem refers to Neruda's "The Education of a Chieftain" ([1950] 2000). Neruda's poem is contained in his historical epic of South American history, *Cantos General* ([1950] 2000), which translated is 'The song of the people.' The epic constitutes a poetic mythmaking of the oppressed and marginalised of South America's bloody colonial history. Neruda describes the intention of *Cantos General* in his memoirs like this:

> Can poetry serve our fellow men? Can it find a place in men's struggles? … I had to pause and find the road to humanism, outlawed from contemporary literature but deeply rooted in the aspirations of mankind. I started work on my Cantos General ... [with the] pressing need to write a central poem that would bring together the historical events, the geopolitical situations, the life and struggles of our peoples. (Neruda, 1977 [1974]: 139-140).

Neruda's description reinforces a number of issues discussed throughout this dissertation. In a similar manner to Cronin's work there is a focus on the intersection between history and the struggle of the 'common' people. Implicit therein is a focus on the forgotten narratives of history and learning how to speak from a communal perspective. Here there is less regard for a great poetic tradition, but rather the idea that poetry participates in the struggle for a more equitable future. The weaving of a history from below also emphasises the particular strains of both Benjamin and Brecht in Cronin's work.

Cronin's response to Neruda's poem describing the education of Lautaro (1534 – 1547), one of the first major leaders of the indigenous peoples of Chile resisting the Spanish *conquistadors*, inverts Neruda's purposeful myth-making of the 'leader.' Neruda's poem focuses on the trials undertaken by Lautaro to become a great leader in the fight against the oppressor, while Cronin's discusses the importance of what takes place after these trials. Lautaro is described as having "trained his head in the thorns" (l. 8), "lived in snowy drifts" (l. 10) and "scratched the secrets of crags" (l. 12) in order to learn

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[67] This is similar to the so-called 'Soweto poets' emphasis on the public political context.

the lay of the land that would assist leading the people militarily against the Spanish. While the chieftain learning how to speak from the land is important to note, much of the poem takes the form of a listing of Lautaro's trials. Each of these trials or lessons begin with the masculine pronoun "He" which is repeated 35 times. A short extract will illustrate this aspect of the poem:

> He allayed the petals of fire
> He suckled cold springtime
> He burned in infernal gorges
> He was a hunter among cruel birds. (ll. 13-16)

The overt listing of achievements is essential to Neruda's project of creating the unsung praises of the struggle heroes of South America to counter colonial history in an epic poem. This strategy is not unlike the traditional African oral poets (imbongi) who listed the attributes of their great leaders in a very similar manner. Like Mtshali's poem discussed in section 2.3, this was a necessary act of historical recovery against the imposition of a history that steadfastly refused to consider the indigenous peoples' culture and history. Neruda ends the poem in the final isolated line with the assertion that "Only then was he worthy of his people" (l. 38). This focus on a single individual surviving all these tests in order to become a great leader provides the fulcrum for Cronin's poem.

Cronin's "A reply to Pablo Neruda" begins with the poet acknowledging that "It is true, Lautaro / Survived cascades, thorns, crags, / Slept under the sheets of snowdrifts, and / Emerged from his trials a formidable hero" (ll. 1-4). The focus on the hero shifts from this myth-making to the assertion in the next stanza: "But, it was only then / The Araucanian chieftain's / Fuller education began" (ll. 5-7). Implicit is the suggestion that the struggle for justice does not end with victory over the enemy. Victory was just the beginning of the learning process. In the South African context, this implies that despite the triumph over apartheid many challenges still remained. Thus, for Cronin, Lautaro still

> [..] had to compel himself now
>
> To train his ear in the tree of sympathy,
> To draw knowledge from small pots,
> To acknowledge his debt to those many years younger. (ll. 8-11).

The choice of the verb 'compel' underscores that this moment afforded the opportunity to listen and learn from those who were not as powerful. It is interesting to note the recurring image of the communal cup or the necessity of 'Umrabulo' discussed earlier. Key to this is the desire to acknowledge the importance of the people placing the leader in such a powerful position, obliging the

leader to listen and take these people into account. This is reinforced when the poet suggests that Lautaro had to "learn now / The harder things":

> To respect the majority,
> To habituate his feet to the ways of the people. (ll. 9-11).

The importance of the connection between leadership and the people, where "the waters of consultation need" to be "bathed in" (l. 19-20), is implicit. The act of learning is importantly extended to the way that the leader speaks, where the poet notes that the "tongue" be "instructed in the difference between we-simple / (meaning us), and we-royal (meaning I)" (ll. 24-25). In this regard it becomes essential to "accept that this was more than a question of grammar" (ll. 26-27). The implication of the power of language to over-write other perspectives is strengthened, suggesting the need to re-evaluate how the leader approaches the notion of dialogue: as an open-ended process or the imposition of a single point of view. This requires an engagement that is more than merely grammatical or formally correct. Rather, this process is a deep commitment to ensure that more perspectives are included. The emphasis on the infinitive 'to' in the poem, as in "To learn how to speak […]," reinforces the necessity for open-ended discussion.

Cronin is writing against the notion of "leadership" as "enlightened patronage" or the "balancing of factions" (ll. 41-42), suggesting that there is an obligation for those in positions of power to direct that power responsibly, and to the benefit of the majority. This challenges the myth of the infallibility of these individuals who have led people in the fight against oppression. Cronin's reply to Neruda concludes with the reiteration of the belief that it is only *after* the trials and the victories that a deeper education begins:

> In short,
>
> Latauro came to understand
>
> Surviving trial by fire, exile, stone, limitless time, or steel bars is
> Only the beginning of being
>
> Worthy of the people. (ll. 45-49).

The key emphasis is the contrasting vision of what it means to be "worthy of the people." Neruda's listing of Latauro's achievements allows for the focus of the narrative to remain fixed on a single individual, disempowering the vital contribution of the 'people' also engaged in the struggle against the oppressor. Cronin's response, while acknowledging the achievements of the leader/s, suggests that

these successes pale against the more difficult period to follow. Foregrounding tasks that need to be learnt (or perhaps re-learnt) after the 'revolution' reinforces the fact that the real transformation of society only occurs when the needs of the people are placed above any self-serving interest. Cronin's poem suggests the importance of continual dialogue between the leadership and the people, and, moreover, that the focus of decisions needs to remain fixed on their needs.

3.6 Conclusion

The participation of history and language in consolidating oppressive systems is significant in this chapter. Cronin targets historical amnesia to undermine the power of language and embedded historical narratives to overwrite marginalised stories. This act of historical recovery is intended to rouse readers from their slumber and participate in the 'struggle to stay awake' against the power of the symbolic. The task of rebuilding a fractured society historically based upon exclusion and racial prejudice is aided by learning how to speak anew and *with* the voices of *this* land. The necessity to rediscover a shared history in a country dominated by many different languages and cultural perspectives is reinforced. A 'border crossing' that favours inclusion over imposition becomes indispensable to challenge the boundaries imposed by language and history. The importance of the connection between the public and private aids the struggle against forgetting. Cronin's use of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' assists in the desire to challenge the dangers of overlooking South Africa's contradictory past, allowing hidden stories to be drawn into embedded historical narratives. Fundamentally, targeting historical amnesia encourages new perspectives and ways of engaging with complicity in oppressive systems. This reinforces the resistance against mythologising the struggle and its heroes, purposefully shifting the focus of historical narratives toward the 'ordinary' and their significance in fighting injustice.

4. Chapter Four: *"More Than a Casual Contact"*: Of the Automobile and the End of the Century

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will concentrate on the use of the automobile as an ironic and ambiguous metaphor in Cronin's third collection, *More Than a Casual Contact* (2006). It is used to explore the notion of the African Renaissance through the metaphor of highways, as well as ideals of progress and who drives this process in the context of South Africa's transition to democracy (and beyond). Importantly, as in the discussion related to Cronin's "A Reply to Pablo Neruda," the poems consistently foreground what is left out of these narratives. The bulk of the poetry examined in this chapter is interruptive in form, with rapid juxtapositions intended to fragment historical narratives in order to challenge the mythology of the 'leader' and the dangers of 'grand visions.' "Where to begin?" will be discussed to illustrate Cronin's self-reflexive strategy in his first person account of driving through parts of the South African landscape. The automobile becomes the central motif in the poet's journey through his daily business ('work,' 'shopping,' etc), allowing him to think about the various intersections of his biography and the surrounding urban landscape. The poem emphasises the interaction between the public and the private. The importance of the automobile is advanced in the next two poems examined, where the daily journey allows the poet to think through history and post-apartheid narratives by including the working parts of the vehicle (the 'wiper blade') and the networks that facilitate the use of the vehicle (the 'freeway'). In the "End of the century – which is why wipers," it is the way the windscreen wipers function that provides the impetus for the poet to consider who is not visible in the post-apartheid narrative of progress. The automobile's rearview mirror and driver operating the vehicle on the freeway become the central focus in "Switchback," allowing the poet to begin to examine history as a way to challenge 'grand visions.'

Due to the length and complexity of the poems examined, and the importance of the automobile to the poetry, other aspects of the collection will need to be sacrificed in the interests of space. The collection was published nine years after his second volume and presents a continuation of the themes running through his entire oeuvre: the consistent blurring of the public and the private and the desire to learn how to speak in various South African voices. Like the second collection, it is short, consisting of 18 poems, three of which are in excess of six pages. The poems are divided into four untitled numbered sections, with the first poem "Where to begin?" standing outside of these sections, offering a quasi-prologue. The title poem of the collection, "After more than a casual contact" (2006: 62), has important implications. In the poem there is an allusion to the HIV crisis experienced under Thabo Mbeki's presidency, referring to the problematic debate around the relationship between HIV and AIDS, which resulted in the slow roll-out of anti-retrovirals designed to alleviate the symptoms of the disease. The

poem begins with a reference to one of the ways in which HIV is transmitted, which is linked to the narratives of history: "Mother to child // epoch to epoch // White to black bourgeoisie / *in utero* transmission" (ll. 1-4, emphasis in original). This suggests that diseases, whether physical or metaphysical, are spread across historical periods. The highly charged metaphor invokes the reality of the HIV crisis, connecting it to the negotiated transition, and functions to represent the post-apartheid period. The implication of the title is that there was more than just a casual contact in the negotiations for a new South Africa, resulting in a great deal of the disease of apartheid being transferred to the 'new' South Africa. "After more than a casual contact" suggests that South Africa's past still needs to be accounted for, as underlined by the conclusion to the poem "The letter bomber seeks amnesty" (2006: 35) describing a future that "remains / an endangered address" (ll. 86-87).

The post-apartheid period is marked by the loss of the unifying aspect of the struggle against apartheid. South Africa was a different country, yet many aspects of previous oppression remained. A new course needed to be charted, and many writers of the time were thinking through the failures of the transition. In the article "Iphin'dlela: Finding a way through confusion" (2000) Njabulo Ndebele notes the schizophrenic character of the transition to a 'newer' South Africa, labeling this fractured sense as the feeling of "Iphindlela," the isiXhosa word for "where is the way?" Ndebele engaged in an act of automatic writing to find a title to this article, which resulted in a collection of random words. Ironically, the stimulus emerged from the very haphazard assortment of words, emblematic of the feeling of being lost, describing how he could "find no immediate path through this forest of words" (102). The confusion resulted in the realisation that:

> the act of writing was a supreme effort at finding your way though immense confusion. It is the act of 'finding your way' through a turbulent sea of words. The only thing that sustains you is a daring act of faith. (Ndebele, 2007: 102).

I argue that *More Than a Casual Contact* represents Cronin's attempt to 'find his way through the confusion' and learn how to speak a new, post-apartheid, South African vocabulary. The strategies employed in the collection remain indebted to aspects of Brecht's *V-Effekt* and Walter Benjamin's perspective on history, and are encompassed by Cronin's reference to an ancient Chinese proverb in the 2008 Van der Vlies interview. Cronin quotes it as saying "'When the finger points at the full moon, the fool looks at the finger'" sardonically adding that sometimes there is "wisdom in the fool's distraction" (Cronin in Van der Vlies, 2008:528). Cronin's addition to the proverb implies that power often foregrounds the image of the moon in an effort to distract individuals from the hidden stories. The wisdom in the 'fool's distraction' is the focus on who is doing the pointing rather than only seeing the beautiful image of the moon. It may be argued that the allusion also serves as an analogue to the

literary debates discussed in section 1.2.1, where the more Formalist interventions concentrated on the 'moon,' while the materialists focused on the 'finger.' The poetry discussed in this chapter uses the image of the automobile and freeway to think through the distractions to provide alternative trajectories to the preponderance of 'grand visions.'

4.2 Automobility: The automobile and the 'new' South Africa

It is important to examine the implications of the automobile as a metaphor. In "Inhabiting the car" (2006) John Urry implicates the automobile as part of a wider network "of domination" which he refers to as Automobility (2006: 17). Urry lists a number of components to Automobility (and by extension the automobile) that usefully traces the choice of the car as a symbol in the poems selected. Using the example of the iconic brand names of Ford, General Motors and Mercedes Benz Urry asserts that the automobile is the "quintessential manufactured product … [of] twentieth century capitalism" (Urry, 2006: 16-17).[68] Urry suggests that the automobile is the "major item of individual consumption after housing [and by extension property ownership] which provides status to its owner/user through its sign-values (such as speed, home, safety, sexual desire, career success [and] freedom)" (17). Urry also notes the dominant "cultural" impact of the automobile that sustains "major discourses of what constitutes the good life," reinforcing the ways in which the automobile contributes to conferring status (17). This points towards the unconscious privileging of the motor vehicle as a means of privacy, status and unhindered movement, contained in the formulation of the word: 'auto' and 'mobile.' The disarticulation of the word suggests the aspect that the poems examined attempt to undermine: the autonomous individual choosing when, where and how to move from point A to B. In contrast to this movement, who or what is left out of this narrative of privilege is foregrounded. Gone are the times when people primarily intermingled on the streets. In contemporary society, privileged individuals are by and large removed from this form of engagement as they drive ensconced in the 'safety' of their motor vehicle. The modern age thus reflects a highly automated, mechanical method of relating which also extends to the internet, where social responsibility is sometimes limited to the clicking of a 'like' button or a hyperlink denoting some or other protest action. Because Cronin chooses to speak from within the vehicle he is emphasizing the sense of disconnection in privileged modern society, isolated and 'moored' in his car. In the representation of the automobile and its working parts, Cronin responds to the 'new' South Africa in a manner that attempts to reconstitute an active participation in the

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[68] This could also be extended into the industrial factory-line processes (referred to as Fordism) that would go into the manufacturing of the automobile. It is important to note the significant focus on the motor-vehicle industry as a barometer for positive economic growth and health in South Africa.

ongoing life of the city; using the quintessential product of modernity, the independent driver of the automobile, as a means to disrupt the smooth 'traffic flow' of progress.

4.3 "Where to Begin?": The intersections of the public and private

Andrew van der Vlies suggests that "Where to begin?" usefully stages "the question of the poet's own history and identity, his historical complicity, and his literary and intellectual points of contact" (Van der Vlies, 2008: 520). The poem asks these questions in a Brechtian manner, endeavoring to show what led the poet to a particular point, tracing, and juxtaposing his movements in the past and present. Importantly the poet is driving in Cape Town to some or other Parliamentary meeting. While in the car, the poet engages in a highly ironised, self-reflexive examination of his personal biography, referring to it as a "shopping list." "Where to begin?" is presented as a question, and not a statement of fact, which emphasises the ambiguity of the self-questioning mode that continues throughout. It begins:

> The certificate says: 1949, Durban … what links me to that now? Is it a 'but'?

> But I grew up mostly in Cape Town. (ll. 1-2).

The above establishes a link with the title by invoking the poet's birth "certificate" denoting the year and place of birth; the logical point of entry in the narration of an individual's life story. The ellipsis begins to question the linearity of plotting a simple movement from one point to another, reinforced by the repetition of the word 'but.' The fragmented biography continues: "the police arrested me in 1976 with rhyme and with reason" (l. 3), qualifying this in the following isolated stanza by saying that "the reason was politics" (l. 4). This wry reference to the interconnection between politics and poetry is emphasised by the invocation of "'Spyker' van Wyk" (l. 5),[69] the apartheid era policeman who arrested him. The unfortunate rhyming in the policeman's name suggests that "(Real life is more / poetic than fiction)" (ll. 5-6). In doing so Cronin demonstrates that one has to pay attention to the unconscious assonance (and rhyme) that manifest in these situations.

The poet's journey continues to foreground snapshots between prison and his subsequent release:

> I wrote poems for seven years in Pretoria Maximum. Prison is an acceptable
> poetical topic for a male poet, more so than, say, housework.

> Then back to Cape Town

> Then to exile with Gemma and three-month old Ben. (ll. 7-10).

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[69] 'Spyker' is the Afrikaans word for 'nail.' There is a pun on the word 'nail' playing with the idea of being arrested and named as a criminal.

The matter of fact delivery reinforces the rapid shifts in movement, suggesting that the poet is providing a list of activities to an individual who is interrogating his background, similar to Cronin poeticizing John Matthews' biography in "Walking on Air." There is a considerable lack of detail surrounding these events, suggesting an attempt to de-mythologise the individual story. Like Cronin's "A Reply to Pablo Neruda," this disinvests the focus on the individual by continually linking the private and public sphere. The range of random activities continues after the poets' return from "exile," where he notes:

> I took part in the multi-party negotiations. I shopped at Pick 'n Pay. I wrote
> poems. Kate was born. (ll. 13-14).

Highlighting the four events undermines the compartmentalization of existence required in rationalist linear thinking. The dispassionate litany of biographical detail begins to establish a relation of equivalence between the public and the private. This suggests a reticence to hierarchise activities, where one activity informs the other. The birth of the poet's daughter is linked to the participation in the negotiations of the early 90s. Shopping and the writing of poetry have to co-habit. This refuses the elevation of poetry, underlining that it cannot be divorced from the everyday, and ostensibly mundane.

Cronin's linking of the aesthetic and the political is explored in the thirteenth stanza. The line reads:

> 'We saw you in parliament on TV last night,' friends say with a disapproving
> look. 'But are you still at least…' (here come capital letters) ' …WRITING?'
> (ll. 19-20).

The poet places his art in relation to his parliamentary position, foregrounding the difficulty of maintaining these seemingly contradictory profiles. The disapproval of his friends at the poet's parliamentary television appearance is reinforced with their question as to what he is currently writing. The implication of the capitalisation of "WRITING" suggests that his friends' believe that the writing of poetry is superior to engaging in parliamentary politics. The poet undermines this common elevation, by writing:

> 'Yes, plenty,' I'm inclined to reply. 'An SACP discussion document. A
> newspaper article. Not forgetting this week's Pick 'n Pay shopping list.'
> (ll. 21-22).

The listing of the different kinds of writing in this excerpt consolidates Cronin's recognition that the public and the private cannot be separated. The stanza ends with the line in parenthesis: "(Why separate poetry from what poetry is not?)" (l. 23). Making poetry out of the mundane proves to be the rebuttal to

his friends' insinuation above. Significantly, the question of separating poetry from what it is not is "ask[ed]" (l. 24) as the poet "drives down Roeland Street to parliament, imagining my shopping / list falling in love with Pablo Neruda" (ll. 24-25). The expressive link between the shopping list and Pablo Neruda suggests that the poet is thinking through the effects of commodification and the prevalence of 'to-do' lists in modern society. Poetry has to take its chances in the context of a fragmentary modern existence as the driver of the self-enclosed automobile drives by. While there is a refusal to hierarchise different types of writing, the poem suggests the difficulty of writing poetry in environments dictated to by the pace of modern (bourgeois) life. The poet has to observe life within the confines of a vehicle while driving down the street. This necessitates an awareness of what is happening outside of the vehicle, which becomes the subject of the next two poems that will be examined in the collection.

The poet drives "past the old jail (now the state archive) / and the Renault dealership with a banner" (ll. 25-26). The coupling of the contradictory nature of a building that once housed apartheid prisoners, now a contemporary post-apartheid repository of South African history, with the Renault dealership is important. The ironic juxtaposition of the jail/archive next to a symbol of European branding highlights the conflict between history and capital. It reinforces the suggestion that an escape from the prison of apartheid still needs to be affected. After reading the banner: "JOE SLOVO … RELIEF / COLLECTION DROP-OFF POINT"[70] (ll. 26-27), he stops the vehicle, and writes "that down, word for word, / annoying the car behind" (ll. 27-28). The act of *arresting* the forward motion of the traffic, the vehicle, as well as his thoughts, is important to note in the context of the discussion on Walter Benjamin. Stopping allows the opportunity to take the ironic 'everyday' material observed and turn this into verse. By slowing down, the poet freezes the moment (and traffic), as well as the forward momentum of history. Moreover, this demonstrates the need to find a new vocabulary that pays attention to the contradictions taking place on the side of the road.

An ambivalent attitude towards the vehicle is highlighted when the poet, after stopping his vehicle and noting down his observation, says that he "dislikes this over-reliance on cars" (l. 29). This

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[70] The need to stop the vehicle and write the contents of the banner "down, word for word" probably relates to deceased General Secretary of the South African Communist Party Joe Slovo's apparent sense of humour. Cronin writes of this in the poem "Joe Slovo's Favourite Joke" (1999: 120) in the collection *Even the Dead*, saying "History can advance on its funny side / By freak, frailty and unplanned – Joe understood that" (ll. 11-12). This line occurs after Cronin relates Slovo's favourite joke concerning the revolution in Cuba where Che Guevara puts up his hand when Fidel Castro asks if there was an economist among the revolutionaries. Guevarra mishears Castro's question, groaning that he thought Castro asked: "'Who here's a / COMMUNIST?" (ll. 8-9). Joe Slovo in the extract would refer to the squatter camp in Cape Town named after him.

statement is then contrasted: "I cherish this time inside of my car" (l. 29). The ambiguity is reinforced when the poet confesses to cherishing the space that the drive affords him to spend time on:

> the way to school with the kids. Or time out of time for a musing to shape
> itself into a poem between gear changes. (ll. 30-31).

Ironically, the vehicle affords a space for reflection, but it is also a space of transition. The pace of modern life underlines the necessity to find the correct poetic tempo. The gear changes utilised in operating the automobile is demonstrated in the content, which represents the interconnections between the poet's private and public life.

The pun on the term "gear change" highlights a more overt political intervention. GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) was the economic policy that replaced the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), the program that the ANC released as its primary election manifesto for the 1994 general elections. The RDP emphasised "a commitment to grassroots, bottom-up development … driven by communities and representative organisations" (Gumede, 2005: 283). The document represented a "consensus policy" based on inclusive and interactive engagement with communities and "encapsulated the spirit in which policy-making in the new democracy was envisaged" (Gumede, 2005: 132). The RDP was abruptly shelved in 1996 and replaced with GEAR, which was organised around the central tenet of economic growth to enable the redistribution of wealth and benefits to the poor majority marginalised under apartheid (the so-called 'Washington Consensus'). GEAR was presented as non-negotiable, and subsequently imposed with little grass roots consultation. In the context of this poem, the discursive shift from inclusion to imposition is suggested when the poet misses "first gear at the lights in front of parliament," while his "car does a lurching / iambic pentameter – er-uhh … five times" (ll. 40-41), effectively stalling at the seat of South African parliament. The car stalling in front of parliament gestures toward the incomplete nature of the attempt to provide for a more equal society in the 'new' South Africa. The parenthesis that features immediately after the description of the lurching vehicle provides an aperture from which to view the use of the automobile. The poet writes: "(even it wants to become a poem)?" (l. 42). The description of the vehicle stalling in iambic pentameter suggests the invocation of a Western literary tradition that may not be able to account for the cadences of South African life. The poet foregrounds the vehicle's 'desire' to become a poem, which is the primary vehicle for his poetic engagement in the next two poems, voiced from within the confines of a motorcar.

"Where to begin?" presents an ambiguous point from which to examine the next two poems. In the next section the metaphor of the vehicle is expanded to include the lessons that the working parts of

the vehicle can provide. These poems challenge the unconscious operation of the vehicle by the autonomous driver by attempting to include what the driver observes outside the confines of the automobile: the individuals and classes still 'stuck' on the margins of the pavement. The activity shifts the earlier desire to learn how to speak with the voices of this land to the urban environment. This is an attempt to respond and learn from an environment that, in the modern epoch, constitutes much of the material of daily existence.

4.4 "The End of the Century": The dialectical wiper blade

"End of the Century—which is why wipers" (2006: 16) foregrounds the contradictory nature of South African experiences as well as the external social environment through the use of the automobile's working parts. The ten part structure allows for the rapid juxtaposition of thought, reinforcing the suggestion that both Brecht's *V-Effekt* and Benjamin's literary montage inform many poems in Cronin's oeuvre. In seeking new ways to think through the turbulence of the 'new' South Africa, Cronin writes a poem about a trivial working part on the automobile. Wiper blades and how they function is the central metaphor throughout this poem. The blades are designed to clear the driver's vision during a storm, but the side-to-side movement offers an incomplete view: the margins of the windscreen, as well as the side windows, remain obscured. The vision of the road ahead is blinkered, resulting in tunnel vision. This suggests the incompleteness of the shift from apartheid, which is also implied by the fragmentary title, "which is why wipers." It may be argued that Cronin is interested in what is left out of the narrative as the wipers frenetically try to clear a limited vision of South Africa's post-apartheid journey. In this regard, Cronin admits to liking the idea of "foregrounding the windscreen wiper to disrupt the illusory, headlong vista of boundless globalizing growth" (Cronin in Van der Vlies, 2008: 528). Cronin concedes that his post-1994 poetry leans "less towards the narrative and more towards the epigrammatic disruption of narrative … hence [the] fascination with the *rubber-thump, rubber-thump* disruptive insistence of windscreen wipers" (528, emphasis in original). The mechanical movements of the wiper blades are scrutinised throughout the poem in order to think about vision and how we see the world.

The "*rubber-thump*" disruption is linked to a desire to alter a discursive slide into the 'grand' vision of neo-liberal discourse represented globally by the 'Washington Consensus,' and by the imposition of the neo-liberal orientation of GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) in the local context. It is interesting to note the implication of the automobile in the policy's acronym, as changing gears allow for the operation of the vehicle, as well as for increasing speed. Cronin's "Symposium on the mount" (2006: 24) in *More Than a Casual Contact* describes this discursive slide

into imposition in terms of language: "It's the era of disempowerment by in-, / not exclusion, one size fits all meanings, / Every time we open our mouths in English, out pours the Washington Consensus" (ll. 19-22). This is further denoted in terms of 'inclusion' as opposed to 'exclusion,' favouring the general over the specific. The grand vision of global competitiveness required the unreflective adoption of the 'Washington Consensus' with little regard to the individuals who bear the brunt of this structural readjustment: the poor and marginalised.

The poem begins with an epigraph taken from some graffiti "spray painted on a wall in Bogata" that notes "Let's leave pessimism for better times" (2006: 16). The 'pessimism' infers a sense of hope in the future, suggesting that 'hope' is an important outlook that may prove to be a guiding light. The first section begins with a consideration of the workings of "windscreen wipers" (l. 1) and the implications this has for driving the automobile:

> With windscreen wipers
> (Unlike drive-belts
> Or footwear, or chameleons' tongues)
> Low adhesion is advised. (ll. 1-4).

Low adhesive wiper blades enable better vision as the vehicle moves forward in the rain. However, in the parenthesis, the low adhesive quality of the wiper blade is contrasted with items that require greater traction to function. The easy nature of clearing the driver's vision is contrasted by another paradigm for the operation of the wiper blade:

> But for this end of century
> Wipers should be given
> Some additional stickiness
> Some adhesive stubbornness to turn
> Grand vision into rhythm
>   Light into rubber. (ll.5-10).

The above contends that the automated workings of the automobile's wiper blades require "stickiness" and "adhesive stubbornness" to interrupt the forward movement. How the wiper blades function therefore need reconsideration. Grand vision is only partial and a different concept will be required to see what is left out of the narrative of global competitiveness. The rhythmical, mechanical movement of the wiper blades offers a ubiquitous metaphor to think around narratives that privilege competition as the only means of satisfying human needs. Instead of concentrating on the vision afforded by the metaphor of the wiper blades, the mechanical movement itself becomes the prime consideration. The alliteration of "some additional stickiness" and "some adhesive stubbornness" serves to focus the reader's attention on the need to "turn" the obsessive forward motion of "grand vision" by suspending

the reading of the lines. This is reinforced by the assonance repeating the suffix "-ness," underlining the effort required to inure the 'pessimism' of the age. The explicit space left between "stubbornness" and "to turn," together with the verbs "sticky" and "stubborn" support this textually. Poetic form can therefore assist in offering alternatives in the 'struggle to stay awake.'

Part two builds onto the implied danger of unchallenged adherence to "clarity of vision" and "forward progress" by using the example of Soviet libraries post the revolution of 1917. The poet notes that "Sometime after the revolution, Soviet libraries adopted / the Dewey Decimal System // With one rectification – the two hundreds: Religion" (ll. 14-16):

> All the way from 201, 202, 214 (Theodicy), 216 (Good & Evil), 229
>   (Apocrypha & pseudo-epigraphs), down to 229 (Other religion) –
>   This textual body of human wisdom, confusion,
>   folly and aspiration was reduced by the Soviets to a bald:

> Dewey Decimal 200: Atheism (ll.17-21).

The limitation of vision imposed by the metaphor of the wiper blades is advanced by highlighting the one-dimensionality of Soviet authorities wiping the slate clean of a particular facet of human existence: religion. This act of enforced amnesia reduced a "textual body" of human invention and enquiry into a single, monolithic term: atheism. Asserting their own form of secularization over the production of knowledge, the Soviets categorised all religious writings under one banner, negating the particularity of these writings to explain or interpret human actions (and history). The Soviet action, noted as "not (not by far) the worst sin of Stalinism" (l. 22), becomes an example of an authoritarian act that "should be remembered of the 20th century" (l. 24), and forces us to question the 'clarity' of vision underpinned by a blinkered and exclusionary view.

The connection between the exclusionary acts of Stalinism and the movement of the wiper blades is strengthened in part three. The poet responds to the reduction of knowledge:

> I decline to name my windscreen wipers 'Easy Come' and 'Easy Go',
> I think of them, rather, as
> 'Quote' and 'Unquote.' (ll.25-28).

It may be argued that the poet refuses to take the 'laissez faire' attitude implied in the phrasing "Easy Come / Easy Go." Instead, he opts to name the windscreen wipers "Quote" and "Unquote." This act of textual respect counters partial vision afforded by an unreflective perspective of letting things be. Indeed, a closer, critical engagement with the texts (and history) is required, where writings must be examined to trace a path through a bifurcated past. The continual back-and-forth motion convinces the

poet that "Reality / Lies in parenthesis" (ll. 30-31). It is possible to challenge the danger of singular, authoritarian visions if what is left out of the narrative is carefully examined; the after-thought of the grammatically correct sentence.

The possibilities of the wiper blade enabling a more comprehensive perspective continues in part five:

> I name my wipers:
>
> 'On the One Hand', and
> 'On the Other Hand.' (ll. 46-48).

The back and forth motion can therefore represent the dialogic situation, reinforcing that other perspectives need to be taken into consideration. The consistent movement from side to side mimics the shape of dialectical thought: the thesis and antithesis, which provides a chance for a potential synthesis through the examination of the two responses. This synthesis, like the constant motion of the wiper blades, offers an on-going reflexive examination of the metaphorical deluge of grand visions in post-apartheid South Africa.

The antithesis of the dialectic is underscored in part eight where occluded aspects of South African history are highlighted. Here, the smaller sites of struggle in the grand narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle are celebrated. Tellingly, it is the margins that are the focus and not a great leader. The movement of the wiper blades result in the poet considering the importance of communal bonds in action against oppression. From inside the moving vehicle the poet considers aspects left out of the grand narratives of history:

> In the shadow of the big banks a stokvel
> Home brew in the backyard
>
> In a thump of rubber with the foot
> To wake up your ancestors in a mine-compound
> With a gumboot dance. (ll. 73-77).

The "shadow" of institutional capital looms over the "stokvel,"[71] which serves as an illustration of a connective social fabric that foregrounds community taking (in this case financial) matters into their own hands. This system is especially popular within township communities with little access to the banking system. Similarly, the semiotic "thump of rubber" from "a gumboot dance" offers another example of social interconnectivity, drawing individuals (in this case mine-workers) together to

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[71] A 'stokvel' is essentially an informal arrangement between groups of individuals who contribute a certain amount of money per month, which is then given to a single individual on a rotational basis.

challenge the symbolic.[72] The image of the gumboot thumping the ground in solidarity is a theme that also appears in "Switchback." The focus on communal solidarity against both capital and apartheid continues when the poet suggests that:

> For most of this century
> People's cultures have retreated to the secret
> Thaba Bosius of the soul
>
> Forced to stratagems of non-hegemony —
> Rhythm, syncretism, exhibition for the tourist, slant-wise to reality
>
> What went up to the high plateaux as a wedding song, or hunting chant
> Came down, sooner or later, transformed
>
> In a factory choir, or a toyi-toyi on the street. (ll. 78-85).

Thaba Bosius refers to the virtually impregnable mountain fortress of King Moshoeshoe, chief of the Basotho people in the independent state of Lesotho.[73] The poet connects the famed mountain stronghold with an internal 'secret' movement towards solidarity via syncretic actions such as the gumboot dance and the stokvel. These sites of struggle are what Barnard described as 'liberated zones,' "symbolic and experimental sites in which one may imagine and act out the possibility of a wholly liberated land" (Barnard, 2001: 159). In this way, cultural markers, or particular actions that served a cultural purpose, are transformed through a 'slant-wise' engagement with 'reality' to serve a new function: challenging oppression. The word 'slant-wise' suggests the need for a different attitude, or angle of vision, to challenge the symbolic, which becomes a 'wise' move. The rethinking of the wiper blades and the actions undertaken in opposition to apartheid thus serve as "an incalculable resource to go, bravely / Slant-wise, into this next imperial century" (ll. 86-87). This recognises the importance of communal solidarity and action throughout South Africa's history, and the vital contribution these 'unofficial' discourses provide in post-apartheid South Africa. The focus on this 'moorage' point reinvests the 'people,' or communal action, as fundamental agents for change in South African society.

Returning to the automobile in part nine of the poem, the poet begins to look at the urban surroundings as he drives:

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[72] The use of mine workers as a reference point further connects this image to the capitalist exploitation of labour in apartheid South Africa. It could be suggested that the centrality of mineral wealth to the South African political economy underpinned the policies of separate development, inasmuch as this ideological process was also designed to secure cheap sources of labour for the mining of minerals.

[73] It is interesting to note that Moshoeshoe managed to stave off both British and Boer attempts to annex the territory claimed by the Basotho during the 1840's to 1860's, defeating both the British and the Boers militarily on a number of occasions. This was in no small part due to Moshoeshoe's skilled diplomacy in his dealings with both the Boers and the British, but also the strategic value of Thaba Bosiu in ensuring the difficulty of defeating the Sotho militarily.

> With all the ambivalence of a car in the city
>
> Being of the street and
>
> Not of it, just passing through. (ll. 88-90).

The single line stanzas reinforce the "ambivalence" of driving the car, isolated and "just passing through" the city streets. The walking masses of the pedestrian city are both physically and technologically estranged from the driver of the vehicle, and it becomes necessary to find some way of including these pedestrians on the journey. As the poet drives "Down Tudhope, wipers at work, rubber-thump, rubber-thump, taking the bend / in the shadow of the tower blocks" (ll. 91-92) he begins to note the surroundings outside the 'safe' confines. The alliteration of the 'wipers at work' rhythmically suggests the sound of the repetitive 'rubber-thump' movement. This interrupts his vision and as the "next bend sweeps left" (ll. 92) snapshots of 'ordinary' human existence unfold before his eyes:

> Just there
>
> One day it's an inner city father walking his four-year-old kid to crèche
>
> One day a kerb-side telephone hawker ('Howzit?','No, grand') with her
>   extension cord looping up to a jack in a third floor flat
>
> One day it's a bucket with 'For Sale' (cooked sheep's trotters) 'Johnny
>   Walkers', they're called. (ll.93-98).

These three images focus our attention on the everyday activities one would often not notice on the margins of the journey, fixing the reader and the driver's attention on the ordinary daily lives of the individuals. The "tenderness" (l. 104) of the father, the "make-do" (l. 104) of the telephone hawker, and the "wit" (l. 104) of the sheep trotter seller are similar to the shoreline community present in the poem "Moorage." This "make-do" ability of the individuals celebrates the resilience of the human spirit to survive in difficult conditions, and offers an important alternative to the preponderance of grand visionary statements in "the midst of a / crumbling, an urban, end of century, something else" (ll. 104-105).

The reality foregrounded in "The end of the century — which is why wipers" lies in the parenthetic movement of the wiper blades affording a more *inclusive* vision. The poet alliteratively refers to this as the "wisdom of windscreen wipers" (l. 106). The insight lies in the wipers "blink / Hesitation in onward rush" (ll. 107-108) offering an "ironic side-swipe on the hypothetical freeway N1 North" (l. 109). The hesitation at each end point of the back and forth movement therefore offers a

conceptual space to observe, and include, the surrounding social material and context. The development of the wiper blade metaphor has thus been subtly shifted over the course of the poem. At the beginning, the wiper blades were acting in concert with grand visionary statements, unconsciously clearing any hindrance to progress cast in the terms of neo-liberal progress. As the journey progresses, other possibilities emerge in the wiper blades mechanical movement, whereby grand visionary statements are interrupted to create spaces from which to consider other viewpoints.

The observations of the tender make-do attitudes celebrated during the daily drive down Tudhope street are contrasted in part nine with the other side of the coin: the "habitual, edgy, typical, turned into a split second *hi*" (l. 111) urban citizenry, where "parents, patients, / dependents, lovers, learners, supporters, congregants, citizens (if we / still exist) are zombified into one thing all – clients" (ll. 114-116). The deliberate line break in the middle of the parenthetical aside, suggests a break down of community; the annihilation of which is reinforced by the verb 'zombified.' Citizens no longer participate in democracy, but are undead automatons, relating to each in a purely 'business-like' way. The dehumanization implicit in a society geared around a principle where individuals are all viewed as 'clients' or commodities becomes another form of the Soviet version of the Dewey Decimal System. Language becomes officialised, and does not take cognisance of the social, the failed vision ironically disempowering via inclusion as opposed to exclusion. This allusion is extended to the "public" sphere when the poet wonders "(if *they* still exist)" (l. 117, emphasis in original). The public sphere is 'zombified' into clients and public "institutions are made, the leaner the meaner / the better, contractual service providers" (ll.117-118). The action of "managerialism" effectively turns every experience into a commodity (or shopping-list) which becomes the "ism to make all isms wasms" (l. 119). The overwriting 'grand vision' consigns other perspectives to the dustbin of history. Privileging of the corporatization of public institutions in the manner of capitalist business practices favours profit over the individual or the good of the community. This results in "the new 200 Dewey Decimal, the delirium of our age" (l. 120): the refusal to acknowledge the complexities of human experience by excluding ordinary people from the grand vision of progress.

The poet returns to the representation of wiper blades in the final section to hinder the "deluge" of grand visionary statements and the overt commodification of so many aspects of life under capitalism. He reiterates the importance of rethinking how the wiper blades initially function:

With their cantilevered, elegant, frenetic, rubber-thump, rubber-thump

Activism want to insist

Clarity of Vision
Forward progress
        Proceeding wisely to the point
        Involve
A certain
On the one hand
On the other hand
Prevarication. (ll. 121- 131).

Re-representing the wipers dialectical and rhythmical 'cantilevered' song exposes the misleading visions of clarity and progress. The "Prevarication" offered by considering other ways of thinking about their function and motion suggests a challenge to the downward spiral into further "impending / Miscellany, theodicy, good & evil, apocrypha" (ll. 134-135). The poet catalogues a dire warning for the future if wiper blades simply clear the driver's vision. The emphasis on changing direction as the next century approaches is heightened in the concluding lines of the poem, as:

You/We
Either way, now
Slant-wise
Ironically
Plunge. (ll. 136-140).

The desperate staccato organisation of this stanza, culminating in the final inevitable "Plunge" (l. 140), confirms that this slide is gathering momentum and is immersing all in its wake.

Through its rapid juxtapositions the poem formally attempts to disrupt 'grand visions' in a similar manner to Brecht's *V-Effekt*. The continual disruptions force the reader to rethink the narrative as it weaves like a wiper blade across the automobile's windscreen. The hesitations endeavour to offer a new way of operating the vehicle in both a literal and figurative sense, challenging a habitual, unconscious automated journey forward. Moreover, the poem is an example of a poet learning how to speak in an urban context, using the metaphor of the automobile (and its working parts) as a more appropriate language to represent contemporary urban realities. It is in this sense that the car *does* to a large extent become a poem. In seeking a way to rethink what a simple drive in an automobile can represent, Cronin strives to offer images and metaphors that speak to contemporary reality. Poems about the symmetry of the rose are perhaps no longer apposite, as these too may offer a kind of limited vision. The necessity of thinking through alternative ways of seeing and speaking at the end of the century is too vital a task to rely on the 'traditional' subject matter of poems in the Western tradition.

4.5 "Switchback": Taking the off-ramp

"Switchback" primarily uses the rear-view mirror and the freeway as tropes to comment on the direction of South Africa's post-apartheid transition. The metaphor of the wiper blades comments on the ability of grand visionary statements to elide, arguing for a vision that is more inclusionary. In contrast, the rearview mirror is used metaphorically to look *backwards*, concentrating on interrogating the past to respond to the elisions perpetuated by grand visionary statements. As the poet drives the vehicle along the freeway, looking into the rear-view mirror allows him to think through South Africa's past and present and how it informs the journey forward. The metaphor questions the free-flowing movement of global neo-liberal capitalism as the best method of moving into the future. Instead of chasing an impossible dream of consumption along the "N1 North" freeway, the poem proposes a change 'switchback' from the metaphorical highway of relentless neo-liberal competitiveness, linked as it was to Mbeki's African Renaissance. Instead, a slower journey, that takes into account history and the individuals left outside this narrative of progress is required: a 'switchback' of another kind into the past.

Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of History' is signalled early on when, as the poet approaches the freeway, he sees, "Drifting into my rear-view mirror" "The Angel of History" (ll. 5-6). It is important to take cognizance of Part Nine of "On the Concept of History / Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940 [1999]) where Benjamin offers a reading of a Paul Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' (1920). In it, Benjamin "pictures" the "Angel of History" turned "toward the past" observing the "wreckage" of history piling up before his eyes (Benjamin, 1940 [1999]: 249). While the 'Angel' wishes to stay and "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed," the storm of "progress" propels him irresistibly "into the future to which his back is turned" (249). Cronin's use of the rear-view mirror deliberately invokes Benjamin's image of the 'Angel,' while the forward momentum of the many automobiles speeding along the freeway stand to represent the storm of progress and grand visionary statements. The poem asserts that this momentum needs to be arrested and the vehicle slowed down. In doing so, decelerating and taking the off-ramp (or 'switchback'), a new direction away from the ubiquitous narrative of progress on the 'freeway' to the future is offered.

The poem begins with two epigraphs that are an important index. The first epigraph, from the pages of a *National Geographic* magazine, describes how "'pressed into an ancient dune that became rock, tracks discovered in South Africa preserve the shape of feet like our own.'" The epigraph goes on to confirm that "'these footprints [are] among the oldest known fossilised traces of anatomically modern humans.'" This celebration of the human species' tenacity and will to survive is explicitly juxtaposed with American automobile maker Henry Ford, who famously proclaimed "'History is

bunk.'"[74] The first epigraph presents an example of human presence over the course of millennia (extended, of course, into history). The second refuses to take cognizance of the past as necessary to the present and the creation of the future. The assertion that "history is bunk," or useless to society, revolves around the 'American Dream,' an idea focused upon the notion of unhindered progress and evolution. This is effectively the dream of capitalism, where success is attributed to hard work and the opportunity to gain massive riches through focusing on one's own agenda. Similar to the implications of "Even the Dead," this paradigm necessitates the elision of the marginalised to promote the mythology of economic gain or individual success.[75]

Throughout the poem the future is specifically linked to the freeway as the poet drives through "Gillooly's interchange, / Pursuing the off-ramp into / The future as freeway" (ll. 1-2).[76] The 'freeway' is a system of roads designed for rapid transportation from one point to another and suggests that there is already a *specific* course or direction that the future must take. At this access point to the highway, all roads join into one, offering a unidirectional course into the future, which suggests that there are no alternatives. This constitutes tunnel vision at the 'end of the century.' Moreover, the driver has to adjust the speed of the vehicle to the dictates of the surrounding traffic in order to enter the freeway system 'safely.' This encourages uniformity, as it is important to not cause any disruption when joining the traffic flow. As the poet joins the freeway "somewhere between / The possibilities of third and fourth gear" (ll. 3-5), he will need to speed up in order to defer to the prevailing traffic.[77] While contemplating the necessity of changing gears to keep pace with the dominant discourse, he notes:

Drifting into my rear-view mirror came
The Angel of History.
Out of breath, blurred, no longer able
To sustain a story […] (ll. 5-8).

As 'The Angel of History's' blurred countenance materialises, the advancement along the freeway is interrupted. Contemplating the consequences of joining the freeway, and what the highway represents as a model of progress, results in the thought that history is unable "to sustain a story." It may be

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[74] The full quote was published in 1916 in the *Chicago Tribune*, which stated: "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today." This quote can be accessed on www.quotationspage.com/quote/2490.html (Accessed on 30 March 2011)

[75] Henry Ford was a leading figure in the formulation of production/assembly lines, and by extension mass production. This is significant with regard to the overall commodification of culture, which in the previous section linguistically casts all as "clients."

[76] Gillooly's interchange, part of the system of freeways circling Johannesburg, is purported to be the busiest interchange in the Southern Hemisphere.

[77] As previously noted, there is a clear pun on the word 'gear,' related to the policy instituted by the South African government in 1996.

argued that the dangers of capitalist consumption and commodification represented by the freeway are ignored, implying that the history of capitalist exploitation remains unnoticed.

This head-long rush into the future results in the Angel of History trying to re-connect the narratives of history, and she[78] whispers a dire warning of what has been lost in South Africa's transition to democracy:

> […] have you heard, she said
>
> Solidarity's clenched fist
> Just turned
> Into a competitive elbow?
>
> Trust in knitting, and, ahead
> There is
> No Freeway. (ll. 8-14).

The clenched fist of political solidarity, once the hallmark of resistance in the struggle against apartheid, has been replaced with "a competitive elbow." Individual forms of self-interest have substituted social connectivity grounded in a commitment to freedom. The co-option of the struggle by the jostling elbow of competition, be it for political power or money, has resulted in South Africa being inserted into a capitalist dream of the 'freeway as future.' The Angel's portentous warning about the replacement of struggle values result in her offering an alternative to the 'freeway': 'knitting.' By slowing down and taking the switchback off the freeway, the time consuming act of knitting and weaving together alternative narratives might become the panacea to 'grand visions.'

After the warning, the Angel disappears from the rear-view mirror with a disapproving "click of her tongue" (l. 15). The sound is repeated "In an ANC Women's League / Political education workshop" (ll. 22-23) at the start of the next section:

> There was a nodding, Hmm-mmming,
> And the soft click of tongues,
> I think in accord, when I tried
> The three-line, angel-given poem
> About the Fist and the Elbow. (ll. 17-21).

The palpable non-verbal skepticism from the participants of the 'workshop' suggests a link between the Angel and these women. The Angel's disapproval is echoed in the participants' recognition of the competitive elbow nudging out solidarity. The semiotic "Hmm-mmming" is a powerful representation of the difficulty in understanding how active grassroots participation in the 'new' South Africa has

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[78] It is interesting to note that while Benjamin's Angel of History is male, Cronin's is female.

been diluted. The non-verbal gestures perhaps signify agreement with the Angel's "three-line" proposal in more ways than language can, demonstrating the potential of the semiotic to challenge the symbolic. There is a rhetorical connection between the Angel, the ANC Women's League participants and the fossilised footprints, which the poet describes as a "young, probably female, adult" (l. 59) in part iii. Together with the image of 'knitting' a stereotypically female orientated productive action, the centrality of women in constructing a more inclusive history is implied. This concomitantly suggests the subversion of patriarchal power associated with the more masculine preoccupation with automobiles and the freeway.

Driving the vehicle on the freeway takes center stage in the next section. Thinking through the implications of pursuing the freeway in light of the Angel's poem and the workshop's reaction to its re-telling, the poet glances "Back into the lagoon of [his] rear-view mirror" (ll. 29-32). There is a sense that the poet begins to drown in the relentless monotony of the accumulation of metaphors focusing on the freeway and the enforced drive to a capitalist utopia. The other vehicles on the freeway are personified as they zip carelessly on, their taillights beading "away like ack-ack" (l. 32). The dangerous 'ack-ack' is juxtaposed with the anaesthetic "mesmeric / Swish of lamp poles" (ll. 33-34) bearing electricity and light while "whispering renaissance" (l. 34) along the side of the road.[79] The whispering promise of 'renaissance' is placed against the Angel's dire warning. The uniformity and implied competitive elbow of the freeway "Conjur[es] nothing from nothing" (l.35) as the poet hears the "repetitive" (l. 37) drone of the tyres over the "catseyes" (l. 37). This encourages the ever-increasing need to get "Competitive-petitive-petitive-petitive" (l. 38). Combining the images of the lamp poles and catseyes, designed to illuminate the road ahead, suggest the demarcation of a homogeneous route that is being enforcedly charted: the only escape from predestination is the switchback. The need to chart a different course is reinforced by the implacable "'signboards' / Deferred promise of freeway" (ll. 39-40) that litter the sides of the motorway, providing empty promises of status and success through the purchase of commodities. Advertising language and the narratives of freedom and democracy are implicitly linked, which suggests the insertion of Westernised ideals of progress into the 'new' South Africa.

Despite the argument for clear-cut direction, thinking through the possibilities of what the metaphor of the freeway forces a re-engagement with South Africa's post-apartheid journey. The relentless and dangerous obsession with speed compounds the difficulty in finding alternatives, as the "faster we drive, the more the immediate / Past pushes its road hog's snout / Right up into the mirror /

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[79] Thematically, this returns to the implications of progress linked to colonial power referred to in the discussion related to Cronin's "Some Uncertain Wires."

Refusing safe following distance" (ll. 41-44). The 'road hog's snout' reinforces the dangers of the competitive elbow. By pushing ahead and forcing others to speed up, the 'road hog' presents a threat to other road users, which could result in a high-speed collision. The 'road hog's' driving results in the need to slow down to "third, second, / Carefully on to the verge" (ll. 45-46) to avoid an imminent accident. As the forward motion of the vehicle is arrested, an opportunity is created to disengage from the implications of a headlong blast down the freeway. The "immanence of gravel" (l. 47) on the side of the road allows for the dangers of the road to briefly fade and "the memory of road [to] unspool through the brain" (l. 48). Thus as the last

> […] ultimate gravel-stone has crunched, once, twice, under our tyres
> Everything suddenly assumes its silence
> And the past can seem to fall
> An immensity away. (ll. 49-53).

The immediate past falls "All the way back / To the ambling, barefooted / Beginnings of globalisation – two fossilised footprints / On their way down to us" (ll. 53-56). The 'two fossilised footprints' noted in the first epigraph juxtapose the mark of the tyre stopping. This foregrounds two different *intensities* of globalisation engineered by human actions. By stopping the forward momentum of the vehicle, the poet is able to consider how the footprints "bounce and slide" in an "Unmistakably human" (l. 57-58) fashion, offering the opportunity to return to our origins to counter the rush of the freeway. The image of the fossilised footprint undermines the descriptions of speed and relentless competition to allow history the possibility of 'sustaining a story.' The Angel's advice to trust in knitting is advanced by foregrounding another slower, human activity, that of walking. The action of walking, as argued in the final sections of the poem, provides an opportunity to reconnect humans and their shared histories.

Before walking becomes the focal point, a further alternative to the freeway is proposed by a conscious return to the beginnings of language. The poet invokes the lost language of the Khoi/San to illustrate the potential in language to sustain a worldview where beings are considered equal. This argument is juxtaposed against the ways language can function to categorise and hierarchise. He recalls how in the beginning "We were all once people / It was only our names that differed" (ll. 62-63), but considers how "those called Kun!/Human / Transgressed, and the world exploded into species" (ll. 64-65). This implies a shift from a more unified worldview, where species were accorded an equal and non-hierarchical status in language. This equality has been lost as language transgressed into a discourse of 'othering.' The 'explosion into species' as a consequence of language and naming, resulted in "the Giraffe persons assum[ing] necks, / !Quagga turned !quagga, Eland eland" (ll. 66-67). Through the switching of the capitalised proper noun into the common noun, a linguistic movement

towards a system of cataloguing is implied, thereby denying the uniqueness of the subject. The shift in the communicative function of language therefore allowed for a system of communication based upon *lack* or *difference* as a signifier. The consequences of this homogenizing tendency, similar to the way the metaphor of the freeway to the future is conceived, resulted in blindspots:

> […] and Humans
>
> Wobbled aloft on the syntax
> Of our bones, upright, two-legged,
> Breaking out from circularity
>
> Into the embrace of freed arms,
>
> Into open-endedness. (ll. 68-74).

The hubris of human language making up the skeletal 'bones' of human culture and communication thus offered an ambiguous "breaking out" of the circle of life. However, instead of the potential to recognise the uniqueness of all species and a perspective that would embrace inclusivity, exclusion became paramount. The poisoned chalice of language offered the potential for freedom, but also entrapment. The double-edged sword presented by "open-endedness," or the possibilities to chart a direction based on the sense of oneness and community in early forms of language, has been destroyed through a "wobbly" progression towards 'otherness.' Cronin thus suggests a return to a language divested of 'otherness' by arguing for a return to the possibilities offered by the forgotten languages.

In order to assist these possibilities, a further movement "into the poems of Walt Whitman" (l. 75) is foregrounded to exemplify the potential for 'open-endedness,' not in the notion of boundless forward movement on the freeway, but in the idea of a return to a language that recognises an implicit connection with the past. Whitman's poetry, for Cronin, suggests that "it's the beginning, / Not the end of the line / that connects with the past" (ll. 76-78).[80] In the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes that the:

> […] *past and present and future are not disjoined but joined*. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He *drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet* … He says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realise you. He learns the lesson … he

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[80] Walt Whitman (1819-1892) was an American poet most famous for the collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

> places himself where the future becomes present. (Whitman [1855] 2004: 338, my emphasis).

Whitman is speaking about poetry in surprisingly materialist terms, and together with Benjamin uses 'the dead' as a rhetorical signifier. Both writers foreground the desire to raise the dead and forgotten aspects of history to challenge the present and move into the future. Poetry is offered in celebration of community and connection with all species to counter language (and narrative) that homogenises humans into black and white, female and male or Third World and Western. The damaging consequences of 'othering' and hierarchisation to South African history are obvious in the way that apartheid cemented *separateness* as the dominant vision. Taking the 'switchback' to find the lost languages may prove vital to counter the prevalence of 'grand visions' and the apathetic freeway to the future.

The penultimate section of the poem returns to the vehicle stopped by the side of the road. The slower conceptual space of 'Nature' resists the discourse of the freeway: "From the circular / Switchback of our transition / It is good to come, even, / To become here / In the unceased / Whist of summer beetles" (ll. 81-86). The unremitting sound of the "summer beetles" allows for the more physical, tactile "immediates / Of touch, smell / Taste to underwhelm / Grand renaissance vision / Of global freeways" (ll. 87-91). Like in the poem "Moorage" the physicality, or materiality, of human responses to the environment through language, history and place, provide breathing room to 'underwhelm' the rhetoric. In this stilled environment, the past can become co-joined to the present, which allows the poet to listen "for the feel of / Springy two-steps" (ll. 92-93) of the ancient human Angel "Coming towards us" (l. 95). This example of ancient human presence allows the poet "To hold fast to this fact: / We humans have walked / All the way from then / To here" (ll. 100-104). The act of walking becomes central, foregrounding a slower, very *human* orientation of progress throughout the ages. This is the ancient Angel's "blessing upon us" (l. 109), the ability to take things one / Step at a time" (ll.81-82). Cronin's Angel calls for us to slow down and weave together the narratives of history to rediscover our *shared* existence.

The importance of walking and stepping is reinforced in the final part of the poem, as the poet witnesses "in the ruins of our city / … / our six-year-old daughter stamping her foot" (ll. 111, 112). The daughter's stomping action, making her own footprints in the soil, repeats the image of the fossilised footprint, as well as the 'crunching' tyre observed earlier.[81] The semiotic clicking of tongues from the

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[81] It also repeats the 'thump of the rubber boot' as an example of 'stratagems of non-hegemony' referred to earlier, again consolidating the importance of human action in the making of histories, as well as challenging oppression.

Angel and the women in the political workshop is repeated as the girl clicks "her tongue in disgust at her parents / With a click that was, at once, millennia-travelled / Spontaneous, indigenous, and foreign to us a bit" (ll. 115-117). This sound of disappointment that echoes throughout the poem, countering the sound of the rushing automobile, leads the poet to muse in the concluding stanza that:

> Small step by step, things,
> Bit by bit,
> Beginning to knit. (ll. 118-120)

The overt alliteration of the 's' and 'b' consonants as well as the rhyme consolidates the act of knitting and piecing together narratives. The small, seemingly inconsequential actions combine to underline an alternative to the so-called progressive aspects of the freeway. Knitting and stepping are accorded the final statement in the poem, which consolidates this opposition. The focus on walking recalls Nelson Mandela's autobiography *The Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), which is emblematic of the time it takes to struggle for freedom against the bonds of oppression. Freedom is not to be found driving the vehicle along the freeway, but by walking step by step into a shared future.

4.6 Conclusion

The presence of the automobile in a number of poems in Cronin's last published collection is significant. As I have shown, the automobile and the networks that sustain the use of the vehicle are purposefully rethought to allow for the direction of post-apartheid South Africa to be reconsidered. The poems require the reader to look at the automobile as a metonymic representation of contemporary South African society, asking the questions: who is driving down the freeway of history; what direction is being undertaken; what ideology is foregrounded; and, perhaps most importantly, who or what is left out of the narrative of relentless competition. Instead of an independent automated driver, safely encased in the automobile, responding to the contingencies of the freeway and the act of driving, the poems suggest ways to interrogate unmitigated direction. This is undertaken to create a reflective space to observe and consider what has been left out on the margins of the metaphorical freeway. Benjamin and Brecht are central to the interruptive nature of these poems, where the desire to stage moments that disrupt the linear movement of history is foregrounded. The possibilities of a more inclusive narrative emerges through rethinking how the automobile's wiper blades function and what the freeway represents in the narrative of global competitiveness. Ultimately, the self-reflective nature of these three poems suggest the importance of continually reviewing the symbolic, as well as learning from this fractured environment that limits human connection. The poems elaborate a more inclusive method

of viewing history to change the discursive direction of grand narratives. Ultimately, they offer an aesthetic that participates in the 'struggle to stay awake' against the monotony of taking the 'freeway to the future.'

5. Conclusion: "To Learn How to Speak"

During the course of writing this dissertation, Jeremy Cronin gave a lecture at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. This was a perfect opportunity to meet the poet. Circumstances led to a number of delays and I was unable to listen to the address. But I did manage to arrange for the briefest of encounters when I told him I was writing a dissertation on his poetry. He was, I felt, taken slightly aback, suggesting that his poetry is brought up very little in conversation with him. We did not talk much about the project, but I did get him to autograph the now well-worn copies of his collections. What he inscribed is very poignant in relation to this dissertation. He wrote, "In the struggle." This may seem a strange choice, writing some sixteen or so years after the first general elections, a moment that has become a watershed for the struggle against apartheid and which for many signaled the culmination of the 'struggle.' For me, this hints at an important perspective that I have discussed throughout this dissertation: the struggle against apartheid did not end with the political transition from so-called white to black power. The struggle against the consequences of apartheid was, in essence, only beginning. The fact that this was acknowledged through his inscription suggests that he considers his poetry as part of, and participating in, a continuing struggle for justice and equality in South Africa. Key to this continuing struggle is the capacity to learn from others and from the past. Indeed, throughout the course of this dissertation I have argued that from Cronin's perspective, there is a necessity to counter inherited forms of injustice and inequality through attempting to learn rather than impose. Jeremy Cronin's poetic project asks us 'to learn how to speak' again. It is also, in fact, imploring us to learn how to relate to each other, to learn what is important to each other. This in itself is a political act of understanding, and proposes a way to move beyond the damaging consequences of South Africa's colonial past. In doing so, the poetry resists the domination of the Western poetic tradition, choosing rather to argue for a mixed, inherently South African form of poetic expression, in form, content and language. It is, in the end, a commitment to expressing and honouring the multiplicity of experiences in South Africa.

Together with the focus on challenging inherited poetic forms, Cronin's poetry presents a confrontation with South Africa's tragic history. This is aided, in part, through the use of Brecht's *V-Effekt* and Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image.' The strategic use of these two Marxist theorists support Cronin's desire to confront a history that has foregrounded great 'men' and their 'visions' to the exclusion of other, equally vital narratives. By consistently highlighting the unheard stories of individuals, Cronin's intention is to revive an active engagement with history, as well as challenge the division between the public and private. The result is a poetic intervention that is provocative in its appeal to counter forms of amnesia, intentionally making South Africans aware of inherited social and

political privileges and impoverishments. Cronin does not allow history to be simply forgotten under a discourse of 'rainbow nationalism,' where South Africans pat themselves on the back at the dismantling of apartheid. On the contrary, in an act of defiance against this form of aggrandisement, the focus remains on what Ingrid de Kok, following poet Derek Walcott, termed the 'cracked heirloom': the resolute devotion placed upon the scars of South Africa's past as a way to move forward into the future. The outcome is an oeuvre that celebrates the 'ordinary' people and challenges poetic convention.

In Chapter One I discussed the tenuous division between politics and art in South African literary criticism, suggesting that this false polarisation resulted in a hardening of positions that undercut the potential for hybridity in South African poetic expression. Instead of finding new forms of engagement with a multicultural South Africa, both during apartheid and the post-apartheid period, Western notions of poetic form and content served as the basis for critical engagement with South African English poetry. Thus in order to 'learn how to speak,' I argue that Jeremy Cronin calls for a 'border crossing' between the public and the private, history and the individual, as well as Western and African poetic forms.

In Chapter Two I demonstrated that *Inside* may be read in light of Cronin's examination of language. The poem "Poem-Shrike" served as an illustration of how poetry can emerge from the most impoverished of surroundings and trivial details of ordinary life by detailing the construction of a hand-made shrike from material found on the prison floor. The poems "Prologue" and "Cave-site" demonstrated the importance Cronin places upon scrutinizing the implications of language to sustain oppressive frameworks and power relations. In "Prologue" Cronin focuses on returning to the most basic act that facilitates communication: breathing in and out. This simple activity links the body to communication and language, which offers the first fruit of rebellion against the symbolic. The implicit link in "Cave-site" between the mouth and an archeological expedition to discover the history of human presence in a cave, suggests the necessity of burrowing deep into what words mean to challenge the unacknowledged power of language to oppress. It is only by undertaking a careful exploration, chipping away at the rock face of human history that new ways of relating might be discovered. The journey of discovery begun in these two poems culminates in what is the central poem in Cronin's oeuvre, and this dissertation, "To learn how to speak […]." This poem argues for the necessity of, not only South African poets, but South Africans across the board, to learn from each other: to begin to cross the borders of racial exclusion in order to recognise that communication and understanding may contribute to the kind of reconciliation which has not yet occurred in South Africa. Fundamentally, to learn is to be open to other positions, and the poem proposes the importance of an inclusionary stance

to confront South Africa's past. The desire to 'learn how to speak' is broadened in the poem "Walking on Air." Here Cronin writes a poetic biography about a fellow inmate pieced together from snippets of conversation overheard on the prison shop floor in much the same manner as the crafting of the hand-made shrike in the first poem. It also demonstrates the implicit foregrounding of the public and private in Cronin's work reinforcing the difficulty in separating the two spheres.

In Chapter Three I explored poems from the collection *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad*. In "Three Reasons for a Mixed, Umrabulo, Round-the-Corner Poetry" Cronin resists inherited Western poetic conventions, essentially consolidating his argument for a form of poetry that takes into account multi-lingual and multi-cultural experiences in South Africa. Again, reinforcing the need to 'learn how to speak' becomes paramount in order to stage new ways of interaction between South Africans learning from each other. The importance of Walter Benjamin's version of historical materialism and the 'dialectical image' is most apparent in Cronin's poem "Even the Dead." Here, Cronin's use of the 'dialectical image' provides a constellation of images and metaphors intended to highlight the overt contradictions in South African history and the present. The compounding of the many ironic events related in the poem is intended to 'awaken' the reader from amnesia. It also presents a further example of the 'cracked heirloom,' here knitting together ostensibly disparate events in an effort to underline the dangers of past oppression leaking into the present. The poem "Moorage" offers an intensely personal account of the interaction between the public and private, with the poet foregrounding his dispute with his wife about versions of how to keep the family unit together. Ultimately, the notion of community and tenderness towards each other become the touchstones toward a reconceptualization of the family unit, no longer an autonomous entity, but intimately connected to the other people, society and history. Finally, Cronin's "A Reply to Pablo Neruda" rewrites Neruda's "An Education of a Chieftain" in a South African, post-apartheid context. The poem implicitly writes against the mythologizing of the leaders or movements that were part of the struggle against apartheid. The notion that these leaders need to learn from the people and *their* needs is foregrounded, reinforcing the importance of continual dialogue in the creation of a community, and by extension, a 'newer' South Africa.

Cronin's use of the automobile as a metaphor was the specific focus of Chapter Four and the collection *More Than a Casual Contact*. This ubiquitous item of modern, privileged existence posits the vital questions as to who is driving the vehicle into the future and who is left out of the narrative of progress. "Where to Begin?" demonstrates Cronin's constant focus on the interaction between the public and private spheres by juxtaposing events from his own life while driving his vehicle to Parliament, reinforcing the inseparability of these two spheres. The poems "End of the century – which

is why wipers …" and "Switchback" focus upon the driver of the vehicle attempting to find ways of including the margins, or those individuals relegated to the pavements, into the narrative of progress, and by extension history. This is undertaken in the first poem by re-thinking the movement of the wiper blade. Instead of the blade frenetically clearing away rain from the vehicle's windshield, the movement of the wiper blade becomes a metaphor for dialectical thought. Here the tunnel vision created by the unconscious moment of the blades clearing the driver's vision of the road ahead is challenged. In its place, the mechanical sideways movement of the blades offers the opportunity to see and include the margins. Again, the desire for inclusion rather than exclusion is paramount. The poem "Switchback" suggests the necessity of directing the vehicle from the freeway to the off-ramp, and taking this switchback off the freeway to the future to find a space to examine the past. The notion of the freeway into a capitalist utopia through concepts such as the African Renaissance, welded as it was to neo-liberal capitalism, is challenged.

In effect this dissertation has demonstrated Cronin's overt concern with the implications of language and history. In addition I have shown that the consistent preoccupation throughout is the foregrounding of the tension between the public and private. Cronin's unswerving focus on this relationship suggests an overall strategy to awaken readers to the silent majority: the hidden narratives. Neruda notes in his Nobel prize-winning speech that he "chose the way of divided responsibility," offering his "services" to the powerless, the discarded, the forgotten. Cronin's ambiguous position as a poet and politician in many ways reflects this, and his poetry mirrors this division. Cronin has been brave enough to acknowledge the necessity of crossing theoretical, poetic and cultural-linguistic borders in his attempt to learn how to speak. One of the ways South Africans can move beyond the ravages of a tragic history is to undertake a similar journey. To be available to other perspectives, languages and ways of thinking is a difficult task and will require even greater resilience in further struggles for justice and equality in the future. The radical challenge of Jeremy Cronin's poetry is his recognition of the necessity to learn how to speak anew, whether poetically or politically, in the voices of *this* country.

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