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Wilhelm Bleek and the Khoisan Imagination: a study of censorship, genocide and colonial science*

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Abstract

In 1864 Wilhelm Bleek published a collection of Khoi narratives titled *Reynard the Fox in South Africa, or Hottentot Fables and Tales*. This paper critically examines this foundational event in South African literary history, arguing that it entailed a Victorian circumscription of the Khoisan imagination, containing its libidinal and transgressive energies within the generic limits of the naïve European children's folktale. Bleek's theories of language and race are examined as providing the context for his editorial approach to Khoi narratives in which the original 'nakedness' was written out. The extent of Bleek's censorship of indigenous orature becomes visible when comparing his 'fables' to a largely unknown corpus of Khoi tales, collected by the German ethnographer Leonhard Schultze during the Nama genocide in the early 20th century. The paper compares these collections of oral narratives, and suggests that this has implications for the way the famous Bleek and Lloyd /Xam archive was subsequently constituted in the 1870s. Wilhelm Bleek's interventions in civilizing the Khoisan imagination marks a move away from a potentially Rabelaisian trajectory in South African literature through which the Khoisan could be represented and represent themselves. In admitting a sanitized indigenous orature into the colonial literary order, it is argued that Bleek helped to create a restrictive cultural politics in South Africa from which the country is yet to emerge fully.

Keywords: W.H.I. Bleek, L. Schultze, Khoisan, Nama, Bushman, /Xam, censorship, oral literature

In 1861 the Prussian philologist Wilhelm Bleek arrived in Cape Town to take up an appointment as the private librarian of Sir George Grey, then Governor of the Cape Colony. Apart from bringing order to Grey's sprawling and eclectic collection of books (which eventually became the core of the South African Library), Bleek's interests lay in the study of the indigenous languages of Southern Africa, having previously worked with Bishop Colenso in the Natal colony to compile a Zulu grammar. Soon after his arrival in Cape Town, Bleek started to collect Bushman and Khoi¹ folktales sent to him by

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¹ The use of racial terminology remains complex and fraught in Southern African studies. The use of the term 'Bushman' is now again in use, though guardedly. I have also referred to the /Xam when my comments have been

missionaries from the remoter areas of the colonies, and in 1864 a collection of 42 of these translated and transcribed oral narratives was published in London as *Reynard the Fox in South Africa; or Hottentot Fables and Tales*.² Coming almost 50 years before the celebrated publication of Bleek's and Lucy Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911), *Reynard* should not merely be regarded as a minor trial run for their now famous /Xam research project, but needs to be seen as a landmark event in South African literary history – though a problematic one, as we shall see. *Reynard* was not only the first published book of indigenous literature, but, coming well before Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883), must rank as one of South Africa's first published works of sustained narrative imaginative fiction, in a context where colonial literary production had long been dominated by the genres of diary and travel writing.

Given the seminal importance of this book as one of the earliest South African documents in which the seam between oral and literate cultures is visible, it is surprising then that it has not been given more critical attention in literary history. It warrants an aside and footnote in Michael Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* (1996), and also only gets a brief mention in Christopher Heywood's controversial *History of South African Literature* (2004).³ But for both literary historians the foundational text of indigenous literature is rather the later *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, and the compendious /Xam notebooks from which it derived. This emphasis is understandable, given the massive impact of the Bleek and Lloyd archive on current

¹ The use of racial terminology remains complex and fraught in South African studies. The use of the term 'Bushman' is now again in use, though guardedly. I have also referred to the /Xam when my comments have been limited to this group. Instead of Bleek's use of 'Hottentot', I have obviously used another less offensive term, choosing the generic, widely accepted word 'Khoi'. The word Nama, which also crops up in several cited sources, is more geographically and ethnologically limiting as it refers to groupings of Khoi people to the north and south of the Orange River, including territory of the modern Namibia and the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Some of the argument in this paper is more generally about the cultural misappropriation and distortion of the Khoi cultures of Southern Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than only about the Nama. Similarly, when I have wanted to make more general observations about commonalities of culture and experience shared by both Bushmen and Khoi in the face of an encroaching colonial order, I have used the synthetic term 'Khoisan'. The use of this term does not imply that I collapse these two groupings.

² W. Bleek, *Reynard the Fox in South Africa; or Hottentot Fables and Tales* (London, Trübner & Sons, 1864).

³ M. Chapman, *Southern African Literatures* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 1996); C. Heywood, *History of South African Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

scholarship and popular writing. Since the rediscovery of the 12000 page /Xam notebooks by Roger Hewitt in the mid 1970s,⁴ there has been a veritable flood of scholarship and creative engagement with these records. Besides Pippa Skotnes's landmark 'Miscast' exhibition (1995), several conferences, and a large volume of academic studies by historians, anthropologists and literary scholars, there have also been numerous imaginative engagements, ranging from Stephen Watson's *Return of the Moon* and Antjie Krog's recent and contentious versification, to a wide range of popular adaptations for children.⁵

While it is evident that the Bleek and Lloyd archive of the /Xam culture is a remarkable and precious record of a unique cross-cultural encounter that demands serious and ongoing engagement, this paper suggests that much of the current interest in Bushman culture has unproblematically accepted the notebooks as an authentic and true record of a vanished indigenous culture. Instead of being wrapped in a certain monumental aura and being regarded with a nostalgic reverence for lost origins (Stephen Watson himself admits of the temptation of the 'mode of elegy' when retelling the stories of the Bushmen),⁶ the archive itself needs to be more carefully interrogated and situated in its colonial Victorian context. As Michael Wessels puts it succinctly, 'Bleek and Lloyd not only recorded the /Xam narratives; in a sense they created them'.⁷ While Andrew Bank's *Bushman in a Victorian World* (2006), which explores the historical context of the archive and the interwoven life histories of Bleek, Lloyd and the /Xam informants,

⁴ R. Hewitt, *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the narratives of the Southern San* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2006).

⁵ S. Watson, *Return of the Moon: Versions from the //Xam* (Cape Town, Carrefour, 1996); A. Krog, *the stars say 'tsau': /Xam poetry of Dia!kwain, Kweiten-ta-//ken, /A!kunta, /Hankassó and //Kabbo. Selected and adapted by Anjie Krog.* (Cape Town, Kwela, 2004). For a recent critical overview of the large volume of literary appropriations of the Bushman archive, see also E. Jenkin, 'San Tales Again: Acknowledgement and appropriation', *English Academy Review* 27, 1 (2010), pp. 24-35.

⁶ S. Watson, *Return of the Moon*, p.17.

⁷ M. Wessels, *Bushman Letters* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2009), p.3.

has been an exemplary revisionist study,⁸ this article will extend the critique by using a comparative and contextual analysis of the *Reynard* volume as basis for the argument that particular silences and omissions were woven into the Bushman archive from their inception. A careful contrastive reading of Bleek's 'Hottentot fables' together with another long-forgotten analogous corpus of Nama stories will allow insights into the extent of Bleek's sanitization of indigenous story-telling cultures, a bias that, it can be argued, also left its mark on the subsequent creation of the /Xam archive. In particular it will be shown that Bleek's scientific and editorial approach not only censored scatological material, but also suppressed a rich vein of erotic and sexually explicit narrative that was strongly present in the indigenous imagination.

When Wilhelm Bleek arrived in South Africa, he had already formed distinct theories about the relationship between language, race and the civilisational rank of cultures. As elaborated in his doctoral thesis, titled *Nominum Generibus Linguarum Africae, Australis, Copticae, Semiticarum, Aliarumque Sexualium*, and submitted to Bonn University in 1851, he saw grammatical affinities between the primitive 'Hottentot' and several more advanced North African and Middle Eastern languages.⁹ These ideas shaped his approach to the *Reynard* material, for example when he claimed in his preface to the *Reynard* volume that 'signs of gender were almost identical in the Namaqua and the Egyptian'.¹⁰ Furthermore, one needed to distinguish sharply between the African languages of the Bantu family (a term he had earlier coined) and those of the Khoi ('Hottentot'). Bleek regarded the latter as the distant, albeit primitive relatives of the more advanced northern, and even European languages. The fables he had collected therefore showed, as he claimed, evidence of 'a much greater congeniality between the Hottentot and European mind than we find between the latter and any of the black races of Africa'.¹¹ By contrast, 'the Kaffir imagination seems not at all inclined to the formation of this class of fictitious tales' and was only capable of prosaic historical narratives and legends.¹² The roots for this supposed distinction in imaginative aesthetic capacity were less racial than linguistic: they lay in the differences of the grammatical structure of the respective languages. Khoi and other more advanced languages were 'sex-denoting'

⁸ A. Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World: The Remarkable Story of the Bleek-Lloyd Collection of Bushman Folklore* (Cape Town, Double Story, 2006).

⁹ See A. Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World* for a detailed discussion.

¹⁰ W. Bleek, *Reynard*, p. xix.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. xiv.

¹² *Ibid*, p. xx.

languages where 'the distinction between masculine and feminine gender pervades the whole grammar'.¹³ In sex-denoting languages, Bleek explained, there is a 'tendency to the personification of impersonal objects ... which in itself is likely to lead the mind towards ascribing reason and other human attributes to irrational beings'.¹⁴ Bleek summarised his theory of racial-linguistic differentiation¹⁵ as follows:

This higher flight of the imaginative faculty which the sex-denoting nations possess (through the stimulus of this personification of impersonal things, consequent upon the grammatical structure of their language) ... becomes more evident if we compare their literature with that of the Kafirs and other black tribes of South Africa.¹⁶

Altogether then, the dominant theme of Bleek's preface is the European-like character of the fables. This outlook is already discernable in his choice of title, a direct borrowing from Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs* verse fairy tale, encouraging a reading of the fables in a way that transcended local cultural specificity and subsumed them in the larger European folklore tradition. The subsequent expanded German edition, *Reineke Fuchs in Afrika. Fabeln und Märchen der Eingeborenen* (1870), contained an additional section of fables from northern African languages, including Hausa and Wolof, with the aim of further proving his thesis of 'Hottentot' affinities to northern cultures.

Bleek's universalist theoretical predisposition, which Moran refers to as a 'global grammatical theory',¹⁷ would thus have given him a strong inclination to give less attention to the differences and the local distinctiveness of indigenous orature, but rather emphasise similarities and commonalities with European fables, and, as will be suggested, select and edit the material accordingly. Furthermore, by dedicating the book

¹³ Ibid, p xviii

¹⁴ Ibid, p. xxi.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of Bleek's theories of language, see S. Moran's recent book, *Representing Bushmen: South Africa and the origins of language* (New York, University of Rochester Press, 2009). Moran describes how Bleek's 'theory structured the codification of African languages and cultures, contributing to the development of the cultural-essentialist racism prevalent during apartheid' (p. 12). Moran's study is wide-ranging and detailed, focusing on Bleek's treatise on the origins of language and its implications for the /Xam archive, and more broadly, for the development of racial thinking in South Africa. It does not however look closely at the *Reynard* narratives. In Bleek's idealization of Khoisan languages and his concomitant disparagement of African languages, Moran sees the basis for a pattern of thought that cast a racist shadow over the 20th century: 'the idealization of the Bushman went hand in hand with the demotion of those indigenous peoples who presented a continuing threat to the security of the settler polity' (p. 16).

¹⁶ W. Bleek, *Reynard*, p. xxviii.

¹⁷ S. Moran, *Representing Bushmen*, p. 14.

'to children in South Africa and elsewhere' and presenting the narratives as children's fables (conventionally understood as narratives of anthropomorphic animals through which a moral lesson is taught), the stories are made to carry a didactic burden which conformed to Bleek's and his audience's Victorian sensibilities:

Children, and also simple-minded people, whose taste has not been spoiled by the poison of over-excited reading, will always be amused by the quaintly expressed moral lessons which they receive through every good Fable; and the more thorough student of literature will also regard with pleasure these first innocent plays of awakening human imagination.¹⁸

It is clear then that Bleek framed the stories as naïve 'moral lessons' that were eminently suitable for the diversion and edification of children. Children could relate to them because they were produced by a 'simple-minded people', springing out of a child-like culture that had not yet been corrupted by literate modernity. We can see the outlines here already of a discursive figuration in which the Khoisan people of South Africa, particularly the Bushman, would frequently be imagined as 'little' people, as not quite grown up, living in a timeless world of child-like innocence, a vision that would find its apotheosis in Lawrence van der Post's romanticized evocation of the Kalahari Bushmen.¹⁹ Even serious scholars like Phillip Tobias, in a foreword on popular Bushmen stories, wrote: "Peter Pans' of humanity they have been called and well do these baby-faced, pygmoid, yellow-skinned huntsmen deserve the title ... In their simplicity and their quaintness, these brief tales underline the child-like qualities of the little yellow people'.²⁰

By casting the Khoi oral material as children's fables, Bleek not only achieved a suitable Victorian moral framing of the stories, but also trapped Khoisan orature in a cultural space that could not admit any adult, mature content. As Bleek himself put it in the preface, 'to make these Hottentot fables readable for the general public, a few slight omissions and alterations of what would otherwise have been *too naked* for the English

¹⁸ W. Bleek, *Reynard*, p. xxviii.

¹⁹ For a discussion of Van der Post's approach to Bushmen, and how this contrasted with earlier attitudes, see H. Wittenberg, 'The Pregnant Man: Race, difference and subjectivity in Alan Paton's Kalahari writings', *English Academy Review*, 27, 2 (2010), pp. 30-41.

²⁰ E. Jenkins, 'San Tales Again', p. 26. Jenkins also comments cynically on the large volume of children's books that draw on the Bleek and Lloyd archive, pointing out that one 'of the reasons why so many tales have been published as children's books is that since the early 19th century whites have regarded indigenous people ... as childlike', p. 26.

eye were necessary'.²¹ The key term here is of course 'too naked', giving us a sense of the true nature of Bleek's 'few slight omissions and alterations': the *Reynard* versions, as will be shown below, suppressed the strong presence of adult and sexually explicit themes as well as coarse language in Khoisan orature, thereby containing the disorderly indigenous imagination within the cultural straight-jacket of a Victorian moral system. In order to substantiate this argument it is now necessary to look at the texts themselves more carefully, reconstructing the type of editorial interventions made by Bleek, and in so doing recuperate a sense of the original 'nakedness' of the narratives. Below is the opening section of one of *Reynard's* longest narratives, a story titled 'The Lion who took a woman's shape'. It was collected for Bleek by the Rev. G.Krönlein, a Rhenish missionary stationed in Beersheba, in southern Namibia. The second parallel story, possibly collected in the same area some 50 years later, is reproduced alongside. It is taken from Leonhard Schultze's travelogue and scientific treatise titled *Aus Namaland und Kalahari*:

The Lion who took a woman's shape (Bleek)

Some women, it is said, went out to seek roots and herbs and other wild food. On their way home they sat down and said, 'Let us taste the food of the field.' Now they found that the food picked by one of them was sweet, while that of the others bitter. The latter said to each other, 'Look here! This woman's herbs are sweet.' Then they said to the owner of the sweet food, 'Throw it away and seek for other.' – (sweet-tasting herbs being apparently unpalatable to the Hottentot). So she threw away the food, and went to gather more. When she had collected a sufficient supply, she returned to join the other women, but could not find them.

She went therefore down to the river where the Hare sat ladling water, and said to him, 'Hare, give me some water

The Girls who picked Gara Berries (Schultze)

Some girls went out to pick gara berries, and they all went there and picked them. But all the others picked sour berries and only one of the girls picked sweet berries. And when it got late they all went home. As the sun went down they spoke to each other: 'Let us taste the berries.' And they tasted the berries and all their berries were sour. Then they said to the girl who had sweet berries: 'Your berries are not good, therefore go back and go pick where we had picked!' So she turned around and went back to pick more. As it was getting dark they shat some shit in the place [to help her find home].

When she came back to that place where the others had left her, she called for them. Then the heap of shit answered:

²¹ W. Bleek, *Reynard*, p. xxviii, my emphasis.

that I may drink.' But he replied, "This is the cup out of which my uncle (the lion) and I alone may drink.' She asked again: 'Hare, draw water for me that I may drink.' But the hare made the same reply. Then she snatched the cup from him and drank, but he ran home to tell his uncle of the outrage that had been committed.

'Here!', so it answered, but she could not see anybody and walked past.

Then she came to the place where the hare sat ladling water, and she said: 'Pour me some!' But the hare answered: 'This tortoise shell cup is my grandfather's and mine, and only meant for us.' But she grabbed the cup away from the hare and drank. The hare however ran to the one with the great mane [the lion] and [told him everything].²²

A comparative reading of these opening paragraphs shows that this is structurally the same story. The lack of change despite a 50 year collecting interval is a testament to the continuity and stability of the Khoi oral story-telling tradition: both Bleek's and Schultze's versions continue with exactly the same sequence of events: the girl is chased by the enraged lion around a bush. He eventually catches her and eats her, taking care however to leave her skin whole, into which he then slips. Disguised as the girl he enters the village where he deceives everyone except the girl's youngest sister who has to share her bed at night. Recognizing his sharp claws, she runs for help; the hut is burned down with the sleeping lion inside, and the dead girl's heart miraculously leaps from the ashes. When the mother puts it in a bowl of milk (both stories specify that it has to be the new, rich milk of a young cow who has just calved), the girl is resurrected into her former shape.

²² W. Bleek, *Reynard*, pp. 50-56; L. Schultze, *Aus Namaland und Kalahari. Bericht an die königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin über eine Forschungsreise im westlichen und zentralen Südafrika in den Jahren 1903 – 1905* (Jena, Gustav Fischer, 1907), pp. 407-8. Schultze's Nama tales were published sequentially as two versions: in a phonetic Nama using an orthography of his own invention, followed by a word-for-word German translation. The German translations are copiously annotated with parenthetical grammatical notes. I have translated the German into English, taking cognizance of Schultze's notes, but not strictly following the original awkward word order. Square brackets indicate either Schultze's or my own explanatory additions. Occasionally I have consulted Nama dictionaries where Schultze's translation seemed suspect. An edited volume of selected and translated tales is forthcoming.

There is one small though significant detail missing in Bleek's version: the girls deposit excrement on the path as a sign to help their wayward compatriot find her way home in the dark by smell. We do not know if this detail was part of the original Krönlein text²³ which Bleek used as a basis for the published *Reynard* version, but the fact that Bleek refers to 'omissions and alterations' without which the tales 'would otherwise have been too naked' makes it very probable that he was referring to precisely this type of narrative material as cited in the example above. While Bleek may have been right in asserting that such 'few slight omissions and alterations' did 'not in any way affect the spirit of the fables',²⁴ the cumulative effect of such editorial interventions would create a sanitized picture of Khoi culture in which bodily fluids and excrements, expletive language and sexuality are curiously absent.

A comparison of Bleek's 42 'fables' with Schultze's collection of 67 tales shows considerable overlap, with at least a third of the *Reynard* narratives finding a close correlate in the latter collection.²⁵ A reading of the Schultze corpus of tales against *Reynard* therefore shows the normalized and natural presence of such elements in the Khoi narratives in which no bodily function or part of the anatomy is taboo. Another good example is the beginning of the story 'The Lions who pretended to be dead', where the canny jackal avoids being tricked:

A pair of travelling lions were tired and saw a jackal approaching. [Not wanting the trouble of a hunt] they lay down pretending to be dead, and the jackal came closer. He quietly crept up and softly touched the back hole [anus] of the one lion, and saw how it contracted. Then he knew that they only pretended to be dead.²⁶

²³ Although Krönlein's manuscripts have survived in the Grey Collection of the South African Library, the small, dense handwriting in the archaic cursive Suetterlin script has faded to the point of illegibility, so that it is very difficult to reconstruct the original text. The argument has therefore relied on a comparison of the Schultze texts with those published in the *Reynard* volume, as well as contextual evidence.

²⁴ W. Bleek, *Reynard*, p. xxviii.

²⁵ A couple of examples of stories which can be regarded as closely related, or even, in some cases almost identical: 'Hunt of the Lion and Jackal' (Bleek, p. 3)) and 'The Lion and Jackal' (Schulze, p. 489); 'The White Man and the Snake' (Bleek, p.11) and 'The Snake which was rolled over by a Stone' (Schultze, p. 491); 'Fish Stealing' (Bleek, p. 1) and 'The Jackal who lies next to the wagon' (Schultze, p. 464); 'Cloud Eating' (Bleek, p. 14) and 'The Hyena and Jackal jump up to the Clouds' (Schulze, p. 460); 'The Cock' (Bleek, p. 23) and 'The Jackal who tricked the Flamingo and the Hen' (Schultze, p. 483); 'The Zebra Stallion' (Bleek, p. 39) and 'The Zebra Mares and the Baboon' (Schultze, p. 535).

²⁶ L. Schultze, *Aus Namaland*, p. 486.

Similar coarse or 'naked' elements can be found in the story 'The Two Women who were captured by the Aigamuchab'. The Aigamuchab (a cannibal ogre figure prevalent in Khoisan mythology, recognizable by the eyes on its feet), has captured one of the women and proceeds to kill her:

Then they came to the place of the Aigamuchab. And as they arrived he said: 'What? Never can this thing taste good! Cut her throat! Let us at least then drink the soup [blood] of it!' so he spoke. Then they grabbed her, and cut her throat off. And as she was shitting herself, they called: 'Catch the fat coming out of the back hole!' And they ate it up.

In the ensuing narrative, the other woman manages to escape death by farting, which paradoxically does not repel the Aigamuchab but inflames his determination to eat her: But then he [the Aigamuchab] looked for the spoor, and he came there and found the spoor and caught up with the woman. Then she gave off a rotting smell which smelt as if she was herself decaying. But he said: 'You stink so sweetly rotten, you will be good for my pot, thus it will taste.' And he quickly went looking for his pot. Then the woman got up and ran away. And while she escaped, he came back with the pot, came there and was disappointed and called: 'Oh sweet-stinking one, where have you gone?' And that is how it happened.²⁷

The violence and scatological references in this story are obviously not suitable as children's literature, or for polite adult society, and the moral of the story is a questionable one as well. But the above examples illustrate a far greater range of earthy Khoi story telling than we can see in *Reynard*. References such as cited above can be found in most of the stories which Schultze collected. Rich expletive insults such as 'You dirty pus-encrusted dick head' (original 'kya !haî !garaba', transl. by Schultze as 'Schmutzkrusten Schamker!')²⁸ litter the narratives. Following Schultze rather than Bleek, we can see that bodily functions, excrement and violence are a natural, uncensored part of the imaginative and story-telling universe in Khoi orature.

The same pattern is also discernable with respect to sexuality which infuses many of the tales. A good example of the fantastic erotic imagination is reproduced here in complete form:

The Jackal and the Two Girls

And that is how it happened: although the jackal had two girls, he only slept with one of them. And because he could not enjoy the other girl, he made a plan. He went

²⁷ Ibid, p. 397.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 481.

hunting and before he left he said to them: 'If a springbok comes past here, then you must say: we wish that this springbok would break apart at his thigh bone!' And both of the girls said: 'Yes!' To that girl [whom he wanted] he then said: 'You will take the private parts when this springbok falls down!'

The jackal went away, changed himself into a springbok, and then ran back to the girls. And as he came past, they called out: 'We wish that this springbok would break apart at his thigh bone!' The springbok then collapsed, and the two girls slaughtered him. The one girl however who had not yet been enjoyed by the jackal, took the private parts of the springbok, and cooked that meat on the fire. She then ate all the fat, and truly ate up all the fat there was. Then she laid the cooked penis of the springbok on a flat stone and pounded it until it was soft. But the penis jumped up and entered her; she pulled it out, and again she pounded it on the stone. But up again it jumped and came into her, and the jackal [taking back his former shape] called out triumphantly: 'The one who has never been enjoyed by me has now been enjoyed!'²⁹

There is obviously no parallel story, even in censored form, in the *Reynard* collection, and it remains open to what extent Bleek was aware of such risqué material, and if such stories were indeed part of the material sent to him by Krönlein and others. Although Krönlein was interested in philology and compiled grammars, he was also a minster and missionary, and we must assume limits as to what Khoi informants would share with cultural strangers, moreover with serious, morally upright men of the cloth. But in view of Bleek's candidly admitted editorial interventions as discussed above, it also appears likely that he consciously selected narratives for the *Reynard* collection from a much larger corpus of available material, and that these selections supported his ideas about a deeper Khoi-European cultural affinity, a shared aesthetic universe in which profane and libidinally excessive content could not be admitted. In a footnote, Bleek for instance mentions 24 tales contributed by the Rev. J. Rath, of which only two were included in the volume. Some of the titles of the omitted Rath stories are 'Two wives', 'Conjugal Relations after Death' and 'The Spectre who fell in love with his son's wife',³⁰ suggesting, on the face of it, a content that touched on sexual matters, possibly even necrophilial themes. Furthermore, a careful examination of the referencing in the *Reynard* text shows that the 24 fables attributed to Krönlein are derived from the following page ranges (referring to Krönlein's original notes): pages 3 – 8, pages 11 – 20, pages 27 – 36, page 53 and pages 60 – 65. This strongly suggests that some material in Krönlein's intervening pages may have been found unsuitable by Bleek and omitted.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 494-5.

³⁰ W. Bleek, *Reynard*, p. xxvi, footnote.

Schultze, who was familiar with Bleek's *Reynard* book, did not take it seriously as an ethnographic record and accused Bleek of censoring the true nature of the Khoi. Compared to his own tales where 'the people for once show themselves without a fig leaf', Bleek's fables were characterised by 'one instance of prudishness following the other'.³¹ Altogether then, a comparison of Schultze's and Bleek's collection of Khoi stories shows that the former was open and receptive to a wide range of narrative material while the latter (possibly filtered through missionaries like Krönlein) excluded any content of an erotic, explicit or vulgar nature, and was drawn more to simple animal fables capable of delivering a pious moral message. In the following years Bleek would become even less interested in the profane aspects of indigenous cultures, showing an increasing interest in the religious and spiritual aspects of native folklore, as shown in his interest in obtaining sidereal stories and creation myths from his /Xam informants. But before we can examine the implications of these attitudes and interests for the Bushman research that Bleek embarked on in the 1870's, it is necessary to look briefly at the context of Schultze's Nama researches.

Leonhard Schultze (1872 -1955)³² was a gifted and multi-talented geographer, zoologist, ethnologist, anatomist, photographer and linguistic researcher, becoming one of imperial Germany's star scientists. Working effortlessly in several scientific disciplines simultaneously, Schultze exemplified a new multi-disciplinary approach to producing integrated and practical knowledge about Germany's colonial possessions and subject people. His treatise *Aus Namaland und Kalahari* (1907) described the region's geology, plants, animals, meteorology and people in a broad, panoramic sweep, blending empirical rigor and carefully observed detail with occasional lyrical passages. His perceptive eye and keen interest in people was not only limited to ethnographic description of the various indigenous groups, but also produced critical observations of colonial German foibles and failings:

We have to admit openly by now that the Hottentot knows us better than we know him ... He never loses interest in studying the white invader.³³

³¹ L. Schultze, *Aus Namaland*, p. 388.

³² The biographical information about Schultze is inferred from the prefaces of several of his publications, as well as a short biographical entry in T. Adam's book *Germany and the Americas: culture, politics and history* (Santa Barbara, ABC-Clio Press, 2005), p. 950. Despite a brilliant scientific career, Schultze is a largely neglected figure today.

³³ L. Schultze, *Aus Namaland*, p. 174.

Schultze's research into Khoi culture and language was intended to rectify this imbalance, and was primarily through his collection of tales that a detailed and in depth insight into the very essence of the subject people was possible. As Schultze put it, 'These texts are the title deeds to the soul of the Hottentot, which need to be decoded'.³⁴ *Aus Namaland und Kalahari* was highly regarded at the time, and led to his appointment as an extraordinary professor in Geography at the University of Jena.³⁵ Schultze's 1903 – 1905 research expedition to German South West Africa was originally conceived narrowly as a scientific investigation of the commercial fishing potential along the Atlantic coast. He quickly dealt with this task, producing a report for the colonial office, and then turned his attention to the interior. Because of the outbreak of the Herero and Nama wars at the beginning of 1904 his exploratory zeal was severely curtailed. Displaced by the conflict to Klein Namaland (the area of the northern Cape Colony south of the Orange River), he worked ethnographically in the area of Steinkopf and Springbok for most of 1904, learned the Nama language, and presumably collected many of the tales.³⁶ Schultze briefly visited Cape Town, and then took the train to Mafeking in order to reach the central Kalahari region of Tshane by wagon.

By the beginning of 1905, Schultze had acquainted himself with both the Atlantic coastline and the deep Kalahari interior; what he now needed was a sense of the intervening geography. But it was precisely in this area of Great Namaland that the German war against the Nama was raging. Schultze accordingly attached himself to the armed forces of General Lothar von Trotha headquartered in Keetmanshoop, repaying the hospitality and supply of armed escorts with part-time work as a war correspondent. Trotha was also generously thanked in the preface of the book. After the last major battles against Hendrik Witbooi, Schultze was given a Schutztruppen escort taking him westwards into the Kalahari interior, crossing into the Cape Colony south of the present day location of the Kalahari Gemsbok Park where he eventually reached Upington, and then the rail-head at Prieska.

In recent revisionist scholarship, the brutal Herero and Nama extermination wars are now recognized as Germany's first exercises in genocide. As recounted in a recent survey article of these studies by Mohamed Adhikari, the Nama lost 50% of their population

³⁴ Ibid, p. 390.

³⁵ After moving to a chair at the University of Marburg he conducted several major overseas research expeditions, including Papua New Guinea and later Central America where he conducted significant linguistic research in Mexico, Guatemala and Salvador. Among his prolific output is the first comprehensive scholarly translation of the Mayan creation codex or 'Bible', the *Popul Vuh*.

³⁶ Schultze's Nama stories are not dated or linked to location, nor are any of his informants named.

following Trotha's notorious annihilation warfare.³⁷ What is extraordinary about Schultze's ethnographic work undertaken during these genocidal military campaigns, is that it reflects none of the unprecedented violent trauma which would have been the unavoidable context of the narration of these tales. It is only in Schultze's subsequent scientific publication intended for a specialist academic audience that we can see the mask of effacement briefly drop. In the preface to his monumental five-volume *Zoologische und Anthropologische Ergebnisse einer Forschungsreise im Westlichen und Zentralen Africa* (1909), Schultze wrote that he regretted the disruptive effect of the war on his scientific work, but also acknowledged macabre benefits:

On the other hand I could also utilize the victims of the war and extract parts from the fresh corpses of the natives; this providing a welcome supplement to the study of live bodies (captured Hottentots were often at my disposal).³⁸

Apart from the collection of Nama stories, Schultze's expedition also brought home several heads and two whole corpses conserved in alcohol which were subsequently subjected to detailed anatomical analysis.³⁹ Violence and literature, as is well-established in postcolonial studies, are inextricably linked in the colonial culture; the history of Schultze's Nama stories, born out of the context of the first genocide of the twentieth century, confirms this in a dramatic and extreme manner.

A paradoxical picture however emerges of Schultze's colonial ethnography: on the one hand he was Trotha's complicit embedded scientist who utilized the victims of war, both the dead and imprisoned, as convenient subjects for study, which included the taking of anthropometric photographs. In their use of prisoners as subjects of research, we need to remember, Schultze shared a similar methodology with Bleek.⁴⁰ Schultze's efforts to

³⁷ M. Adhikari, 'Streams Of Blood And Streams Of Money': New Perspectives on the Annihilation of the Herero and Nama Peoples Of Namibia, 1904-1908' *Kronos: Journal Of Cape History* 34 (2005), p. 317.

³⁸ L. Schultze, 'Einleitung', in L. Schultze (ed.), *Zoologische und anthropologische Ergebnisse einer Forschungsreise westlichen und zentralen Südafrika ausgeführt in den Jahren 1903-1905 mit Unterstützung der Kgl. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Volume 1 (Jena, Gustav Fischer, 1909), p. viii.

³⁹ H. von Eggeling, 'Anatomische Untersuchungen an den Köpfen von vier Hereros, einem Herero- und Hottentottenkind'. In L. Schultze (ed.), *Zoologische und anthropologische Erkenntnisse*, Volume 3, pp. 128-142. Eggeling remarked on the emaciated condition of the corpses, surmising hunger as the cause of death, an assumption entirely consistent with Von Trotha's military tactics of starvation warfare.

⁴⁰ As is well-known, Bleek utilized a number of prisoners from the Breakwater Prison as his informants. Less well known is Bleek's involvement in taking anthropometric photographs, including nude studies of Bushman subjects (see Bank 2006). Schultze took similar photographs, though those of naked subjects were not published in *Aus Namaland und Kalahari*, but in the subsequent specialist, scholarly volume which he edited (1909). Intriguingly, one of Schultze's photographs in the 1907 volume, a gravure plate titled 'Hottentotten Mädchen', was subsequently proposed by J.M. Coetzee as the cover image of his first novel titled *Dusklands* (1974). Coetzee's

learn the difficult language with its complex plosives and clicks, and his painstaking method of transcription and exact, grammatically annotated word for word translation, however reveal not only a man of extraordinary listening skills, but also someone who engaged intimately with the culture and language of his informants. The sheer volume, the detailed annotations and moreover the candid content of the narratives suggest a close and mutually trusting relationship between himself and the people who gave him the gift of their stories.

The different story-telling context must therefore also be considered when evaluating the divergence between Schultze's narratives and those collected by Bleek in the 1870's subsequent to the *Reynard* publication. Unlike the artificial situation that prevailed in Bleek's Mowbray house where his /Xam prisoner informants had been forcibly removed from their social and cultural home contexts, Schultze was travelling in their land, and shared their nightly camp fires. In such an intimate context under a familiar night sky, surrounded by a land that was their home, a qualitatively different form of story-telling could emerge, more open to the free flow of risqué jokes, and earthy, racy content that could here naturally be included. Schultze's stories were primarily performed for the other Nama listeners who accompanied the research expedition as mule drivers, cooks and guides. The researcher himself sat quietly taking notes in the background:

What I had listened to at night around the fire, I had repeated to me slowly the next day by the story teller, so that, after some practice, I was able to obtain a coherent dictation. In order to ascertain if the act of dictating had disturbed the sentence structure and sequence, I asked the Hottentot to repeat his story at normal speed and carefully noted down variations.⁴¹

Comparing his stories with those assembled by Bleek, Schultze's conclusion about their ethnographic veracity is scathing: 'Bleek's stories do not reveal to me the Hottentot whom I have gotten to know. Since I was able to tap into the very source of their lore, I will disregard his versions completely'.⁴²

Schultze was not the only one who could not relate to the *Reynard* fables. In 1870, Bleek and Lloyd attempted to use tales in the *Reynard* volume to elicit stories from /A!kunta, their first /Xam informant. As Andrew Bank puts it, 'Lloyd's and Bleek's

novel was partly set in Namaland, and he must have thought that the image was suitable. His publishers at Ravan Press disagreed, and the Schultze photograph was eventually not used (Letter by J.M. Coetzee to Peter Randall, 19 December 1973, Macmillan Archive, Johannesburg).

⁴¹ L. Schultze, *Aus Namaland*, p. 752.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 389.

experimentation with story-telling yielded very little information from /A!kunta. They were hoping that listening to 'Hottentot fables' would unlock his memory about the traditional stories of his own people'.⁴³ Bleek drew the improbable conclusion that /A!kunta was simply too young to know the folklore of his own culture, and went back to the Breakwater Prison for another older informant. That the *Reynard* fables themselves were defective records of indigenous orature and incapable of triggering any meaningful creative response, evidently did not occur to Bleek. Nevertheless there is one reason why we do need to be grateful for *Reynard's* inadequacy, for it provided the trigger for a crucial shift in the history of the /Xam project: the recruitment of //Kabbo, the master narrator, into the Bleek household. It was //Kabbo who would unlock mythical and spiritual universe of Bushman culture.

The divergence between Bleek's and Schultze's stories would be a curious footnote in South Africa's literary and cultural history, would it not have significant implications for the way in which the Bleek and Lloyd archive was constituted, raising questions about how indigenous orature was written restrictively into the South African literary record. If we accept the thesis that Bleek's editorial handling of the 'naked' elements of Khoi orature was shaped by a certain Victorian prurience, as well as a desire to promote the aesthetic affinity of the 'Hottentot fables' to European folk literature, we also need to examine the impact of these ideas on the famous /Xam project.

Bleek's discomfort with sexual and erotic matters is not only reflected in the almost complete absence of such themes in the 12000 page /Xam archive, but also in his coyness regarding sexually explicit vocabulary. As Andrew Bank has shown, Bleek's awkward attempts to elicit /Xam equivalents from /A!kunta of phrases such as 'exerceo coitum' ('I have sex') and 'exerceo coitum cum ea' ('I have sex with her' – possibly pointing to Lucy or his wife Jemima) met with little success. They are also the only passages in the notebooks where Bleek sought refuge in the scholarly formality of Latin, indicating his discomfort with the topic.⁴⁴

Instead, Bleek was increasingly preoccupied with the mythical and spiritual dimensions of /Xam culture. As Bank's analysis has shown, Bleek's and Lloyd's notebooks are remarkably different in content, style and overall orientation, with Bleek's material seeking confirmation of his ideas about sidereal worship and the correspondence of Bushman mythology to Mediterranean cultures, whereas Lloyd was far more open and receptive to a wide range of language material and stories, including matters concerning the everyday. But overall, the image created of Bushman culture in the archive is one

⁴³ A. Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p.101.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.98.

that emphasizes the transcendental over that of the profane, and the mythic over that of the mundane, allowing little space for earthy humor and profane themes. The literary appropriation of the Bushman archive has consequently focused on the former qualities, a trend that is particularly evident in Watson's and Krog's poetic recastings.

Given the abundance of sexual, bawdy and other risqué content in Schultze's Nama tales, the absence of such material in the Bleek and Lloyd archive points to a selective and limiting engagement with Bushman culture. It is noteworthy too, that Schultze's collection of folktales is likely to have occurred in an area of the Northern Cape around Steinkopf and Springbok, not too distant from the Kenhardt region from which many of Bleek's /Xam informants originated. This close geographical proximity would make a convergence or at least overlap of oral traditions more likely. As Megan Biesele has shown, 'Bushman folklore is itself practically indistinguishable from Khoisan tradition as a whole. It is very hard to tell the difference between a Bushman story and a Khoikhoi story'.⁴⁵ She gives the example of the well-known 'Eyes-on-his-feet' Bushman stories which are 'familiar to every adult Nama today',⁴⁶ and which Schultze also recorded as his Aigamuchab stories. Biesele's work points to the commonalities in Southern African Khoisan culture. She cites close similarities and linkages between /Xam stories published in Bleek and Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* and narratives collected among the Kalahari Ju/'hoa during the 1970s. Biesele found that Bushman storytelling was not always highly formalized and concerned with serious quasi-religious reflection, but could also occur through colloquial and profane speech, touching on matters such as birth, sex, excrement and food. One of the stories collected by Biesele among the! Kung aptly illustrates the gap between Bleek's other-worldly Bushmen and anthropological reality:

!Gara tried screwing his wife in the nostrils. Then he tried her ears. Finally he screwed her nostrils again. He was getting nowhere. His wife looked at him and said: 'Don't you know *anything*? What do you think you're doing in my nostrils and my ears? Can't you see there is a much better place, here? *This* is what you 'eat', you fool!' !Gara was a person who was really ignorant. He was definitely ignorant and did not know how things were.⁴⁷

Michael Chapman comments on this story that 'such idiom is not to be found in Bleek and Lloyd', and speculates that the absence of such risqué elements 'could have had

⁴⁵ M. Biesele, *Women like Meat. The folklore and foraging ideology of the Kalahari Ju/'hoa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1993), p. 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ M. Biesele, cited in M. Chapman *Southern African Literatures* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 1996), p. 28.

more to do with the relationship between narrator and transcriber than any shift in story-telling convention'.⁴⁸ Like Bank, he makes the argument that even

had forthright reference been part of //Kabbo's repertoire, it is unlikely that, as an ex-convict in a situation of dependency, he would have let slip his somewhat austere manner in front of two white people of considerable authority who had secured his release from prison.⁴⁹

It is clear though that the absence of such modes of 'naked' story-telling in the Bleek records is more complex, and cannot be reduced to the fraught dynamics of an unequal and coercive relationship between narrator and listener. As outlined earlier, Bleek's ethno-linguistic theories and his commitment to cultural universals, coupled with a bounded sense of morality, are the larger context of his Bushman work.

In conclusion, it is evident that the Bleek and Lloyd archive needs to be read with considerable qualification as a route to the rich pre-colonial orature of the Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa. Such a revisionist reading of the archive needs to register the 'processes of exclusion, occlusion and effacement that have occurred in the construction of the cultural history of this country', as Duncan Brown has put it in his introduction to *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa*.⁵⁰ The interwoven story of these narratives, both Schultze's and Bleek's, therefore allows us to reflect on and rethink an originary moment in South African literary history. This moment, marked by the publication of *Reynard*, entailed a moral circumscription of the Khoisan imagination, containing its libidinal and potentially transgressive energies by reducing its narrative range to the generic limits of the naïve European children's folktale. *Reynard* in this sense signaled the attempt of inducing a major shift in the colonial idea of Khoisan culture. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the 'Hottentot' was persistently associated in European travel writing and colonial Cape discourse with disorderliness, indolence and licentiousness.⁵¹ And in the métis figure of the irreverent and bawdy Kaatjie Kekkelbek (1838), who mercilessly satirized organized religion and polite settler society, Andrew

⁴⁸ M. Chapman, *Southern African Literatures* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 1996), p. 28.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ D. Brown, 'Introduction' in D. Brown (ed.) *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa* (Claremont, David Phillip, 1999), p. 4.

⁵¹ See the essay 'Idleness in South Africa' for an incisive overview of the (mis)representations of the Cape 'Hottentot'. In J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven, Radix, 1988), pp. 12-35.

Geddes Bain had created an early rare example of an indigenous carnivalesque voice.⁵² Wilhelm Bleek's interventions in civilizing the Khoisan imagination, well-meaning as they may have been, must therefore be seen as marking a move away from a potentially Rabelaisian trajectory in South African literature through which the Khoisan could be represented and represent themselves. In admitting a sanitized version of indigenous orature into the colonial literary order, Bleek thus helped to create a restrictive cultural politics in South Africa from which the country is yet to emerge fully.⁵³

⁵² A. G. Bain, 'Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life among the Hottentots', *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain. Trader, Explorer, Soldier, Road Engineer and Geologist*, ed. Margaret Hermina Lister (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1949 (1838))

⁵³ This is wide area requiring substantive discussion, but one particularly iconic example may suffice here to illustrate the point: the editing of the Bushman figures in South Africa's new coat of arms. The image is based on the famous Linton Panel in the Iziko National Museum, Cape Town, but the noticeably erect phallus of the Bushman hunter in the original rock art has been 'photoshopped' away for use in the coat of arms. Indigenous identities can clearly only be admitted to represent a new South Africa in a restricted, sanitized fashion, a misrepresentation that involves the disciplining of the native body, and excising any sign of sexual potentiality. See also Alan Barnard's article 'Coat of Arms and the Body Politic: Khoisan Imagery and South African National Identity', *Ethnos* 74,1 (2009) for a general discussion, as well as Moran (2009) on the idea of the Bushman in post-transition South Africa.

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