

The Historiographic Metafiction of

Etienne Van Heerden

By

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Declaration

I the undersigned declare that the work contained in this thesis, is my own original work that has thus far not been submitted either partially or fully, to any other university for the acquisition of a degree.

Signature.

Date

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the possibility that there are other ways in which to represent the past, not just the traditional way as practised by historians. For instance, other forms such as historical fiction in the historical novel, and therefore, narrative, can act as an important conduit for conveying historical meaning.

Through the examination of the historiographic metafiction of the South African writer, Etienne Van Heerden, this study has concluded that through a reading of both the author's belletristic and theoretical texts, readers interested in history and literature will gain some understanding of the problems that come with writing up the past. At the same time, they will gain some knowledge of a different way of writing about South African history, because the author portrays the historical events in a refreshing, vivid and imaginative way. However, it needs to be said from the outset that in no way is the writer of this thesis neglecting the merits of traditional history or advocating its abolition, which is, ultimately, the scientific way of representing the past and remains sacred and paramount for the historian, both amateur and professional.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die moontlikheid dat die verlede volgens ander sienswyses voorgestel kan word en nie slegs volgens die tradisionele sienswyses van historici nie. Daar is byvoorbeeld ander vorme, soos historiese fiksie wat in historiese novelles gebruik word, en daarom kan die narratief as 'n belangrike kanaal dien om historiese betekenis mee oor te dra.

Deur 'n ondersoek van die historiese metafiksie van die Suid-Afrikaanse skrywer, Etienne van Heerden, kom hierdie studie tot die gevolgtrekking dat deur die lees van beide die skrywer se belletristiese en teoretiese tekste, lesers wat in die geskiedenis en literatuur belangstel, 'n begrip sal kry van die problematiek wat gepaard gaan met die skryf van geskiedenis. Terselfdertyd sal hulle 'n begrip kry van 'n alternatiewe skryf van die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis, omdat die skrywer historiese gegewens in 'n verfrissende, helder en verbeeldingryke wyse oordra. Dit moet egter beklemtoon word dat die skrywer van hierdie tesis geensins die meriete van tradisionele geskiedskrywing negeer of die afskaffing daarvan voorstaan nie, aangesien die wetenskaplike voorstelling van die verlede kosbaar en van kardinale belang vir beide amateur en professionele historici bly.

Acknowledgement

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Mr Raymond Danowski of Norfolk, England, sent many books on the topic which have been used in the writing of this thesis. I wish to thank him.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all who love reading, studying and wanting to know more about history.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the historiographic metafiction of Etienne Van Heerden with special reference to selected texts from his *oeuvre* and investigates the historical consciousness in the belletristic as well as the theoretical Van Heerden text. It focuses on the code of self-conscious historiography in the Van Heerden *oeuvre*, ie, the metafictional problematisation of the relationship between the “real past” and the textualisation of the past. The study has involved a critical reading of both the belletristic and the theoretical texts, with, as the main theoretical source, *Postmodernisme en prosa* by Etienne Van Heerden (1) as well as *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* by Linda Hutcheon (2). The editors of *Groniek* emphasise an aspect of romanticised history and narrative:

“Een romancier schetst een beeld van het verleden dat, door de ‘echtheid’ van de - al of niet historische - personages, voor de lezer tot leven komt. Dit in tegenstelling tot de grote hoeveelheid geschiedkundige werken van allerlei hooggeleerde heren die door de grote meerderheid van de mensen als saai wordt aangemerkt”(3).

For this study the following statement by J J Degenaar is important: “In this context historical facts are not simply given; they are rather discursive constructions created in a specific paradigm” (4). Hayden White adds: “A specifically historical enquiry is born less of the necessity to establish that certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might mean to a given group, or culture’s conception of its present task and future prospects”(5).

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- (1) E Van Heerden, *Postmodernisme en prosa*, (Cape Town, Human en Rousseau, 1997).
 - (2) L Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, (New York, Routledge, 1989).
 - (3) The Editors, *Groniek, Gronings Historisch Tydschrift*, 105/1989, 7.
 - (4) JJ Degenaar, “Historical Discourse as fact-bound fiction”, in Doeser, M C & J N Kraay (eds), *Facts and values: Philosophical reflections from Western and non-Western Perspectives*, (Dordrecht, Boston and Lancaster, Marthinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 65-80.
 - (5) H White quoted in E Ibsch, “Fact and Fiction in Postmodernist Writing”, in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 9 (2), 187.

There is a great deal of general literature available on the subject of history as a form of narrative, but it is writers such as F R Ankersmit, Alun Munslow, Keith Jenkins and others, whose views are important for the purposes of this study (6). A number of works and articles can be cited as forming a part of this body of writing, and this study has sought to interact with them in some way or other, and if not, to mention them here. Michael Green makes a detailed claim for an important kind of historical understanding relating to both history and fiction (7). One can appreciate this argument in context of Frank Ankersmit who makes the distinction between historical writing (narrative) and historical research. The two are different. Because the writing of history is based upon facts, which comes from “to make” (*facere*) in Latin, and because fiction means “to make up” (*fingere*), there is every reason to campaign for an understanding of both. Much like Hayden White who emphasises the **form** the text takes, Michael Green examines **resistant form** by shifting the category of “historical fiction” away from its dependence on content.

Writers such as Etienne Van Heerden and writers of literary criticism such as Michael Green, therefore, are concerned with the production of historical meaning, and their works examine this field. Strangely enough, there is not one reference by Green to any of Van Heerden’s works, which, one would have thought, might be fertile ground for this purpose. This study looks at Green’s proposals quite closely, since it makes a lot of sense in enabling White to come to the fore in the South African scene, especially if one is to examine the Van Heerden novels as a possibility for “novel histories” in the South African context.

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- (6) See the works by, among others, F R Ankersmit, *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*, (Berkley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1994); Carl Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998); *A New Philosophy of History* by F Ankersmit & H Kellner (eds), (London, Reaktion Books, 1995); *Reconstructing History: The Emergence of a New Historical Society* by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn (eds), (London and New York, Routledge, 1999); *On ‘What is History?’: From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* by Keith Jenkins, (London, Routledge, 1995); *The Memory of the Modern* by Matt K Matsuda, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996); *Landscape and Memory* by Simon Schama, (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1995); *The Postmodern History Reader* by Keith Jenkins (ed), (London, Routledge, 1998); as well as writers such as Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1997), and furthermore, related articles in *History and Theory* by Jörn Rüsen, (Vol 36, Number 2, 1997); Ewa Domanska, (Volume 37, Number 2, 1998) and Richard T Vann, (Volume 37, Number 2, 1998).
- (7) M Green, *Histories, Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1997).

Important works in South African literature which examine culture and identity through the struggle for land are by J M Coetzee (8) and Ampie Coetzee (9). Their works accentuate the importance of narrative within the context of literature and history. This study has, therefore, briefly examined A Coetzee's work in relation to the role of narrative in history, especially as far as the farm novel is concerned. Of particular note and relevance is Coetzee's idea of "story within story" and he provides an apt setting for this by referring to the opening lines of Van Heerden's *Kikoejoe* where he describes the idyllic nature of a beautiful guest farm:

"Ver in Afrika, aan die voet van 'n berg, lê 'n vakansieplaas. Die opgestopte koppe van wildsbokke is teen die stoepmure gemonteer. In die sonbesiesomers borrel vlermuise skemertyd uit die groothuis se nok en kort voor die strawwe rypwinters sit swawels op die telefoondrade. Hulle kyk noord en tiep in die wind" (10).

This thesis could easily have referred to several other works available on South African historiography, such as that of Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (11), who analyse the tools of memory making in South African society, to include autobiography, fiction, museum exhibits and accounts from the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the purpose here is to provide "some reflections", and not to try to cover the whole topic. It is recognised, though, that their works greatly enhance the process of the production of historical meaning *via* the various manifestations as mentioned here above, but these specific developments, as dealt with by them, have not been included in this study since they are not deemed central to it.

(8) J M Coetzee, *Disgrace*, (London, Secker and Warburg, 1999).

(9) A Coetzee, *'n Hele os vir 'n ou broodmes*, (Pretoria and Cape Town, Van Schaik-Human en Rousseau, 2000).

(10) Referred to by A Coetzee, in *'n Hele os vir 'n ou broodmes*, 143.

(11) S Nuttall and C Coetzee (eds), *The making of memory in South Africa*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998).

There are a number of important contributions in the form of various articles and papers which, in themselves, form an important bank of literature on the topic of narrative in the South African historical context. For instance, H P van Coller examines the distinction between objective history and that purported by Hayden White who questions the possibility of its existence (12). History can never be objective, according to White, since it has an ideological dimension and because it needs to be told and emplotted, hence its narrative character. Extensive reference in this study is made to the role of White in the debate on historical writing, in Chapter One, and in Chapter Two, where the relevance of White to South African historical fiction is noted. However, there are other important articles, too, which are listed hereunder for the benefit of students wishing to engage in further research on the topic (13).

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- (12) H P Van Coller, "Die waarheidskommissie in die Afrikaanse letterkunde: die Afrikaanse prosa in die jare negentig", in *Afrikaanse Letterkundevereniging*, Bundel van Referate, 18-29 September 1996, 248-264.
 - (13) There are a number of articles which examine literary historical writing such as J P Smuts's "Die nuwe herinneringsliteratuur in Afrikaans", in "*Afrikaanse Letterkundevereniging*, Bundel van Referate, 18-29 Sept. 1996, 125-132; W H Thornton's article which examines the development of literary historiography, "hard pressed between literature and history proper", entitled "The Politics of Literary Historiography", in *Tydskrif vir Literatuurwetenskap*, Jg. 10, Nr 3/4, Des. 1994, 425-436; Willie Burger's "Geskiedenis in resente genealogiese romans", in *Afrikaanse Letterkundevereniging*, Bundel van Referate, 18-29 Sept. 1996, which examines the relationship between history (defined as historical narrative) and the past; Philip John's "Literatuurgeskiedskrywing en diskoers: die 'begin' van die Afrikaanse letterkunde", in *Literator*, 15 (1) April, 1994, 97-113, which examines literary historiography, analysed by means of the discourse-analytical tradition associated with the name of Michel Foucault, whose discourse theory is used with reference to the alternative conception of history which accompanies it in order to suggest a solution to the problem of these marginalised Afrikaans literary traditions. One thinks strongly of the position of Etienne Van Heerden in this regard. Finally, there are other articles, for instance, by Helize van Vuuren, "Literary Historiography, with Specific reference to the Problems of the South African Context", in *Tydskrif vir Literatuurwetenskap*, Jg. 10 Nr 3/4, Des. 1994, 261-278, which states that literary historiography in South Africa is still embryonic and the discipline is still undergoing serious rethinking. This makes the writing of Etienne Van Heerden important in this regard, because he takes on the issues raised by van Vuuren, namely the changes of the political state and the problematic concept of nationhood. An important contribution is from Pieter Conradie in "Kantaantekeninge by die *literator* as historiograaf", in *Stilet*, Jg 10 (1) Mrt. 1998, 139-150, where the title fits in strongly with the theme of this study, namely, the writer as historiographer.

Furthermore, Louise Viljoen identifies Etienne Van Heerden's *Casspirs en campari's* as an important novel in Afrikaans literature, specifically because it adopts historical themes (14). Her own opening words are significant:

"An important feature of Afrikaans novels published since the beginning of the nineties is that a great number of them have history as their subject. Sometimes the historical events portrayed in these novels form part of the recent past (for example the traumatic eighties in South Africa)" (15).

There are other articles such as the one on postcolonial studies on hybridity in which Steward van Wyk heightens the awareness of the role of Afrikaans within the community of Coloured people (16). This is an important position to take, since any author trying to make political and historical sense of the past within a South African context would have to situate his/her writing within this trajectory and territory. This study has consequently taken note of these viewpoints and has tried to incorporate them when examining the Van Heerden *oeuvre* as outlined at the beginning of this introduction.

Johan Tempelhoff has similarly highlighted the importance of Van Heerden, whom he says, looks at South African history in a refreshing way:

"In die proses van 'n bestekopname na 'n gevolgtrekking oor *Postmodernisme en prosa*....is dit noodsaaklik om te besef dat daar 'n koersverandering besig is om in die Afrikaanse letterkunde plaas te vind. Vir die historikus is die tendens redelik verstaanbaar. Ofskoon die historisme in die "postmodernisme" opgeskuif word, is dit so dat die hermeneutiese verstaanproses herontdek is. Dit is wonderlik om kennis te neem van die bereidwilligheid om nuwe weë te verken en 'n koers in te slaan wat sal dui op 'n heraanvaarding vir die verindividualisering van die menslike gees" (17).

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- (14) L Viljoen, "Re-presenting History: Reflections on Two Recent Afrikaans Novels", in *Current Writing* 5 (1) 1993.
- (15) *Ibid.*, 1.
- (16) S Van Wyk, "Hibriditeit, of die baster in ons, in *Skrywersberaad*, in Litnet, 6 Januarie 2001.
- (17) J Tempelhoff, Book Review of E Van Heerden's *Postmodernisme en prosa*, (Cape Town and Pretoria, Human & Rousseau, 1997), in *New Contree*, Jg 42, 1997.

However, the following point needs to be made. If one is going to examine Van Heerden purely from an historian's point, one can say that in his writing, areas exist where more research from him should have been forthcoming. For instance, as far as black historical fiction accounts are concerned, aspects of which he includes in *Die Swye van Mario Salviati* (used as a case study for the purposes of this thesis), the work by Wolfgang Gebhard is important (18). However, from a postmodernist historical novelist's point of view, this is not the intention. Van Heerden will say that his writing is "from within" and therefore, as such, does not strive to give an overall historical perspective. By trying to strike historical balance, as a postmodernist novelist, he would be guilty of the very aspect he is trying to avoid, namely, totalising history/grand narrative, totally alien to his writing. Similarly, the "Herkennings" at the end of the novel ironise the acknowledgements in the academic sense because it is not the purpose of the writer to involve himself in methodical historical research as would an historian. They serve as "artistic impulses" for the creation of historical meaning in the postmodernistic (historiographic metafiction) sense of the word. Rather than try to act in any way as a political treatise, Van Heerden's novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati* is more a discourse on hybridity than a commentary on socio-economic and political factors in South Africa society.

It is my belief that this thesis, taking into account all what has been said thus far, will make a contribution to the existing knowledge of historical writing in South Africa, because it recognises that there is a call among South African historians for a broadening of ways in which to represent the past, so as to pass historical writing onto the readers of history in a fresh and exciting way. The role of narrative as adopted by Van Heerden, to be shown in the case study of *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, has been selected for this purpose, because it is believed it is a fitting way to demonstrate an alternative or counter history to the totalising, conventional and often tedious canons of South African history.

(18) W Gebhard, "Shades of Reality: Black Perceptions of South African History", (Essen, Die Blaue Eule, 1991).

CHAPTER 1

ASPECTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON HISTORICAL WRITING

The Age of Enlightenment saw the emergence of grand scale, rationalist history-writing whereby history moved away from chronicle, to a science of causation and change. For instance, history in “moving cycles” and, therefore, as scientific progress, was examined by Giambattista Vico in his *Scienze Nova* (1725). Soon after, history of the grand narrative emerged, producing large-scale works such as William Robertson’s *History of America* (1777) and Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1788). Further classic examples of grand narratives are the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century, Marxism and the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity as well as Freud’s Theory of Psychoanalysis which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1913) “considered the manifest appearance of phenomena to be underpinned and made possible by underlying systems and structures; for Marx, it was the system of economic and social relations; for Freud, the unconscious; for Saussure, the system of language”(1). Furthermore, Saussure’s “influence on literary theory came to the fore in Structuralism and later in post-Structuralism”(2). According to Alun Munslow, Structuralism itself emerged in many ways, for instance, by the way we structure our sentences, interact with each other, construct stories and arrange our ideas (3).

The notion of scientific objectivity came under pressure as a result of Structuralism, which greatly influenced the way we think about the past and history. Furthermore, intellectual developments took on new forms through post-Structuralism and New Historicism, and these, in turn, “have ultimately all helped to shape the deconstructionist objections to traditional history”(4).

(1) Quoted in P Rice and P Waugh (eds), *Modern Literary Theory*, 6.

(2) *Ibid.*

(3) Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 27.

(4) *Ibid.*

Munslow further debates that science, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, “has depended upon powerful, socially constructed, political and philosophical ‘master’ narratives to support, protect and legitimise it - what Lyotard calls meta-narratives”(5). Fully aware of the notion of “objectivity” which claimed to have been the mainstay of historical writing, Peter Novick refers to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) which introduced the general academic world to “postempiricist” conceptions of science (6). Arthur Danto says of Kuhn’s theory that it:

“opened the way to discussing science as a human and historical matter instead of a logical *Aufbau* of some immaculate form of language” and that “there now really was a unity of science, in the sense that all of science was brought under history rather than, as before, history having been brought under science construed on the model of physics”(7).

Munslow claims that “the meta-narrative of scientific objectivity and the unfolding of progress through our grasp of the past is now under challenge” (8), whilst Keith Jenkins sees it as: “a general failure which can now be picked out very clearly as the dust settles over the twentieth century - of that experiment in social living which we call *modernity*”(9). Munslow’s concluding remarks to the argument are significant: “at the close of the twentieth century, narratives both grand and petty, beliefs, attitudes, values and disciplines, societies and meaning itself, appear to be fractured or fracturing”(10).

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- (5) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 14. Munslow sees Lyotard, and in particular, his *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) as important in the debate on the deconstructionist view of history because he distinguished between a narrative rather than an objective-empiricist undertaking for history.
 - (6) P Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 526. Novick refers to “the multiple but loosely convergent assaults on received notions of objectivity which swept across the academic world from the 1960s onwards”, which he refers to as “postmodern”.
 - (7) A Danto quoted in P Novick’s *That Noble Dream*, 526.
 - (8) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 15.
 - (9) K Jenkins, ‘On What is History?’ *From Carr and Elton, to Rorty and White*, 6.
 - (10) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 15.

According to Jenkins: “we now just have to understand that we live amidst social formations which have no legitimising ontological or epistemological or ethical grounds for our beliefs or actions beyond the status of an ultimately self-referencing (rhetorical) conversation”(11). He further qualifies this statement by saying that it is: “The recognition of this, variously expressed at the level of theory from the actualities of living in the condition of post-modernity”, which he calls “postmodernism”(12). Munslow’s point earlier about the meta-narrative of scientific objectivity and the unfolding of progress through our grasp of the past now being under challenge, is further explained by him in the following extract:

“The rise of fascism, two world wars, de-colonisation, seismic technological change, environmental and ecological disaster, the information explosion, the growth of exploitation and non-accountable global capitalism, with its commodification of labour in the ‘developed’ West, and the worsening dispossession of the toiling masses across the undeveloped globe, have all but destroyed the meta-narratives that legitimised both science and history as foundations of what has been regarded as an inexorable trend towards individual freedom and the self-conscious improvement of the human condition”(13).

To Munslow, therefore: “It now seems quite incredible that anyone could have ever believed in the hierarchy of master narratives like liberalism, science, Marxism, socialism, or a view of history that emphasised either the discovery of the past as it actually was, or even the inevitability of progress”(14). Yet, the “traditional paradigm” of the meta-narrative and the accompanying historical writing that came with it, all “under the wing” of Structuralism, accounted for much of the latter half of the nineteenth century and more than the first half of the twentieth century’s historiography (15).

(11) K Jenkins, ‘On What is History?’ *From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White*, 7.

(12) *Ibid.* There is a full explanation of the terms “postmodernism and postcolonialism” in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds), 289-292. The distinction between modernism and postmodernism is discussed by Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, 106-111.

(13) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 15.

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) The “traditional paradigm” is a term used by Alun Munslow.

By the middle of the twentieth century the grand narrative as a system of knowledge was coming increasingly under pressure. This was precipitated by a significant shift in historical thinking and the resultant development of historiography. Grand narratives came to be seen as too imposing and devoid of a greater awareness about the nature of, among other disciplines, history and the different ways of thinking about the way the past could be represented. The following account by Peter Novick of Jean-Paul Sartre's exposition to his friend Giacometti, serves as a fitting illustration:

"You reach a point where you have to throw your piece of sculpture in the rubbish bin, or exhibit it in a gallery. You never quite grasp what you set out to achieve. And then suddenly it's a statue or a book. The opposite of what you wanted. If its faults are inscribed methodically in the negative which you present to the public, they at least point to what it might have been. And the spectator becomes the real sculptor, fashioning his model in thin air, or reading the book between the lines" (16).

Michel Foucault formulated his theory on Discourse derived from his interest in Saussure's Structuralist theory of language, and ironically, his theory was a break with it (17). For Foucault, Discourse is an inclusionary/exclusionary system whose rules not only determine what can be said, but who can say it. He aimed to reveal the shadowed side of all different forms of discourse purporting to serve "the truth", by demonstrating their "duplicitous, deceptive and nefarious nature". Through Discourse, therefore, society creates its own fiction. Similarly, Jacques Derrida challenged the notion of what was determined as "rational", thus providing one of the intellectual meanings of the term post-Structuralism, a term that is used interchangeably with deconstruction.

(16) Jean-Paul Sartre in P Novick's *That Noble Dream*, 629.

(17) The consequence of the study of Structuralism is that there is no autonomous reality available to cognition, which fits in with Foucault's view. He was originally regarded as a Structuralist, but gradually his work came to fall under the auspices of post-Structuralism. In Jeremy Hawthorn's *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, there is a useful account of post-Structuralism on pages 137-138. It is important to see post-Structuralism as a "development and a deconstruction of Structuralism".

J J Degenaar's contribution to the debate on historical writing is interesting to note. In evaluating the condition of historiography, he says: "In this context historical facts are not simply given: they are rather discursive constructions created in a specific paradigm"(18). To this, Hayden White adds:

"A specifically historical enquiry is born less of the necessity to establish that certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might mean to a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present task and future prospects"(19).

Thus, it can be seen that a number of writers have expressed themselves strongly on the status of (historical) knowledge and its ability to express "truth" as "scientific knowledge". These writers/philosophers have consequently placed phenomena such as Structuralism, and historical writing, under immense challenge, using the traumatic events of the twentieth century, such as the Cold War, Vietnam and the fall of Communism, to give credence to their theories.

In a different genre, but in a similar way, one is reminded of how the artists Braque and Cezanne, who, each having gone their own way one summer holiday, returned with examples of their work showing a similar style which was a significant shift from their previous style. Overnight their work changed from conventional structure, to the "broken-down" image. Their works are cited as the precursor to cubism, with its emphasis on many viewpoints of the same subject.

(18) J J Degenaar, in "Historical Discourse as Fact-bound Fiction", in *Doeser, M C & J N Kraay* (eds), "Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and non-Western Perspectives", 65.

(19) H White, quoted in E Ibsch, "Fact and Fiction in Postmodern Writing", in *Tydskrif vir Literatuurwetenskap* 9 (2), 187.

It has thus been shown that the notion of the meta-narrative or the over-arching structure of knowledge has been challenged by some writers, thus enabling a different and also multiple view of phenomena to be considered. Their opinion is that the interpretations of the past can never be fixed, which Munslow refers to as “deconstructive consciousness”. He says this can exist in many ways, as in “epistemology, the treatment of evidence, the construction of explanations, or the precise nature of our explanatory narrative form”(20). Furthermore, Munslow emphasises that: “postmodern or deconstructive history challenges the traditional paradigm at every turn - hence its description variously as the deconstructionist, deconstructive or linguistic turn”(21).

In whatever way one wishes to approach the debate, postmodern/deconstructive/post-Structuralist history has challenged the conventional grand narrative, Structuralism and empiricism. Munslow formulates this as a deconstructive perspective, derived from the focus coming from postmodern philosophers of history (22). For them, the possibility of traditional history being able to know what happened in the past based upon the “objective constitution of the facts”, is no longer possible. They look to a new way of constructing meaning, rather than try to embark on a better way of representing reality, and they do this through creating narrative representations of the past.

(20) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 16.

(21) *Ibid.*

(22) For the purposes of this thesis, the terms postmodernist/deconstructionist/post-Structuralist are used interchangeably. But Munslow distinguishes between reconstructionist-empiricist/constructionist-social/deconstructionist-postmodern theories. On p. 19 of *Deconstructing History*, he provides a list of deconstructionist historians: Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, David Harlan, Allan Megill, Keith Jenkins, F R Ankersmit, Philippe Carrard, Joan W Scott, Patrick Joyce, Roger Chartier, and many other “new wave” intellectual and cultural historians, where the emphasis is placed less on traditional empiricism or explicit social scientific theorising, than on the relationship of form and content (sources/evidence and interpretations) and the unavoidable relativism of historical understanding. In a footnote to the list of postmodern writers, Munslow provides a bibliography of publications of these authors, available to students wishing to read more about the subject (page 200).

Paul Maylam suggests that “historians must engage constructively and critically with the postmodern critique” although he is prepared to accept the validity of some basic premises, for instance, that the past cannot be known with any final precision, that historical texts are ideological and theoretical, and that historians should be more reflexive and transparent about their own practice (23). However, he warns that when postmodernism calls for this “greater reflexivity”, “such reflexivity can lead to a kind of free-flowing epistemological relativism that could be used to undermine the whole postmodernist critique” (24). Maylam further challenges the postmodernist view of historical knowledge which N Etherington refers to as “the common wisdom of the best present-day practitioners [of history]” (25). Maylam warns, though, that : “In the end anybody who writes history cannot escape the constraints, shortcomings, limitations that go with the business of historical reconstruction and explanation” and points out further that: “Postmodernists have been right to emphasise and highlight these shortcomings and to demand from historians a greater awareness of them”, and finally, a caveat: “But ultimately, if the task of reconstruction and explanation is to continue, all historians, modernist or postmodernist, have to work within these constraints”(26). However, Munslow takes a strong stance on defending narrative representation as a way of constructing meaning rather than “reconstruction and explanation”, which Maylam discusses:

“Deconstructionist history treats the past as a text to be examined for its possibilities of meaning, and above all exposes the spurious methodological aims and assumptions of modernist historians which incline them towards the ultimate validity of correspondence between evidence and interpretation, resulting in enough transparency in representation so as to make possible their aims of moral detachment, disinterestedness, objectivity, authenticity (if not absolute truthfulness) and the objective constitution of historical facts - allowing the sources to speak for themselves. Because today we doubt these empiricist notions of certainty.....there is no more history in the traditional sense, there are only possible narrative representations, in and of, the past, and none can claim to know the past as it actually was” (27).

(23) P Maylam, “ ‘Post-Theory’ and the Historian’s Practice”, *SAHJ*, No 42, May 2000, 124.

(24) *Ibid.*, 125.

(25) N Etherington, “Po-Mo and SA History”, *Southern African Review of Books*, No 44, July/August 1996, 11, quoted on page 124 of Maylam’s article in the *SAHJ*, No 42, May 2000, 124.

(26) P Maylam, “ ‘Post-Theory’ and the Historian’s Practice”, *SAHJ*, No 42, May 2000, 134-135.

(27) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 16.

"These narrative representations, in and of, the past" come to us as a result of the view that language is "an infinity of free-flowing signifiers that have no knowable, and therefore no concrete, point of origination, and consequently no certain end" which has been a central concern of Derrida, and which led him to come up with his theory of *différance*, whereby "words are defined by their difference to other words, but meaning is continuously *deferred* as every word leads to another in the system of signification"(28). Thus, because history ultimately appears in language form, the way knowledge of the past is related, must be intermediate, and so meaning can never be final.

One of the movements that raised this criticism against the correspondence theory of meaning - which said there could be no second-order levels of meaning and signification (29) - and questioned the representational power of written history, is the New Historicism of the 1980s. One of its aims was "to relocate literary works within their historical context - to understand poems, novels and plays as texts not simply in their structuralist relation to each other, but also in their associative connections with the institutions of society and the historical events that might have influenced their production - the relationship, text to context"(30). The historian Lawrence Stone, for instance, welcomed New Historicism because it threatened the traditional study of the past for the simple reason that history is emptied of its association with reality and instead takes on the form of a cultural script dealing with political and social practices (31).

Deconstructionist history, thus, challenges the notion that historians who search for the "real" historical past will reach it. However, due to the fact that language is always going to be an uncertain means for recording what happened in the past, the knowledge that we will gain from it will be uncertain. Thus, "truthful" narratives as historical explanations are accordingly not possible (32).

(28) A Munslow referring to J Derrida, in *Deconstructing History*, 29.

(29) Refer to R Barthes, "Theory of the text" in Young, R (ed), McLeod, I (trans), *Untying the text: a Post-Structuralist Reader*, 36.

(30) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 30-32. For an explanation of the derivation of the term New Historicism, see Munslow, footnote 31, in *Deconstructing History*, 201-202.

(31) L Stone, "History and Post-Modernism", *Past and Present*, No 131, 1991, 217-218.

(32) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 30.

Hayden White, a leading American historian whose publication *Metahistory* (1973) is seen as central to the debate on the move away from empiricist causality and history, distinguishes between *the past* and *history*: “History, as opposed to the past, is a literary creation because it is always interpreted through textualised relics which themselves are only to be understood through layers of interpretation as the historian’s facts”(33). According to White, because it is impossible for the facts to arrange themselves into some kind of meaningful story, the historian has to “impose meaning through the organisation of the data as a narrative”(34). In terms of what traditional historians do, it does not come as a surprise that White could be strongly criticised for his aestheticising history and relativising the past. For White, “the imposing of meaning through the organisation of data as a narrative” essentially means that the **form** the historical account takes is as, if not more, important than the content. This notion is strongly borne out by the following view held by White:

“historical narratives....are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences”(35).

White proposes a “mechanism” for historical explanation whereby the historian can “impose meaning through the organisation of data as a narrative”. For the historian to place the facts in their historical context/framework means that there need to be certain specific strategies of explanation, which White divides up into four categories: the **tropes** (figures of speech - *metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy* and *irony*); **emplotments** (*romance, tragedy, comedy* and *satire*); **formal arguments** (*formalist, mechanist, organicist* and *contextualist*); and **ideological explanations** (*anarchist, radical, conservative* and *liberal*). White employs these strategies of explanation because for him history takes on a narrative form which means the medium of the historian is **the word** which has to be configured just as a painter has to arrange his/her **brushstrokes** onto the canvas, or the musician composes the **notes** of the music onto the sheet.

(33) H White referred to in A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 33.

(34) *Ibid.*

(35) H White, “The Historical text as Literary Artifact”, in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 82.

Hayden White is important to this study and an important philosopher of history, instrumental in the debate on modern historical writing because of his espousal of the relationship between historical narrative and figurative explanation. For him, as for the other writers already referred to, history no longer would rely on the correspondence theory: the empiricist-reality type of historical representation must make way for a new deconstructionist consciousness for history.

Keith Jenkins dwells on two important aspects for which White is well-known, firstly, his most succinct response to what history is, namely, “a narrative discourse, the content of which is as much imagined/invented as found” (36), and, secondly, and by way of explanation of the former point:

“because in the construction of their historical narratives historians inevitably combine known or found parts (facts) with ultimately unknown and thus imagined/invented wholes; because the attempt to make truth claims about the past beyond the level of the statement and/or the chronicle based upon some sort of correspondence between the stories they tell and the stories lived in the past, breaks down when it is realised that there are no stories in the past to correspond to - that past ‘events’ just don’t have in them the shape of stories”(37).

White’s **formalism** is an important contribution to modern historical writing, and through his development of a philosophy of history he has provided historiography with a new dimension, which Jenkins puts succinctly as follows:

“through these developments narrative history took on the form of the ordered, the measured and the beautiful, as opposed to a view of the past that lacked these aesthetic proportions, so that the aesthetic tamed the irregularities and grotesqueness of the sublime”(38).

(36) K Jenkins, referring to White in *‘What is History?’ From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White*, 134.

(37) *Ibid.*

(38) *Ibid.*, 141.

Neither White nor Jenkins are advocating the disregard for trueness to the facts. The problem with traditional history, for White, is that the facts relate to the chronicle and not the story. How can this be when the story becomes something in itself - a narrative made up of "symbols of the plot structure of the series considered as a story of a specific kind" (39)? Historians can find the "syntax" of the past which are the facts/statements/chronicle, but can never find its "semantics" which is the story/narrative (40). For the postmodernist historian, historical meaning is created through the narrative because for him/her one cannot render reality in a new or a better way as modernist historians have attempted to do (41). There are a number of points in White's philosophy worthy of note. If the historian recorded the facts, then he/she would be more a chronicler than an historian; there need be no violation of the syntax (facts) in order to yield alternative but yet equally plausible interpretations of the events; histories are never just about the events/facts of the past *per se* but also "about the possible sets of relationships that those events [facts] can be demonstrated to figure" (42). Furthermore, according to White, because history itself does not have a generally accepted "technical language":

"the only instruments the historian has for endowing his data with meaning, or rendering the strange familiar, and of rendering the mysterious past comprehensible, are the techniques of *figurative* language. [consequently] All historical narratives presuppose figurative characterisations of the events they purport to represent and explain. And this means that historical narratives, considered purely as verbal artifacts, can be characterised by the mode of figurative discourse in which they are cast"(43).

The above basic outline of White's philosophy of history can certainly help to sharpen the historical consciousness of students of history heretofore reliant on a factual approach to the discipline. With the chance to exercise greater historical imagination, now made possible to a large extent by White's work, history students can display a clearer understanding of historical phenomena and engage more meaningfully with their subject.

(39) H White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 92-93.

(40) K Jenkins, referring to White, in 'What is History?' *From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White*, 152.

(41) An idea put to me by Wilhelm Liebenberg, in a discussion in September 2001. Liebenberg is a past lecturer in Linguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand.

(42) H White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 94.

(43) *Ibid.*, 94.

A special session of the American Historical Association held in January 1997 honoured the achievements of Hayden White, and examined the influence of his work on the historical discipline. The anticipation was that there would be an account of the impact of the “linguistic turn” and of narrative theory in particular, on the practice of academic history.. White responded by suggesting his work should be positioned in its “moment of production”, and acknowledged his earlier fascination with Structuralism, suggesting that his work, *Metahistory*, resulted from his experiment with applying it (Structuralism) to nineteenth century historical writing.

It is, therefore, interesting to note this view of White, because it fits in strongly with the flow that this chapter has taken, essentially the move from Structuralism to post-Structuralism in historical writing. In Nancy Partner’s appraisal of White, she admits that he “touched many nerves” in the historical writing profession, because of his insistence on linguistic form as the “primary carrier of meaning in historical writing and in historical knowledge”(44). In traditional historiography one finds a preoccupation with content and often the importance placed on form is consequently neglected. To best illustrate this, Nancy Partner used Hayden White’s example of a fragment of an early medieval chronicle called *The Annals of St Gall* (709 - 734 AD). White cited this chronicle as an example of “unexplained fragments” “connected to a few years and the rest left empty of history”. According to him: “the only principle of meaning evident here is the sequential temporal order of years which are *Anni Domini*, the normal sequence from the calender grounded in Christian incarnation theology”(45). In the account, Partner points out how frustrating the reading experience is because:

“there is no central subject, no beginning, no middle, no end, no evident principle of selection, no connections, no indication of the relative importance of events, no apparent reason for entire years left historically blank, no narrative voice, in short, no narrative”(46).

(44) N Partner, “Hayden White: The Content of the Form”, in *History and Theory*, Volume 37, Number 2, 1998, 162.

(45) *Ibid.*, 164.

(46) *Ibid.*, 162.

Yet, White insists that the almost empty list: “709 - hard winter, Duke Gottfried died; 710 - hard year and deficient in crops; 711 - nothing noted; 712 - flood everywhere; 713 - apparently nothing happened; 714 - Pippin, mayor of the palace died; 715 - then nothing happened; 716 - nothing happened; 717 - nothing at all recorded in the event column”, does have a plot, in the sense of a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole (47). White uses the above chronicle as an example of a piece of realistic history, stripped of the fictions of form. The importance of narrative in historiography is therefore emphasised, accompanied by the emplotment, configuration and interpretation of the historical events. For White:

“The more historically self conscious the writer of any form of historiography, the more the question of the social system and the law that sustains it, the authority of this law and its justification, and threats to the law occupy his attention”(48).

Put differently, if we wish to impose meaning (*via* form) on reality, we must ultimately “acknowledge the legitimacy of the state as a large-scale emblem for reality itself, and to accept what goes with it, namely its legal and moral constraints as an allegory of meaning”(49). White has “brought to the fore the relevance of literary critical concepts and rhetoric to the work of historians and has provided history with the linguistic medium and so given it an intellectual visibility (50). In this way he has provided historical writing with another logic, one that “reconfigures the historical text as an artifact of constructed reality, rather than see it as an inert window on it”(51). History, thus, becomes “a cultural artifact, a complex form of literature, constructed under the constraint of a protocol which evokes a reader-response, recognizing “not-fiction” (alias “truth-claim”) as its textual intention” (52). In the outline of White’s philosophy as stated in the above pages, it is clear that he offers a proposal for a different view on historical writing and so widens its perspective.

(47) *Ibid.*, 167.

(48) *Ibid.*

(49) *Ibid.*

(50) *Ibid.*

(51) *Ibid.*

(52) *Ibid.*

White's purpose is certainly not to see narrative for narrative's sake, but to view historical writing as:

“Less to remind men of their obligation to the past than to force upon them an awareness of how their past could be used to effect an ethically responsible transition from present to future”.

(Hayden White)

The works of the philosophers of history referred to in this chapter, and especially that of Hayden White, open up the discourse on historical writing for students in pursuit of “what is history?”. They offer a proposal for a different way of looking at the writing up of the past. An interesting question worthy of note is the extent to which “the White principle” operates in practice in the South African setting. A brief examination of this will follow. The idea of narrative history, so central to White's thinking, is also central to this study. Whilst historians need to defend traditional history which lays claim to “trueness” to historical sources, there is room in this huge field for a different approach, a wider perspective and dimension. Thus, other forms, such as fiction or the historical novel, become fertile ground for such an approach. These “other forms” can also offer aspects not always found among traditional historians, specifically from an historical imagination point of view. Thus, when applying White to the South African scene, one will need to examine the extent that his approach is a valid, but different one, to the existing bank of traditional historical writing.

Because the consciousnesses (*sic*) of people differ, there are many different proposals for the recording of the past, but only one historical framework into which must fit the all-encompassing form/content debate on history and “what it is”. Hence, there is a trade off between the two, form - content/content - form, and this constitutes a moral decision for the historian. The move away from Structuralism to post-Structuralism/deconstructionist/postmodernist history is one of many stories in a broad range of kinds of historiographies. For deconstructionists, it is as if the Berlin Wall of history has finally come down. For re-constructionists is it possibly the closing curtain on historical writing? Whatever the situation, deconstructionist history, although not necessarily “right”, opens the way for other voices, other views and can lead to interesting developments in the reality-history debate, abroad and in our own country.

CHAPTER 2

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT DEBATE ON SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Sociological and anthropological *constructionism* found in the New Cultural History, referred to as *deconstructionist* history, has contributed to the change in historiography over the last thirty years (1). The Marxist School's social theory of class exploitation, "constructionist-social science-inspired" history of the *Annales* school of historiography of the 1920s, the New Economic History of the 1960s and the social history of the 1970s have contributed to this (2). Deconstructionist history sees the past as a "complex narrative discourse" because representation itself cannot act as a transparent mode of communication for adequately carrying understanding or generating "truthful meaning" (3). Deconstructionist history, therefore, comes as a direct challenge to the modernist-empiricist notion that the past can be represented as it happened. This is so because when we look at events that have happened in the empirical past, we view them through our own "constructed categories of analysis", such as race, class and gender (4). Thus, we need to appreciate the difference between representations of the past, and the past itself, and we need to do this not only for historical writing on a broader basis as in the previous chapter, but also for South African historical writing if we wish to gain a better understanding of history here at home.

Alan Munslow has identified Hayden White as the leading practitioner of the narrative version of constructionism. White's theory is that if what we expect from history is to be able to reconstruct the past according to evidence, then we have failed. His justification for holding this view is that writing history requires the emplotment of the past as a way of taking into account the rhetorical, metaphorical and ideological strategies of explanation. This is the historian's task. Thus, the way in which history is explained is inextricably linked with the study of rhetoric. This makes history, according to White, a "literary artifact" which is "as much invented as found" (5). One can say, therefore, as does Munslow, that history exists as a cultural product which, in turn, exists *within* society, and not as an objective methodology and commentary outside of it (6).

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- (1) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 9.
 - (2) For a more comprehensive explanation of these contributing factors, refer to A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 8.
 - (3) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 9.
 - (4) *Ibid.*
 - (5) For this reference, refer to A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 9.
 - (6) A Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 9-10.

The achievement of Hayden White is that he proposed a different way for historians to set to work. F R Ankersmit says of White: "But historians find an extra argument for their dislike of White's ideas in his alleged cavalier disregard of how historical facts limit what the historian might wish to say about the past" (7). Ankersmit opines that this is a misguided view of White, whom, he maintains, spent much of his time on expressing "a full awareness of the kind of problem encountered in the effort to tell the truth about historical reality" (8). To this, Ewa Domanska adds that: "A current stage of irony manifests itself in a doubt as to the capacity of language to grasp reality", and that, as a result, we live in a "prison-house of language" (9). To Domanska, White could very well be a "poetic historian"..... "for whom there is no distinction between the history one lives and the history one writes" (10). Richard T Vann says of White: "But nobody looking back at what was available to the "reflective historian" in 1973 can miss the great sea-change which White, more than anybody, has created" (11).

White clearly moved away from the modernist-empiricist view that history can reflect reality, and identified himself with Michel Foucault who "represents a continuation of a tradition of historical thought which originates in Romanticism" (12). In this respect, according to him, "Foucault and the Romantics hold in common a desire to defamiliarise the past", and so move away from the conventional history of ideas such as continuities, traditions, influences, causes, comparisons, typologies and so on, and instead take up their opposites, such as ruptures, discontinuities, disjunctions - "the *differences* between the various epochs in the history of consciousness, rather than their similarities" (13).

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- (7) F R Ankersmit in "Hayden White's Appeal to the Historians", in *History and Theory*, Volume 37, No 2, 1998, 182.
 - (8) *Ibid.*
 - (9) E Domanska in "Hayden White: Beyond Irony", in *History and Theory*, Volume 37, No 2, 1998, 173.
 - (10) *Ibid.*, 181.
 - (11) R T Vann in "The Reception of Hayden White", in *History and Theory*, Volume 37, No 2, 1998, 161. The reference is to White's *Metahistory* which is considered a landmark in postmodern historiography.
 - (12) H White referring to M Foucault, in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 256.
 - (13) *Ibid.*, 234.

This approach to history espoused by Foucault and embraced by White is a radical break with the traditional history that came with the nineteenth-century revolution in historical consciousness, and so Foucault's emphasis on history as *difference* can serve as a counterpoise to conventional historiography, referred to quite extensively by White, as follows:

"Since historians always deal with a subject matter that is strange, and often exotic, they often assume that their principal aim should be to render that subject matter 'familiar' to their readers. What appears strange at first glance must be shown in the course of the narrative to have had sufficient reasons for its occurrence and therefore susceptible to understanding by ordinary informed common sense. Since all things historical are presumed to have had their origins in human thought and practice, it is supposed that a vaguely conceived 'human nature' must be capable of recognising something of itself in the residues of such thought and action appearing as artifacts in the historical record....Hence the essentially *domesticating* effect of most historical writing. By rendering the strange familiar, the historian divests the human world of the mystery in which it comes clothed by virtue of its antiquity and origination in a different form of life from that taken as 'normal' by his readers" (14).

According to Michael Green, for White to transform historical studies into a discipline, "he demonstrates that a necessary feature of this process was the subjugation of the utopian impulse which springs from perceiving the past as truly *different* from the present" (15). For Green: "In making the past explainable, the discipline of history *domesticates* it, or, in Enlightenment terms, reduces it from the 'sublime' (in which awe, even revulsion prompts a utopian reaction) to the 'beautiful' (in which all difference is reduced to an aesthetically acceptable pluralism)" (16).

(14) H White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 256.

(15) M Green, *Novel Histories: Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, 145.

(16) *Ibid.*

White's campaign is for a reversal of this, by looking forward "to a recovery of the historical sublime which bourgeois historiography repressed in the process of its disciplinization" (17). This means moving away from history as domestic, beautiful and real, to history as different, subliminal and romantic. In this regard, White's approach to history as an ontological phenomenon is worthy of study. In other words, the meaning of a fact remains empty unless a cognitive interest, an emotional impulse or an ideological commitment constructs a system which makes that fact into a historical "event", and, at the same time, into a *narrative*. It would be especially relevant to the study of South African historiography to examine the extent to which White's ideas about historical consciousness and writing can be applied locally.

Michael Green suggests that the role of imagination in historical writing, such as espoused by R G Collingwood in *The Idea of History* (1946), should not be something foreign to the work of South African writers, for instance, that of Daphne Rooke (18). Green opines that "Hayden White usefully characterises the place of the imagination in this 'modern historical theory' in a way that brings relevance to Rooke to the fore" (19). It might be that although the world which we enter when reading her work is not necessarily that of the "literally historical", she still, according to Green, uses her imaginative strategies in *Wizard's Country* to serious historical effect (20), and furthermore, according to him, the movement of the narrative in *Wizard's Country* thus represents a compelling "novel history" to the reader, as he suggests:

"Fiction becomes an historicising form, letting us experience the resistance of a world different from our own and yet finding a way to relate that world meaningfully to our own" (21).

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- (17) H White, "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation", in *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1), 136.
 - (18) M Green, *Novel Histories: Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, 166.
 - (19) *Ibid.*
 - (20) *Ibid.*
 - (21) *Ibid.*

In her novel, *Wizard's Country*, where the character Benge's personal history is one of restoration, both magic and history play a vital role in the story. Because Benge is physically deformed, he is on the receiving end of "communal supernatural belief", and as a result, he is treated like a child even though he is an adult, because of his physical deformity. But magic plays an important role in Benge's life and as a result he is freed from the influence of the witch. Here one can see what was referred to earlier, namely, while the world which we enter is not necessarily that of the "literally historical", the author in the novel can still use his/her imaginative strategies to serious historical effect, and "the movement of the narrative is towards an increasing integration into formal history" (22).

It seems, therefore, that there is a case for examining the South African literary genre in view of Hayden White's approach to historical writing. In *Novel Histories*, Michael Green confesses that the study for his book "arose out of a preoccupation with the place of the referent in fiction" (23), and: "My South African context.....cast that preoccupation primarily in the form of the historical, so historical fiction seemed a natural focus" (24). Green ultimately confesses that: "Any desire to present a comprehensive survey of South African historical fiction in English soon gave way, however, to the more fundamental problems of defining just what is at issue when considering uses of history in fiction" (25).

There is, thus, a warning from him that "the past began to emerge as only one of a broadened definition of historical fiction's focuses, dominant only in a particular phase of the area of 'South African literature' " (26). The sphere of interest open to Green, thus, became more broadened as he realised the teleological nature of the genre. By his own admission: "As my field began to break up and reform around these varying temporal emphases, a work of historical fiction became for me any work that was engaged in the production of a particular sense of the 'historical' - itself a contingent term" (27). Hence the themes in Green's book: Part One - *Uses of the Past*; Part Two - *The Present as History*; Part Three - *The Future as History*.

(22) M Green, *Novel Histories: Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, 166.

(23) *Ibid.*, 8.

(24) *Ibid.*

(25) *Ibid.*

(26) *Ibid.*, 8-9.

(27) *Ibid.*, 9.

One should see Green's work, *Novel Histories*, as an important kind of historical understanding emerging from fiction, especially in the light of theory relating to history and fiction. In this respect, Green's interest in literary fiction and history can be seen in collaboration with Hayden White's interest in **form** in the production of historical meaning, which for Green is "resistant form", defined as follows:

"**Resistant form** refers to the search for a critical model as much as an aesthetic mode that can, at one and the same time, recognise the inevitable constructedness of its subject within its own productive process, yet create that subject in such a way that that subject challenges the terms within which it is constructed - thus resisting the very forms within which it is produced" (28).

In the light of this, Robert Young puts forward the idea that history can be theorised not so much as a contradictory process, but rather as a concept that must enact its own contradiction with itself: "this difference is what is called History" (29). There is a strong reminder from this, of the question of the meta-narrative *versus* Foucault's idea of *difference*. Furthermore, in this context, Jacques Derrida writes: "...history is impossible, meaningless, in the finite totality, and...it is impossible, meaningless, in the positive and actual infinity;history keeps to the difference between totality and infinity....." (30).

The notion of resisting form is at work in the minds of writers such as Young, Derrida and Foucault, brought out by the views of Green in his work. Essentially, for him: "History as a form, then, remains a 'phantasm', a necessarily totalising structure that resists all but its own most radical implications of difference" (31). Furthermore, as held by Green: "projects of the present all histories are, but if they are to be "histories", their most meaningful effect must be the way in which they resist that present, the very politics which produces them, and in so doing force it to question itself" (32). This is a classic example of what Hayden White would call *meta-history*. By acknowledging this, one acknowledges that history "must be accorded a force of its own and treated as valid in itself.....and not simply something entirely open to the manipulation of the present" - this process Green terms "historicising form" (33).

(28) M Green, *Novel Histories: Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, 6.

(29) R Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, 84.

(30) J Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 123.

(31) M Green, *Novel Histories: Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, 33.

(32) *Ibid.*

(33) *Ibid.*

Green explains this complex argument in more detail. “History” has the duty of challenging the present and forcing the different positions within that present to examine the “specificities of their positionality”, and to do this it must stamp its authority on the present and not be open to the manipulation of the present. In this sense, as a historicising form, history becomes a model for a particular and vital fictional *activity* (34). Thus, fiction can carry out the function as described above, and to this end, according to Michael Green: “The ‘historical novel’ as a category defined by its subject matter (the past) gives way in this account to the process carried out by fiction as an *historicising form*” (35). This happens when fiction operates upon its material and is no longer bound to a particular temporal location, and is open to the past, present and future - “as to turn it into history” (36).

Green goes further to explain the validity of such a historical method for contemporary South Africa. To this effect, the historian must be open to the interrogation of his/her subject, because, in this way, historians can get to know more about our divided community. Green adds: “The resulting sense of a community created out of difference may be read directly into current attempts to transform the signifier ‘South Africa’ from a term of deeply contested geographical significance to a national one that is able to encompass fractures of region, ethnicity, gender, and class” (37).

In this sense, one must consider the “specificities” of history, nation and form in context of “past, present and future in modern South African fiction” (38). These views justify the examination of South African writers who employ fiction as their medium, to see the extent to which their works constitute “history of a kind”, and not necessarily traditional history. To this end, Green looks at Sol T Plaatje, Peter Abrahams, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Oliver Walker and Daphne Rooke whose works are examined in relation to their “historical” form.

(34) M Green, *Novel Histories: Past, Present and Future in South African Fiction*, 33.

(35) *Ibid.*

(36) *Ibid.*, 34.

(37) *Ibid.*, 33.

(38) *Ibid.*, 34.

Ampie Coetzee uses a story from Nadine Gordimer to illustrate the point that if you want the facts about the French withdrawal from Moscow in 1812, you read a history book, but if you wish to gain some kind of insight into and understanding of war, you read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which is not a history book in the conventional sense of the word, but rather a novel (39). In some ways Tolstoy's might very well be considered a historical account, although strictly speaking it does not purport to be a history. As a novel, however, it does not have to follow the pattern of time and place, continuity and change. Yet, in a way, it can be read as history because of its emplotment. In a similar way, one can say the typical South African farm novel can be seen as a "history" because of the discourse which it conducts in so many different ways - just as Tolstoy spoke about war without stringing together the individual events of the war itself.

Thus, a farm novel can be its own sort of history because of the discourse it engages in over possession, appropriation, nature, the farm, the farm novel, the laws governing inheritance, and future generations, to name some features (40). A further example can come from C Louis Leipoldt who deals with the farm, nature, the relationship between farm, worker and land baron. It might not be a "true-to-life" (historical) account of events, yet there is a fair assimilation of historical events throughout *The Valley* (2001), so much so that one might even derive a better account of cultural life in the Cederberg-Clanwilliam area than any other existing histories such as that of P L Scholtz (41). It is interesting to note further in this regard Michel Foucault who describes the way in which *énoncé* forms discourse, which is important in the formation of, say, the discourse on the concept, land:

"Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the *oeuvre* of the author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing is, in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general. One is led therefore to the project of a *pure description of discursive events* as the horizon for the search for the unities that form within" (42).

(39) A Coetzee, in *'n Hele os vir 'n ou broodmes*, xiv.

(40) *Ibid.*

(41) C L Leipoldt, *The Valley*. The trilogy of historical novels was recently edited by T S Emslie, P L Murray and A Russell, published by Stormberg Publishers, 2001. For the reference to Scholtz, see *Die Historiese Ontwikkeling van die Onder-Olifants Rivier, 1660-1902*, (PhD Thesis submitted to the History Dept. at UNISA in January 1964)

(42) M Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*, 27.

Writers such as André Brink, John Miles, Karel Schoeman and Etienne Van Heerden, as well as Christoffel Coetzee in *Op soek na generaal Mannetjies Mentz*, employ discourse in such a way that it reflects a “population of events”. From this the “pure description of discursive events” act as “the horizon for the search for the unities that form within”, to re-quote Foucault. In this instance, their writing is subliminal as it theorises about the very status and identity of the farmer on his/her land. The discourse of the farm theorises about and questions the continual search for Afrikaner identity on a continent that is in many ways so different to what the Afrikaner left behind three-hundred-and-fifty years ago - European soil. To this end, Coetzee posits: “Die plaas en grond is dus dele van ‘n meerstemmige gesprek, ‘n dodelik ernstige debat - ‘n diskoers in die ware sin van die woord”(43). For Coetzee, the historical text will be employed in the form of the farm novel: “Die prosanarratief in Afrikaans sal egter die hoofbron van die studie wees, veral die plaasroman”(44).

The position of the farm novel in Afrikaans literature and culture is thus an important one for understanding the identity of the Afrikaner in South African society today. It is, therefore, safe to suggest that one does not necessarily derive the same “unities that form within” from history texts written by historians such as F J van Jaarsveld, T R H Davenport and C F J Muller. Theirs are principally traditional histories which string together the researched facts and can be considered almost chronicles in the White sense of the word. To take the matter further, the discourse found in farm novels such as those by Etienne Van Heerden and J M Coetzee provide the discourse on land and land possession not readily found in traditional or conventional South African histories, which are, of course, undeniably still very much part of the South African historical writing experience.

As a qualification, Ampie Coetzee reminds readers that: “Hierdie boek wil die verhaal van grond, grondbesit en die plaas in Suid-Afrika vertel. Nie om die verlede te herskryf nie, ook nie om die geskiedenis van die verlede in terme van die hede te vertel nie. Maar om die geskiedenis van die hede te vertel”(45). In this way, Coetzee’s work is similar to Green’s who talks of “Novel Histories” and the role of the present in history.

(43) A Coetzee, *‘n Hele os vir ‘n ou broodmes*, xiii.

(44) *Ibid.*

(45) *Ibid.*, xii.

Elsie J E Biggs examines Etienne Van Heerden's *Die Stoetmeester* as a typical farm novel (46), as does Herman Wasserman (47). *Toorberg* would possibly have been more suitable, since it appeared before *Die Stoetmeester*, but Van Heerden says of it (*Toorberg*) that: "dié boek nie 'n plaasroman is nie, maar miskien juis 'n reaksie op die ouer plaasromans van byvoorbeeld van den Heever" (48). Yet, according to André le Roux, *Toorberg* is a new perspective on the world of the farm novel (49). *Toorberg* raises existential questions, but "Die eksistensiële vraagstukke speel in op die aktualiteit van *Die Stoetmeester*" (50). To this, Marion Hattingh adds a very important point: "Die verhaal word 'n allegorie van die ingewikkelde netwerk faktore wat die uiters gespanne verhoudings tussen gemeenskappe in Suid-Afrika onderlê" (51). Consequently, *Toorberg* can be considered an important contribution to South African historical writing as can *Die Stoetmeester*, since both engage in historical discourse about Afrikaner status and identity in our country, particularly from the point of the farm novel.

The problem of the Afrikaner's future existence on the continent of Africa is certainly one of the main issues explored in the Van Heerden *oeuvre*, thus making it a novel that deals with moral and political identity (52). It is fair to suggest that the idea of history as "the present" as seen in Green and Coetzee referred to earlier, is played out in one of Etienne Van Heerden's characters: "One day" in *Toorberg* believed: ".....eendag is vandag. Eendag het aangebreek. En wee die een wat vir die Here sê: nie vandág nie, Here, maar môre.....Eendag is nou!" (53). This problematises "tomorrow's existence" in South Africa and Africa as far as the Afrikaner is concerned.

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- (46) E J E Biggs, "Die samespel van landskap en figure in Etienne Van Heerden se plaasroman *Die Stoetmeester*", MA Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Stellenbosch, November 1996.
 - (47) H Wassenaar, "*Die Stoetmeester* deur Etienne Van Heerden binne die Plaasromantradisie in Afrikaans", MA Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Stellenbosch, March 1997.
 - (48) E Van Heerden in Elsie J E Biggs's MA Thesis: "Die samespel van landskap en figure in Etienne Van Heerden se plaasroman *Die Stoetmeester*", 68.
 - (49) A le Roux, "Die plaas is verby - moenie lag nie", *Die Burger*, 14 Januarie, 1987, 6.
 - (50) E J E Biggs, "Die samespel van landskap en figure in Etienne Van Heerden se plaasroman *Die Stoetmeester*", 68.
 - (51) M Hattingh, "*Die Stoetmeester* van Etienne Van Heerden: Gesigte van 'n gestorwe siener", in Hattingh, M. en Willemse, H. (reds) "Vernuwing in die Afrikaanse letterkunde", 135.
 - (52) *Ibid.*
 - (53) E Van Heerden, *Toorberg*, 170.

When a nation is going through trauma caused by a great crisis as in and after the South African Anglo-Boer War, typical patterns of behaviour seem to emerge, according to Chris van der Merwe (54). The five responses outlined by him are: “Don’t forget”; “Who’s to blame?”; “It’s not so simple”; “Universal Patterns” and “We’re to blame”. In the last of the final responses, van der Merwe refers to Christoffel Coetzee’s novel about the Anglo-Boer War, *Op soek na generaal Mannetjies Mentz*. Coetzee’s brutal *Commando* has much in common with the covert activities of the 1980s in South African history, and the book has as much to say about working through the political trauma of that time as about that of the Anglo-Boer War. In C Louis Leipoldt’s poem *In die konsentrasie-kamp*, the aggrieved Afrikaner pours out his political feelings, which are historically based. He simply cannot forget the way the British treated his people:

“Vergewe? Vergeet? Is dit maklik vergewe?
Die smarte, die angs het so baie gepla!
Die yster het gloeiend ’n merk vir die eeu
Gebrand op ons volk; en dié wond is te ná -
Te ná aan ons hart, en te diep in ons lewe -
‘Geduld, o geduld, wat so baie kan dra!’”(55)

In the poem Leipoldt explains the psyche of the Afrikaner as a result of the events of the recent past and their impact on him/her. Afrikaners were very bitter about the way they were treated by the British. One can consider Leipoldt’s a piece of historical writing (albeit in poetic form), in the sense that he sketches a political condition prevailing in the minds of his people at the time, and after. In a similar way, Christoffel Coetzee heightens one’s awareness of the trauma that occurred in South Africa’s grim political past, especially in the “kragdadigheid” of the eighties. Whilst essentially not considered to be in the farm novel genre, *Op soek na generaal Mannetjies Mentz* features strongly as a “geskiedkundige navorsingsroman”(56). In this sense, it is relevant to the foundation of this thesis, because it raises the point that literary history, historical fiction, novel histories, Afrikaans poetry and specific genres in Afrikaans and South African-English literature such as farm novels, can provide an historical understanding of South African history. All history does not necessarily have to be traditional history.

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- (54) C van der Merwe, in an address: “Right or Wrong? Bitter-enders, Hands-uppers and Joiners in the Anglo-Boer War”, presented on Tuesday 18th September 2001 at the Owl Club of Cape Town.
- (55) C Louis Leipoldt, *Vyftig Gedigte*, 22. Van der Merwe recited a few lines in his presentation to the Owl Club, by way of illustration.
- (56) A Coetzee, *’n Hele os vir ’n ou broodmes*, xv.

AM Grundlingh has campaigned for wider dimensions to social history in South Africa (57). Timothy Keegan recognises this because “today’s young scholars are more likely to be preoccupied with meaning and mentality, ideology and culture, than were their predecessors”(58). In the development of the connections between historical writing and fiction, Michael Green has something very important to say in this regard: “Both in content and form.....the writing of social history comes close to modes that intersect with structures commonly associated with fiction - or, to be more precise, a certain mode of fiction: realism”(59). In order to enter the realm of social history (realism), one needs a bold approach which can often act as a counter to the South African history that once passed as official. Often it is the historical novel, poems and fiction, such as have been referred to in this chapter, that lend themselves to a better understanding of “narrative, biography (‘life history’) and human experience as a way of bringing home the lived effects of the dehumanising structures of segregation and apartheid”(60). Biggs supports this in her view expressed as a result of her study on *Die Stoetmeester*: “Dit wil egter voorkom asof die roman ook ’n ruimer toepassing soek met betrekking tot die geskiedenis, die hede en die toekoms van Suid-Afrika”(61).

By making Hayden White’s poetics applicable to South African historiography and by examining important writers on the literary history/literary fiction and other scenes, such as Michael Green and Ampie Coetzee, it might very well be that Grundlingh’s call for “wider dimensions” to the existing “breadth of social history” (in South Africa) can be met by someone as close to home as Etienne van Heerden. Much will depend on the form and content of his work.

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- (57) AM Grundlingh, “Transcending Transitions? The Social History Tradition of Historical Writing in South Africa in the 1990s”, 14.
 - (58) T Keegan, referred to by AM Grundlingh, *Ibid.*, 14.
 - (59) M Green, *Novel Histories*, 17.
 - (60) M Green, *Novel Histories*, 18.
 - (61) E J E Biggs, “Die Samespel van landskap en Figure in Etienne Van Heerden se Plaasroman *Die Stoetmeester*”, 64.

CHAPTER 3

ETIENNE VAN HEERDEN: THE AUTHOR AS COUNTER HISTORIAN

An aspect that Alan Cobley traces in the emerging South African radical historiography in the light of the disintegration of the apartheid state and the transition to majority rule, is “the resulting popular perception that the new South Africa should look to the future, not to the past” (1). This teleological dimension which historical discourse can, and should offer, is made manifest by Cobley through the works of the radical historian Shula Marks and the rise of social history. Cobley cites the Minister of Education, Professor Kadar Asmal, as saying: “Studying history in a creative manner through critical interrogation of different interpretations and sources is not incompatible with having a non-negotiable content”(2).

Etienne Van Heerden, although by no means a historian in the traditional sense of the word, can fit into the mould campaigned for by the Minister, for in post-apartheid/post-colonial South Africa, his writing looks to the future, his work can be considered a form of social history and he approaches the events of the last thirty or so years in South African history “in a creative manner through critical interrogation”. In the race to keep the teaching of history alive in this country, one sincerely hopes that the words of Alan Cobley ring true, namely that: “.....it is evident that a struggle for the hearts and minds of policy makers, no less than for prospective students, is continuing”(3). Writers of fiction such as Van Heerden can play an important role in keeping alive the historical imagination of their readers through their novels. In a way, therefore, Van Heerden’s work can be seen as a “truth and reconciliation commission” of a different kind, where: “The voices of ordinary people have entered the public discourse, and shaped the passage of history”(4). These people are the “long silent, unheard, often unheeded before they spoke, in their own tongues, at the microphones of South Africa’s Truth Commission”(5).

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- (1) A Cobley, “Does Social History have a Future? The Ending of Apartheid and Recent Trends in South African Historiography”, in *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 27, Number 3, September 2001, 613.
 - (2) *Ibid.*, 625.
 - (3) *Ibid.*
 - (4) A Krog, *Country of My Skull*, viii.
 - (5) *Ibid.*, viii.

As a novelist, and as a result of a number of different circumstances, Van Heerden's historical consciousness has meant he has been able to stand up for people whose voices have seldom been heard in the annals of South African history, although historians such as Colin Bundy, Charles van Onselen and others, have represented the stories of marginalised people in this country. In his paper, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", Van Heerden stresses the "**vanuit**" and contrasts it with N P van Wyk Louw's "**rondom**" in "Rondom eie werk" (1970) (6). According to N P van Wyk Louw, it is possible that "jy histories en onbevange op eie werk kan kyk"(7). For Van Heerden this is not possible because:

"Daar is vir hom geen bevoorregte afstandelikheid, geen objektiewe terugkyk, geen afhandeling, geen gevoel dat hy opeens kan stilstaan, omdraai en filosofies kan terugkyk vanuit 'n bevoorregte, intelligente hede nie"(8).

For the writer, as Brenda Marshall suggests, history is not a linear construct which places itself within a final moment for the whole of history to march upon it (9). In the **Nota** to Van Heerden's first novel, *Matoli* (1978), one is immediately struck by the autobiographical inscription of the self into the past. For instance, we read that "Kobus se vader is intussen oorlede...." (10), which refers to the untimely death of Van Heerden's father who farmed the twelve generation-old family farm in the Graaff-Reinet district. A further example of the inscription of the writer into the past is: "waaronder die voorsate van Kobus was, in die tyd van Sir John in konfrontasie gekom met die voorvaders van Matoli" (*sic*) (11).

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- (6) E Van Heerden, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, Augustus 1994, 1.
 - (7) N P van Wyk Louw referred to in Van Heerden, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, Augustus 1994, 2.
 - (8) E Van Heerden, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, Augustus 1994, 2.
 - (9) B Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, 148.
 - (10) E Van Heerden, in the **Nota** to *Matoli*, 7.
 - (11) *Ibid.*

Van Heerden's **vanuit** eie werk can mean he adopts a style referred to as "historiographic metafiction" (12) whereby he problematises language's inability to gain access to the past. We see this at an early stage in his writing, for instance, in *Matoli*: "Amptelike rekords oor die gebeurtenis is uiters fragmentaries en boere in die distrik reageer nie danig spontaan wanneer hulle oor die Matoli-episode gepols word nie" (13). To Van Heerden, therefore, it is difficult as a writer to approach one's writing from the perspective of "Rondom eie werk". He would rather approach his subject from the perspective of "Vanuit eie werk", which he explains fully in his paper.

Van Heerden admits that his texts are born out of the emergence of the "ego document" or "I fiction" coming from the New Journalists in the USA in the post-Vietnam era, where news was seen as a socially constructed and manipulated reality, a commodity to be sold like any other in the market place: "die klem op voorlopigheid, subjektiwiteit, die blootlê van die skrywende rol van die verteller-ervaarder, is natuurlik die klimaat waarin my tekstegebore is"(14). He explains further: "Omdat hierdie tekste dikwels die problematiek van die verhouding feit en fiksie verder voer as die New Journalism, word hulle seker tereg postmodernisties genoem. Geneties het hulle egter baie te danke aan die insigte van die New Journalism" (15).

Van Heerden opposes any idea of there being "objective journalism", "true facts", or "official history" and much of his work is devoted to debunking these myths. However, he does not leave the matter hanging in the air, but embraces it as a real challenge, showing in his work that there are manifestations other than those deemed to be "objective", "true" and "official". An attempt will be made to discuss them here.

(12) The phrase was coined by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London, Routledge, 1988). This "code" explains the way in which writers (autobiographically) inscribe themselves into the past, within the text, and problematise the past both distant and recent.

(13) E Van Heerden, *Matoli*, 8.

(14) E Van Heerden, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", 6.

(15) *Ibid.*

The Angolan War acted as fertile ground for several Afrikaans writers to pursue a similar approach to that of the New Journalists, by raising questions about South Africa's involvement in a bush war with a heretofore unknown "enemy". Among them was Van Heerden. Thus began the documentation of a society of violence which Dorian Haarhoff refers to as a "neo-documentary response" (16). A bigger literary response grew when writers such as Alexander Strachan and George Weideman began to theorise about the concept "border", which resulted in the debate on the "equality" between the world of the text and the world of the bush war (17). Van Heerden's own significant contribution where the term "border" was problematised, came in *My Kubaan* (1983) and a year later in *Om te Awol* (1984). These texts sought specifically to act as what Brenda Marshall refers to as Foucauldian "counter-memory" by questioning the official lies emerging from the Minister of Defence to cover up his government's "Total Onslaught" campaign (18). Ihab Hassan reminds one that this counter memory intervenes in history rather than tries to document the historical events - so, these stories do not so much try to spell out the "historical facts" or the "political exactitudes" of the bush war, as that they attempt to move in behind what Lyotard has called "metanarratives" (19).

In *Om te Awol* counter-memory is at work when a national serviceman endeavours to establish an own "identity" in the wake of a host of master narratives that confront him: a culture of whiteness, apartheid, national service, Separate Development and Christian National Education. His wanderings represent the inscription of the self into a personal history. A misplaced personal diary acts as a metaphor for trying to find and establish meaning. On a visit to the farm where he was born, the soldier's thoughts begin to crystalize as he searches for meaning, and the diary turns into a novel which juxta-poses hero/anti-hero, the world of belonging/awolling, departing/arriving, a man with no name/identity, truth/lies and text/the past. This dialectic is used to suggest that there is no such thing as a universal truth, illustrated by the following extract from Van Heerden about *My Kubaan*:

- (16) D Haarhoff, *The Wild South-west; Frontier Myths and Metaphors in Literature set in Namibia, 1760-1988*, 199.
- (17) A Strachan and G Weideman, referred to by E Van Heerden, in "Vanuit eie Werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", 6.
- (18) B Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, 150.
- (19) I Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, 7.

“Ek herinner my ’n Professor in Geskiedenis aan die Universiteit van Zoeloeland wat my tydens ons eerste kennismaking in 1985 vir tee en blikkoekies nooi, vertroulik naderskyf en in ’n sameswerende stemtoon vra: “Dié Kubaan van jou, in daardie boek - is hy vyandig gesind?” Wat ek aan daardie historikus probeer verduidelik het, is dat die grens tussen “Ons” en “Hulle” opgehef word, selfs ondermyn word deur die manier waarop die hondehanteerder nie ontslae kan raak van sy Kubaan nie. Wat ek nie aan hom probeer verduidelik het nie, is dat die erotiese ondertone in *My Kubaan*, ’n erotiese kode wat in *My Afrikaner* verder ontwikkel word totdat erotiek en marteling gevaarlik oor mekaar skuif, dat dié ondertone dien as ’n inenting van die vyand in die bewussyn, ja, selfs in die lyf, van die verteller sodat ’n mens van begeerte na die Ander kan praat. Die sensuele bestryking met warm ysters deur die martelaar word ’n tastende, pynigende soeke na en ondersoek van die Ander”(20).

According to Van Heerden: “Ook in verhale soos *My Kubaan* en sy teenhanger *My Afrikaner* (in *Liegfabriek* (1988)) is daar ’n osmose tussen die gemaklike ruimtes van “Ek” en “Ander”. Daar is nie ’n vertroostende kyk op dié digotomie nie; geen gerusstellende, stabiele kern van “ons” wat opgestel word teenoor dié oorkant die grens, die “Ander” nie”(21). For Van Heerden, “die opwinding lê in die verlange, die strewe, die onvervuldheid, of die “spankrag” van wat wesentlik ’n foedale verhouding tussen skrywer en lewe, teks en werklikheid word...”(22). In this respect, and specifically for Van Heerden, writers are journalists of sorts, or even detectives seeking experience for their writing in order to report on the events that have happened - in this way they are “historiographers of life”.

However, this does not go unchallenged, as Van Heerden confirms: “...die offers wat gevra word van ’n skrywer wat bewustelik of onbewustelik alles wil inspan in sy onderneming om historiograaf van die lewe te wees, is dikwels té groot”(23), which is played out in the following scene: “Ek is, soos *Die Stoetmeester* se Siener Wehmeyer, hier in die rol van ’n rentmeester ingeskryf; ek moet rekenskap gee”; and then, again in *Die Stoetmeester* where the “stoetmeester ’n optog, ’n prosessie, ’n stoet karakters en gebeure en beelde voor die oog moet roep om só, natuurlik te vergeefs, meester te probeer wees van my eie vertelling”(24). The “gebeure”, no doubt, are historical events which appear in all of his novels. In this sense, Van Heerden employs a vivid historical imagination in the way he writes about the past.

(20) E. Van Heerden, “Vanuit eie werk: *Die Skrywer as historiograaf*”, 8.
 (21) *Ibid.*
 (22) *Ibid.* 9.
 (23) *Ibid.*
 (24) *Ibid.*

Van Heerden's characters are people from all walks of life, including peasants and farm workers who give an account of "a day in the life of the ordinary person". In this way it can be said he operates as *literator* of "die klein geskiedenis" and makes his characters move in behind what the official history promulgates: "En ineens besef ek dat my verhale dig bevolk word deur karakters wat 'n verlede probeer agterhaal of rekonstrueer, of as u wil, wakkerlieg"(25). The relationship between writer, text and model - historiographer, historiography and the past - all work together in a moment of tension (26) because the past is not accessible even though it exists as a phenomenon, as Magistraat Van der Ligt in *Toorberg* admits:

"Almal laat iets in hul lewens deur die vingers glip; dit is die lewe: die wegglip, die onkeerbare verdwyning van dinge. Weet jy nie beter as ek nie? My standaardbegrippe was nie genoeg nie: dolus, culpa, animus en al die ander etikette wat my vak koppel aan bykans elke skadu van menslike strewe, wellus, afwyking of late. Nou, hier op die plaas in dié afgesonderde distrik, is dié begrippe ook nie genoeg nie"(27).

This passage is apt commentary for the notion that the modernist way of representing reality does not automatically mean one can gain access to the past. Postmodernist writers approach the matter differently, from within, with the view that by constructing a new reality through narrative, one provides a better understanding of the past. This is essentially Magistraat Van der Ligt's confession as contained in the above extract, and Van Heerden's *ipsissima verba* confirm the futility of trying to capture the past as it really happened:

"Maar namate Magistraat Van der Light die mense van *Toorberg* oor die verlede pols, loop hy hom vas in die wesentlike onkenbaarheid van die verlede. Hy verdwaal in mites, oorlewings, skinderverhale, verswygings.... Uiteindelik word hy deur omstandighede gedwing tot wat 'n mens 'n postmodernistiese opvatting kan noem - dit gaan oor die onkenbaarheid van dinge, betekenis wat bly wyk, bly spook....." (28).

(25) E Van Heerden, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", 9.

(26) *Ibid.*, 10.

(27) E Van Heerden, *Toorberg*, 167.

(28) E Van Heerden, "Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*", 11.

A method adopted by Van Heerden which seeks to destabilise static history by ignoring the conventional elements of time and place *continua*, is what is referred to as “magic realism” (29). According to Brenda Marshall, any text that uses the strategy of magic realism does so because such a text wishes to focus our attention on the fact that we are unable to explain the world in all its physical, cultural, political and inter-personal manifestations (30). In *Toorberg*, for instance, time is embraced in the concept of “pastpresentfuture”, and the attempt to be historically correct is dispelled by stretching out the time to span several generations, from the time that the pioneer StamAbel maps out the farm, to the time that his five-generation-later descendent Druppeltjie falls in the bore hole: “In ’n geteleskopeerde werklikheid sal dié tydperk deur waarskynlik tien geslagte later beleef word” (31). In *Die Stoetmeester* Siener Wehmeyer acts as the historiographer, and the following reference from Brenda Marshall underscores his role: “Nothing dies because memory is like intertextuality - threads that reach back and across and through lives, weaving a tissue of pastpresentfuture and providing the network through which we construct meaning” (32).

In one of the Van Heerden short stories, *Dol hond*, Jakadas Pool, when looking for the spoor of the rabid dog that had been following him and his family since their departure from the farm from which they were evicted, finally finds out that there is no spoor, he is confronted with “history as an illusion”. In this sense, as it is for Brenda Marshall, “the logic of the narrative is the logic of the fantastic”. A mimetic account of the past is not possible, since the past is illusionary, as we discover through Jakadas. That is why Siener Wehmeyer, the ‘seancemeester’ is both a character and the narrator, thus creator of historical meaning. Furthermore, he narrates that he narrates, just as one writes that one is writing, and in this way, he is the metafictional narrator, using the text to theorise about the inability of it to gain access to the real, empirical past, and instead, engage in other more meaningful questions (33).

(29) E Van Heerden, “Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*”, 11.

(30) B Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, 179-180.

(31) E Van Heerden, “Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*”, 11.

(32) B Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, 183.

(33) E Van Heerden, “Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*”, 11.

The inability of the text to capture the past in the sense of traditional history, is recognised by Van Heerden who adopts a narrative strategy in his *oeuvre*. Van Heerden explains that it is not possible for characters such as Siener Wehmeyer to be present in the text and at the same time not engage with it: “Ook vir Siener Wehmeyer is dit dus onmoontlik om “rondom” sy verhaal te beweeg; hy is self meegesleurde in die stroom van sy vertelling. Hy bevind hom nie in ’n finale oomblik waarop heel die geskiedenis afgemasjeer het nie” (34). In a different sequence from Van Heerden, the historiographer’s inability to capture the past is epitomised in the name of the farm in *Die Stoetmeester*, Fata Morgana (35), which becomes a reminder to historical writers that the past is illusionary. Historical meaning is not something that can be “reclaimed”. It has to be produced/constructed within the text.

For Van Heerden, his writing is an intervention in a personal past which challenges official historical perspectives. For instance, *Toorberg* deals with a personal family history that, according to Chris van der Merwe, developed into an allegory of the history of the Afrikaner (36). Apart from being a history of the advertising industry, *Casspirs en campari’s* was an intervention in the South African official history of the Eighties. *Die Stoetmeester* reveals a different kind of story with its emphasis on genetic demons. It is in the context that Van Heerden’s works challenge the status quo, that Foucault’s words are apt: “....behind the always recent, avaricious, and measured truths....(lies) the ancient proliferation of errors” (37). Foucault’s concept of counter-memory can be strongly considered in the Van Heerden *oeuvre*, since he works as Foucault would say, by moving in behind the conventional, official history. This is a critique of traditional history with its emphasis on the instruments of time and place, now purposefully challenged as part of the strategy of the postmodern historiographer.

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- (34) E Van Heerden referring to B Marshall, in “Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*”, 12.
 - (35) Fata Morgana is a mirage occasionally observed in the Strait of Messina in which, from refraction in the atmosphere, images of objects, such as men, houses and trees are seen from the coast under or over the surface of the water; the name refers to “Morgan le Fay”, the pupil of the wizard Merlin of Arthurian legend.
 - (36) C van der Merwe referred to by E van Heerden, in “Vanuit eie werk: *Die skrywer as historiograaf*”, 13.
 - (37) M Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 143.

In a paper on historiography, Van Heerden explains that it has become more so that “die ongemak met die verlede” can be deduced in the creation of fiction, as a means to gain access to the past both distant and recent, and that this involves also “die ongemak met die optekening, vaslegging of boekstawing van daardie verlede”(38). The “fiction” referred to above is self-conscious fiction that engages with the past, operating under the banner of “...die postmodernistiese vooropstelling van die problematiek van representasie geradikaliseer tot ‘n corpus tekste wat nou algemeen bekend staan as historiografiese metafiksie”(39). Historiographic metafiction, according to Linda Hutcheon, is where “its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (40). Thus, when writers of fiction are in the process of narrating their fictions, they question the conventions and “accepted wisdoms” of the craft of the historian. In this manner, fiction writers, by employing both through narrative **and** theory, send queries to the traditional/conventional historians and challenge them with what Van Heerden terms “metahistoriese bemoeienis”, which he qualifies as follows:

“Hierdie metahistoriese bemoeienis beteken dat besinnings oor historiografie of geskiedskrywing nie alleen ’n invloed op skeppende werk uitoefen nie, maar ook dat die roman of die kortverhaal ’n selfbewustheid openbaar oor ons dokumentering van ons verlede, en dat hierdie tekste al storievertellende ’n bydrae lewer tot die teoretiese besinning oor die historiografie of geskiedskrywing as ondereneming”(41).

“Al storievertellende” establishes Van Heerden’s status as a historiographer of sorts by using narrative which is the creation/production/construction of historical meaning. Whilst on the one hand “the past” is his terrain, by moving in behind the official or “knowable” history, he employs the counter-memory strategy. As a (kind of) social historian, he comes up trumps for the landless, the dispossessed, the marginalised. In this regard I feel I can refer to Van Heerden as a counter-historian.

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- (38) E Van Heerden, “Die geding met die geheue: Kontemporêre fiksie se bydrae tot teoretiese besinnings oor die historiografie”, 1.
- (39) *Ibid.* A further note: Linda Hutcheon uses the term “historiographic metafiction” in her work, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*. See in particular Chapter One in Part One, “Theorizing the postmodern: towards a poetics”, 3-21. See also the work of Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Chapter One, pp 1 et seq.
- (40) L Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*, 5.
- (41) E Van Heerden, “Die geding met die geheue: Kontemporêre fiksie se bydrae tot teoretiese besinnings oor die historiografie”, 1.

This proposal is soundly met by the idea offered by Linda Hutcheon:

“What has surfaced is something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known it....we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few” (42).

Van Heerden’s self-conscious obsession with the past and the problems of textual representation that accompany it, is thus evident. Whilst he certainly does not deny that the past happened, he is saying, all we know or can know about the past is caught up in texts, thus making the past an archaeological concept and an epistemological construct. Thus, “every text is a quotation”, and his epistemology, an archaeology of knowledge, is a palimpsest (43). Patricia Waugh adds: “So, history, although ultimately a material reality (a presence) is shown to exist within ‘textual’ boundaries. History, to this extent, is also ‘fictional’ ”(44). It does not necessarily, however, mean that because “the past” is assigned a textual role, that reality itself is denied. In fact, the opposite holds true. The observation by Linda Hutcheon is that, for historiographic metafiction, empirical events (the past) occurred, but the question is how can we know that past today, and not just that, but what can we know of it ? (45) Showing that certain postmodernist novels unavoidably construct as they textualize the past, Hutcheon says:

“The “real” referent of their language once existed; but it is only accessible to us today in textualized form: documents, eye-witness accounts, archives. The past is “archaeologized”but its reservoir of available materials is always acknowledged as a textualized one”(46).

Brenda Marshall’s considerations in this regard, are worthy of note: “The question historiographic metafiction raises, then, is not what is the ‘true’ history, but rather, who represents what history, and who reads and interprets it, towards what purpose?” (47)

(42) L Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, 66.

(43) From an interview with Etienne Van Heerden in Grahamstown in July of 1995.

(44) P Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 106.

(45) L Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, 93.

(46) *Ibid.*, 81.

(47) B Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, 153.

The distinction that Hutcheon thus makes between knowing the past through texts or textual traces (empirical), and saying that the past is only textual (epistemological), is one which both she and Van Heerden share:

“Historiografiese metafiksie maan ons dat, alhoewel bepaalde gebeure wel in ’n empiriese verlede plaasgevind het, ons aan daardie gebeure naam en status verleen by wyse van narratiewe seleksie en rangskikking”(48).

But Van Heerden warns very strongly that this does not mean that the process of “rangskikking” (ordering) should take place from a position of privilege. For, there is always the sceptical element when looking back at what happened, which dispels the idea of history as a linear development, which Brenda Marshall explains:

“The poststructuralist decentring of the subject from the position from which reason emanates means that we may no longer perceive of history as a linear construct which places the subject, in the present, in the privileged position of making sense of all that has come before - as if the subject were either “outside” of history, or else the final moment toward which all history has marched. Derrida pointed out that we are never “outside” the labyrinth of discourse, we are never outside of a point of view or perspective which is always situated as a systematic function, within textuality”(49).

Because Van Heerden operates within a climate that is knowingly self-conscious about the nature and role of our view of the past, as a writer, he needs to be preoccupied with his relationship with his time and his past. His stories, according to William Ray would thus:

“propose various construals of the rapport between personal and public experience, individual will and collective authority, entailing different formulations and how personal narration, with its interpretation of events and expression of personal values, interacts with the shared, evolving script of collective assumptions”(50).

(48) L Hutcheon referred to by E Van Heerden, in *Postmodernisme en prosa*, 68.

(49) B Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, 148.

(50) W Ray, *Story and History: Narrative Authority and Social Identity in the Eighteenth-Century French and English Novel*, 13.

Van Heerden's narrative comes to us *via* his historical novels whether it be *Matoli*, *Toorberg*, *Casspirs en campari's*, *Kikoejoe*, *Die Stoetmeester* and, now his latest, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*. Throughout the belletristic texts, the historiographic metafiction code is evident. Similarly, his theoretical text, *Postmodernisme en prosa* (1997), together with his papers delivered on the subject, form a valuable bank of literature for the student of the subject. By reading these texts one learns how Van Heerden plays (parodies) upon the truth and lies of the historical record, and how he confronts the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/general, and the present/past. In his writing, history is a strong shaping force in which human destiny is a dominant feature, including the destiny of ordinary people, political victims, the landless and the dispossessed - in a way, those who find themselves "outside history". Without wanting to compose a history (for that would be contra to his aim), Van Heerden brings them into the historical arena, and enables their voices, heretofore silent and silenced, to be heard.

In his novels, the author/narrator (tries to) make(s) sense of the historical facts that he/she has collected so as to create some kind of narrative order to produce, construct and create a knowledge of the past (and present and future). The act of narrating or emplotting an order, means one must acknowledge the paradox of the reality of the past and at the same time that it is through the "linguistic turn" that this past becomes available - thus, a textualised past. To Van Heerden, "**History**" is the interpretation of real events. The "**past**" is what happened in the world of phenomenology. "**History**", therefore, has become so self-conscious that it is, indeed, now narrative, and the form it takes is through historical writing (51).

Showing particular interest in the theoretical work of Van Heerden, Johan Tempelhoff comments on the process of historical reality and fictional "clothing" being a technique employed to lend a literary wholeness to the past, which is conveyed by means of conventional narrative (52). According to Tempelhoff, for the historian, the importance of Van Heerden's work is to be found on the terrain of his theoretical perspectives on postmodernism.

(51) E Van Heerden's written words to Paul Murray, Grahamstown, July 1995.

(52) J Tempelhoff, in a review of Van Heerden's theoretical work, *Postmodernisme en prosa*: "Vertelstrategieë in vyf verhale van Abraham H de Vries", which appeared in *New Contree*, Jg. 42, Nov.1997, 197.

Tempelhoff situates Van Heerden's writing within the French and Anglo-American philosopher-writers such as Foucault, De Certeau and Lawrence Stone, who displayed a systematic return to narrative history (53), and sees his narrating the past a useful device to the historian, especially in context of the current state of history (54). Furthermore, Tempelhoff acknowledges that: "Die historiese verhaal is veel meer as die versameling van en beriggewing oor 'n aantal dokumente wat in 'n chronologiese of tematologiese eenheid saamgesnoer kan word"(55). Often history does not read very easily. Thus, entertaining writers such as Karel Schoeman prosper, as opposed to those historians who are hell-bent on revealing "the truth"(56). In this sense, Tempelhoff is full of praise for Van Heerden: "wanneer hy van die historiese denkwys gebruik maak om "die verlede as onthouboek" of die "historiografie" te ontsyfer"(57).

Tempelhoff further holds the view that the emphasis of history has moved from the group to the individual and, thus, for him, a salient feature of Van Heerden is that his work carries with it a rediscovery of the hermeneutic process of understanding. In this way, Van Heerden, according to Tempelhoff, makes a strong contribution to the debate on historical writing and opens a new way of appreciating the "verindividualisering van die menslike gees"(58). Van Heerden's words strongly lie behind this idea when he opines: "Die problematisering van die aard van historiese kennis kom ter sprake, asook die klem op kleingeskiedenis van andersheid en eksentriek gesien moet word"(59).

(53) J Tempelhoff, Boekbespreking van Etienne Van Heerden, *Postmodernisme en prosa*: "Vertelstrategieë in vyf verhale van Abraham H de Vries", in *New Contree*, Jg. 42 Nov. 1997, 198.

(54) *Ibid.*,

(55) *Ibid.*, 200.

(56) *Ibid.*, 200.

(57) *Ibid.*, 200-201.

(58) *Ibid.*, 201.

(59) E Van Heerden, *Postmodernisme en prosa*, 60.

Keith Jenkins has suggested that historians need to be “open about our closures”(60). Van Heerden and Jenkins have proposed new ways for discourse, one a *literator*, the other an historian. Van Heerden chose to uncover the myths of the past at a time when his country’s government had to be silent on a number of sensitive issues - from what was taking place on its borders, to political activity within the country. Particularly in the seventies, as a young South African, he was confronted with the dilemma of remaining silent on issues that affected his life, or speaking out against them. He chose to act, and created characters in novels to challenge the “official lies”, concerned with what he calls a “metahistoriese bemoeienis”. In many ways he reminds one of the political intern, Carlo Levi, whom Mussolini banished to the poor, rural south of Italy, and who in his award winning novel, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, tells of how salvation and self-respect was brought to the shores of a people left out of history. The Van Heerden character, Mario Salviati, in the novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, acts in a similar way, and brings a sense of strength and soothing to the people around him. In a way, therefore, through the production of narrative, and through the creation of characters who challenge the status quo, it can be said Van Heerden operates as a micro-historian, a counter historian, and at the same time embarks upon the terrain of social history which has enriched South African historiography. Thus, one can say Van Heerden has created wider dimensions and perspectives of the fascinating history of our country.

(60) K Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader*. In the Introduction: “On being open about our closures”, p 1 *et seq.*

CHAPTER 4

THE ALBERT VERWEY LECTURES:

THE POETICS OF ETIENNE VAN HEERDEN: A CASE FOR HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Albert Verwey Lectures presented by Van Heerden at the University of Leiden on 22nd and 29th November 2000, respectively, contain his poetics which give rise to his latest novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati* (Tafelberg, 2000). By **poetics** is meant “a flexible conceptual structure which could at once constitute and contain postmodernist culture and our discourses both about it and adjacent to it”(1). The discourse employed by Van Heerden is self-conscious narrative in the historical world, hence the language of historiographic metafiction. This means that as a writer, any theorizing must derive from that which it purports to study (metafiction), within the bounds of historical writing. From this perspective, the Verwey Lectures, and the poetics of Van Heerden that lie therein, are useful if one wishes to gain a better understanding of the historical perspective of the novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*. However, the Lectures are worthy of study in themselves, and provide interesting insights into Van Heerden’s historical consciousness.

One of the Van Heerden characters in the novel, Captain William Gird, came to southern Africa on a “voyage of discovery”. The paraphernalia and instruments that he bears, namely (a) a telescope and (b) maps, act as symbols of appropriation and are used as (a) a symbol of **time** in history - “pastpresentfuture”, and (b) to show the appropriation of the **space** of the Other. In addition, the telescope is symbolic of Van Heerden’s blindness in one eye. Ironically, although himself not aware of it, the victim of appropriation is ultimately the Captain’s guide, SlingerVel Xam!, a member of the declining San community which inhabited South Africa as far back as 125 000 years ago, whose demise came about directly as a result of colonisation.

The giraffe scene (cf. p 24 of *Mario Salviati*) provides useful commentary on historical writing. We read of how Gird together with his guide, return many years later to the area where the giraffe was originally slain, and find the remnants of the animal, hardened skin and bones, lying where it was shot. South Africa’s colonial past cannot be evaded, and history as archaeology acts as fertile ground for a writer such as Van Heerden to “write up the past”. The Gird scene forms a very strong theme in both Lectures, as well as in the novel, and it sets the scene for strong commentary to follow, namely that colonisers appropriated the space and landscape of previous inhabitants of this country. Thus, it issues a strong post-colonial statement which will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

(1) L Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, viii.

From an early stage in the novel, Van Heerden has inscribed himself into the text, just as he did from the time of his first novel, *Matoli*. He does it again in *Mario Salviati*:

“Ek het grootgeword in ongeveer dieselfde omgewing waar kaptein Gird en SlingerVel Xam! op debieuse wyse die laaste eer aan daardie onbekende kameelperd betoon het”(2).

The scene begins with the Captain painting the giraffe on canvas. He carefully records its finest details, after which he proceeds to shoot the animal. In his representation of the giraffe we see how the artist exaggerates the features: “die kameelperd se nek is veel langer as die lewende dier s’n, die oë is amandelvormig, die bene komiekliker”(3). Similarly, when the captain-cum-artist captures the San rock art in his drawings, the features are enhanced: “Nou maak die kaptein sy eie tekening, in helderder verf as die San s’n.....” (4). Here, the commentary from Van Heerden is that the past is only accessible in textual form and so can never be recorded exactly. Furthermore, the writing up of the past changes, and so as the next, revised version of history is recorded, it is a palimpsest. Furthermore, there is parody in the “komiekliker” way in which the paintings are exaggerated. Margaret Rose says of parody: “The parodist will usually aim to create a comic or surprise effect by letting readers or viewers realise that they are receiving something different from the work which is being imitated”(5). Rose opines that parody “will not simply break away from its preceding texts, but will transform them and recreate them within itself”(6). For Van Heerden, this is an essential tool if he is to be a dynamic interpreter of the past.

The giraffe scene in *Mario Salviati* can be considered commentary on the duty of the historian (or artist) to record. At the same time, the scene spells out the intriguing and exotic nature of Africa as a continent, which became the site of possession and destruction by colonial parties represented by people such as Gird. In a sense, one can also say the scene portrays the role of the writer as intruder, as explained by Van Heerden:

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- (2) E Van Heerden in “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 4. From the Verwey Lecture of 22 November, heretofore unpublished. The place reference is to the Karoo.
 - (3) *Ibid.*, 2.
 - (4) *Ibid.*
 - (5) M Rose, *Parody: ancient, modern and post-modern*, 70.
 - (6) *Ibid.*

“Die skrywer se teks wemel van die vingerafdrukke van die gewoontemisdadiger - die skrywer as genetiese krimineel wat weer en weer na die toneel van sy misdaad terugkeer”(7).

The writer is both “Misdadiger” and “Getuie” who constantly constructs meaning from observable events coming out of the empirical past (both distant and recent), who then emplots them and arranges them into narrative form. The inspiration for constructing the history is derived from Van Heerden’s formative years as a youngster on his father’s farm in the Karoo, the “scene” of several of his novels, such as *Toorberg*, *Kikoejoe*, and now, *Mario Salviati*. He acknowledges this in the following extract:

“Die bruin mense op die plaas het stories in my wakker gemaak. Robert was so iemand, hy’t vir my pa gewerk. Elke aand as hy kom skoene skoonmaak in die kombuis, het hy jakkals-en-wolfstories vertel. Dis ’n mitologiese landskap vir ’n kind. In die Karoo het elke hek mos ’n naam, elke draai in die pad. Die Karoo se gestrooptheid dwing jou om betekenis op te lê, om die oopheid, die barheid, te vul. Daardie mitologie, dink ek, het in my agtergebly”(8).

The meaningfulness to Van Heerden of the oral tradition that he was exposed to when a boy on his father’s Karoo farm is instrumental in the production of historical meaning (“.....om betekenis op te lê....”). This exposure in his early years on the farm is one of the decisive factors in the formation of Van Heerden’s historical consciousness, further enhanced by the awareness of Olive Schreiner who lies buried very close to where he grew up. There is a strong connection between these factors and Van Heerden’s farm novels for which he has become well-known in Afrikaans literary circles, as he admits in the following extract:

(7) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 3.

(8) *Die Burger*, 27 Augustus 2000, “Aktueel” in “Perspektief”, 5.

“Dit is ’n geweldige toeval dat twee skrywers in die groot en wye land Suid-Afrika op hierdie manier ingebind is. Schreiner se bekendste roman se titel is *The story of an African farm*, en hierdie naam kan waarskynlik met gemak ook oor sommige van my eie romans geskryf word”(9).

Further extracts from the Lecture show the extent to which Van Heerden was inspired and imbued with an historical spirit, imagination and awareness of the events and people that surrounded him then, and surround him to this day:

“Ek hoor tydens my kinderjare verhale oor Schreiner: van ’n swart vrou wat haar borste toegebind het en vermom as man Schreiner se doodkis teen Buffelskop help uitdra, om so die laaste eer aan haar geliefde werkgewer te bewys”..... “Wat alles waar is en wat nie, weet ek nie as kind nie - dit is stories en bewerings wat versmelt met ander gerugte van daardie tyd: voorspellinge van sprinkaanplae en swart opstande, van Uhuru en winde van verandering, van dalende wolpryse, droogtes en veesterftes, van diefstal en aanrandings op afgeleë plase”(10).

Van Heerden is fascinated by the way in which Olive Schreiner, a lady, who was buried in a stone igloo-like grave (sarcophagus), could get to be “daardie man Olaf Schneider (*sic*), die uitlander, wat hier bo, agter die stasie, op die berg begrawe lê”(11). For him, the irony of this lies in the way phenomena are represented in textual form. In a way, it blends with his idea of the kind of space which he experienced when young: “Die Karoo word die mitelologiese ruimte van my jeug; ’n terrein van stilte; ’n gebied waar dinge wat verkeerd geloop het, hoort”(12). This fascination with the Karoo, with its landscape and people, is at the core of *Mario Salviati*, and reflects the history of ordinary, everyday people set in a landscape that goes back in time and space, with its secrets and silences which some of Van Heerden’s characters try desperately to uncover and others try to hide.

(9) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 4.

(10) *Ibid.*, 4-5.

(11) *Ibid.* 5.

(12) *Ibid.*, 6.

Van Heerden further explains his fascination with the secret-silence of the unique Karoo, metaphoric, for him, of the secrets and silences of phenomena that occur in our own lives:

“Dis ’n landskap wat ek vandag nog met ’n mate van voorbehoud besoek. [...] Baie van die gedigte (en verhale) sluip klandestien terug Karoo toe, begin versigtig, met ’n nuwe oog, die landskap en sy mense aftas”(13).

As a young lawyer practising in a Bellville firm of attorneys, it was always the motive behind the (one is hesitant to say criminal) human action that interested Van Heerden. In a way, he admits, he acts as “ ’n rondreisende fotograaf” trying to capture what happened in the lives of ordinary people. A further influence on him was the distorted way the official history was being presented in his country at the time:

“As skoolkind binne ’n deur Apartheid geskepte wit gemeenskap, en weggesleur uit my plaasagtergrond waar ek baie kontak met swartmense had, het ek min idee van wat in die swart gemeenskap gebeur. Geen politieke rewolusie swiep deur die geleedere van my skoolmaats nie - die jeugopstande van die swart jeug van Soweto sal eers jare later - in 1976 - plaasvind”(14).

From his literary studies at the University of Stellenbosch, especially the Russian Formalists (who distinguish between the ordinary and the literary use of language), Van Heerden became inspired to strive for alienation and originality in writing which led to the blending of his historical consciousness with literary language in order to achieve *ostranenie* (15).

There was a fascination with Adam Small, especially since his writing was strongly representative of “Other” South Africans with a very rich and colourful history, yet at the same time, a sad history because of the historical background as former slave societies who came from the East Indies to the Cape. A logical consequence of the slave presence at the Cape was miscegenation, both physically and linguistically, and as an important theme in post-colonial writing, this subject (hybridity) served as fertile ground for Van Heerden’s fascination:

(13) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 6.

(14) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 10.

(15) *Ibid.*, 13. *Ostranenie* means “to make it strange”.

“ Ek maak ook kennis met die gedigte van Adam Small, ‘n Kaapse bruinman wat onder meer in Kaaps skryf - die variant van Afrikaans wat op die Kaapse vlakke gepraat word. Kaaps is die hibriede taal van die Cape Flats; ’n mengsel van wat toe standaard-Afrikaans genoem is, en Engels. ’n Werkerstaal”(16).

The influence from writers close to home, such as Olive Schreiner and Adam Small provided Van Heerden with a consciousness of African, and more importantly, South African history, and it is this historical awareness that produced the “plaasroman” of which *Toorberg*, *Die Stoetmeester* and *Mario Salviati* are examples. In particular, *Mario Salviati* embraces the theme of South African history from a very wide perspective to include the current post-colonial debate on hybridity (17).

The cultural status of the Afrikaner within a colonial context is a strong theme in the Van Heerden *oeuvre*. For instance, the “bloedboom” of Tallejare can explain, to an extent, the integration of South African society - there is a great deal of miscegenation evident from the genealogy, to be found at the very beginning of the novel. Each of the main characters is hybrid. Hybridity, a post-colonial phenomenon, strengthens the genes, unlike the “floubokke” of *Die Stoetmeester* who are genetically weak.

Van Heerden, as an Afrikaner, struggles with the concept of identity in Africa and one sees in the Verwey Lectures how he contrasts his past in the dry, arid land of his birth, with the country of his ancestors, built on water - South Africa became the newly found home of Van Heerden’s ancestors, as post Second World War South Africa became the new home of Mario Salviati.

These and other themes are relevant to South Africa today, especially from an historical perspective, since they explain its cultural fibre. Further topics which feature in the Van Heerden *oeuvre* include, among others, land possession/distribution, farm murders, race and gender questions, as well as the existence of a feudal order, still strongly prevalent in South African socio-economic society. Van Heerden strongly questions this in the following extract, and augurs the advent of a new social order:

(16) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 14.

(17) This theme will be treated in more depth in the following chapter.

“ ’n Nuwe generasie skrywers, waarby ek myself inreken, verset hulle egter teen die ouer plaasroman se mitiese vertekstualisering van die lewe van Afrika. Van ons belangrikste prosateurs wy hulle aan die herskryf van die plaasroman. Hulle draai die plaasromangenre op sy kop deur die sekerhede wat dit skep rondom die witman se posisie as grondeienaar in Afrika, te ondermyn. In hierdie nuwe plaasromans word die ou sekerhede van plek, tyd en hierargie omgewerk tot verlies, uitbuiting en onsekerheid. Wat beskryf word, is ’n sosiale orde wat uitrafel. Die mitologiese onderbou van die ou plassroman word afgewys en ’n alternatiewe moontlikheid word gevestig. Elke alternatiewe plaasroman skryf teen die tradisie in, pleeg dus ’n misdaad, is wesentlik ’n ondervraging of herlees; terselfdertyd ’n oedipale strewe na ’n nuwe alfabet vir ’n nuwe landskap”(18).

Van Heerden has traced his patrilineal line to Central Holland, a small municipality called Heerde. Its crest bears two head of sheep. His own background as a son of a merino farmer makes the perpetuation of the genealogical theme prevalent in Van Heerden, so much the stronger. For Van Heerden, it validates writing genealogical history, hence *Toorberg*, and, possibly even more so, *Die Stoetmeester*. Although one can argue just as strongly that British colonial rule was responsible for the advent of apartheid, Van Heerden confesses:

“ek ervaar dikwels die kulturele debat oor die verhouding tussen Nederland en Suid-Afrika as ’n soort kalamiteitspolder - die waters van skuld en aanklag, van politieke korrektheid en koloniale vergrype, van apartheidsgeskiedenis en morele suiwering, stroom daarheen”(19).

(18) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Misdadiger”, 16.

(19) *Ibid.*, 24.

The bond with the motherland was broken by Van Heerden's ancestors when they left the shores of Holland for the Cape of Storms, which has a deep effect upon his writing, in particular, in the way he compiles his histories. His awareness of identity and belonging, alienation and other important themes, is evident. He speculates about subjects such as the genetics of appropriation, the usurping of power by one group over another, the fascination with the exotic/Other and the migration of people across borders. The Afrikaner's migration to South Africa acts as another post-colonial theme which he explains: "die genetika van verset", "van verlange na afstande en vreemde plekke" and "die instink om weg te breek van die veilige".... "om nuwe ruimtes onder kaart te bring" (20). There is a tendency in people to want to colonise, to appropriate, which is strongly reflected in the writing of historiography, as explained by Van Heerden:

"Dus moet ons my aanwesigheid hier in 'n koloniale beskuldigbank ook binne 'n groter sfeer van misdadigheid plaas: ter hande is die vergrype van die geskiedenis; die blindhede en beperkte visies van die verlede; die VOC en die Nasionale Party wat elk 'n *animus* en *actus reus* van sy eie had. Die geskiedenis is - so gesien - inderdaad een groot uitgesponne misdaad en kunstenaars wat daarmee meespeel geen engele nie" (21).

One should see the above comment in the light of "historical involvement" at all levels of society, and this can be seen to question the validity of the master narrative. Therefore, through the recognition of the Other, the marginalised can have more say: "In die wilde Ander word die onderdrukte Ek herken"(22). It is through this recognition and awareness, that Van Heerden writes a counter history of aspects of South Africa's past.

(20) E Van Heerden, "Die Skrywer as Misdadiger", 26.

(21) *Ibid.*

(22) *Ibid.*

In the second of the Verwey Lectures, “Die Skrywer as Getuie”, whilst Van Heerden discusses the mythology of his novel, explaining his treatment of elements such as water, stone and desert, a very important feature of the Lecture is the confrontation with the past. For instance, one of the devices adopted by Van Heerden is the treatment of the flow of water; which he uses to bring people who live near it, together; metaphorically, to merge the past with the present. In this respect, the historiographer acts as a witness of what happens in the present, and what has happened in the recent and distant past, and constructs narrative as a result:

“die skrywer as ’n alternatiewe historiograaf - iemand wat, naas die konvensionele historiografe - ook ’n historiese narratief, ’n geskiedenis, aan die skep is. ’n Mens sou dit ’n kontrageskiedenis noem; selfs ’n apokriewe dokumentering - ’n optekening van stiltes en verswygings, ’n voorliefde vir die gemarginaliseerde en alternatiewe - inderdaad, die skrywer as alternatiewe historiograaf wat vryelik kan flankeer met die mitiese, die magiese, met voorspelling en leuens”(23).

Historical memory plays an important role in Van Heerden’s engagement with the past. Some of the inspiration for this is derived from museums that he visits in the various cities, but also from the display cabinets at home, where there are a number of artefacts that each have their own, collective story to tell. Van Heerden explains how the historical memory is jogged by this:

“My besoek in Nederland bring hierdie insident in sterk reliëf: opeens sien ek die parallele tussen die Rijksmuseum en die vertoonkas; ek sien hoedat elkeen as bevestiging dien; hoedat elkeen ook bestaan te midde van verwysing - dié wat nie opgeneem en uitgestal is nie, spreek in die huiskamermuseum net so hard soos in die geval van die Rijksmuseum”(24).

(23) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Getuie”, 5. (This is the second Verwey Lecture - unpublished).

(24) *Ibid.*, 21.

“Die wakis” is another symbol for Van Heerden, because it represents the early white pioneers’ search for their Monomatapa. “The text” is nomadic and its meaning is never fixed. Consequently, there is a constant search for new meaning as existing, written history has to be challenged and constantly revised. The Trekboers, followed by the Voortrekkers went in search of this new meaning, as they traversed the land to leave behind the formal, stiff administration of the DEIC. Gradually, they established their presence in conflict with other groups of people whose claim to the land might not have been in the same mould as the euro-centric way of appropriating space. The Van Heerdens set up farm in this way. The historiographer creates historical meaning in narrative form, which essentially is an appropriation of the facts. In the same way as the museum director arranges (emplots) the artefacts in the displays in the museum, so the historiographer arranges his historical novel to include/exclude information:

“Ten einde gebeure in ’n nabye of verre verlede om te tower en te rangskik tot ’n ketting historiese feite, moet die historiograaf selekteer, orden, skeep, of belangriker: vertel”(25).

This takes one back to the distinction between the words fact and fiction, essentially both meaning “to make”, the first from the Latin *facio* which means “I make”, and the second, *tingo* which means “I make up”. Previously, there was the reference to Hayden White’s idea of “the fictionalisation of form” whereby the arrangement of the story is equal to the emplotment by the historian. One is reminded of that here. Van Heerden describes the role of the historiographer as that of a creative witness (“skeppende getuie”):

“Feite, word ons gewaarsku, word nes fiksie ook gemaak. Gebeure in die verlede word uit die chaos en vergetelheid gelig, afgestof, uitgestal: gemaak tot feite” (26).

(25) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Getuie”, 29.

(26) *Ibid.*

Just as the stories about Olive Schreiner were twisted and changed as they were told and retold, so Van Heerden gives account of how the power behind historical bias can change the nature of the story, so much so, that it requires the counter historian to move in behind the lies, and reveal the “truth”. The following is a fitting illustration of the point:

“Dit is die jaar 1985; ‘n noodtoestand is pas in Suid-Afrika geroep. Die Staatspresident uit daardie tyd, die strenge P W Botha, woon ’n militêre parade op Bloubergstrand, digby Kaapstad, by. Die windjie stoot sterk; die militêre orkes se koperblasers speel; en die soldate staan op aandag. Teenwoordig is die Minister van Verdediging, Magnus Malan; ook die Minister van Buitelandse sake, Pik Botha. En om die een of ander vreemde rede, ook Biskop Desmond Tutu. Die wind waai ineens Staatspresident Botha se Homburg-hoed van sy kop af, skep dit oor die golwe, totdat dit ’n ent die see in op die golwe dobber. President Botha kyk na die Minister van Verdediging, maar dié maak of hy die hoed nie sien nie. Ook die Minister van Buitelandse Sake kyk anderpad. Dan beduie die President aan Biskop Tutu: gaan haal my hoed. Die Biskop trek sy skoene uit, stap na die water se rand en loop dan - natuurlik - op die water, kry die hoed en bring dit droogvoets terug na die eienaar daarvan. Die volgende oggend lui die opskrif in die Kaapse dagblad: “Tutu kan nie swem nie”(25).

The idea that comes across is that of appropriation, even of the facts. By selection, the writer has power over inclusion/exclusion. However, writers such as Van Heerden see it as their task to uncover the lies. In a conversation with Van Heerden he emphasized that “the process of colonisation is a process of constructions, historical and other, but essentially of the constructions of the artist”(26). Added to this, he said, one needs to see “art as the history of perception, of thought”(27). In the same conversation, he remarked that for him the most important term as far as Captain Gird and the other artists portrayed in the novel *Mario Salviati* is concerned, would be the concept of appropriation, which he defines as follows:

(25) E Van Heerden, “Die Skrywer as Getuie”, 32.

(26) The conversation took place on 26 June, 2001.

(27) *Ibid.*

“The parallels between the way in which the artist appropriates landscapes, peoples and times and the way historians appropriate the same and the way in which the colonial hunter and coloniser appropriates. This raises complex questions about the role of art in the process of colonisation”(28).

Reading the Verwey Lectures and *Mario Salviati*, makes one aware of the issues raised by Van Heerden in his work. For him: “The novel is a work of art, and in this respect, the novel is history”. In his novels there is the history of art and fashion (*Die Swye van Mario Salviati*), of intellectual history (*Postmodernisme en prosa*), of economic history (*Die Stoetmeester*), and of political and resistance history (*Kikoejoe*), and so much more. The production of historical meaning emanates from all his work.

The problematization of art and its meaning in *Mario Salviati*, is, at the same time, the problematization of the role of the historiographer. The main characters in *Mario Salviati*, such as Mario Salviati himself, Jonty Jack, Ingi Friedländer, Meerlest Bergh, Irene Lampak and GrootKarel Bergh, are artists in their own right, and for each, Van Heerden writes a critique of their search for meaning. In this sense, he problematizes the role of historiography which is done in several ways. One such way is what the academic commentator van Coller suggests as appearing “Tussen nostalgie en parodie: die Afrikaanse prosa in die jare negentig”, where he says:

“Dit is egter eers ná 2 Februarie 1990 dat die jong skrywers veral begin met wat nou reeds begin lyk na ’n bykans obsessionele worstelstryd met die persoonlike en kollektiewe verlede en die betekenis daarvan”(29).

(28) In an interview with Etienne van Heerden on 26 June 2001.

(29) H P Van Coller, “Tussen Nostalgie en Parodie”, in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskap*, Jg 35 (3), Sept. 1995, 198.

To van Coller this is a valid way of writing novels. In the following extract, he admits there is room for an alternative view of history, which could include the one espoused by Van Heerden:

“Aspekte soos die parodie, intertekstualiteit, deurstreping, en fiksionalisering van die geskiedenis is hoofkomponente hiervan” (30) [.....] “Wat verder opvallend is, is die wyse waarop vorme van “informele” geskiedskrywing (oratuur, mites, sages) hierin beslag kry”(31).

This is fair justification for writers such as Van Heerden to operate under the banner of literary history, as Van Coller qualifies:

“Die obsessionele belangstelling in en bemoeienis met die geskiedenis voltrek hom na my gevoel tussen die pole **nostalgie** en **parodie**. Nostalgie is die hunkering na iets wat onherroeplik verby is - ’n koestering van dit wat herinner aan verloë tye, altyd met die bygedagte dat dit toe “beter”, “eerliker”, “suiwerder” was en dat dié verlede vormend was. Die nostalgie kan vorm vind in objekte uit die verlede: ’n jongmanskas, ’n geelhouttafel, ’n konfoor van geelkoper [.....] - normaalweg verval die oorspronklike (pragmatiese) funksie en verkry dié objekte ’n nuwe (estetiese) funksie”. [.....] “Parodie is die belaglikmakende nabootsing, omwerking, travestie van ’n oorspronklike gegewe. Uiterdaad gaan dit hier ook om materiële objekte (tekste, skilderye, beeldhouwerke, geboue ens.) waarvan daar ’n bespottende nabootsing (persiflage) gemaak kan word”(32).

Van Coller refers to Linda Hutcheon to further explain: “To parody is not to destroy the past: in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it”(33).

(30) *Ibid.*, 198.

(31) *Ibid.*, 199.

(32) *Ibid.*

(33) H P Van Coller referring to L Hutcheon, on p. 200 of his article: “Tussen Nostalgie en Parodie”, in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskap*, Jg 35 (3), Sept. 1995.

As with the previous novels, *Mario Salviati* and the Verwey Lecture strongly bring out Van Heerden's historiographic metafiction rubric, to which Van Coller refers;

"To focus on the individualised and collective past, an approach that Linda Hutcheon called "historiographic metafiction"..... the authorial stance in texts fluctuates between, what can be termed, nostalgia and parody. The parodical stance not only seems to dominate but marks the exemplary texts as *postmodernistic*, the prevailing paradigm in the Afrikaans literary context "(34).

Through a previous reference to Gird, Van Heerden explores an own historical consciousness. He uses the events from the past, both distant and recent, and explores his position as an artist. In this case the *Mario Salviati* text is ontological. For instance, one of the characters in the novel, Captain Gird, the Colonial Hunter, represents Van Heerden's own act of appropriating "landscapes, peoples and times", just as other writers and artists operating in the colonial mould have done before him. On this Van Heerden comments as follows:

"Ek kyk na Kaptein Gird. Ek het begrip vir jou soort, sê ek. Ek sou dieselfde as jy en my voorsaat Pieter Willemzoon, uit Heerde, gedoen het. Ons sluit ons nuwe broederskap terwyl SlingerVel Xam! ons gehuurde fietse vashou en 'n entjie agter ons staan; swyend"(35).

The character of Captain Gird came to South Africa to look for something new and exotic - in this case, to hunt, essentially an act of appropriation. In the following extract, Van Heerden elaborates on this concept of appropriation, of the longing for the exotic:

(34) H P Van Coller, "Between Nostalgia and Parody: Afrikaans prose writing in the Nineties", 197. In this context, he refers to the nineties.

(35) E Van Heerden, "Die Skrywer as Misdadiger, 25.

“Ek herken instinktief, in my voorvader se optrede, die genetika van verset, van verlange na afstande en vreemde plekke; die instink om weg te breek van die veilige; om nuwe ruimtes onder kaart te bring. Inderdaad ’n skeppende onderneming - kolonialisasie - en dalk was Jan van Riebeeck, dus, ’n kunstenaar?”(36).

Van Heerden theorises about the process of writing history, as he admits: “Ek, as vervalser van Harris, as skepper van Gird, as herskrywer van die verhaal, staan in die beskuldigingsbank”(37). The interpretation of history is not an easy activity because many of its components are to be found in secrets, motives, lies. To this end, by problematizing language’s inability to gain access to the past, the activity of writing is a textualised and archaeologised past. Van Heerden is a past master at deconstructing which to him means creating narrative and thus producing new historical meaning which challenges the official canons. In the following extract he underlines South Africa’s colonial (onslaught) history in a sentence:

“Die proses van besitname van eksotiese Afrika, so sensueel beskryf deur William Harris in sy “Wild Sports of Southern Africa”, en trouens ook in sy pragtige pentekeninge vasgelê, was ’n metode van toe-eiening - aanvanklik deur fisieke verowering, die skiet van die dier. Later het toe-eiening deur tekeninge en reisbeskrywings gekom, nog later, met, dink ek, ander bemoeinisse met Suid-Afrika” (38).

In the second of the Verwey Lectures (“Die skrywer as Getuie”) a strong feature of the paper lies in the way it reveals Van Heerden’s process of research: “Museumbesoeke is vir my soos toonlere oefen. Voordat jy ’n gegewe stad waar jy op besoek is, werklik musiek kan maak, moet jy jou eers by sy museums instudeer”(39).

(36) E Van Heerden “Die skrywer as Misdadiger”, 25-26.

(37) *Ibid.*, 28.

(38) *Ibid.*

(39) E Van Heerden, “Die skrywer as Getuie”, 2.

Van Heerden is obsessed with “die opskryf met die verlede” and the problems and difficulties that accompany the process. To illustrate this he describes how he gives a coin to a group of Russians basking outside the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam, and how he wonders: “Daar is ’n verlede, dink ek, wat soos ’n duikboot onder die see, in diepwater, gesink het”(40). Does he refer to the fact that Communism and the Cold War meant the covering up of a vast history which will still need to be uncovered? By his own admission, he acts as an alternative historiographer, uncovering the myths of the past:

“My opdrag is om hier aan die Universiteit van Leiden ’n reeks seminars aan te bied oor die skrywer as historiograaf. Dit gaan oor die skrywer as getuie van die hede en van die onlangse en verre verlede; die skrywer as ’n alternatiewe historiograaf - iemand wat, naas die konvensionele historiografe - ook ’n historiese narratief, ’n geskiedenis, aan die skep is. ’n Mens sou dit ’n kontrageskiedenis kon noem; selfs ’n apokriewe dokumentering - ’n optekening van stiltes en verswygings, ’n voorliefde vir die gemarginaliseerde en alternatiewe - inderdaad, die skrywer as alternatiewe historiograaf wat vryelik kan flankeer met die mitiese, die magiese, met voorspellings en leuens”(41).

However, he carefully distinguishes between the past itself, and the writing up of that past:

“Dit is goed om te onderskei tussen die verlede en die optekening van die verlede, en om versigtig te wees wanneer mense na die geskiedenis verwys..... Ons hou ons oë oop vir die skilderende hand, en vra: wie het geskilder, en waarom? Vir wie het hy geskilder? Wie het sy verf gekoop, die kwasse en doek betaal? In watter museum sal die skildery eendag hang, en waarom? In watter groep mense se geheues gaan hierdie skildery mite word?” (42).

(40) E Van Heerden, “Die skrywer as Getuie”, 4.

(41) *Ibid.*, 5.

(42) *Ibid.*, 29.

Van Heerden admits to being a micro-historian, recording the actions of ordinary people, as a challenge to the canons of South African history:

“Ek dink.....dat skrywers goed geplaas is om as optekenaars van ’n era te dien. Die skrywer is bewus van die manipulasies van die verlede. Anders as diegene wat die verlede in breë kwashale wil skilder en oor die groot gebare van die wêreld verslag wil doen, is die skrywer dikwels die optekenaar van die kleingeskiedenis, die skynbare insidente, die marginale” (43).

The theory of Van Heerden the micro historian can be seen from the following: “Die skrywer weet dat die sogenaamde geskiedenis van die mensdom in die klein, onbelangrike tragedies van miljoene skynbaar onbelangrike mense opgesluit lê” (44). In his role as historiographer, his mission is; “Die skrywer wil ’n stem gee aan hierdie stiltes; wil ’n soort eksentrieke, apokriewe wêreld tot lewe roep” (45). It is clear from the above that Van Heerden has chosen to present a different view on history. His formative days as a young South African when he was exposed to the lies that the apartheid history tried to sell him, spurred him on to look at and report on a different side of what was happening in South Africa: “Dit was skrywers wat stem gegee het aan stiltes - *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*. In apartheid se Suid-Afrika is een gesanksioneerde verhaal as die enigste waarheid oor hede en verlede voorgehou”. Van Heerden has enriched South African historical writing because he was bold enough to offer a different view. The unpublished Verwey Lectures provide one with good insight into how the historical consciousness in Van Heerden works, and his poetics help one understand how as a writer he produces a counter history to the existing canonised history. These papers in themselves thus form a valuable contribution to South African historical writing and lay the foundation for wider dimensions as far as the reading and appreciation of current South African history is concerned.

(43) E Van Heerden, “Die skrywer as Getuie”, 31.

(44) *Ibid.*, 31.

(45) *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

MARIO SALVIATI - ASPECTS OF A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Die Swye van Mario Salviati (2000) is Etienne Van Heerden's latest novel about a young, frustrated artist, Ingi Friedländer who as an employee of the official art gallery in Cape Town, is commissioned by the new Directorate of the gallery to acquire art works from Tallejare, a small town situated on the periphery of the Moordenaarskaroo. During her stay in the town, and whilst preoccupied with the task of acquiring art works, she tries to unravel some of the many secret-stories of the past that took place there. For instance, there is the account of the canal that was built to carry water over Berg Onwaarskynlik and down over to the other side where the town lies (1). A further story is of Meerlust Bergh, the wealthy designer whose fortune might have derived from other means - it is alleged he knew the secret whereabouts of the Kruger Millions which came to Tallejare by ox wagon late one night during the time of the Boer War. The secret of the whereabouts of the gold was enshrined in a series of maps, one of which was scrolled up in his wooden leg (2).

Yet another important feature in *Mario Salviati* is the fabulous account of the riches of the feather boom of the Little Karoo in the nineteenth century. Already referred to is the account of the Kruger Millions and its secret whereabouts, believed to be buried in the *vlakte* outside Tallejare. It is not sure exactly what happened to the gold, but there are different claims - anything from Meerlust shipping it to Europe, or to Karel Skoonveld having found it and then disappearing with it (an alternative to the claim that his embarrassment at the failure of the water to ascend Berg Onwaarskynlik, led to his flight). Not only are there the stories about secret happenings that took place in the town, but there are also the accounts of intense love stories such as between Mario and Edit, an opera singer with a beautiful voice, whose father was Meerlust and whose mother was the beautiful fashion queen and international model, Irene, the Indonesian princess.

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- (1) The Law of Bernoulli states that water can move in an upward direction if there is sufficient pressure created by the oncoming water in the canal structure. Van Heerden acknowledges in the "Erkennings" that Erik van den Bergh assisted with the research and put him in touch with an engineering firm from Delft, specialising in water affairs.
 - (2) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 153.

Aspects of South African history to be found in *Mario Salviati* physically cover the period “van die vroegste pioniersgeskiedenis af deur oorloë en ontbering, die volstruisveertydperk en die koms van Italiaanse krygsgevangenis in die Tweede Wêreldoorlog, tot by die hedendaagse Suid-Afrika”.

In the novel Ingi is intrigued by Jonty Jack, the son of GrootKarel Bergh (also known as Karel Skoonveld) and Lettie Pistorius. It was GrootKarel who proposed and engineered the building of the canal, but since the water never managed the uphill journey, certainly not immediately, he disappeared out of embarrassment never to appear again, hence his other name, Karel Skoonveld. It is the art work of Jonty that Ingi has come to enquire about, for acquisition by the gallery in Cape Town. No doubt, Jonty is famous for his “alternative art”. He leads a different kind of a life, closed, hermetic, outside of the town where he can practise his eccentricities (history as “eccentric”), part of Van Heerden’s story making and part of the poetics of his novel. This shows Van Heerden’s interest in what goes counter to the norm. Whilst Jonty is an energetic young man, it is to the Italian, “die Taljaner” that Ingi is attracted, because of his inner strength and secret-silence (the past, history as un-knowable). He preserves many of the “hidden truths” and the secrets of Tallejare are safe with him.

The tension between South Africa’s colonial past and the post-colonial present is a strong feature of the novel. This is borne out by Ingi’s interest in the hybrid statue called “Visman Steier”, which shoots up out of the ground in an almost surrealistic fashion, but then is contained and sinks back into the past, symbolic of our state as human beings in this world, caught up in the stories and guilt of the past - mere products of history:

Maar Jonty hou vol: die Visman styg op, ja, maar hy steier terselfertyd. “Só is die lewe”, verklaar hy dikwels daarna in die kroeg: “Jy dink nog jy gaan vorentoe, dan steier jy inderwaarheid weer terug die verlede in” (3).

(3) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 14.

Jonty has a hybrid past, as have most of the main characters in the novel. As the son of GrootKarel Bergh and Lettie Pistorius, his grandfather, Meerlust, is the product of Hugenoot Viljee and Saartjie Bruin, whence the patrilineal hybridity. The hybridity concept is strongly linked to the process of identity formation to be found in the work of Van Heerden, which is very much a topic of postcolonial studies. Homi Bhabha places it in context:

“hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (4).

The hybridity theme empowers the Van Heerden characters, such as Jonty Jack, the artist, not only genetically (cross-breeding is meant to be genetically strengthening), but also socio-politically and culturally. The trans-section of cultures that hybridity brings with it is a strong theme of the novel and certainly subscribes to the view offered by Steward van Wyk:

“Hiermee gaan saam aantal prosesse wat tekenend is van die dekonstruktiewe werking van kulturele bewegings uit die marge en wat beskryf word deur terme soos desentreer, destabiliseer, dialogies en diaspories. Enkele strategieë wat al geïdentifiseer is, is die fantastiese, groteske, chaotiese, die parodiërende herhaling of omkeer van dominante kodes, die vervreemding van die bekende, die verwringing van die meesterstylfigure (“master tropes”), die breuk met taalreëls”(5).

(4) H Bhabha in S van Wyk, “Hibriditeit, of die baster in ons”, in *Seminaarkamer*, in Litnet, 16 January 2001, 2.

(5) S van Wyk, “Hibriditeit, of die baster in ons”, in *Seminaarkamer*, in Litnet, 16 January 2001, 2.

One of the views on Coloured people in South Africa is that they are the product of a feudal society. In J M Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997) there is the scene where the writer mumbles about his mother's naïvety:

"Why he asks in exasperation, does she have this faith in Coloured people? Because they are used to working with their hands, she replies? *Because* they have not gone to school, *because* they have no book-learning, she seems to be saying, they know how things in the real world work" (6).

Later, J M Coetzee writes: "He is also Coloured which means that he has no money, lives in an obscure hovel, goes hungry" (7). This is a pathetic rendition of the state of the Coloured person given by the character in Coetzee's novel. On the other hand, Van Heerden who was much influenced by the ideas of Adam Small in this regard, concentrates on the empowerment of the Coloured character in his novel. In this sense, Steward van Wyk's viewpoint is important: "Wat my veel meer interesseer, is hoe rym dit met die viering van hibriditeit wat ons tans betref, die inklusiewe Afrikaansheid en met die idee dat Afrikaans se oorlewing by die bruinmense lê?" (8). In this regard, van Wyk claims that the voice of Coloured people as part of the inclusive debate on the status of Afrikaans will always be fairly silent, mainly because of socio-economic issues. "Dit verklaar miskien die stilswye en teësin van bruin/swart Afrikaanssprekendes om aan die Afrikaanse gesprek in sy verskillende geledinge mee te doen" (9). In Van Heerden's novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, it is the voice of the former marginalised of our country (die stilswye referred to by van Wyk) that can now be heard, and, therefore, his writing is an answer to the plea from Van Wyk. The following extract from van Wyk, and the historically hybrid characters in Van Heerden's novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, find each other on common ground:

(6) JM Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 36.

(7) *Ibid.*, 61.

(8) S van Wyk, "Hibriditeit, of die baster in ons", 6.

(9) *Ibid.*, 7.

“Daar is ’n groter Suid-Afrikaanse projek om aan te bou, en waartoe Afrikaans en Afrikaanssprekendes vanweë hul hibriede aard ’n besondere bydrae kan maak: een van opheffing, bemagtiging, die skep van eie waarde, die omkering van gesetelde koloniale waardes, die vind van ’n plek in die Suid-Afrikaanse hibried” (10).

One can almost say of Tallejare, the Karoo town in Van Heerden’s novel, that what happened there is a microcosm of the history of South Africa. Tallejare thus becomes a melting pot of cultural activity, representative of the broadest cultural spectrum one finds in South African society today. For instance, there is the San (Tietie Xam!), the Khoi (Kalbassies Swartebooi), the East Indian (Irene Lampak), the Middle Eastern-Jew (Ingi Friedländer), the Black-African (the Moloi’s), the Coloured (Saartjie Bruin), the English (Captain William Gird) and finally the French (Hugenoot Viljee). Thus, woven into the history of Tallejare are many of the manifestations of the history of South Africa at large, such as race relations, the history of cultural development, and more specific subjects such as the history of the South African Anglo-Boer War and the Kruger Millions, the history of the fashion industry and the history of South African art, residential questions such as the town *versus* black townships, urbanisation, and many more.

As already mentioned, the novel begins with the arrival in Tallejare of Ingi Friedländer, the Jewess art official from the “National Collection” (11), whose task it is to purchase a piece of art which fits into the postcolonial South African mould. This can be deduced from “reënboogkuns” (12), for the new republic, and “windvlae oor Tafelberg kom en water en wind om die museum ruk” (13). From this one can deduce that Van Heerden’s writing challenges the status quo.

(10) *Ibid.*, 7.

(11) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 15.

(12) *Ibid.*, 16.

(13) *Ibid.*

There is a distinction in the novel between what has happened in the past (irrecoverable, with its secrets and silences) and history (in the postmodern code, as the construction of meaning through narrative). The history itself (the story of the novel) is based upon the Van Heerden characters, whose experiences within the novel very often fall into the category which I have called counter history. In the code of historiographic metafiction, with the author inscribing him-/herself into the distant and near past, Van Heerden constructs the narrative in accordance with the historical events that he selects, as a kind of “historiese entertainment” as he confesses in the frontispiece of *Casspirs en campari's*. This is very much in line with the postmodernist historiographic metafictionist who parodies and ironizes the historical facts, and this process then acts as commentary on the futility of the master narrative's attempt to gain access to the past.

It is the task of Ingi to locate the appropriate art piece representative of the “new South Africa”: “Alhoewel die Minister se glimlaggende versoek aan haar was dat sy “reënboogkuns” moet terugbring museum toe - “om die wondere van vryheid te vier” ” (14). Her destination is a town in the Moordenaarskaroo (Prince Albert, where Van Heerden goes for his writing holidays), with its mountain, which Van Heerden has called “Berg Onwaarskynlik” (15) because of the secrets of the past that are hidden in the town. As she enters the plain, one gets a real feel of a Karoo town as Van Heerden describes it: “Sy ry die dorpie binne, maar is aanvanklik onseker of dit ’n stelsel kleinhoewes of ’n dorp is. Dan begin die huise nader aan mekaar staan, met die landerye agter hulle uitgestrek” (16). This is a comment on white communities living in towns, especially in the wake of the burgeoning informal settlements emerging alongside them.

With Ingi's arrival she is introduced to some of the historically based secrets of the town which in true detective style she tries to uncover, like an historian trying to find out what happened in the past. “Ag, Juf, jy weet hoe die goudwa loop....” (17) refers to the Kruger Millions coming to Tallejare by ox wagon during the Boer War. Another important feature of the novel is the ostrich feather boom, “Struisveertyd” (18) that gripped the Little Karoo in the nineteenth century. These are some of the many “secrets” of the town, which belong to its historical past. Can Ingi find out what really happened? Can the historian ever?

(14) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 16.

(15) *Ibid.*, 19.

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) *Ibid.*, 21.

(18) *Ibid.*

Van Heerden engages in topical social, political and economic commentary: “Die boere kry swaar deesdae en die nuwe ding is jagplase. Die mense kom koedoes skiet” (19). This occurrence of a different form of land use is currently on the increase especially in the Eastern Cape where families who have been farming for many generations are fast selling their farms which, in turn, are made into “jagplase”. Classic examples are to be found in the Karoo, as well. A further example from *Mario Salviati* is the reference to the government’s changing social programmes: “Gebou in die laat sewentigjare, vroeg tagtig, dink sy, toe hierdie kliniese administrasiekantore landwyd opgerig is” (20).

The “small town/countryside” theme, with the sagas of the people that live there, is a very prevalent theme in the Van Heerden *oeuvre* - “die klein geskiedenis”. In a similar way, but in a different genre to that of Van Onselen and Bundy, Van Heerden narrates the account of the Other, of the marginalised. Small town/countryside history can be entertaining and not without its own dimension: “Nes al die gehuggies en dorpies wat hulle in die Groot Karoo of op die rand van dié vlaktes bevind, waar bossiesveld oorloop in bergveld of suurgras, het Tallejare ’n veelbewoë geskiedenis” (21). In many ways, the small town/countryside history, which falls under the umbrella of social history, needs attention because of its importance and neglect, especially because it can throw light on the feelings and attitudes of people who live in a milieu of social reality. It is remarkable the way he has captured detail and how his commentary brings out interesting references to the social fibre of that society.

(19) *Ibid.*, 21.

(20) *Ibid.*, 22.

(21) *Ibid.*, 23.

As already mentioned, a strong side to the novel is postcolonialism/postcoloniality with its hybridity theme. There is further commentary on postcolonialism, such as on the position of the earliest inhabitants of the country: “Soos op die soetgrond van soveel ander plekke wat in dié wêreld in die kinkel van ’n rivier of die lies van ’n berg lê, was die San eerste hier. Hulle het in die grot teen die berg gewoon en hul tekeninge teen die wande vir nageslagte gelaat om in verwondering uit te pluus” (22). The implication is the destruction of that society through appropriation of their land.

Van Heerden engages with the distant past in this respect, by priming the reader to the fact that white (and other) colonialism appropriated the land of the Other, in this case, the San. There is also reference in the novel to the important role of other indigenous people, the Khoi (Quena), whose history and traditions disappeared with their demise in the eighteenth century as a result of European colonization: “Khoi-stamme het ook hul beeste hier deurgejaag en op die sandwal staning gemaak....” and “William Gird....maan sy agterryer wat as tolk en gids optree, tot stilte”(23). The voices of the indigenous people, San and Khoi, are silent.

The guide referred to in the novel is SlingerVel Xam! and as we see from the “Bloedboom”, Gird becomes wedded to his sister, KleinTietie, daughter of the original inhabitants of Tallejare, Vaandrig Moloi and Titie Xam! The Captain and KleinTietie’s daughter is Saartjie Bruin who became the partner of Hugenoet Viljee. Their son is the very wealthy Meerlust Bergh, who, in turn, married the beautiful Indonesian princess, Irene Lampak, whose offspring run right through, down to Jonty Jack. Thus it can be said that the postcolonial novel includes not just issues such as the appropriation of space, land, and territory, but also lifestyle and customs.

(22) *Ibid.*, 23.

(23) *Ibid.*, 23.

The hunting scene on *pp* 23 *et seq.*, are important for many reasons. It is the outward manifestation of Van Heerden's historiographic metafiction. He confesses: "Ek is dus hier as nie-stamverwante verwant; as bloedskandelike familielid" (24). What is meant by this, is that the past with its secrets and silences, the things that go unheard, but that are important in and to history, affect Van Heerden and his past: "ek ervaar dikwels die kulturele debat oor die verhouding tussen Nederland en Suid-Afrika as 'n soort kalamiteitspolder - die waters van skuld en aanklag van politieke korrektheid en koloniale vergrype, van apartheidsgeskiedenis en morele suiwering, stroom daarheen" (25). The history of Gird and Van Heerden's own intense consciousness of the Other leads him to believe that: "Ek en kaptein Gird en Slingervel Xam! sit af na Heerde. Ons koop op Amsterdam Sentraal treinkaartjies. Tot by Apeldoorn reis ons per trein, en dan met die bus na Heerde. Die kaptein het sy tekengereedskap op sy skoot, en terwyl ons voortspoed, kry groteske windmeuels en fietse, windverwaaide wolke, treine en peronne en bushaltes en mense in dik jasse gestalte op sy tekenpapier" (26). Van Heerden is both product and perpetuator of appropriation.

Van Heerden certainly bonds his English and Dutch past; "Ek kyk na kaptein Gird. Ek het begrip vir jou soort, sê ek. Ek sou dieselfde as jy en my voorsaat Pieter Willemzoon, uit Heerde, gedoen het. Ons sluit ons nuwe broederskap terwyl Slingervel Xam! ons gehuurde fietse vashou en 'n entjie agter ons staan; swyend" (27). The heart of the novel *Mario Salviati* is brought to light in the words of Van Heerden in his paper: "Die Skrywer as Misdadiger":

"Die besadigde eenselwigheid wat ek in die gesellige dorpie Heerde aangetref het, sou my ook tot die radikale misdaad van emigrasie en kolonialis-wees gedryf het. Ek herken instinktief, in my voorvader se optrede, die genetika van verset, van verlange na afstande en vreemde plekke; die instink om weg te breek van die veilige; om nuwe ruimtes onder kaart te bring. Inderdaad 'n skeppende onderneming - kolonialisasie - en dalk was Jan van Riebeeck, dus, 'n kunstenaar?" (28).

(24) E Van Heerden, *Die Skrywer as Misdadiger*, 24. Gird was van Heerden's maternal grandfather.

(25) *Ibid.*

(26) *Ibid.*

(27) *Ibid.*, 25.

(28) *Ibid.*, 25-26.

In the “Bloedboom” of Tallejare at the outset of the novel, Van Heerden’s line features strongly, and this notion fits in with the argument that, as a writer, he inscribes himself into the past and thus into the text - all three lines feature; Huguenot, Dutch and English. Meerlust Bergh represents his matrilineal side, (the Myburghs of Meerlust), and then there is Etienne Roché from the Huguenot side which is from his father’s matrilineal side, and from his mother’s paternal line, the relationship with Gird, and then also, directly from his father’s line, a relationship with the Dutch (29). He chose the word “Bloedboom” for the very reason that he involves himself in a personal history of the past. Van Heerden has purposefully inscribed himself into the past and confesses the hybrid nature of his past (30).

The creation of the Van Heerden character such as Gird, is his way of linking his experience with history. For instance, Gird was the name of his mother’s grandfather: “en jy’t my die van van jou moeder se moeder gegee” (31). He further confesses his guilt: “Ek, as vervalser van Harris, as skepper van Gird, as herskrywer van die verhaal.....” (32). The giraffe scene which appears in *Mario Salviati*, by Van Heerden’s admission, ties up much of his poetics referred to in the earlier chapter, namely that the act of creating a text is an act of appropriation which more broadly speaking involves also “ander bemoeienisse met Suid-Afrika”:

“Die proses van besitname van eksotiese Afrika, so sensueel beskryf deur William Harris in sy *Wild Sports of Southern Africa*, en trouens ook in sy pragtige pentekeninge vasgelê, was ’n metode van toe-eiening - aanvanklik deur fisieke verowering, die skiet van die dier. Later het toe-eiening deur tekening en reisbeskrywings gekom, nog later, met, dink ek, ander bemoeienisse met Suid-Afrika” (33).

The colonial appropriation of land is essentially the theme that is central to Van Heerden’s postcolonial novel: “Die eksotiese dier sterf pragtig; die koloniale oog palm in” (34). There is a nasty incident whereby Captain Gird massacres a number of Khoi-khoi because they returned to steal stock that they had swapped for mirrors and brandy with the white colonists, which further emphasises colonial appropriation of the space and landscape of the Khoi (35).

(29) *Ibid.*, 27.

(30) *Ibid.*, 28.

(31) *Ibid.*

(32) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 24.

(33) E Van Heerden *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, pp 23 et seq.

(34) E Van Heerden, *Die Skrywer as Misdadiger*, 29.

(35) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 25-26.

Instead of describing the historical events of the time, as a history text might, Van Heerden creates a story which becomes the narrative and in this way comments on historical issues and raises questions about official history, “truth” and exposes lies. Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders in what can be called the most definitive South African history text written in English, have the following to say about the way in which Van Heerden wrote under difficult political circumstances in South Africa, although no specific works are referred to: “...in view of the quality of the best South African writing to emerge from the tensions and the tragedies wrought in so many lives by the toughness of the legal system (were, among other - PLM) the highly evocative novels of John Coetzee and Etienne van Heerden” (36). The following is an example of such “tensions andtragedies”: “ ’n Skoot klap, kieries word gebruik, en die kaptein en sy gids moet skiet-skiet deur die flak rivierwater terughink na hul staning, met bloed-druppels wat stadig in die water oplos. Hoeveel mense dood is, word nooit agterna verklap nie, maar die son sak daardie aand treurig oor die plek wat later jare as Tallejare bekend sal staan” (37). Not only is Van Heerden prepared to unearth politically sensitive issues such as the one just referred to, but his is a different and refreshing way of representing the past.

Ingi’s arrival at Tallejare was accompanied by an introduction, at first in name only and later in person, to the Italian stone mason, who cannot speak: Mario Salviati, a prisoner of war from Florence and a immigrant product of the Second World War. Salviati ended up in Tallejare as a mason for which he trained in his home town of Florence in Italy, just as previous generations had done in his family. The Italian prisoners of war, many of whom remained behind in South Africa after the war, have made a huge contribution to massive building projects in this country. After all, he built the canal for the water to be led to Tallejare. But the Italian presence in South Africa must be viewed in the light of the postcolonial theme of the transgression of cultures in areas where there has been disruption of the original lifestyle of the original inhabitants. There is a scene in the novel which bears this out, although some might say the reference is too vague. Salviati is in charge of the explosives and blasting in order to build the “blitswater” canal, but this causes some disruption to the local inhabitants from the township (38).

(36) TRH Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 445.

(37) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 26.

(38) *Ibid.*, 75.

As research for his novel, Van Heerden consulted Giorgio Dalla Cia, the well-known Italian wine maker at Meerlust, and interviewed several members of the post-war Italian community in Stellenbosch. Furthermore, one can see from the “Erkennings” at the end of the novel that he engaged in further research (39). In the novel itself, there is reference to the Italian presence in South Africa: “The Italian Prisoners of War from Zonderwater Prison arrive at Tallejare” (40). Mario Salviati was one of them. Salviati’s presence in South Africa springs from a historical phenomenon: he was one of 100 000 Italian prisoners of war posted to the Zonderwater Prison outside Pretoria during the Second World War. In the post-colonial novel, the character of Salviati is important because he represents the trans-culture, the nomadic, the search for the exotic, the Other and the transgression of cultures. He never returned to the country of his birth, remained dumb and went blind. This makes the fact that he held the secret to the whereabouts of the Kruger Millions, so more fascinating, and one remains spell-bound throughout the novel as to the whereabouts of the alleged gold coins. One needs to manoeuvre through the historical labyrinth of the Van Heerden novel to find out what happened.

Thus, the information covering the story of the Italian prisoners of war in the novel is based on some research done by Van Heerden. Van Heerden explains how he came to write his Italian novel: “Die nuwe roman ...het, gepas, met grappa afgeskop. Italiaanse witblits. Een wintersoggend op Meerlust, saam met Giorgio dalla Cia se wonderlike grappa en geselskap, en met die lig en skadu’s oor Meerlust se tydlose wit herehuis” (41). Meerlust Bergh became one of the characters in the novel; Myburgh is the surname of Van Heerden’s maternal grandmother, the same family as the current owners of the wine farm, Meerlust. But there is more to the story. In June of 1992 Van Heerden undertook an important research tour to Italy, and particularly to Florence and Rome, and there he developed a love for and some understanding of the Italian culture. He used to take his coffee sitting in Piazza della Signoria, the heart of Florence, with the piazza and surrounding buildings all of *pietra serena*. Furthermore, in his study at home there is a leather belt with five interwoven thongs, and it was Van Heerden’s intention to develop a story from this “stimulus”, because an Italian (ex prisoner of war) working on his father’s farm, made it and gave it to his father. According to Van Heerden, this motivated him to incorporate the five love stories in *Mario Salviati*, of which Mario and Edit is the most important. There is an explanation in the “Erkennings” of his novel, to this effect (42).

(39) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, For this, see “Erkennings”, 405.

(40) *Ibid.*, 28.

(41) Hanlie Retief, *Aktueel*, in *Rapport*, 27 Augustus, 2000, 5.

(42) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, in the “Erkennings”, 405.

There is further reference to research in the “Erkennings” on page 406, which reads as follows: “’n Foto van ’n Italiaanse messelaar wat aan die Meiringpoortpas werk, het as inspirasie vir Mario Salviati gedien. Die foto is gepubliseer in die toeristegids *Meiringspoort - Scenic gorge in die Swartberg* (1990), geskryf deur Helena Marincowitz, en die onderskrif daarvan lui: “An unknown Italian, unable to communicate with his fellow-workers, laying stones in the retaining wall built at the time of tarring Meiringspoort” ” (43). One sees that Van Heerden does involve himself in research although not necessarily in the methodical and scientific way which a traditional historian would do. He might even say that any reference in the “Erkennings” merely serves as “artistic impulses”. Be that as it may, they are interesting and form an historical perspective. In any case, he is at liberty to refer to and use historical sources and not acknowledge them, because he plays on the historical record. This is Van Heerden’s imaginative methodology. So, whilst the reference to actual historical sources takes place in a different way to that adopted by the traditional historian, by using them as a postmodernist novelist, he grounds himself in historical imagination, and this is what he wants - his novels to be read and enjoyed. One can say, therefore, that his works are more “imaginary” than actually “proven” historically. Furthermore, there are other reasons, already mentioned, for this particular *modus operandi*.

Had he wanted to research more, there are further sources he could have consulted, such as existing works on Italian history in South Africa (44). On the other hand, the fashion industry has been much more researched, as can be seen from the “Erkennings” at the end of the novel (45) and in the novel itself. To give one some idea of the way Van Heerden writes about it, the following extract can serve as an example - his attention to detail is remarkable:

(43) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 406.

(44) See Gabriele Sani, *History of the Italians in South Africa: 1489 - 1989*, published by Zonderwater Block, South Africa, undated.

(45) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 241. Part III of the novel, *Mannekynveer*, deals with the fashion industry, 241. There is reference p. 406 in the “Erkennings”. D Coetzee’s, “Immigrants to citizens: civil integration and acculturation of Jews into Oudshoorn society”, MA Thesis, UCT, 2000, deals extensively with the fashion industry.

“Hulle ontwerp nog hul hoede met groot tekenhale op die stukke papier wat jy op die esels vasgespeld sal sien; en sy speld nog klere oor houttorso’s op staanders vas”..... “Bloedruppeltjies wat soos spelde haar vingers geprik het, spikkel nog op die vloerplanke voor daardie gipsmodelle wat daar rondstaan. Gaan kyk, die huis is ’n museum van die style en strewes van die afgelope eeu....” (46).

The aesthetics of the novel are such that Van Heerden contrasts the elements of beauty with the social reality of the country. Kampong Spoggerig is the black township on the outskirts of Tallejare, much along the lines of the way all townships in the country are situated, “on the outskirts”(ex-centric social issues, not readily spoken about). In the novel, the question of migrant labour is referred to as workers from the Transkei come to assist with the construction of the canal: “....en met die koms van die Transkei-werkers wat aan die blitswaterkanaal grawe...” (47). There is also a hint of the redistribution of land and capital: “Wat gaan hierdie nuwe mense, so onbekend aan die Karoo, saambring? Gestel die goud word gekry - wat gaan hulle vir hulself opeis? En gaan hulle aanbly hier op Tallejare?” (48). Van Heerden engages in further social commentary, particularly on racial issues:

“In hul onkunde wil hulle ’n keer of wat deurmekaar raak met die meisies van Kampong Spoggerig en die ander bruin meisiekinders wat sprokkelrig tussen die wit huise in Tallejare woon, maar hulle leer gou dat daar dinge is wat jy doen en dinge wat jy nie doen nie. Die muur is van glas: jy kan lewens anderkant die glasmuur dophou en hulle jou, maar as jy jou hand uitsteek, stamp dit teen die onsigbaarheid van ’n verbete kollektiewe besluit van die wit Tallejaners” (49).

(46) E Van Heerden, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, 257-258.

(47) *Ibid.*, 198.

(48) *Ibid.*, 198.

(49) *Ibid.*, 200.

Van Heerden gives pride of place to Goodwill Moloi and Mama Moloi, the first citizens of Tallejare. In fact, if one looks at the “Bloedboom”, the first descendant with Tietie Xam! is her partner Vaandrig Moloi. The one side of the family goes Coloured, and the other African, including the Pedi line as seen in Ouma Siela Pedi. Thus, the social fibre of South African society is as widely cast in the Van Heerden novel as it appears in our society today:

“En sy het darem haar familie: die herinnerings aan LostCause, aan haar mooi seun Goodwill Significant Moloi die eerste, en sy kinders, Goodwill Moloi II-en Fielies Jollies, die man van die bloednat boomstam, daar waar Ouma Siela, toe die eerste mes deur die melktert sny en ’n ballon in die hoek van die saal onverwags van die hitte bars, nou staan” (50).

Ouma Siela suffered from physical appropriation at the hands of white men over black women: “So het hulle ongeskik gemaak met my, byna ’n jaar lank”, and again: “Hulle het my soos rantsoen uitgemeet - soveel dae per maand by elke man” (51). The commentary is in the postcolonial rubric, accentuating the poor social position of black women, and the way they were treated.

There are many more themes of historical interest. The following extract emphasises the role of traditional medicine in South Africa:

“Goodwill vertel haar dat Rooibaard Pistorius een nag die loodkis oopgesluit en een handjie daaruit gesteel het nadat hy, op die langpad, ’n paar maande voor Tallejare, by ’n staanplek ’n sangoma gaan opsoek het, ’n vrou onder ’n leeuveld, met krabbelende toorbeentjies en diep sugte en skuim in haar mond. Sy moes hom help om los te kom van sy verslawing aan daardie vrou (Ouma Siela - PLM) wat toe al ’n halwe jaar saam met hulle op die os aan die trek was. Die songoma het beloof dat sy dit sal doen, en na die swart ossewa (with the Kruger Millions - PLM) se reis uitgevra.Die vrou het gretig opdrag gegee: “Gan jy eers terug, veldkornet (Pistorius - PLM), en bring vir my een van daardie handjies (from the Concentration Camp - PLM). Dit is groot muti. Dan sal ek jou, as vergoeding, genees en die muskeljaatkat uit jou lende haal. Ek sal jou lus vir swart vroue wegneem” ” (52).

(50) *Ibid.*, 199.

(51) *Ibid.*, 159.

(52) *Ibid.*, 160.

It is not the purpose of this study to detail all the historical themes in the novel. It would be very difficult anyhow, especially in view of the way they arise in the novel: Van Heerden has his own time (pastpresentfuture) and the place can be anywhere, as Port Cecil in *Die Stoetmeester* (East London, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth). The point is that throughout the novel, there is reference to South Africa's history, as already stated: "van die vroegste pioniersgeskiedenis af, deur oorloë en ontbering, die volstruisveertydperk en die koms van Italiaanse krygsgevangenis in die Tweede Wêreldoorlog, tot by die hedendaagse Suid-Afrika".

The historical significance of Van Heerden's novel, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, lies in the fact that he challenges important conventions and that he acts as a counter historian. Furthermore, he provides interesting and imaginative accounts of historical phenomena that often are treated dryly by history texts. In addition, he tries to create some kind of picture of aspects of the history of the country, and tries to be relevant and topical in his commentary, for instance, by the way he addresses postcolonial issues such as hybridity, genetics, feminism and the position of the marginalised, whose voices we do not hear nearly as much as should be the case. In this way, Van Heerden, through his poetics and novels, especially his latest one, *Die Swye van Mario Salviati*, acts as a micro historian, and a counter historian, and thus contributes to the international and South African bank of existing historical writing.

CONCLUSION

In a recent article by Patrick Joyce the title reads: *A quiet victory: The growing role of postmodernism in History* (1). Whilst there have been strong ideas on the philosophy of history coming from philosophers of history such as Collingwood and Carr, few British historians have identified with narrative in history, although the name Keith Jenkins certainly springs to mind. So, when one is faced with an article such as the one referred to above, it comes as rather a surprise. Yet, Joyce makes a strong case for narrative and history, as can be seen from the following extract from his article:

“The postmodern idea that history was a form of narrative, among other narrative forms, was particularly difficult to swallow, given the widely held idea that somehow facts preceded narrative, and not what seemed to be the other way round. In many cases of this resistance, expressed in the wave of “in defence of history”, books and articles of the 1990s, ideas of objectivity continued to be defended in terms of older academic idioms, whereas postmodernism in fact offers not so much a threat to history as material for a rethinking of what objectivity was all about in the first place”.

He further asserts: “As for narrative, a lot was to be gained, and certainly nothing lost, by recognizing that History was not the innocent garb of truth”. This is an important statement for the purposes of summing up this study. For one is at no stage and in no way saying that Etienne Van Heerden’s approach to his novels, which use history as their subject matter, is the same as what historians do if and when they strive for “objective truth”. Classic, traditional and conventional historians, who want to document the past in a specific way, will continue to do so.

By examining aspects of the international debate on historical writing (Chapter 1), and then by reflecting on aspects of the current state of South African historical writing (Chapter 2), it has been possible to situate Etienne Van Heerden in context of being a counter-historian (Chapter 3), who gives marginalised historical characters whose voices one does not normally hear in South African society, a chance to air their views, which can be called an alternative kind of social history, a different “truth”, as it were.

(1) P Joyce in the *TLS*, 26th October 2001.

By further examining his writing, *via* the heretofore unpublished Verwey Lectures, one can gain valuable insights into Van Heerden's thinking and poetics, thus enabling one to form a deeper understanding of this South African writer's historical consciousness (Chapter 4). Finally, by using as the case study the already acclaimed *Die Swye van Mario Salviati* (2), one can see how Van Heerden treats the historical themes "in the flesh", emphasizing the importance of his work as a counter and alternative history to the existing canons of South African history (Chapter 5).

It must finally be said, Van Heerden's is an imaginative view on history in a country whose historical energy, specifically within the scintillating postcolonial paradigm, makes it worthwhile and engaging reading and opens up avenues for historians to explore.

(2) It won the M-Net Prize in 2001.

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