

# **This little chicken went to Africa**

A historical survey into the development of narrative structures within relief printmaking in community centres in South Africa and a formal analysis of the relevance of the medium in contemporary children's picture book illustration.



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Department of Visual Arts

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 1 March 2009

## **ABSTRACT**

When dealing with emergent literacy in South Africa, the didactic aspects of picture books are often privileged over their aesthetic quality and the idea of reading for pleasure. The themes of the books are not always locally relevant and for economic reasons, they often fail to reach the communities that need them the most.

By looking at the history of relief printing within a community environment, I hope to highlight how communities themselves may be able to develop locally relevant children's picture books, instituting a 'grassroots' approach rather than the paternalistic 'top down' approach of the past. I will also be looking at the narrative and stylistic elements of relief printing that are complimentary to the picture book genre and how these can be utilised for a pleasurable rather than didactic approach to the narratives.

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## INTRODUCTION

The art of relief printing and the illustration of picture books for children have gone hand-in-hand since *Kunst und Lehrbüchlein* was first published in Frankfurt in 1580, which featured woodcut illustrations by Jost Amman (1539-1591). The title page declared it to be “a book of art and instruction for young people, wherein may be discovered all manner of merry and agreeable drawings” (Salisbury 2004:8).

Books like Antonio Frasconi’s *See and say* (1955) and John Lawrence’s *This little chick* (2002) (see Figure 1.1) and *Tiny’s big adventure* (2008) (see Figure 1.2) have taken relief illustration into the twenty-first century, but at a cost of R140 per book<sup>1</sup>, they, along with most picture books, remain out of reach of a large percentage of South Africa’s population<sup>2</sup>.

The drive towards greater literacy in South Africa, like most other issues the country faces, provides a multitude of challenges. In producing books for younger learners, sensitivity to cultural identity needs to be taken into account and a positive scenario would involve taking the cultural context into account in all areas of children’s book production i.e. distribution, mediation, production and reception (Van der Westhuizen 2001: <http://www.childlit.org.za/itsclpapvdwesthuizen.html>).

The traditional concept of picture books as “simple, action-orientated, didactic and optimistic”, as described by Perry Nodelman in *The pleasures of children’s literature* (1992) (cited in Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:261) becomes much more involved when one takes into account South Africa’s eleven official languages and multitude of cultures. If these issues are not taken into account, authors/illustrators run the risk of creating books which generalise and reduce cultural identities to stereotypes, thereby alienating the readers that they are trying to reach. Another issue is that with such a strong focus on

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<sup>1</sup> At Exclusive Books ([www.exclusivebooks.co.za](http://www.exclusivebooks.co.za))

<sup>2</sup> 53.7% of households in the Eastern Cape have a average monthly income of less than R500 (2004: [http://www.socdev.ecprov.gov.za/statistics/demographics/ecape\\_area\\_info.htm](http://www.socdev.ecprov.gov.za/statistics/demographics/ecape_area_info.htm))

education and the didactic, there is always the risk that the ‘merry and agreeable’ aspects of the picture books may be left by the wayside.

Since the transition to democracy in South Africa in 1994, the promotion of literacy amongst previously disadvantaged communities has become a key priority for the education department (2004:<http://www.education.gpg.gov.za/publications/papers/genevieve%20koopman%20%20&%20hlengani%20mabasa.doc>).

However, it is often non-governmental organisations (NGO’s) like Biblionef, The Centre for the Book, READ and Project Literacy who seem to be making the greatest headway in promoting literacy, especially amongst the oft neglected kindergarten or pre-school age groups (Willenberg 2004:149). Whereas books promoted by the Education Department have a pedagogic slant and are produced on a very tight budget, Biblionef’s<sup>3</sup> selection includes books which are read purely for pleasure and which have been designed with aesthetics in mind (2007: <http://www.biblionefsa.org.za/index.php?c=3>).

*Horns Only* by Gcina Mhlope, Fathima Dada and Leoni Hofmeyr was initially used as part of the Centre for the Book’s, ‘First Words in Print’<sup>4</sup> project, but has since been adopted by Biblionef. It is sophisticated, well designed and colourful and although there is a moral to the story, it is secondary to the enjoyment aspect of the book.

Biblionef does promote books of a didactic nature like *The Peace Star* by Isabella Holden and *Brenda has a dragon in her blood* by Hijltje Vink, but these are outweighed by books for pleasure, such as *Monde’s present* by Alexia van Heerden and *Lulama’s magic blanket* by Mari Grobler (2007: <http://www.biblionefsa.org.za/index.php?c=3>).

When looking at the titles of these books, a common thread becomes apparent. Most of the picture books for pre-school black children are written and illustrated by white adults. Even the picture books offered at schools share this thread. The Nasou/Via Afrika catalogue includes books written by A Walton, R Viljoen and U Schreuder; and

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<sup>3</sup> Founded in France in 1989 by Max Vegelin van Claerbergen, a former Dutch ambassador to Surinam (2007: <http://www.biblionefsa.org.za/index.php?c=3>).

<sup>4</sup> Run from September 2002 to April 2003, the project aimed to expose care-givers and parents to the importance of sharing books with their children. The initial stage saw the distribution of books to 10 000 disadvantaged children in four provinces. The four titles distributed were: Abongi’s Journey, Thandeka’s Gift, Horn’s Only and Khushu Khushu (2003: <http://www.nlsa.ac.za/NLSA/centreforthebook/projects/first-words-in-print-1>).

illustrated by Marna Hattingh, Piet Grobler and Robert Hichens. All the authors and illustrators that I've mentioned here have created books with a black child as the main character and yet the books are first written in English and Afrikaans and then translated into Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho etc (Nasou/Via Afrika 2008:21).

Although these books are still effective in promoting literacy, Project Literacy<sup>5</sup> believes that, "a text is more easily understood by learners if the content is relevant and familiar to their life experiences, the stories [are] written with input from learner and community groups, set in both urban and rural settings, and drawing on African Myths and strong links with oral traditions" (2007: <http://www.projectliteracy.org.za/bookshop2.asp>).

In South Africa, a historical premise exists for the development of a locally relevant narrative within a community environment, in the form of relief printmaking. Community centres like ELC Rorke's Drift Centre in KwaZulu-Natal (referred to simply as Rorke's Drift in this thesis) found different ways of nurturing what they believed was an authentically *African* approach to the narrative during a time when there were limited opportunities available for black artistic expression. The continuous efforts by the community centre teachers and the artists to tackle the contentious issues of suitable teaching methods, Christian subject matter and the development of a black identity through art, resulted in the development of a new or recontextualised form of African narrative. In chapter one, I will look at how these issues influenced the formation of this new African narrative in relief printing and how the development of the printing 'craft' within community centres, undermined the apartheid government's aim to marginalise black communities by suppressing their empowerment through art.

Not much literature exists about Rorke's Drift, and I have used Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs', *Rorke's Drift: empowering prints* (2003) as my main sources of information. There is no scope within this thesis for a historical survey of Rorke's Drift however, I will be formally analysing the narrative content of a selection of relief prints

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<sup>5</sup> Founded in 1973 by Jenny Nesor. They primarily deal with adult literacy but launched a program in 2006 called 'Run home to read', which encourages parents and care-givers to read to children (2007: [www.projectliteracy.org.za](http://www.projectliteracy.org.za)).

which were created at this centre, in particular the work of Azaria Mbatha (1941-), John Muafangejo (1943-1987) and Dan Rakgoathe (1937-2004).

There are a variety of relief printing media available<sup>6</sup>. However, I will be limiting my discussion to woodcut and linocut, as these are the most commonly used media in South Africa. Levinson states that, “it is believed that relief printing gained popularity because it shares similarities to wood carving, which was already an established craft in Bantu tradition” (1992:345). Linoleum was used as a cheaper option to wood at missionary stations and the earliest reference to the use of linocut that I’ve been able to source dates to 1935, when Grace Anderson, who lectured drawing at The Diocesan Teachers Training College at the Botshabelo (Grace Dieu) mission station, wrote an article on lino-printing for the Grace Dieu Bulletin of December 1935 (Miles and Rankin 1992:37).

Woodcut has always presented a natural fit for illustration as only one relief surface (block of wood) is required for both text and image. Laurens Coster from Haarlem in the Netherlands is believed to have created the first block-books in the mid-1400s. By 1457, woodcuts were being used to print the decorative elements of books (Latin Psalters by Faust and Schoeffer at Mainz) and by 1461 they were being used to print the illustrations accompanying the text (Pfister at Bamberg). The period from 1470 to the mid 1500s is viewed as the high point of woodcut book illustration and single prints by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) are perceived to represent the apex of woodcut design (Hind 1963:31-36).

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards there was a marked deterioration in the quality of woodcut illustration, in particular with the introduction of ‘chap books’ in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These books were crudely cut and printed and ‘stock’ images, that had no relevance to the text, were used as illustrations. However, the books were cheap to produce and were sold by travelling peddlers, thereby providing literature to a section of the population that may otherwise not have had access to books (Salisbury 2004:8).

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<sup>6</sup> Collograph, plaster relief, cardboard relief, woodcut and linocut (Hobbs and Rankin 1997:39).

Thomas Bewick (1753-1827) elevated the stature of woodcutting when he popularised white line engraving<sup>7</sup> in England, which he used to illustrate books for both adults (*The general history of quadrupeds*, 1790) and children (*Tommy Trip's history of the birds and beasts* 1779). William Blake (1757-1827) used the technique to explore the integration of text and image, which can be seen in his children's books, *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) (Salisbury 2004:9).

The work of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, William Morris (1834-1896) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), saw the use of woodcut in the revival of the production of fine books and this trend eventually spread to the rest of Europe, in particular Germany (Hind 1963:47).

Woodcut became synonymous with the German Expressionist<sup>8</sup> group, who utilised the medium for both fine art and illustration. As their personal philosophy prescribed the return of 'German Gothic Art', invoking great German artists like Lucas Cranach (1472-1553) and Albrecht Dürer, woodcut was their medium of choice and best exemplified their aims (2008: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/linocut>). The German Expressionists also used linoleum for relief illustration, with Die Brücke group in Germany reportedly using the medium from 1905-1913. When linocut<sup>9</sup> was used, it was for economic reasons and seldom acknowledged<sup>10</sup> (2008: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/linocut>).

In 1907, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) used linocut to illustrate fairytales in 'Jugendstil' and it was first used in England in 1912 by Horace Brodzky, an Australian expatriate (Coppel 1995:14).

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<sup>7</sup> Engravers used sections of hard boxwood, utilising a graver instead of a knife to cut the designs which resulted in a much finer range of textures and tones. White line engraving refers to the use of white lines on a dark background (Salisbury 2004:9).

<sup>8</sup> Expressionism in the visual arts is associated with artists of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter and includes artists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Max Pechstein (Lang 1976:12).

<sup>9</sup> The term 'linocut' was first used by the poster designer, Charles E. Dawson, in 1907, when he described the process in a trade journal called 'The Process Engraver's Monthly' (Coppel 1995:14).

<sup>10</sup> However, the use of linocut has been acknowledged in the work of Christian Rohlf's (*Wanderer* (Nomads), 1910) and Sella Hasse (*Kornträger* (Corn Carriers), 1912-1916) (Milwaukee Art Museum 2004:127 and 227).



Linocut gained in status with Picasso's popularisation of the reduction colour linocut in the early 1950s. Matisse also expressed a preference for linocut's softness in comparison to wood, which allowed him to carve the soft, smooth contours that epitomised his female figures (2001: <http://printsandprintmaking.gov.au/catalogues/bibliography/136140/bunbury-alisa-not-picassos-invention--a-foray-into.aspx>).

Linoleum<sup>11</sup> is softer to work with than wood and does not require specialised tools, which makes it accessible to amateurs and professionals alike (Hobbs and Rankin 1997:35). Technically, as a form of relief printing, it does not offer the fine detail available in woodcut and the blocks are less durable, as they crumble easily. As a result, the use of linocut in the twentieth century was an economic choice<sup>12</sup>, linoleum being cheaper and easier to obtain than good quality soft wood (Alexander 1974:69).

Linoleum is no longer as economically viable as it was but more economical relief media that mimic the aesthetic qualities of linoleum and woodcut are being used at community centres today.<sup>13</sup> I hope that by looking at the way that relief media are being used today, as informed by developments in the past, I will be able to identify narrative and aesthetic possibilities for the development of children's picture books, which are both economically viable and culturally relevant.

In order to make my picture books culturally relevant, I have placed them within a specific geographical context. As I have spent most of my life in the Eastern Cape, I have chosen to limit my focus to Xhosa communities in the Makana<sup>14</sup> and Nelson Mandela Metropole Districts<sup>15</sup>. The fact that I, as a white South African, am both the author and illustrator of my picture books is clearly problematic when viewed in line with

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<sup>11</sup> The origins of linoleum date back to 1860, when Frederick Walton patented a process of oxidising linseed oil. He patented a more advanced version of the process in 1863, in which solidified linseed oil and crushed cork were pressed onto a coarse canvas backing, which then evolved into a versatile form of flooring (Rothenstein 1970:116).

<sup>12</sup> Linoleum is no longer economical and many educational centers and artists now use alternative media like supawood, masonite and supaflex.

<sup>13</sup> At the Egazini Centre in Grahamstown, artists have substituted linoleum with cheaper options like supawood, supaflex and masonite (interview with Dominic Thorburn, Grahamstown, 5 August, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Includes the towns of Grahamstown, Sidbury, Salem, Riebeeck East and Alicedale.

<sup>15</sup> Includes the towns of Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Despatch.

community involvement. However, I do not seek to create picture books which provide a solution to the question of local production, but rather to offer a practical and theoretical example for how further development may be achieved. In the development of my narratives I have sought the advice of Xhosa people from both rural and urban areas of the Eastern Cape, and have also relied on memories from my own upbringing in these areas, in order to create an appropriate environmental genre and use of symbolism. Most importantly, the narratives will place emphasis on enjoyment rather than didacticism.

I have chosen the Eastern Cape also because of its high percentage of illiteracy, which highlights the importance of finding ways to encourage children to read at a young age, as well as encouraging illiterate caregivers to embrace picture books as a middle ground between images and text. Hannah Morris cites T Radebe as saying, “the illiterate parent can use the picture-book to create narrative through the context clues of the visual story and in this way share a rich experience with the child” (Morris 2007:33).

With an illiteracy rate of 42.6% and the lack of basic infrastructure like roads, schools and electricity in rural areas, the Eastern Cape provides a challenging environment and yet one in which even the smallest effort can show marked results (2004: [http://www.socdev.ecprov.gov.za/statistics/demographics/ecape\\_area\\_info.htm](http://www.socdev.ecprov.gov.za/statistics/demographics/ecape_area_info.htm)).<sup>16</sup> Although these areas have a greater need for educational facilities and development<sup>17</sup>, I have had to take into account the practicalities of doing research in areas with poor access roads and where very little English is spoken. Therefore, I feel that the two districts that I have selected are both manageable in size and accessibility.

My research includes interviews with local artists and university printmaking lecturers, visits to craft centres and a visit to a pre-primary school where I was able to test my first

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<sup>16</sup> Despite these obstacles, the first FWIP (First Words in Print) Project achieved a 96.7% rate of distribution in the Mt Ayliff area, a fairly remote small town in the northern Eastern Cape, largely due to assistance by Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres based in the region (2003: <http://www.nlsa.ac.za/NLSA/centreforthebook/projects/first-words-in-print-1>).

<sup>17</sup> The unemployment rate is 54.6% (2004: [http://www.socdev.ecprov.gov.za/statistics/demographics/ecape\\_area\\_info.htm](http://www.socdev.ecprov.gov.za/statistics/demographics/ecape_area_info.htm)).

book and interact with children between the ages of three and seven years (my target age group) and their caregivers.

Xhosa traditional culture in South Africa has a long and rich history of oral story-telling and in chapter two I will discuss how the performative and interactive aspects of oral storytelling can inform the development of locally relevant and vibrant picture books. Xhosa oral narratives can be divided into three main genres: *iintsomi*, referring to fictitious, mythological and fantastical tales; *amabali*, referring to legendary tales, and *imilando*, referring to historical events (Jordan 2004:14). In this chapter I will look at two books with relief illustrations, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* (1990) by Karen Press (see Figure 1.3) and *Tales of the trickster boy* (1990) by Jack Cope (see Figure 1.4). These books provide an interesting contrast, as they were both published in 1990, are both aimed at primary school level learners and yet offer very different forms of narrative. *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* is written within a postcolonial context through which Press addresses the inconsistencies that exist in the portrayal of Nongqawuse, a Xhosa girl who, based on a message from her ancestors, convinced the rest of her community to kill their cattle and destroy their crops in exchange for a greater reward. By believing her story, the Xhosa people were driven to starvation and were forced to submit to colonial rule. The narrative has a strongly didactic subtext and this is reflected in the formal illustrations by Jeff Rankin, executed in a woodcut medium. In writing *Tales of the trickster boy*, Jack Cope sets out to provide a pleasurable reading experience, and in order to achieve this, he has borrowed heavily from the methods of oral storytelling. The result is a vibrant narrative, which draws the reader in and these attributes are echoed by illustrations by Azaria Mbatha, executed in a linocut medium. The book consists of a collection of short stories about Hlakanyana, a well known trickster in Nguni narratives. The short stories are linked by their narrator, Mamethu, who is telling them to a group of children. By comparing how Cope has effectively used elements of oral storytelling to Press's more didactic approach, I will attempt to highlight how to make picture books more enjoyable for the reader.

I have based the majority of my research into oral storytelling on AC Jordan's book, *Tales from Southern Africa* (2004) and *Oral Stories in Southern Africa* (1990), edited by HC Groenewald. I have taken the basic structure of my formal analysis of picture books from *How picturebooks work* (2006) by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott and have borrowed their sub-headings of narrative perspective, setting, characterisation and intertextuality, all of which relate to the creation of culturally relevant, interactive picture books. I have also applied their terminology of differentiating between 'verbal text' (the written text) and 'visual text' (the pictures) in a narrative.

The analysis of the picture books in *How picturebooks work* (and this thesis), is informed by the theory of narratology. To inform my use of narratological structure to analyse the visual and verbal texts, I have primarily used the following sources: *Narratology: introduction to the theory of narrative* (1999) by Mieke Bal; *Narratology: The form and functioning of narrative* (1982) by Gerald Prince and *Narratology* (1996) edited by Susana Onega and José Angel Garcia Landa.

Both Bal and Prince apply the theory of narratology in its original structuralist form. However, since the post-structuralist reaction of the 1980s and 1990s, narratology has moved away from its formal structuralist approach and incorporated other disciplines, such as psychoanalysis, gender studies and post-colonial studies to become what Onega and Garcia Landa term 'interdisciplinary narratology' (1996:25). Bal defines narratology as, "the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that tell a story. Such a theory helps to understand, analyse, and evaluate narratives" (Bal 1997:3). In essence, it distinguishes between the 'what' (story) and the 'how' (discourse). However, within contemporary narratological discourse, narratology also incorporates any semiotic representation of a series of connected events and any semiotic construct can be said to be a text. Therefore a 'text' can be an image, a film, a comic or even a play (Bal 1999:6).

To highlight the importance of the reader and reader interaction with the narrative to enhance its meaning, I have referred to Roland Barthes' essay, *Death of the author* (1962), which can be found in his book, *Image, Music, Text* (1977).

In chapter two I will also look at how the interactive and locally relevant aspects of oral storytelling have informed the creation of my own two books, *Pumla and the chickens* (see Figure 1.5) and *The gold seed* (both 2008). *Pumla and the chickens* is a story about a young girl called Pumla, who is excitedly waiting for her aunt to arrive for a visit. She and her mother are making her aunt's favourite chicken stew but when she goes to the backyard to fetch a chicken, she discovers that they have disappeared. The rest of the narrative describes her search for the chickens, which are hiding on every page of the book. She eventually gives up looking for them and her mother buys a chicken from the shop. During dinner, the chickens miraculously reappear in the yard.

*The gold seed* tells the story of two boys, Mandla and Vuyo, who won't let their sister, Zukisa, play with them. They go on an imaginary journey to the Bird-King's cave to find the gold seed, only to discover that he will only give it to a princess. They elicit Zukisa's help, she plants the seed and they are all rewarded with corn on the cob for dinner.

I tested *Pumla and the chickens* on a group of Xhosa pre-school children at St Anne's Pre-primary School in Port Elizabeth (see Addendum A), in order to gauge whether or not I had been successful in producing an entertaining book, and was surprised to discover that the teacher, Colleen Mbambani, employed the performative skills of an oral storyteller when presenting the story to the children. This reflected what AC Jordan had written about Xhosa storytelling, where he stated that, "within the home environment in Xhosa communities, it was usually the older women or care-givers who told the stories and the dynamism between the teller and audience enhanced the aesthetic experience" (Jordan 2004:13).

If children relate better to what they see around them, then perhaps it is important to derive narratives from their local environment and traditions, preferably related by authors and illustrators from within the community.

Jane Doodan writes that there are three main elements to a children's picture book. Firstly, it needs to visually appeal to the child; secondly it should provide a means to an

end, ie literacy or education; and thirdly, the book should be aesthetically appealing. She believes that good picture books should be viewed in the same way that one might view an artwork and that the development of a visual awareness will not only enhance literacy skills but will also develop an appreciation for art (Doonan 1993:7).

If good picture books can be viewed in the same way that one might view art, then it seems logical that relief prints could be used to inform picture books. In chapter three, I investigate how the aesthetic qualities of woodcut and linocut can enhance the vibrancy of picture books. Again, I have borrowed Nikolajeva and Scott's sub-headings: counterpoints, modality and mimesis, time and movement; along with postmodern aspects of picture books: metafiction and multiliteracy and the economic viability of relief printing.

*Nongqawuse's Prophecy* and *Tales of the trickster boy* are both plate books (visual and verbal texts are not integrated), so in order to highlight the importance of fully integrated picture books, I have included a fifth book for analysis within this chapter, *Tiger on a tree* (2004) by Anushka Ravishankar and illustrated by Pulak Biswas (see Figure 1.6). The book tells the story of a tiger which goes on an adventure but soon becomes scared and hides in a tree. The villagers (who are equally scared) catch it with a net and then have an animated discussion about what they should do with it. Eventually they decide to set it free and the tiger happily goes back to the jungle. Although Biswas' illustrations are not executed in a relief medium, the bold lines and strong contrast of positive and negative space are reminiscent of linocut.

In this chapter one refer back to the work of Mbatha and Muafangejo, especially in their use of verbal text within the narrative, framing and varied mark-making to enhance the vibrancy of the text, which in turn enhances reader interaction and refers back to the elements of oral storytelling discussed in chapter two. Referring to these two artists, Elizabeth Rankin comments that "their work is filled with references to cultural traditions, symbols and subversive statements against the political situation at the time. Even the composition reflects the interwoven nature of the narrative, with the surface

often divided into cartoon-like blocks and various aspects of the story being displayed at once, reflecting the interactive nature of the oral story-telling tradition” (1999: <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1299r&htext.html>).

In chapter three I also discuss how postmodern elements in picture books can be used to enhance reader interaction. A postmodern picture book can be described as having the following characteristics: non-linear narrative forms in storybooks, books that are ‘aware’ of themselves as books and include self-referential elements, and what is known as metafiction (2008: [http://www.rif.org/educators/articles/childrens\\_book\\_illustrations.msp](http://www.rif.org/educators/articles/childrens_book_illustrations.msp)). M Anstey expands on these characteristics by including non-traditional ways of using plot, character and setting, unusual use of narrator’s voice, a requirement by the reader to construct some of the text or meaning, a pastiche of illustrative styles, unusual design layout, contesting discourses and the availability of multiple readings and meanings for a variety of audiences” (2002: [http://www.reading.org\\_Library\\_Retrieve.cfm\\_D=10.1598\\_JAAL.45.6.1&F=JAAL-45-6-Anstey.pdf](http://www.reading.org_Library_Retrieve.cfm_D=10.1598_JAAL.45.6.1&F=JAAL-45-6-Anstey.pdf)). Although some of these characteristics can be found in relief printing, this does not mean that the relief prints are therefore postmodern, and my discussion of postmodernism relates only to how it manifests in picture books.

Another postmodern aspect that can be found in picture books is multiliteracy, which highlights how culture can affect a reader’s interpretation of a text. It also emphasises the importance of broadening the pedagogic aspects of literacy to include new forms of communication and technology. While there is no scope within this thesis for a detailed discussion of new technology and how this affects the production of picture books, it will become a growing concern in years to come as more and more people in the Eastern Cape relocate to urban areas or if the rural areas are provided with better infrastructure.

Like linocut, the production of children’s picture books in South Africa is strongly influenced by economic concerns. By emphasising that ‘good’ picture books do not necessarily need to fall into the full-colour, hard cover, ‘Disney School’ stereotype, I hope to demonstrate that ‘good’ books can be produced cheaply, without losing their

essential 'quality' (Schwarcz 1991:8). From a production perspective, the printing methods should be economically viable and accessible to printers in urban and rural areas alike. If the prints have been limited to black and white and one colour, this should be done in such a way that it is still as appealing to the child as a full-colour book.

By looking at past narratives in relief printing and how these have informed relief narratives today, I hope to show that they can offer a structure for the development of culturally relevant children's picture books in urban and rural areas. The First Words in Print project noted that "the relevance of the stories and illustrations to, particularly, the African and more rural children's lives, accounted for the evident positive response in areas where there had previously been no interest in reading to children"

(2003: <http://www.nlsa.ac.za/NLSA/centreforthebook/projects/first-words-in-print-1>).

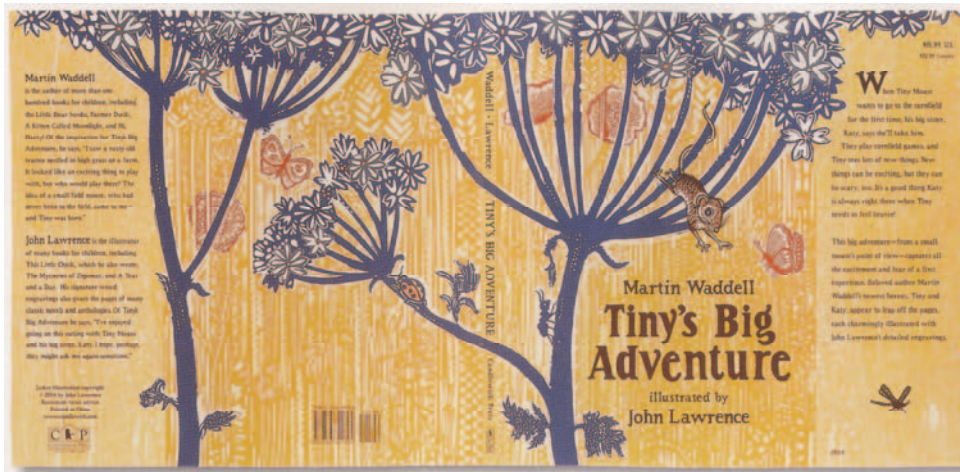
I believe that the key to creating vibrant and interactive picture books lies in incorporating the performative and interactive elements of oral storytelling, privileging the reader and providing ambiguities in the text to encourage multiple, culturally-informed interpretations of the text. To cite Christine Nostlinger (1936-), a well-known Austrian writer for children, "as long as children are treated as irresponsible babes, so long will children's literature be considered an irresponsible medium" (in Schwarcz 1991:10).

By allowing the readers, in this case the children, to interpret the story for themselves, they are able to draw on their own culture and experiences to actively participate in constructing the relevance of the images and text. However, the response of the teacher/caregiver to the picture book is also crucial, so it is important to find a way of incorporating the pedagogical elements that they look for in a book without privileging pedagogy over reading for pleasure. In the end, I hope that by incorporating the elements of oral storytelling and relief printing that enhance vibrancy and reader interaction in picture books, I can create books which strengthen a child's sense of identity by providing narratives that reflect their world, with characters that represent their own ethnic groups and more importantly, are fun to read.

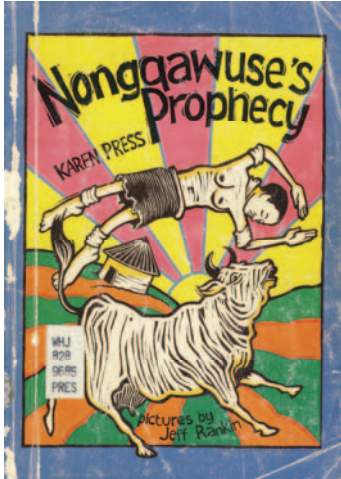




**Figure 1.1** (above) Cover illustration by John Lawrence, *This Little Chick*, 2002. Collection: Gericke Library, Stellenbosch University.

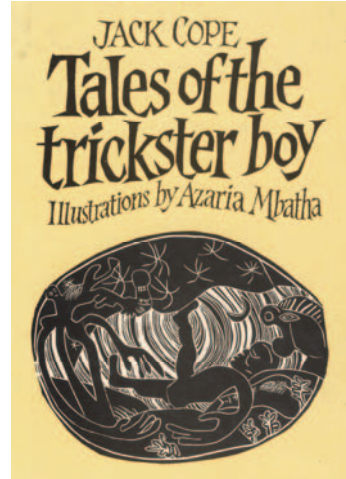


**Figure 1.2** (above) Cover illustration by John Lawrence in Martin Waddell, *Tiny's Big Adventure*, 2008. Collection: Gericke Library, Stellenbosch University.



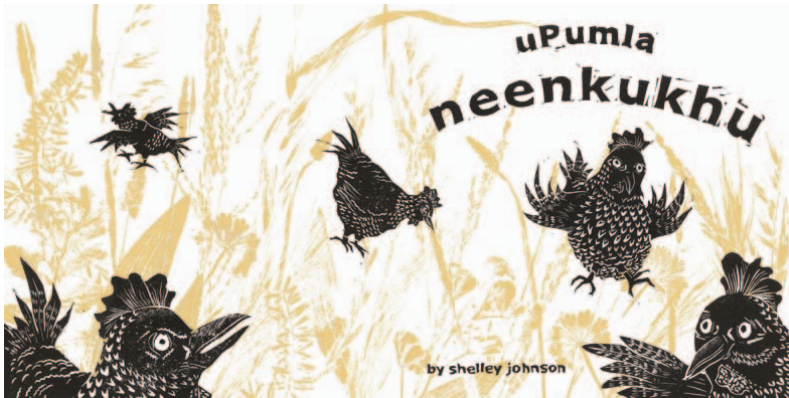
**Figure 1.3** (above) Cover illustration by Jeff Rankin in Karen Press, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy*, 1990.

Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town.

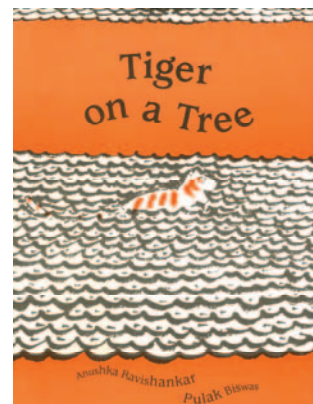


**Figure 1.4** (above right) Cover illustration by Azaria Mbatha in Jack Cope, *Tales of the Trickster Boy*, 1990.

Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town.



**Figure 1.5** (left) Cover illustration from Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens*, 2008. Collection: Artist's.



**Figure 1.6** (right) Cover illustration by Pulak Biswas in Anushka Ravishankar, *Tiger on a tree*, 2004. Collection: private.

## **CHAPTER 1: The Development of the Narrative in Relief Printing**

In this chapter, I will be looking at how the concept of community in the form of community art centres, helped to shape the narratives present in relief printing in South Africa. I will explore how the lessons learnt in the past can inform the development of community-based relief printing in the future. More importantly, I will look at how the narratives of relief printing have the potential to be transformed into illustrations for good quality picture books, the technical aspects of which will be discussed in greater detail in chapters two and three.

Community art centres in South Africa have enormous potential to become an integral part of how communities function and progress, especially in rural areas. Local people and artists use arts and crafts as a way of providing income for the community and also as a form of communication and expression (van Robbroeck 1991:10). This was particularly relevant in a country in which, for many years, a large portion of the population was disenfranchised and had no voice.

In the past, the motivation behind the establishment of many of the community arts centres in South Africa was very different from that of Europe and America. Rather than being initialised by young politicised artists and activists, centres in South Africa were established by missionaries and government departments in the hope of generating employment through the revival of so-called 'traditional' black craft and providing recreational facilities to keep unemployed youths off the streets. Lize van Robbroeck writes that these 'top-down' origins were 'paternalistic', in that they were not initiated, administered or run by the local black community (cited in Falken 2004:42).

Another problem that community art centres tried to address, besides unemployment, was the severe inadequacy of art tuition in schools. Before the implementation of the Bantu Education Act (1953), the only place that black South Africans could acquire literacy was

at mission stations and if any form of art tuition was provided it was usually in the form of crafts like woodcarving and basket weaving (Draper 2003:96)<sup>18</sup>.

The Nationalist government's Bantu Education Act of 1953, instituted mother tongue tuition and placed an emphasis on cultural identity, crafts and skills, through which, within the framework of apartheid, they hoped to achieve their aim of creating a subservient black work force in South Africa (Rankin and Hobbs 2003:18).

Cultural identity was not encouraged as a means to empower the black population but as a way to divide the black population back into tribes, governed by government-vetted chiefs, so that the government could control them more effectively (Christopher 1994:10).

I believe that Lize van Robbroeck's phrase 'top-down' does not only apply to how the community art centres were run but also to how narratives were conceived in the early development of relief printing in these centres. By looking at the work of Azaria Mbatha, Jon Muafangejo and Dan Rakgoathe, I hope to demonstrate how the narratives present in their work developed from literal and didactic representations into narratives which undermined the authority of the government and sought to empower the communities in which these artists lived. It is the concept of 'empowerment' that tends to be the key ingredient lacking in a 'top-down' system.

In order to track the development of relief printing within community art centres, I will be looking at Rorke's Drift<sup>19</sup> in Kwa-Zulu Natal (1962-1982) and The Egazini Centre in Grahamstown (1999-present), both of which serve(d) largely rural areas. I have selected these two centres because they illustrate how empowering a community by providing an

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<sup>18</sup> Although missionary schools fell outside of direct government control, they conformed to the rules of segregation until the 1980's in order to gain state recognition (Draper 2003:96).

<sup>19</sup> A missionary station was first established in the Rorke's Drift area in 1878 by a Swedish mission called Otto Witt. He renamed the area Oscarsberg after the Swedish king, Oscar II. The name 'Rorke's Drift' gained popularity after a famous battle on the 22nd of January 1879, where one hundred and fifty British soldiers defended their supply depot and hospital against four thousand of Prince Dabulamanzi's Zulu warriors. The Battle of Rorke's Drift became famous in Britain as it was promoted in an attempt to overshadow the dramatic defeat that the British had suffered at Isandlwana the previous day (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:4).

environment for dialogue and artistic expression enhances the development of the narrative in relief printing.

## Teaching methods within community art centres

Rorke's Drift began as a craft workshop<sup>20</sup> run by Peder and Ulla Gowenius<sup>21</sup> on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in KwaZulu-Natal in 1961. The original aim of the centre was to provide employment for women in the area. Initially they based themselves at Ceza Hospital<sup>22</sup> and proceeded to set up a recreational and occupational programme for convalescing tuberculosis patients. Weaving and sewing was offered to the female patients and proved to be very popular but did not always appeal to the male patients. Peder Gowenius had noticed some of the men carving wood<sup>23</sup> and decided to try to introduce linocut.

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<sup>20</sup> Before setting up the centre, the Gowenius' travelled around South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe looking at the crafts that were being made by local communities. They also visited the Polly Street Centre in 1961 (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:16-17).

<sup>21</sup> Graduates from the Konstfackskolan in Stockholm, Ulla had studied textile art and weaving and Peder's curriculum had included printmaking and sculpture, along with a specialization in art education (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:16).

<sup>22</sup> With the rapid growth of the weaving and art programs, the Gowenius' realized that they would require more space than Ceza hospital could offer. They decided to relocate to Umpumulo, the largest mission station in Zululand. The Umpumulo Art Centre was launched on the 17th of September 1962, with the aims of training advisors to develop crafts to help with patient rehabilitation and aid the economic situation of local women (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:23). In 1963 the art centre was relocated to Rorke's Drift and the name was changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Church Arts and Crafts Centre, Rorke's Drift. As a result of the notoriety of its location, it came to be popularly known as the Rorke's Drift Centre (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:52).

<sup>23</sup> Steven Sack believes that when Peder Gowenius introduced linocut to the students at Rorke's Drift, it was readily accepted because it echoed the existing styles of local artists, in their carving of amabhaxa (mat racks); and that this style can be seen as far back as in the work of Tivenyanga Qwabe (c.a. 1900) in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1920s (cited in Levinson 1992:345).

Tivenyanga Qwabe used boxwood and various other timbers to make the mat racks, using a pocket knife to carve the designs and then burning the surface to highlight the symbolic relief patterns. The racks were often dismantled by shopkeepers, who sold the panels as artworks (Sack 1988:10).

In the 1930's, owing to taxes on chiefdoms and severe droughts, many rural people were forced into wage labour and wood-carvers began to sell their items on the side of the road or in craft markets. This led to the formation of two outlets for the sale of wood-carvings and other crafts: a community-based market for the sale of functional goods and a market for curio artworks (Sack 1988:9).



Gowenius chose linoleum as a medium because of its economic viability and availability<sup>24</sup>. As part of craft tuition, linoleum was largely used in schools as a cheaper alternative to wood. It had a reputation as a medium for amateurs, on which they could practise until they were adept enough at carving to move on to woodblocks (Bunbury 2001: <http://www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au/catalogues/bibliography/136140/bunbury-alisa-picassos-invention-a-foray-into.aspx>).

The craft education provided at government schools was viewed as inferior to education offered at white schools and seen as an attempt by the government to suppress black ambition<sup>25</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that black students viewed the teaching of crafts with suspicion and saw it as an extension of apartheid policy (Miles 2004:17).

In a 1999 paper on Primitivism, Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs surmised that linocut “seems to have been thought of in a rather patronising way as an appropriate project for rural black artists, producing work which comprised uncomplicated black-and-white linocut prints of Biblical stories and African folklore” (1999: <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1299r&htext.html>).

Gowenius did not see craft in the negative light in which it was perceived in South Africa, perhaps because of his training at Kontsfackskolan, which encouraged the study of crafts (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:15). To cite Rankin and Hobbs, he believed that, “training in fine art should not be divorced from other skills that were usually excluded from conventional art schools in South Africa, which tended to dismiss craft as an inferior pursuit” (2003:60).

Although his enthusiasm for craft more than likely stemmed from the initial aim of the Rorke’s Drift centre to empower the community through employment, in Gowenius one

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<sup>24</sup> He had run a small workshop at Oscarberg Primary school when he first arrived, so he had the tools and materials available (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:41).

<sup>25</sup> To quote HF Verwoed, in his role as Minister of Native Affairs at the time, “[native relations] cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of frustrated people who, as a result of the education they received, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled immediately, when it creates people who are trained for professions not open to them” (Christopher 1994:5).

can see a struggle between a need to encourage students to progress beyond the narrative restraints of the relief printing produced at government or church run schools and community art centres and the seemingly contradictory need to maintain what non-Africans perceived to be an African authenticity in the work (Sack 1992:343).

There has been much discussion about what constitutes traditional African art and it is a particularly contentious issue in South Africa, especially within a postcolonial context. The term 'postcolonial' can be confusing in that it does not refer to the period after colonies had been granted independence but rather to the period that began with the colonization itself. In the rest of Africa, post-colonialism presents the desire to be liberated from foreign imposed European influences, both politically and culturally. In South Africa the situation is different.

In his 1968 book, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, Ulli Beier<sup>26</sup> states that, “[in South Africa] the ruling white man is not trying to assimilate [the African]. On the contrary, the policy of the South African Government is to isolate the African just as the white man has already isolated himself.” He goes on to say that “from [the Africans] position, tradition is narrow and stifling. He wants to break out, gain access to other cultures, to the wider world. In terms of creative activity this means, generally speaking, total rejection of traditional African values, an orientation towards Europe, and even more towards America” (Beier 1968:55-57). Furthermore, in his article, *The reality of myths: the issue of identity in African art*, Paul Faber<sup>27</sup> believes that this rejection of tradition is not only a form of political rebellion but also a sign of the effects of urbanization on the black youth (1999: [http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/articoli/art\\_faber\\_eng\\_2\\_3\\_99.doc](http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/articoli/art_faber_eng_2_3_99.doc)).

At Rorke's Drift, perhaps owing to its rural location and the lower level of urbanization, the work of Mbatha, Muafangejo and Rakgoathe does not show a rejection of tradition but rather its adaptation to reflect contemporary concerns. John Picton states that “art that

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<sup>26</sup> Ulli Beier (1922- ) is a German editor, writer and scholar, who had a pioneering role in developing drama, poetry and visual arts in Nigeria (2005: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Ulli-Beier>).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Faber is the curator of the African section of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (2008: [http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/articoli/art\\_faber\\_eng\\_2\\_3\\_99.doc](http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/articoli/art_faber_eng_2_3_99.doc)).

comes out of nowhere is effectively inconceivable” (Picton 2005:8). Cultural and historical traditions may not be obvious in the artists work but have almost certainly subconsciously informed the formal elements of the artwork or development of the narrative. Picton goes on to say that these new artistic traditions are handed on to other artists, who learn by watching their peers. This in turn encourages a workshop type of environment, in which everyone is both the teacher and the learner.

It was this type of workshop environment that Gowenius hoped to develop but, in an attempt to limit his influence on the traditional origins of the imagery, he strove to employ a non-interventionist approach to teaching and took on the role of facilitator rather than teacher. He introduced all the technical skills that were required and then allowed the students to develop their own identity and confidence. He encouraged good design elements but did not suggest improvements to elements that did not work (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:41).

Over the years, Gowenius’s approach to teaching has been met with criticism.

In his foreword to *Contemporary South African art: The Gencor Collection*, Okwui Enwezor implies that the non-interventionist form of teaching stunted the development of black art: “there was a tendency amongst the different organizers of these workshops to provide African artists with the rudimentary tools of technology. This was, of course, seen to form part of the transforming process of nation building; of the transition from colonial vassals to independent post-colonial states.” He goes on to say that “this form of art education, for whatever reason, tended to put emphasis on practical training, an emphasis which quite erroneously worked to release from within the artists a kind of nativist fidelity to their individual cultures. There was very little encouragement for innovative thinking, but rather the reproduction of genre scenes comprising landscape, folklore and domestic elements, which overloaded the picture plane with a surfeit of what one critic called ‘African deco scenes’” (in Geers 1997:72).

By looking at Azaria Mbatha’s early work, it is possible to see that there are both valid and invalid aspects to Enwezor’s statement. In *Adoration of the Magi* (1964), there is



use of the simpler technique of cutting black silhouettes into a white background, with the occasional use of white lines to describe detail; along with the more complicated use of black outlines on a white surrounding area, which involves cutting around the line, leaving black line details and textures (see Figure 2.1). The background is decorative but not only creates a rhythmic flow between the different panels of the comic-strip layout but also assists in focussing the main characters of the narrative, with the eye resting on the ‘quieter’ black areas, the largest of these being the figures of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Although the scene is clearly taking place in Africa, with shepherds in loin cloths, long-horn cattle and Mary and Joseph in traditional Zulu dress, their displacement from their local community is emphasised by the western-style pitched roof of the stable. The *overloading* of the picture plane reflects the multiple narratives evident in traditional Zulu oral story-telling (Neethling in Groenewald 1990:133). By taking a very popular Bible story, placing it into a South African context and using the composition to represent local story telling techniques, Mbatha has recontextualised it within an African narrative, thereby making it a lot more relevant to his own community. This recontextualisation is evidence of innovative thinking and to cite AD Botha in the forward of Mbatha’s autobiography, “reconstructing history in an imaginative mode is the dominant feature of Mbatha’s storytelling” (Mbatha 2005:xvi).

Steven Sack sees the teaching methods used by Gowenius as more of a dialogue and states that “the work of so many of the Rorke’s Drift artists is testimony to the dialectical and symbiotic relationship that developed between the local artists and their Swedish teachers” (cited in Levinson 1992:343).

The situation at Rorke’s Drift perhaps proves that it is not possible to teach in a truly non-interventionist way. In the same way that Gowenius’ culture and upbringing informed the way that he worked, these influences would have filtered through to the way that he taught. In an attempt to not intervene in what the artists produced, he created a workshop environment, which in turn encouraged discussion amongst the artists. By being given the opportunity to work through the challenges of creating art without any strict guide lines to limit them, the artists ended up adopting what Gowenius referred to

as a *bildspråk* methodology. *Bildspråk* methodology denotes a visual language of self awareness that forms the basis for developing critical thinking and a questioning of the system. Amanda Jephson<sup>28</sup> wrote “for Gowenius... the aim and purpose of art was a social one: art was seen as a means of questioning the political and social status quo, the migrant labour system, worker/employee relations, and the expected social and political roles of black men and women in South Africa” (cited in Hobbs and Rankin 2003:7). Gowenius has admitted to holding lengthy discussions with the students about social, religious and political topics and to discussing the subject matter of prints with Mbatha (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:41). Therefore, although he did not directly influence the subject matter of the students, he did create an environment and way of working that encouraged the development of the narratives and rather than resorting to the literal Christian imagery that was encouraged by the missionary schools, the artists at Rorke’s Drift were encouraged to utilise narratives within their art to represent their own identity and comment on their social and political concerns.

When working at the Molofa Centre in Johannesburg, Dan Rakgoathe adopted Gowenius’ method of teaching and commented that, “a style ‘comes like language’. Although the words are the same, the accents differ and through time each artist would find his own voice and form of expression” (cited in Miles 2004:144). In this way, artists were empowered to develop artworks that created a new tradition in African art and better represented the outlook and concerns of communities in which they lived.

The Egazini Centre<sup>29</sup> in Grahamstown provides a contemporary example of how Gowenius’ teaching methods were adopted and expanded upon to create a truly democratic workshop environment.

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<sup>28</sup> In 1990, Amanda Jephson and Gavin Younge arranged an exhibition, *Rorke’s Drift and After*, at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:7).

<sup>29</sup> The project was initiated by Dominic Thorburn and the Rhodes University Fine Line Press and used the Battle of Grahamstown (1819) as a way to re-examine and re-interpret the turning point in the history of the region in a printmaking format, utilizing oral traditions under the guidance of Julia Wells, from the history department (2000: [www.ru.ac.za/community/egazini/](http://www.ru.ac.za/community/egazini/)).

The art activities at Egazini began as a printmaking workshop run by Rhodes University<sup>30</sup>, involving university students, local artists and residents from the nearby townships (some were artists) and school children. In the past, the topic of the workshop, *The Battle of Grahamstown* (1819), was predominantly documented from the point of view of the British Imperialists, so oral storytellers were sourced to provide a balanced view to work from. Julia Wells<sup>31</sup> commented that by opening up a dialogue about the battle, a stronger sense of community identity could be achieved, out of which would flow “the benefits of healing, reconciliation, ‘decolonising the mind’ and economic advancement” (Wells 2003:80).

Some of the work produced in the workshop reflects this dialogue by presenting the imagery in the form of a fabula (series of events), showing multiple scenes, which have either been compositionally juxtaposed or divided into comic-strip boxes. The inclusion of oral story tellers provided an environment in which the narrative was alive and constantly changing, setting up a conversation within the workshop that resulted in vibrant and diverse artwork (interview with Dominic Thorburn, 5 August, 2008) (see Addendum E). Although some of the work depicts imagery which is very literal (the Xhosa versus the British in battle scenes), a lot of the work uses more symbolic imagery to depict the community’s emotional response to the event.

*Intliziyo yam ibuhlungu - My heart pains* (1999) by Violet Booï, is based on a dream that the artist had after hearing the oral story teller’s tale of the escape of Makana<sup>32</sup> from Robben Island, where he had been incarcerated after the battle (see Figure 2.9). She describes how his feelings of loneliness and pain echoed the feelings that she and her community felt during the apartheid struggle (see Addendum F). In her image, Robben Island is represented by a grid with a lock attached to it. The artist has depicted herself

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<sup>30</sup> The project was called ‘Egazini-the Battle of Grahamstown, recasting history through printmaking’ (2000: [www.ru.ac.za/community/egazini/](http://www.ru.ac.za/community/egazini/)).

<sup>31</sup> Born in America, Dr Julia Wells has served as a program administrator, researcher and lecturer on South African history from 1982-1993. Since 1993 she has been the senior lecturer in the history department at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. She is also an active member of the African National Congress (ANC) (2000: [www.ru.ac.za/community/egazini/](http://www.ru.ac.za/community/egazini/) and interview with Dominic Thorburn, Grahamstown, 5 August, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> The prophet and warrior who led the Xhosa warriors at Battle of Grahamstown (Wells 2003:86).

escaping from the prison, rather than Makana, which shows her deep affinity with the narrative. Her distress is emphasised by the rough texture of the background and the vicious-looking dog-like creatures that surround her.

Booi's approach is indicative of how Gowenius' *bildspråk* methodology could enhance the narrative content of the artwork. Cecil Skotnes<sup>33</sup> had dealt with similar issues surrounding appropriate teaching methods and retaining African traditions during his tenure as Recreational Officer of Polly Street<sup>34</sup> (1952-1965). Six years after leaving the centre, he commented that from a purely visual point of view, there was no tribalism left to preserve but that he had not considered how the psychological background of the artists would impact their work (cited in Miles 2004:92). *Bildspråk* methodology takes this into account and in doing so, allows the artist to develop new African traditions and narratives in their work.

## **The recontextualisation of religious imagery**

The spread of Christianity in South Africa had a profound effect on spiritual and social spheres of black cultures, creating a paternalistic society that fell in line with the aims of British colonialism<sup>35</sup> and introducing a written text for Bantu languages that used the Bible as the main source of literacy (Gilmour 2006:79).

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<sup>33</sup> Cecil Skotnes was born in East London on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 1926. His father was Norwegian and his mother was Canadian; both were active members of the Salvation Army. At Con Cowen Junior High School in 1938, he was taught sculpture by Jan Couzyn and learnt modelling and casting. After World War II, Skotnes enrolled for a BA (FA) degree at the University of the Witwatersrand - the university did not offer printmaking at the time (Miles 2004:32).

<sup>34</sup> The Polly Street Adult Education Centre was established at No. 1 Polly Street, Johannesburg in July 1949. It fell under the authority of the Local Committee for non-European Adult Education and the non-European Affairs Department of the City of Johannesburg and was established as a cultural and educational centre for non-European communities. Ironically, by the time that the centre opened, the Malay Quarter and Prospect Town had been demolished and the only township within walking distance was George Goch Location (Miles 2004:14).

<sup>35</sup> A case in point would be *The Kaffir Language*, written by Rev. John Whittle Appleyard who had arrived in the Eastern Cape in 1840, as part of a Methodist missionary group. The book is the author's subordination of the competence of native speakers to that of the missionary linguist (Gilmour 2006:94,111).

To cite Rachel Gilmour, "Appleyard subordinated spoken to written language: it was the 'translations and writings' of missionaries, 'approved' by missionaries, which carried authority. 'Oral testimony' of native speakers played a legitimate but secondary role by validating (where 'needful'), but never originating, the

As part of the missionaries attempt at ‘civilising heathens’, Africans who converted to Christianity (known as *kholwa* in KwaZulu Natal) were not only expected to follow the religion in a spiritual sense but also live their lives according to accepted ‘western’ norms. This included the abandonment of polygamy, traditional dress and spiritual customs, as specifically set out in the Lutheran Church’s ‘United Testimony’ of 1961 (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:48).

Azaria Mbatha felt that, “[Christianity] found acceptance because it imparted valid meaning to blacks in the fabric of white society” (Mbatha 2005:36). In other words, Christianity became the map used to negotiate the pitfalls and confusion of integrating Western tradition and belief systems within their own traditions and lifestyle.

Azaria Mbatha, John Muafangejo and Dan Rakgoathe were all educated at missionary schools and yet this influenced the imagery that they created in their linocuts in very different ways. Azaria Mbatha had been born into a Christian family and yet traditional Zulu values were also upheld. In his autobiography he states, “even though my father was a converted Christian he strove not to accept the whole western civilization. I heard him praying first to our ancestors and then to God” (Mbatha 2005:29).

As a child, his father told him stories which synthesized Christian religious themes with African beliefs. He remembers that from an early age he wanted to Africanise the bible (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:48). An example of Mbatha’s ‘Africanisation’ of the bible can be seen in *Jonah* (1962), in which the Old Testament figure of Jonah is shown within an African context, and is used to symbolise the arrival of the settlers in KwaZulu-Natal<sup>36</sup>

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examples Appleyard used.” The examples that he used were mainly bible texts, so the Xhosa language became another tool for the spread of Christianity. Appleyard described his didactic approach as “speak[ing] forth the words of truth and sound doctrine” (2006:111).

<sup>36</sup> The narrative is read from right to left, reflecting the arrival of the settlers from the eastern coastline. The boat that Jonah is thrown from resembles a sailing ship and in his hand he carries a stick (or a gun) and a bag (or items to barter). The whale expels Jonah onto the shore where he meets a group of Zulu warriors and their king (Dingaan). Mbatha has made the king bigger than the warriors to show his status and he is also wearing an animal skin (leopard skins were worn by Zulu kings).

The mound that Dingaan is seated on may refer to Dukuza, his kraal near the coast, which he established as a half-way house between the Zulu kingdom (and the Kwabulawayo kraal) and the British, whose

(see Figure 2.3). In the original story, Jonah was told to preach to the Ninevites<sup>37</sup>, who were ‘wicked sinners’, much the way the missionaries may have viewed the Zulu people. The narrative concludes in the top left corner of the image with Jonah standing under a tree, which represents the gourd created by God to protect him from the elements. In the original Biblical text, the Ninevites were shown mercy by God and the sub-contextual discourse of Mbatha’s print may represent a hope for mercy during the struggles of Apartheid. Alternatively, Jonah, within this particular fabula (series of events) of the narrative, may represent the Zulu people, who feel that they have been forsaken by God. To quote P. le Roux<sup>38</sup>, “we are unmistakably in Africa. We are made to view [the Biblical narrative] through fresh eyes” (cited in Levinson 1992: 346).

As with the African traditions previously discussed in the narratives of relief printing, when the artist’s Christian subject matter is viewed superficially (by looking at only the imagery), what comes across is a didactic and moralizing narrative. Rankin, in her essay, *The role of the missions in art education in South African*, surmised that the graphic work of both Mbatha and fellow student, John Muafangejo “suggest(s) a religious link with the mission background, not only in the frequent choice of biblical subject matter, but in the nature of their narrative, which suggests a visual equivalent of the didactic approach of Protestantism” (Rankin 1992:45).

When Gowenius first started working with Mbatha, he disapproved of the moralizing texts that he included in his work. “A picture in my opinion must be so that the reader starts to wonder, question and translate it according to his experience. [The words] ‘Jesus died for us’ takes over the vision” (cited in Hobbs and Rankin 2003:41).

However, Gowenius’ attitude towards Biblical imagery changed when Mbatha produced the print *David and Goliath* in 1962 (see Figure 2.2). He realized that Mbatha merely

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settlement is depicted in the bottom left corner of the image. The cattle alongside the settlement may represent the wealth of the settlers, as the man guarding them is clothed in western-style dress.

<sup>37</sup> Citizens of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (Douglas 1982:836).

<sup>38</sup> Le Roux was referring to Azaria Mbatha’s print entitled *The Birth of Jesus*, which is a departure from a conventional nativity scene in that it depicts a bald, bearded Joseph, a lion, a bush pig and King Herod lurking in the jungle behind the three wise men who are on an elephant (Levinson 1992:346).

Where I have placed ‘the Biblical narrative’ between brackets, the original quote referred directly to the nativity scene.

used the Biblical characters as actors within a recontextualised narrative, which contained a subtle political sub-contextual discourse in the black David defeating the white Goliath (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:46).

Okwui Enwezor quotes Thamsanqa Mnyele as saying “the art that sprang from [the workshop] experience was seldom encouraged out and away from biblical themes, African landscape, wildlife, myths and legends. No explanation of the immediate social political phenomena” (cited in Geers 1997:72). When looking at the work of artists from Rorke’s Drift, it becomes evident that this could not be further from the truth. Even Enwezor goes on to contradict this statement, saying that printmaking became a subversive and intellectual tool, with artists reworking current and historical subject matter to deliver a political message (cited in Geers 1997:72, 73). The delivery of this political message began with subtle symbolic imagery utilised in a Biblical narrative (Mbatha’s *David and Goliath*) and evolved into more obvious imagery of the 1970’s, of political unrest, harsh labour conditions and forced land removals.

If one looks at stories in the Old Testament, many relate to the South African context; the fight for land, nationhood, deliverance from oppression and trying to establish an independent identity within the confines of such oppression (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:175). In Mbatha’s print, *Herod and the wise men* (1965), Herod is portrayed as a white man; in fact Mbatha has commented that he associated him with apartheid-era president, HF Verwoed (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:174) (see Figure 2.8). The nativity scene is placed within a rural Zulu environment, with Nguni cattle, shepherds wearing *ibheshu* (wrap-around hides) and Mary wearing an *isicolo* headdress (denotes that a woman is married). Joseph is wearing a suit, which may represent the attire of migrant workers when they returned home from the cities. As a whole, the print can be read to represent the violent authority of the government and the displacement caused by the government’s relocation of black people. The hut with the hand in the doorway could represent the apartheid, ‘whites only’, segregation policy (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:174).



Andries Olifant writes that “Christian iconography, often dismissed as nothing more than the uncritical regurgitation of medieval dogma designed to induce quietism, can now be seen for what it actually is: a register of dissent and resistance to the social and cultural order of colonialism as well as an invocation of spiritual and humanist values” (cited in Hobbs 2006:166).

John Muafangejo’s<sup>39</sup> work is not intentionally political but certainly contained a social message that he was unable to avoid.<sup>40</sup> To quote Edward Lucie-Smith “political themes only find their way into his work when they force themselves on him” (cited in Levinson 1992: 134).

In discussing the unavoidable influence of social context on meaning in a narrative, Mieke Bal states that “the so-called extra-textual situation creates yet another problem: the influence of reality on the story, in so far as reality plays a part in it. Even if we do not wish to study the relations between text and context as separate objects of analysis, we cannot ignore the fact that direct or indirect knowledge of the content of certain characters contributes significantly to their meaning” (Bal 1997:118). Therefore, the meaning of an artwork can never offer a closed reading of the narrative, as, not only is the artist commenting on his own social environment but also because the viewers may have experience of that same environment so that they bring their own reading to the artwork.

Muafangejo’s work highlights a way in which the depiction of Christian imagery came to reflect social concerns, as his “work, [initially] religious in content, develops into an explicitly social commentary” (Levinson 1992: 346). Although he did produce work

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<sup>39</sup> Muafangejo was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1943 in Etunda lo Nghadi, Angola; close to the Namibian border and grew up amongst the traditions of the Ovambo people. His father died in 1955 and his mother converted to Christianity and in 1956, crossed the border to Namibia to live at the Epinga Anglican mission station. Muafangejo joined her there a year later. He attended the Onamunama Holy Cross Missionary School as a child and had completed Std 6 at the St Mary’s Missionary School at Odibo. It was there that Bishop Mallory had recognized his artistic skill and had arranged with Peder Gowenius that he enroll at Rorke’s Drift.

<sup>40</sup> John Muafangejo’s birth place and where he grew up became a war zone during the border war between South Africa and Angola, in what was then called South West Africa. He also spent time in South Africa and would have been exposed to the effects of apartheid.



with a biblical narrative such as *As the Serpent Leers, Eve hands* (1973) (see Figure 2.5) and *Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord for R3.00* (1973), many of his Christian-themed prints dealt with the church itself, rather than the Bible. For example, he documented current events like Bishop Winters expulsion from Namibia in *7<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Damaraland Rt. Rev. Colin Winter, who has been* (1972) (see Figure 2.6), the death of Rev. Namueja in *The death of Rev. Gabriel H Namueja* (1974) and church gatherings in *New Archbishop Desmond Tutu Enthroned at* (1986).

It is the verbal text that Muafangejo incorporates into the narrative that usually contains the social message, although unlike Mbatha's work, the text is seldom didactic. Often it simply provides a form of documentation. The ambiguities present in the verbal text may result from the fact that English was not Muafangejo's first language and the sentences are often constructed in a rather obscure way. An example of this would be *Cathedral Church of St. George Windhoek* (1981) (see Figure 2.7), in which the verbal and visual text documents the enthronement of Right Rev. J.H. Kaulumdas. In the verbal text, Muafangejo wrote "It is my first bishop of ours" (sic). This sentence seems to refer to the fact that Rev. Kaulumdas was the first black person to be ordained as a bishop in Namibia but it is not very clear. However, Muafangejo may have hidden his social message within the biblical text notation, *Mat. 5-1-12<sup>41</sup>* (sic), which he has included after the words, *I am very happiness, an enjoyable day to John* (sic). Verses ten and eleven would have been particularly relevant, with their references to persecution, in light of the racial inequality in South Africa and Namibia at the time.

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<sup>41</sup> Red Letter Testament, Chapter 5, verse 3-12: "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed *are* they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (sic) (1945:6-7).

The work of Dan Rakgoathe<sup>42</sup>, and before him, Muziweyixhwala Tabete<sup>43</sup>, offers a very different take on the influence of religion on linocut imagery in their incorporation of dream imagery. Dreams formed an important part of African spirituality but they were scorned by the missionary churches. This resulted in many people joining the Zionist, and other 'black' churches (Mbatha 2005:31).

In Rakgoathe's work, Tabete's influence can be seen in his symbolic use of composition. Tabete was not constrained by the traditional Western notion of viewing a work 'right side up' and divisionary lines within the prints were used in a narrative context, dividing the scene depicted into living and ancestral worlds, as can be seen in his print *Untitled (Madela and the Creator)* (1962)<sup>44</sup>.

The importance of the interaction between the spirit and living worlds can also be seen in Xhosa culture. Xhosa people made no distinction between the natural and supernatural, as all aspects of life and death were pervaded by divinity and ancestors were still believed to take an active interest in the life of the living, especially with regards to rituals (Elphink and Davenport 1997:69). This belief will be explored further in chapter two in relation to the ancestor's involvement in oral storytelling. To quote Dan Rakgoathe "in Africa, ritual is the most important way to make people understand certain truths. They may not be able to rationally understand them, but they do understand them subliminally" (cited in Langan 2000:145).

The amalgamation of Rakgoathe's exploration of his cultural heritage through ancestors, spirits and dreams and his missionary-imposed Christian beliefs through the image of Christ is well represented in his print, *Fundudzi* (1975) (see Figure 2.4). Although the

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<sup>42</sup> Dan Rakgoathe was educated at the Botshabelo Mission Station (Grace Dieu) and graduated from Std 8 in 1957. He then went on to study to be an art teacher at the Ndoleni Art School near Richmond in Natal.

<sup>43</sup> Tabete was introduced to linocut at Ceza hospital, after seeing Mbatha work with the medium. Tabete did not share Mbatha's Christian beliefs and was apprenticed to Laduma Madela, a medicine man and 'lightening doctor'. His prints dealt with Zulu mythology and spirituality and his confidence with the medium may have stemmed from his exposure to Laduma's wall murals, which have a similar look.

<sup>44</sup> Even today this disregard for Western compositional norms permeates linocut production. Ethna Frankenfeld, the head of printmaking at NMMU in the Eastern Cape, commented that she continues to be amazed by the curious compositional arrangements that her Xhosa students come up with in their relief prints. (interview with Ethna Frankenfeld, Port Elizabeth, 2 June, 2008) (see Addendum 3).

work should be viewed right side up, he does not use classical perspective and some of the figures have been distorted. The narrative depicts the myth about the sacred Fundudzi lake, a story that describes how, when drums are heard, people sometimes mysteriously disappear. Rakgoathe has used a huge variety of mark-making, giving the work a spontaneous and vibrant feel, which enhances the rhythm of the python snake dance of the Venda virgin girls, who are dancing not only towards the sun but also a Christ-like figure in the centre of the work, his arms spread out in a crucifixion pose. The bottom half of the image seems to represent the spiritual world, with drummers in underworld caverns and an owl on the right as the omen of death.

The incorporation of both Christian and African spiritualist beliefs in the daily religious practises of the *kholwa* eventually led to the rise of a new form of religious dialogue in the 60's and 70's with the growing interest in Black Theology<sup>45</sup>, the concept of a black Christ became central to the movement and His suffering came to represent the suffering of black people in South Africa (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:186).

While staying at the Umpumulo Centre, Mbatha had lengthy discussions with the theology students at the seminary about Black theology and the church's disinterest in an African worldview.<sup>46</sup> The western views regarding Christianity, which had been instilled in the missionary educated Rorke's Drift students was challenged by views of students from urban areas, where events like the Soweto uprisings had strengthened their belief in developing a stronger sense of black identity.

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<sup>45</sup> Black theology "proposes to raise the consciousness of the African people by analyzing their socio-cultural experience in the light of Christian revelation" (Durban Art Gallery 1998:42). Not everyone agreed that Black Theology was the best way to achieve black identity. Mangasuthu Buthelezi wrote, "in South Africa, an African theology tied to a past traditional heritage smacked of something similar to the government's attempt to link the political future of the black man to past traditional institutions like chieftainship" (Durban Art Gallery 1998:46).

<sup>46</sup> Helge Fosseus, a bishop based at what was then still called Oscarsberg Mission, had a view which was considerably more liberal than that of his colleagues at the Umpumulo Theological College. He tried to make the bible accessible to the African congregation and believed that images created by Africans themselves would be a lot more effective than the imported felt-board cut-outs used in Sunday Schools (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:49).

Bongi Dhlomo recalls an encounter with Sam Nhlengethwa: “[he] called me and told me in a very nice way that I did not have to make Adam and Eve white. He was really saying: there is nothing wrong with using black people as your subject. But I hadn’t been exposed to that, because I hadn’t grown up with that kind of consciousness – for me Adam was white! I began to understand how art could be used to record, inform and document, so that when you see an image, it says something; it speaks to you in the manner the artist intended or in the manner in which you read it” (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:185).

Dhlomo’s attitude reflects the didactic and ‘top-down’ approach of a missionary education and how it influenced the imagery and narratives of relief printing. By creating a democratic workshop environment and encouraging students to explore their own identity in their work, the Rorke’s Drift art centre presented the opportunity for artists to find a way to use the Christian imagery, considered by the church and government to be appropriate subject matter for black artists and recontextualise it into a new symbolic language, thereby continuing their ‘conversation’ with their community. Whereas the aim of the Rorke’s Drift art programme may initially have been to preserve an authentic African narrative, which was perceived to be threatened by urbanization and a burgeoning art market for African curios, what ultimately emerged were narratives which reflected the community’s social and political concerns. The print medium became a tool by which they could express these concerns in a progressively outspoken way as the oppressive apartheid rule was slowly lifted.

### **The Egazini Centre as a model for the development of picture book illustration**

It would perhaps be unfair to accuse Gowenius of paternalism in the way that he taught art at Rorke’s Drift. The term ‘paternalism’, if placed in the context of racial inequality, refers to a relationship in which the dominant party claims that their domination is in the best interests of the oppressed. The dominated are perceived to be in a state similar to that of childhood, in which they are “dependent, immature, irresponsible, and unable to run

their own affairs” (Cashmore 1994:236). As discussed previously in this chapter, Gowenius’s workshop-style teaching and promotion of a *bildspråk* methodology contributed a great deal to the empowerment of the Rorke’s Drift artists and the development of the narrative content in their work. However, the same can not be said for how the centre was run from an administrative perspective. One of the initial aims at Rorke’s Drift had been to train local people and then hand the centre over to them, so that it could become a self-sustaining entity. This never happened, which resulted in a teacher shortage and harsh criticism from the students studying there at the time. Azaria Mbatha felt that one of the reasons that Rorke’s Drift failed was because “white people were too arrogant to believe that the school could succeed under black management” (Mbatha 2005: 305). Despite all the progress that the Rorke’s Drift centre made in the classroom, they essentially remained managed on a ‘top-down’ basis, an issue which played a major role in the eventual closure of the centre due to a lack of funds and qualified teachers.

The Egazini Project in Grahamstown may have started out as a community printing project facilitated by Rhodes University in 1999 but the centre is now run by the resident artists on a self-sustaining basis. To quote Julia Wells “it is highly significant that the Project started as a fine art initiative, rooted in the local community, and only later became involved in generating income from tourism as something of a by-product” (Wells 2003:96).

By focussing on the art product and artists, the Egazini project started with minimal expenses and grew, rather than being weighed down with huge overheads from the beginning. To quote Lize van Robbroeck “it seems that by developing centres with ‘top-down origins’, financial independence within the community can never really be achieved. The process has to start with the viability of the art product as an income-generating source” (cited in Falken 2004:42-48).

The work that is produced at the Egazini centre today presents narratives which have been drawn from the surrounding community. Since the art is an income generating source, it would be impossible to run a self-sustainable centre without producing some

work with narratives which appeal to the tourist market.<sup>47</sup> However, rather than producing narratives that represent the stereotypical themes that tourists expect (ie. African landscapes, wildlife and quaint township scenes of musicians), the artists at Egazini, on the whole, have produced narratives which represent a much more realistic representation of their environment.

The print by Vukile Teyise entitled *If you want a better life you better cross over the bridge* depicts the stark contrast between the township and the more affluent areas in central Grahamstown, with the Settler Monument looming at the top of the print as a constant reminder of past colonial rule (see Figure 2.10). *A woman place – anywhere she visits* by Linga Dika depicts the new roles that women are taking within the community, building walls, plastering houses and working as electricians (see Figure 2.11). Many of the narratives at Egazini are set in Grahamstown or the surrounding area and focus on the communities that live there.

The fact that the narratives that were used in the original workshop were sourced from local storytellers, enhances the potential for vibrancy and community relevance if applied to picture books (this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two). Therefore, if picture books which are culturally relevant are more interesting for children to read and enhance their sense of identity, then the narratives of the relief prints produced at Egazini already contain the building blocks for the development of culturally relevant picture books.

As demonstrated at the Egazini Centre, a community initiative benefits from modest beginnings ie. the artists and a training programme. An example of an organisation that runs such training programmes within the field of illustration is Illusafrika<sup>48</sup>. As with the

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<sup>47</sup> The artists are solely responsible for the management of the centre, are required to submit 15% of their sales towards the running costs and offer free tours to visitors of the exhibition space, workshop and interpretation centre (with the expectation that tourists will buy something, even if it's just a postcard). (interview with Dominic Thorburn, Grahamstown, 5 August, 2008) (see Addendum E)

<sup>48</sup> Founded in 1999 by Dominique Mwankumi, Jean-Claude Kimona and Christian Kingué Epanya, this non-governmental and non-profit organization aims to promote new prospects for African illustrators by running illustration workshops and facilitating publishing opportunities, in the hope of developing good quality African picture books (2004: <http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=721>).

Egazini Project, they assemble oral storytellers, writers and illustrators within a workshop environment and by creating a dialogue and offering technical training, they are able to produce a truly community-based picture book.<sup>49</sup> The workshops are hosted by existing community institutions or aid organisations, so there are no excessive staff quotas or administrative overheads. By empowering the community with new skill sets, the potential exists for the development of community based initiatives that are developed on a bottom-up basis.

To quote Van Robbroeck “in South Africa, community arts centres are geared towards providing solutions to pressing social-economic and educational problems within the black community” (van Robbroeck 1991:29). The production of relief illustrations for picture books, as part of a workshop or on a freelance basis for publishing companies, not only has the potential to create employment for black artists but also to alleviate illiteracy in rural areas of the Eastern Cape. It would also provide children with economically viable, culturally relevant picture books that not only reflect the world that they live in but draw inspiration from the vibrant tradition of oral storytelling within their communities.

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<sup>49</sup> An example of this, *The Blue Marble* (2006), a picture book that was the result of a workshop held in Windhoek, Namibia and was co-published by UNESCO and Sub-Saharan Publishers (Ghana) (2006: [http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL\\_ID=31807&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL_ID=31807&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html))





**Figure 2.1** (above) Azaria Mbatha, *Adoration of the magi* (1964). Linocut. (Durban Art Gallery 1998:111).

**Figure 2.2** (above right) Azaria Mbatha, *David and Goliath* (1962). Linocut. (Durban Art Gallery 1998:104).



**Figure 2.3** (left) Azaria Mbatha, *Jonah* (1962). Linocut. (Durban Art Gallery 1998:27).





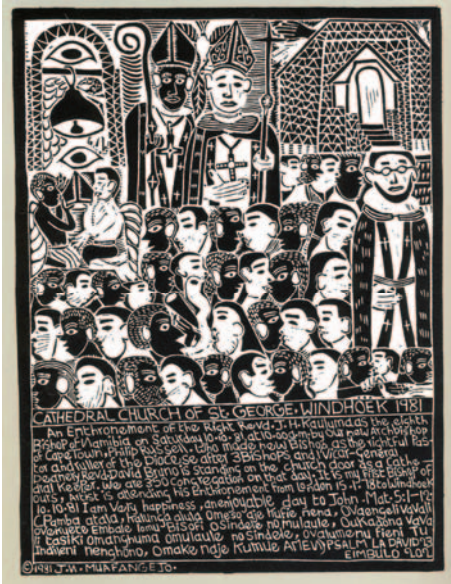
**Figure 2.4** (right) Dan Rakgoathe, *Fundudzi* (1975). Linocut, 46 x 67cm. (Langhan 2000:146).



**Figure 2.5** (above) John Muafangejo, *As the serpent leers, Eve hands* (1973). Linocut, 46.2 x 34.1 cm. (Levinson 1992:73).



**Figure 2.6** (above right) John Muafangejo, *7<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Damaraland Rt. Rev. Colin Winter, who has been* (1972). Linocut, 25.5 x 30.5cm. (Levinson 1992:65).



**Figure 2.7** (above) John Muafangejo, *Cathedral Church of St. George, Windhoek 1981* (1981). Linocut, 86 x 61cm. (Levinson 1992:200).

**Figure 2.8** (above right) Azaria Mbatha, *Herod and the wisemen* (1965). Linocut, 29.2 x 23.1cm. (Durban Art Gallery 1998:58).



**Figure 2.9** (left) Violet Booi, *Intliziyo yam ibuhlunga – My heart pains* (s.a.). Linocut. Collection: Egazini Centre, Grahamstown. Photograph: S. Johnson.





**Figure 2.10** (above) Vukile Teyise, *If you want a better life you better cross over the bridge*. Linocut. Collection: Egazini Centre, Grahamstown. Photograph: S Johnson.



**Figure 2.11** (above) Linga Dika, *A woman place – anywhere she visits*. Linocut. Collection: Egazini Centre, Grahamstown. Photograph: S. Johnson.

## CHAPTER 2: How the construction of picture books can enhance reader participation

In this chapter I will be looking at how the structural elements of a picture book, such as setting, characterisation, narrative perspective and intertextuality, can be constructed in such a way that they encourage reader interaction with the narrative, thereby enhancing the vibrancy and cultural relevance of the book for the reader. These aspects will be discussed through the analysis of two examples of children's literature, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* by Karen Press and *Tales of the trickster boy* by Jack Cope, along with my own two books, *Pumla and the chickens* and *The gold seed*, using narratology<sup>50</sup> as an analytical framework to analyse the structures of these texts.

Over the years there has been a shift of focus in literary theory from the author as the site of meaning production to meaning production through the reading of the text, as formulated by Roland Barthes in his text, *The Death of the Author* (1968) (Barthes 1968:142). This shift has had an effect on how picture books are constructed. To quote Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, "as the century progresses, the author/illustrators' intention and impact change. Rather than the text/illustration relationship clarifying and making more apparent the detail, perspective, events of the twofold narrative, the works increasingly challenge the reader, introducing ambiguity that is sometimes so intense that the more often the text is read, the more closely the illustrations are examined, the more uncertain the communication appears. The result is that readers are required to bring their own answers, their own resolutions to the works, and to join forces with the author/illustrators in creating the scenario, the story, and the interpretation" (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:250).

I will look at how these concepts of ambiguity and reader interaction function within a South African context, in particular how they can be informed by the performative and

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<sup>50</sup> The term, *narratologie* (narratology) was first used by Tzvetan Todorov in his 1969 book, *Grammaire du 'Décaméron'*, to describe a 'science of the narrative', in line with other sciences like biology and sociology.

interactive elements of oral storytelling, which as a form of entertainment for children and adults alike, and which aims to elicit maximum audience participation while subtly conveying a pedagogical message.

The American theorist, Gerald Prince, defines narratology as “the study of the form and functioning of narrative” (Prince 1982:4). As a sub-domain of Structuralism, researchers like Roland Barthes, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince and Gerard Genette privileged narrative in *general over individual* narrative and by dissecting the narrative into structural constituents (characters and events); they endeavoured to determine their functions and relationships (Phelan and Rabinowitz 2005:19). In this way, narratology deals more with the way that a text functions to create meaning, rather than looking at the meaning of the text itself.

In *Narratology* (1996), Susana Onega and José Angel Garcia Landa define narrative as “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal or causal way”. Their definition represents the evolution of narratology from its use of the narrower definition of the word ‘narrative’ as an exclusively ‘linguistic phenomenon’, to one which incorporates any semiotic construct, i.e. anything made of signs, including visual images, gestures and acting (Onega and Landa 1996:3-4). In this way, the tools of narratology can be used with equal efficiency when dealing with written texts, as with picture books (not all picture books include written text) and oral storytelling.

Mieke Bal provides the following breakdown of a narrative text as being “a text in which an agent relates a narrative. A *story* is a *fabula* that is presented in a certain manner. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An *event* is the transition from one state to another state. *Actors* are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. To *act* is defined here as to cause or to experience an event” (Bal 1985:5).

Narratology can also be divided into two main concepts of analysis, namely, story and discourse.

In *What is Narratology*, John Pier cites Seymour Chatman (1978) who states that “each narrative has two parts: a story (histoire), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse (discourse), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated” (2003: <http://books.google.com/books?id=tk9SttOppIoC&printsec=frontcover&dq=what+is+narratology>).

In *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* by Karen Press, the story is a retelling of an actual event in Xhosa history known as the ‘Great Xhosa cattle killing’. Within the Xhosa tradition of oral storytelling, the story would fall within the genre of *imilando*, a story which refers to historical events (Jordan 2004:14). Nongqawuse was the niece of an *igqirha* or witchdoctor and is said to have been approached by ancestral spirits who told her that if the Xhosa people killed all their cattle and did not sow grain, a great storm would come and blow all the white settlers into the sea, and their cows and crops would be returned ten-fold (Press 1990:back cover).

I was told this story at school in the 1980s and within the context of the apartheid era, Nongqawuse was portrayed as mentally unstable and the Xhosa people as ignorant to follow a prophecy that was rooted in superstition. It was told as a way to explain why the Xhosa people could not govern for themselves and required the guidance of a more ‘civilised’ white rule. The school that I attended served a very religious Afrikaans Protestant community and the Xhosa people’s spiritual beliefs were portrayed as ‘evil’ and in need of religious redemption, in much the same way as they were viewed by the missionaries operating in the Eastern Cape in the 1800s.

To understand how this discourse differs from the discourse presented by Karen Press, it is important to identify the focaliser. To quote Mieke Bal, “focalization is the relationship between the ‘vision’, the agent that sees, and that which is seen ... the subject of the focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed” (Bal 1985:104). In *How picturebooks work*, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott refer to the focaliser as the ‘narrative perspective’ or ‘point of view’, although Bal feels that these

terms do not make an explicit distinction between “the vision through which the elements are presented ... and the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision” (Bal 1985:101).

In this thesis, I primarily use the term focaliser, although I have also used the terms ‘narrative perspective’ and ‘point of view’ where I feel they better describe the function of the focalisation within the narrative.

The focaliser of the discourse of the narrative, as it was told to me at school, is an external focaliser (i.e., not presented within the narrative itself) who is viewing the whole scene from a distance (has an omniscient perspective). By way of how the story is told, we could assume that the focaliser is a white missionary, historian or community member who lives in the area where the incident occurred.

Karen Press has approached the narrative from a very different angle. *Nongqawuse’s Prophecy* was published as part of the ‘Hidden Histories’ series, which sought to redress the inconsistencies that a colonialised view has created in South African history, and in particular, the way in which it has been taught at school. As an anti-apartheid activist, Press was concerned with reevaluating this imbalance and has written the story within a post-colonial context. Monika Fludernik describes post-colonial narratology as a critique of how the text is imbued with (neo)colonial discourse that colludes with the oppression of the native population and how the discourse at the same time ends up undermining this ideology. “It attempts to describe how the choice of specific narrative techniques helps to transmit underlying orientalist or patriarchal structures and how the narrative, by its choice of focalisation, plot structure, or use of free indirect discourse sometimes resists these structures, undermines or deconstructs them” (cited in Phelan and Rabinowitz 2005:45).

Press has used the main character, Thembi, as the focaliser of the narrative. She is present within the narrative and is therefore an internal focaliser. As Thembi is a member of the Xhosa community within which the narrative takes place, she seems a more

reliable narrator than the external focaliser in the story I was told at school and her view is more sympathetic and less paternalistic. Thembi constantly questions the truth and motives behind the prophecy. She implies that Nongqawuse was tricked or used by the white settlers, through her uncle, to breakdown the Xhosa people to the point of being were reliant on the settlers for food and work. When Thembi asks, “it is the English people who do wrong, to take our lands and kill us! Why must we sacrifice?”, Press is emphasising a previously rarely spoken critique against colonial rule, which at the time of being written, was fairly groundbreaking considering that South Africa had not yet become a democracy (Press 1990:15). Press further emphasises this when Thembi’s aunt, Nosisi, says “they are saying that this whole story about the spirits is a trick of the English. It’s just another way they have found to weaken us, so that they can steal our land without first having to fight us” (Press 1990:35). Although the story of Nongqawuse’s Prophecy remains the same, by changing elements within the discourse, the narrative now provides a completely different message or meaning. I will discuss focalisation in more detail further on in this chapter.

Although the example above makes it seem as if the author has the ultimate power over the reader in his/her ability to manipulate discourse, Roland Barthes advocates that the ultimate power essentially lies with the reader. In *The death of the author*, Barthes describes the author as a ‘modern figure’ and the product of a society emerging with English Imperialism, which emphasised the prestige of the individual. When trying to find a meaning or ‘explanation’ for a work, one would invariably have looked to the author who produced it (Barthes 1977:143). Barthes believed that by privileging the author, the meaning of the text becomes limited and a closed writing. As the reader is “without history, biography [and] psychology” (in other words, unknown as an individual), he/she can bring an infinite number of interpretations to a text, based on own life experience, knowledge and culture; or as Barthes states, “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focussed and that place is the reader, not...the author” (Barthes 1977:148). Gerald Prince concurs with this view when he states that “instead of establishing the meaning of the text in terms of an



author's intentions or a set of textual patterns, for instance, students of literature have focussed more and more frequently on the ways in which readers, armed with expectations and interpretive conventions, structure a text and give it meaning" (Prince 1982:103).

So how does this relate to picture book production? By opening up a text to unlimited interpretation and interaction by of a multitude of readers, the meaning of the text becomes more dynamic and colourful and reading the book becomes a lot more *fun*.

This same principle of audience interaction can be seen in oral storytelling. In his effort to dislodge the power of the author in the text, Barthes uses the example of oral storytelling as the antithesis to Imperial individualism, when he states that, "in ethnographic societies the responsibility for the narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance' – the mastery of the narrative code – may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'" (Barthes 1977:142).

In *Tales from Southern Africa* (2004), AC Jordan emphasises the dynamic relationship of the narrator and audience when he writes that, "the custom of oral transmission of the literary tradition lent to it a flexibility and dynamism, which could be utilised by the teller and the audience to enhance their aesthetic experience ... thus, though a tale may be repeated over and over again, it can never be quite the same tale each time. The colours take on new hues ... with the additional colours drawn from personal and community experience mixed in by each artist ..." (Jordan 2004:13).

In oral story telling, there is no clear demarcation between the narrator and the audience and both are equally involved in the creation and consumption of the tale.

Musa Dube, cited by Jonathan Draper in *Oral literacy and colonialism in Southern Africa* (2003), expands on this in her description of a *semoya* or spiritual reading as a "communal and participatory mode of interpretation through the use of songs, dramatised narration, and repetition. The text, decided on for the occasion by an individual, once

read, becomes the property of the group”. She goes on to write that, “this indigenous method of interpretation capitalizes on recalling, narrating and dramatizing the story without explicitly defining what it means. Instead, meaning is articulated by graphically bringing the story to life through dramatic narration.” To sum up, “a story well told is a story well interpreted” (Dube 2003:54). Although the term *semoya* relates to the reading of a religious text, the principle, when applied to other forms of oral storytelling, is much the same.

Anne Pellowski states that, “many types of oral African folk-tale are not told in a straightforward linear manner, but are interrupted with chants, songs, refrains, dances, miming or the like. These folk-tales, when they are put down in written form and used in reading textbooks, are invariably ‘translated’ into the European style of folk-tale, and use the controlled vocabulary concept common to American textbooks” (Pellowski 1980:26).

Jack Cope’s *Tales of the trickster boy* (1990) provides an example of how the original style and feel of oral storytelling can be maintained, in both text and illustrations. Cope was born and bred in Zululand and was familiar both with Zulu language and culture. Hlakanyana, a trickster boy who is part human, part mongoose, is a popular myth amongst the Nguni peoples of Southern Africa. The oral stories were first recorded in written form by Bishop H. Callaway<sup>51</sup> and Dr. AT Bryant<sup>52</sup> and were performed for them by old storytellers born before the arrival of the Europeans (Cope 1990:back cover).

The narrative falls into the category of an *iintsomi* or mythological tale, which deals with both humans and animals, with the animals often taking on human traits (Jordan 2004: 14-15).

*Iintsomis* are usually told at night, as it is believed that “night is supposed to bring along a multitude of spirits to participate in the oral performance” (Groenewald 1990:130).

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<sup>51</sup> “Bishop Henry Callaway published two collections of transliterated Zulu oral narratives, with parallel English translations and copious notes: *Nursery tales, traditions, and histories of the Zulus* (1866-1868) and *The religious system of the Amazulu* (1869-1870)” (Gilmour 2006:163).

<sup>52</sup> Bryant, AT *A Zulu-English Dictionary*. Pinetown. Marionhill Press, 1905.

Xhosa people consider it taboo to tell *iintsomi* tales during the day, although on days when the normal working routine of the home had been disrupted, the taboo can be avoided.<sup>53</sup> It is also essential for children to be present when the *iintsomi* is told, and the narrator is usually the grandmother. The story begins and closes within a formula, however these formulae are not static and can be changed if required. The opening formula for a Xhosa story is: “*kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi*” (“and now for an intsomi”); the closing formula is: “*phela phela ngantsomi*” (“the ntsomi is ended”) (Groenewald 1990:27).

In writing his version of the tales, Jack Cope shows an eagerness to evoke the magic of the original storytellers by finding ways to depict the vibrancy and dynamic between the narrator and audience. His narrator is Mamethu (a term for ‘mother’, or in this case, possibly ‘grandmother’) and the children of the community are sitting around the fire begging her to tell stories.

*Tales of the trickster boy* is divided up into a number of short narratives and Cope has made use of the traditional opening and closing formulae. The first narrative begins with Mamethu asking the children, “So you want me to tell you a story”? Each narrative ends with Mamethu placing the story back into the story bag<sup>54</sup>.

The performative device of the story bag adds to the element of mystery, as the children have no idea which story will be next. Mamethu teases the children and asks many questions, which makes the reader feel like he/she is part of the audience. The children’s excitement is portrayed by the use of exclamation marks and colloquial expressions of amazement like “*Wa-sha*” (Cope 1990:17).

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<sup>53</sup> It is believed that people who tell *iintsomis* during the day will grow horns. It is also believed that there are various ways to avoid this, where either the narrator or member of the audience may place a piece of wood in their hair just above their foreheads, or wear a pair of horns. It has even been reported that teachers who tell *iintsomis* to school children during the day have been known to wear hats with horns (Groenewald 1990:130).

<sup>54</sup> I have also chosen to use Jack Cope’s idea of a story-bag as a way to present my books. The set of three books will be presented in a small, child-size bag that can be slung over a shoulder and carried to school. With the spines of the books not being visible from the top of the bag, I hope to recreate Mamethu’s sense of mystery in that they will not know which story will be pulled out next.

The story bag becomes a key component in creating the atmosphere of Mamethu's performance:

"A story?" She opens her bag and peers in. "All I can say is my story-bag looks quite empty".

"Ha! Mamethu, it cannot be empty. Please, please take another look."

She gropes in the bag and shakes her head. "Nothing in here that I can find. What do you want a story about?"

"About Hlakanyana!" they cry.

"That little twister. I cannot think what mischief he will do next."

"You don't need to think, Mamethu. It is all there in your bag."

She digs in the bag and pretends to pull something out.

"Yes, here he is....Oh! Oh! Oh! He has slipped out of my hands. Where has he gone? He must be hiding among you. Have a good look and pass him back to me."

The children laugh and pretend they are looking for Hlakanyana. The youngest finds him and takes him back. (Cope 1990:40)

Both the narrator and the children have become part of the performance and Hlakanyana is no longer just a character in a story, but real and hiding amongst them. This slippage between reality and fantasy will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

In the narrative of *Hlakanyana and the hare*<sup>55</sup>, Cope incorporates another important element of oral storytelling – the chorus, refrain or core cliché. The chorus has two main functions, firstly to facilitate the recollection of tales and secondly to enhance the aesthetic presentation of the tale (Groenewald 1990:47).

The tradition of the chorus can be found in most forms of folklore narrative and in reference to the French equivalent, the *conte fable*, M Leach describes it as follows: "A narrative form in which a story is told partly in song: common in folktales in many languages and many countries. The song sections, usually in dialogue, are the most important or emotionally charged elements of the story, containing magical utterances,

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<sup>55</sup> Hlakanyana sings the following chorus while playing the flute: "I met the hare, no one is more cute, now he does not care, his shinbone is a flute" (Cope 1990: 42). Further on in the narrative he continues singing the chorus as follows: "I tricked Hloya's mother, we played at cooking each other, I did not burn, she was done to a turn." (Cope 1990:43).

witty or wise replies to questions, riddles, sayings of poets, musicians, birds or animals, wishes or calls etc. The prose narrative explains or sets the scene for the song, which may be repeated with or without change in the course of the tale” (Leach cited in Groenewald 1990:41).

Although rhyme is not important in a chorus, it usually reflects rhythmical symmetry and often a chorus will consist only of a group of letters, written phonically or in the form of alliteration to create rhythmic effect. The location of the chorus within the tale structure may also be arbitrary to the meaning of the narrative. However, as the chorus is functional within the plot, the tale structure would be adversely affected if it was removed. To quote HE Scheub, “the sources which have been passed down from generation to generation include the basic core-images centred around clichés (songs, chants, sayings) which are expanded to create the tensions of conflict and resolution of a *ntsomi* image” (cited in Groenewald 1990:46).

The oral storytelling style of the verbal text of *Tale of the trickster boy* was very influential in how I structured the narrative for *Pumla and the chickens*. I felt that it was extremely important to involve the reader in the narrative, although the format of a picture book, with its limited use of verbal text, offers many more challenges in creating an interactive dialogue with the reader. Both *Tales of the trickster boy* and *Nongqawuse’s prophecy* are plate books, i.e. books with narrative text and occasional illustrations. The illustrations have a secondary function in prescribing meaning to the narrative and in some cases, are purely used for decorative purposes (see Figure 3.1(a)). By looking at the important narratology elements of narrative perspective (focalisation), setting and intertextuality<sup>56</sup>, I will show how the reader can be privileged by the functioning of both the verbal and visual text.

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<sup>56</sup> As utilised in *Tales of the trickster boy*, *Nongqawuse’s prophecy*, *Tiger on a tree*, *Pumla and the chickens* and *The gold seed*.

## **Narrative perspective (focalisation)**

In a verbal text, focalisation is used metaphorically to identify the assumed position of the narrator, character or implied reader. In a picture book, a point of view is literally provided by the illustrator/artist, in the same way that it is in an artwork. Within one picture, the point of view remains the same but the sequential nature of a picture book allows it to change as the narrative progresses from one picture to the next. Mieke Bal's concern, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, that the term 'narrative perspective' does not make an adequate distinction between "who sees" and "who speaks" is dealt with to a certain degree in picture books, as the point of view (who sees) is primarily conveyed by the visual text and the narrative voice (who speaks) is primarily conveyed by the verbal text (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:117).

In *Nongqawuse's prophecy*, Thembi is a character-based internal focaliser with a strong narrative voice. By choosing to focalise a child in her narrative, Press has bridged the distance between narrator and the implied reader, as children prefer to read stories in which the narrator is the same age or slightly older than themselves (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:132).

In the majority of the illustrations however, the focaliser is external and in some instances omnipresent and omniscient. This type of extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator is usually assumed to be an adult, which creates a distance between narrator and reader. However, in an attempt to increase reader involvement, the illustrator, Jeff Rankin, has used a few graphic devices to change the point of view in some of the illustrations. To quote Nikolajeva and Scott, "pictures for obvious reasons lack the possibility of internal focalization, at least in the direct sense ... [however] the character's feelings may naturally be conveyed by facial expression, position in the page, tone, colour and other graphic means" (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:118). On pages 27 and 42 of *Nongqawuse's prophecy*, Rankin has zoomed in the focus of the illustration to create greater intimacy with the character, who in the verbal narrative is said to be suffering.

Another way of creating a type of internal focalisation in the visual text is to present the perspective from behind the narrator, thereby offering the reader the same point of view as the narrator. Rankin has used this device on pages 6 and 19. On page 6, the internal focalisation, used along with the superior positioning of the father figure, enhances a feeling of submission and powerlessness (see Figure 3.1(b)). Thembi has no choice but to follow her father's rules and the reader is left in no doubt about this. The looming figure of the father may even cause a child reader to be slightly fearful.

The figure on page 19 apparently means to represent the king (see Figure 3.1(c)). However, the characterisation is not very clear, so the reader may interpret the figure as the king or as another child figure. This ambiguity, although probably not intentionally depicted as such, allows the reader not only to view the dream from the king's point of view but also to relate to it as if they were part of it themselves.

The point of view on page 14 does not conform to an omniscient view, as we cannot see what is in the reeds (see Figure 3.1(d)). In fact, the picture seems to be viewed from the point of view of whatever is in the reeds. This gives the picture a mysterious and sinister tone. We don't know what is watching Thembi and she does not seem to be able to see it either. The fact that the reader's eye level is lower than Thembi's implies that whatever is watching her is hiding amongst the reeds and tension is created by the fact that the image presents an eerie stillness, enhanced by the regularity of the line work, and the reader has no idea what will happen next.

Although Jeff Rankin has attempted to involve the reader in the visual narrative, he does not achieve the sense of audience participation found in oral storytelling as well as Azaria Mbatha does with his illustrations for *Tales of the trickster boy*.

As a Zulu, raised in a rural area, Azaria Mbatha would have had first hand experience of oral storytelling and, as I have discussed in chapter one, his artwork already exhibited narrative qualities. His illustrations for *Tales of the trickster boy* present a complex solution to the problem of how to enhance reader involvement in a visual text.

Mbatha has incorporated the interactive elements of oral storytelling into his illustrations by presenting multiple narrative situations within one narrative text. The majority of the illustrations present two fabulas (series of chronologically related events) simultaneously, namely that of Mamethu's storytelling and the story of Hlakanyana itself. In the opening illustration for the story entitled, *The birth of Hlakanyana*, on page 8, Mamethu and the children are surrounded by the actors of the various narratives that may be present in the story-bag (see Figure 3.2). The older boys hang back but are drawn into the circle by Mbatha's bold line work. The hare, lion and hyena sit together in the bottom left corner, warriors perform a wedding dance in the top right corner and we are introduced to the character of Hlakanyana in top, centre portion, with his small body, bald head and over-sized arms and hands. The eye is forced to stop on him by the steady vertical lines behind him, in comparison with the swirling lines that draw the eye around the rest of the composition. By splitting the visual text into two fabulas, Mbatha has created both a non-focalised omnipresent and omniscient perspective (the fabula of Hlakanyana) and an externally focalised perspective (the fabula of Mamethu). To quote Nikolajeva and Scott, "pictures have unlimited possibilities of conveying literally an 'omnipresent' perspective by giving a panoramic view of the setting, such as depicting several parallel events or several characters at different places, that is, expressing something that the verbal text can only express indirectly, for instance, by saying: "At the same time..." (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006:119). The externally focalised perspective of Mamethu, on the other hand, is only following one perceptual point of view. By viewing this in the light of oral storytelling, Mamethu's externally focalised perspective is that of the narrator, while the omnipresent and omniscient view is that of the audience, especially if the audience is adding extra events or details to the story as it progresses. Mbatha's use of swirling line emphasises how the story develops from the primary narrative into the secondary narrative (represented by the circular composition of Mamethu and the children) into a detailed and vibrant performance.

The way in which Jack Cope and Azaria Mbatha have structured the verbal and visual narratives of *Tales of the trickster boy* to create maximum reader involvement, has in



many ways informed how I structured the narrative for *Pumla and the chickens*. In trying to involve the reader in the narrative, I decided to turn the picture book into a game. Roland Barthes believed that children are taught to read text as a form of *consumption*. In *From work to text* (1977), he writes, “*Playing* must be understood here for all its polysemy: the text itself *plays*...and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for practice which re-produces it, but in order that practice does not be reduced to a passive, inner *mimesis*’ ... ” (Barthes 1977:162). Pumla is looking for the chickens and only the reader can see them. In this way, the whole plot is based on the discrepancy between the verbal and visual point of view; the reader can not just ‘consume’ the text, but is required to *play* with the discrepancy between the verbal and visual text in order to interpret the text. The verbal text focalises Pumla as a character-bound internal focaliser, or as Nikolajeva and Scott would describe her, an intradiegetic-homodiegetic (first-person child) narrator (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:119). The verbal text represents a dialogue that she is having with the reader, which bridges the gap between narrator and reader to the point where it has the intimacy of a one-to-one conversation.

The visual text has an omniscient perspective that allows the reader to find the chickens. It is this contradiction between visual and verbal point of view that provides the tension and action of the story. In a way it is similar to the popular element in Shakespearean plays known as an ‘aside’, in which a character may address the audience or the audience may be made privy to something that is happening, but which the main actor is unaware of. Pumla cannot find the chickens anywhere, but the reader can see them hiding behind her. This adds to the excitement of the children knowing something that the main actor does not.

When an exasperated Pumla eventually addresses the reader directly by asking, “have you seen any chickens?”, she becomes an ‘intrusive’ narrator (see Figure 3.3(a)). Intrusive narrators are usually didactic and authoritative, although in this case the authority still lies with the reader, as only they can see the chickens. Visual texts can usually only be intrusive (or didactic) by indirect means, such as by the character making

direct eye contact with the reader, or by placing the character above the reader's gaze (creating a sense of superiority) (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:119).

By creating a vector (direct eye contact) between the reader and the chickens (joining them in a single signifying practice), the reader is forced to 'notice' them and feel empathy for them. Whether or not it matters to the reader that the chickens may be cooked for dinner may be a deciding factor in whether or not they will choose to finish the book. However, Pumla is also looking directly at the reader, so the reader may feel empathy for her and may want to help her find the chickens for dinner. This creates a tension within the narrative, which is resolved when Pumla's mother buys a frozen chicken from the shop and her 'pet' chickens are saved (see Figure 3.3(b)).

Most picture books make use of a child focaliser in the verbal text and an omniscient perspective in the visual text (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:137). If the omniscient focaliser is assumed to be an adult, then this often undermines the reliability of the child focaliser. When the pictures provide an ironic counterpoint to the words, the narrator may be perceived as naïve or a liar. In *Pumla and the chickens*, I have tried to keep the viewpoint of the reader at the same height as Pumla's. While this was not always possible to achieve, I feel that the use of linocut and monoprint as a medium enhances the naïve viewpoint of a child. I will discuss this further in chapter three.

Nikolajeva and Scott state that "books that use the child's perspective in the visual narrative often impose the adult ideology on the reader by means of the extradiegetic narrative voice" (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:137). By using a child focaliser in both the visual and verbal texts and by omitting any possibly didactic or authoritative adult perspectives, I strove to make *Pumla and the chickens* as accessible as possible to its target audience and entertaining to read.

## Setting

How a setting is presented in a picture book is another way in which a reader can be engaged in the narrative. After World War II, illustrators began to use more minimal settings, as a form of 'hyperrealism', which focused on presenting settings that would be real and familiar to a child's fairly limited everyday experience (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:63). Another benefit of a minimal setting is that it lifts the visual text out of place and time and prevents it from becoming outdated. In the absence of prescriptive detail, readers will often use their imagination to fill in the gaps. To quote Mieke Bal, "when a location has not been indicated, readers will, in most cases, supply one" (Bal 1985:43). To refer back to Barthes' theory, visual texts which contain a great deal of descriptive details, although often aesthetically pleasing, become 'consumptive' and do not allow the reader any scope for imaginative 'play' (Barthes 1977:162).

In *Nongqawuse's prophecy*, the visual text simply forms a backdrop to the story, neither forming an integral part of the plot, nor enhancing the emotional tone of the narrative. Rankin has used traditional Xhosa huts to locate the narrative within the rural areas of the Eastern Cape and although he has depicted the huts on pages 31 and 44 in a fairly realistic way, they seem stylised and rigid (see Figure 3.4). Although Rankin lives in the Eastern Cape now, when he illustrated the book, he was not familiar with the area and was forced to source reference material to inform his illustrations. (interview with Jeff Rankin, 17 October, 2008) (see Addendum E). As a result, his huts have been generically depicted, without the traditional geometric decorations that may have provided them with an individualistic feel and they seem to represent an imperialist 'cookie-cutter' perception that all Xhosa huts look the same. The Xhosa people are not being seen as individuals, but as a mass entity, stereotyped into tourist postcard snapshots of typical houses and typical landscapes. The stylised and stereotypical look of Rankin's huts probably stems from a reference source that was originally intended to promote tourism.

In *Tales of the trickster boy*, Mbatha has also depicted huts in a stylised way and yet they work within the context of the visual narrative (see Figure 3.5). The reason for this may

lie with the illustrator's *intent* when depicting them. In many of Mbatha's artworks, as discussed in chapter one, he depicts huts in a similar simplified way, but instead of attempting to depict a realistic representation of a Zulu hut, he uses them as symbols to represent a village, community or home. Children use similar symbol-like depictions when they draw houses at an early age, using basic geometric shapes, and would likely have no trouble accessing the visual code of Mbatha's huts.

Creating settings which are recognisable to children from a variety of cultures and income groups in South Africa is extremely problematic. Anne Pellowski, writing for UNESCO<sup>57</sup>, highlights the problem of creating generalisations, stating that, "books produced by government institutions often aim for national uniformity as a way of keeping cost down and ensuring that basic educational material is being covered in all schools. However, this uniformity may not only stifle children's creativity but tend to develop a blandness of style in an attempt to please everyone and yet remain politically correct" (Pellowski 1980:18). Using minimal settings and allowing the readers to fill in the gaps, could provide one solution to this problem.

In *Pumla and the chickens*, I have placed the narrative within a largely non-specific setting and the reader can fill in the gaps, which are quite literally constituted by large areas of negative space. Pages 4 and 7 provide a contradiction, in that page 4 could present a rural environment, while page 7 is clearly taking place within an urban environment (see Figures 3.6 (a) and (b)). A sense of blandness has been avoided by including a lot of detail with the combination of collage, linocut and monoprint in the positive spaces and in the way that these then contrast with the empty negative spaces, the technical aspects of which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Fantasy or fairytale settings provide a new set of challenges when depicting picture books. Anne Pellowski believes that "it is essential for children to feel a connection with the practical everyday life and imaginative life of the picture book" (Pellowski 1980:25). In a way this seems to contradict the whole concept of fantasy and yet if a child feels that

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<sup>57</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

there is the slightest possibility that a fantasy or fairytale could come true, then they are more likely to buy into the magical elements of the narrative. Keeping this in mind, I set the primary narrative of *The gold seed* in an urban/rural township community environment. Mandla, Vuyo and Zukisa are playing in a sparse, muddy patch of ground next to their house and the reader can see other houses in the background. The boys' tent is made from an old cardboard box, a wooden plank and a blanket. The fantastical landscape of their adventure forms a contrast to the sparseness of the yard, with long grass and lush jungle foliage. Nikolajeva and Scott write that, "settings can strongly contribute to and clarify the conflict in a story, especially in plots that take the characters away from their familiar surroundings. By moving characters into an 'extreme' setting ... a writer can initiate and amplify a maturation process that would be less plausible in a normal setting" (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:70). The point of conflict in *The gold seed*, is Mandla and Vuyo's reluctance to let Zukisa play with them. However, within the fantastical landscape, they can set aside their pride and include her in the game by turning her into a princess to increase her status (see Figure 3.7).

The use of exotic or jungle-like setting for a narrative journey can be highly contentious. A traditionally patterned narrative sequence would result in the return of the character to his/her normal surroundings (restoring order), showing the characters development from 'savage' to 'civilised' and maintaining the superiority of civilisation over 'nature' (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:70). Within a postcolonial context, this connotation is obviously highly undesirable. Nikolajeva and Scott propose that this transformation is viewed from a different perspective, "if we view [the character's] evolution as a depiction of a little child's socialisation, the change in setting will reflect a metaphorical rather than realistic transformation". In *The gold seed*, Mandla and Vuyo have developed a more mature attitude towards Zukisa and have learned to appreciate what knowledge she has to offer. Nikolajeva and Scott go on to say that, "this transformation also reflects the general trend in children's fiction toward urban rather than rural settings" (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:71). Rural settings are often used to reflect an idyllic childhood, while urban settings epitomise the harsh realities (and even dangers) of adult life. Neither *Pumla and*

*the chickens* nor *The gold seed* really deal with the realities of living in an urban environment and I plan to utilise this setting in my third book.

In the end, a setting only forms a part of a visual and verbal narrative and a large part of how it functions depends on the actors or characters that act within it. With this in mind, the next section deals with the very important element of characterisation.

## **Characterisation**

In defining the aims that illustrators should try to achieve when dealing with characterisation, Joseph and Chava Schwarcz write that, “characterisation within a narrative should not only be lively but also display diversity. Characters that are presented in an idealised or stereotypical way tend to be two-dimensional and children struggle to empathise with them. Stories ... should present both the typical and the individual” (Schwarcz and Schwarcz 1991:7,11). The key word here is ‘empathy’. If a reader does not feel empathy with the main character, they will not care enough to want to finish the book to see what happens to them.

Although characters may be described in the verbal text, it is the visual text that provides the most clues. A character’s appearance, their size and placement on the page and how they interact spatially with other characters, can convey a lot about their status, mood changes and relationships. By presenting characters as both ‘typical and individual’, the typical would allow the reader to make a connection with the character by finding similarities to his/herself while the individual shows that although children of the same age may show typical characteristics, in the end they are all individuals. Children also enjoy books more when they believe that they could be the main character.

In *The gold seed*, Mandla and Vuyo may be typical of boys their age in that they don’t like to wear shoes, don’t like playing with girls and enjoy adventures. However, they are individuals in that they have different hairstyles, wear different styles of clothes and have

different personalities. On page 4 we can see that while Vuyo enjoys flying, Mandla is instead grasping his seat in terror and peering cautiously over the top of it.

Nikolajeva and Scott write that, “names, especially “telling” names ... may add to our understanding of characters” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:82). In *The gold seed*, I have named the little girl Zukisa for a reason. In Xhosa, Zukisa means ‘to be patient’ and in the narrative, it is her patience that allows her to discover why the gold seed is a treasure. If it had been given to the boys, they may have thrown it away, thinking that it was just a useless ‘mielie pip’.

It is important for the illustrator to present the characters in a consistent way throughout the book, as identifying characteristics like hairstyles, clothes, accessories and facial features helps the reader to decode the narrative with minimal confusion.

In *Nongqawuse’s prophecy*, Thembi has a very distinctive narrative voice in the verbal text, but this is not reflected in the visual text, as there is a lack of clarity in the characterisation of the actors. Thembi and Nongqawuse look identical and in the illustration on page 27, it would be impossible to differentiate between them without reading the text (see Figure 3.8(a)). Rankin has used generic Xhosa features and dress and appears to have made little attempt to formulate his characters as individuals. By not being able to identify Thembi as an individual, she loses credibility as a narrator. The reader does not get to know her through pictures as well as they do by reading the verbal text and therefore may not relate to, or empathise with her situation. In the verbal text, the figure on page 19 is identified as the king and yet, with the exception of a headband, Rankin has not supplied us with any clear visual clues that would identify him as a king (see Figure 3.3(c)). Rankin has been more successful in his characterisation of the cow on the cover of the book. When cows are stressed they tend to roll back their eyes, which, in this case, creates direct eye contact with the reader. This engages them with the plight of the cow, which works well within the content of the story. With cows being viewed as a form of currency in the Xhosa community, this empathy for the cow may be something which only children would feel. This is reflected by the verbal text, when

Thembi describes how much she loves cows because of their “big, brown eyes” and “golden skin”, whereas the adults of the story only refer to them as currency and food (Press 1990:9).

Azaria Mbatha’s illustrations for *Tales of the trickster boy* demonstrate that a visual text does not require a great deal of detail to present a character in an easily identifiable way (see Figure 3.9). Mbatha has successfully depicted a full range of facial expressions with a few simple lines, and the distortion of Hlakanyana’s body further emphasises his actions and emotions without losing any clarity of characterisation. Even the depiction of other human and animal actors in the fabula is consistent throughout, despite the limitations that the carving process of the medium may have presented. The hyena is recognisable by its square jaw and spots, the hare by its big ears and the lion by its mane. Although these typical features make them recognisable, Mbatha’s distinctive artistic style still reflects their individuality. The looseness of Mbatha’s line work and the distortion of his figures effectively portray the theatricality of an oral performance. The reader can almost feel Mamethu’s body movements, voice modulations and gestures in the flow of the lines.

Besides the use of characterisation to create continuity within a visual narrative, it can also have two important didactic functions.

Firstly, in an educational book like *Nongqawuse’s Prophecy*, where the illustrations have been depicted in a realistic way, it is essential for the illustrator to ensure that they have the correct references for characters, or they may end up providing the reader with false information. On page 2, the verbal text refers to the bird watching Thembi as a being a hoopoe, however the bird in the visual text on page 1 does not have a distinctive crest and is rather generically depicted (see Figure 3.8(b)). When asked if this discrepancy was intentional, Rankin replied, “no – thought I was using an accurate reference ... but I’m no birdwatcher!” (interview with Jeff Rankin, 17 October, 2008). In ‘Ways of the Illustrator’, Joseph Schwarcz presents this sort of factual inconsistency under the chapter subtitle, ‘The Undesirable’ and states that, “the child has the right to get books which are



representationally consistent” and that illustrators who do not pay attention to these sorts of details “do not care too much about the customer” (Schwarcz 1982:178). More importantly, by including incorrect characters unintentionally, the illustrator may accidentally undermine the integrity of the book and thereby lose the trust of the reader.

Secondly, it is important to provide culturally relevant books to readers as a way of enhancing their self esteem. This is even more important in a country like South Africa, where certain ethnic groups have, in the past, been made to feel inferior. To quote Anne Pellowski, “unless children see themselves reflected in the characters of good quality books, within their cultural milieu, they will continue to have negative images of self” (Pellowski 1980:50). If children in rural areas of the Eastern Cape are constantly given books in which the main character is a wealthy, white child, they may be led to believe that children from their own race and income group are not worthy of being heroes and heroines in books, and congruently, can not be heroes or heroines in reality. To quote the Schwarcz's, “children learn interaction and body language not only from reality, but from media as well: we are dealing with the picture as part of the child's social experience” (Schwarcz and Schwarcz 1991:8).

Characters that are culturally relevant, recognisable and consistent, increase reader involvement within a narrative, as they illicit empathy and allow the reader to care about how the narrative progresses. They can also provide a reliable example to the reader of how to deal with certain social situations or increase their knowledge about their culture and environment. Most importantly, because the reader may see him/herself in the character, any form of pedagogy that exists within the narrative can be presented to the reader in a non-authoritative and non-didactic way.

## **Intertextuality**

In *Narratology*, Onega and Garcíá Landa define intertextuality as, “a theory [which] asserts that no text exists as an autonomous and self-sufficient whole: the writer's and the reader's experience of other texts conditions its form and interpretation” (1996:32).

Although intertextuality is linked with metafiction, in that they are both reflexive texts, within the discourse of this thesis I have chosen to discuss them separately. Many of the elements of narratology overlap in the way that they function, but where metafiction “experiments with its own form as a way of creating meaning”, I felt that it would be more appropriate to include it in chapter three, which deals with the picture book as an object (Onega and Garcíá Landa 1996:32). Intertextuality highlights the existence of other ‘realities’ outside the given text and refers to links between two or more texts in the form of irony, parody, literary and extra literary allusions, direct quotations and indirect references to previous texts (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:227). As with the other narratological tools in this chapter, intertextuality involves an interaction between the writer, the reader and the text, both verbal and visual. In developing the narrative, the writer/illustrator may allude to other texts, but unless the reader is familiar with or able to decode these hypotexts (texts alluded to), they become meaningless. In this way, intertextuality can be culturally dependent.

In *Pumla and the chickens*, the visual text on page 7 shows an intertextual link with the chicken jokes that usually begin with the question, “why did the chicken cross the road?” (see Figure 3.6(b)) Most children know these jokes and in this way, the text takes on a new meaning and is ‘recreated’ by the interaction of the reader.

The cultural dependency of intertextuality can be shown in *Nongqawuse’s prophecy* (see Figure 1.3). There is a Eurocentric intertextuality about the cover image, which is quite overwhelming, in that it reminds one of the Mother Goose rhyme of the ‘cow jumping over the moon’, even though it is Thembi who is doing the jumping. Children in rural areas of the Eastern Cape may not have had access to Mother Goose rhymes and the image would just show a girl flying. There may be traditional stories within that culture that contain fabulas about flying girls and this would, therefore, give the visual text a completely different meaning to that which an urban child, who has read Mother Goose, might have.

It is not clear whether or not this intertextual reference was intentionally used by Rankin, but if it related to a culturally relevant narrative that the reader was familiar with, the intertextuality would enrich the text by creating a complexity of multiple meanings, based on the reader's interpretation.

In *Tales of the trickster boy*, Mbatha's characterisation of Hlakanyana as stocky and naked creates an intertextual link with another fabled trickster, the Tokoloshe. However, whereas Hlakanyana is depicted in the narrative with humour, traditionally the Tokoloshe is feared. The presence of well known tricksters in the animal kingdom, the hare and hyena, also provides the reader with intertextual clues as to Hlakanyana's character. In African fables, the hero is not always a sympathetic figure and may be used to translate the rules of social morality (IBBY 1982: 56). In many of the stories told by Mamethu, Hlakanyana escapes unpunished. As the children already understand that Hlakanyana is a trickster (and as a result of the link to the Tokoloshe, also evil), the author does not need to didactically 'punish' him at the end of every story, as they already understand that whatever he has done constitutes some form of bad behaviour. In this way, intertextuality has been used in a way that the hypotexts are understood by the reader and this understanding enhances the meaning of the text.

This form of interaction once again reflects the interactive qualities of oral storytelling. Although it is the narrator who starts with the core cliché, the story is built up as it progresses by the participation of the audience, which adds its own knowledge and experience to the narrative.

### **The chickens visit St Anne's**

In order to gauge whether my aims of increasing reader's involvement and producing a culturally relevant text had been met, I decided to test *Pumla and the chickens* on a live audience within my target age group (see Figure 3.10(a) and (b)).

St Anne's Pre-primary school is located in 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Walmer in Port Elizabeth and serves the Gqebera township. The building is adjacent to a Catholic church, but the church is in no way involved in administration or teaching at the school.

Gqebera is ideally located for this study in that it is wedged between the affluent (formally white) suburb of Walmer and the airport on one side and small holdings, horse farms, open bush and a golf course on the other. It is also unusual in that, unlike many other townships in South Africa, it is located very close to the city centre. Therefore, the children growing up in Gqebera are familiar with both rural and urban environments (see Figure 3.11).

The principal at St Anne's, Ms Colleen Mbambani, agreed to read *Pumla and the chickens* to a group of the children, comprising both boys and girls, whose age group ranged from four to six years of age. The reading was also attended by Mr CM Pretorius, a former Department Chief Education Officer, who expressed interest in seeing how Ms Mbambani presented the book.

I did not prescribe the way in which Colleen Mbambani should present *Pumla and the chickens* to the children, so I was thrilled to see her performing the story in much the same way that Mamethu performs in *Tales of the trickster boy*, employing theatrical gestures and vocal modulations. Initially the children did not understand that there were chickens hiding on each page and Ms Mbambani had to explain this to them. Although the little girls were very shy, finding the chickens became a stiff competition amongst the boys and there was a lot of movement and excitement in the group. When someone found a chicken, the rest of the group applauded enthusiastically. Mr Pretorius wrote in his report (see Addendum B) that, "the educational impact in the interpretation of the story greatly depends on the interpretation of the Educator. In this case the educator did a magnificent presentation". This emphasises again that there is no clear demarcation between the narrator and the audience in an oral presentation of a story, as both are equally involved in the creation and consumption of the tale.

In depicting the setting of *Pumla and the chickens*, I had tried to find a middle ground between rural and urban. Therefore, it was interesting for me to see how reader interpretation, by filling in the gaps, adjusted the setting to one which they best related to. To quote Ms Mbambani, “it takes me way back where I grew up in King Williams Town’s rural area called Emdizeni. The setting of the story shows a simple way of life. The kindness and respect portrayed, for example, cooking your aunt’s favourite meal, ‘isityu’. This shows people in the olden days were giving, even if they will give you their last thing”. Ms Mbambani also said that she would “definitely choose to read [*Pumla and the chickens*] to [the children] so that they understand how people in the olden days used to live. That would encourage them to respect and know their culture and not to feel inferior about it” (interview with Colleen Mbambani, Port Elizabeth, 6 August, 2008).

As the author, I did not realise that I was writing a book with a didactic bent about the ‘olden days’ and culture. In retrospect I realise that I was writing from what I remembered as a child growing up on a farm and that this would not necessarily reflect an urban child’s viewpoint. In *Pumla and the chickens* I was trying to avoid a didactic approach in favour of reading for pleasure and was therefore surprised by the moral that Ms Mbambani had attached to it. The children, on the other hand, did not seem to understand this moral until it was pointed out to them and were much more interested in the entertainment aspects of the story. Although I originally did not feel that picture books should have a didactic tone, after speaking to Ms Mbambani I have realised that by reaching a compromise, in which pedagogical aspects are included, but where pleasure is privileged, both the happiness of the teachers and children can be ensured. This approach is reflected in how morals are included in oral storytelling. Harold Scheub writes that, “the storyteller never preaches, but she always deals with this essentially moral problem of the good man and his potential for evil ... thematically, adherence to custom is emphasised as the most effective means of ensuring the continued equilibrium of the human community; stylistically, animals and fabulous images are worked into the plots to communicate vividly such a harmonious or disharmonious society ... movements towards an ideal society forms the thematic focus of the narratives, and cultural values

are discovered in the mechanisms applied by individuals and society as they attempt to duplicate the natural harmony” (cited in Groenewald 1990:134).

Picture books can help children to understand their environment in much the same way as oral stories can. To quote the Schwarcz’s, “picture books can be used to broaden children’s horizons and help them to understand human interaction within a social environment, leading from dialectic attitudes, justifying only one opinion, to dialogic attitudes, accepting several points of view” (Schwarcz and Schwarcz 1991:11). They can do this by mimicking the characters or learning from how they deal with certain situations. If the situations presented in a picture book relate closely to a child’s environment, then they are more likely to be able to appropriate these lessons. This is similar to the didactic subtexts present in oral stories. The story teller is able to present lessons about life in an entertaining way and by interacting with the storyteller, the child learns how to deal with these social situations.

However, as important as the pedagogical functions of a picture book (or oral storytelling) are, they would not be nearly as effective if it was not for the vibrancy and cultural relevance of their delivery. As has already been shown in the art of oral storytelling, privileging the reader/audience is an important step towards harnessing this vibrancy.

Joseph and Chava Schwarcz identify the following concepts as being essential for the creation of good picture books: entertainment value, meaningful human interest, societal significance and aesthetic appeal (Schwarcz and Schwarcz 1991:11-12).

Entertainment value is provided by texts that engage with the reader, encouraging the reader to use his/her imagination and participate in prescribing meaning to the narrative, in the same way that an audience enhances an oral narrative. Meaningful human interest is achieved by making the books culturally relevant and providing the reader with characters that they can relate to and which help to build their sense of identity. Societal significance can become a subtle subtext in a narrative, in the same way that it does in

oral storytelling. Pedagogy is present within a narrative without overpowering the entertainment aspects, making the book more relevant to the teacher or caregiver, who is then more likely to read the book to the child. Aesthetic appeal relies on the skill of the illustrator and designer, as well as the author, in conjuring a vibrant and exciting integrated narrative, so that children can find something new and magical in the picture book every time they read it.





**Figure 3.1** (a) (top left) Illustration by Jeff Rankin in Karen Press, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* (1990). Woodcut. Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town. (b) (top right), (c) (bottom left), (d) (bottom right) Illustration from *Nongqawuse's Prophecy*, see above for details. (Press 1990:35, 6, 19, 14)





**Figure 3.2** (left) Azaria Mbatha in Jack Cope, *Tales of the trickster boy* (1990) p8. Linocut. Collection: Gericke Library, Stellenbosch University.



**Figure 3.3** (a) (top) Illustration by Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p8. Linocut, collage and monoprint, 40 x 20cm. Collection: Artist. (b) (bottom) Illustration by Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p10.



**Figure 3.4** (above) Illustration by Jeff Rankin in Karen Press, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* (1990), p31. Woodcut. Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town.

**Figure 3.5** (above right) Illustration by Azaria Mbatha in Jack Cope, *Tales of the trickster boy* (1990), p60. Linocut. Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town.



**Figure 3.6 (a)** (top left) Illustration by Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p4. Linocut, collage and monoprint, 40 x 20cm. Collection: Artist.

**(b)** (bottom left) Illustration from Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p7.





**Figure 3.7** (above) Illustration from Shelley Johnson, *The gold seed* (2008), p2. Linocut, collage and monoprint, 40 x 20cm. Collection: Artist.



**Figure 3.8** (a) (above left) Illustration by Jeff Rankin in Karen Press, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* (1990), p27. Woodcut. Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town. (b) (above right) Illustration by Jeff Rankin in Karen Press, *Nongqawuse's Prophecy* (1990), p1.



**Figure 3.9** (left) Illustration by Azaria Mbatha in Jack Cope, *Tales of the trickster boy* (1990), p43. Linocut. Collection: Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town.



**Figure 3.10** (a) (top) School children, St Anne's Pre-primary School, Port Elizabeth (2008). Photograph: CM Pretorius. (b) (bottom) School children, St Anne's Pre-primary School, Port Elizabeth (2008). Photograph: CM Pretorius.





**Figure 3.11** (above) *Far from the farm - kids cowed*, Eastern Province Herald, Port Elizabeth, 19 September 2008. Photograph: Mike Holmes.

## CHAPTER 3: Relief printing and the creation of vibrant, economically viable picture books

Using the principles of oral storytelling to inform the creation of picture books is one way of increasing their vibrancy and dynamic interaction with the reader. Another method is by looking at how the utilisation of a relief medium, such as woodcut or linocut, can enhance this vibrancy, especially when viewed in light of technical components such as text/image interaction, metafiction, time and movement, paratexts and modality.

As this chapter deals with the picture book as an object, I have chosen to include a fifth book into the discussion: *Tiger on a tree* (2004), written by Anushka Ravishankar<sup>58</sup>, an Indian children's book writer; and illustrated by Pulak Biswas, a well known illustrator in India.

*Nongqawuse's Prophecy* and *Tales of the trickster boy* are plate books and the visual and verbal texts are not integrated within their design. In order to discuss how visual and verbal texts function within picture books, it was therefore necessary to refer to a book that offers a completely integrated text. In fact, it is in picture books that these two 'languages' come together most intimately, to the point where their cooperation is so essential that one component alone is unable to carry out the full intention of the work (Schwarcz 1991:5). Despite the fact that the illustrations in *Tiger on a tree* were not created using a relief medium (they are screen-prints), Biswas' use of positive and negative spaces, the way he's depicts the verbal text and his limited palette were all extremely influential on the design of my books, especially *Pumla and the chickens* (see Figure 4.1(a)).

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<sup>58</sup> Ravishankar began writing books in 1992, after failing to find locally relevant and non-didactic books for her six-year-old daughter. Her influences include nonsense verse by Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and Edward Gorey and her narratives are presented in the form of rhymes (2007: <http://www.livemint.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx>).

To quote Martin Salisbury, the “union [of text and image] is increasingly important today as picture books are becoming a ‘complete concept’, in that the artist and author is usually same person” (Salisbury 2004:7). As both the author and illustrator of *Pumla and the chickens*, I was particularly concerned with finding a way to create this ‘complete concept’ by successfully integrating the verbal and visual texts in such a way that they could not function independently of each other. This type of relationship between the visual and verbal texts is referred to as a counterpoint by Nikolajeva and Scott. They state that, “many of the most exciting examples of counterpoint between text and picture are to be found in books created by a single author/illustrator who is completely free to choose either of the two iconotexts to carry the main load of the narrative” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:17).

## **Counterpoint**

When counterpoint is used in picture books it creates a dynamic and stimulating experience for the reader, as they are free to use their imagination to interpret the story, and the ‘gaps’ provided by a non-specific narration can elicit varied interpretations of the text based on the readers personal experiences and knowledge.

*Tiger on a tree* can be described as a counterpointing picture book, as the verbal and visual narratives are mutually dependent. When the tiger encounters the goat-like creature, the verbal text simply depicts the sounds that the goat makes (see Figure 4.1(b)). If one was reading the verbal text and did not have the visual text to supply more information, it would make no sense. This also applies to the visual text, as is evident on the various pages depicting the men gesticulating wildly (see Figure 4.2(a)). Without the verbal text, the reader would know that the men were having an animated discussion, but it would be unclear what they were having a discussion about.

If the author and illustrator are two different people, then it is essential for them to collaborate closely to create a successful counterpoint narrative. This seems to be the case in *Tiger on a tree*, as the counterpoint between characterisation in the verbal text and characterisation in the visual text forms a major part of how one interprets the story.

Nikolajeva and Scott state that, “the counterpoint between textual and iconic narrative is an important point of tension in communicating the book’s theme” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:23). This tension is created by the characterisation of the tiger (see Figure 4.2(b)). By only reading the verbal text, the reader might assume that the tiger was vicious, especially in light of the fuss made by the villagers when trying to catch it. However, in the visual text, Biswas has characterised the tiger as a friendly, non-aggressive character. This in turn creates a counterpoint in perspective. The verbal text seems to be narrated from the point of view of an adult, especially when it is made up of the direct speech of the villagers. The visual text is shown from a child’s point of view. The villagers are all positioned on a higher plane than the reader and the simplified forms of the illustrations could represent a child’s perspective. The counterpoint created by characterisation and perspective creates tension in the book by eliciting empathy for the tiger from the reader.

In *Pumla and the chickens*, tension is created by the counterpoint of modality. Modality enables the reader to decide on the degree of truth in the communication that they receive (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:173). Pumla, as the narrator, is presenting her story as ‘truth’. From her point of view, conveyed by the verbal text, all the chickens have disappeared. However, the visual text, by allowing the reader to find the five chickens, counters this truth and presents Pumla as an unreliable narrator. There is also a counterpoint in address, in which textual and visual gaps are deliberately left to allow for different interpretations, based on the reader’s level of sophistication. The readers of picture books are generally assumed to be children and their interpretation of the counterpoint may be that Pumla is not looking properly, or that the chickens are very clever. An adult reader may read more into Pumla’s motives and take a more judgmental stance: perhaps she is pretending not to see the chickens so that they won’t be eaten, perhaps she is avoiding the hard work of having to pluck the chickens and would rather buy one from the shop or perhaps Pumla is not looking properly because she is lazy. How different levels of readers interpret visual and verbal texts is a challenge which has to be dealt with by the author/illustrator, especially if they are trying to avoid overt didacticism or pedagogy within a narrative.



Over-managing a narrative by removing all the gaps and ambiguity would result in a picture book that is predictable and boring. By looking at how different interpretations are dealt with in *Tiger on a tree* and *Pumla and the chickens*, it seems that a possible solution may lie in how the visual or design presentation of the visual and verbal narratives affects their relationship.

When Ravishankar wrote *Tiger on a tree*, her aim was to create a book that would be read for *pleasure* only. As is the case in South Africa<sup>59</sup>, children in India seldom read for fun, but rather as a learning exercise. Ravishankar states that, “they are also so brainwashed ... if you ask children they will say we read this because we learn this. They don’t understand that you just read for fun”. Ravishankar claims this is her main motivation for writing fun books, “I don’t write to teach or moralise anything,” she says, “you could end up finding messages but consciously I have never tried to do that” (cited in 2007: <http://www.livemint.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx>). Her views are echoed by Anne Pellowski<sup>60</sup>, who feels that, “the ‘uses’ of the enchantment of printed literature for children are not clear to the average parent, not even in places where oral story-telling is still considered a good thing” (Pellowski 1980:19). Ravishankar has eliminated some of the potential for didacticism by writing the verbal text as a nonsensical rhyme. However, since the verbal text in this case reflects an adult narrator, Biswas has integrated the design of the verbal text with the visual text, thereby bringing it closer to the child-like perspective of the visual text.

The verbal text of *Pumla and the chickens* is open to multiple interpretations, some of which could be pedagogic. Like Ravishankar, I tried to create a picture book which would be read for pleasure, but as discussed in chapter two, when seen from the perspective of an adult reader, pedagogic elements which I had not foreseen became apparent. While I can not deny that they exist, I did attempt to minimise their impact by utilising design elements from *Tiger on a tree*. To quote Jane Doonan, “in a wholly

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<sup>59</sup> Morris 2007:18

<sup>60</sup> Anne Pellowski is an authority on international literature and non-print media for children, a former storyteller and a specialist in public library group work. She also created and directs the Information Centre on Children’s Cultures of the United States Committee for Unicef (Pellowski 1980:preface).

integrated layout, the text is not only a guide through the narrative but also becomes part of the design and in this way, can be used to enhance the emotional or metaphoric content of the narrative ...” (Doonan 1993:57). On page 1, the curvature of the verbal text mimics Pumla’s cartwheel, reflecting her happiness (see Figure 4.3). On pages where Pumla stops to think, such as on page 3, when she realises that the chickens have disappeared, the text is static and literally stops short of the image of the yard. On page 7, the verbal text is small in scale, to show that Pumla is whispering. Although the design elements of the verbal text do increase its integration with the visual text, the problem of modality still exists. The only way to overcome this would be to appeal to the assumed child reader of the book, rather than a potential adult reader. If the verbal text is usually the domain of the adult (they’re the ones reading the book to the child) and the visual text is the domain of the child (they can look at the pictures), then the verbal text should become an integral part of the visual text. I did this by producing them in the same medium, in this case linocut.

By taking another look at the work of relief-print artists in chapter one, it becomes clear that where visual and verbal texts were incorporated within an image, counterpoint was often used by the artists to create tension. The verbal text in *Death of Chief Mandume* (1971) by John Muafangejo may not present any judgements about the incident presented in the visual text, but by using counterpoint, Muafangejo has given the narrative multiple levels of meaning, even if this was not his intention (see Figure 2.11). The style of the text is reminiscent of the text on a tomb stone (the linocut medium reflecting how the text would be carved into the stone). One could take it one step further and say that it’s a war memorial, which would then make Chief Mandume’s slaying an act of war. The austere tone of the text could even be a sentencing for a crime. Whatever forms the verbal text may take, Muafangejo is laying down the facts ‘in stone’; and the tempered tone of the verbal text lies uneasily next to the brutality of the visual text. By combining the verbal text within the medium of the visual text, Muafangejo leaves the viewer with a sense of unease. The format is similar to that of a newspaper, in which an unemotional text is juxtaposed with an emotionally charged photograph. Muafangejo seems to want the viewer to deal with the Chief’s death with both intellectual detachment and emotional

outrage. However, by carving the text in his own handwriting, Muafangejo loses the detached air of a newspaper article and, even though he claimed that his work was not political, he appears to not have been able to avoid commenting on the situation as it affected him and members of his community. Combining verbal text and visual text in a relief medium forces the viewer/reader to engage with the narrative as a single entity and the text cannot be read as a form of *consumption*, as discussed in chapter two. The counterpoints encourage an interactive, and therefore vibrant, reading of the narrative.

Relief printing also provides a perfect medium for the execution of type, as the letters are bold and easy for young children to read. In *Pumla and the chickens*, the original stiffness of a mechanically generated typeface, in this case Verdana, is lost in the cutting process, adding to the relaxed, almost colloquial ‘voice’ of the text, as if the story is being told within a group of friends. Referring to language rather than design, although it could apply to both, Anne Pellowski believes that the ‘cleaning up’ and ‘making proper’ of text is a hangover from early European traditions and that it takes the life out of the text and adds didacticism (Pellowski 1980: 35).

In *Pumla and the chickens*, certain ‘untidy’ elements surrounding the text have been maintained to enhance the natural, ‘home-made’ feel of the overall image. The key challenge when doing this is to ensure that the text is still clearly legible to young children, although the slightly uneven lettering and lack of rigidity that one sees in mechanically generated type may well allow the child to feel less intimidated by the text. At St Anne’s, Mr Pretorius commented that, “it was clear that the learners were more interested in the visual impact than the text as their vocabulary had not been developed to this advanced stage”. He felt that the target audience should have been an older group (see Addendum B). However, my belief is that to simplify the text too much will become counter-productive to the acquisition of literacy skills.

By incorporating the text into the illustration, the children learn to recognise letters without the pressure of an educational expectation. Colleen Mbambani simply used the book as a visual tool to capture the attention of the children and then slowly incorporated

a lesson about numbers and morals into the reading. She did not employ a directly pedagogic approach and this very much sums up the essence of picture books as first aesthetic and then educational objects. By utilising a relief medium, the text and image are integrated in both style and design, so that children may appreciate the narrative firstly on a purely visual level and then as part of an educational experience.

Therefore, in *Pumla and the chickens*, the linocut verbal text becomes a counterpoint within itself, as it is no longer just a verbal text, but part of the visual text. Any expectations of pedagogy that are associated with a mechanically generated verbal text are undermined by this counterpoint, thereby privileging pleasure over pedagogy. As the picture book is now perceived as a fun item, any gaps created by the counterpoint of verbal and visual text are much more likely to be interpreted in an imaginative and playful way by the reader.

## **Modality and Mimesis**

As mentioned before, the concept of modality helps the reader to decide on the degree of truth in a narrative. It does this by looking at the contrast between mimetic (a literal or direct reflection of reality) and non-mimetic (symbol, metaphor or imitation of reality) aspects of the narrative (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:173). Although this definition denotes a simple division of narrative texts into the genres of fantasy and realism, the suspension of reality can function on many different levels in a picture book.

In *The gold seed* the narrative can be divided into reality (the children playing in the yard) and fantasy (their adventure). However, the adventure itself can be interpreted in two different ways. A child reader may believe that the magic is real and that the events actually happened, whereas an older reader may interpret the fantasy in a rational way, i.e. that the children are playing a game and the adventure is a figment of their imaginations.

In *The Magic Code*, Nikolajeva defines fantasy as, “a logical narrative that takes place in two worlds which constitute a unity (usually one world is magical and the other real. Sometimes it may be two real worlds separated in space and time, while the contact between them is established in a magical way” (1988:10).

If the reader was to believe that the adventure was real, then they would assume that the box that the boys are playing in is magical and forms a portal to another reality. In this alternate reality, talking animals and flying zebras would be completely believable.

However, in *The gold seed*, the modality is decided by two elements - one visual and one verbal. On the first page, Zukisa asks the boys if she can play with them, which subverts the objectivity of the visual text, while in the visual text, the reader can see that the boys are playing in the box, thereby subverting the indicative modality (truth) that is implied by the use of a first person child narrator. There are still ambiguities or gaps evident between the counterpoint of the verbal and visual texts, which lead to an interactive response from the reader, ie. maybe Zukisa thinks that the boys are playing and does not realise that the box really is a magical portal.

This ambiguity is emphasised by the introduction of what Nikolajeva and Scott call the ‘the Mary Poppins Syndrome’, which they describe as follows: “although the verbal and visual text may support each other in general, a minor detail can be inserted that subverts the other’s credibility: the detail may suggest that what was presented as true is in fact a dream, or visa versa” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:175). The Mary Poppins evidence in *The gold seed* is the ‘mielie pip’. Although it has been discovered in the imaginary world that the children have created while playing, Zukisa is able to plant the seed in the yard and watch as a maize plant grows and the children are then able to eat the corn. The reader is given no clues about whether or not the maize plant is magical – it may have grown in a few minutes or it may have taken months. The Mary Poppins evidence contradicts the improbable modality of the narrative, creating ambiguity which adds to the mystery and vibrancy of the narrative.

These ambiguities in modality are effectively achieved by Azaria Mbatha's use of split narratives in his illustrations for *Tales of the trickster boy*. Jane Doonan describes split narratives as, "two episodes with different characters portrayed within the same setting on a picture plane" (Doonan 1993:88). By combining the reality of Mamethu telling a story to the children and the fantasy tale of Hlakanyana within one visual text, the reader is encouraged to accept the tale of Hlakanyana as being true. There is nothing dividing the two narratives and this uniformity is enhanced by the use of the linocut medium, which Mbatha has worked in a consistent style throughout the book. Split narratives were used by John Muafangejo in his work in order to show two opposing viewpoints within reality, so they are symmetrically indicative (both visual and verbal texts are presented as true). In *Lonely man, man of man* (1974) he presents his 'lonely' life in contrast to the active social lives of other people his age (see Figure 4.4) and in *Men are working in town. They are working in mine* (1981), by contrasting a narrative of men working in the mines with that of women working in the rural areas, he comments of the separation instituted by migrant labour (see Figure 4.5). In *S.Africa soldiers at north of Namibia* (1987), Muafangejo contrasts the orderly and well-armed South African soldiers with the camouflaged and guerrilla-like Angolan soldiers, whose weapons include bows and arrows (see Figure 4.6). Muafangejo highlights what he perceived to be the unevenness of the war by describing the Angolans' actions as a form of self-defence in the verbal text. The modality of this statement would obviously depend on the perspective of the viewer. In this print, he also uses the medium itself to emphasise the contrast, as the highly textured clothes of the Angolan soldiers blend well into the background, while the flat surfaces of South African soldiers stand out and make them look out of place in their environment.

It is therefore evident that a split narrative does not only allow the narratives to cross between fantasy and reality, space and time, but also to comment on the varying degrees of modality within reality itself. This process of weaving between the narratives reflects the interactive and dynamic nature of oral storytelling. The audience is invited to add details to the narrative based on their own experience. If the performance (or in this case, illustration) is animated enough, the audience (reader) becomes so involved in the

storytelling process than they can almost believe that it is true. By interpreting texts mimetically (as true), the reader identifies with the characters and shares their perspective, making the reader more sympathetic towards and interested in the narrative as a whole.

## **Time and movement**

Nikolajeva and Scott state that, “unlike decorative art, the picture book medium is narrative and sequential, and intends to convey a sense of movement and of duration” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:139). However, by looking at relief printing in South Africa, it is possible to see examples of how duration and movement can be conveyed in decorative art and how this in turn can inform the development of relief-medium picture books.

In *The revelation of St John* (1965), Mbatha has used a medieval technique called *simultaneous succession*, defined by Nikolajeva and Scott as, “a sequence of images, most often of a figure, depicting moments that are disjunctive in time but perceived as belonging together, in an unequivocal order” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:140) (see Figure 4.7). Although the term ‘simultaneous succession’ (simultaneous picture) is widely used by German critics, it has the same meaning as the term ‘continuous narrative’, which is used by Joseph Schwarcz in *Ways of the illustrator* (1976), and which I have chosen to use in this thesis. Schwarcz states that continuous narrative is evident when “the protagonist of the story ... (or any other figure) appears two or more times at different places in one and the same picture, while the background and other elements remain more or less unchanged” (Schwarcz and Schwarcz 1976:24). Continuous narrative was often used in the depiction of hagiographies (lives of saints) and it may have been within this religious content that Mbatha was introduced to the technique. The changes that occur in each event of St John’s life come to represent the flow of time, which in the visual text is unspecified and could be days, months or years.



If a continuous narrative is not used in the visual text, then the text essentially becomes static; the story time is therefore zero and yet the discourse time could be infinitely long. In narratology theory, this would be termed a 'pause', described by Bal as, "all narrative sections in which no movement of the fabula-time is implied. A great deal of attention is paid to one element, and in the meantime the fabula remains stationary" (Bal 1985:76). The attention paid to one element, in the case of a visual narrative, could denote a visual text that contains a lot of detail; or in the case of *Pumla and the chickens*, a visual text that forces the reader to stop and look for the chickens on each page. In this descriptive pause, the reader is still actively engaging with the visual text and therefore the discourse continues.

By alternating visual scenes (discourse and story time the same), visual summaries (discourse time shorter than story time, as in continuous narratives) and pauses, the narrative can be sped up, slowed down or stopped. Alternating the tempo of a narrative makes it a more vivid experience for the reader and while children may enjoy the excitement of a fast-paced action scene, they also enjoy returning to pauses to look for more information in the details (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:161).

On page 9 of *Pumla and the chickens*, I have combined continuous narrative with a visual device (the clocks) to show the passing of time (see Figure 4.8(a)). If not used in a continuous narrative, then these visual devices (like clocks, calendars, season changes etcetera) rely on the sequential nature of the picture book to be effective. The verbal text can also assist in defining temporality in a narrative in the form of verbal ellipses. On page 9, Pumla says that, "Aunty could be here any minute". Despite the fact that the clocks show that three hours have passed, the verbal text imposes a degree of urgency, which is reflected by the literal depiction of the metaphor that 'time flies', reflecting a child's subjective view of time. Another example of verbal ellipses can be seen in *The gold seed* when Zukisa plants the maize seed. The repetition of the words, "and grew ... and grew ... and grew" on a single page, implies the quick motion of time. The focaliser in this instance is Zukisa, so it could be another example of the subjective view of a child

but as mentioned before, it does create ambiguity when counterpointed by the adult objective view that maize takes months to grow from a seed to full maturity.

Movement is another way that temporality can be depicted, whether it is movement depicted by graphic means, movement between genres (fantasy and reality) or the movement between primary and secondary narratives. Nikolajeva and Scott state that, “different graphic codes, many borrowed from comics and photographs, have been adopted by picturebook authors. These include such features as blurs, motion lines ... distortion of perspective ... [and] action in progress” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:139). Movement depicted by graphic means is also very effectively conveyed by relief media.

If the linoleum or wood has been carved into in a very loose or aggressive way, a trace of this process is left in the negative spaces. An example of this trace can be seen on page 2 of *Pumla and the chickens*, where it has been used to reflect that the chickens are flustered and flapping their wings. On page 1, the trace does not only emphasise the movement of Pumla’s cartwheel, but also surrounds the verbal text, to reflect her excitement. Whereas the linear movement in picture books may be created by directional gazes, gestures or the positioning of objects and characters; in the relief medium, this linear movement is often quite literally conveyed with lines, whether they are intentional or traces.

Both Muafangejo and Mbatha use lines to create the backgrounds of their prints. While these have the potential to make the print look very flat and two-dimensional, they have been used in such a varied way (both in the variety of mark-making and directionality) that they actually give the print a degree of perspectival depth, along with guiding the viewer’s eye through the narrative. While Mbatha’s line work tends to be a little more rigid than Muafangejo’s, as can be seen in the largely vertical and horizontal background of *Adoration of the magi*, in *Tales of the trickster boy* he has adopted a looser style that is reminiscent of prints like Muafangejo’s *Men are working in town. They are working in mine*. On page 1 of *Tales of the trickster boy*, the reader’s eye is drawn into the narrative by the swirling lines that surround the primary narrative of Mamethu and the children and

it is then thrust upwards into the secondary narrative of Hlakanyana by the strong vertical lines above them. The relief medium also offers the opportunity to create a visual pause by juxtapositioning vibrantly textured areas with large areas of flat colour. The eye is encouraged to stop on the main elements of the fabula like the image of Mamethu, the trio of tricksters in the bottom left corner and Hlakanyana at the top. To quote MacCann and Richards, “the reader’s response to balance, harmony and proportion is often influenced by their culture and traditions. Western tradition often dictates the importance of symmetrical design and it took many years before readers could accept negative space as a design tool” (MacCann and Richards 1973:40).

Page 1 of *Tales of a trickster boy* also offers an example of *paralepses*, in which the time of the secondary narrative is independent of the primary narrative. The time that it takes Mamethu to tell the story (primary narrative) is not the same as the duration of the Hlakanyana story itself (secondary narrative). This can also be seen in *The gold seed*. When the boys disappear into their box, Zukisa is making a mud pie. After travelling over what seems like a great distance to the Bird-King’s cave, Vuyo re-emerges from the box to find Zukisa making the same mud pie and in reality it seems like no time has passed at all. This device is often used in fantasy tales.

Despite what the author/illustrator may hope to achieve by using visual and verbal devices to convey time and movement, how these devices are read ultimately lies with the reader and this in turn depends on the reader’s knowledge, experience and culture. Whereas it may be assumed that an American child will read a narrative from left to right, the same would not be true for a Japanese child, as Japan has a literary tradition of reading from right to left. This once again emphasises the importance of the local relevance of picture books and how important it is to take into account the educational level of the child (ie. are they advanced enough to decode graphic devices like motion blurs and character actions?) and cultural sensitivity (ie. using snow to show season change in an area with a moderate climate would confuse the reader).

The tradition of the relief print in South Africa offers a solution to the problem of showing movement and time in the form of continuous narratives, vibrant use of line and the bold contrasts of black and white, offering a format which is easy for a pre-school child to decode.

### **Postmodern aspects of picture books: metafiction and multiliteracy**

Throughout chapters two and three, I have emphasised the importance of designing picture books that engage with the reader in a vibrant and culturally relevant way. Some picture books that function in this way have been labelled ‘postmodern’, as, to quote Laura Colker, “Postmodernism, as a concept, emphasises the interconnectedness of our modern world and embraces multiculturalism”. She goes on to say that, “rather than just enhancing the meaning of the text, postmodern picture books challenge the reader to come up with [his]her own meaning ... each reading of the book may cause the reader to construct a new and different meaning” (Colker s.a: [http://www.rif.org/educators/articles/childrens\\_book\\_illustrations.msp](http://www.rif.org/educators/articles/childrens_book_illustrations.msp)).

When the author and illustrator consciously use a range of devices that produce multiple meanings or disrupt the reader’s expectations, these devices are referred to as ‘metafiction’. Metafictive elements not only affect the visual and verbal text of the book but also how the picture book functions as an object. To quote Nikolajeva and Scott, “metafiction is a stylistic device aimed at destroying the illusion of a ‘reality’ behind the text and instead emphasising its fictionality. Metafictional elements in a text deliberately draw attention to its status as a literary construction and therefore raise questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:220).

In *Pumla and the chickens*, metafictive elements have been used to blur the borders between fiction and reality in two different ways. On page 8, Pumla directly addresses the reader by asking, “do you see any chickens?” and on page 5, the chickens are made to look as if they are hiding behind the page of the book itself (see Figure 4.8(b)). As fictional characters, Pumla technically should not be able to address the reader and the

chickens should not be able to function outside of the picture frame; by doing so, they question the idea of their own fictionality and become part of the reality of the reading experience.

As a way of incorporating the reader/viewer into the experience of the illustration or artwork, metafiction has also been used by John Muafangejo, as can be seen in *I wish you well on your way* (1986), in which the figure in the print directly addresses the viewer, both in the form of direct eye contact and in the verbal text, which says, “I wish you well go with God on your way go in peace. I hope you will become back to us one day”. His print entitled, *The death of chief Phillimon Elifas* (1975) ends with the sentence, “Let us think and remember our two killed chiefs for us” (see Figure 4.9). In many of Muafangejo’s works it is evident that he is addressing God or fellow members of his community. However, by using a direct form of address, especially in the first example where the addressee is not identifiable, the metafictional text does serve to incorporate the reader into the narrative.

Relief printing also displays the important self-referential metafictional element of framing (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:224). As mentioned previously, both Muafangejo and Mbatha were probably exposed to framing within a religious context, either by viewing hagiographies or stained glass windows. The Zulu *amabhaxa* (mat racks) occasionally displayed frames or outlines around forms, but these were utilised for decorative purposes and did not contribute towards how the narrative functioned (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:37). Frames create a sense of detachment between the image and the viewer/reader and acknowledge the book or artwork for what it is, a two dimensional representation of a fictional narrative. This again emphasises the newspaper-like quality of some of Muafangejo’s prints, in which his commentary seems to be purely documentary, while Mbatha’s hagiographic type scenes are reminiscent of religious cards and had a largely didactic function (Hobbs and Rankin 2003:51). The absence of a frame invites the reader into the picture, allowing them interact more closely with the narrative, as can be seen in Muafangejo’s print, *I wish you well on your way* (1986) (see Figure 4.10).

Another way in which relief printing utilises a postmodern trait which could enhance reader interaction in picture books is, to cite M Anstey, through “non-traditional ways of using plot, character and setting, which challenge reader expectations and require different ways of reading and viewing” (2002: [http://www.reading.org\\_Library\\_Retrieve.cfm\\_D=10.1598\\_JAAL.45.6.1&F=JAAL-45-6-Anstey.pdf](http://www.reading.org_Library_Retrieve.cfm_D=10.1598_JAAL.45.6.1&F=JAAL-45-6-Anstey.pdf)).

In both *Tales of the trickster boy* and *Jonah*, Mbatha has rejected the ‘Western’ notion of reading a narrative from left to right, forcing the reader to reevaluate how they read the narrative. In Mbatha’s print, *Flight into Egypt* (1965), the characters have been depicted in an African context (as shown by their clothes) and yet the setting is depicted using a multitude of mark-making which the reader is required to decode as a jungle (see Figure 4.11). This is quite a departure from the expectation created by the Bible story of Mary and Joseph dressed in robes, escaping to the desert-like setting of Egypt.

Ambiguity, the gaps created by counterpoint or “indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character, or setting, which requires the reader to construct some of the text and meanings” is also defined by Anstey as a postmodern trait (Anstey 2002). In the case of Hlakanyana, Mbatha has used very little detail in his characterisation of the trickster and, if the reader was Zulu and had encountered the story of Hlakanyana before, he/she might resort to intertextual referencing to fill in the gaps. If this was the reader’s first encounter with the story, they would have to rely on their own imagination or cultural experiences to form a more detailed characterisation. This links with another point that Anstey makes in her article, that of “the availability of multiple readings and meanings for a variety of audiences” (Anstey 2002). As mentioned in chapter two, if an author/illustrator is trying to reach a culturally specific target audience, it is important for them to use hypotexts that the audience will have the knowledge and experience to decode. However, if ambiguities have been included that do not affect the basic storyline, then these can add vibrancy to a text by offering multiple readings.

This vibrancy can also be enhanced by “a pastiche of illustrative styles, which require the reader to employ a range of knowledge and grammars to read [them]” (Anstey 2002).

In all of my books I have combined the techniques of linocut, monoprint and collage. As linocut has historically been used to teach art in community centres and schools in South Africa, the assumption could be made that a large portion of the black population would be familiar with the medium. Collage is used to decorate the interiors of township houses and monoprint resembles a basic drawing technique. However, because picture books are aimed at such a young target audience, I could not rely on a historical knowledge of the media but had to focus instead on how the media could convey the narrative in a simple and understandable way without losing any of their aesthetic appeal. To quote Anne Pellowski, “relief printing provides an exciting and vibrant medium for pre-literate children and research shows that ‘young children, having their first exposure to visual material in a print format seem to be able to understand the content best in illustrative material that uses flat, primary colours and firmly defined lines” (Pellowski 1980:49). Collage, especially when using organic matter like leaves and grass, is a simple printing technique that offers a real-life object in the place of an illustrated representation, which is therefore easily identifiable. Monoprint resembles crayon drawing, which pre-school children would relate well to as it is often the medium that they use to make drawings.

The notion of literacy is no longer just about being able to read verbal texts, especially when dealing with a postmodern picture book in which the visual text carries as much importance as the verbal text. To quote Anstey, “the development of different relationships between the written and illustrative text is ... an important feature of the postmodern picture book” (Anstey 2002). This contemporary understanding of literacy is called ‘multiliteracy’<sup>61</sup> and the authors of the term contend that, “the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world

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<sup>61</sup> Multiliteracy is a term coined by the New London Group, a group of educators (from Australia, the USA and Great Britain) who met in New London, New Hampshire, USA in September 1994 to discuss the state of literacy pedagogy (New London Group 1996:[http://wwwstatic.kern.org/filer/blogWrite44ManilaWebsite/paul/articles/A\\_Pedagogy\\_of\\_Multiliteracies\\_Designing\\_Social\\_Futures.htm](http://wwwstatic.kern.org/filer/blogWrite44ManilaWebsite/paul/articles/A_Pedagogy_of_Multiliteracies_Designing_Social_Futures.htm)).



today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches” (New London Group 1996).

The New London Group identified two main issues that demonstrate the importance of multiliteracy. The first issue highlights the necessity of communication between other cultures and languages due to globalisation. The second deals with how technology and multimedia has changed the way that people communicate. As educators, the New London Group are obviously concerned about the pedagogical aspects of literacy, but as a degree of pedagogy is unavoidable in picture books, it is still important to keep in mind how they may be used to enhance multiliteracy.

In *Pumla and the chickens* and *The gold seed*, an English translation of the verbal text has been included on the back endpaper. When asked if this was something that educators would be able to use, Ms Mbambani from St Anne’s Pre-primary School responded that, “that would be great to be able to read it to them in isiXhosa and English. For instance, one day you do it in isiXhosa and next day in English. It makes them think about the meaning of the words, for example, *uzakupheka* means to cook” (interview with Colleen Mbambani, Port Elizabeth, 7 August, 2008).

The issue of technology and multimedia presents a bit more of a challenge, especially within the context of producing picture books in the Eastern Cape. It is possible to access interactive picture books online, although these often require a fast Internet connection ([www.magickeys.com/books/](http://www.magickeys.com/books/)). However, the majority of pre-schoolers in the Eastern Cape do not have access to computers and some communities do not even have access to electricity. Although interactive CD-Roms<sup>62</sup> that do not require an Internet connection may provide a solution in some areas of the Eastern Cape, they are still costly to produce.

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<sup>62</sup> Initially I had hoped to include a CD-Rom as part of the practical component of my thesis. However, there are so many economic and logistical factors that one has to consider, that I was eventually forced to concede that it was beyond the scope of this thesis.

## Affordable picture books

Pellowski suggests that illustration courses in third world countries should emphasise the hand production of books and materials, through block-printing, paper-making and possibly even screen-printing (Pellowski 1980:116). Linocut and woodcut provide the perfect media for the hand production of books, as they do not require expensive equipment, can produce multiple copies of the same image and, as discussed previously in this chapter, provide a good solution for to problem of creating a fully integrated text, as the verbal and visual text can be carved on the same block.

Colour is another important aspect of children's picture books. In my books, I chose to limit my palette to one colour as a way of addressing economic concerns. To quote the Brazilian illustrator, Gian Calvi, "the number of colours does not appear to me to be significant. More essential is the quality of the images and their appeal. To lower production costs, we should try to stimulate the use of one- and two-colour illustrations, but of the highest possible quality" (Pellowski 1980:72). Within an African context, Meshack Asare<sup>63</sup>, an illustrator from Ghana, believes that "the most effective and appealing illustrations have not always been in full colour. Creative use of monochromatic media, utilizing textures and good design sense, have achieved as much success as full-colour illustrations. There is a timelessness about them that is hard to attain with many colours" (Pellowski 1980: 71-72). The use of a good design sense and textures can be seen in *Tiger on a tree*, although Ravishankar and Biswas have chosen to use a limited palette purely for aesthetic reasons as their books are not cheap and sell for between 150 Rupees and 350 Rupees in India<sup>64</sup> (Ravishankar 2007).

However, when testing my book at St Anne's Pre-primary School, I discovered that Colleen Mbambani did not believe that the lack of colour could be compensated for by good design and the use of textures. In her interview she stated, "colour, colour and more

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<sup>63</sup> Illustrator, Ghana Publishing Corporation, Ghana

<sup>64</sup> While this only works out to R26 – R61 in South Africa, when one takes into account that 44% of the Indian population lives on less than R7.00 per day, R26 becomes a lot to spend on a 'luxury' item like a picture book (2003: [http://cee45q.stanford.edu/2003/briefing\\_book/india.html](http://cee45q.stanford.edu/2003/briefing_book/india.html)).

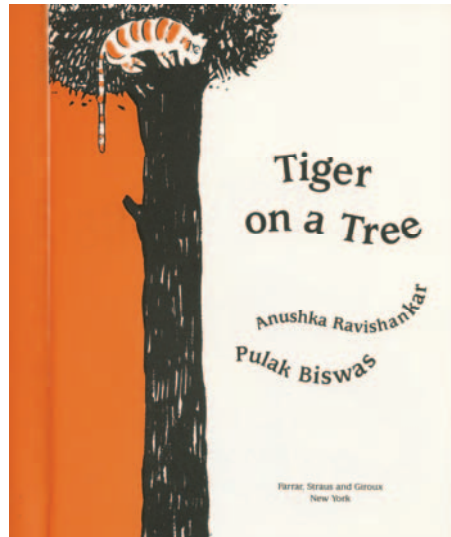
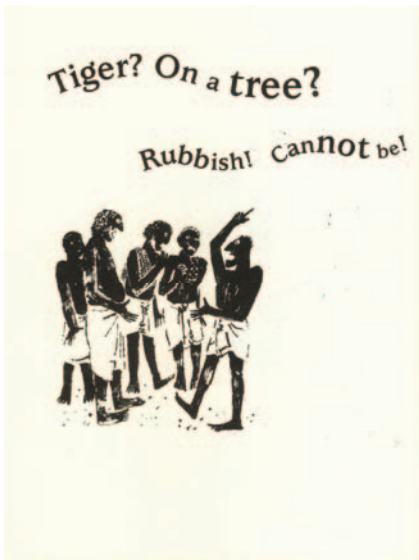
colour, that's what they want. I can't express it more than this. Black and white does not do for them. Remember the age: 3-6 years. [It is] a different case when it comes to older children. So, yes, colour is a must" (interview with Colleen Mbambani, Port Elizabeth, 7 August, 2008). This raises a serious issue: how can one use only one colour, maintain the aesthetically pleasing look of the illustration and yet satisfy a pre-school child? A possible solution can be found in John Lawrence's woodcut illustrations for *This Little Chick* and *Tiny's Big Adventure*. In both of these stories, he has used a warm yellow for the background and then by layering the colour with the black textures of the woodcut, he has created a variety of tonal variations. In *Tiny's Big Adventure*, instead of printing the relief illustrations in black, he has used a greyish blue, which changes in tonality when it is placed alongside the yellow (see Figure 1.2). In areas, he has also textured the background, allowing white areas to come through, which softens the impact of the colour. I utilised this technique on the cover of *Pumla and the chickens* and more extensively in *The gold seed* and feel that it successfully adds a range of well integrated tones to the print (of one colour), without looking flat or forced. To quote MacCann and Richard, "it is important that colour is used as an inherent part of the illustration rather than as a page filler" (MacCann and Richard 1973:35).

If used in an imaginative and technically skilled way, relief media like linocut and woodcut can offer all the advantages of other illustration media, along with the added advantage of being economically viable. By offering the option of integrating text and image within the same medium, counterpoints can be produced which enhance the ambiguity of the text and encourage reader interaction in determining meaning. The linear or textured qualities of relief media provide an integral way of depicting time and movement, not only in the process of carving, but in the trace material that is left behind. By using the compositional structures of past relief narratives to inform contemporary picture books, illustrators and authors can disrupt the reader's expectations by requiring that they read the book in a different way. The crisp lines of linocut or woodcut can be altered by combining them with other simple relief media such as collage and monoprint, thereby creating a pastiche of illustrative styles. All these elements result in a picture books which are vibrant and challenging to read, eliciting multiple readings and

meanings and providing a stimulating and enjoyable reading experience, hopefully for a price that makes picture books equally affordable to all income groups.



**Figure 4.1** (a) (top left) Illustration by Pulak Biswas in Anushka Ravishankar, *Tiger on a tree* (2004), p3. Collection: private. (b) (bottom left) Illustration by Pulak Biswas in Anushka Ravishankar, *Tiger on a tree* (2004), p9.



**Figure 4.2** (a) (top left) Illustration by Pulak Biswas in Anushka Ravishankar, *Tiger on a tree* (2004), p19. Collection: private. (b) (bottom left) Title page illustration by Pulak Biswas in Anushka Ravishankar, *Tiger on a tree* (2004).



**Figure 4.3** (above) Illustration by Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p1. Linocut, collage and monoprint, 40 x 20cm. Collection: Artist.



**Figure 4.4** (above) John Muafangejo, *Lonely man, man of man* (1974). Linocut, 47.9 x 45.4cm. (Levinson 1992:91)



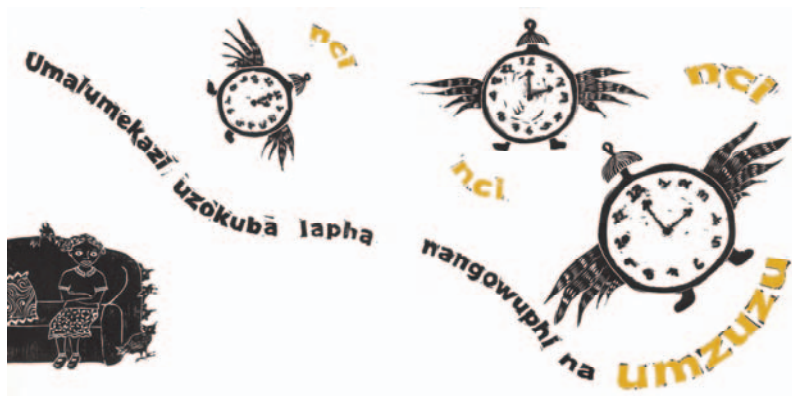
**Figure 4.5** (above right) John Muafangejo, *Men are working in town. They are working in mine* (1981). Linocut, 59.7 x 41.7cm. (Levinson 1992:190)





**Figure 4.6** (above left) John Muafangejo, *S. Africa soldiers at north of Namibia* (1987). Linocut, 41.1 x 73.4cm. (Levinson 1992:276)

**Figure 4.7** (above right) Azaria Mbatha, *The revelation of St. John* (1965). Linocut. (Durban Art Gallery 1998:43)



**Figure 4.8(a)** (top left) Illustration by Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p9. Linocut, collage and monoprint, 40 x 20cm. Collection: Artist.



**(b)** (bottom left) Illustration by Shelley Johnson, *Pumla and the chickens* (2008), p2.





**Figure 4.9** (above) John Muafangejo, *The death of Chief Phillimon Elifas* (1975). Linocut, 69.2 x 39cm. (Levinson 1992:130)

**Figure 4.10** (above right) John Muafangejo, *I wish you well on your way* (1986). Linocut, 64.8 x 26.5cm. (Levinson 1992:262)



**Figure 4.11** (left) Azaria Mbatha, *Flight into Egypt* (1965). Linocut, 39.9 x 26.7cm. (Durban Art Gallery 1998:111)



**Figure 4.12** (left) John Muafangejo, *Death of Chief Mandume* (1971). Linocut, 61 x 43cm. (Levinson 1998:61).

## CONCLUSION

Linocut and woodcut have a long history of use in children's book illustration in Europe, America and the Far East and yet in South Africa, it is rare to find the medium used. This seems strange if viewed in line with the important role that relief printmaking has played in the development of the narrative in black art in South Africa. Okwui Enwezor states that, "printmaking remains one of the most resiliently available expressive tools for many artists working today" (cited in Geers 1997:73).

What began as an economical form of craft in missionary schools and community centres, became a tool for the expression of social and political views at a time when these were being suppressed by the apartheid government. Craft centres like Rorke's Drift, which were administered on a 'top-down', paternalistic basis seemed to be colluding with "the oppression of the native population", as described by Monika Fluderick in relation to post-colonial narratology, in that they were never able to hand the reins of the centres over to the communities which they served, and yet ended up "undermining this [oppressive] ideology" by providing the skills and an environment that empowered artists to reassess the paternalistic narratives that had been imposed on them and recontextualise them to reflect their own social and political concerns (Phelan and Rabinowitz 2005:45). What had seemed to Peder Gowenius at Rorke's Drift like didactic regurgitations of biblical narratives turned out to be an inventive way of sending out a political message in a subversive way by using codes that were culturally accessible to black communities and yet did not fall foul of apartheid censorship.

By initiating a conversation on the idea of *bildspråk* methodology, promoted by Gowenius within relief printing, and with the tradition of oral storytelling in black communities, it seems natural that the artworks produced would have a strong narrative content. To quote M Currie, "narrative is ubiquitous in the contemporary world, in fact so common place that it would be difficult to think about ideological issues and culture forms without encountering it ... culture not only contains narrative but is contained by narrative in the sense that the idea of culture, either in general or particular, is a narrative"

(Currie 1998:96). The one area of narrative that still does not really ‘contain’ or reflect the culture of its community is that of children’s picture books. Owing to economic concerns and a paternalistic and didactic stance which is often privileged at the expense of reader enjoyment, picture books in South Africa do not always offer the reader a reflection of their own environment or characters that they can relate to. To cite a question posed by Anne Pellowski, “how does one write well for [children in developing countries], satisfying their needs for emotional fulfilment, entertainment, information, sense of identity (personal, social and national) and any other needs that may have been met by oral literature?” (Pellowski 1980:34)

In chapter two I used oral story telling as a reference to provide clues as to how the culturally relevant narratives in picture books could elicit greater reader interaction. By analyzing *Nongqawuse’s Prophecy*, *Tales of the trickster boy* and my own books within a narratological structure, highlighting key elements like setting, characterisation, narrative perspective and intertextuality, I was able to discern that, if the reader is invited into the performance of the text, in the same way that the audience participates in the process of oral storytelling, then the text opens up to multiple interpretations and becomes more dynamic and fun to read.

This can be achieved by offering the visual or verbal text (or both) from a child’s perspective and minimising the didactic element of an adult narrator and providing settings that children not only relate to, but that offer enough gaps or ambiguities to allow them to use their imagination to build on what has been presented to them. Characters should be both typical and diverse, so that children can see themselves in them, but also understand how to interact with and accept people from other cultures or environments. The author/illustrator should also understand how to use the possible intertextual references of their target audience to allow the text to function on a multitude of levels, based on a multitude of reader interpretations. By introducing Barthes’ concept of ‘play’ into the narrative rather than providing a consumptive text that provides no reader interaction, narratives becomes more vibrant.



In chapter two, I also considered the importance of the teacher/caregiver role in exposing pre-school readers to picture books in the first place, usually within an educational environment. To quote Eve Bearne, “in this aspect of children’s reading experience, particularly it seems that there is a significant gap between newly emerging views of the importance of playful texts to the development of literacy and the traditional anxieties associated with how best to help children become readers”. She goes on to say that, “this is often the result of ‘target-based’ teaching, which does not allow time for ‘pleasure’ reading and that parents often do not see its value as ‘real reading’” (Bearne 2000:146). I had originally envisioned removing the pedagogic aspects from my picture books altogether but realised that this was impossible, as by reading the book within a pedagogical environment, the teacher/caregiver comes with pedagogic expectations that are invariably transferred into their understanding of the narrative. In order to create books that are both appealing to adults as well as children, it seems that it is acceptable for narratives to contain a certain degree of pedagogic content, as long as this is not privileged over the entertainment aspects of the narrative. This reflects the ideals of oral story telling which, according to Pellowski, “provides a highly prized entertainment value in addition to the moral and social values it was intended to convey” (Pellowski 1980:34).

In chapter three, I looked at how using the relief media of woodcut and linocut could promote the production of good quality picture books that, again, enhanced reader interaction and provided a vibrant reading experience. By placing this analysis within the narratological structures of counterpoint, time and movement and modality and mimesis, I looked at how the inherent qualities of the medium, along with how the historical use of the medium as an art form in South Africa, could inform its use in creating fully integrated illustrations. The concept of counterpointing emphasises the need to combine verbal and visual texts in such a way that they complement each other and yet provide ambiguities which allow play within the narrative. Nikolajeva and Scott cite John Stephens as saying that counterpoint offers the “capacity to construct and exploit a contradiction between text and picture so that the two complement one another and together produce a story and a significance that depend on their differences from each

other” (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:30). Relief printing provides a good format for integrating text and image within the same medium and the lettering is not only easy for pre-school children to read but by looking ‘hand-made’ it minimises their anxieties about having to tackle text as a form of pedagogy.

In *Illustrations in children’s books*, Patricia Cianciolo claims that, “children respond to monochrome because the figures stand-out and express action and vitality” (Cianciolo 1979:22). This vitality and action is well represented by the relief medium, not only in the process of carving but also in the trace that it leaves behind, allowing for a vibrant depiction of time and movement without necessarily having to use the graphic codes that may be difficult for children’s to interpret if they have not been exposed to them before. Modality and mimesis in picture books allow for the narrative to move between varying levels of reality and fantasy, creating ambiguities in meaning which allow for multiple interpretations. By using split narratives and continuous narratives, fine art relief printing provides solutions for creating varying levels of modality within a single picture plane. The postmodern aspects of picture books also provide an opportunity for the relief medium to disrupt the way that a reader approaches the picture book as an object by using framing, the unconventional ways of reading the narrative present in fine art relief printing, self-referential techniques like metafiction and a pastiche of illustrative styles.

In *Pumla and the chickens* and *The gold seed*, I have endeavoured to consider all the opportunities that picture books provide in order to create vibrant and entertaining books. However, it is very difficult to gauge what children would choose to read if they were given a choice, especially in an environment where they have no real choice. When Anne Pellowski asked illustrators in various African countries how they tested their books, most responded that they approached neighbouring children or local community-run crèches, once again highlighting the importance of community-based initiatives (Pellowski 1980:26-30). Accordingly, she states that, “testing has usually involved what children are able to read, rather than what they wish to read, perhaps due to the difficulty of testing intangibles such as imaginative development or the transference of fantasy and curiosity into scientific inquiry” (Pellowski 1980:24).

Despite this difficulty, I was satisfied with the research conducted at St Anne's Pre-primary School, as it highlighted both the positive and negative aspects of *Pumla and the chickens* and brought to light a few important concerns, like finding the right 'level' for pre-school children and how to achieve a greater integration of colour, both of which I have tried to address when creating *The gold seed*.

I believe that by creating books within a community environment, there is far greater scope for ensuring that the narratives are culturally relevant. Based on its historical premise in South Africa and economic viability, relief printing provides the perfect medium for the development of picture book illustration. Organisations like Illusafrica prove that it is possible to run training programmes which are community based without creating a huge financial burden and which then offer the opportunity for a workshop project to offer some form of financial gain if the book that they produce is published. Maxim Gorky, the famous Russian author, emphasised that books which are produced in economically challenged areas must "appeal to children not through the lowering of literary standards, but through consummate craftsmanship" (cited in Pellowski 1980:36). A centre like Egazini proves that consummate craftsmanship is still evident, not only in the technical aspects of the printing process but also in the development of culturally relevant narratives. Whereas oral storytelling traditions may be dying out in many communities, picture books not only offer the opportunity to reignite this dying genre but also to provide an alternate form of storytelling which has the potential to empower communities through the use of relief printing techniques to produce books for economic gain. In this way, the *iintsomi* is not ending, "*phela phela ngantsomi*"... it is just beginning, "*kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi*".



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## **ADDENDUM A: Interview with Colleen Mbambani**

7 August 2008

St Anne's pre-primary school

Port Elizabeth

Colleen Mbambani: the principle of St Anne's and the teacher responsible for the reading of 'Pumla and the chickens'

Class: 20 children aged 3 – 6

### **Interview**

**Shelley:** Did you like the book and if so, why?

**Colleen:** Yes it takes me wayback where I grew up in King William's Town's rural area called EMDIZENI. The setting of the story shows a simple way of life. The kindness and respect portrayed e.g. cooking your aunt's favourite meal 'isityu'. This shows people in the olden days were giving even if they will give you their last thing. Family ties are observed in this story.

**Shelley:** Is it the type of book that you would choose to read to the children?

**Colleen:** I would definitely choose to read them so that they understand how people in the olden days used to live. That would encourage them to respect and know their culture and not to feel inferior about it.

**Shelley:** Do you think that the chickens were easy enough for this age group to find?

**Colleen:** Not easy enough to find, definitely. I also struggled to find the fifth one.

**Shelley:** What type of stories do the children like to read or be told?

**Colleen:** They enjoy magical stories like the ‘Magic Porridge Story’ and animal stories like ‘The musicians of Bremen’.

**Shelley:** Where does the school obtain most of its books from?

**Colleen:** Mostly from donations. People phone and pop in to donate anything from books to clothing and toys.

**Shelley:** Do you have a library that the children have access to all day or do they have a special ‘story-time’?

**Colleen:** There is a special book time, ‘story reading time’. When they finished with their creative writing I put piles of books on the carpet for them to look at.

**Shelley:** How important is the educational aspect when choosing books?

**Colleen:** It is very important to choose books related to their themes. In a story there has to be a lesson learned out of it.

**Shelley:** Is the limited colour use in ‘Pumla and the chickens’ a problem or wouldn’t it really matter if the book was affordable?

**Colleen:** Colour, colour, more colour, that’s what they want. I can’t express it more than this. Black and white does not do for them. Remember the age: 3-6 years. It’s a different case when it comes to older children. So, yes, colour is a must.

**Shelley:** Would it be better if the book had an English translation at the back or doesn’t it matter with such young children?

**Colleen:** That would be great to be able to read it to them in isiXhosa and English. For

instance one day you do it in isiXhosa and next day in English. It makes them think about the meaning of the words e.g. uzakupheka means to cook.

**Shelley:** Thank you very much for your time. It was really helpful for me to watch you reading the story to the children.

**Colleen:** Thank you so much for everything and for visiting us.

**Questions addressed to learners:**

Who liked the book and why?

Half of the class liked it. Half were not sure if they liked it or not. Both groups couldn't tell why they liked it or not.

What is your favourite animal?

The majority said zebra, elephant, dog, kudu, and lion

## **ADDENDUM B: Feedback report from CM Pretorius, a former Department Chief Education Officer in the Eastern Cape.**

Mr Pretorius attended the reading of 'Pumla and the chickens' at St Anne's Pre-primary school, 7 August 2008

### **Presentation Evaluation:**

Educator: Mrs Mbambani was well prepared and conversant with the material provided  
Presented the material in isiXhosa

Learners: Learners responded to the questions set by Educator as a group and individuals

Learner response:

- The learners reacted enthusiastically to the initial introduction by the Educator
- The boys were far more enthusiastic than the girls
- Questions posed as a group found half the class responding
- Questions posed to individuals indicated that they were conversant with the contents and understood that they could look for the chickens
- It was clear that some of the hidden chickens were difficult to identify and find
- Appreciation was shown by the applauding and clapping of hands when an individual eventually found the hidden chicken.
- It was clear that the learners were more interested in the visual impact than the text as their vocabulary had not been developed to this advanced stage. (Maybe the target audience should be an older age group).
- The Educator used the story to emphasise principles, morals and also integrated a lesson based on multi-numbered counting and observation.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that children of this age are particularly orientated to the impact of colour.

The educational impact of the interpretation of the story boards greatly depends on the interpretation of the Educator. In this case the Educator did a magnificent presentation.

Although the picture book was well received, it is clear that in some pages the chickens need to be larger in size.

## **ADDENDUM C: Interview with Ethna Frankenfeld**

Head of Fine Art Printmaking, Nelson Mandela Metropole University (NMMU)

Correspondence by email – 02/06/2008

**Shelley:** Do you still teach linocut printmaking at NMMU?

**Ethna:** Yes, we do. I do it at first year level in workshop format. I set the brief and work in collaboration with the first year lecturer who has some printmaking experience – trained at Rhodes! It's a teaser to get them hooked and I work hard at making the workshops interesting – it has paid off. I have 15 second year Printmakers! In 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year it's very much like if you enjoyed the process in 1<sup>st</sup> year then let's look at it again – who has worked in that medium and how have they used the technique to convey their concepts? How can you refine your cutting technique? As with all printmaking processes/techniques these days, I use them as a way to access ideas and to work with concepts. The luxury of exploring the technique for its own sake is not possible – the print is great – but what does it mean? is the question all the external moderators and examiners ask – and so do we!

**Shelley:** Where do you buy the lino from and what does it cost?

**Ethna:** We don't use traditional lino (too expensive), we use supaflex linoleum – the stuff people put on floors. It's thin and harder – and more difficult to carve unless you warm it in the sun or on a warm stove top – then the tools slide through like butter. The advantage is that your line is very refined and subtle – more like wood engraving. You can score it and burn it and sandpaper it and run it through the press to imprint a mechanical texture onto it etc. The downside is that the tools get blunt very quickly and the surface wears down with each successive print.

**Shelley:** What percentage of your printmaking students are black?

**Ethna:** In a class of 15 second year printmaking students there are 5 black students. In a class of 5 third year printmaking students, 1 is black. In my 4<sup>th</sup> year group of 6, 2 are black.

**Shelley:** Do you feel that the black students have a better aptitude for linocut and if so, why? Is it because they've been exposed to lino (carving) before?

**Ethna:** A lot has been written about this although I can't point you to a specific text offhand. Yes, I suppose it has to do with the strong tradition of carving – will pick up on this question later.

**Shelley:** What sort of imagery do the black students generally choose to depict (in any printing medium)? Has there been a move away from traditional landscape/cultural imagery? Do you influence what imagery they choose to depict at all?

**Ethna:** .....to generalise I would say that most of our black students have difficulty with abstract. They still want their work to tell a story and for the forms to be recognised. Having said that, they do come up with the most curious compositional arrangements! At the moment I have two 4<sup>th</sup> year students investigating social issues. Both are creating graphic novels – one about the taxi industry and one about garbage in the townships. I have a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student working with the issue of the death penalty – he is very interesting because he started out making very crude graphic images of hanging, death and torture and is now venturing into the abstract, trying to make images about the darkness he sees in Africa – he is appalled at all these horrific xenophobic killings. So I guess I'm answering your next question too! I hope that I don't change or influence their choice of imagery too much – I challenge them to go beyond the surface, to stretch their imagination and to question their motives. I stress the importance of hearing their own voice, of being original.



## **ADDENDUM D: Interview with Professor Dominic Thorburn**

Head of Fine Art Printmaking, Rhodes University  
Personal interview, Grahamstown, 5 August 2008

*This is not a direct transcription but an edited compilation of notes made during the interview.*

**Shelley:** What happened to the Dakawa Centre? Is it still open?

**Dominic:** It closed down a few years ago. All the facilities are still intact but nobody has ever been able to get it reopened, so it's become a white elephant. It was always more of a political vehicle than an art project. The ANC was very interested in showing their support of community arts and had received a grant from a Swedish foundation. They brought in Malin Sellman to set it up – she used to work at Rorke's Drift. Giselle Bailey, a Rhodes student, was also very involved in teaching and setting up workshops. She did her thesis on the influence of the Swedish teaching methods on printmaking. The centre was managed by a woman who was head of the ANC Woman's League in the area - I'm not sure if she had any art experience. She was just a manager I think. However, the political agenda began to overshadow the artistic achievements, the Swedes pulled their funding because of bad management, the ANC couldn't fund it on their own and the project closed down. They also made the mistake of paying everyone who worked there, even artists who were just using the studio – with such a huge outlay of salaries there was no way that they could keep going without funding. This caused a lot of resentment amongst the local artists and it is still a contentious topic with them. Many of the artists ended up at the Egazini Centre.

**Shelley:** Why did the government and the Swedish Foundation decide to locate Dakawa in Grahamstown? Was it because of the proximity of the university?

**Dominic:** It may have been one of the reasons but I think that it was mainly because they felt that the area presented the greatest need. They were probably also hoping to use the Grahamstown Arts Festival as a way to sell the work produced there.

**Shelley:** Does Fort Hare University support any local art initiatives?

**Dominic:** I don't think so. Their art department is quite run down at the moment. I was showing some visitors around there about two years ago and they couldn't even find the key to the studio.

**Shelley:** What about their art collection?

**Dominic:** It's not properly catalogued and I think that a lot of it has been 'misplaced'. They also have the most amazing collection of African artefacts – again it is in total disarray. If somebody came in and sorted it out, catalogued it and put it on exhibit, it would be one of the best collections in Africa and would actually draw tourists to the area.

**Shelley:** What community art projects does Rhodes University run?

**Dominic:** In 2006 we started the Grahamstown Art Project. Students from the Fine Art Department taught art to high school pupils, included printmaking, sculpture, drawing and photography. In 2007 it was expanded to form 2 groups, senior and junior and we moved the classes from the Methodist Church to Carinus Art School, where the students have access to better equipped studios. Before this project, school children in the East Grahamstown area (consists mostly of townships) had almost no exposure to art.

We established the Egazini Outreach Project in 2000. We decided to use the Battle of Grahamstown as the theme for the project because it was a key event in the power shift in the area – it was the battle that gave the British total

control over Grahamstown and the Xhosa people were forced to relocate beyond the Keiskamma River. The battlefield is still called Egazini today – place of blood.

**Shelley:** I read that Prof. Julia Wells also incorporated oral traditions into the project.

**Dominic:** Yes, she chose four men from the community, who were interested in history and encouraged them to present the battle from an African point of view. They were shown all the written documentation that exists about the battle but they also spoke to some elderly people in the township and added stories that hadn't been written down before. At a workshop, these findings were discussed with the artists, who then continued the 'conversation' in their work.

**Shelley:** Were the artists who participated all familiar with the printing techniques?

**Dominic:** Some were but we started with technical training in the linocut medium. The group included white students and artists, black artists, high school students and women from a local craft group.

**Shelley:** How much influence did you have in what they chose to depict and how they went about it?

**Dominic:** Giselle Baillie was a lot more involved in that phase than I was but we offered technical assistance and commented on design where necessary. We didn't interfere in what the group chose to depict.

**Shelley:** Was the exhibition well received?

**Dominic:** It was very well received at the Grahamstown Festival and we received invitations to take the exhibition to London, Madrid and Iceland. The AVA in Cape Town also hosted the exhibition – you should ask Estelle about that.

**Shelley:** How is the Egazini Centre run now?

**Dominic:** It is run by the artists, although Linga Dika seems to be the main organiser at the moment. They are expected to give 15% of their sales to the Centre and this is used for up-keep and materials. They also have an exhibition hall, a shop and an interpretation centre. Occasionally they run workshops for the community, although it's mostly the tourist trade that keeps them going.

**Shelley:** Do you find that the tourist trade influences what they produce?

**Dominic:** Some artists will repeat themes in their work if they prove popular – this is hard to avoid considering that they are reliant on sales to make a living. However, the work is quite diverse and the artists have moved from the 'Battle of Grahamstown' theme to subject matter which depicts their local environment.

**Shelley:** Why was Egazini more successful than Dakawa?

**Dominic:** Egazini is run by the artists. There is no political agenda and whether or not they are successful is entirely in their hands.

**Shelley:** In the paper that you submitted for the Impact conference in 2001, you wrote about the democratic nature of the printing medium – can you expand on this please?

**Dominic:** The studio environment itself encourages collaboration between the artists – they discuss their work, share techniques and often work on the same projects. The multiplicity of the print makes the images more accessible to the public, both because of the ease of distribution and the fact that it can be affordable to the average art buyer. It also exists both as 'fine art' and a conduit of popular

culture.

**Shelley:** How much do you think that Rorke's Drift has influenced printmaking in South Africa today?

**Dominic:** They have had a big influence on printmaking, mostly through the training of a group of artists who then took their skills to other community centres and teaching facilities around the country. There's a lot of talk about a Rorke's Drift style, which was probably enhanced by the book by Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs. It's the only really complete book about Rorke's Drift, it has come to represent a new sort of 'truth' about the centre. Giselle Baillie did her thesis on the influence of Swedish training methods on printmaking in South Africa. She could probably tell you more about it.

**Shelley:** What do you think about the idea of developing children's picture books within a similar community set-up as Egazini?

**Dominic:** I think that useful books for children, like basic instruction books for how to plant a maize plant or how to learn ABC's using imagery which is locally relevant could work. It's probably something that would be more interesting to the women than to the men. I don't think that the men see anything that relates to children as being part of their job.

## **ADDENDUM E: Interview with Jeff Rankin**

Head of Fine Art, Walter Sisulu University, East London

Interview by e-mail, 30 September 2008

**Shelley:** Was it your choice to illustrate the book using woodcut or did  
The publisher request that you use the medium?

**Jeff:** It was my suggestion which the publisher agreed with.

**Shelley:** If it was your choice, why did you feel that it would be the best medium to  
illustrate the story?

**Jeff:** Having always enjoyed the strong character of woodcut, I felt that it had not been  
deservedly exploited as an illustration medium. This story did not preclude this  
exploitation for any reason.

**Shelley:** Was the fact that only the cover is in colour an economic or aesthetic choice?

**Jeff:** Economic I recall: publishers had prescribed no colour inside.

**Shelley:** Was the cover illustration originally printed in black and white? Was the colour  
added by you or by designers at the publishing company?

**Jeff:** I printed the woodcut then painted the colour by hand before giving it to them.

**Shelley:** If the colours were chosen by you, do they have any symbolic meaning?

**Jeff:** No, they just needed to work with the image.

**Shelley:** Did the publishers give you a brief about what to illustrate or were you free to

interpret the text in any way that you chose?

**Jeff:** I was left quite free to select what to illustrate, with a limit on total quantity.

**Shelley:** Did the writer have any input into the illustrations?

**Jeff:** I seem to remember feedback via the publisher.

**Shelley:** What were your references for the imagery? Had you spent a lot of time in that part of the Eastern Cape when you illustrated the book or did you use other reference materials like books?

**Jeff:** I used printed reference material, wasn't greatly familiar with the area although I live here now.

**Shelley:** In the text, the bird on page 1 is described as a hoopoe and yet the bird that you have depicted is less specific - is there a reason for this?

**Jeff:** No - thought I was using accurate reference. But I'm no birdwatcher!

**Shelley:** Karen Press has presented the story in a post-colonial context - were you encouraged to reflect this in the illustrations?

**Jeff:** Yes, I worked with Sally Howes (editor at the publishers) & she understood the context and I think tried to be faithful to the author's intentions.

**Shelley:** Are the students that you teach interested in relief printing or is it perceived negatively and if so, why?

**Jeff:** I'm currently at WSU, a developing institution; woodcut fits well with the context of the art school, and is used very strongly by a few students.



**ADDENDUM F: Description of *Intliziyo yam ibuhlunga – My heart pains* by Violet Booï, as displayed on the wall of the Egazini Centre, Grahamstown, 5 August 2008**

**Violet Booï**

b. 1940

Masikkhule Women's Group Printmaking Development Project

**Intliziyo yam ibuhlunga – My heart pains**

Linocut on stained paper - Edition 15

After I was told the story of the escape of Makana and the Eastern Frontier Rebels from Robben Island, I had a dream which showed me what I must say in this picture.

In this dream I saw myself holding my heart, feeling the pain of being alone, crying, feeling pain which all the prisoners who were sent to Robben Island must have felt. They say that Makana was kept alone, and they also tell us that Robert Sobukwe and sometimes Mandela were kept alone, away from the other prisoners on Robben Island. They must have been very sad to be alone.

My own history as a woman alone, who has lived through injustice, feeling that there was nothing that I could do until now, makes me remember how people like Makana and Mandela were also alone in their own struggles on Robben Island.

So in this picture I show you how I as a woman feel history through my heart. And I also show you how memories of my own history and our bigger history are very important to me, something which I will pass on to my children and grandchildren so that they can know where we have come from. That is why I am running away from the man who is trying to steal my heart from me. I will always protect my memories.