

# Figuring from within: a study in history, painting and the work of Moses Tladi



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# Part One

## DECLARATION

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ALL PAINTINGS BY MOSES TLADI ARE TAKEN FROM *THE ARTIST IN THE GARDEN, THE QUEST FOR MOSES TLADI* (ISBN 978-0-9802609-7-7), WRITTEN BY ANGELA READ LLOYD AND PUBLISHED BY PRINT MATTERS.

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Yda Cornelia Coetsee

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the significance of landscape painting in my own work and in the work of Moses Tladi, one of the lesser-known SA pioneer artists working in the oil painting convention. Through a Romantic lens, I argue that Tladi's paintings exist as record of his experiences, thoughts and emotions, making use of a hermeneutics 'from within', rather than one aimed at Realist exposition. While employing such a hermeneutics in my own practice, I seek out points of connection between Tladi and myself, as well as explore if and to what degree our different socio-political circumstances shape our practices.

In part one of the thesis I sketch a narrative backdrop to the era in which Tladi lived and of his relationship to his patrons, mentors and the establishment. I explore his work in relation to popular conventions at the time, matters of modernism and abstraction, as well as to some degree how the landscape genre functions in terms of class. The overall argument is divided in two parts, that of the metaphorical 'Garden' and that of the 'Wilderness'. With this divide I aim to reveal how Tladi employs the transcendent both in the sublime expanse of Sekhukhuneland and in his domestic, everyday reality. The ideological relationship between the Garden and Wilderness is examined in terms of theories on landscape, imperialism and the Lutheran missionary project.

In the second part I describe my own work and discuss the contribution it makes. While alluding to many of the devices already discussed in Tladi's work, I sketch the context in which my own paintings were made and explain some of my stylistic and curatorial choices. In demonstrating how our techniques and methodologies overlap, I aim to crystallise some of the theoretical themes explored.

Keywords: Tladi, landscape, biography, missions, pastoral, Romanticism

## Uitbeelding van binne: 'n studie oor geskiedenis, skilderwerk, en die werk van Moses Tladi

### OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie handel oor die belang van landskapskilder in my eie werk en in the werk van Moses Tladi, een van Suid-Afrika se minder bekende pionier-kunstenaars in die olievertadisie. Ek argumenteer, deur 'n Romantiese blik, dat Tladi se werk as rekord verskyn van sy ervarings, gedagtes en emosies. In hierdie opsig is sy hermeneutiek 'inwaarts' gekeer, eerder as gefokus op die Realistiese ontbloting van sekere sosiale kwessies. Terwyl ek in my eie skilderpraktik ook van 'n hermeneutiek gebruik maak, soek ek raakpunte tussen my en Tladi se werk onderwyl ek ondersoek of, en tot watter mate, ons verskillende sosio-politiese omstandighede ons werk vorm.

In Deel Een van die tesis skets ek 'n narratiewe agtergrond tot die era waarin Tladi geleef het en kyk na sy verhouding met sy beskermhere ("patrons"), sy mentors en die kunststiging. Ek ondersoek Tladi se werk aan die hand van populêre konvensies van sy tyd sowel as kwessies van Modernisme en abstraksie. Ek kyk ook vlugtig na hoe die landskap-genre ten opsigte van sosiale stand funksioneer. My algehele argument het twee afdelings, die metafoor van die 'Tuin', en dié van die 'Wildernis'. Met hierdie verdeling beoog ek om te wys hoe Tladi transendente aspekte voorstel in die uitgestrekte, ontsagwekkende landskappe van Sekhukhuneland, maar ook in sy alledaagse, sosiale realiteit. Die ideologiese verhouding tussen die Tuin en die Wildernis word verder ondersoek ten opsigte van teorieë oor landskap, imperialisme en die sendingpraktik van die Lutherse Kerk.

In Deel Twee beskryf ek my eie werk sowel as die bydrae wat dit maak. Ek beskryf die konteks waarin sommige van die skilderye gemaak is, bespreek hul inhoud, en kyk na spesifieke stilistiese en kuratoriale keuses. Deurentyd raak ek aan die tegnieke en temas wat alreeds bespreek is in die afdeling oor Tladi. Deur te demonstreer hoe my en Tladi se tegniek en metodologie oorvleuel, hoop ek om die teoretiese temas wat reeds ondersoek is, te kristalliseer.

Sleutelwoorde: Tladi, landskap, biografie, sending, pastorale, Romantisme

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# Introduction

By the time I started doing a visual arts masters I was already working in the landscape genre. I spent a lot of time in the mountains, trying to maintain a sense of the real, the “world perceived through the feet”, as Tim Ingold suggests in his article “Culture on the ground” (2004). Before I injured my ankle on a trip a few months ago, we were tackling some of the highest and most challenging peaks in the Western Cape, sleeping in freezing tents, abseiling down kloofs and getting lost in fog, mist and dense Protea forests. Strange that one should seek out physical privation in a context where many people have no choice.

To come to terms with some of the questions I had about my place in the South African and African context, I undertook a four months’ exchange programme to Makerere University, in Kampala, Uganda in East Africa. This proved to be an extremely challenging but fruitful venture. The fact that Makerere was previously a British institution<sup>1</sup> made it a good setting so share some of my views about Moses Tladi, an artist whom I have been working on for some time. There is a sense of enigma around Tladi’s work, one that moves me to imagine like Jeremy Foster, “that certain parts

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<sup>1</sup>In the years between 1922 (when Makerere was started as a small vocation school) and 1970 (when the country gained independence) the institution was governed by the British colonial government, and later affiliated with the University of London (from 1949) (Wada 2011).

of the earth's surface can evoke powerful and similar intimations of something there, noumenal or otherwise, in different people" (Foster 2008:6). My early research on Tladi, published in the *South African Journal of Art History* (Coetsee 2014), focused on Romantic elements in Tladi's work, relating certain of its stylistic aspects to artists such as the Northern German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, and the British painter William Turner. I often wondered how his South-African context made him different from these artists, if at all. In Kampala I had interviews with scholars and artists at Makerere University, most prominently Kabiito Richard, Kizito Maria Kasule, and the artist Ahimbisibwe Ronex. During this time, I read widely on contemporary notions of African art, philosophy and culture, and how they compare to earlier Western texts. One of the main themes I discussed with scholars was Tladi's use of landscape, an ostensibly 'Western' genre. Tladi was in his early teenage years when the South African Natives National Congress was founded (1912), and the influential Natives Land Act of 1913 implemented.<sup>2</sup> In the light of this dramatic setting, should an artist necessarily expose social and political issues? Are 'political' and 'non-political' sufficient taxonomies to describe someone like Tladi?

Sekhukhuneland, or just 'Sekhukhune', the area of Tladi's birth, has gained increasing attention in the media.<sup>3</sup> The massive De Hoop dam project in Limpopo was officially opened by the president in March 2014. Pres. Zuma explained that the dam was to aid social and economic growth by supplying water to poorly serviced communities in the area as well as to the platinum mines. He added that 70% of a pipeline from Jane Furse to Lobethal was finished (Tladi grew up in Lobethal), and would cater for the villages of Ga-Mashabela, Diphagane, Ga-Phahla, Ga-Marishane, Tisane and Mamone (South Africa opens R3bn De Hoop Dam 2014). In April 2014 I undertook a short

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<sup>2</sup>In 2013 The Land Divided Conference in Cape Town commemorated the centenary of the passing of the act, and offered insightful views by scholars from different disciplines in history and social science.

<sup>3</sup>There are different spellings to the word Sekhukhuneland. In most academic texts authors use the spelling 'Sekhukhune'; one of Tladi's works are titled 'Sekhukuniland', and newspaper articles from Tladi's time refer to either 'Sekukuni' or 'Sekhukhuni'.

field trip to the Sekhukhuneland area which allowed me to ‘walk in Tladi’s footsteps’, albeit in a very small manner. A friend and I explored the geographical landscape, climate and aesthetic, and experienced the racial restrictions still acutely felt by many in the area. It proved difficult to access Tladi’s birthplace Ga Phaahla and the vicinity of Jane Furse without accompaniment, but easier to travel around Groblersdal, Lydenburg and Roossenekal. I painted some small landscape studies in situ and took photographs that echo the scenery in some of Tladi’s paintings. Historical sites such as the Mapochs Monument, Lydenburg Museum, and Botshabelo — the ruins of a Berlin Mission village established in the 1860s — helped to form a tangible idea of Tladi’s era.

Tladi came from a rural Protestant background and herded cattle as a boy while going to school. He left the mission town Lobethal, married from the church in Vereeniging, and in his early twenties found himself in the heart of Johannesburg’s large-scale capitalist industry.<sup>4</sup> ‘Cushioned’ inside the garden walls of the Read estate where he worked as gardener, Tladi started his career as painter and exhibited a few times around the 1930s and 40s.

Herbert and Lily (née Visser) Read, a British-Afrikaans couple, got married during the tense years of the Anglo-Boer War. Herbert Read (born 1875) came from London to Johannesburg as an *Uitlander*, a young administrative officer looking for work. He eventually established himself at the Corner House Mining Company, where his career comprised mostly of ventures into forestry. The family set up home in Federation Road, Johannesburg, named their estate after Visser’s family farm in the Free State and modelled its grounds on the aristocratic gardens of Herbert’s home country. The political and social narratives that played into the family history of Lokshoek are recorded in

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<sup>4</sup>The term capitalism will be used in this text simply in so far as it denotes an economy built on production and a livelihood dependent on cash. According to scholars like Robert Brenner a true Marxist analysis of an agrarian-to-capitalist transition would involve tracing the origin of the class system of free wage labour, or “the historical process by which labour power and the means of production became commodities” (Bradford 1990:60). This complex process, as Goody explores wonderfully in his critical *Capitalism and modernity: The great debate* (2004), is not simply a question of colonial ‘assimilation’.

*Bridging the divide, The story of a Boer-British family* (2002), by Angela Read Lloyd, also the author of Tladi's biography. It is here that the lives of the Reads and Moses Tladi begin to overlap.

## RESEARCH AIMS

For this practice-based Master's Thesis I consider Tladi's work while pursuing my own explorations in landscape painting. The theory and history that I examine help inform my landscape practice, while, equally, I consider my work a means of gaining insight into Tladi's painting.

In Tladi's work, I aim to critically re-evaluate certain art-historical designations outside the context of the Euro-centric West. I am not interested in reiterating theories on landscape and the colonial, something done extensively by seminal scholars such as Cosgrove, Mitchell, Foster and others. Instead, I suggest that Tladi's work calls for the further interrogation of these theories. In agreement with Nettleton (2011:8), I acknowledge that the reading of artworks is to a large extent "idiosyncratic", yet can become more informed when seen against a particular historical context. By providing some of this context, I hope to make a contribution to the discourse on South African and particularly African painters.

With the written part of the thesis I hope to affect the viewer's way of seeing landscape practice: towards interpreting the figurative not as the representation of a stable 'political' or 'non-political' reality, but as a precarious negotiation between the inner and outer reality of the artist amid the social forces affecting him/her.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

The main problem regarding this study is one of methodology. How should a study on Tladi, a 'counter-culture' artist with almost no written record, be approached, and how is this enhanced (and complicated) by means of a practice-based research methodology? My writing as an artist

presents paradoxes in interpretation. While the resonance between my work and Tladi's secures an element of the imaginative and intuitive (as suggested by Barone and Eisner 2012), the critic must also avoid the interpretive romance that he/she critiques.

The second problem is the current lack of writing on Tladi's work. Read Lloyd did much research on Tladi, gathering biographical information, collecting photographs of most of Tladi's works and interviewing his remaining family members. Yet she admits to not writing academically.<sup>5</sup> The scattered nature of the paintings and lack of writing on it makes my own research more difficult. It was only in the later phases of the study that I could view some of Tladi's actual pieces myself.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My main research inquiry, in Tladi's art and my own, is whether landscape as genre can be an appropriate tool with which to create a 'voice' as artist, irrespective of a precarious socio-political position.

Secondly, what is the value of using certain art-historical taxonomies, such as Romanticism, when discussing an African or South-African artist? A 1931 article in *The Star* records that "[p]ainting in the European technique among the Bantu is an original phase. Moses Tladi has established a reputation in landscape [...] Moses Tladi is a revelation of a new felicity in native painting" (Read Lloyd 2009:103). In which ways does Tladi's work compare and comply with certain Western genre conventions, such as the picturesque or topographical and what could this reveal of his aspirations? Is it an 'imposition' to use certain art-historical frameworks (across continents and classes) on Tladi or on any African artist?

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<sup>5</sup>Inside the dust cover of the book the publisher writes that "the author has not attempted an academic review of Moses Tladi's life and work but chose to tell an extraordinary story that delights the soul" (Read Lloyd 2009).

Thirdly, how does Tladi use landscape to transcend his immediate circumstances, and what does this reveal about his pastoral world view? What does the sublime in his work signify about nostalgia, nationalism, modernisation and the religious? How is the Romantic language in Tladi's sublime paintings influenced and complicated by the ideologies of the mission project?

#### METHODS OF RESEARCH

Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner, in *Arts based research* (2012:129), believe that arts-based research is inherently political (2012:121) (for different reasons), and can act to destabilise deeply entrenched ideologies. They explain that

[t]he epistemologically humble arts based researcher desires [...] to offer small, closely observed, local stories and portraits that invite readers (and viewers) to look again at what they think they have already seen. But they achieve this by offering a degree of ambiguity [...]. This ambiguity arises within a recognition of the value of a variety of alternative perspectives within a research text. These are the perspectives of the author/artist, the various views of the characters, and the perspectives of the members of the audience of the work.

In order to preserve Tladi's voice a degree of ambiguity is required. In *The New art history: A critical introduction*, Jonathan Harris argues (2001:2) that the discipline of art history has generally become more open, interrogative (questioning) and self-critical. The debate on art-historical methods and visual studies has largely been influenced by a turn towards semiotics, psychoanalysis and critical theory and by an increasingly post-colonial and trans-cultural focus since the mid 1990s (Cherry 2004:479-480). Deborah Cherry believes that the older forms of art history have failed to identify present ideological investments in the accounts of the past (2004:482). Visual culture therefore critiques art history's "conventional procedures, its connoisseurship and enthusiasm for 'a good eye'"



(Irit Rogoff in Cherry 2004:482).

Léger, in *Art and art history after globalisation* (2012), engages this debate in Marxist and philosophic terms, most prominently because “in some ways art and art history have long developed in accordance with the trajectories of the nation-state” (Léger 2012:522). He explores the views of critical theorists such as Zizek, Bourriaud and Elkins as well as Ladislav Kesner who argues that “‘global art history’ and local environments [...] are fluid and permeable and exist within a competitive global market” (Léger 2012:520). In his study Léger tackles questions of Euro-centrism, multiculturalism and the claims of “cultural imperialism” and “compromised relativism” (2012:520), especially in terms of current trends in global art biennales (2012:518). As Harris explains, “art history is as much a matter of money and commodities, in publishing and the dealing-gallery, as a matter of ideas and arguments in lectures and seminars” (2001:9).

My discussion on Tladi uses a critical art-historical framework, relating his artistic choices and expressions to his particular social and political context. Formal analysis is used to explore the significance of the artworks, grouped into two sections to provide a ‘scaffolding’ for this analysis.

In the practical part of the thesis, which is done concurrently with the Tladi research, I use personal biographic images to narrate and express some of my experiences through figurative landscape painting. These works, which make use of the same landscape devices explored in Tladi’s work, regard the landscape genre from different perspectives by focusing, for instance, on the topographical, the sublime and the picturesque.

#### FORMAT OF THE STUDY

This visual art research project consists of three components; Part One, an art-historical discussion on the artist Moses Tladi; Part Two, a brief reflection and interpretation of my own work, and Part Three, a body of work exhibited in a gallery location. The ‘separation’ of the theoretical component

from my practice serves three functions. Firstly it awards Moses Tladi's work the recognition and attention I think it merits, thereby making a theoretical contribution towards the study of South African pioneer painters. Secondly it acknowledges our diverse academic backgrounds and epochs which, as I argue, are important elements to the reading of both our work. And thirdly it allows a measure of imagination in allowing the viewer to make his/her own connections between Tladi's work and my own.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

To approach Part One of the study, I have divided Tladi's work roughly in two categories, those that deal with the Garden, and those belonging to the Wilderness. Jeremy Foster makes a brief reference to this divide, explaining that the pastoral landscape has its roots in classical biblical Arcadian mythologies and that the 'wilderness' grew popular in the eighteenth century together with notions of the sublime (Foster 2008:48). I use this divide to indicate how Tladi employs a pastoral world view in his images of pristine Sekhukhuneland, but also in his works depicting his 'everyday' life.

In the first of the two chapters on Tladi I look at Tladi's 'domestic' work and its relationship to the notion of the Garden. In some works the garden trope is explored as a romantic folk memory perpetuated by the colonial project, while in others the garden signifies a spiritual enclosure in a pastoral setting. In many of his landscapes, especially those containing figures, Tladi makes use of the Picturesque, a convention aimed at improving or ornamenting. I ask what role beauty and nostalgia play in romanticising the countryside for a urbanised population, and what possible impact matters of class, patronage and the establishment could have in this formation.

Chapter two explores the sublime aspects of Tladi's 'untouched' landscapes. I ask what his point of contact with the historical 'sublime' landscape trope is, and whether Tladi could have been aware of certain Romantic conventions and symbols when painting his Wilderness works. Romantic ide-

ologies underlying the missionary project are explored, as well as the relationship between Romanticism and Modern painting in the quest for a national landscape. As Tladi live in a time of rapid industrialisation, I explore whether, like the Hudson River painters, Tladi makes an environmentalist statement about the changing face of his landscape. Throughout, however, I suggest that current debates on land ownership, environmentalism and race relations were not the primary source of inspiration for Tladi's landscape, but rather his phenomenological encounter with nature outside of the boundaries of the institution. Tladi uses the Wilderness to escape and transcend the political tension in the Transvaal.

#### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to understand the context that formed Tladi as a person and against which he created as an artist, I researched the economic and political developments of the Pedi area, the mission project, and the migrant labour system. Peer-reviewed texts on early Pedi history are limited, and the work of Peter Delius<sup>6</sup> is extremely helpful in this regard. His “Dikgomo di lie (The cattle have gone): The changing context of resistance in Sekhukuneland 1950 – 1986” narrates some of the practical aspects of the migrant worker system, and a recent article published together with Kirsten Rüter, “J.A. Winter – Visionary or mercenary? A missionary life in colonial context” (2010) gives crucial insight in the Lutheran mission project in Sekhukuneland. Deborah James’ “‘I dress in this fashion’: Transformations in Sotho dress and women’s lives in a Sekhukuneland village” (2009) and Edward Lebaka’s “Thanksgiving songs in contemporary Pedi society” (2012) offer insights from other disciplines. Texts such as Colin Bundy’s *The Rise and fall of the South African peasantry* (1988) are

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<sup>6</sup>Peter Delius, a professor in the department of history at WITS, did prolonged historical work in the Sekhukuneland area. His fieldwork, starting around 1976, focused on recording Pedi oral histories. He was also part of the History Workshops held at The University of the Witwatersrand since 1982.

contested by more recent work on the topic by Ivor Chipkin.<sup>7</sup> Most of these texts fall outside the field of my academic expertise, but are helpful for a broader understanding of Tladi's context.

For insight into the Tladi's biography I rely heavily on Angela Read Lloyd's book, *The Artist in the garden – The quest for Moses Tladi* (2009). The primary research done by this author (primarily from family sources) makes it possible to piece together the narrative of Tladi and investigate some of the major role players in his life (and more specifically his career as directed by the Reads). I interviewed the author in her home in Cape Town, and corresponded with her on the Tladi project via e-mail. Read Lloyd provided some of the titles for Tladi's work, but also indicated when the artist wrote his own title on the back of a painting. In my study, I use the caption '[Tladi's title]' to make this distinction.

Romanticism, Modernism and Landscape, often referred to in one context, are important as theoretical themes. Examples such as Anitra Nettleton's "Writing artists into history, Dumile Feni and the South African canon" (2011) have been very helpful, as well as Michael Godby's (ed.) *The lie of the land* (2010) and Jeremy Foster's extensive *Washed with sun: Landscape and the making of white South Africa* (2008). These texts are used to contextualise Romanticism as a 'borrowed' or 'remnant' trope from the West influenced by specific South African elements. Jeremy Foster's work is relevant in exploring Johannesburg as a centre of prosperity and materiality (chapter 7) as well the Highveld as backdrop for a transcendent and phenomenological understanding of landscape (chapter 6), both relevant in how I read Tladi's work. Richard Drayton's *Nature's government: Science, imperial Britain, and the 'improvement' of the world* (2000) explains some of the colonial ideologies informing picturesque landscape painting.

Romanticism is theorised in most earlier Western texts as an art-historical movement (or style)

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<sup>7</sup>Ivor Chipkin is an associate professor at WITS University as well as Executive Director of the Public Affairs Research Institute. His article "Nationalism as such: Violence during South Africa's political transition" (2004) gives insight in the politics of the migrant labour system.

dominating most of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe and Britain. The seminal works of art historians Kenneth Clark (*The Romantic rebellion: Romantic versus Classic art*, 1973) and Hugh Honour (*Romanticism*, 1979) deal with this period in visual art, and they agree that Romanticism brought about a major shift in Western philosophical thinking.<sup>8</sup> These authors focus on describing and exploring the context and methodologies of formative Romantic painters such as Goya, Blake, Friedrich, Delacroix and Gericault. A tendency in these texts is, to use Mitchell's term (2002:23), to 'pigeonhole' eighteenth and nineteenth century landscape into seven themes: "God in Nature, the Ideal, the Sublime, the topographical, the Picturesque, the sketch, and the Impressionist", something I will refer to in my discussion of Tladi's work.

Critiques such as those of Mitchell (*Landscape and power*, 2002), John Berger (*Ways of seeing* 1972), Raymond Williams (*The country and the city*, 1973) and Ann Birmingham (*Landscape and ideology*, 1989), have largely discredited earlier texts on Romanticism.<sup>9</sup> New points of entry are specifically sought in the field of landscape painting.<sup>10</sup> The work of Dennis Cosgrove and Stephen

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<sup>8</sup>According to Romanticism, the value of art is no longer implicit in the subject portrayed (or even in the fashion it is represented), but in the integrity of the artist as individual. This is not the singular effect of Romantic painting, but a philosophic shift related to different economic (increasingly capitalist) factors. Whereas artists worked for instance on commission to the feudal gentry, they could now act as tradesmen benefitting from an individual voice (Cosgrove 1998:224-225). The movement resulted in a diverse (and hard to define) set of stylistic products relying less on subject matter and more on a subjective approach to art and experience. As Honour explains, "many paintings of ostensibly 'romantic' subjects – of wild or exotic landscape, of supernatural phenomena or scenes from medieval literature and history – [...] were, and still are, rejected for their lack of individual authenticity" (1979:20).

<sup>9</sup>Romantic theorists like Newman, Clark and Honour acknowledge the social implication of the Romantic mentality, yet also present the kind of universal narrative severely critiqued by postmodern scholars. The Romantic conception of the landscape is for instance critiqued by W. J. T. Mitchell in *Landscape and power* (2002:6): "[w]hat we now know is what critics like John Barrell have shown us, that there is a 'dark side of the landscape' and that his dark side is not merely mythic [...] but a moral, ideological, and political darkness that covers itself with precisely the sort of innocent idealism Clark expresses".

<sup>10</sup>One of these alternative points of re-investigation is the imperial and political implications of the landscape in terms of modernisation and democracy. Denis Cosgrove noted that "the landscape idea and the techniques of linear perspective emerge in a particular historical period as conventions that reinforce ideas of individualism, subjective control of an objective environment and the separation of personal experience from the flux of collective historical experience" (1998:27).

Daniels, *The iconography of landscape* (1988) and Cosgrove in *Social Formation and Symbolic landscape* (1998) have dealt with the way in which Western ideologies underlie most previously held assumptions on landscape and nature.

Theories of subjectivity and identity are used but remain conjecture because of the dearth of biographical information available on Tladi. Was, for instance, the Sekhukhuneland landscape necessarily his ‘self’, and the Read estate garden an alien ‘other’? Tladi was not the only employee (or African employee) at the Read estate,<sup>11</sup> but through his painting endeavours had a special kind of access to Herbert Read’s circle. Questions of colonial mimicry are investigated not so much in philosophic terms as in the historic development of what was termed the “rising black elite”. Work by Kapenzi (1988), as well as Kennedy’s “Missionaries, black converts, and separatists on the Rand, 1886-1910: From accommodation to resistance” (1992) is interesting although somewhat out-dated. Similarly, Copley’s *Class and consciousness: The black petty bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950* (1990) has been useful, although it makes no mention of visual artists such as Tladi. Zine Magubane’s *Bringing the Empire home: Race, class, and gender in Britain and colonial South Africa* (2004) reveals the ways in which African individuals, and especially those interested in art or music, were conscious of the shifting boundaries of race. Throughout, my emphasis falls less on the social dynamics between black and white subjects and more on describing how Tladi’s elusive identity as artist falls beyond the limits of these racial types.

In terms of the ‘colonial’ programme’s bearing on Tladi’s perception of nature, religion and ethics, I am deeply obliged to Ryan Dunch, who in a paper, “Beyond cultural imperialism: cultural theory, Christian missions, and global modernity” (2002), aims to move beyond theories of simple assimilation. One will never be able to uncover how ‘other’ societies have perceived or experienced

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<sup>11</sup>According to Angela Read Lloyd, servants at times included what she calls a housekeeper, a butler and a governess for the girls, four menservants and a washerwoman (Read Lloyd 2002:157).

their exposure to European societies (2002:304). In agreement with this, I examine how the missionary project in Lobethal — with its roots in German Romanticism — could have shaped Tladi's world view and perceptions of nature, but I do not describe this as a process of assimilation. Instead I merely take into consideration some of the elements of the German missions, a task in which Kirsten Rüter's "‘Sekukuni, Listen!, Banna!, and to the children of Frederick the Great and our Kaiser Wilhelm’: Documents in the social and religious history of the Transvaal, 1860-1890" (2004), is especially helpful, as it explores the relationship between religion and education. Works by Poewe and Van der Heyden (1999), Jordaan (2011) and Edward Lebaka (2012) are also mentioned.

The politics of patronage is discussed at the hand of texts already mentioned. Bruce Berman's "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: The politics of uncivil nationalism" (1998) is also useful. Many of Read's acquaintances were somehow involved in the arts, and the popular strains and conventions of white (and particularly British) artists in Tladi's time are discussed specifically with this in mind. In terms of the quest for a national identity in the arts and especially landscape, Jeanne van Eeden's article "Collecting South African art in the 1930s: The role of Martin du Toit" (2008) is useful.

#### A PRACTICE-BASED STUDY IN HISTORY

Barone and Eisner believe that "[d]eliberation, inquiry, and imagination are the values that give direction to arts based research" (2012:158). In an already extensive discourse on landscape painting in South Africa, my contribution rests on new writing on Moses Tladi, as well as on presenting a body of work exploring landscape 'looking back'. I hope that my own practice in landscape offers an intuitive platform from which to understand Tladi's work. Although this methodology does not merely expand on a theoretical study of Tladi, and requires some difficult negotiation, the practice-based hermeneutics of the study ideally adds depth and empathy to my consideration of his work.

*It is not easy to try to perceive this complex art historical moment through the lens of a post-1948 and post-1994 South Africa. To understand Tladi's situation we have also to consider the internal dynamics of the local art world of the pre-1948 era. Matters of taste (conservative) and national identity (white) sat firmly alongside issues of race .*

Hayden Proud (in Read Lloyd 2009: n.p.)

# 1

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 AN ENGLISH GARDEN

As the main subject of some of Tladi's oil paintings, the garden could act as metaphor for the juncture between the grand narrative of British dominion and the 'domestic' reality of Tladi's life. Jeremy Foster believes (2008:22) that pastoral ideals were an important part of British policy in South Africa. He explains that in a Romantic harmony between 'peasant' life and the natural world, the



nation's strength would be located "in an unchanging, semi-feudal, place-bound way of life, emphasizing custom and tradition rather than capital and trade" (2008:22).<sup>1</sup> In Western history, gardening has a complex set of significations, some of which are prominently tied to the Imperial project. In his *Nature's government: Science, imperial Britain, and the "improvement" of the world* Richard Drayton explains that (2000:xvii)

Christian assumptions about man's place in nature played a central role in the making of Imperial Britain well into the nineteenth century. Ideas of Providence, and of Adamic responsibilities and prerogatives, were the ideological taproot of the First British Empire and, translated into political economy, they underpinned the Second, and the nation-states which were its successors.

Horticulture was the perfect manifestation of this ideal for the established and 'conservative' British ruling class, many of whom modelled their properties "imaginatively and physically on the estates of the paternal landed gentry in Britain" (Foster 2008:142). Herbert Read likely regarded gardening as a means of recreation and, like many emigrants, a means to create a familiar environment in a strange (and particularly unattractive and industrial) city. Read acquired a slightly isolated piece of land between the ridge and the Sachsenwald, one "rustic" enough for his Afrikaans wife, Lily Visser, who had grown up on a farm in the Free State. Having no capital, Read arranged for a mortgage loan and then approached an architect.<sup>2</sup> Read named the road to his house Anerley, after the area where he had lived as a child (Read Lloyd 2002:135), and the farm Lokshoek, after Lily's family farm. The area was soon developed and later included a convent school and some of the largest man-

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Bradford remarks that references to the "feudal" or "capitalist" countryside should be approached with caution, as both have steep political effects. The specific moment that transition took place is unclear, and in what she calls the "agrarian debate", the term "capitalist" is rarely examined and often used loosely (Bradford 1990:60).

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Baker was the most auspicious architect of the day, but as a protégé of Lord Milner he was not the first choice for the Afrikaans Lily Visser. Read instead approached the architect Harry Clayton.



**Figure 1:** Moses Tladi, *Lokshoek; Johannesburg - front facade of house*. [s.a.]. Oil on canvas, 25 x 35cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:14).

sions on the Rand, such as Timewell and Villa Arcadia, the estate of the Randlord Lionel Phillips. Angela Read Lloyd recalls that the Lokshoek house demonstrated England's arts and crafts movement (2009:121), and that Herbert Read was "a discerning collector of etchings and engravings", as well as "modest" paintings, most of which he ordered from Europe (2002:138). The Reads were familiar with many of the emerging Transvaal artists – Albert Gyngell and Herbert Read's children were friends, and Sydney Carter had a studio not far from Lokshoek. Apart from importing art, Read was interested in the work of local artists, and he followed the career of the young Gregoire Boonzaaier with interest (Read Lloyd 2009:206). The Reads enjoyed family picnics and walking in the Sachsenwald<sup>3</sup> close to Lokshoek (Read Lloyd 2009:62).

Herbert Read gradually created an extensive garden, a source of great pride and pleasure to the Read family. Incidentally, both his first wife, Lily Visser, and second wife, Blanche Gogh, enjoyed gardening (Read Lloyd 2009:2, 10). The garden was a fantasy play area for the children, a means of decorating the estate, as well as a place for growing vegetables and fruit and keeping chickens (Read Lloyd 2009:4-9). Angela Read Lloyd remembers that "carefully selected" herbaceous plants were ordered from England (2009:28) and explains that an "awareness of garden, and landscape, and 'the view' began early in life" (Read Lloyd 2009:18). She introduces her family narrative in *The Artist in the garden* with an extensive prologue called "Paradise", indicative, perhaps, of a deeply entrenched belief in a harmonious way of life between mankind and the garden.

The eighteenth-century English garden relates a "complex matrix of associations" (Shultz 1985:17), grounded in the belief that Nature can be divided in three parts: paradise within the enclosed garden walls, the rural world encircling it, and the fallen world at its furthest extremity, which is "wild,

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<sup>3</sup>A forest planted and named by the German emigrant Eduard Lippert. It was later implemented for forestry by Hermann Ekstein's Braamfontein company (Read Lloyd 2002:133).



**Figure 2:** Moses Tladi, *Lokshoek - East facade*. [s.a.]. Oil on canvas board, 23.5 x 29cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:[n.p.]).

tangled, and unkempt” (Shultz 1985:17).<sup>4</sup> Although sacred in its origins (both in antique Christian theology and Stoic pantheism, as Baker and Biger argue in *Ideology and landscape in historical perspective* (1992:40)), the garden was adapted to suit a relatively secular lifestyle. The Garden belonged to the country life of social intercourse (Shultz 1985:21), “a new Eden in which are installed latter-day Adams and Eves in knee breeches and afternoon gown, who fear no divine exclusionary restrictions” (1985:37). In his *Paradise preserved: Recreations of Eden in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century England* (1985:16), Shultz explains that the English aristocrats’ gardens

[...] communicate more than the traditional Christian message that in death one finds eternal life. They convey also the radical message that paradise is regainable on earth in historical time, a belief increasingly in fervor throughout the century to peak in the millennialism of the French Revolution.

Foster calls the garden “that most cultivated of human artefacts” (2008:7). In a broader vein, he believes (2008:157) that

[h]ouses and gardens are usually thought of in scenographic terms (style) but there are also inventions that mediate our inhabitation of the world, both through the way they organize space and how they are made. Houses and gardens are the most proximate tangible portion of the spatial world we inhabit, where that world is most likely to be experienced through preconscious, participatory corporeal engagement – typically, through the roots of architectural construction: site, enclosure, and materials.

On tour at one of London’s many flower and home exhibits, Herbert wrote to his son Edward in South Africa: “Even 4 or 5 hours could only absorb a fraction of its wonders. ... the gardens are marvellous ... massed arrangements of spring flowers round artificial ponds which do not look artificial,

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<sup>4</sup>The painting by Thomas Cole, *Expulsion from Eden* (c. 1827-28), stands as one of the best representations of the dichotomous world drawn between paradise and the wilderness outside (Shultz 1985:17).

& groupings of shrubs & trees” (cited in Read Lloyd 2002:228). Read, like many settlers, imported foreign plants such as jacarandas, hydrangeas and roses (Read Lloyd 2009:27-28; 2002:139), keeping a firm hand over his garden to maintain order. Simultaneously, South African plants were displayed at imperial exhibitions in Britain, maintained as the treasures of colonial conquest. Cosgrove (1998:236) ascribes the Victorian conservancy to an obsession with control: these gardens and parks

[...] represented not so much control over land as control over the very processes of nature, a control which reached its clearest expression in the ultimate ‘gardenesque’, the Victorian conservatory which displayed the green and blossoming treasures of colonial territories in an entirely artificial environment wherein land is irrelevant and natural processes depend utterly on human control.

## 1.2 TLADI’S ESTATE PAINTINGS

In its eighteenth and nineteenth century origin, the picturesque refers to scenery suitable for being painted, in the case of which it doesn’t, the artist is allowed a measure of ‘deception’ rather than ‘imitation’ (Gilpin 1808). Newman (1962:63) believes that the picturesque is “a sweet disorder”, following Uvedale Price who writes in 1794 that the effect of the picturesque is curiosity, and that it embodies the “coquetry of nature; it makes beauty more amusing, more varied, more playful” (Ashfield & de Bolla 1996:274). The light and ‘sweet’ nature of Tladi’s *Landscape, woodfetcher* (figure 19) could be regarded as a good example of the picturesque in this regard. In a fascinating study on the picturesque and imperialism, Jeffrey Auerbach explains that picturesque landscape painting portrayed the peripheral territories (the colonies) as similar to the British landscape, in effect helping to “unite and homogenize the many regions of the British empire” (2004:47). He explains that through a complex process of exchange, the picturesque frame “served to conceal the hardships and beautify the frequently unpleasant surroundings that characterized life in the imperial zone, refract-

ing local people and conditions through a single, formulaic lens” (2004:48). An interesting argument can be made for Tladi as artist and gardener, mediating the soil and the representation thereof to appeal to certain British norms. A few artists, such as A.W. Johnstone, Nellie Gogh (Read’s sister-in-law) and G.W. Pilkington (who was commissioned by Herbert Read), painted the Lokshoek garden. When Tladi’s interest in painting was discovered by the family, he was encouraged by being given materials and extra time for painting (Read Lloyd 2002:185) and it was presumably in the time following his ‘discovery’ that Tladi would sit in the garden and paint his estate works.

The Read estate was not only Tladi’s place of employment, but also his place of residence for a significant portion of his life. Angela Read Lloyd explains that there were “staff quarters” at the old carriage house, with a staff bathroom, ironing room, tool shed and pump house. There was a lawn and a piece of ground “by the back wall, where staff could grow their own vegetables if they wished” (Read Lloyd 2009:11). Tladi lived in the loft of the house at first, she explains, where the children would often visit him (Read Lloyd 2009:151). The safe environment of the Read estate surely benefited Tladi’s painting aspirations. Brian Kennedy argues that converts who entered into “long-term employment” in the town and lived on their employer’s property were better adapted to the “pressures of the large-scale, industrial world of the city” (1992:201).

Tladi’s estate pictures were found in the possession of Rekiloe, his daughter who sadly passed away recently. Three of Tladi’s garden images are shown in Read Lloyd’s book, two being views of the main house (figure 1 and figure 2) and one of a cherry tree and the carriage house (figure 3). Lokshoek; *Johannesburg – front facade of house* (figure 1) positions the viewer at roof-level with the house, as if looking at a picture in an estate agent’s catalogue. Whereas figure 2 has a deeper awareness of tone, the stark light of figure 1 flattens the images, the plants, path and building, reducing them to simple (and somewhat stilted) colours and forms. In the view of the east facade, clouds and shadows are emphasized, adding character to the image, and the large shadow cast over the bowling green evokes a feeling of peacefulness and nostalgia.



**Figure 3:** Moses Tladi, *Cherry tree and old carriage house at Lokshoek*. [s.a.]. Oil on artist's board, 25 x 25.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:0).



Although the estate pictures, in terms of their similarity to pictures by other commissioned artists, belong to a relatively public sphere, they reveal something of the intimacy of Tladi's relationship to the garden and his encounters therein: Read Lloyd explains that Colin Allen was busy with a pastel sketch of the Read garden while Tladi "did one of the jacaranda tree, which he gave to Moog. We did it together. Moses did a painting of the house at the same time" (Read Lloyd 2009:77).<sup>5</sup> Tladi would later sketch and send a painting by post to Dr Colin Allan, *Caught in a Wind* (figure 36), which Allan received as a special gift (Read Lloyd 2009:79). Colin Allen and Tladi were described as "comrades in art" (Read Lloyd 2009:76). Colin, who was in school at the time, remembered later that "[Tladi's] ability rapidly developed. He could portray anything. But he was limited in medium" (Read Lloyd 2009:77).

A measure of stateliness can be detected in figure 1, but figure 2 depicts the house with more empathy, perhaps as a sanctuary, or stripped of figures to present something melancholic. Compared to the lifestyle of most of the disenfranchised, the estate must have been incredibly luxurious. Cobley explains that before the 1940s, Africans acquired land in townships like Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare (1990:31) as well as Alexandra and Evaton, five miles north-east of Vereeniging (1990:32). Yet despite this, even those having an income of double the average wage would not have been able to support the lifestyle of the most unskilled white workers (Cobley 1990:49). Tladi did not own his own property, but lived on his father-in-law's land both in Evaton (Read Lloyd 2009:144) and later Sophiatown. Perhaps his work *Cherry tree and carriage house* (figure 3) reveals a sense of belonging he felt at the Read estate. This work chooses an element of nature as focal point, with the carriage house, which was where Tladi's studio was situated, in the background (Read Lloyd 2009:93). The composition is interesting, suggesting a technique where the viewer is partly blocked from the narrative part of the image, thereby creating a sense of mystery.

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<sup>5</sup>Moog was the nickname of Margaret Read, Herbert's one daughter.



**Figure 4:** Moses Tladi, *Study - roses in a vase*. [s.a.]. Watercolour and gouache on board, 22 x 34cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:183).



**Figure 5:** Moses Tladi, *White roses in a glass vase*. [s.a.]. Watercolour on board, 22.5 x 28.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:181).

Two still life works were found among the family members of Tladi, a genre which places Tladi metaphorically ‘inside’ the house of the Reads. The specific vases in *White roses in a glass vase* (figure 5) and *Study — Roses in a vase* (figure 4), belonged to the Lokshoek house. Flower decoration in this context served a purely decorative function, and the painting thereof doubled as a kind of artistic rite of passage. Tladi framed these two works in certain European conventions (perhaps because he was encouraged to), likening himself to other aspirational British artists like Herbert Read, who also painted occasionally. Interestingly, Tladi’s two still lifes differ quite dramatically in character: one is free and expressive and the other stilted and static. The two styles could point to the different stylistic influences from his mentors, or simply denote the artist’s inclination to experiment. Godby explains in *Is there still life?: Continuity and change in South African still life painting* that early twentieth century South African still life painting adopted European models and had little interest in challenging the means of representation, which, at the time, was a major interest of European artists. He believes that despite the numerous aims of the genre (such as narrative, formal or symbolic (2007:14)), flower paintings generally tend to have little symbolic value beyond communicating joy in nature and the privilege of looking at it (Godby 2007:21). Still life in this regard

symbolises the decorative function of the garden outside. Angela Read writes of her own experience of still life painting as a child. This unappealing exercise, she explains in retrospect, denoted her “classic grounding in the art of painting, in the tradition of the great old masters”, which she believes Tladi was also offered (2009:36).

### 1.3 ASPIRATIONAL CONVENTIONS, CLASS, ‘MORALITY’ AND CONQUEST

Tladi exhibited for the first time in 1929 at the tenth Annual Exhibition of the Johannesburg Academy, two years after his arrival at Lokshoek. He also showed at the National Gallery in Cape Town (Read Lloyd 2009:65), the South African Academy and at the Gainsborough Galleries in Johannesburg (Read Lloyd 2009:202). Most of these galleries, at the time, promoted British imperialist ideas. Van Eeden (2008:194) quotes art historian Jillian Carman as saying that in the early twentieth century the Johannesburg Art Gallery

[...] ‘provided an opportunity for certain powerful British mine owners, the Randlords, to reaffirm the superiority of the British way of life and construct a civil society that would attract suitable immigrant families to service the mines and their community’, thereby implicitly ‘highlighting the perceived differences in quality between European and so-called colonial art.’

Foster writes poetically that “[u]nlike other parts of the world ‘discovered’ in the early modern period, the African continent was never seen as an Eden. It belonged not to the New World but to the ecumene of the Old, of which it formed the farthest, most fearsome extremity” (Foster 2008:2). Foster explains that for many of the immigrant European artists the landscape around them (particularly the Transvaal — the Cape was often described in quite picturesque terms) was frustrating and unlike the landscapes they were used to; “[f]or all its seductive expansiveness, the view from the

Ridge was completely devoid of the Picturesque schema of field, grove, land, gleaming river, and half-hidden roof that usually led European eyes to the horizon” (Foster 2008:152).

The Picturesque remained class-related in its appeal to an educated elite “that could make the proper painterly associations”, Joseph Rosenblum explains in the *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain, 1780s to 1930s* (2010:457). Jeremy Foster explains that many of the better educated of the ‘progressive, urban intelligentsia’ in the Transvaal were involved in the arts, education and research institutions, as well as certain sectors of government and civil service (2008:35). For Herbert Read, Howard Pim and Albert Gyngell, one may argue, the moral and political open-mindedness with which they advanced Moses Tladi’s career was directly equivalent to their appreciation of the arts. The interaction between aesthetics and what could be termed ‘morality’ is deeply embedded in most of Western aesthetic theory. In its most literal form, it claims that “the grounds of our distinguishing between good and bad artworks are identical to our grounds for making ethical judgments” (Ashfield & De Bolla 1996:50), a contentious notion. Read Lloyd’s daughter-in-law Charlotte Moor Allen was a social worker in Orlando Township and lived at the mission house, Ekutuleni, in Sophiatown (Read Lloyd 2009:33). Herbert Read used to write letters on behalf of one of his staff members, Joel Lekobola, because he was unable to write (Read Lloyd 2009:28). Instances such as these reveal that the Read family and their acquaintances were aware of a certain moral obligation towards the disenfranchised, perhaps something tied to their appreciation of beauty and order.

Magubane explains in her post-colonial critique *Bringing the Empire home*, that typically, in the English worldview, the “ability to grant charity was invariably associated with superior social status” (2004:136), thereby becoming a “politics of class by virtue” (2004:35).<sup>6</sup> The autonomous subject helps those still in the “dust” to recognise and meditate on the higher aspects of human ex-

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<sup>6</sup>This is of course complicated by the fact that Tladi’s daughter Mmapula was herself an active humanitarian (Read Lloyd 2009:279).

perience, almost like someone pruning a plant in a garden towards perfection.<sup>7</sup> It was perceived that Africans asserted these ‘higher aspects’ through their aspirations in church and state leadership positions. Copley explains that many officers of the ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers Union) displayed a strong affiliation with white sympathisers, were eloquent in English, had a relatively luxurious lifestyle and “were anxious to maintain their differentiation from the proletarian rank and file” (1990:11). In *Intermediaries, interpreters, and clerks: African employees in the making of colonial Africa* Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts (2006:78) explain that some of South Africa’s best known nationalist leaders of the twentieth century served as or aspired to positions as interpreters. Sol Plaatje was a court interpreter before moving to a career in journalism and later in politics, and his artistic endeavours included translations of Shakespeare into Setswana, and Tswana folktales and proverbs into English (Lawrance, Osborn & Roberts 2006:3). Nelson Mandela recalls in his autobiography that “[a] career as a civil servant was a glittering prize for an African, the highest that black man could aspire to” (in Lawrance, Osborn & Roberts 2006:78).

Tladi was not the only African painter exhibiting at the time, although he was perhaps the most distinguished in the field of landscape. Read Lloyd’s research (2009:67-68) reveals an interesting event, namely an *Exhibition of the paintings of Gerard Sekoto & the African schoolboys from the Priory, Rosettenville* held at the Gainsborough Galleries.<sup>8</sup> The catalogue for this show lists works by three older artists — Sekoto, Segwai and Tladi — and a number of school boys between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. The titles of paintings fall roughly under three categories: urban

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<sup>7</sup>In a 1716 text on the sublime (Ashfield & De Bolla 1996:42), Sir Richard Blackmore reveals some of the ideology behind ‘morality’, art and the autonomous subject: “If it be his ambition to write extraordinary things, becoming the height and importance of his subject, worthy of his character, and fit to be transmitted to future times, he should not grovel in the dust, nor breathe in thick impure air, but keep above, and inure himself to lofty contemplation, till by a constant correspondence and intercourse with superior objects, he gets a habit of thinking in the great and elevated manner, peculiar to the heroic poet.”

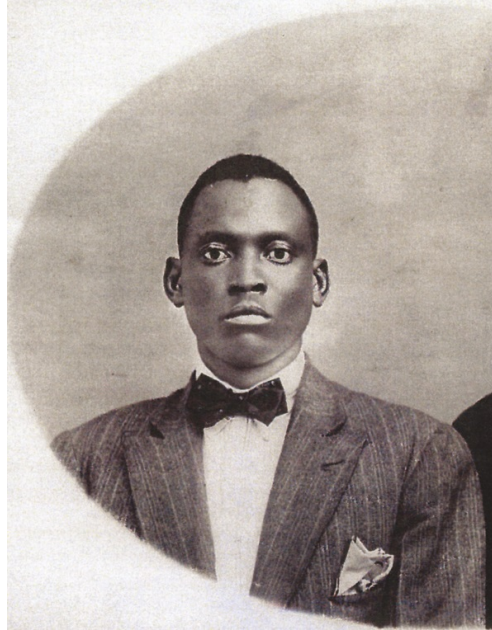
<sup>8</sup>Sack explains that exhibitions that showed the works produced at mission colleges (such as the Diocesan Training Centre in Pietersburg and St. Peters Secondary School in Rosettenville) gave artists such as Sekoto and Mancoba exposure to the white art buyership (Sack 1988).

and domestic titles such as *Mine compound*, *Sophiatown*, *Boy with broom*; religious themes such as *Crucifixion*, *St Peter*, *Christ healing a blind man*; and images of nature, such as *Two trees*, *Seascape*, *Still life*, *Veld fire*, *The streamlet*. Moses Tladi showed two works, *Kopjes* (for sale at 6 guineas) and *Sekbukuneland* (8 guineas). None of the younger artists, for instance Hermann Matlejoane, Mathew Job and Samuel Simpala, are known today, except Sekoto, who must have become established as an artist around that time.

The establishment, influenced by benevolent liberals such as Howard Pim, prized itself as being a place where artists who were otherwise disenfranchised could expose and share their realities or beliefs in the form of figurative art. The media responded positively to Tladi's work in most cases, and a reporter writes in 1938 that Tladi's "drawing, perspective, composition and even colour denote a measure of technique that compels the visitor (and critic) to take his art seriously" (quoted in Read Lloyd 2009:65). Nonetheless, the extreme difference between selling prices in the exhibitors work reveal a deeply entrenched bias; a painting by someone like Roworth would have been sold for up to 450 guineas, and that of an unknown white artist for up to 100 or 300 guineas (Read Lloyd 2009:103). Tladi's work was sold here for a mere six or eight guineas.

#### 1.4 PATRONS, LIBERALS AND THE PETTY BOURGEOISIE

Urban men, where possible, engaged in activities like soldiering, music and art, something which Magubane believes African men did to assert their agency against some of the prejudices of their time (2004:129). These men formed debating societies, literary societies, choral groups and sporting clubs, some as early as the 1890s and 1900s (1990:68-69). In his interesting study *Class and consciousness: The black petty bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950* Copley (1990) analyses what he calls the black petty bourgeoisie (BPB), an 'occupational elite' in the period 1924 to 1950. This group, he believes, included professions such as clerks and interpreters, journalists, certificated teachers, or-



**Figure 6:** Anonymous, *Photograph of Moses Tladi* [S.a]. Black and white studio photograph, no dimensions given. Private Collection. (Read Lloyd 2009:[n.p.]

dained clergy, trained nurses and social workers, chiefs appointed by the Government, headmen and indunas, fixed traders such as shopkeepers, general dealers, eating-house owners, and a handful of medical doctors and lawyers.

Although Tladi occupied none of the listed professions, his affiliation with certain activist groups on civic matters could position him roughly in this social group. Tladi exhibited on numerous occasions – one journalist even referred to him as the “now well-known native artist Tladi”. Of his political involvement, unfortunately, not much is recorded. Tladi’s daughter remembers that he travelled to Cape Town with a civic delegation sometime before the 1950s regarding land ownership (Read Lloyd 2009:263). He also pursued contact with the American philanthropist Raymond Phillips, and was (after substantial deliberation) able to use his connections to acquire a bigger house through the Oppenheimer trust later in his life (Read Lloyd 2009:182). As I understand it, the influential medical doctor, teacher and president of the early ANC (1938), Dr A.B. Xuma, lived just off Oxford Road

around 1929, close to the Reads (Read Lloyd 2009:37). Xuma had connections with Howard Pim and J.D. Rheinallt-Jones (*Dr Alfred Bathini Xuma* [s.a.]) and it is likely that Tladi met him or at least knew about him when he lived at Lokshoek.

Despite the general engagement of Pedi men in what Deborah James calls the world of industrial capitalist production (1996:52), Tladi's job as servant bound him to a domestic sphere. Keith Allen believes Tladi was "[h]umble and reticent, he had no confidence, he couldn't measure himself" and that it was "fascinating that he came so far" (Read Lloyd 2009:153).

Steven Sack explains that the pioneers of black South African art (1920s — 1930s) arose from three streams, "those living and working in the countryside (e.g. Tivenyanga Qwahe), those living and working in the cities (e.g. John Koenakeefe Mohl) and those constantly moving between these two localities (e.g. Gerard Bhengu)" (Sack 1988). He explains that during the first decades of the 20th century, entering into the cash economy became essential for most Africans, and forced them to either sell their labour or, if skilled, the products of their labour (Sack:1988). Tladi was not dependent on the selling of his paintings and Read Lloyd explains that the Read family supported his endeavours with painting while he remained employed as gardener. For artists who were unemployed, patronage proved a promising alternative. In his article "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state" Bruce Berman writes that (1998:325)

[t]he origin of differentiation in the spreading social relations of capitalism brought the issue of class formation into the moral economy of communities in ways that both reinforced and cut across existing cleavages. Finally, Christian converts who rejected indigenous religious belief and practice, and who embodied Western modernity in their literacy, dress and occupation directly challenged conceptions of cultural identity and community membership.

Patronage offered many perceived advantages, including economic and social privileges (for instance



funding the social and cultural activities that offered cohesion to the emerging BPB), emphasizing the social and cultural exclusivity of the BPB, and furthering the black franchise by using the ‘non-racial’ ideology of the white bourgeoisie as leverage (Cobley 1990:90; Kennedy 1992:216-217). Compared to the relative advantages of white artists, artists dependent on patronage had less freedom for autonomous experimentation. Nettleton explains (2011:10-11) that twentieth-century African artists

came from a multiplicity of backgrounds [...]. Market forces, shaped by the tastes, traditions and assumptions of Western and Westernized patrons, largely dominated the demand for modern art forms (tourist and high) in African urban centres.

Pemba (1912-2001) and Bhengu (1910-1990) worked in relatively realist (i.e. naturalistic) paradigms. The expressive and abstracted figuration associated with later African artists, Nettleton believes, was significantly influenced by institutions such as Cecil Skotnes’ Polly Street Art Centre, framing high art “in the universalizing forms of Western modernism” (2011:13). She explains that this created a certain preconception of Africa and African art, namely that “to qualify as distinctively ‘African’, [painting] would preferably be expressive and not naturalistic” (Nettleton 2011:13).<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, not only white patrons were interested in art during this early period. John Koenakeefe Mohl, who worked in Sophiatown and Soweto (1940s-1980s), also sold art to black patrons (Sack 1988).

Cobley believes patrons on the giving end often felt justified as trustees (Cobley 1990:88). The benevolent paternal colonial state acted as arbiter in conflict, specifically in the area of missionary and grassroots politics (Berman 1998:317). Foster (2008:40) writes that a

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<sup>9</sup>Nettleton (2011:13) critiques this, explaining that the expectation of expressive figuration

[...] not only denied the existence of a history of abstract visual art in Africa, and the ontological complexities of image-making within African contexts, such as that explored by Lawal (1996), but also the possibility that Africans might be able to develop either a realist or a completely abstract tradition of art.

romanticized view of Africans formed an integral and persuasive part of fundamentally racist assumptions and policies. It allowed members of the colonial national white elite to see themselves as paternal figures with a natural right to become involved in tribal legal and cultural affairs; it also allowed these whites to be perceived by conservative Africans as bulwarks against the designs of both more radical segregationists and the African intelligentsia.

In *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, published in eight volumes in 1901, Louis Creswicke reveals this bias (1901:65):

Here we see, within one year, how much was done for the protection of the Transvaal at the cost of British money and British blood. Looking back, it is easy to perceive that, but for our intervention, the South African Republic would have been slowly but effectually swallowed up. Cetchwayo and Sekukuni between them would have made a meal of the Transvaal.

Sadly, this seeming benevolence came at the cost of thousands of lives in concentration camps and in war. Apart from losses on both Afrikaans and British sides, the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) impacted African communities significantly. Bundy reveals that “[t]ens of thousands experienced enforced removals, the requisition of foodstuff and stock, and the destruction of homes and crops. Over 108,000 Africans were settled by April 1902 in sixty-six refugee camps set up by the British military authorities” (1988:207).

## 1.5 EMIGRANTS AND THEIR TOPOGRAPHY

Apart from its strong economic hold on Johannesburg during the 1920s, Britain’s impact in the fields of art and culture was also considerable. By the time Tladi started painting (between 1925 and 1929) landscape was a widespread form of painting among resident artists, especially in the Cape.

Van Eeden explains that until the 1930s, British (and Dutch) conventions were still normative (as proliferated by for instance Roworth), and that this was largely influenced by art prints sold and distributed from art dealers such as Emil Schweickerdt in Pretoria (Van Eeden 2008:164). Some of the romantic realist painters of “conservative” sensibilities included Frans Oerder, W.G. Wiles, W.H. Coetzer, J.E.A. Volschenk and Tinus de Jongh (Van Eeden 2008:166).

Emigrant artists commonly remained working in European conventions, applying their styles to the local topography. Two such artists were Albert Gyngell (1866-1949) and Sydney Carter (1874-1945), both of whom Tladi encountered personally. Carter, a British emigrant, was trained at London’s Royal College of Art and came to Johannesburg in 1927 as an already mature artist (Read Lloyd 2009:205). Carter’s most apparent influence was his love for bluegum trees (*Bluegums Parys*, figure 7), as shown in paintings by Tladi such as *Blue gum trees and water* (figure 9), *Blue gum trees by water* (figure 8) and *Winter — trees, Driefontein* (figure 10).

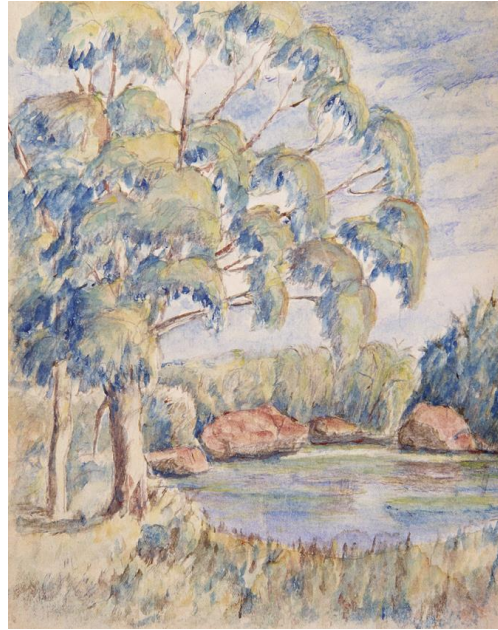
Read Lloyd believes that Tladi’s palette and fine brushwork was influenced by Albert Gyngell, a British artist who was trained at the Royal Academy School in London. Gyngell was sent to South Africa for medical reasons, and worked as storekeeper and stationmaster for many years. In 1910 he started teaching and painting in Johannesburg, and in 1911 he was appointed the first curator of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. When he retired from this position he lived and worked in Rosebank, not far from the Reads. Read Lloyd believes that Gyngell was a man of great generosity, perhaps because Collin Allen and Tladi were allowed to visit him in his studio (2002:185). Gyngell’s painting is more concerned with mimetic figuration and less ‘free’ than some of Tladi’s paintings. Apparently some of the same locations can be seen in works by Gyngell and Tladi, suggesting that they might have sketched together (Read Lloyd 2009:282-283).

Resident artists grew increasingly interested in local topography. In the decades after 1930s, as Foster and Van Eeden (2008:164) explain, a greater focus on South African identity emerged.

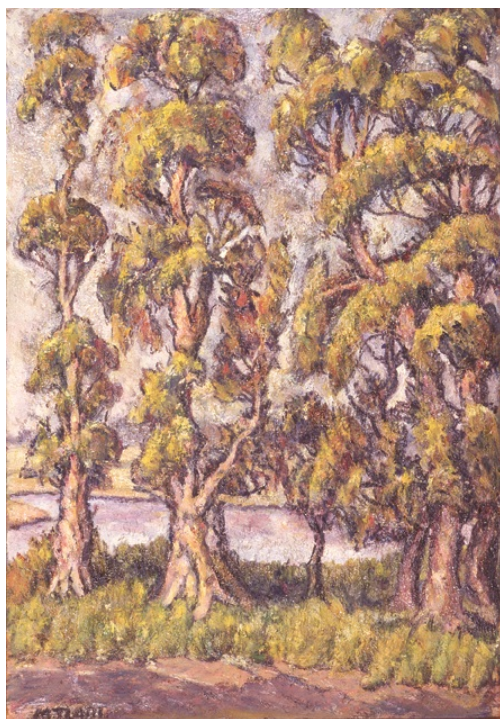
During these decades, a preoccupation with the native landscape was latent in many



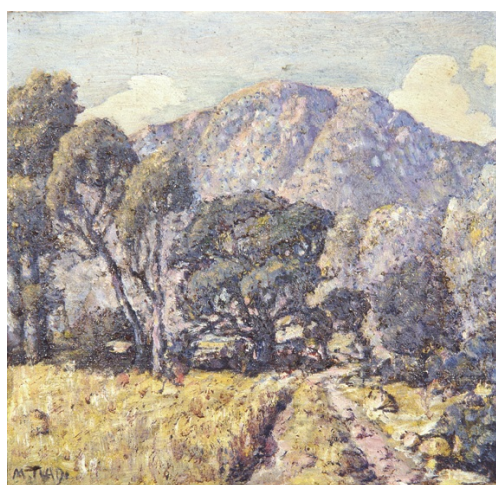
**Figure 7:** Sydney Carter, *Bluegums Parys*. [s.a.]. Oil on canvas, 69.5 x 85.5cm. Private Collection. [Online]. Available: <http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/sydney-carter/bluegums-parys-qpakOWRdTyitd2KfsbTkyw2> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014].



**Figure 8:** Moses Tladi, *Blue gum trees by water*. [s.a.]. Pencil and wash on board, 25 x 20cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:120).



**Figure 9:** Moses Tladi, *Blue gum trees and water*. [s.a.]. Oil on wood panel, 34.5 x 24.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:176).



**Figure 10:** Moses Tladi, *Winter - trees, Driefontein* [Tladi's title]. [s.a.]. Oil on board, 25 x 26cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:175).

different forms of cultural production, and the geographical imagination – that is, a “sensitivity towards the significance of place, space, and landscape in the constitution and conduct of social life” – was a constant strand in cultural and political debates (Foster 2008:50).

Tladi’s work was praised for its topographical accuracy, as can be seen in two newspapers clippings from that time. Bernard Lewis writes in *The Cape* of c.1931: “Tladi tells the stark truth in a poetic way” and: “The atmosphere of the Witwatersrand is in those two pictures unmistakable to all who know the Transvaal” (cited in Read Lloyd 2009:126). And in a 1938 article a writer simply called D.G. writes that “Sekhukuneland (sic) is a well-composed oil of mountain scenery. [...] The artist gives an effect of his home scenery that is more convincing than the facile painting of more sophisticated artists” (cited in Read Lloyd 2009:65).

An artist often noted for his convincing depiction of topography is Adolph Jentsch (1888 - 1977), a German emigrant who found the barren Namibian landscape (then South West Africa) his source of inspiration (figure 11 and figure 14). Jentsch’s watercolour landscapes are simplistic and serene, sensitive to the small changes in the weather and geography, and rarely exaggerated. Esmé Berman describes his brushwork as intuitive; “Whereas the brush, in Pierneef’s hand, was basically an instrument of colour application, to Jentsch the brush was an extension of his nervous system – his brushwork is the centre of his style” (1994:107). Berman believes that Jentsch was a meditative painter who did not like “intellectualised abstraction” or “unnecessary emotionalism” (1994:106). He is also described as “a spiritual painter with mystical inclinations” (*Adolph Jentsch (1888 - 1977)* 2014), as well as a tireless walker who derived pleasure from the natural world (*Adolph Jentsch* 1970). Jentsch came to South West Africa partly to escape the political turmoil in his native Germany at the time.

In their escapism and sensitive response to the landscape, I believe there are similarities between Jentsch and Tladi. Tladi’s watercolour sketches illustrate particularly how gently Tladi works with



**Figure 11:** Adolph Jentsch, *Swakopmund*. [S.a]. Watercolour, 39 x 61cm. Private Collection [Online]. Available: <http://www.absolutart.co.za/masters/adolph-jentsch> [Accessed 21 Oct 2014]



**Figure 12:** Moses Tladi, *Landscape - riverbed*. [s.a.]. Watercolour on board, 20 x 25.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:239).



**Figure 13:** Moses Tladi, *Road and mountains - study*. [s.a.]. Watercolour on paper pasted onto artist's board, 13.5 x 23cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:57).



**Figure 14:** Adolph Jentsch, *South West Africa*. [S.a]. Watercolour, 18.5 x 36cm. Private Collection [Online]. Available: <http://www.absolutart.co.za/masters/adolph-jentsch> [Accessed 21 Oct 2014]





**Figure 15:** Moses Tladi, *Trees with great aloe*. [s.a.]. Watercolour on board, 20 x 25.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:253).

the painting medium. Three of Tladi's landscape sketches, probably done in situ,<sup>10</sup> *Landscape Riverbed* (figure 12), *Road and mountain* (figure 13) and *Trees with great aloe* (figure 15), bear an immediacy of character and a sense of atmosphere. The artist seems to have been drawn by the 'essence' of the landscape, by particular aspects of the geology and specific forms of flora. The brushwork in figure 13 suggests that Tladi painted 'loosely', not depicting each element, but rather giving an overall impression of the landscape by mimicking the texture and colours of the veld with his brush. The stillness in these works remind of the vast landscapes of Jentsch.

It is possible that Tladi's intuitive brushwork was inhibited by his use of the oil medium. In a work such as *River Scene* (figure 16), however, his tone is equally sensitive. This work is one of Tladi's most affective works, belonging more specifically to a 'Wilderness' paradigm. In the article "Transvaal Romantic: an exploration of Romantic elements in the landscape paintings of Moses Tladi", I explore the work in more depth, arguing that it depicts the landscape as alien and 'unknowable', yet simultaneously has a specific preoccupation with place.

In *The Iconography of Landscape*, John Lucas writes that the 'picturesque' is characteristic of artworks that aim at pathos but have a distanced viewpoint and offer vague emotions (1988:83). The anti-picturesque [...] offers a more original concern with place, more detail, has a gravity of vision and interpretation, and is known by human association with place (1988: 83-84). Tladi's depictions of his surroundings are always very particular. *River scene* speaks of a geographical setting that would barely incite the imagination unless painted in situ. Perhaps the artist "fell in love with certain aspects of Nature" as Newman describes in *The Romantic Rebellion* (1962: 100). Tladi's *River scene* might contemplate the Ngwaritsi River flowing through Tladi's ancestral

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<sup>10</sup>There is unfortunately no record to tell us which of Tladi's paintings were made in situ. In some cases Angela Read Lloyd based her assumptions on knowledge of the Johannesburg area, and in others on conversations she had with Tladi's daughters, Rekiloe and Mmapula.



**Figure 16:** Moses Tladi, *River scene*. [s.a.]. Oil on canvas, 51 x 61cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:25).

Ga Phaala, or the Jukskei River near Kensington (Coetsee 2013:9).

Compared to the picturesque style of artists who framed ‘peripheral territories’ in the formulaic lens of the countries they came from (Auerbach 2004:48), Tladi’s concern with place is more particular, more like a ‘childhood memory’.

#### 1.6 PASTORAL SETTINGS, ARCADIAN CHARM

Urban dwellers from different backgrounds propagated romantic notions about agriculture and the countryside. Drayton explains that to the British imperialists, agriculture was “nature sanctified”, and crucial to the culture of British expansion (2000:xvii). Foster believes popular pastoralist ideas originated in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain and were strengthened by the “idealism and future-oriented dirigisme of Milnerite Reconstruction” (2008:39).<sup>11</sup> Cobley (1990:75) argues (in a somewhat old fashioned tone) that

as the black petty bourgeoisie began to emerge in the teeming urban locations and townships, the identity and heritage of the once prosperous *kholwa* communities in the countryside was incorporated in the new petty bourgeoisie consciousness, taking on the aspect of an increasingly romanticised folk memory.

It is possible to ascribe the nostalgic, romantic undertone in Tladi’s rural works to this large-scale urbanisation of young people. The Romantic movement in Europe and Britain, largely an urban movement, appealed to young people’s loss of folk culture, community and their ‘connection to

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<sup>11</sup>Foster refers to projects implemented by Lord Milner, High Commissioner of SA in this period, to remodel administration, develop land settlements by British colonists, build railways, and improve the justice and education systems. This idealism also aimed at rebuilding relationships between British (primarily mining magnates) and Afrikaner politicians towards a stronger ‘white race’ (*Alfred Milner* [s.a.]

the land'.<sup>12</sup> Due to increasing industrialisation, Cosgrove argues in *Social Formation and symbolic landscape* (1998:226), the “artist-genius” placed “the truths of common humanity against the falsity of a social order which regarded people as instruments of mechanical production”. Perhaps Tladi depicted rural settings as peaceful because of the increasingly regulated nature of urban context. Delius is of the opinion that (1990:6-7)

[...] despite their impoverishment, the rural areas — especially the reserves represented places of refuge from white authority and from the social corrosion of capitalist relationships. Of course, the reserves were by no means immune to the effects of either of these phenomena but both communal tenure and chiefly authority provided barriers against the complete domination of their lives by white officials, employers and the market.

The Read family was familiar with rural farming life, despite the fact that they moved in relatively ‘aristocratic’ circles.<sup>13</sup> Lily Read (née Visser) grew up on the farm Lokshoek in the Free State, one of the farmsteads nearly destroyed in the Anglo-Boer War. The house was ransacked, furniture burned, windows broken and the family graveyard desecrated (Read Lloyd 2002:128-129). Herbert Read’s second wife, Blanche Ellen Read (née Gogh), whom he married after Lily passed away, seems to have had a more romanticised view of the countryside. In a letter to the Read children at Lokshoek (Johannesburg), she describes a road trip through the Free State and Transvaal with Herbert:

Hitched up by the roadside – a beautiful farm ... A fine big healthy young Dutchman was ploughing a field with a well-matched team of red oxen the field was bounded by

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<sup>12</sup>The industrial revolution is but one of the complex aspects impacting the upsurge of Romantic landscape. Raymond Williams (1963) explores this in terms of five related cultural changes, among which are the growing culture of production, the relationship between the artist and the public and the notion of the autonomous genius (Cosgrove 1998:224-225).

<sup>13</sup>Read worked under Lionel Phillips, one of the most influential mining magnates in the country. Phillips’s wife, lady Florence Phillips, established the first collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

the river on two sides with undulating hills beyond. Well-grown willows & oak trees & flower gardens peeping through. All so happy & peaceful – now & then carts with friendly Dutch folk passing – the snickering call of the driver to his oxen & crack of the ox-whip – sight & senses all awake and drinking in nature ... (cited in Read Lloyd 2002:194).

One can argue that to the privileged elite, the “friendly Dutch folk” or any agricultural community remained part of a stagnant archaic landscape, one set against Britain’s rule and development and romanticised for its sentimental appeal.<sup>14</sup>

Bruce Berman explains that most models of African history were ahistorical, dealing either with a decontextualized present or an unchanging past (1998:309). Mönnig’s anthropological study on the Pedi could be an example of this.<sup>15</sup> One of the exhibitions in which Tladi showed categorises his work with objects unrelated except for their ‘Africanness’: “The work of a sixteen-year old Native in the Rosettenville Priory, paintings and etchings by a local Native artist, M. Tladi, bead ware, brass and silverware, mats, and a host of other things of interest are to be seen. A chair carved for Dingaan, the Zulu King, which was recently discovered in England, is also being shown” (Read Lloyd 2009:91).<sup>16</sup>

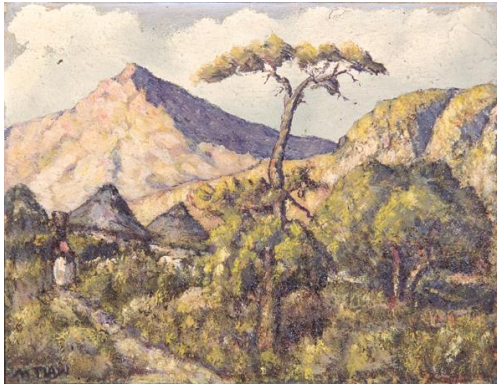
It is not clear how Tladi positioned himself in terms of this ‘African heritage’. Patterns of urbanization were complex in terms of how they affected class formation and reformation (Cobley

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<sup>14</sup>In the early text *South Africa and the Transvaal War* (1901), an anonymous writer on “The Transvaal Boers” explains that “[t]he Dutch farmer is in some respects very unlike his supposed counterpart in England. His pursuits are pastoral, not agricultural, for in most parts of South Africa the want of irrigation renders the cultivation of cereals impossible. [...] His labourers are all natives [...]. The unsophisticated Boer is a curious blend of hospitality and avarice” (unknown writer in Creswicke 1901:21-22).

<sup>15</sup>Mönnig’s extensive anthropological study *The Pedi* was written in 1967. Although somewhat outdated, the work is still cited by recent theorists, including Lebaka (2012), Jordaan (2011) and Delius and Rüter (2010).

<sup>16</sup>This is an article in *Umteteli wa Bantu* which describes the content of the Native arts and crafts section at an *International Exhibition of Art and Beauty* (1934).



**Figure 17:** Moses Tladi, *Three huts* [Tladi's title]. [s.a.]. Oil on board, 20 x 26cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:189).



**Figure 18:** John Constable, *Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River)*. 1916-17. Oil on Canvas, 133 x 158cm. Collection: Tate. [Online]. Available: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-flatford-mill-scene-on-a-navigable-river-n01273> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014].

1990:2). Bonner explains in “The politics of black squatter movements on the Rand, 1944-1952”, that between the 1890s and the 1910s great numbers of squatter shanties were built on mining land along the Rand and later broken up and re-constituted into urban locations (1990:90). The “exodus gathered force”, he explains, because of an extreme drought in 1932-33. In the years between 1926 and 1936 Johannesburg’s black population increased by 40%, with increasing numbers of women and children (Bonner 1990:91). For migrant workers living in hostels the countryside stood in sharp contrast to life on the East Rand, romanticised not so much in aesthetic as in practical terms. Lauren Segal’s interviews with migrants, published in “The human face of violence: Hostel dwellers speak”, reveal that most interviewees make reference to the high expenses of city life, the lack of freedom, lack of space and limited access to food (1992:199-200).

In the work *Three huts* (figure 17), Tladi’s landscape embodies something of rural life and custom. The composition is ordered and purposeful and his application of paint focused on representing form in space. Tladi seems aware of “framing” the scene, composing the elements in perfect

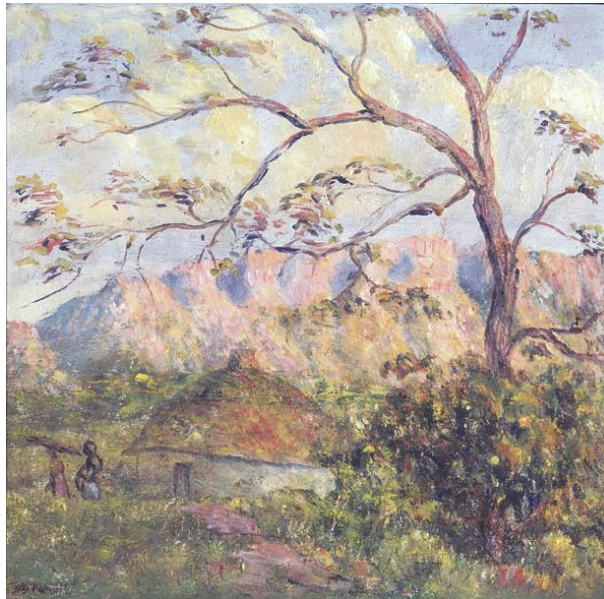
balance. Tladi's subject could be argued to be similar to Constable's *Flatford Mill* (Scene on a navigable river) (figure 18). Both make use of the specific character of the environment, and represent nature as the familiar ecology in which humankind peacefully goes about their work. Constable was one of the Romantics less interested in the spectacle of the sublime than in wielding the power of the everyday. Honour explains that Constable believed "it is the business of a painter not to contend with nature, and put this scene [a great sublime landscape] on a canvas of a few inches, but to make something out of nothing, in attempting which he must almost of necessity become poetical" (Honour 1979:68). Constable's poetry resides in transforming the everyday into the significant, most prominently his unassuming childhood environment "with its canals and field[s] and men going about their everyday occupations" (Honour 1979:69). Although reminiscent of a bygone era, Honour explains, Constable's work paid tribute to being 'truthful to reality'. His depiction of farm implements, for instance, was very contemporary (Honour 1979:71).

Tladi's work of the "everyday" is not nearly as detailed as Constable's paintings (and his work much smaller), yet they can be seen as transforming a lived environment into something significant, as well as appealing to the nostalgia of urbanised people. As I understand it, Tladi's rural paintings were inspired by visits to Sekhukhuneland and elsewhere in the Transvaal, places in stark contrast to his life in Johannesburg generally. Tladi's choice to stay in (and paint) the countryside and the rustic area Kensington B rather than Sophiatown, reveals something of his pastoral world-view. It is in works where Tladi 'disrupts' this pastoral landscape with a focus on human figures, that his work becomes somewhat more incongruous.

## 1.7 BODIES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Steven Sack (1988) believes that almost all of the pioneer artists worked on commission for white patrons, and that African personages (e.g. "sangomas, people in traditional dress, and rural scenes")

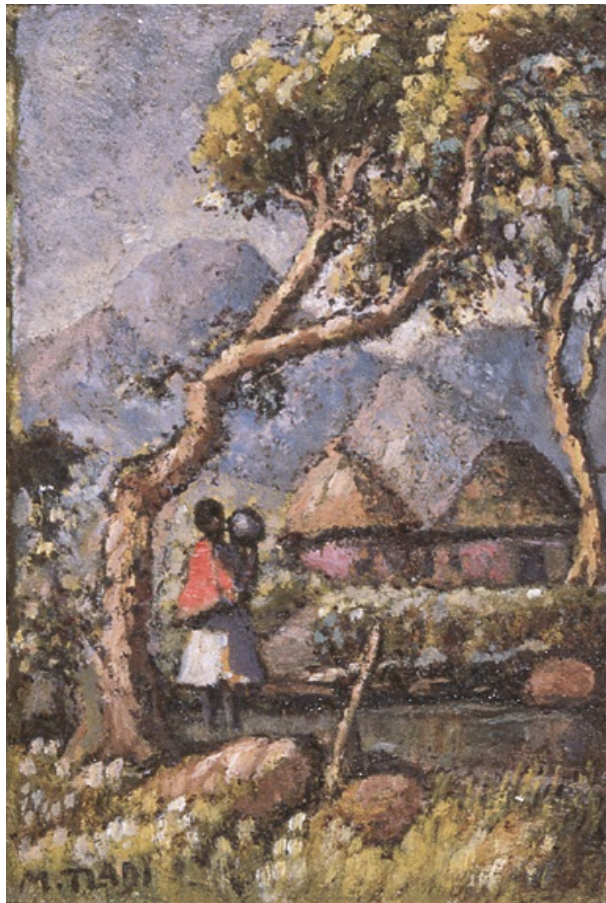




**Figure 19:** Moses Tladi, *Landscape - woodfetcher* [Tladi's title]. [s.a.]. Oil on wood panel, 30 x 31cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:187).

were popular themes. Copley writes about the same time (1990:74) that similar sentiments were rising among artists. He believes that the members of the 'elite class' who, in the 1920s, would have been "proud of their attributes and achievements as 'black Englishmen'", were by the 1930s trying to reaffirm their African identities. Apparently they valued and cultivated previously rejected ethnic loyalties, and cultivated a kind of "romanticised folk memory" (1990:75). White patrons, in turn, encouraged these ideas:

The subject matter of most of this early work, and that includes the watercolors of Gerard Bhengu, was essentially the portrayal of African life and customs. White artists popularize this [sic] fitted fairly comfortably into the current as well at that time. There existed an enormous demand for depictions of 'indigenous' scenes. African subjects and the South African landscape were popular (Steven Sack 1988:online).



**Figure 20:** Moses Tladi, *Water carrier* [Tladi's title] [s.a.]. Oil on canvas on board, 24.3 x 16.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:222).



**Figure 21:** Gerard Sekoto, *Washerwomen*. [s.a.]. Oil on canvasboard, 25.5 x 33cm. Private Collection. [Online]. Available: [http://www.johansborman.co.za/exhibition-work/art-that-inspires-our-10-20-anniversary-gallery-i/washerwomen 25 x 33 cm.jpg/](http://www.johansborman.co.za/exhibition-work/art-that-inspires-our-10-20-anniversary-gallery-i/washerwomen%20x%2033%20cm.jpg/) [Accessed 15 Oct 2014].

Cosgrove explains in *Social formation and symbolic landscape* (1998:26-27) that in landscape painting figures are most often included as means to pictorial ends, and when included are either “at repose” or, if active, distant and hardly noticeable. In works such as *Landscape — woodfetcher* (figure 19), *Water carrier* (figure 20) and *Three huts* (figure 17), Tladi adds figures who are either inactive or doing the small tasks suggested in the titles. In much of post-colonial writing, theorists are critical of this, arguing that the “aesthetic contemplation” of the Other distances the observer from the observed “while simultaneously asserting his dominance” (Magubane 2004:35).

In Tladi’s two works *Figures and hut* (figure 23) and *Landscape with figure* (figure 22), the artist portrays human figures as subjective participants in village life. In *Figures and hut* Tladi seems to depict a narrative moment, and *Landscape with figure* portrays a woman carrying a basket, two very domestic scenes. Although these two works depict the human body as active, Tladi’s technique is stilted and unconvincing. His method is similar to that of Sekoto (e.g. figure 21), yet less dynamic and has none of the political undertones. It is unclear whether Tladi struggles to give form to this subject or whether the works conform deliberately to a certain style or convention. Nettleton explains that for a long time African art was expected to be in a style of ‘expressive and abstracted figu-



**Figure 22:** Moses Tladi, *Landscape with figure*. [s.a.]. Oil on canvas on board, 15 x 22.8cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:227).

ration’ (Nettleton 2011:13).

Gerard Sekoto, who like Tladi was born and educated at a mission station, seems somewhat dismissive of Tladi, perhaps because he did not pursue his career from the township.<sup>17</sup> The two artists’ contact was limited, but Sekoto remembers some encounters (Read Lloyd 2009:82):

Yes, I do remember on my arrival in Johannesburg meeting Moses Tladi on three or four occasions. He did have some talent. [...] It was after [my] immediate fame that I then thought of Mohl to be raised up to my level as well as of Moses Tladi but unfortunately my attempt did not succeed since the Gainsborough Galleries were following a particular trend by then. Yes, it is true that Tladi was doing oil painting, but since he had not lived in Sophiatown as both Mohl and I, then his whereabouts got entirely lost, and I saw no more of his later works. Mohl had been the only one who lived in

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<sup>17</sup>Nettleton is critical of the term ‘township art’, “because it sets up false dichotomies between artists on the basis of race and class (see Van Robbroeck 1998)”. In the work of Dumile Feni, she believes, the term ‘township’ conjures up a particular colonial situation “in which the separation of township and suburb is a metaphor for endemic social injustice” (Nettleton 2011:15).



**Figure 23:** Moses Tladi, *Figures and hut*. [s.a.]. Oil on artist's board, 22.5 x 34cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:166).

Sophiatown, and I had made efforts for him to be on the same footing to the public as I had been.

#### 1.8 THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY

Moses Tladi's rural works seem to reveal a pastoral world-view, one in which 'living off the land' is more honourable than living in the township. Deborah James believes that in places like Sekhukhuneland a deep ideological rift existed between the traditional and modern, "resulting in sets of opposed dualities: town/country, townsman/peasant, Christian/non-Christian, *setswana/segoa*" (1995:1). It was not uncommon for rural migrant workers to experience hostility from Africans living in townships. Ivor Chipkin (2004:319) notes that the most apparent reason for the migrants' marginalization was their rural background. They were poor, "came to the cities as unskilled workers usually starting off as cleaners and night watchmen or in other low-paid menial jobs" and were not as sophisticated as township residents. The migrants, on the other hand, generally saw the township dwellers as

“morally corrupted” and “physically weak” (Chipkin 2004:323).<sup>18</sup> Commonly, Delius explains, Pedi migrants remained in contact with Sekhukhuneland, setting up credit associations and organizing support when a miner was injured or died. Migrant workers from the same village or district often stayed together, “travelled between the different mines visiting their village and peers and engaging in a range of activities with them from drinking to debate” (Delius 1990:3). Lauren Segal believes that although some hostel dwellers identified themselves as part of the township community, this was accompanied by a general disdain of township life and culture. Many of them felt “Johannesburg is not ‘home’” (1992:200).

During a visit to Ga Phaahla with Tladi’s daughter Rekiloe, Read Lloyd discovered that Tladi’s father, Selaoane, had been a sangoma, as well as a skilled ironsmith, a craft from which he would have made a good living. According to Enos, one of his distant family members, Tladi’s mother, Motebete, was skilled in pottery (Read Lloyd 2009:240). Both parents, Rekiloe explained, had become “believers” (Read Lloyd 2009:244). Rekgopetse Makate, the younger sister of Moses Tladi (who was in her nineties at the time), told Angela Read that “he always had beautiful clothes”<sup>19</sup> and that “Moses and his wife were very quiet-mannered and dignified [...] Everything had to be calm” (Read Lloyd 2009:235).

Both Tladi and his wife Sekhubami were educated at the Kilnerton High School, a Wesleyan school and one of the notable ‘native institutions’ mentioned in Cobley’s book. The early mission schools, he explains, “had been a haphazard affair”, and fell far short of offering sufficient education (Cobley 1990:61). Some of the institutions focused on training students for ‘industrial’ work, while

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<sup>18</sup>Delius also states that during initiation youths were warned that “locations, and especially urban women, were dangerous, disease-ridden and degrading” (1990:3).

<sup>19</sup>Dress issues are explored extensively in *Clothing and difference: Embodied identities in colonial and post-colonial Africa* (Hendricksen (ed.) 1996). Deborah James’s article “‘I dress in this fashion’: Transformations in Sotho dress and women’s lives in a Sekhukhuneland village, South Africa” (1996), is also included in this edition.

others such as Lovedale provided a more general academic education. Copley notes that the quality of instruction was variable (1990:62).<sup>20</sup> By 1912, about the time Tladi was at school, only 4.8% of the children in this area were attending school (Copley 1990:61). Prior to the mission schools, skills were generally learnt in a peer- or mentorship-based system which started from a young age with regards to farming and household tasks (Delius 1990:2). Initiation was the primary rite of passage for young people.<sup>21</sup> Delius explains (1990:4) that boys growing up in Sekhukhuneland in the early decades of the twentieth century would have been responsible for herding cattle, something Tladi also did as a child (Read Lloyd 2009:254). “Education at the cattle post and more generally amongst herders was largely in the hands of their peers and older youths. Only a tiny minority attended the handful of mission schools in the area and these children were predominantly from the small Christian communities”. Although some children took part in both traditional and mission education rites, Delius explains that generally people were sceptical and that attendance at schools was low, mainly because parents feared that schools were “recruiting grounds for Christianity” (Delius 1990:2; Nkadimeng 2008:17).

*The Schoolmaster* (figure 24) is one of Tladi’s few works depicting figures in an interior, and the only known work to depict children. Both Tladi and his wife attached great importance to the education of their children. Mmapula remembers, “[r]elations of ours said, ‘Send the kids out to work.’ But my father said ‘I have nothing to leave these children but their education ... no-one can take

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<sup>20</sup>A big debate existed on ‘native education’, as many white educationalists felt ‘industrial’ education for Africans was more beneficial than academic subjects, which were “unsuitable or irrelevant to a ‘less developed’ or ‘subject’ race” (Copley 1990:63). This debate would later result in the Bantu Education system (Sack 1988).

<sup>21</sup>Initiation was one of the most fundamental (and controversial) aspects of Pedi life contested by the mission project. The prohibition thereof (Delius 1990:3) questioned societal (and gender) roles which, according to Shiona Moodley, an archeologist from WITS, were not believed to be innate (2008:116). Initiation, (*koma*), takes the form of a ceremonial seclusion of the group of initiates under a heavy veil of secrecy (Moodly 2008:120), “compulsory for all youths of the appropriate age from early teens to mid-twenties to attend” and held “approximately every five years”. “The instruction they received laid great emphasis on rank, the office of chieftainship, and the authority of age. Boys were schooled in the history of the community and in the economic, political and sexual roles that they would assume as adults” (Delius 1990:2).



**Figure 24:** Moses Tladi, *The Schoolmaster*. [s.a.]. Pencil and wash on paper, 22.5 x 29cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:243).

that away from them” (Read Lloyd 2009:268). His illustrative style, also seen in *Caught in a wind*, shows five schoolchildren shyly but attentively listening to their self-assured teacher. The work is playful and seems to communicate the joy of going to school, rather than engage with debates on mission and native education.

Nkadameng explains that non-denominational schools were established after 1930, when some Pedi chiefs appeared before the 1930 Native Economic Commission. These schools would “accommodate the custom and traditional practices of the Pedi” (Nkadameng 2008:18). By the 1960s, Sekhukhuneland would undergo a series of rural uprisings, partly spurred by opposition to the



Bantu Authorities and Bantu Education acts of 1956. Govan Mbeki writes that “[t]he Chief Mooramoche was deposed, riots broke out and police forces seized control of the area. More than 200 were arrested in one incident and eleven of those trialled were given life imprisonment” (Mbeki 1964).<sup>22</sup>

## 1.9 REFUGE

Rekiloe said that her father disliked living in Sophiatown and grew very fond of the family property in Kensington B (today Bryanston), a large piece of land that the reverend Ramotebele More had bought in 1905 (Read Lloyd 2009:142). Sekhubami More’s grandfather was affiliated to the Methodist Church, a connection that could possibly have helped him acquire land. Cobley explains that the reverend Joel Msimang, who was ordained in the Methodist Church and became a founder of the Independent Methodist Church of South Africa in 1904, owned large herds of cattle and three farms (at Edenfale, Driefontien and Waschbank) (Cobley 1990:71). According to Colin Bundy, Africans owned nearly a quarter of a million acres of land in the Transvaal at the beginning of the Anglo-Boer War (1899), most of which was communally owned and farmed (1988:204-205). In the late 1800s trading between white city residents and local agriculturalists was still customary; the Pedi traded maize for cattle and diamonds (Bundy 1988:201) and farmers co-existed in share-cropping or tenant-labouring systems focused on subsistence farming. After the Anglo-Boer War (1902) and under Milner’s reconstruction, white farmers had more and more advantages, including government loans which allowed them to buy agricultural machinery (*Alfred Milner* [s.a.]). Sharecropping and labour tenancy continued, but African farmers found it increasingly difficult to find fertile land to

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<sup>22</sup>Govan Mbeki writes about this in the *The Peasants’ Revolt* (1964) published when he appeared in the Rivonia trial with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Raymond Mhlaba. His book is available on the African National Congress website, and describes the different rural uprisings of this era (<http://www.anc.org.za/>).



**Figure 25:** Moses Tladi, *Study - House among trees*. [s.a.]. Watercolour on board, 20 x 29cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:27).

farm, as well as to compete with the white farmers' trade. By the 1930s, it was impossible to live without cash, primarily because of levies imposed by the government (*In the city* 2014).

Rekiloe explained to Angela Read Lloyd that Tladi wanted to raise his children “in the country”. Moses and Sekhubami More had four children: Rekiloe (born 1931), Seloane (1934), Mmapula (1936) and Ramotebele (1942). Both Rekiloe, a qualified social worker living in Soweto, and Mmapula, a nursing sister who later married and now lives in London, helped Angela Read Lloyd significantly in her research. Apparently Mmapula was active in the ANC and later, when she lived in England, in the ACSA (Read Lloyd 2009:270, 278). Both sisters remember their house fondly. Mmapula remembered that the house in Kensington had an amazing view and that one could see all the way to Magaliesberg: “It was open country then” (Read Lloyd 2009:182). They also explain that



**Figure 26:** Moses Tladi, *The house in Kensington B.* [s.a.]. Oil on masonite, 37.5 x 77cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:136).

Moses Tladi enjoyed gardening at Kensington B and the yard had many trees and an orchard, most of which were cut down when the family left (Read Lloyd 2009:221).

Tladi's *Study – House among trees* (figure 25) depicts a small house amid a few large trees, a building that seems at first quite uncharacteristic, but which Read Lloyd suspects was a preliminary sketch for the painting of his house. Compared to the picturesque design of the Read estate garden, the layout of this space is simple and unassuming. The artist emphasises the different tree species, and places the viewer just outside earshot of the house, perhaps to give it a sense of privacy. Unlike the densely populated township, Tladi's house seems peaceful and almost shy, anthropomorphised as someone (perhaps Tladi himself?) hiding beneath the trees.

According to Read Lloyd (2009:146), the second work (figure 26) was still unfinished when Tladi's family was expropriated as part of the 'black spot removals' in 1956 (2009:145). This contentious political history is not explored in detail here, but was foreshadowed by the Land act and the development of the Native Administration act of 1927, which provided that "5.(1) The Governor-

General may (b) whenever he deems it expedient in the general public interest, order that, subject to such conditions as he may determine, any tribe, portion of a tribe or native shall withdraw from any place to any other place or to any district or province within the Union” (*Native Administration act no. of 1927 Unisa*). Mmapula remembers they were removed to an empty piece of land where nothing grew. Their father took up the affair with some officials, trying to acquire at least a somewhat bigger house. Mmapula believes it was the move to Soweto that killed Tladi, who died about three years after the removal (Read Lloyd 2009:182).

Apart from the coming trauma of their forced removal, it was a difficult time for the Tladi family. The artist was more or less 58 years old and had tuberculosis when he was painting this work. When Tladi returned from army service (something which is explored in his Wilderness works), he was too ill to do heavy work. His wife, Sekhubami, could not find an occupation of a more educated kind and took a job as domestic servant (Lloyd 2009:144-145). Tladi’s widow lived until 1981 (Read Lloyd 2009:109).

Tladi’s Kensington painting (figure 26), which has an oblong composition and bolder use of colour than figure 25, is not particularly gloomy or suggestive of his impending personal crisis, yet one may read a melancholy mood in the dark trees, shadows and empty porch of the house. His home is shown at a slight angle filling the whole frame, with a tree painted on either side, framing the house in a reassuring fashion. Tladi paints the house with a closed door and without figures, and although the curtains are slightly drawn, the house seems closed off and private. The typical elements of what would later denote township art, such as laundry hanging to dry, animals, children playing and dusty roads, are conspicuously missing. The soft shadow cast on the house and grass seems to make the work nostalgic and melancholic.



**Figure 27:** Moses Tladi, *Peter, the wire-haired Terrier*. [s.a.]. Pastel and wax crayon on board, 48.5 x 31.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:84).



**Figure 28:** Moses Tladi, *Bush scene with lion*. [s.a.]. Coloured pencil and crayon, 23.5 x 22cm Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:168).

## 1.10 ELUSIVE IDENTITIES

It is difficult to calculate the extent to which Tladi perceived himself as a part of the “black elite”. It is significant that his paintings were primarily found in the possession of his daughters, and not with patrons. I believe this confirms that the artist perceived painting not as a tool with which to place himself in an economic or political position, but rather something private.

Tladi is particularly concerned with the domestic and familiar, his own ‘Garden’ setting. In one his most ‘domestic’ works, *Peter the Terrier* (figure 27), Tladi paints the Read’s pet dog for his father-in-law, the Reverend Zachariah More, who occasionally visited the estate. On a different occasion, Tladi created two images of wild lions (one shown, figure 28) to amuse his children (Read Lloyd 2009:168). Quite unlike the melodramatic depiction of the same subject by high Romantic artists such as George Stubbs (1724-1806), Delacroix (1798-1863) and Gericault (1791-1824), Tladi’s lion images seem quite domestic. Perhaps his role as father is embodied in these drawings. Not only does Tladi’s work act as biographic record of his experiences, but the artist also shows a consideration for and awareness of the social allure of his subject matter, using painting as social medium. In this regard the works exist as traces of the relationships in Tladi’s life: His framing dates back to the frames he and Colin Allen made together (Read Lloyd 2009:190) and the Lokshoek Garden images to his relationship with the Reads. Works of bluegum trees could date back to his contact with Sydney Carter, and some of his landscapes to sketching with John Mohl. Whereas the Garden is a place of social interaction, the private, more meditative significance of his painting is discussed in his Wilderness works.

*"It is the task of the painter [...] to recover this sense of being, to witness the 'continued birth' of the world, to rekindle in us the astonishment of vision, and to remind us that there are things to be seen only because we first can see".*

Tim Ingold 2005

# 2

## Chapter two

### 2.1 ROMANTIC RIGOUR

Tladi's parents were converts and baptized him as a baby in the Lutheran Church at Lobethal, the mission station at Ga Phaahla. His name and date of birth, 1903, still feature in the church register under the name of Mosé Motsepe, son of Lukas and Berekiloe Selaioane (figure 29). The Berlin

Mission Association (BMA)<sup>1</sup> was the earliest missionary programme in the Sekhukhuneland area, and was established in 1860 by the Lutheran Church. The paramount chief at the time, Sekhukune, seemed to welcome the missionaries as teachers, but due to their increasing spiritual influence, began to prosecute them after 1864 (Jordaan 2011:28). This was followed by a complex history with many conflicts and attempts at reconciliation. According to Read Lloyd's research on the area where Tladi grew up, the missionary work among the Bapedi seemed well established by 1886. The church at Lobethal could hold 400 people, and the congregation was a "flourishing agricultural community" (2009:226).

The reason why I explore the missionary aspects of Tladi's work under the Wilderness section is because of the German missions relationship to Romanticism, pietism and the sublime aspects of the natural world. In many respects, the missionary church functioned at the overlap of the Domestic and Sublime; it laid down a set of rules and requirements for daily life, yet emphasised the mysterious and powerful nature of the Divine. In "Sekukuni, Listen!, Banna!, and to the children of Frederick the Great and our Kaiser Wilhelm': Documents in the Social and Religious History of the Transvaal, 1860-1890" (2004) Kirsten Rüter explains that as early as the late 1800s, African individuals who considered themselves part of the Christian elite used literacy as a window on the world of the European reading public (2004:207). She explores how "documents, and the ability to read, write, and multiply them, were used to construct, shape and consolidate new forms of social, political and economic relationships following the ruptures associated with colonial encroachments, and mission conflicts" (2004:209). Missionaries such as J. A. Winter acted as correspondents on behalf of tribal chiefs such as Sekhukune, both with state authorities and the head of the mission in Germany (Rüter 2004:213-214). As 'owners of the written word', they often added their own in-

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<sup>1</sup>Explored by, among others, Delius and Rüter (2010), Poewe and Van der Heyden (1999) and Jordaan (2011).



	Name des Täuflings	Früherer heidnischer Name oder Name der Eltern des Kindes	Alter oder Tag der Geburt	Tag der Taufe	Name der Taufzeugen	Ort der Taufe	Nation des Täuflings	Name des Täufers
71	Josef Ambrosius Sebolai	Bileam Sebolai Johana "	22. Jan. 1903	10. Mai 1903 (Kantate)	Meester Timotheus van Elisabeth f. f.	ga Pankwane	Mokgatla	P. Kaa
582	Luisa Makobe	Timotheus Ranya Elisabeth "	20. April 1903	"	Samuel Thoroane Lea Nanyabe	"	"	"
583	Mosé Motsepe	Lukas Selaioane Berekiloe "	19. April 1903	17. Mai (Kagate)	Adam Mole Berekiloe f. f.	Labethal ka Phala	"	"
84	Jakobus Lerame	Kefanya Molane Martha "	30. April 1903	"	Jaculus Mafoko Ledia Nametlo	"	De. Marisane	"
85	Ambrosius Thomo	Filippus Motsepe Maria "	3. März 1903	24. Mai 1903	Daniel Letladi Pius Bakgatla Karoline Mankho	"	De. Phala	"
	Jesaias Christofas Segodemane	Augustinus Samabe Molebogo "	6. Mai 1903	31. Mai 1903	Isak Ratsiroane Debora f. f.	"	De. Rantko	"
	Talitha	Jod. Monnana Elisabeth "	19. Mai 1903	31. Mai 1903	Stoffmus Sebgabe Paulus Bakgatla Bakgatla Bakgatla	"	De. Marisane	"
	Isias Makobane	Sheemia Mafoko Magdalena "	14. Mai 1903	1. Juni 1903	Daniel Letladi Bakgotatse Mole	Sentindem Casi	"	"
	De. Namphoko	Andreas Ngoro Letile "	26. Mai 1905	"	Samuel Thoroane Rebeditsoe f. f.	"	"	"

Figure 29: Tladi features under the name of Mosé Motsepe, son of Lukas and Berekiloe Selaioane – third row from the top (document credits to Angela Read Lloyd).

terpretations. Rüter explains that the Bible was held up as supreme and divine word, a “repository of truth” and that it was even seen as containing magical powers (2004:210). Access to the power of the book rested in the ability to read. Missionaries found that local people “cherished the worth of literacy”, and that, soon, membership to the church (and therefore access to the Divine) was associated with the possession of a book or having one’s name written into a book or on a list (Rüter 2004:210-211).

Moses Tladi and his wife Sekubami both attended the Kilnerton Christian mission school in Vereeniging. It could have been their similar education and mission background (Tladi was Pedi and Sekhubami a Motswana) that drew them together.

The BMS was famous for its bureaucratic style, relying heavily on its *Platzordnung*, a set of laws and regulations determining rights and duties on the mission station. Because the missionaries held the prerogative of land distribution, they maintained power, fining those disobeying church and mission station rules (Rüter 2004:218-219; Copley 1990:60) and at the worst chasing them away from the mission station.

Romanticism and ‘academicism’ were both part of the meta-narrative of the Berlin Missions and Rüter emphasises the role of the missionaries as teachers, offering literacy “without conditions, as long as there was a prospect of their teaching leading to conversion” (2004:214). The Lobethal mission project was supposedly intellectual and “committed to literacy and learning” (Read Lloyd 2009:224) and its founding members aristocrats, high civil servants, and professors (Poewe & Van der Heyden 1999:7). Poewe and Van der Heyden write that by the 1820s in Berlin “Romanticism, filtered through Brethren Pietism, shaped the Prussian awakening and the Christianity of Berlin missionaries” (1999: 10). Nature as trope was fundamental in the early period of German Romanticism, a philosophy that originated at the University of Jena around the 1790s. The group of Jena scholars, Schelling, Hölderling, Tick, Novalis and the Schlegel brothers (most of whom were quite young), immersed themselves in Fichte’s philosophy, starting the first formal discourse about Ro-

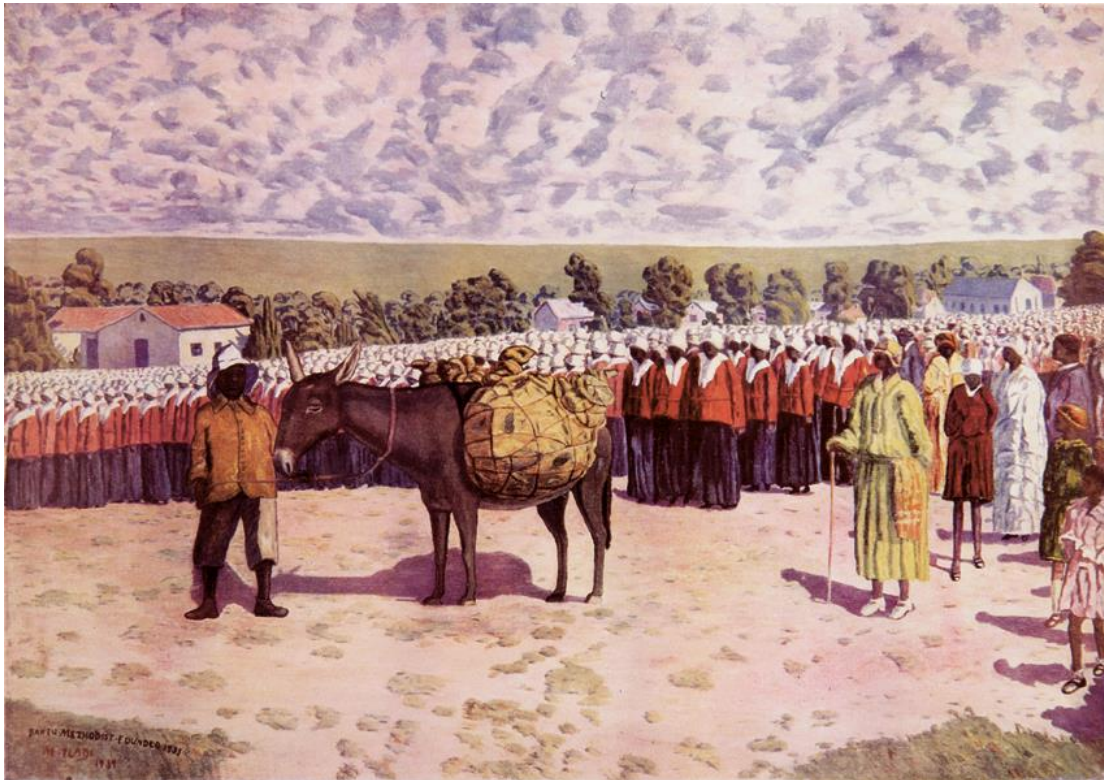
mantic philosophy. This large and complex discourse (not explored here) centred on “post-Kantian attempts to ‘repair’ difficulties raised by Kant’s view that subjectivity is irreducibly dual-natured” (Kneller 2007:123). Hölderin and Novalis, especially, focused on the the ‘reunification’ [*Vereinigung*] of nature and self and “how human desire and feeling may be united with reflection and reason” (Kneller 2007:123). Notably, the high-brow Romantic philosophy of German Idealism was not concerned with the mystical and irrational, but embraced an appeal to reason and academic and philosophic legitimacy (Kneller 2007:21-22).<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 REVIVALISTS AND PANTHEISTS

It is not known whether Tladi was a devout believer, and it is mentioned that he was “not a church-goer” (Read Lloyd 2009:268). An interesting indication of Tladi’s relationship with the missionary church is his commission for the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa (figure 30), a painting whose whereabouts are still unknown. This work illustrates the forming of the Bantu Methodist Church, nicknamed the Donkey Church, in 1932-1933. Madise and Taunyane explain in *The Methodist Church in Africa, 1933-2001* (2012) that church members grew unhappy with the Church establishment for complex racial and political reasons, and because of the request to pay two shillings and sixpence when attending religious services. Under leadership of some delegates a protest was organised at the main church hall in Sophiatown. Visitors from Germiston, Alexander, Boksburg and other towns around the Witwatersrand participated. The revival service would act as the founding of the independent movement of the ‘Bantu Methodist Church’. During the protest some men

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<sup>2</sup>Kneller writes: “Controversial as it may sound, in many ways early German Romantic philosophy carried Kant’s Enlightenment banner longer and higher than those who named themselves heir to Kant’s philosophy. [...] Certainly, to associate Kant with mysticism, irrationalism, and otherworldly utopianism is false, and would be anathema to the no-nonsense humanism of ‘the Prussian Hume.’ Yet characterizing early German Romanticism in these terms is itself a gross misrepresentation of its most lively and central tendencies” (2007:21-22).



**Figure 30:** Moses Tladi, *Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa, founded 1933* [Tladi's title]. 1939. (Work found only as reproduction) 10.5 x 13.5cm. Collection unknown. (Read Lloyd 2009:194).

organised a donkey to carry the new movement's flag, and when the donkey reappeared miraculously among the crowd of praying believers, this was interpreted as the sanction to establish the new church (2012:25-27). The secession was not apolitical. Sundkler, writing much earlier, believed that "[t]here was an unmistakable nationalist spirit which fired leaders and followers with enthusiasm for the break, as well as dissatisfaction with the financial policy of the Missions" (1961:74). Legal issues followed in the aftermath and eventually, because of conflicts among the leadership, the new BMC split into two church bodies.

There is something eerie but definitely domestic about Tladi's depiction of the scene. He paints the scene in stark light, and the mass of repetitive brush strokes in the clouds echo the rows and rows

of figures standing in the landscape — the figures on the far right are painted with special care. It is possible that Tladi wanted to communicate something of the powerful resistance of the BMC. In his research on the Independent African Churches, David Barrett avers that there is “a striking number of parallels” between the history of African Initiated (or Independent) Churches and the sixteenth-century Reformation. It exhibited a radical mission of renewal, especially of over-Europeanized Christianity (Anderson 2001:107). The scene Tladi depicts, however, is peaceful, and the artist does not make a clear political statement. He seems almost more interested in the patterns of the clouds, in silhouettes of the figures and the shapes of shadows cast by the stark sunlight. Like in his rural works, human figures become elements in a landscape scene.

It is not clear what Tladi’s position was in this regard and his spiritual life seems private. For the Western Romantics, Honour explains, whatever is dogmatic has to be tested against the individual sensibility of the artist. “The rules of art had to be submitted to it, just as the dogmas of the Church had been weighed, accepted or rejected according to the Protestant’s inner light” (Honour 1979:16). His wife was affiliated to the Methodist Church and committed to church activities (Read Lloyd 2009:268). Sekhubami’s father was a minister and writer of hymns for the Methodist Church (Read Lloyd 2009:288), and she probably grew up in a devout Christian family. The church in Kensington B where the Tladis lived was called St Thomas, and it was used as a school during the week (Read Lloyd 2009:279).

Read Lloyd believes that Tladi had a ‘universal’ idea of spirituality and faith, and was not bound to the doctrines of for instance Christianity (interview 2014). It could be argued that the pantheism of German pietism has some points of connection (and confusion) with Tladi’s background, although it is possible that he rejected both of these doctrines. For the famous Northern German Romantic painter, David Caspar Friedrich, “all nature was the hieroglyphic language of God” (Honour 1979:77). Together with Blake, Runge and Dahl, Friedrich used figurative painting to express certain spiritual truths. Shaw (as well as others such as Rosenblum and Newman) suggests that the

German Romantics endeavoured to bridge the gap between the seen and the unseen, noumena and phenomena. Romanticism advocated the holistic view of the artist and art, as works were no longer directed by the patron (often the church establishment), but by the experience and feeling of the artist-genius.

In a contemporary study on Pedi religious practices, Edward Lebaka explains that a continuation exists between spirituality and expression. Music, for instance, could in no way be separated from a person's spiritual background and experience; “[m]usic serves as an adjunct to religion” (2012:172). Furthermore, music is not ‘studied’ as under the detailed teaching of western music pedagogy, but relies on *Gestalt* — students learn to grasp things as “an experiential whole” (Lebaka 2012: 171).<sup>3</sup> Different Pedi music genres, Lebaka explains, are used to express the different feelings, intentions and beliefs of an individual or group. In one example in “Thanksgiving songs in contemporary Pedi society” (2012:173-174), Lebaka explains that

[i]n [the analysed] song we observe the careful use of figurative words with powerful associative meaning. The text possesses variation in poetic expression. The singers make use of several figures of speech, forms of imagery, idioms, parables and proverbs that require contemplation – serious thinking that demands insider knowledge of the Pedi language to fully comprehend the meaning of the song. [...] The tone in lines 4 and 5 reflects loneliness, despair and frustration because all men in the community have died. Taking melancholy of the lyrics into consideration, the focus in these two lines (4 and 5) is on relationships, the loss of men in the community and the frustra-

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<sup>3</sup>Menkiti, a Nigerian poet and philosophy scholar at Wellesley College, argues in “Nature, agency and causation in African traditional thought” (2004:111) that African beliefs are set in an attitude of mind “best described as grounded in the material circumstances of life. They have an empirical warrant and contain a tough-minded refusal to abandon the anchor that holds them to the original sense of things.” He warns, however, that this “does not have to lead, inevitably, to a claim regarding the ultimate reducibility of mind to body with no remainder whatsoever” (Menkiti 2004:120-121).

tion experienced by the bereaved families.

The Romantic painters and poets' form of expression which, in Novalis' phrase, 'leads inwards' (Honour 1979:16), was in this way closer to how Lebaka explains the Pedi songs than to the norms and abstractions of for instance Classical music or Baroque. To the Western Romantics, because of the almost mystic communion between the physical and transcendent, nature was often used as metaphor for the artistic process (in art and music) and even anthropomorphised as man's representative. Cosgrove explains that in the Western artists' attempt to not become part of the mere mechanical production of the industrial revolution, they "allowed a distinction to be made between that which grows naturally, the dynamic or organic – of which the products of genius were examples — and that which is imitated or mechanically reproduced – manufactured" (1998:225).

### 2.3 SYMBOLIC FORMS: SEASONS AND THE SUBLIME

In Tladi's mission church upbringing, natural objects had specific, prescribed meanings. In the Lutheran hymn books of 1905, for instance, one writer finds himself shrouded in the "deepest darkness" until the Spirit "breaks our night with the beams of truth unclouded" (Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod 1905:3).<sup>4</sup> Symbols that would have been natural for Western missionaries were often problematic in the African settings in which they worked, most obviously the connections between darkness, blackness and sinfulness (Viriri & Mungwini 2010:38).

Tladi uses symbols in his own way, depicting objects in the veld in different emotional registers. In three representations of trees I believe the artist imbues the landscape with sadness, doubt and even angst. In *Sekbukuniland* (figure 32) Tladi paints a single tree in a bright mid-day scene, but

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<sup>4</sup>This example is from an evangelical book used in American missions. Yet similar hymn books were translated into Sesotho; one of them is titled *Difela tša Kereke*. They are still used in the Lutheran Bapedi Church today, as can be seen on the LBC website (<http://www.lutheranbapedichurch.co.za/books.html>).

blocks the viewer from the receding view, perhaps emphasising the viewers' limitations. With a dark shadow cast behind it, the tree stands lonely in its secluded landscape.

The painting *Landscape with trees* (figure 31) is darker and shows a clump of trees unsettled by the wind. Distant clouds bear forebodings of a storm. In *Landscape, two trees* (figure 33) Tladi represents a tree with brush-strokes full of movement. The central tree and its fan-like leaves seem convoluted, the dark shadow under it intensifying the drama. The artist seems to wedge the branches further apart, so that they are stretched out like a hand, and the raised viewpoint in this work is peculiar and creates a feeling of detachment.

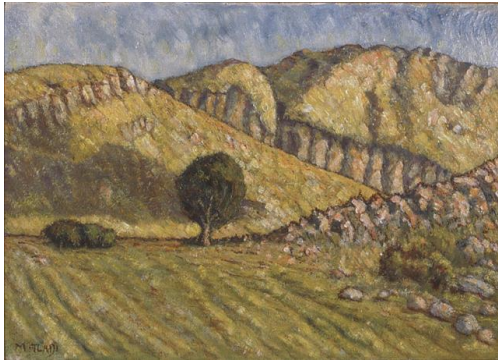
I have argued elsewhere (Coetsee 2013:8) that, like Friedrich's *Solitary tree*, Tladi's *Flowering tree* (figure 34) gives the effect that "the randomness of nature has been replaced by a fixed, emblematic order that may elucidate an eternal truth" (Rosenblum 1975:32). His painting could be anthropomorphic, acting as metaphor for his own isolation. Tladi's *Flowering tree* is placed centrally, is nearly symmetrical, and is surrounded by a landscape that has been significantly rearranged. In its self-assured execution, Tladi's tree (scathingly called a 'kaffir tree' in earlier vernacular) incites a feeling of the sublime. Incidentally, compared to the sketch which Read Lloyd believes is the preliminary of the later painting (figure 35) Tladi's *Flowering tree* suggests that the artist paints not only in response to a visual impulse, but returns to the studio for successive grafting, designing and finishing.

In his almost mystical analysis of *The Romantic rebellion*, Eric Newman argues that the Romantic approach to nature differs from the Classical in that it is concerned with essence rather than with appearance, often relying on a mysterious and personalized use of metaphor (1962:67). Tladi's work is not unconcerned with the particular appearance of his physical environment, yet seems committed to convey certain 'essential' aspects of nature: In works such as *Morning at the Magaliesberg Mountains* (figure 39), *Autumn (Craighall)*, and *Spring near Witkoppes* (figure 46), each titled by the artist, we see Tladi in a 'Rungeian' fashion naming his work according to the seasons of the year





**Figure 31:** Moses Tladi, *Landscape with trees*. [Sa]. Oil on canvas, 21.8 x 31.25cm. Museum Afrika, Johannesburg. (Read Lloyd 2009:55).



**Figure 32:** Moses Tladi, *Sekhukuniland*. [Sa]. Oil on canvas, 25 x 36cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:106).



**Figure 33:** Moses Tladi, *Landscape - two trees* [Tladi's title] in a black frame. [Sa]. Oil on artist's board, 19.5 x 24cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:272).

or times of day.<sup>5</sup>

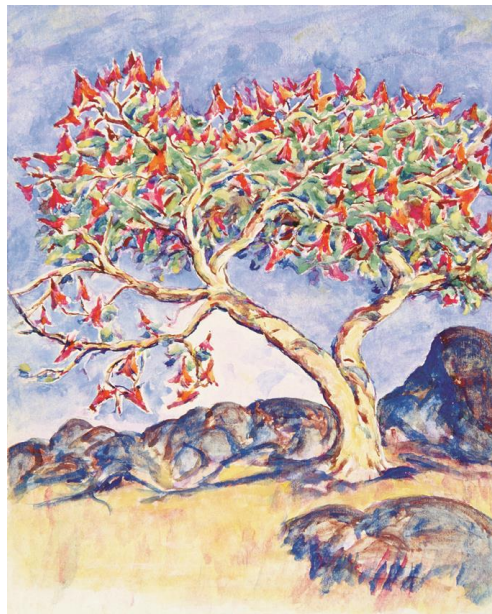
Apart from using natural forms in a particular setting, the weather is used as catalyst to evoke the effect of the sublime. In a painting that Tladi gave to his friend Colin Allen, *Caught in a wind* (figure 36), Tladi paints a figure bent by a strong oncoming wind. Colin says that “[i]t shows a man leaning into it ... the movement is there ...” (Read Lloyd 2009:76). Tim Ingold writes an interesting article on the general disregard of the weather in the discussion of landscape painting. He explains (Ingold 2005:97) that the experience of weather is multisensory, and that the auditory, haptic, olfactory and visual “cooperate so closely that it is impossible to disentangle their respective contributions”. Musing on the strangeness of light, sound and feeling, all of which are experiences of

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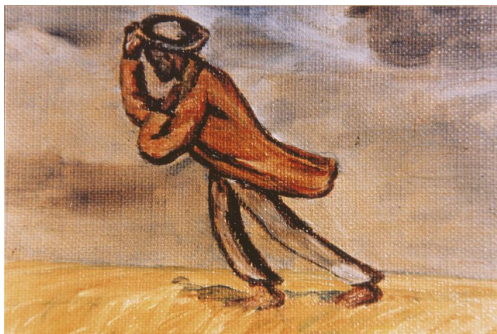
<sup>5</sup>The Romantic artist Philipp Otto Runge (1777 - 1810) is famous for his symbolic nature drawings, some of which are titled *Night*, *Morning* and *Evening*. In each instance he draws on metaphor to convey a specific natural phenomenon. In a more general sense, the distinctions between seasons would be an interesting subject to explore further. In Uganda, for instance, no distinction is made between spring, summer, autumn and winter. Only two seasons exist colloquially, namely the rainy season and the dry season, and both have moderate temperatures.



Figure 34: Moses Tladi, *Flowering tree*. [Sa]. Oil on cardboard, 25.5 x 31.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:230).



**Figure 35:** Moses Tladi, *Landscape*. [Sa]. Watercolour and gouache on board, 25 x 20cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:60).



**Figure 36:** Moses Tladi, *Caught in a wind* [Tladi's title]. [Sa]. Oil on canvas board, 14 x 18.5cm Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:75).



**Figure 37:** John Koenakeefe Mohl, *Country scene in the rain*. [Sa]. Oil on board, 44 x 60cm. Private Collection. [Online]. Available: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/john-koenakeefe-mohl/country-scene-in-the-rain-y9HeYbJFkl8xBzrF C3xgQ2> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014]



**Figure 38:** Moses Tladi, *Highveld summer rainstorm*. [Sa]. Oil on canvas, 26 x 35.4cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:291).

“being”, Ingold writes quite poetically that “it is the task of the painter [...] to recover this sense of being, to witness the ‘continued birth’ of the world, to rekindle in us the astonishment of vision, and to remind us that there are things to be seen only because we first can see” (Ingold 2005:99).

In *Highveld summer rainstorm* (figure 38) Tladi paints a small figure with a hat engulfed by the rainstorm which gathers in thick clumps of clouds, typical of the Highveld climate. Tladi’s dramatic clouds, subtle illumination of the distant mountains and scale of the figure in the surrounding landscape invokes the feeling of the sublime. Nonetheless, his figure in the foreground has a local relevance. Mmapula explains that the picture was done close to their home: “There was a township over beyond the slope, and a path went along over the landscape to get there” (Read Lloyd 2009:268).

Here Tladi seems to conflate the grand notion of humankind's encounter with nature and the everyday experience of workers such as himself. It is in essence phenomenological.

*Caught in the wind* (figure 36) and *Summer Highveld rainstorm* (figure 38) are two of the few works in which Tladi uses the human figure to illustrate some aspect of nature. This is done to a greater extent by the artist John Mohl who seems to emphasise the drama of the everyday by presenting the layman in his relationship to nature. John Mohl, who Read Lloyd explains had studied in Windhoek and Germany, showed at the South African Academy in 1942 and 1943 and attracted much attention as a Landscape painter. He also exhibited work at the Empire exhibition of 1936 (Read Lloyd 2009:87). In his landscapes, Mohl adds Basotho figures or miners illuminated by the moon, not as afterthought but as the subject upon which nature exerts herself. Rekiloe, Tladi's daughter, remembers that John Mohl used to come to their house, watching the artist painting, and they would talk. "They would go out far into the countryside together [...]. They would sketch together, often in charcoal..." (Read Lloyd 2009:146). Mohl's work is more dramatic than Tladi's, yet often uses the same techniques – highlighting objects to denote the direction of light, using dramatic light and dark contrasts, making the landscape fade as it recedes, placing a tree close to the viewer. An equally sensitive painter yet less acutely dedicated to the elements of the natural world, Mohl captures the effect of nature in a slightly more illustrative way (see, for example, figure 37).

#### 2.4 VISIONARIES

In their interest and pursuit of art in the Johannesburg elite circles, artists such as Moses Tladi and John Mohl were pioneers. Howard Pim (1862-1934), a well-known liberal philanthropist, governor of Fort Hare University, friend of Herbert Read and one-time mayor of Johannesburg,<sup>6</sup> organized

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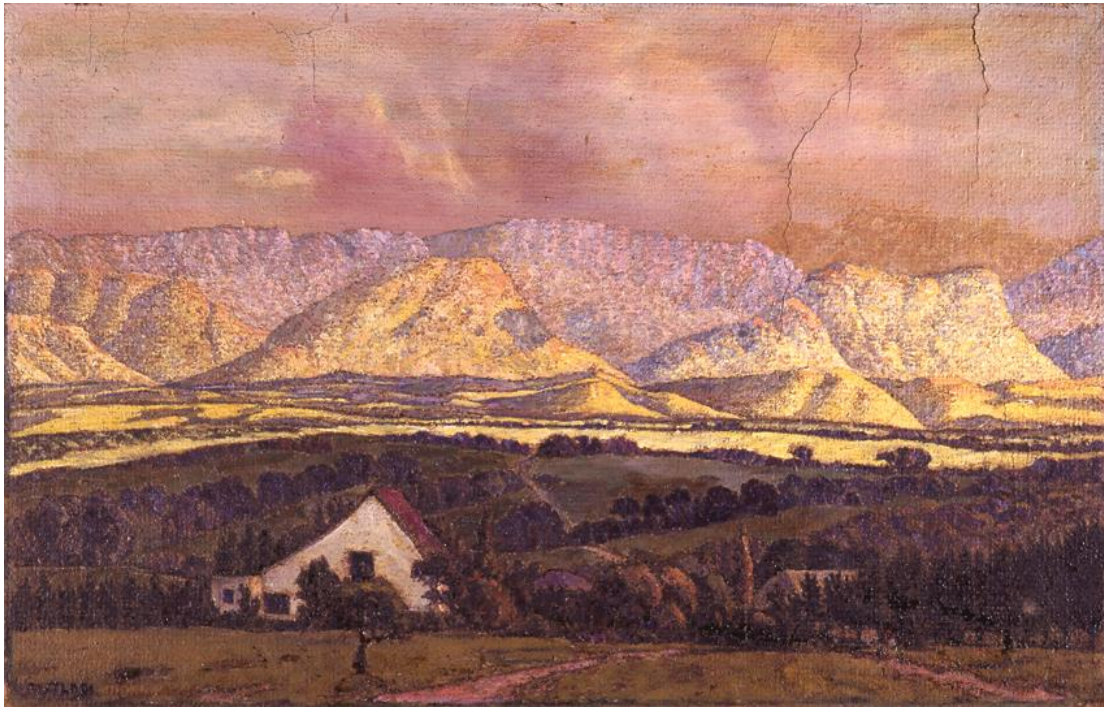
<sup>6</sup>The area named Pimville now forms part of Soweto. Incidentally Mmapula, Tladi's daughter, attended Pimville High School (Read Lloyd 2009:221).

a special visit for Tladi to the Johannesburg Art Gallery around 1928, a year before Tladi's first exhibition (Read Lloyd 2009:114). This was the year that he reported to the newspaper, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, that he had discovered a "Native genius" (Read Lloyd 2009:24). The particular exhibition that Tladi visited was showing some of the key French Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites, including Henry Harpignies, Buxton Knight, Mark Fisher, Edward Millais and Wilson Steer, artists of high 'international acclaim'.

In the Johannesburg Art Gallery at the time, 'Native' scholars and pupils were not allowed, except from 7:30 to 10:00 on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, and under supervision of the three provincial inspectors of Native schools (Read Lloyd 2009:119). The establishment, including Pim, must have been curious, and perhaps anxious, to see what the racially conspicuous young Tladi would do. In a letter following the visit (Read Lloyd 2009:112-113), Pim writes that "[t]here were a fair number of people in the Gallery, but they all took Moses's presence there as quite a matter of course and there was no hint of any difficulty."

Foster believes imperialist scholars at the time were sure that a 'higher allegiance' to the Empire would replace ethnic differences that caused division, and generate devotion to the ideals of the British Commonwealth (2008:26). (The term 'English-speaking South African', Foster explains, barely existed in 1910, as settlers thought of themselves as British (2008:30)). The Johannesburg Art Gallery was one of the institutions that most ostensibly aimed at 'cultivating' art on the continent and normalising British supremacy. This while, ironically, artists in Europe turned their gaze towards African forms and practices as inspiration. According to Van Eeden (2008:193), the Johannesburg art gallery

[...] focused almost exclusively on British and French art and promoted British cultural values; its collecting policy, curatorship and patronage reflected an imperialistic vision of culture and "civilisation" [...] It was felt that a competent South African school of art did not yet exist, and that collections such as these should inspire local



**Figure 39:** Moses Tladi, *Morning at the Magaliesberg Mountains* [Tladi's title] [Sa]. Oil on Bristol-board, 47 x 73.5cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:191).

artists to emulate the art of the great “masters” so that, according to Lady Phillips, ‘our South African School of Art [would] begin to produce work worthy to appear side by side with the best examples of other countries’.

A work such as *Morning at the Magaliesberg Mountains* (figure 39) could depict something of Tladi’s own vision, both in his painting ambitions and in the peacefulness he portrays in the landscape. Tladi’s rich glowing palette and a dramatic use of light evokes a sense of an idealised future, a “heavenly Jerusalem” as Rosenblum describes it (Coetsee:2013). It is possible to argue on an ideological level that Tladi employs the kind of rhetoric connected to the work of the Hudson River School or the Luminists, an American translation of the sublime landscapes of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In “The return of nostalgia: A fetishistic spectator in Leslie Scalapino’s *The Return*





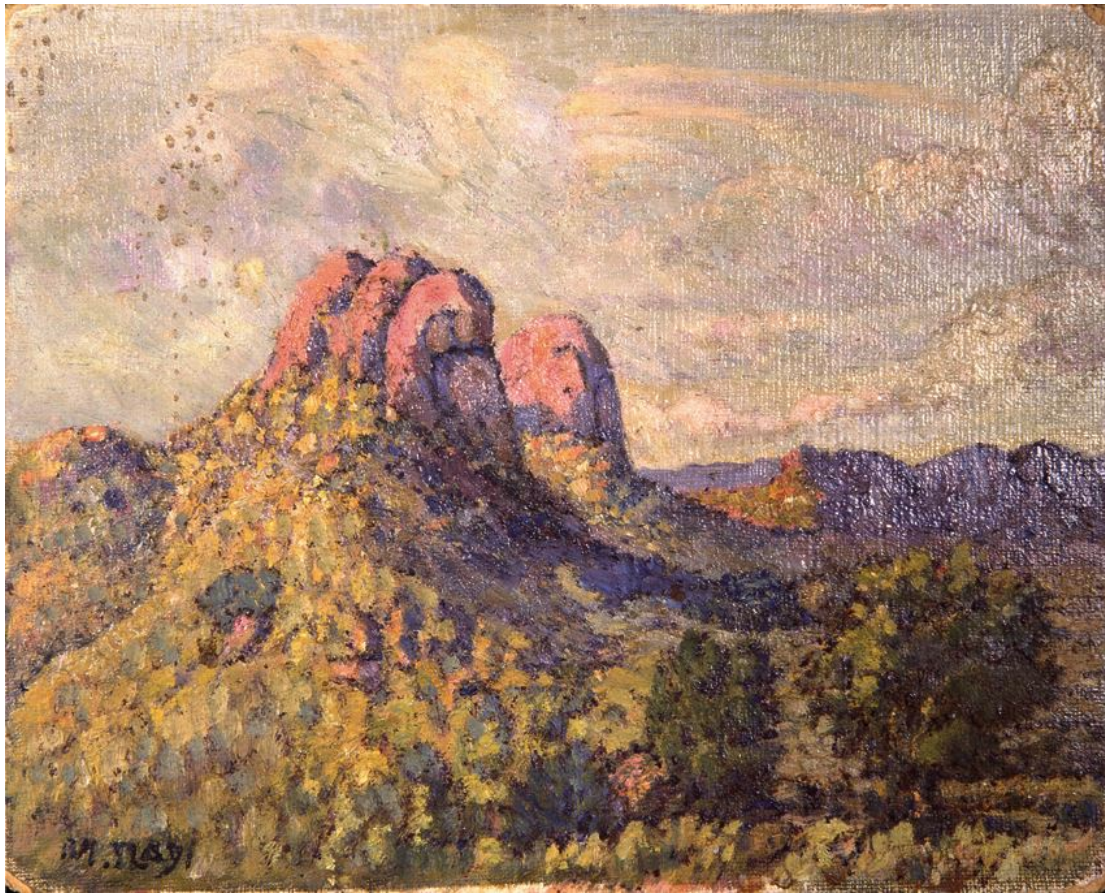
**Figure 40:** Albert Bierstadt, *Looking down Yosemite Valley*, 1865. California. Oil on paperboard, 163 x 245cm. Collection: Birmingham museum of art. [Online] Available: <http://www.artsbma.org/january-2014-looking-down-yosemite-valley-california/> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014].

of Painting and the Hudson River School of Art” (2010), Hinton argues that the Hudson River School painters mythologized the land they depicted and wanted to recreate the ‘pure’ or ‘original’ natural world, which was an “American commodity fetish” (2010:226). Their eternalizing of the wilderness was an act of preservation primarily in reaction to Jacksonian expansionism<sup>7</sup> (Hinton 2010:226), which proposed a market economy and geographical expansion in the place of older forms of farming. Hinton believes Albert Bierstadt was among America’s first environmentalists (2010:226).

The seduction of the Hudson River School’s paintings lay in their combination of ‘realism’ and fantasy, or in other terms, “empirical observation and nostalgic fetishism” (Hinton 2010:227). In its relation to the Divine (who is both spectator of His mastery and absent from the visual field be-

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<sup>7</sup>A Democratic movement connected to the American president Andrew Jackson. His political party pursued geographical expansion in the belief that the American people were destined to expand and cultivate the continent.



**Figure 41:** Moses Tladi, *Two hillocks* [Tladi's title]. [Sa]. Oil on canvas board 22 x 25cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:251).

cause of His sublimity), the paintings emphasize the transcendent and spiritual through dramatic contrasts, a luminous use of light and chiaroscuro (Hinton 2010:226). The “purity and harmony” of the natural world is identified with the spectator’s “Christian innocence”, and echoes a feeling of the Almighty (the missionary’s God), gazing over and protecting the ‘perfect’ landscape (Hinton 2010:227-228). Some of the Hudson River School artists, including Albert Bierstadt (example figure 40), had his roots in the German Düsseldorf school.

## 2.5 THE LIMITS OF THE INSTITUTION

A work such as *Two hillocks* (figure 41) echoes the transcendence and illumination of the Hudson River School painters, urging the viewer to become ‘immersed’ in the landscape. The artist contemplates the landscape in the presence of a Divine spectator. Foster dedicates a chapter to the landscape poetry of John Buchan, a Scottish travel writer (but also political Unionist and private secretary to Milner) who came to the Transvaal in 1902. Buchan’s work, mostly poetry and adventure fiction, is a response to his experience of being “on” the landscape. Buchan’s poetry is ostensibly Romantic and deeply religious, and concerned with what one could call the phenomenology of nature and the limits of representation. As Shaw explains, for the Romantics the profound encounter with the sublime is followed by the deep feeling of disappointment or loss, the “displeasure of knowing that one can never give sensual representation to it”. Because of this, Shaw explains, the German Idealist tradition celebrates not so much what he calls the triumph of reason, as the “failure of imagination as it strives to realise the ineffable” (2007:90). According to Foster (2008:129 and 132) the way in which Buchan describes the scenery around him “valorizes the rhetoric of firsthand experience”, and, because of the undomesticated terrain of the landscape, signifies a largely masculine identity (2008:73).

In Britain and the west, the Sublime experience of the landscape was reserved for a small portion of the social hierarchy. Cosgrove explains that “[t]he sublime then was initially erudite and elitist in that it marked only the most elevated minds, hardly attainable by ordinary mortals who, like merchants and tradesmen, had limited time to contemplate the majestic verities of Pandemonium or the Inferno” (Cosgrove 1998:227). In the South African context, this hierarchy was most probably racialised.

Tladi’s family remembers him as someone with a particular concern for and fascination with nature. His sister Rekgopetse Makate remembers that he used to draw mountains and show them “Small bushes, flowers. He would take some colour carefully, and put it on, all in little bits, very

precise.” Mmapula remembers how they watched him painting (Read Lloyd 2009:182) and Rekogopetse describes how “once he had started work, and to paint, he didn’t want anyone around” (Read Lloyd 2009:236). He returned indoors to paint, and shut the door to be alone. Tladi continued reworking older paintings, and when asked why, said that it was “not right like that” (Read Lloyd 2009:280). Perhaps most indicative of the Romantic mythology around Tladi’s persona is Mmapula’s description (during a meeting with Angela Read Lloyd in 2000) of her father as “a strange person ... he had a dreamy way with him ... we’d be with him, and we’d help him in the garden – he would garden, then he’d sit and smoke, and look at the clouds, and the shapes of the clouds ...” (Read Lloyd 2009:221). Sometimes he would ask his children what shape they could see in it (Read Lloyd 2009:221, 280).

The use of fairly Romantic language to describe the artist — introspective, melancholy and interested in the natural world – is useful in that it denotes the seriousness, intent, and individuality with which the artist painted nature. Tladi’s family members describe him as a complex individual with specific desires and struggles, one quite different from the image portrayed by the media (and even his friends); A Cape Times journalist with the pseudonym W.R.M. wrote around 1931 that “incidentally, it was of interest to note the work of the native artist, Moses Tladi, who I understand has been receiving tuition and whose work has lost its original naivety and directness and has become somewhat academic and stilted” (Read Lloyd 2009:124). Keith Allen found that “Moses in our time was so uncomplicated and unsophisticated and humble and unspoilt. But his Anerley Road painting became a bit chocolate box. It pulled him down, because he was trying to please white people” (Read Lloyd 2009:152).

This rhetoric (Tladi is described as ‘trying to please’ or ‘uncomplicated’ as if a child) was often utilised in early missionary discourse. Cobley believes that “[w]hile many white missionaries regarded the creation of an African educated class as a positive achievement, others – including a large majority of the white settler community – regarded articulate, educated Africans as a spoilt and dan-

gerous class, prone to crime, indolence and political agitation” (1990:4). In the artists’ circles, Hayden Proud affirms, there were “white” fears that native artists would be ‘contaminated’ by exposure to outside influences. He believes this was a form of “artistic ghettoisation couched within misguided benevolent and paternalistic intentions” (Proud in Read Lloyd 2009:n.p.). African artists were thus omitted from a broader pursuit of a modern national landscape.

## 2.6 THE QUEST FOR A NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Unlike the ‘nostalgia of Britain’ propogated by the Johannesburg art circles (as supervised by Lady Phillips), artists and intellectuals involved with the Pretoria Art Gallery concerned themselves with breaking away from British conventions and creating a ‘unique’ national identity, a theme investigated recently by Jeanne van Eeden in “Collecting South African art in the 1930s: The role of Martin du Toit” (2008). To the new generation of South African born artists, the Wilderness became an important icon of belonging. Van Eeden explains that although a large part of the Afrikaans population was still struggling under the effects of economic depression, drought and unemployment (2008:167), the Afrikaner community was growing in cultural and economic stature and placing an increasing emphasis on arts and culture and especially landscape. Under the leadership of Martin du Toit, the *Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging* started a quest for a truly ‘South African style’.

The importance of a nationalist landscape, Foster believes, was facilitated by two important phenomena, namely the fact that some 250,000 white people were migrating from rural areas to the cities, and secondly, that the availability of cheap, reproducible prints of landscape increased dramatically (Foster 2008:50).<sup>8</sup> Pierneef, like many of the Transvaal artists, believed that national art could

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<sup>8</sup>Not only Afrikaans artists were interested in breaking away from British norms. Copley believes that many African intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s, “regarded the creation of an African ‘national’ literature as a matter of the first importance for the progress of the African race” (the last-mentioned term is perhaps a bit dubious) (1990:87).

only be created “by means of an intimate interaction with one’s own environment [...] an organic synergy between the artist, and the South African native soil and culture” (Van Eeden 2008:164). Unfortunately, Van Eeden explains, the ideals of those such as Pierneef were often misinterpreted to justify cliché scenes of jacarandas, blue gums and bushveld sunsets (2008:164).

Gwelo Goodman (1871-1939), one of the South African artists in this quest for a national aesthetic, was one of the artists encouraged or “discreetly financed” by Howard Pim (Read Lloyd 2009:99). His *Source of the little Tugela* (figure 42) and *Hex River valley* (figure 43) are similar in form and palette to Tladi’s *River scene* (figure 16) and *Two hillocks* (figure 41), although they depict different geographies. Gwelo Goodman’s family emigrated from England to South Africa before he reached the age of 20, and although he trained in Europe, played an important role in creating a truly ‘South African’ style. In her book *Gwelo Goodman: South African artist* (1951), Newton-Thompson praises his work for “its dramatic sense of colour, its self-confidence; the profound affection it shows for the beauty of our own country”. His vivid use of colour in later work became iconic of the South African landscape tradition.

By the time Tladi was in his late twenties, contemporary South African art veered towards abstracted and expressionist forms of landscape. Van Eeden explains that although popular tastes were generally directed towards Romantic Realism, artists working in the 1930s started asserting more ‘modern’ forms, following trends in what can be identified as “post-impressionism, monumental-decorative art and expressionism”,<sup>9</sup> each of which challenged entrenched notions of what constituted art (Van Eeden 2008:166). Martin du Toit was cognizant of European trends<sup>10</sup> and interested

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<sup>9</sup>These were categories named by Professor Matthys Bokhorst, head of the Department of Dutch Cultural History at the University of Pretoria during the 1930s. Bokhorst and Du Toit took it upon themselves to contest the sentimentality of art in the Union at the time – to them it displayed a lack of sophistication.

<sup>10</sup>Du Toit also taught German both in the Cape and at the Transvaal University College (TUK), something which Van Eeden believes “is significant in terms of the influence this seems to have had on his notions regarding national identity and a metaphysical conception of culture” (2008:169) He furthermore believed that the arts offered a place for different peoples (he mentioned Afrikaners, English and Jews) to meet on an



**Figure 42:** Gwelo Goodman, *Source of the Little Tugela*. [Sa]. Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 89.5cm. Private Collection. [Online]. Available: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/robert-gwelo-goodman/source-of-the-little-tugela-OP96geNWt6nDFqrzOlpSA2> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014]



**Figure 43:** Gwelo Goodman, *Hex River valley*. 1939. Print reproduction (Oil on canvas), 26 x 22cm. Private Collection. [Online]. Available: <http://www.amazon.com/Evening-Painting-Robert-Goodman-Mountain/dp/B0060OUMA8> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014]

in the African continent, and became a *kampvegter* for the avant garde (Van Eeden 2008:180). Du Toit even visited both Lagos and Accra in West Africa, exploring local arts and meeting leading local artists (Van Eeden 2008:173-174).

A century earlier, theorists were already meditating on the power of landscape to revolutionise art practice. Kenneth Clark writes that “[t]he painting of landscape cannot be considered independently of the trend away from the imitation of the *raison d’être of art*” (Clark in Mitchell 2002:20) and Mitchell explains that “abstract painting is the successor to landscape, a logical outgrowth of its antimimetic tendencies” (2002:20).<sup>11</sup> Many artists of the more ‘modernist’ or abstracted sentiments had their Pretoria debut exhibitions in the 1930s, at about the time when Tladi also exhibited for the first time. Among them were Maggie Laubser (1931), Irma Stern (1933), Maud Sumner (1933), Anton Hendriks (1933), Jeanette Fincken (1933), Gregoire Boonzaier (1934) and Gwelo Goodman (1935).<sup>12</sup>

It is rumoured that Tladi had some formal training in painting, either at the Bantu school of arts (Read Lloyd 2009:274-275) or Polly Street Art centre, but this has not yet been confirmed.<sup>13</sup> Tladi and Sekoto were the only black participants in the 1939 Academy exhibition who did not work either in wood or clay, materials that, as Sack explains, evoked a sense of the ‘traditional’ (Sack:1988). Tladi clearly had no intention to use traditional materials and probably perceived himself as an aspiring artist, positioned next to Gyngell and Carter in a dynamic historical trajectory. According to Nettleton in her work on Dumile Feni, Chika Okeke argues that “the modern in African art

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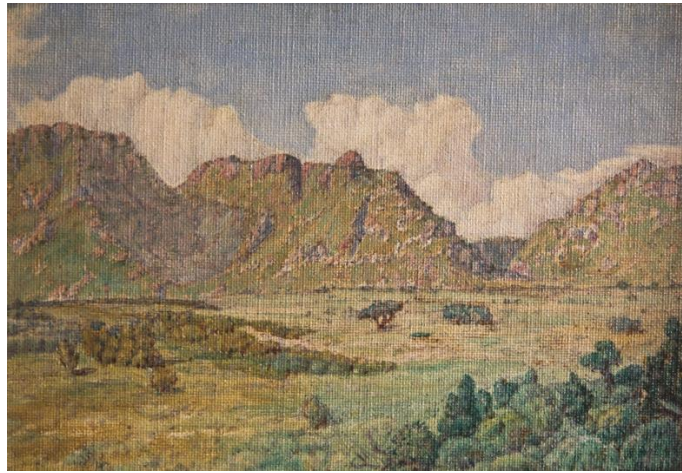
equal footing (1933:5, quoted in Van Eeden 2008:138).

<sup>11</sup>The paradox of this, however, is that while at the one end, landscape painting moved towards ‘naturalistic’ depictions of nature rather than conventional formulas, yet at the other it began to meditate on what painting was, and so started the project that ended in abstraction (Mitchell 2002:13).

<sup>12</sup>These exhibitions were held in the MacFadyen Hall and organized under the auspices of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture at the Transvaal University College (TUKs). Van Eeden explains that “[t]he exhibitions were frequently opened by influential figures from the university or government, such as General Jan Smuts or the Mayor of Pretoria, and judging from contemporary newspaper accounts, appear to have been well attended” (Van Eeden 2008:179).

<sup>13</sup>Read Lloyd approached Cecil Skotnes in this regard, but the artist had no recollection of Moses Tladi (Read Lloyd 2009:15).

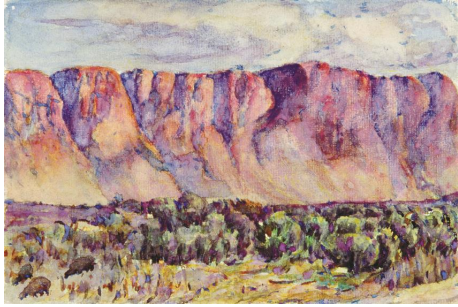




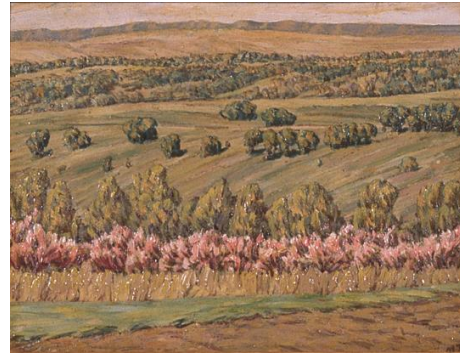
**Figure 44:** Moses Tladi, *White clouds near Meerless* [Tladi's title] [Sa]. Oil on canvas board, 15 x 23cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:277).

practice stemmed from the emergence of individuals who saw art as ‘autonomous practice’” (Okeke 2001:40) or “those who are aware of their own individualized places in a historical trajectory” (Nettleton 2011:13).

Tladi was not completely removed from the events and developments in the art world of the 1930s. When Pierneef’s *Premier Mine* received some attention in the media, Edward Read wrote a letter to a local newspaper, explaining that he owned a mine painting by the young artist Tladi (Read Lloyd 2009:101). Tladi’s work ranges from very ‘conservative’ landscapes to works that are quite expressive and experimental in colour. Works such as *White clouds near Meerless* (figure 44) seem similar in colour and form to work by artists such as W.H. Coetzer and Jan Volschenk while *Spring near Witkoppes* (figure 46) and *Mountain range* (figure 45) favour experimentation with colour and composition. In *Mountain range*, a watercolour sketch composed as three flattened planes, Tladi uses loose, confident brushmarks that seem spontaneous. His palette is almost fluorescent. In *Spring near Witkoppes* (figure 46) the artist disrupts perspective by painting the landscape as a set of horizontal lines crossing over most of the frame. The landscape is ordered, symmetrical



**Figure 45:** Moses Tladi, *Mountain range*. [Sa]. Water-colour on paper glued onto artist's board, 15 x 23cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:89).



**Figure 46:** Moses Tladi, *Spring near Witkoppen* [Tladi's title] [Sa]. Oil on canvas on board, 18 x 24cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:204).

and rhythmic, as if the artist sought some inner structure in the view before him.

#### ROMANTICISM, MODERNISM, INDUSTRIALISATION

Many artists in the Western Romantic movement used modern landscape (that is, landscape used for its own sake) to comment on the industrialisation of their environment (think for instance of JMW Turner). Foster believes it is not accidental that early South African painters represented land, which is claimed as unchanging and distinct, as an icon of continuity. “During periods of rapid social change the land becomes an object of consolation to a wide range of individuals, partly because even as it changes and decays it is renewed, and partly because its life is longer than theirs” (Foster 2008:17).

Tladi's time in a more industrial environment could have heightened his awareness of the changing character of his environment. The two works referring to his military service are painted in a dark palette, have an unusual use of colour as well as something apprehensive about their composition. In *Near the mill, Kroonstad* (figure 47) Tladi chooses a landscape with little picturesque appeal, showing no rolling hills or mountains leading the eye into the frame, only a small footpath

leading towards a mill. Read Lloyd suggests that this painting was done after he had been transferred to Kroonstad during his army service (2009:30). Tladi signed up some time after leaving the Read estate (1939-1945) (Read Lloyd 2009:201), a time in Tladi's life which, unfortunately, has not been well documented. The Read family largely lost contact with the artist and access to military information or archives proved difficult for Read Lloyd in her research for *The Artist in the Garden* (Read Lloyd 2009:158). One of the few clues to this time is his daughter Rekiloe's explanation that Tladi was in charge of 'stores and supplies', a position which could denote that he was literate and therefore useful administratively, or was posted in a less physically demanding position because he was older and had tuberculosis.<sup>14</sup> Rekiloe explains that at the end of his service "he could not manage any other work as he was declared unfit to do any heavy work" (Read Lloyd 2009:144). Tladi's children apparently visited him when he was posted at Irene or Lyttleton, as well as at the YMCA where the stores department was based near the Johannesburg railway line (Read Lloyd 2009:146).<sup>15</sup>

Tladi's use of colour in *Near the mill - Kroonstad (OFS)* (figure 47) is subdued, his subject melancholy. Directional lines in the grass suggest the movement of wind, acknowledging the subtle effect of the weather and repeating the strong direction of the smoke. Black smoke, a stark symbol of industry, creates an immediate sense of unease. Small trees in the foreground stand — somewhat eerily — upright and spread out, almost as if reporting for duty. The line of trees act as barrier, hiding the building in an almost shy way.

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<sup>14</sup> Tladi was ill for years with TB, although he was not bedridden. Incidentally Moog, or Margaret, Herbert Read's daughter, worked as a nurse at the Baragwanath Hospital after her return from the Second World War. While giving a lecture in one of the wards, she was informed that Tladi was in the hospital. This was in 1949 or 1950. The two friends greeted each other warmly, and Tladi presented some paintings which he had with him to her (Read Lloyd 2009:94).

<sup>15</sup> While working there, Tladi got acquainted with Dr Ray Phillips, an American social worker and philanthropist. According to Cobley, Ray Phillips was a member of the American Board of Mission on the Witwatersrand and was responsible for instituting a network of special debating clubs for Africans (1990:89-90). Because of the advice and recommendations of Ray Phillips and Miss Joane Pim, the Tladis enrolled their daughter Rekiloe for a course in Social Work.



**Figure 47:** Moses Tladi, *Near the mill – Kroonstad (OFS)*. [Tladi's title] [Sa]. Oil on canvas wrapped over board, 36 x 55cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:201).



**Figure 48:** Moses Tladi, *Cloudy evening (at Kroonstad, OFS)* [Tladi's title]. [Sa]. Oil on canvas stretched over plywood, 35 x 46cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:30).

The second work, *Cloudy evening (at Kroonstad, OFS)* (figure 48), which was bought by Edward Read when Tladi visited him some time during World War II, is equally melancholic and creates a feeling of foreboding. The small building seems engulfed by grass and trees, and one tree extends its branches like a hand (Read Lloyd 2009:30). No path is revealed. The building seems isolated by the dark, strange light in the clouds as well as a strange composition and eerie tree in the foreground. For Romantic artists such as David Caspar Friedrich, industrialization proved not so much a physical threat as a spiritual one.<sup>16</sup> Honour writes that Friedrich's paintings reveal a "grappling with the problem of art and reality – with the agonizing doubts of the man of faith confronted with desacralized nature" (1979:76).

#### NO. 1 CROWN MINES

One of the most interesting paintings in Tladi's oeuvre, I believe, is *No 1 Crown Mines* (figure 49). According to Edward Read, Tladi's mine painting depicts a view of the Robinson Mine change house, an area which Herbert Read had access to because of his work (Read Lloyd 2009:23). In *The Corner House: The early history of Johannesburg* (1965), Cartwright explains that Crown Mines Ltd. was the product of the amalgamation of the leading mines on the Rand, including the South Rand, Crown Reef, Langlaagte Deep, and Robinson Central Deep Mines.<sup>17</sup>

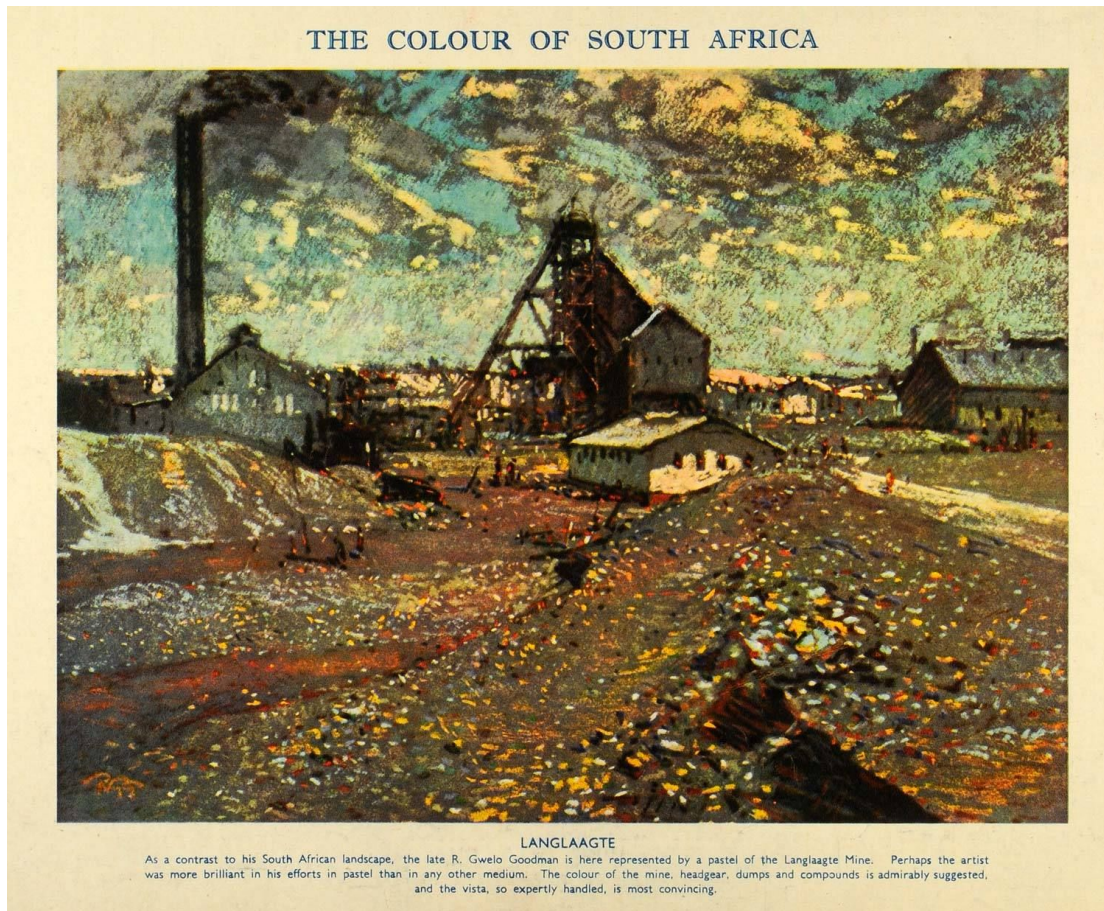
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<sup>16</sup>Hugh Honour suggests (1979:31) that Caspar Friedrich's *Cross in the mountains* exhibits a mood of doubt: "The picture's ambiguities, the questions it poses but does not answer, suggest doubt of both rationalism and Christianity. The spectator is obliged to ponder whether it represents a wayside cross of Golgotha, whether Christ has turned his back on the world, whether the sun that is setting will rise again" that is, whether faith will survive the increasing pressure of worldly pursuits and industrial modernisation.

<sup>17</sup>According to Cartwright, this scheme was initiated in order to reduce expenses in the industry, simplify administration charges and make the best possible use of the limited labour supply. It was also aimed at getting rid of "the best hated of institutions, the Chamber of Mines". Despite much opposition from mining leaders on the Rand as well as in Britain, the new company was established in April 1909. Louis Reyersbach, the president of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines and junior partner of Lionel Phillips at H Eckstein and Company, suggested that Crown Reef, as the most valuable of the blocks concerned, should absorb the companies and change its name to Crown Mines Ltd (Cartwright 1965).



**Figure 49:** Moses Tladi, *No 1 Crown Mines*. [Sa]. Oil on canvas board, 35 x 50cm. Private Collection (Read Lloyd 2009:23).



**Figure 50:** Gwelo Goodman, *Langlaagte mine*. 1939. Print reproduction (Pastel on Paper), 26 x 22cm. Private Collection. [Online]. Available: <http://www.amazon.com/Langlaagte-Mining-Industry-Painting-Goodman/dp/B0060OUM4Y> [Accessed 25 Sept 2014].





**Figure 51:** John Koenakeefe Mohl, *Miners at night*, Crown Mines S.A. c.1965. Oil on board, 43 x 57.5cm. Private Collection. [Online] Available: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/john-koenakeefe-mohl/miners-at-night-crown-mines-sa-lrk8Acg8YoaQGWT02tZ4Cw2> [Accessed 15 Oct 2014].

Herbert Read and his brother Ted joined Rand Mines as accountants in April 1896, by which time Lionel Phillips as well as other senior men in the company were in jail for their involvement in the Reformer and Uitlander movements against the Transvaal government. Conflicts by migrant labourers were dormant. In 1913 African protesters vandalised the Park station and the office of *The Star* (the mining magnates' newspaper) at the Corner House, and nearly attacked Lionel Phillips' estate, Villa Arcadia. Neither Arcadia nor Lokshoek was reached (Read Lloyd 2002:154). Yudelman explains that at least 4171 miners went on strike (1983:74).<sup>18</sup> Obviously feeling threatened, men like Phillips believed that picketing needed to be stopped by physical means (Yudelman 1983:73-74), and military involvement became the norm. Another wave of industrial unrest spread on the Rand in 1922, causing nearly two months of "civil anarchy", Foster explains. The strikers were confronted with a full-scale military operation, and in the end 230 lives were lost and more than 500 people injured (Foster 2008:34).

<sup>18</sup>Part of the conflict during strikes was that Afrikaner miners came forward as strikebreakers. Around 23% of the mineworkers were whites (South African born) (Yudelman 1983:75).

Despite the extreme conflict surrounding the Rand mines industry, Tladi represents the industrial site as a conventional landscape, a pictorial view of a three-dimensional space. Unlike John Mohl who seems to express how African workers become part of the 'machinery' of the capitalist world (for instance in *Miners at night, Crown Mines S.A.*, figure 51) Tladi's bird's eye view over the mine is sublime, leading the viewer's gaze to a distant mountain range (very small, top left corner). The terrain seems empty of figures except for what may be some minute silhouettes almost in the middle of the work. In Tladi's painting, little formal distinction is made between the 'natural' foreground with trees and the industrial elements of the mine. Tladi paints the mechanical incisions in the sand and the blue gum trees, grass and clouds with equal care.

Tladi's painting of the mine was not the only of its kind. In the catalogue list for the exhibition of Sekoto and the young artists at the Gainsborough Gallery in 1939, two mine images were entered by the young Wilson Thankge, then fourteen years old (Read Lloyd 2009:67). It seems possible that young artists like Thankge did these works on recommendation of capitalist patrons. Perhaps it was the only accessible landscape subject for young artists living in the city. Tladi's mine image, which was bought by Herbert Read's family, was the most frequently exhibited of all his works, shown among other places at the Land & Lives Exhibitions in 1991 and again between 1997 and 1998 at The National Gallery in Cape Town.

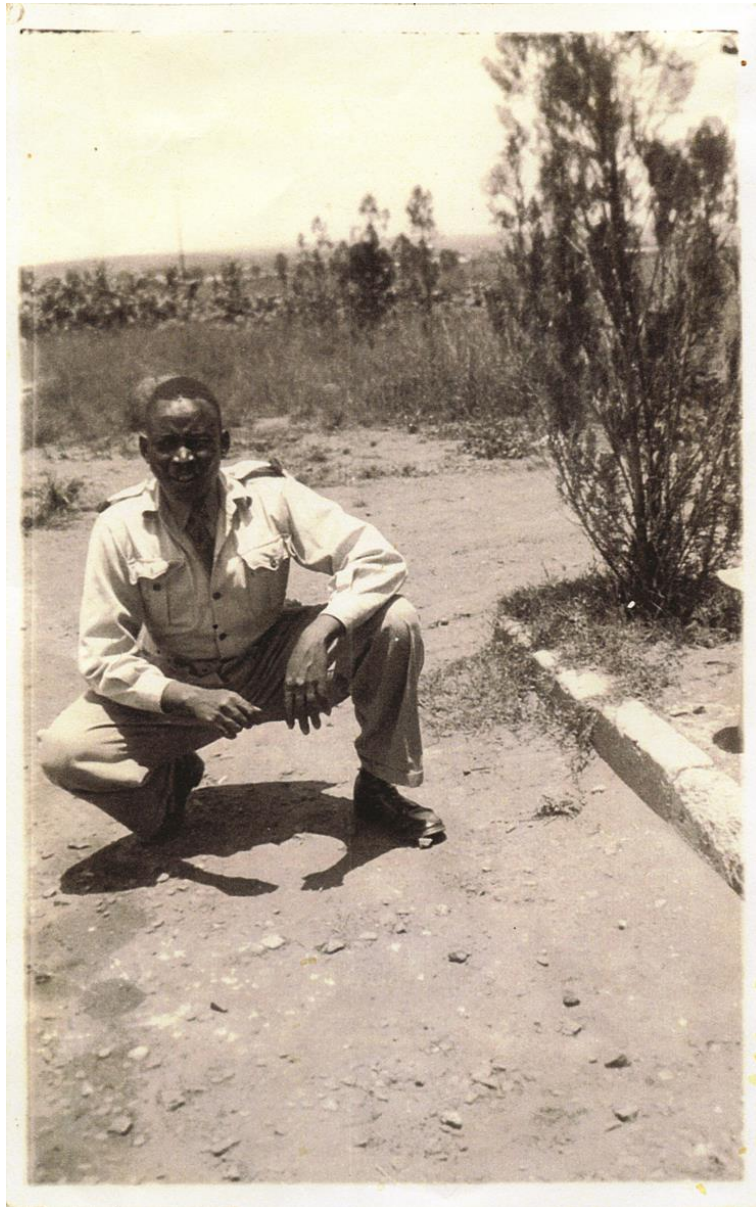
By imagining the 'cultivated' as something sublime, the industrial site of the mines stretching towards the horizon and towering over trees and fields, Tladi's *No 1 Crown Mines* destabilises the dichotomy between the metaphorical 'garden' and 'wilderness'. In a mine work from about the same era, the artist Gwelo Goodman does the same. Goodman emphasises the formal potential of the mine setting (figure 50), drawing attention to the pastel medium, the interesting silhouettes created by the industrial machinery, and the combination of patterns and lines created by clouds, rocks and sand. The 'gentle sophistication' with which both Goodman and Tladi's works speak of the destruction of the environment makes them somewhat uncanny and affective.

## 2.7 FIGURING FROM WITHIN

In retrospect, then, Landscape painting was not unpopular at the time Tladi painted. Foster explains in *Washed with sun* (2008:54) that

[m]ost early South African painters subscribed to a generalized academic naturalism that valorized likeness to life, atmosphere, and technical ability. [...] They depict nature as a realm of immersion and contemplation, using skills, techniques, and ways of seeing evolved in the gently lit, well-watered landscape of Western Europe, whose main metaphorical charge derived from distinct seasonal change.

I believe Tladi's landscapes are different from the formulaic picture making that was popular at the time. His landscapes are informed by certain personal memories, relationships, experiences or state of minds, the origin of which remains conjecture. In this regard the artist does not make a simple formal distinction between the Wilderness and the Garden, or nature and industry, grand thematic themes. Tladi rather paints 'from within'. Tladi's sublime landscapes evoke the feeling of the phenomenological, a person in a landscape experiencing the dynamic moods of nature. In his playful yet relentless exploration with the painting medium, Tladi translates the external world — the wind, the rocks and the sun — into a personalised language that transcends mere representation.



**Figure 52:** Anonymous, *Moses Tladi in army uniform* [S.a]. Black and white photograph, no dimensions given. Private Collection. (Read Lloyd 2009:137).

## Conclusion

I believe Tladi not only sought out the sparsely populated landscape where he found solace from the strains of his political circumstances, but his pastoral escapism also found expression in the security of family life, the Read estate garden, the Venda homesteads in Sekhukhuneland and his own house in Kensington B. These two dimensions bind Tladi's work to my own practice, something explored in the part that follows as well as in the exhibition.

My research into the work of Tladi took an incredibly meandering turn. I originally aimed at working with three groups of South African artists who captures some Romantic element of social marginalisation in their work. I wanted to explore questions of social segregation, Romanticism in art and Postcolonial theory in three chapters on South African artists, including artists such as Solomon Caesar Malan, William Nethven Cathcart, Simon Moroke Lekgetho, Mduduzi Xakaza and Sandra McGregor.

I narrowed my focus to the study of landscape, and later to Moses Tladi only. The Tladi project was initially somewhat anthropological in the sense that it sought out connections between the socio-economic factors affecting Romanticism in the West and the African colonial situation, something which could be an interesting venture. I spent much time looking at Tladi as Romantic counter-

culture figure, a marginalised archetype of which Newman writes, “[o]bedience, the acknowledgement of an accepted code, is repugnant to the man whose only loyalty is to himself and whose only duty is to express himself” (1962:64).

Later I moved away from theories on subjectivity and engaged more vigorously with the historical context of his work. I tried to do more primary research on Tladi’s era by using texts that give an unmediated and uncensored view of certain historic perceptions, and looked more intently at the ‘uncomfortable’ paintings in Tladi’s oeuvre (like the mine image and rural scenes). As far as possible I studied the whole of Tladi’s available collection.

Throughout, academic feedback was diverse, urging me to either embrace the intimacy of the project (writing for instance fictional letters to the artist and presenting the work as conversations) or to do the opposite, namely a more rigorous theoretical paper that contests the sentimentality of what has been written on Tladi up to the present time. My choice eventually fell on the last-mentioned, although the project remained ‘intimate’ on a personal level. In terms of the research questions set out in my introduction, namely, to gauge whether landscape can be an appropriate tool with which to create a ‘voice’, I feel I have engendered beneficial conversation, hopefully leading to more debate.

In the last few months of the study I had the opportunity to view four original Tladi paintings, an extremely meaningful experience. I interviewed Read Lloyd in her home in Cape Town, where we discussed some of the aspects of the study, and I had a chance to meet Sally and William Stanley, relations of Read Lloyd who also have a small Tladi painting. Seeing the real paintings bolstered my interest in the project and allowed me to write more confidently on the materiality of Tladi’s paintings.

In terms of the contribution of this study, I hope in the first place that the project benefits research on early African South African artists, a field advanced by scholars such as Anitra Nettleton on Dumile Feni (2011); Sue Williamson (2004); Siebrits on the pioneers of black art (2004); Colin

Richards on Durant Sihlali (2006); and the *ReVisions* project of Hayden Proud (2008). There are limited instances of artists writing on other artists, and I hope that this element of my methodology has enhanced the reading of Tladi's work. More research can be done on aspects of Modernism in Tladi's work, especially compared to the use of landscape in other African countries. The Romantic nuances in the work of artists such as John Mohl could potentially get more attention. Furthermore, the link between Romanticism, the Berlin Missions and certain tropes in German Idealism could be explored further in terms of their impact on landscape painting.

Secondly, my research on Tladi hopefully adds relevance to the arts in its overlap with other disciplines, most prominently those of history and missiology. Much writing has surfaced recently on Pedi and Transvaal history (roughly the period from the 1930s to the 1960s) by South African writers such as Lebaka (2012), Delius (2010), Jordaan (2011), Nkadimeng (2006) and Van Eeden (2008). For the wider reading public, I hope I have aided in dismantling some of what Nettleton calls the "well-worn art historical mythology" of the unheralded self-taught genius, explaining how art and landscape filtered through Tladi's life in a myriad ways although he had little formal training.

Lastly, the practice-based methodology of this study suggests new ways of combining art practice with critical writing on art history. In her book *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* Patricia Leavy explains that researchers working with arts-based tools are "merging their interests while creating knowledge based on resonance and understanding" (2009:2). In a form of research that relies heavily on 'resonance', the writer has to carefully negotiate what is said, what is concealed and what is implied. Whereas the different practical elements of my study (travelling to Limpopo, studying in Uganda) do not necessarily exist as extensive written narratives, they lie concealed in my own work, just as Tladi's paintings suggest certain narrative elements but rarely spell them out.

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