

"Truth will out" (MM 167). "At last, we are writing ourselves into history" (RLH 143). "the records of the hearings of the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] are the repository of South African memory" (Nuttall/Coetzee 1). "the need to record, to thwart forgetfulness; to grasp at that truth which is not so much the opposite of the lie as of forgetting" (AT 625). "Sometimes a parenthesis can be more significant than the surrounding syntax. At the ... breaks the il ... the ... experier ... the

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André Brink's Voices of Truth

... 18; original italics). "the dreary binarities ... ism (one of whose apotheoses was the apartheid system)" (ISN 19). "stories are not lies but monuments to the search for a specifically human truth" (Ommundsen 106). "the silences of apartheid" (ISN 19). "Perhaps, in the final analysis, all art can really do is to help us formulate those questions on which our true survival as human beings depends (AIS 58). "societies, like individuals, cannot grow and mature unless they come to terms with the dark places – the silences – in themselves" (ISN 24). "the aim is to inscribe the memory of the past in its [South Africa's] vision of the future" (Nuttall/Coetzee 13). "In the suspension of disbelief the reader, after all, does not relinquish his/her faith in right and wrong, but finds him-/herself confronted with the text itself as choice: and each act of choice is inevitably informed by value systems" (ISN 22). "writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning" (Barthes 147). "truth is always relative" (Ommundsen 19). "herstory" (ISN 23). "the dangerous binarism of 'fact' and 'fiction'" (ISN 21). "the reality of living in time requires narrative reflection and [...] narrative reflection, in turn, opens the way toward a more comprehensive and expansive conception of truth itself" (Freeman 32). "all sense of identity is dissipated in the endless postponement and distancings of Derridean *différance*, and the very notion of 'historical origins,' of an Ur-text, of a reality behind the textualising processes of a self-inventing narrative, is left open-ended" (RC 233-4). "true stories about the world, in order to be 'true', must be self-conscious, must acknowledge the story-telling process" (Ommundsen 19). "At first sight the solution may appear to lie in compiling as many diverse narratives as possible so that the resulting jigsaw puzzle [...] would be as comprehensible as humanly attainable. But [...] there is the double bind that the kind of whole the exercise is aimed at can never be complete and that ultimately, like all narratives, this one must eventually be constructed around its own blind spots and silences" (SOH 37). "the big words that disguise reality: fatherland, national security, discipline, God..." (Julio Cortazar qtd. in WSS 173). "the ambiguity of language as text *and* subtext, or words *and* silence" (TN 116). "Is truth that closely related to identity? It must be. What you believe to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be" (Krog 149). "History hovers" (Issacson 290).

Shouting Against Silence:

André Brink's Voices of Truth

by

Shelley May Dixon

A thesis
submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington
in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in English Literature

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2002

On the Nature of Truth

'People do not follow the same direction, like water'
Zulu saying

Those who claim the monopoly of truth
 Blinded by their own discoveries of power,
 Curb the thrust of their own fierce vision.
 For there is not one eye over the universe
 But a seething nest of rays ever dividing and ever linking.
 The multiple creations do not invite disorder,
 Nor are the many languages the enemies of humankind.
 But the little tyrant must mould things into one body
 To control them and give them his single vision.
 Yet those who are truly great
 On whom time has bequeathed the gift of wisdom
 Know all truth must be born of seeing
 And all the various dances of humankind are beautiful
 They are enriched by the great songs of our planet.

Mazisi Kunene.

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Shelley Dixon
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Key to Abbreviated Titles Used for Brink's Oeuvre*

AF	"Afrikaners"
AIS	"The Arts in Society"
AR	"Assuming Responsibility"
AS	"After Soweto"
AT	<i>An Act of Terror: A Novel</i>
BD	"A Background to Dissidence"
CL	"Censorship and Literature"
CV	<i>A Chain of Voices</i>
DV	<i>Devil's Valley: A Novel</i>
DWS	<i>A Dry White Season</i>
EAW	"English and the Afrikaans Writer"
FP	"Foul Play"
HOI	"The Hour of the Idiots"
IHW	"The Intellectual and His World"
IS	<i>Imaginations of Sand</i>
ISN	"Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature"
IW	<i>An Instant in the Wind</i>
KA	"Die kuns is Aanstootlik" ("Art is Offensive")
LC	"Literature and Control"
LCO	"Literature as Cultural Opposition"
LD	<i>Looking on Darkness</i>
MGT	"Mahatma Gandhi Today"
MM	"Mapmakers"
NWO	'No Way Out': 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead' and the Dilemma of Political Drama in South Africa"
OC	<i>On the Contrary: Being the Life of a Famous Rebel, Soldier, Traveller, Explorer, Reader, Builder, Scribe, Latinist, Lover and Liar.</i>
OCA	"On Culture and Apartheid"
RC	"Reinventing a Continent"
RC	<i>Reinventing a Continent: Writing and Politics in South Africa.</i>
RLH	"Reflections on Literature and History"
RTR	"Reimagining the Real: English South African Fiction Now"
SAP	"South Africa: Postmodernism in Afrikaans & English Literature"
SJ	"Sentimental Journey"
SOH	"Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-Apartheid Narrative"
SV	"Speaking in Voices"
TSF	"Towards a Syncretic Future"
WAS	"Writing Against Silence"
WAW	"The Writer as Witch"
WP	<i>The Wall of the Plague</i>
WSS	"The Writer in a State of Siege"
WWW	"Writers and Writing in The World"

* In keeping with traditional annotation practices the abbreviated titles of book-length works have been italicised.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the notion of 'Truth' upheld by the South African writer André Brink and discusses his deconstruction of the processes of truth-making. I argue that Brink understands fixed narratives, or received 'truth', as constructed to the detriment of alternative narratives, resulting in their subjugation and eventual loss. In response to authoritative discourses, Brink advocates an ongoing and evolving series of challenging narratives which refuse the closure of narrative possibilities. He urges a constant process of *un-forgetting* and *re-membering*, a contestational activity that undermines the truth-claims of any oppressive group.

Three central texts have been chosen as exemplary of Brink's directive to contest fixed truth claims. The first of these, *Devil's Valley*, offers an opportunity to examine the novelistic (and often postmodernist) blurring of distinctions between binary oppositions such as 'fact' and 'fiction', 'past' and 'present', 'real' and 'unreal'. In undermining the ostensibly dichotomous nature of these pairings, Brink challenges the bases upon which prejudicial systems such as the Apartheid regime rely. In doing so, he reveals the constructions behind both prejudice and hegemonic discourses, and ultimately undermines these foundations. Similarly, *Imaginings of Sand* provides a means by which to further explore Brink's engagement with prejudice, and most specifically, with the patriarchal oppression of women. I suggest that Brink's female narratives, in which multiplicity and endless possibility are foregrounded, again contest the constraints imposed by a dominant discourse, offering alternative versions. My final textual examination focuses on *A Chain of Voices*, in which both the polyphonic narration and the thematic content exemplify the concerns discussed previously. Brink's usage of various imagery related to oppressive relationships, I claim, provides metaphors for the manner in which binary relationships are co-dependent, rather than dichotomous, undercutting the justifications associated with privileging certain narratives over others. Brink's Truth, I argue, involves an ongoing contestational process of narratorial imagining, a revisionary project central to both the prejudicial environment of Apartheid South Africa, in which much of Brink's work was written, and also to the larger context of prejudice in all its forms and geographical locations.

INTRODUCTION

BRINGING TO LIGHT "THE SHADOW-SIDE OF HISTORY"¹

I shall not, and will not, be silent.
(BD 15)

¹ (LD 48)

Narratology and the shadow side of history

History: story. Fact: fiction.
How strange that these pairs should still be experienced as opposites,
as dichotomies.
(RLH 137)

André Brink, in both his novels and his essays, demonstrates an obsessive concern with history and the manner in which it is rendered. He exhibits a particular interest in narratology,² the constructed nature of narrative, and its relationship to the creation of personal, communal and national identities. He notes that “within historiography itself there has been a move away from the approach of the past as a set of ‘data,’ a ‘reality behind the text,’ toward the open-ended perception of history itself as text and narrative” (RC 230). Further, he states:

the relationship between history and story, fact and fiction [...] can be one of opposition only if one accepts, rather naively, that in ‘history’ we have direct, unmediated access to the factual world of events (that is, if we believe that, in history, language becomes a transparent window through which one looks directly into ‘reality,’ whatever that might be), while in ‘fiction,’ in literature, the world is mediated, and reinvented, through the imagination, through language that draws attention to itself. (RLH 139)

In Brink’s opinion, historical narratives are to be recognised “as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (Hayden White 1978: 82 qtd. in RC 236). Similarly, in *Metafictions?*, Wenche Ommundsen notes that “[t]he history of the world, as we know it, is infused with fiction” (49) and further emphasises the relationship when she states: “[t]he very word ‘history’ in English contains within it its fictional counterpart ‘story’, and many languages do not mark the difference between the two” (49). Likewise, Brink records: “[i]t is significant that French, like other Romance languages, has but a single word for

² M. H. Abrahms notes that “[n]arratologists [...] do not treat a narrative in the traditional way, as a fictional representation of life, but as a systematic formal construction” (173).

both genres – *histoire*” (ISN 17). Further, he suggests that “[i]n the most literal sense of the word ‘history’ [...] coincides with ‘story’: it is shaped around notions of a beginning, middle, and end”, concluding that “[n]arrative lies at the heart of the very *process* we call history” (SOH 32; italics added). Thus, he argues, “story and history should not be read as choices in an either/or equation, but as markers on a scale” (ISN 17). History, therefore, is viewed not as a factual record of past events, but rather as a *constructed narrative* in which the (often unconscious) ordering, selection and exclusion of events influence the interpretation of the whole.³

Concomitant with the contemporary acknowledgement of “history’s urge towards story” (TN 77) is the recognition of the ideological assumptions inherent in traditional official and singular modes of historical record; a recognition that is particularly apt when considered in relation to Apartheid South Africa. Ommundsen notes that “history is interpretation, the past and the present are ideologically constructed according to the interests of particular individuals or groups” (53). J. M. Coetzee, Brink’s contemporary South African novelist, argues along similar lines, suggesting that “history is not reality; that history is a kind of discourse; [...] that, inevitably, in our culture, history will, with varying degrees of forcefulness, try to claim primacy, claim to be a master-form of discourse” (1988a: 4). The inherent danger each of the above writers recognise is that such master narratives may be, and often are, espoused as ‘truth’, and thus become self-fulfilling methods of control in which contradictory or alternative modes of belief are forcibly disallowed or devalued as ‘untrue’.

In Brink’s recognition of “the underlying ideological assumptions of history as a representation of the real” (RC 231) lies the basis of his concern with those excluded from traditional master narratives. Brink acknowledges that one’s personal sense of historical positioning, and therefore of identity, is based in large part upon a narrative of past events and thus those who are excluded from this

³ Jean-François Lyotard “defines the modern era as the era of the grand narratives. These understand human history as a collective progress through time to a specific goal, such as the maximum realisation of the human spirit, the creation of a free and just society or the perfect operation of society as an efficient economic machine” (Nick Mansfield 182). Postmodernism is often defined by the suspicion of such grand narratives and, in these terms, Brink’s attitude

communal narrative are consequently denied personal and collective identification with the 'history' asserted. Within his recognition of the links between the constructed nature of historical record and the maintenance of power is his awareness of "the shadow-side of history" (LD 48): that which has been neglected, forgotten, forbidden or ignored. The exploration and recovery of these 'shadowy' narratives forms the basis for much of Brink's oeuvre, in particular the three novels discussed primarily within this thesis: *Devil's Valley* (1998), *Imaginings of Sand* (1996) and *A Chain of Voices* (1982). In each of these novels, Brink probes the shadows of the past, exploring and critiquing the historical narratives of the Afrikaner, of women and of the non-white⁴ of South Africa. Consequently, this novelistic triad has been selected as representative of Brink's examination and reinvention of the narratives of these three groups, and of the thematic concerns which permeate the remainder of his oeuvre.

Brink's acknowledgement of the many levels and forms of prejudice and oppression in operation in South Africa and beyond has prompted me to reconsider the traditional focus on non-white South African oppression in discussions of liberal and protest literature of that country. In Brink's self-conscious defence of his position as a white male writer who treats issues of racial and gender oppression, I recognise my own 'white' positioning. Consequently, I have chosen to begin my discussion from this perspective, and to gradually increase the perspectival range over the course of the thesis. My discussion, therefore, commences with a consideration of the 'white' view of historical 'truth' found, defended and critiqued, in *Devil's Valley*. Following this, I expand the scope of the discussion by considering the 'white/female' view predominant in *Imaginings of Sand*. Finally, I extend the issues to include a discussion of *A*

towards history (as revisable, constructed narrative) can be understood as postmodernist.

⁴ The usage of politically correct terminology to describe the various racial and ethnic groups of South Africa is problematic. The labelling of different groups and the pairing of 'black' versus 'white' (or their various euphemisms) operates under a dichotomy contrary to the moral intent of both Brink's oeuvre and the scope of this thesis. Similarly, the usage of terms which denote an 'other' by describing that which is *not* (e.g. the usage of the term 'non-white') are also inherently problematic. Invariably, attempts made to create new and more positive terminology fail, as the new labels soon become tainted with the same negative connotations associated with the originals. Each term is thus inherently fraught with undesirable racial overtones. Therefore, the terms 'white' and 'non-white' will be utilised, with full cognisance of the problematic nature of each and, where appropriate, further distinctions will be made between various groups such as the 'indigenous' tribes and the 'Afrikaners'.

Chain of Voices, in which Brink attempts to include *all* views, white/non-white, male/female, master/slave. Interestingly, this ordering of the novels is non-chronological in terms of publication and yet, as will be discussed, the earliest novel, *A Chain of Voices*, encapsulates the range of issues explored within the two other texts, and within Brink's oeuvre as a whole. It is evident that themes of 'truth', from a variety of perspectives, permeate Brink's work.

Subjectivity and nationhood

I am, we are; we are, I am.
(AQ 36)

In a *re-appropriation* of history's 'fictionality', Brink utilises fictional techniques and mythologies to speak for those previously excluded and, in doing so, also reveals previously obscured elements of his own personal and national identity. He states:

I turn more and more in my writing toward the great oral traditions of South Africa's indigenous languages: their mythologies, their narrative patterns, their rhythmic structures. Only by acknowledging *all* my roots – not in terms of whiteness or blackness, but as a Euro-African - and by drawing sustenance, through them, from the soil on which I live, can my writing hope to be true both to my past and to the possibilities of my future. (TSF 220-1)

The exploration of historical narrative is thus linked to that of both personal and collective identity, a relationship commonly noted within both literature and critical commentary. [Floris Albertus] Van Jaarsveld,⁵ for example, is quoted by Brink as stating, "[w]hen people appeal to history, it means that questions about themselves are answered, i.e. that they are thinking about their nationality" (AF 85). Similarly, Susan Barton, the narrator of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, asks, "[h]ow can we live if we do not believe we know who we are, and who we have been?"

⁵ Brink fails to provide either a full name or a reference for the author of this quotation. It is probable that the person referred to is Floris Albertus Van Jaarsveld (1922 -), author of several South African histories including *Die Ontwaking van die Afrikaanse Nasionale Bewussyn* (*The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism*) and *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*.

(130). In *Rewriting the Self*, Mark Freeman notes that “[t]he idea of the self, as we have come to know it, and the idea of history are in fact mutually constitutive” (28), and in *Postcolonial Theory*, Leela Gandhi defines the relationship between ‘self’ and (collective) history in the following way:

‘[h]istory’ is the vehicle of rational self-consciousness through which the incomplete human spirit progressively acquires an improved sense of its own totality. In other words, ‘History’ generates the rational process through which the alienated essence of the individual citizen acquires a cohesive and reparative identity in the common life of the nation. (105)

In the opinion of each of these writers, self-identification is dependent upon a sense of belonging within an historical framework. Thus, elements of historical positioning such as ancestral ties, personal and national mythologies and memories play crucial roles in determining identity.

Othering

Our craft is all in reading the other:
gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled, the dark,
the buried, the feminine; alterities.
(J. M. Coetzee 1988b: 81)

For those excluded from the collective and (ostensibly) authoritative narratives of the past, however, traditional historical records provide little basis by which to explore personal or communal identity, or a collective notion of nationhood.⁶ Dominant discourses ensure uniformity that denies those labelled as ‘other’.⁷ The ‘self’/‘other’ dichotomy is central to the construction and maintenance of any exclusionary regime, including those of a racist or gender-based nature. Racist regimes such as Apartheid, for example, which literally

⁶ Clearly, the exclusionary consequences of unitary historical narratives also extend to many other groups beyond the scope of this thesis. Those considered sexually ‘other’, for example, have been traditionally excluded from the dominant historical narrative of heterosexuality.

⁷ In relation to the ‘self’ and ‘other’ relationship, Gayatri Chakravorty notes that during the era of European colonization, Europe paradoxically “consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as ‘Other’, even as it constituted them, for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets, into programmed near-images of that very sovereign self” (qtd. in Robert Young 17).

means “apartness” (Nelson Mandela, 1995: 127), are founded upon binary oppositions of an either/or nature.⁸ Thus, the non-white are cited as ‘other’ in relation to the Afrikaner; a dichotomous and exclusionary classification based solely upon skin colour that encapsulates the desire to maintain racial purity;⁹ hence, J. U. Jacobs’ definition of Apartheid as “alienation” (1989: 27). Brink notes, “[w]hat repels me in Afrikaner nationalism, as in any other, is the way in which it immediately defines an ‘us’ opposite a ‘them’” (AF 121). Within this ideological construct, alternative historical frameworks such as matriarchal¹⁰ or non-white narratives are subsumed by a white patriarchal model.¹¹

Brink’s fiction and criticism also demonstrate the manner in which both white and non-white women are positioned as ‘other’. His often feminist deconstruction of ideologies which discriminate on the basis of gender mirrors his critique of racism, citing each as founded upon arbitrarily imposed binary oppositions. He exhibits an awareness that in both racism and genderism, dichotomous categories ensure domination and subjugation of that deemed inferior. Antjie Krog, a South African poet and journalist, describes such domination and subjugation in her account of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission trials of 1994, *Country of My Skull*. In relation to women, she records the testimony of Sheila Masote, whose name is revealed only after she states, “I don’t seem to have an identity that belongs to me. I’m either Zeph Mothopeng’s daughter or Mike Masotes’s wife. But I feel I am me” (284).¹²

⁸ Brink’s critique of binary thinking extends to a suspicion of separatist nationalisms. He states, “the image of two opposing nationalisms may be a simplification, especially if it omits to explore the surprising amount of common ground between Afrikaners and Blacks. After all, both carry collective memories of a tribal, nomadic past: both have been shaped through struggles for independence, and both, in their acknowledgement that ‘land and community (are) inseparable’, share a profound allegiance to the physical and metaphysical presence of Africa” (TTD 45).

⁹ In binary thought such as this, the pairing is not one of equality, but rather endows one side of the pair with positive and desirable qualities, and the other, by consequence, with negative connotations. Notably, Léopold Sédar Senghor describes non-white Africans as the “negatives of the colonizers” (339), a common description which is extended in Brink’s *An Act of Terror*, in which symbolism related to photography and photographic-negatives comments on this negation of the ‘other’.

¹⁰ Brink literally sets up the maternal line and a chain of female voices in opposition to the patriarchal narratives usually in operation, particularly in his novel *Imaginations of Sand*, to be discussed further in chapter two.

¹¹ Notably, in Apartheid South Africa, the voices of the non-white majority were overwritten by the master narrative of the white minority.

¹² The desire for, and denial of, personal female identity, removed from male domination, is particularly relevant to my later discussion regarding the women of Devil’s Valley.

Positioned as ‘other’ in relation to the dominant male, women are thus dependent, for their societal roles and sense of identity, upon their male counterparts. The French feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva articulates the ‘otherness’ by which woman is defined when she states: “I [...] understand by ‘woman’ [...] that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies” (1974: 21). Similarly, Robert Young summarises Sigmund Freud’s “characterisation of femininity as the dark unexplored continent” (3) and records Freud’s belief that “within [the male’s] economy, she is the strangeness he likes to appropriate” (qtd. in Young 3).¹³ Thus, the act of ‘othering’ and the maintenance of binary oppositions is the framework upon which both racism and genderism operate.

In what follows, I argue that in response to racism and genderism, Brink attempts to undermine binary thought, opening up complexities and destroying “simplistic polarities” (IHW 203). His deconstruction of binaries reveals their arbitrarily constructed nature and foregrounds the interdependent relationships between binary terms or categories traditionally upheld as fixed dichotomies. In a blurring of the distinctions between various binary oppositions, Brink also undercuts the demarcations between ‘self’ and ‘other’. In “Literature as Cultural Opposition”, he notes: “[t]o learn to define oneself *only* with reference to the other (that is, as the *object* of the other rather than as its own *subject*) is to deny a whole dimension of existence” (200; original italics). He claims that self-knowledge is reliant upon *identification* with the ‘other’, as opposed to its subjectification.¹⁴ Thus, the ‘other’ is depicted as a “dark complement” (HOI 27)¹⁵ to the ‘self’, offering wholeness, through its appropriation, to an otherwise fragmented sense of selfhood. Identity, Brink suggests, is not merely individual, but also, intrinsically, collective. Relationships are therefore the basis upon which identification is

¹³ In what follows, Brink’s own fictional representation of women will be scrutinised and found to be problematic, undermining his attempts to give them voice. In his female characterisations he often slides into stereotypical representations of women as either virginal or sexual predators.

¹⁴ Similarly, in *Les Morales de l’histoire*, Tzvetan Todorov delineates the interrelationship between the identity of ‘self’ and ‘other’ when he states, “[t]he knowledge of the other is determined by my own identity. But this knowledge of the other in turn determines my knowledge of myself” (39).

¹⁵ The passage from which this term is taken, in which the “dark complement” refers to the basement beneath a house and symbolises the Freudian subconscious, will be discussed in the context of memory, in the chapter related to *Imaginings of Sand*.

formed, and are consequently foregrounded within Brink's texts. The symbolic confrontation of one's own prejudices and the recognition of 'self' in the 'other' is perhaps most powerfully exemplified in Brink's essay, "The Hour of the Idiots". He describes the town of Oudtshoorn, in which the intellectually disabled, rumoured to be the offspring of incestuous intermarriages, are imprisoned in an institution and released for a mere hour every Sunday, at a time when the other inhabitants are sleeping. The "idiots", literally excluded from society, represent elements of which the ruling authorities are both ashamed and fearful. Brink confesses that he once "stumbled across some wandering idiots and followed them back into the uneasy recesses of the mind in which they normally lurk; and [...] discovered, with dismay, that they were familiar to me" (27).

Such recognition of the 'other' in the 'self', and of 'self' in 'other', Brink claims, is the antidote to racism and the basis for the future of South Africa, in which a shared nationhood is crucial. In 1992, two years before the first South African democratic elections, he stated, "[a]s the country moves painfully, convulsively, from the structures and the mentality of authoritarianism [...] the most obvious disappearance is that of an easy sloganised 'target' or 'enemy,' an Other in terms of which the 'self' is to be described. It affects, in other words, the very notion of 'self' and of 'identity'" (RTR 156). Thus, Brink's search for a "common South African identity" (RTR 145) is to be discovered beyond the realm of 'self' and 'other', white and non-white, man and woman.

Silence

the eclipse, the occultation, the silencing of the other
(Emmanuel Levinas qtd. in Benita Parry 152)

To enable identification with the 'other', the voices of the subjugated must be resurrected from enforced historical silencing or absence. Brink notes that "history, even in the most traditional sense of the word, is not composed only of *texts* (written and otherwise), but strung together from *silences*" (RC 240). Each narrative holds, inherent within it, the possibility of all those narratives which remain untold and which it excludes. In speaking solely of the coloniser, for example, the colonised are also inherent within the text, existing as a trace of

possible narratives left untold. Similarly, patriarchal narratives may deny a matriarchal alternative, and yet the trace of the female remains within the male.¹⁶ Brink's frequent utilisation of the image of a falling stone provides a metaphor for this notion. In *A Chain of Voices*, for example, the rebellious slave, Galant, states, "[i]n the falling of a stone one hears the silence that comes before it as well as the silence that follows" (326). The stone, and the noise associated with its fall, gain context and meaning only in relation to the silence which precedes and follows. In an extension of this temporal image, Galant notes:

[u]sually one lives like a man walking with a candle in the dark. Behind him, where a moment ago it was light, darkness closes in. Ahead, where it will soon be light, darkness still lies undisturbed. Only where he is right now is there light enough to see by, for a moment; and then he moves on. But in a night like this it is different: then the darkness that was and the darkness that is to be merge in the light of what is now. I can close my eyes and see inside. Everything is alive in the heart of the flame. Within the falling of the stone lies the silence of before and after. (CV 500)

Again, the metaphor illustrates that absence is framed by presence, and vice-versa, demonstrating the interdependence and co-existence of binary categories. Thus, that which is voiced in a text paradoxically gestures towards that which is silenced.

South Africa's official historical text has traditionally epitomised exclusion in its refusal to include the narratives of the majority of its inhabitants, an act of dispossession mirroring that of colonisation. Benita Parry notes that "the process of muting is staged as an act of conquest" (153) and records: "[w]ithin the discussion of colonial and postcolonial discourse, silence has been read as a many-accented signifier of disempowerment and resistance, of the denial of the subject position and its appropriation" (152). Silence within South Africa has

¹⁶ In *The Tain of the Mirror*, Rudolphe Gasché explains, "[t]he word *trace* makes reference to Nietzsche's and Freud's, Levinas's and Heidegger's preoccupation with a critique of the value of presence as constitutive of classical ontology" (186). Traces represent the residue of alternative versions. In these terms, any word or text has inherent within it the trace of versions which have been suppressed or excluded and yet upon which its meaning rests, in opposition.

operated in many forms, the most obvious of which has been the historical enforced silencing of the non-white majority by the withholding of enfranchisement. Further methods include those enacted by the stringent laws of censorship¹⁷ and various parliamentary acts designed to quell private or public protest, the extreme consequences of which involve voluntary or involuntary exile, or death.¹⁸ More insidiously, the majority of South Africa's people were denied the right to their own narratives, as their own histories became overwritten by the ruling whites. Brink claims:

[t]hroughout the apartheid years whole territories of silence were created by the nature of the power structures that ordered the country and defended the limits of its articulated experience. Some of these silences were deliberately *imposed*, whether by decree or by the operations of censorship and the security police; but in many cases the silences arose because the urgencies of the situation presented priorities among which certain experiences simply did not figure very highly [...]. In yet other cases the silences had to be discovered *below* the clamor that filled certain gaps: the clamor of "official versions" and "dominant discourses" which caused such a din that one often did not even realise the noise existed, not for its own sake, but purely as a cover-up for the silences below. (RC 240)

In his preface to Brink's *Reinventing a Continent*, Mandela further claims, "[t]he imposition of silence was a powerful tool in the oppressive arsenal of apartheid

¹⁷ As stated by Brink in "Interrogating Silence", "[i]f any word involves a grappling with silence, the word uttered in the kind of repressive context exemplified by apartheid evokes an awareness of particular territories forbidden to language" (14-5). For an examination of censorship and literature in South Africa, see Margreet de Lange's *The Muzzled Muse*. Commentary related to the relationship between a writer and the censorial state is also included in J. M. Coetzee's essay "André Brink and the Censor". Notably, when Brink delivered his essay "Literature and Control" at a symposium in 1993, he recorded that the Publications Control Act of 1974 was "still on the statute book" (172).

¹⁸ The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and the 1967 Terrorism Act are examples of the manner in which legalised silencing operated within Apartheid South Africa. Jonathan Paton records that the former gave the Minister of Justice the power to "exclude any individual from public life if, in his opinion, that individual was 'furthering the aims of Communism'" (185). He adds that, under this act, many "South Africans of all races [...] were restricted to certain areas, prevented from entering any educational institution, from preparing any material for publication, and from attending social gatherings" (185). Mandela claims the latter "gave the government unprecedented powers of arrest and detention without trial" (1995: 529), and Paton states that police operating within the terms of this legislature were "under no obligation to release information about detainees" (215).

[...] We were meant not to hear one another and ourselves, not the world of us, except in the censored and sanitized terms it would determine and prescribe”(vii-viii).¹⁹ This enforcement of silence represents, Brink claims, a denial of ‘the other’. He parodies this notion thus: “*thou shalt not consort with the Other. Thou shalt not trust thine own experience of the Other. Thou shalt deny the Other, even that part of the Other which thou findest within thyself, and that of thyself which thou seest in the other*” (SV 14; original italics).

Brink views the writer’s position within this context as one of restoration, outlining the writer’s role in articulating the experiences of the silenced and “restoring worlds previously under erasure” (SAP 486). He thus attempts to foreground that which has previously been silenced in order to undermine hegemonic discourses such as those of a racist and genderist nature in operation in South Africa. He notes that in literature “[t]he very silences of a text – the *nature* of those silences – became a system of signposts demarcating the writer’s operational area” (LC 173), and that “these silent places invite exploration” (SOH 30). Mandela supports this claim when he states that during the Apartheid regime, “the writers and intellectuals [...] documented and analysed; proclaimed, protested and prophesied; narrated, dramatized and sang [...] Their work continued to demonstrate, even in the darkest years, that the South African voices of justice and reason would not be silenced” (1996: viii). Beyond the fall of Apartheid, the censorial nature of such authoritarianism continues to operate as an exemplification of the historical silencing found throughout history in various forms. In response, Brink shouts “on the contrary” (181)²⁰ in the face of official

¹⁹ In addition to censorial impediments, language plays an important role in the silencing of the ‘other’. As the Afrikaans and English languages became the predominant means of communication within the government and business arenas, the ability of non-white South Africans to speak politically or professionally in their own various languages was increasingly threatened. Brink notes that “as the Afrikaner became politically dominant his language also began to bear the stamp of exclusiveness” (EAW 112). Ironically, in post-Apartheid South Africa with its eleven official languages, Afrikaners are now concerned that the future of the Afrikaans language will be jeopardised. Brink’s own relationship with language is indicative of the manner in which the silenced must find a means by which to speak. In 1973, Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand* (*Looking on Darkness*) was the first novel by an Afrikaner to be banned in South Africa, followed by *A Dry White Season* in 1979. Consequently, Brink made the decision to begin writing in English, to ensure that his literature would have an audience outside of South Africa, beyond the confines of official silencing. See Rosemary Jolly, 1996: 55 for a discussion of this.

²⁰ A term described by Brink as “the writer’s motto *par excellence*” (WSS 181) and which he adopted as the title for his novel of the same name (*OC*); the novel addresses notions of history, ‘truth’ and narrative in a postmodernist manner.

recorded history, and articulates “some of the terrible silences of history” (DG 166).

Master and Slave

God Himself [...] decreed that the sons of Canaan
should forever be the servants of Shem and Jafeth.
(CV38)

Ironically, it is not merely the subjugated whose voices become subsumed by the more dominant narratives of others. In that which follows, I will discuss not only Brink’s consideration of female and non-white South Africans, but also his exploration of his own identity as an Afrikaner within South Africa, and the manner in which unitary official narrative disallows the individual identity of *both* oppressor and oppressed. Brink’s resistance to binary oppositions extends to the stereotypes of those in power as either victims or villains, and prompts him to *re*-appropriate the historical renditions of coloniser and creator of Apartheid to redefine what it means to be an Afrikaner.²¹ Thus, the ‘self’/‘other’ pairing is explored from a variety of perspectives, as are the narratives of each. Relationships are therefore crucial within Brink’s oeuvre, providing scope by which to consider roles of dominance and submission and to explore the interrelations between ‘self’ and ‘other’, male and female, white and non-white. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss the master/slave pairing as a metaphor for all authoritarian relationships; it is revealed as another binary opposition that can be ultimately undermined and its terms found to be co-dependent.

Notably, Brink’s willingness to transgress the confines of his own race and gender has invoked criticism regarding his right to appropriate the voices of others. In a discussion focussed primarily on Brink’s novel *A Dry White Season*, for example, Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Olga Taxidou posit Brink’s authorship as

²¹ Brink’s *A Dry White Season*, in particular, challenges a stereotypical Afrikaner identity in its demonstration that not all Afrikaners are subsumed by the dominant narrative of Apartheid. The novel’s protagonist, Ben Du Toit, refuses to conform and is consequently victimised by his religious institution, employer, family and friends. He thus exemplifies the identity of individual Afrikaners (or others) who deviate from the official narrative, enabling an exploration of the manner in which non-conformists are ostracised and thus denied identification with their fellow Afrikaners.

a further act of colonisation.²² They state:

Brink's story fails to acknowledge that the explorer's lonely and misunderstood venture is a direct result of an historical process of colonisation; a fact which might help put in perspective his company's refusal to have the map drawn and thus offer its exploits to competition. More important, however, is the absence of any real or historical consideration for the actual land (including its people) which was there to be mapped; the assumption being that it exists as a result of its reconstruction by the cartographer. 'Refined' and 'enlightening' as it may be, this representation conceals and displaces an act of exploitation. The fact that in Brink's formulation, the map reflects the vision of truth of its maker, ultimately exposes the whole enterprise in both its actual and metaphorical sense as a self- glorifying appropriation. (44)

In 1997, in a postscript to an essay in which he defends himself against such criticisms, Brink states:

[t]he crucial question concerns *power relations* [...] there is a difference between men's appropriation of femininity in order to strengthen their own authority and their attempt to question masculinity through adopting a feminine position in the system of sexual difference; and the same would apply to a white writer speaking, in a racist society, in the voice of a black. (SV 20; original italics)

Throughout this discussion, the author's problematic attempt to speak of (or for) the 'other' will be explored.

²² This criticism is framed in terms of Brink's essay, "Mapmakers", in which he utilises the metaphor of a cartographer to describe the position of the South African writer and the desire to communicate his knowledge. Threatened with imprisonment should he disclose his map of South Africa's interior, the cartographer represents the South African writer operating under the tenets of censorship (166-7).

Memory

the struggle of man against power
is the struggle of memory against forgetting
(epigraph W&S)

Brink's exploration of Afrikaner identity and his critique of acts of appropriation lead him to consider the role of memory as a form of personal and collective narrative. Thus, memories and acts of remembrance form a recurrent trope within Brink's oeuvre. The act of remembrance represents both a personal access to history, and a (mutable) record of identity. As Freeman notes in *Rewriting the Self*, in which he outlines what he labels the interrelational "history-memory-narrative triad" (29), memory operates as "a kind of mini-narrative" by which access to the past is enabled (32). He notes, further, that "the process of self-understanding is itself fundamentally recollective", and adds, "[m]emory [...] which often has to do not merely with recounting the past but with making sense of it [...] is an interpretive act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self" (29). This act of interpretation is an *ongoing* exploration of selfhood in which there is no final fixed identity. Brink's exploration of the narratives of memory is based upon a similar post-Freudian assumption that remembering is crucial to one's sense of selfhood or identity. Present self-knowledge is inextricably linked to one's (remembered) past and thus one's memories of previous selves (or subject positions).

It is my contention that, in a complication of the relationship between identity and memory, Brink also highlights the unreliable and mutable nature of memory as a mode of narration, and links remembering, in these terms, with the act of storytelling. In a manner mirroring that of his exploration of historical record, Brink acknowledges the *fictionality* of memory, recognising that elements such as the (often unconscious) selection and ordering of past events are instrumental in their subsequent interpretation. Memory, therefore, is depicted as an ongoing act of narration or narrative *process* which demonstrates how events and their narratives are constantly under reform. Brink portrays memory as a transient, changeable and constructed record of both personal and collective histories, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that it is all one has to base one's

identity upon. Both memory and nationhood, it is suggested, are bound together, and beyond one's control.²³

The role of remembrance is particularly important in the attempt to ensure traditionally ignored or silenced narratives are not irrevocably lost, and the *active* use of memory as a tool of challenge offers some response to the sense of disempowerment expressed above. In *An Act of Terror*, memory is foregrounded as a means of countering that which is 'untrue'. Thus, the narrator re-defines 'truth', stating:

[i]n Greek, I read it somewhere, the word for truth, *aletheia*, is not the opposite of lie as one would expect, but of *lethe*, forgetting. It is not a word, a concept, a notion in its own right, to which something else can be opposed – truth/untruth – but itself the opposite or denial of a given concept, it is *un*-forgetting. Forgetting is the starting point, the natural state. Truth is only what has been remembered, salvaged, from that territory of oblivion. (659)

In a censorial regime such as Apartheid South Africa, ongoing acts of *un*-forgetting are of particular importance, bringing into play voices of contestation. Brink notes that "memory, which is always and even per definition selective, comprises not only acts of recovery but also processes of suppression" (SOH 36). He claims that "power exercises the faculties of forgetting" (LCO 191)²⁴ and records that "apartheid memory", in particular,

was constrained to forget large tracts of the South African past (the shaping of the Afrikaans language in the mouths of slaves; slave revolts;

²³ In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes a similar sense of disempowerment related to notions of nationhood. He records the manner in which a nation's members describe their nation: "either in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*) or that of home (*heimat* or *tanah air* {earth and water, the phrase for the Indonesians' native archipelago}). Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied [...] in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen" (131).

²⁴ Hence, Brink's references to memory as that which is used to forget. Brink quotes, for example, from a psychological enquiry into repressed memory in which a child is reported to have said, "[m]y memory is what I use to forget with" (Loftus and Ketcham 1994: 38 qtd. in SOH 36 and (variously) qtd. in *TN* 4). Acts of *un*-forgetting, therefore, offer a challenge to the enforced

the enslavement of indigenous people; the role of the Coloured and black labourers in the service of Boers in the Great Trek; collaboration between black nations and Afrikaners on the Eastern frontier during the nineteenth century; the part played by women in conserving certain standards of education and morality in the deep interior, or in the Great Trek...). (SOH 36)

Many of these forgotten (tr)acts are articulated within Brink's oeuvre, reinforcing his claim that "surely one of the enduring functions of literature as an oppositional force is to make it impossible for us to forget" (LCO 191).²⁵ Similarly, in the introduction to Njabulo Ndebele's *South African Literature and Culture*, Graham Pechey states that "[a]partheid has thrived on the spiritual genocide of enforced forgetting", and records the "overcoming of communal amnesia, the act of comprehensive and redemptive remembering" inherent in non-white South African literature (3).²⁶ In *Negotiating the Past: the Making of Memory in South Africa*, editors Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee offer a forum for a number of authors to comment upon "the ways in which memory is being negotiated in [post-Apartheid] South Africa" (1). Brink's contribution to the collection describes the task before writers as "archaeological, inasmuch as they [...] turn to memory as a means of excavating silence" (33); and his fellow-contributors Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool note the role of "personal memory to counter official and documentary 'black holes'" (91). Likewise, the editors note the various contributors' insistence on "the significance of keeping older chapters unclosed and simultaneously present" (15). Thus, in this collection, as in Brink's oeuvre, memory is foregrounded as an important mode of articulating the enforced silences of the past and offering an ongoing contestation to traditionally accepted 'truth(s)'.

forgetfulness of the received narrative of authoritarianism.

²⁵ Notably, Brink's *A Dry White Season* concludes with the narrator's claim: "[p]erhaps all one can really hope for, all I am entitled to, is no more than this: to write it down. To report what I know. So that it will not be possible for any man ever to say again: *I knew nothing about it*" (316). This claim will be discussed further in the chapter related to *Imaginings of Sand*.

²⁶ Due to its singular perspective, however, this act of "redemptive remembering" will effectively become a fixed truth, and therefore does not meet the requirements of endless multiplicity suggested in Brink's ideal. This non-white re-membrance remains redemptive, therefore, only whilst it offers a challenge to the fixed authoritarian narratives of the white.

Brink's notion of *un*-forgetting, however, does not rely on dwelling in the past. Rather, it urges utilisation of past memories to realise the potential of the present moment and to create an improved future: "[w]e must turn over the old page; but not before we have read every word of it – otherwise we cannot remember. And without memory there can be no real initiative, no bold invention, no leap of the imagination" (SJ 253).²⁷ Likewise, Ndebele claims:

we have to cry out when the past is being deliberately forgotten in order to ensure that what was gained by it can now be enjoyed without compunction. It is crucial at this point that the past be seen as a legitimate point of departure for talking about the challenges of the present and the future. The past, no matter how horrible it has been, can redeem us. It can be the moral foundation on which to build the pillars of the future. (1994: 155)

The endless activity of re-membling the past, it is suggested, can provide the moral foundation for the future. Brink emphasises the need "to keep memory not only alive but ablaze, lest anyone be tempted afterwards to reiterate those dismal words of Nuremberg: '[w]e didn't know'" (RTR 154).²⁸ Speaking of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created to investigate the human rights violations committed in South Africa between 1960 and 1993, he records "its attempts to bring to light the most painful and shameful memories of the past in order to pave the way toward a new understanding" (RC 8).²⁹ Thus, the role of re-collected past narratives in those of the future is highlighted.

Krog articulates the belief of many authors and critical commentators

²⁷ Ndebele claims "[t]he past is knocking constantly on the doors of our perceptions, refusing to be forgotten, because it is deeply embedded in the present" (158). Similarly, Nuttall notes that "[m]emory is always as much about the present as it is about the past, and the texts I look at are about telling stories of the past but also about working out what constitutes a collective, resistance, freedom, place, and survival in the present" (76). Brink further claims, that "without memory, [...] a whole society, a whole culture becomes maimed, if not paralyzed" (RTR 147).

²⁸ This statement is mirrored at the conclusion to *A Dry White Season*, discussed above, and in the chapter related to *Imaginings of Sand*.

²⁹ Toni Morrison's *Beloved* treats a similar cathartic notion of remembrance in relation to the violence of racism. The protagonist's past horrific acts lie suppressed in her subconscious, yet continue to harm her; she discovers she must remember and *dis*-remember in order to purge them and heal.

when she notes, “[n]ations tell stories of their past in terms of which they try to shape their futures” (299). Brink’s claim is that present and future narratives are not only determined by, but can benefit from the constructed narratives of the past found within our memories. Nutall and Coetzee note that “[f]or Brink the lacunae in the archives are most usefully filled through magical realism, metaphor, and fantasy, modes that allow for a large degree of affective and symbolic interpretation of the ways in which the past can be remembered and used” (3). They make further reference to Brink’s description of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission “as a ‘patchwork’, thereby emphasizing the fragmentary nature of the work of memory, as well as the ways in which old scraps are put to new use in larger wholes” (3-4). In the following chapters, I will discuss Brink’s utilisation of acts of *re*-membrance as a means to give voice to alternative memorial narratives, in order to challenge the authority of fixed historical models. Thus, in each of the texts under discussion, the notion of historical or factual ‘truth’ is countered by a multiplicity of differing memorial narratives, demonstrating that Brink’s novels are in themselves acts of *re*-membrance.

Memory, so envisaged, represents a continual challenge to metanarrational claims, demonstrating that ‘truth’ always remains open to revision. Brink’s model suggests that any fixed narrative, or ‘truth’ is forged at the expense of alternative narratives, and thus enforces forgetfulness or the silencing of those alternatives. Brink’s notion of Truth, therefore, is based upon a *constant* state of *un*-forgetting and *re*-membering, in which no one narrative is allowed to assume authority over others; when any narrative version becomes dominant, it must be challenged: revised and remembered.

In their introduction to *Negotiating the Past*, Nuttall and Coetzee summarise Ingrid De Kok’s use of a “cracked heirloom”³⁰ as “a metaphor for the processes of memory in South Africa” (5). They emphasise the effect the damaged surface has, highlighting De Kok’s

³⁰ This image is reminiscent to that of the Landman mirror in *An Act of Terror*, to be discussed

cautions against the construction of a unified and sanitized past, arguing instead that contradictory voices should be heard. The task of memory should therefore not be to reconstitute and make whole, a whole which needs to lie about the fracture; instead the task of memory is to reconstitute turbulence and fragmentation. (5)

Thus, multiplicity is propounded as an alternative to singular modes of narrative and interpretation.³¹ As will be discussed in the chapters which follow, this favouring of multiplicity over singular narratives suggests a postmodernist notion of the play of *différance* and deferral of fixed meaning.

A Postmodernist Challenge to the Mediation of Truth

the words we are told.
(118 53)

Brink utilises many postmodernist devices within his oeuvre to demonstrate that both writing and language mediate 'truth'. Self-reflexive narrative strategies such as the confusion of binary oppositions and the use of magic realism overtly foreground the fictionality of both text and language, and therefore undermine author-ity. In these ways, Brink demonstrates that both narrative and the language in which it is expressed cannot contain any pure 'truth'. In each of the texts under discussion, postmodernist tactics ensure the reader's continual awareness of the constructed nature of the textual, and the arbitrary and narratorial nature of 'absolutes' such as 'truth'.

Brink's manipulation of magic realist devices ensures the 'reality' upon which a character or reader may depend as a basis of 'truth' is questioned; magic realist elements are visual metaphors for acts of narration. In a manner reminiscent to that of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which it is proposed "[o]f course it happened. Of course it didn't happen" (qtd. in Brian McHale 100), Brink demonstrates the mediated nature of 'truth' by blending

subsequently.

³¹ A celebration of postmodernist multiplicity or pluralism, however, depends upon some commensurability between competing accounts.

accepted 'reality' with the 'surreal'. The postmodernist leaning towards the disruption of a linear or singular notion of 'truth' found in earlier Brinkian texts such as *The First Life of Adamastor* is continued in the three primary texts under discussion; in *Imaginings of Sand* and *Devil's Valley* in particular, this disruption is enhanced by magic realist tactics. The introduction to *The First Life of Adamastor* commences, "[o]nce upon a time there was and there wasn't" (1)³²; a notion which is further enhanced by the mythological and magic realist intimations of the text proper. Similarly, I argue that elements such as the 'surreal' bird imagery of *Imaginings of Sand* and the walking dead of *Devil's Valley* act as constant reminders of alternative versions to that which is traditionally accepted as 'real'. Thus, "[i]n the same sentence, the same story, the same book, in the same view of the world, *was* cohabit[s] with *was not*" (RLH 138).

Likewise, in the chapters that follow, I will suggest that the disruption of binary categories is a constant feature of Brink's work, blurring the boundaries between apparent dichotomies such as the 'self'/'other' pairing discussed above, and subverting notions of the oppositional nature of 'truth' and 'fiction'. As if in response to comments such as those made by Michael Chapman who states, "the southern African situation is too complex [...] to permit choices of either/or" (94), Brink's writing can be seen to answer the request for "not only either/or, but also both/and" (97). Brink notes that "[t]he search for truth [...] implies also an attack on facile polarities" (IHW 203) and claims "the old forms of binary thinking have to be treated as suspect and we have to move toward more 'lateral,' more 'deconstructive,' more 'sliding scale' modes of thinking and of definition" (LCO 189).³³ Brink's work demonstrates that binary pairings are not fixed dichotomies but rather co-dependent and dialectical relationships with an "*inherence* of each in the other" (TN 28; original italics).

³² This forewarning of the disruption of narrative author-ity is a traditional storytelling device found in many cultures. Arabian folktales, for example, "conventionally begin with the words, '[t]here was a time and there wasn't in the long, long ago'" (Ronald Ayling 59).

³³ Similarly, in *Postmodernist Fiction*, McHale notes the absence "of any third alternative to the polarity of true and false, any mode of being between existence and nonexistence" (106). He further records Umberto Eco's suggestion that "worlds in which the law of the excluded middle seems to have been abrogated [...] mount a subversive critique of world-building" (106).

In demonstrating the arbitrary nature of the dominance of one binary over another, Brink frequently inverts the traditional South African male Afrikaner Calvinist narrative in order to scrutinise and undermine it. Such inversions are vulnerable to criticisms of reverse prejudice; women's narratives, for example, are often presented more favourably than those of men. In the following chapters, however, I argue that inversions are merely the first stage in a continued challenge to dominant discourses. The inversion initially offers a necessary alternative to the authoritarianism of any one dominant party, but is then itself challenged by further versions in an ongoing process of contestation which ensures it does not itself become a fixed master narrative. Brink's examination and deconstruction of dominant discourses based upon binary oppositions of gender, ethnicity and religion will also be discussed.

I will further suggest that Brink's subversion of binary pairings also extends to a deconstruction of accepted modes of reality in which he forces the reader's reconsideration of that which is accepted as 'real'. Magic realist techniques operate in a similar manner to those of 'surrealism', described by Roland Barthes as "ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning" (144). The effect is to maintain a reader-stance in which perspective is consistently altered and interpretation constantly undercut. Thus, in texts such as *Imaginations of Sand*, the distinction between a 'reality' traditionally associated with realism and 'fantasy' is blurred. The narrator articulates this blend of the 'real' and the 'surreal' when she describes "the - a - real world" (IS 42), suggesting the presence or possibility of many worlds within the fictional heterocosm, and therefore undercutting the notion of a singular 'truth'. Brink shapes the three texts under discussion, each of which is representative of Brink's oeuvre as a whole, in such a way that the reader's search for the 'truth' of each is resisted. In each, the reader is therefore directed to assess the nature of the construction of each text, rather than focussing purely on its content.

Brink's postmodernist tactics also extend to the utilisation of intertextual

references to undermine author-ity.³⁴ In his inclusions of literary and critical material from various sources, and the 'borrowing' of official and mythological historical narratives, Brink both re-writes the historical and re-contextualises it. In each of the three primary texts under discussion, 'history' is ultimately re-written with the assistance of a multitude of alternative voices, whether created by the author, found within the annals of historical record, or derived from other narrative forms. I argue that this inter-weaving of material considered 'fictional' and 'factual' subverts these terms of reference, revealing them as *arbitrary* designations. Intertextual gesturing undermines the author-ity of any text demonstrating that both author and text have inextricable ties to alternative authors and texts and so refutes the author-ity associated with authoritative or canonical versions. As Barthes notes in his oft quoted essay, "The Death of the Author":

[w]e know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (146)

Further, Peter Dews explains the extent to which postmodernist deconstructions of the textual are contingent upon such a realisation as that stated by Barthes; Dews claims, "interpretation is impossible without the recognition of an 'intertextuality', in which the meaning of a text is modulated by other contiguous texts, and the meaning of these in turn by further texts, in a process which has no determinable boundaries" (12). Thus, "interpretation is an endless activity" (Dews 12). In these terms, Brink's intertextual tactics provide a further means by which the author may challenge fixed and dominant discourses.

In that which follows, I argue that it is Brink's concern with the *medium* through which representation is expressed which frames his literature. Artistic

³⁴ A full examination of intertextuality in Brink's work is outside the scope of this thesis but must be mentioned, as it is clearly related to the topics explored. For further discussion regarding Brink's postmodernist response to dominant discourses see his article "Interrogating Silence: New

and mirror imagery, particularly within *Devil's Valley* and *An Act of Terror*, will be examined as symbolic of the mediation involved in representation. Crucially, these mediums are flawed. The Landman mirror of *An Act of Terror* is cracked (188), as is the mirror into which the protagonist of *Devil's Valley*, Flip Lochner, stares each morning (9); similarly, Gert Brush's paintings are blurred by previous images (*DV* 27). Each of these flawed mediums demonstrates a postmodernist concern with the fallibility of both language and narration as a means of representation. In contrast to realist narratives in which an image is upheld as mimetic, in each of the novels under discussion Brink undercuts both the 'truthful' nature of the represented, and of 'reality'. Brink's challenge to the 'truthfulness' of language and narration is also a refutation of the authority of fixed or authoritarian narratives in which acts of appropriation and dominance are in operation. In historiographic metafiction such as *A Chain of Voices*, in which a single historical event is retold from a variety of contestational perspectives, Brink comments upon the mediation involved in acts of narration, challenging the authority usually associated with a narrative voice and subverting the 'truthfulness' of the representations of 'reality' therein. In subsequent chapters, Brink's continual demonstration of the mediation of absolutes, 'factuality' and 'reality' will be discussed as demonstrative of a concern with the medium through which 'truth' is defined.

The Act of Re-membering: Brink's Ongoing Contestation of Master Narratives

Ideology is haunted by what it excludes,
subverted by what it subordinates.
(Johnathan Goldberg qtd. in WAW 45)

However, a significant and potentially paradoxical aspect of Brink's writing remains to be considered. Despite Brink's many (meta)fictional challenges to any notion of historical or factual 'truth', in his non-fictional literature Brink often claims an idealistic role for literature as a means to convey some form of unmediated Truth,³⁵ and represents the author as the means by

Possibilities Faced by South African Literature".

³⁵ All further references to Brink's notion of Truth will adopt a capital 'T' as a distinguishing marker.

which this Truth is expressed. Brink's critical claims as to the Truthful nature of literature and his fictional utilisation of postmodernist devices to deconstruct any notion of 'truth' appear to be paradoxical in nature; they are, however, ultimately revealed as both disparate *and* co-operative. Initially, the postmodernist refutation of 'truth' claims seems to conflict with Brink's statements regarding the Truth inherent in literature; he postmodernistically undermines language in his novels by showing it as a mediated form in which the truth cannot be represented, and yet claims notably in his essays, that literature *can* in fact express Truth.

However, Brink's notion of the moral Truth enacted by and in literature is far removed from that of the factual truth under deconstruction. In his essay "Mapmakers", he states:

[d]eep inside him [the writer] apprehends a welter and a whorl of truth, a great confounding darkness which he shapes into a word; surrounding him is the light of freedom into which his word is sent like a dove from the ark. In this way, through the act of writing, truth and liberty communicate. (163-4)

Further, he notes that "literature, when it is true to its primitive function, can never be other than a quest for truth" (TSF 221). Crucially, this claim is framed in terms of a "quest", suggesting an ongoing search in which the goal remains beyond reach;³⁶ each time a 'truth' is identified, it becomes fixed, excluding other 'truths', and thus the quest must begin anew. Within his fictional works, Brink demonstrates that memories and narratives traditionally considered non-factual or 'unreal', and thus untrue, can, nonetheless, *enact* moral Truth which he encourages his readers to recognise and acknowledge. The morality of Brink's Truth is found in its contestational activity, rather than in its 'factuality': it is an unending process, not a discoverable entity.

³⁶ Brink envisions the mythical realm of Monomotapa as a metaphor for Truth. In "Mapmakers" he describes "an imaginary land, a strange and distant but necessary Kingdom of Monomotapa which Gorky called Virtue and which we can call Truth" (168). The kingdom is also referred to in "Afrikaners" as "the fabled kingdom of gold in the heart of Africa" (79) and is utilised as one of the settings for Brink's fictional novel *On the Contrary* in which 'truth' and fiction elide.

Claims as to the moral integrity of the contestational act are particularly apt when considered in relation to the censorial impediments to artistic expression within Apartheid South Africa.³⁷ In the schema Brink proposes, the literary artist instigates a process of ongoing contestation to the untruths of the state, “making sure that their lies are exposed, that reality is not distorted, that truth will prevail” (WSS 194).³⁸ In these terms, the ‘lies’ of the state³⁹ are not untruths in the sense of being non-factual, but rather are actions and narratives which preclude alternative versions. For Brink, as for Jean Paul Sartre, “words are acts” (qtd. in Llosa 23) against the oppressive nature of such authoritarianism. Brink notes that “[w]hen the conspiracy of lies surrounding me demands of me to silence the one word of truth given to me, *that word becomes the one word I wish to utter above all others*” (MM 165; original italics). Brink’s “one word”, however, is not a singular challenge to the status quo, but rather an *ongoing* utterance; what is uttered is not final or fixed, but is a continual process of voicing that which is censored/silenced at that moment. Acts of writing and of reading are therefore *processes* which never reach a final or fixed conclusion.

In his essay “Mahatma Gandhi Today”, Brink uses an incident from an essay by Van Wyk Louw as a parable to encapsulate the notion of the dissident versus the oppressive state:

on the eve of his execution, a condemned prisoner is visited in jail by the

³⁷ J. M. Coetzee’s essay, “André Brink and the Censor”, discusses the censorial Apartheid regime in which many of Brink’s works were written, and Brink’s response to that environment, providing a full and explicit critique of Brink’s Truth claims in his non-fictional essays. Coetzee describes censorship as a self-fulfilling mode of complete authority, claiming, “[t]he entire South African censorship system is abstracted from interrogation of its authority and from the dynamic of blame. It is elided from rivalrous discourse in advance by means of the meta-rule of contempt” (71). In speaking of Brink’s stance, however, Coetzee deems Brink’s portrayal of “the lone writer confronting the colossus of the state [...] excessive” (72).

³⁸ In “André Brink and the Censor”, Coetzee notes of Brink’s expressed notion of writers/writing, “[i]t may or may not be true that truth always triumphs; in South Africa, at least, it is almost always the case that the writer has the last word” (64).

³⁹ Brink states that for the Government and its various agencies, “[t]he lie has become established as the norm: truth is the real obscenity” (CL 247). In “André Brink and the Censor”, Coetzee responds, “why does the state abhor the truth?” (65) and answers, “Brink, writing with South Africa and comparably tyrannous states in mind, does not have to answer the question in its general form. Founded on the lie, it is simply in the nature of tyranny to hate the truth:

In the truth embedded in the writer’s words lies that ineffable power feared so much by tyrants and tyrannies and other agents of death that they are prepared to stake everything they have against it. For they know only too well that no strategy or system can ever,

head of state. The tyrant promises him a reprieve on the condition that he recant. If not, he will die and every word he has ever written will be destroyed. With quiet assurance the humanist elects to die, bolstered by the conviction that he will win in the end. 'How can that be?' the tyrant asks. 'I have two reasons,' replies the condemned man. 'One is that your executioner will see me die. The other is that you have found it necessary to visit me tonight.' (retold in MGT 56)

In "André Brink and the Censor", Coetzee discusses this passage, noting that "[t]he power of the writer is recognized and feared by the state: despite the apparent powerlessness of the writer, writer and state know that, in the deepest sense, they are on an equal footing" (60). Brink takes this claim a step further, stating that "in the struggle between authority and artist it is always the artist, in the end, who wins. Because his voice continues to speak long after the members of the relevant government ... have been laid to rest" (KA 64, 67 qtd. in Coetzee 1990: 60). Thus, moral Truth lies in the continual contestation of the dominant discourses of authoritarianism.

Brink's imperative to endlessly challenge fixed narratives and received debates is far removed from notions of 'factuality', 'reality' or fixed meaning. For Brink, 'factuality' and 'reality' are each *constructions* founded upon accepted terms of reference, and meaning is independent of moral Truths. Dual moral imperatives define Brink's Truth as that which it is the responsibility of the writer to express, and the reader to engage with and respond to. Truths, in his terms, do not represent *the* Truth, in a singular form, but rather a multiplicity, or chain⁴⁰ of alternatives which challenge the linear and unitary master narratives of authoritarianism. The writer's role, therefore, is to constantly maintain the act of *re-membrance*, offering alternative versions to counter fixed, singular or authoritative claims in order to maintain an openness to the possibility of other

finally, resist the word of truth. (OCA 93 qtd. in Coetzee 1990: 65)

Coetzee further critiques Brink's notion of the 'lies' of the state, noting that "[a] lie is treated not as a dialectical strategy but as a manifestation of an evil essence" (1990: 66), a representation which ensures that the "antagonist's response is infirmed [sic] in advance as just another lie" (1990: 66).

⁴⁰ The image of the links of a chain as a series of individual narratives which form a greater Truth, or whole, is discussed in the chapter related to *A Chain of Voices*.

narratives and to resist closure. Consequently, the reader's role is also framed in terms of re-visioning, re-interpretation and/or re-membling; the reading process is therefore viewed as another act of narrative construction or meaning-making. Brink's non-realist narrative practices, including the rendering of multiple alternative narratives and the disruption of categorical thought offer a model of Truthful *process* which operates to undermine the state's imposition of fixed meanings and its shutting down of narrative possibilities; his Truth, therefore, is paradoxically based upon a refusal of the state's 'truth'. Thus, Brink's apparently contradictory claims, in which he espouses the Truthful nature of literature and yet postmodernistically undermines truth claims in his fiction, can be reconciled; it is literature's myriad of alternative versions which is espoused as Truth, and authoritarianism's fixed 'truth' which is refuted.

A further paradox related to Brink's truth claims is situated in the role of the author. Although master narratives such as Christianity are emphatically deconstructed within Brink's texts, there is a paradox in his oeuvre between the manner in which he undercuts such narratives in a fictional context and yet, in much of his non-fictional writings, depicts the author as a Godlike figure who has direct access to Truths unavailable through alternative means. In Biblical terms he notes that "[a]s writers we believe in 'the power of the word'" (LCO 189), he insists on the author's access to the Truth discussed above and has been described as situating the author as "an organ developed by society to respond to its need for meaning" (Coetzee 1990: 61). Problematically, if the author is indeed Godlike, then his creative output must surely be another of the master narratives Brink sets out to refute. This contradictory stance appears to undermine his own critical position within texts such as *A Dry White Season* and *Looking on Darkness*. Typically, however, his breadth of critical thought allows an acknowledgement of literature's role as an authoritative text which in itself requires deconstruction. Speaking of protest literature, he notes that:

if, in its moral dimension, literature is a dense and textured form of resistance to power [...] it means that in an intriguing way literature acts in opposition to impulses within *itself*: because *the functioning of literature is itself predicated on a notion of power, the power of the word, the power of*

the pen, the power of the mind, the power of culture. This explains another dimension of literature, not as a destructive, but as a de-constructive force (WAW 57; italics added)

He also notes that “story involves an awareness and an implicit or explicit acknowledgement of its own processes of narrativisation [sic]: every narrative text [...] is per definition also a meta-narrative” (SOH 38). In that which follows, I argue that the postmodernist tactics employed within Brink’s fictional oeuvre demonstrate his acknowledgement of the potentially meta-narrational qualities of the textual and ensure that these elements are as consistently undercut as are those more overtly under deconstruction. Thus, whilst the reader is continually prompted to participate in re-visionary acts of narrativisation against dominant discourses, her/his *own* acts of re-narration are also critiqued and found to be bound by the same meta-narrational limitations as are those of the author and text.

Despite his utilisation of many self-reflexive devices within his oeuvre and his depiction of an (almost) postmodernist deferral of ‘truth’ in its multiplicity and transience, Brink’s relationship with postmodernism is problematic. In *Devil’s Valley*, for example, narrative closures such as Seer Lermiet’s explanations, in the final chapter, and Brink’s many directives to the reader as to how to approach and read the text, undermine a purely postmodernist approach. The postmodernist understanding is outlined in the notion of ‘the death of the author’, forcibly articulated by Barthes in his essay of the same name. He states, “the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent” (145). Ommundsen adds that, in Barthes’ formulation, “the demise of the author signal[s] the birth of the reader as the sole arbiter of meaning” (69).⁴¹ The postmodernist author recognises that her/his authority over the meaning of the text is limited and that this meaning will be, at least in part, construed by the reader.

⁴¹ The critique raised against Barthes’ theory and this suggested reader position is one of essentialism. Rather than the traditional essentialist position of the author, in which meaning is inherent within the text and traceable to an author’s intentions, in Barthes’ model the position is inverted to reveal the reader as the primary source of meaning. However, the reader is always constrained by the text, as it is indelibly printed upon the page, and thus cannot be the *sole* arbiter of meaning. The relationship is rather a dialectic between reader and (through the medium of the text) the author, in which each contributes to the overall meaning of the work and its effect on, and relevance to, the reader.

Brink, however, maintains an authoritative stance, guiding his reader to a certain mode of reading and response. He attempts to manipulate or modulate the reader by using clues such as narratorial asides and the encouragement of reader sympathy to prompt a certain (often moralistic) manner of engaging with the text and its themes. He ensures that a certain amount of information is provided regarding his characters, in order that the reader may make moral judgements upon which the credibility of their narratives may be judged. The reader, therefore, is technically given the freedom to interpret, but is guided in this interpretation; judgement is simultaneously placed with the reader and withheld.⁴² Thus, not only is the reader's postmodernist contribution to the meaning of the text undermined, but also postmodernism's "commitment to difference" (Mansfield 184) is reduced to a hierarchical structure based upon moral values. An awareness of Brink's problematic postmodernist practice will be retained in the discussions which follow.

Truth Enacted

*Altheia. My Meagre truth.
(AT 376)*

The ideas briefly sketched in this introduction are developed in the following chapters. In the first, "The Truth of *Devil's Valley*", I consider the novelistic (and often postmodernist) blurring of distinctions between binary pairings such as 'fact' and 'fiction', 'past' and 'present', 'real' and 'unreal' in *Devil's Valley*. These blurrings, I claim, undercut the dichotomous foundations of prejudicial systems such as those exemplified by the racist Apartheid regime. Acts of interpretation within the text, and most particularly the artistic medium through which such interpretations are made are also discussed as markers of the arbitrary imposition of judgement upon others. In each of these examinations, I argue that the dismantling of such binary pairings subverts the authoritative stance of master narratives. Further, I discuss Brink's exploration of the 'self'/'other'

⁴² The danger in attempting to guide reader response lies in the assumption that a certain *type* of reader will engage with the text. Necessarily, an *implied*, or *likely* reader is addressed and, in Brink's case, this reader is assumed to uphold certain liberal and moral values. A reader of Brink's oeuvre may, however, be racist or discriminatory towards women, and thus may misinterpret or disregard the signs laid for her/him to follow within the text.

relationship in his depictions of Afrikaner identity and the position of women within the patriarchal fictional heterocosm. It is my claim that, in each of Brink's attempts to deconstruct the binary pairings upon which racism and genderism depend, he encourages a notion in which multiple versions are favoured over singular dominant discourses; this, I argue, is Brink's Truth.

In my second chapter, "Stories or History?: Female Counter-narratives in *Imaginings of Sand*", multiplicity is clearly given precedence over proclaimed fixed or singular 'truth(s)'. Conflicting acts of remembrance and narration within the text, I argue, challenge the traditionally unitary and linear rendition of patriarchal historical record. Granting themselves freedom from the restraints of linear, singular or 'factual' 'truth(s)', Brink's female protagonists explore their personal and collective identities beyond the realm of those constructed for them by the patriarchal and ideological confines of the 'real' world. Tracing Brink's predominant concerns through imagery related to memory and narration, I consider his postmodernist resistance to categorisation and 'fact', and his favouring of multiplicity and doubt within the text and in the reader. I claim that Brink acknowledges, in this text, the manner in which presence is defined by absence and vice versa, an issue related to my discussion regarding the co-dependent nature of seemingly dichotomous binary oppositions. Further, I argue that, in giving voice to the previously silenced, Brink not only articulates the female perspective, but also attempts to undermine the imposition of dominant discourses which result in the enforced silencing of many groups. Consequently, I discuss Brink's problematic inversion of the patriarchal fictional heterocosm in favour of a matriarchal one, and consider the roles of language, naming and narration in attempts to counter silence with speech. This examination of issues derived from the text also extends to an exploration of Brink's notion of Truth, as introduced above; Truth, I argue, is found in the multiplicity and diversity of experience, rather than in any hegemonic narrative.

In my third chapter, "'Who are You?': The Search For Personal Truth(s) in *A Chain of Voices*", I argue that the favouring of polyphonic narration foregrounded in the two previous texts is epitomised within *A Chain of Voices*, both in terms of structure and thematic content. Brink's utilisation of chain

imagery, I claim, provides a metaphor for the manner in which multiplicity ostensibly offers more Truth than the individual narratives represented by each link; dominant discourses are again revealed as arbitrarily imposed notions of 'truth'. Moreover, I suggest that the chain also represents the bondage inherent in human relationships, metaphorically extended in imagery related to sexual and physical dominance; each of these metaphors is crucial in Brink's treatment of the dual elements of entrapment and companionship found in interrelations. Similarly, imagery related to clothing, shoes and naming foregrounds the co-dependent nature of apparently dichotomous relationships; the resonance of such imagery within the text, I argue, once again undermines binary oppositions such as those posed by the 'self'/'other' pairing or that of the master/slave.

A Chain of Voices thus treats themes raised in *Devil's Valley* and *Imaginings of Sand*, encapsulating issues related to Afrikaner and female identity, and also addressing the non-white South African situation. This perspectival polyphony, I argue, epitomises the Brinkian notion of Truth articulated and gestured towards within the two texts previously discussed and represents Brink's own "shout against silence" (CV 505).

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRUTH OF *DEVIL'S VALLEY*

'... to write up our story [...]'
'History.'
'One word is as good as another.'
(DV230)

The 'Facts'

Just as ancient maritime charts of Africa marked certain parts
 with the legend *Hic sunt leones*,
 there were old maps of the interior on which the Swatzeberg was superscribed
 with the words *Hier zijn duvelen*, or *Here be Devils*.
 Hence, I guess, the name 'Duiwelskloof' - Devil's Valley.
 (DV 12)

As suggested in the introduction, *Devil's Valley* exemplifies Brink's literary exploration of 'truth'. Employing a journalist as the narrator and protagonist of the novel, Brink investigates 'factual truth', questioning both its validity and the reliance upon it. Utilising postmodernist tactics such as the subversion of binary oppositions and acts of interpretation, Brink deconstructs the position from which dominant discourses originate and reveals the arbitrarily imposed prejudices upon which hegemonic narratives are constructed. The narrative of the Valley is demonstrated to be both racist and genderist; thus, the contradictory female and non-white narratives inherent within the text act in contestation to the operative master narrative. In this chapter, I will argue that this collective narrative, in which multiplicity and confusion reign, is proposed as Brink's Truth, in opposition to the 'factual truth' claimed by the dominant patriarchal discourse.

After a chance meeting with a former resident of Devil's Valley, and his untimely death, Flip Lochner, the novel's protagonist and narrator, is prompted to travel to the insular community and explore an environment which has long fascinated him. As a journalist, Flip is ostensibly in search of a story, but his literal and metaphorical descent into the interior also serves as both an exploration of Afrikaner identity and of the racist ideologies exemplified in the Apartheid regime. Flip cites factual evidence as "a single constant spot of reference" (DV 29), and finds comfort in "proof" (DV 200), in "[t]he reassurance of a few small hard facts [...] unshakeable by wind or weather, adversity or time" (DV 29). He believes "it's in our nature to look for something to hold on to. Footprints to lead you somewhere" (DV 276). He claims, however, that his belief in any notion of 'truth' has long since dissipated, stating:

FACTS. FACTS were now my passion. When I was young, at the time I was still teaching history, I believed in the possibility of truth. Historical truth, so help me God. Gradually I was shocked out of this certainty, as out of most others. All that remained was my faith – tempered by cynicism, okay, but even so – in facts. I'd dig among the rubble in search of a handful of irreducible facts. (DV 89; original emphasis)

During the course of the narrative, however, it becomes clear that Flip believes these “irreducible facts” (DV 89) *will* lead, by association, to ‘truth’. He states, “I was supposed to remain disinterested, an objective observer, non-judgemental, *concerned only by what could be proved, by the truth. Facts, facts* with which to feed the gnawing rat” (DV 156; italics added); and he continues, throughout the narrative, to search for “a grain of truth” (DV 273). He constantly questions the veracity of the tales he is told, and insists that “every fact must be double-checked” (DV 235), but is countered by those who negate the validity of ‘truth’ itself. Emma, a young inhabitant of the Valley with whom Flip becomes infatuated, suggests that the ‘truth’ can never be known, and queries, “[d]oes it really matter? All you really need is a story that makes sense to you” (DV 276).¹

His frustration at the lack of facts to be obtained within Devil’s Valley is evident. Before his pilgrimage to the Valley begins, the little information provided by Little-Lukas is “hedged in by question marks” (DV 29) and upon arrival, he is told the town holds no official written records of any kind; no “[b]aptism certificates, letters of transport, tax papers, church registers, [...] private papers, old journals, diaries, letters” (DV 44).² Tant Poppie Fullmoon, the Valley’s healer and Flip’s hostess, claims that “[i]t was to get away from all those things in the Colony that our Seer first brought us here” (DV 44) and explains that “what happens among us we all know anyway, so there’s no need to write it down” (DV 45). Flip, however, is suspicious of a reliance on oral renditions, with “no substance at all, just bloody inventions and tall tales” (DV 9), and counters:

¹ Notably, the fictionality of the novel itself is foregrounded in its subtitle: “A Novel”. This inclusion, considered in the context of Brink’s textual explorations of ‘truth’, suggests a claim as to the ‘Truthful’ nature of this otherwise ‘fictional’ text, a claim which is foregrounded throughout.

² Similarly, archives from outside of the Valley contain very little information about the

perhaps there was something even worse in the Devil's Valley – the suspicion that *nobody* really knew anything. Perhaps when you know that others are watching all the time, you make sure that they only see what you want to be seen. In the end you reveal nothing at all, and all remain huddled over their own riddles. It's like a pond covered with leaves. Where everything seems so open and exposed, it's easy to miss what lurks below. (*DV* 227-8)

He remains concerned that oral forms of history, rather than promoting openness, instead breed secrecy and doubt. He says, "I felt as if I'd come to the edge of a precipice; but below me was only fog, one couldn't see down to the bottom. And I wasn't sure that I wanted to see that far" (*DV* 159) and notes, "[t]his place had become to me the threshold between the familiar and the impossible" (*DV* 248).

The utilisation of magic realist techniques in the novel creates a 'surreal' fictional realm in which "the familiar and the impossible" blend, challenging any privileging of fact over fiction. In this climate, Flip suspects that the women who visit his bedroom at night, and the sexual couplings which follow, are imagined. In one such instance, he states that "[i]n my sleep a woman came to me" (*DV* 83), and the description which follows does not differentiate between this dreamlike situation and 'reality'. Similarly, a nocturnal hunt, in which several of the Valley's men are involved (*DV* 77ff), remains unacknowledged by its other participants (*DV* 109) and Flip begins to question whether it happened at all. Further indications of the blurring of demarcations such as 'fact' and 'fiction' include his acknowledgements, when describing certain events, that he "could have been mistaken" (*DV* 131) or it "might have been hallucination" (*DV* 131). Events seem "remote and unreal" (*DV* 128), resisting Flip's attempts "to know, for sure, once and for all" (*DV* 132). Thus, his search for 'truth' is undermined by the obscured demarcations between fiction and 'reality'. This confusion highlights the undercutting of binary oppositions which occurs throughout the narrative and the correlative impossibility of gaining categorical 'truth' of the

kind Flip searches for.

Interpreting 'truth'

the meanings one arrives at are in some sense as much made as found.
(Mark Freeman 30)

The act of interpretation is crucial to Flip's search for 'truth', as it is to the thematic concerns of both the text and the reader. During Flip's first meeting with Tant Poppie, he states, "[t]he problem was that I had no idea of what was right and wrong in her two button-spider eyes [...] *Mene mene tekel*" (DV 39).³ The Biblical reference to the writing on the wall emphasises the act of interpretation required to 'read' Tant Poppie, the dangers inherent in such an act, and introduces an interpretative motif which permeates the remainder of the text, often expressed in religious forms. The town's religious relics, brought back from his travels by Jacob Horizon "to convince the doubting Thomases" (DV 121) of the extent of his adventures, exemplify the arbitrary endowment of meaning and the 'authority' of certain acts of interpretation. When Isak Smous unpacks the "much-used little tin trunk" in which they are kept (DV 121), Flip narrates:

[s]ome of the objects didn't exactly impress me. A pair of battered binoculars as an example of the advances of science in the world outside. A porcelain doll with one arm missing, which he made out to be a child somehow petrified after Herod's massacre. An object that looked like a large salt crystal, apparently broken from the remains of Lot's wife in the bloody Jordan valley, but resembling quite suspiciously a stalactite from the Congo caves at Oudtshoorn. (DV 121)

The interpretative act, and the possibility of resistance to interpretation, particularly that which ostensibly realises a singular conclusion, is again emphasised in the wooden carvings on the church's pulpit. Flip notes:

[f]rom a distance one couldn't make out any details, and from close up it

³ "The writing on the wall", Daniel, 5:25, also utilised in Brink's *An Act of Terror* (637). Notably, Daniel was a prophet, known for his interpretation of dreams (particularly that of

just looked like a weave of abstract shapes. Yet the moment I turned away they appeared to regroup into identifiable figures. Pretty fucking startling figures at that, a proper karma sutra of men and women caught up in the clinches of sex; and the couples were not all human either [...] *The moment I tried to focus on any given couple, they would promptly dissolve again into the general blur of unrecognisable shapes.* Was it my bloody imagination? Hallucination? (DV 120-1; italics added)

Thus, perspective is also identified as a crucial element in gaining insight, providing a key to both the narrator's and the reader's interpretation of the text as a whole. The (male) townspeople's interpretation of the Bible, exemplified in the definition of adultery offered to Flip, also points to a larger framework of interpretation within the novel, and the questioning of the act of interpretation itself. Lukas Death tells Flip, "[w]e've been fortunate in having some wise men with us who taught us over several generations how to interpret the Scriptures [...] Adultery happens when a woman from inside the Devil's Valley consorts with a man from outside without the approval of her people" (DV 166). This religious justification for the patriarchal control of the Valley's women is revealed as a misuse – indeed abuse – of the interpretative act, and thus questions interpretative acts as a whole, particularly those leading to unitary and emphatic conclusions.

In a text in which the interpretative act itself is questioned, the authority of master narratives such as Christianity is undermined, and revealed as a mode of oppression and control. Isidore Diala notes that in Apartheid South Africa:

the Bible is distorted to a justification of a racist ideology. Like historiography and cartography, theology too has become a species of mythmaking, annexed into the formidable machinery specifically created to empower the Afrikaner Establishment through the presentation of an authorized version of reality. (1)

In *The Dissident Word*, Chris Miller comments on the nature of religion as a fixed narrative, noting that “[e]stablished religious authority is generally *textual*, and it restores us to the realm of language, creation, and interpretation from which we set out” (19; original italics), adding that it “cannot allow too free an interpretation of its text” (30). The Valley acts as a microcosm of Apartheid ideological constructs with their reliance on limited theological interpretations to justify the unjustifiable.⁴ The old woman Ouma Liesbet Prune, for example, wryly describes the incestuous couplings and offspring of the original patriarch, Lukas Lermiet, or Lukas Seer, as “[a]ll scriptural, of course” (*DV* 105).⁵ Similarly, the insularity of the community and its attempts to remain racially pure are expressed and vindicated in Biblical terms. Tant Poppie is adamant that it was “the good Lord himself who brought us up here [...] What’s in here is meant to stay here, and what’s outside must stay out. It’s clear as daylight that God didn’t want us to mix with others. We got to keep our blood pure” (*DV* 94). Ironically, (in light of Flip’s later knowledge of the community’s genealogy), she adds, “[i]t was God’s will that only Boers came in here [...] Kaffirs and Englishmen are enemies. The Bible says they shall bruise our heel and we shall bruise their head. We’re very strict on keeping God’s law and ordinances” (*DV* 94-5). God’s ‘law’, so interpreted, also allows the harsh treatment of those who act against the community, as evidenced by the fatal punishment of a man who stole water during the drought. As Lukas Death, the Valley’s undertaker, explains, “the Lord rejoices in law and order” (*DV* 128). Clearly, the Valley’s inhabitants consider

⁴ Insular Afrikaner communities of this kind do exist within South Africa, inhabited by Afrikaners who often justify this exclusivity by claiming their actions serve to protect the Afrikaans language and culture. Brink records that two champions of the Afrikaans language, the brothers Nienaber, claimed, “[a]ny fully-fledged nation [...] requires its own language and its own country; but since Afrikaners do not have a land of their own, *everything* is focussed on the language” (AF 106; original italics). Founded in 1991 by Afrikaner activists, the privately owned town of Orania epitomises this type of exclusive community. Located in the Upper Karoo, it operates as a “self proclaimed Afrikaner ethnic enclave” (SABC) whose residents “see themselves as an endangered minority fighting for self-determination” (John Murphy). Potential inhabitants undergo a strict vetting process and those who fail to meet the standards of the community are expelled. The township is viewed by its people as the initial step in achieving the ultimate goal of an “Afrikaner Homeland” (Go TV), a dream upheld by many Afrikaners. In “Afrikaners”, Brink acknowledges the call made by Hendrik Verwoerd, son of the “architect of apartheid”, Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, for “territorial segregation to create a separate state for his people” (121), the *volkstaat*/(people’s state) or white homeland. This ideal was of such importance to the Afrikaner community that in 1993, immediately prior to the first South African democratic elections, a Volkstaat Council was formed “to investigate the concept of a nation-state for Afrikaners” (D. Burger).

⁵ The deformed children who are the result of such incestuous couplings are described by Flip, however, as “an all-too blatant exhibition of sins better kept secret” (*DV* 56).

themselves *volk die uitverkore*, (the chosen people), yet the interpretative warnings inherent within the text challenge both the justifications of the inhabitants and the reader's complicity.

Afrikaner Identity

the God-given role of the Afrikaner in the African continent
(Marq de Villiers 281)

In its interrogation of the act of segregation and the grounds upon which this is based, *Devil's Valley* also addresses the macrocosmic situation of South Africa, both past and, to some extent, present. Traditionally, the Afrikaner has sought to find a place where s/he may belong within South Africa. The iconic image of this search for a sense of place is found in the Great Trek of the 1830s,⁶ a series of journeys into the country's interior in which the Afrikaner people sought to escape English control in the Cape.⁷ De Villiers records that:

the Boer imagination always turned to the north, where he could carve out for himself a home that was his alone, where he would be left in peace, where his fierce identification with the veld could be expressed; he looked always to some mythical republic of the imagination, to some imagined Land of Beulah where he would be master. (55)⁸

In search of a home removed from the strictures of British control and the (real or imagined) threat of invasion from indigenous peoples, the Afrikaner felt the need for a means of defence against the outside world. This need was fulfilled by the *laager*, "the defensive circle of wagons that was to become a central symbol of Afrikaner life" (de Villiers 69). The *laager* mentality, a founding element of the Afrikaner identity, can be perceived within both *Devil's Valley* and the racist

⁶ In "After Soweto", Brink states, "[e]ssentially, I believe, one can evaluate the Trek and its subsequent history, as a search for identity on the part of the Afrikaner" (137).

⁷ See any number of histories of South Africa, including Marq de Villiers' *White Tribe Dreaming*.

⁸ In keeping with the religious terms in which Afrikanerdom is often expressed, this search for a homeland is often described in terms of a pilgrimage, in which the Promised Land is the ultimate goal. Brink notes that "the tribe was prepared to trek into the wilderness and follow the example of Moses and his people, in search of a new Promised Land" and comments on "[t]he religious fervour with which Afrikanerdom relived, in the Great Trek and its aftermath, the history of the Old Testament" (AS 136).

ideologies of South Africa, prior to and during the Apartheid regime. Brink notes that, “[i]n South Africa the ‘*laager*,’ traditionally the circle of ox-wagons within which Boers secured themselves in battles against black attackers, has now become the spiritual enclosure in which the mind entrenches itself against a hostile world” (HOI 31). Brink’s notion of a “spiritual enclosure” in which Afrikaners are *trapped* is indicative of his approach to the role and complicity of the Afrikaner in racist South Africa. Rather than simply critiquing Afrikaners as the evil instigators of South African racism, he highlights crucial elements within Afrikaner identity which in some way explain the fears and reasons behind the exclusivity which was most powerfully institutionalised as Apartheid. He suggests a certain victimology was at work,⁹ whilst simultaneously harshly criticising the resultant racist ideology. His critique, as is typical of his critical commentary, allows for the complexity and multiple perspectives required to undermine simplistic reactions to the South African situation. Brink writes that “part of the narrative wealth of Africa lies in moving beyond the simple dichotomies of *either/or*, to arrive at more syncretic and holistic patterns of narrative thinking” (RC 241; original italics). In undercutting the binary distinctions between victim and victimiser, colonised and coloniser, he acknowledges that each of these roles is found within Afrikaner identity. In essence, his exploration of the Afrikaner psyche can be viewed as a cleansing ritual¹⁰ in which the horrors of the past are both acknowledged and given context, in order to expose where the horrendous errors of the past lie and to ensure that they do not continue into the future.¹¹

The Valley acts as a specimen of Afrikaner psychology in the extreme, placed under a microscope and dissected to reveal its underlying structure. Flip

⁹ In his essays, Brink further explores “the victim syndrome from which all Afrikaners seem to be suffering” (AF 119) and notes that “[t]he paranoid syndrome of victimology has been developed by Afrikaners to a fine art” (FP 226).

¹⁰ This cleansing ritual extends to Brink’s own privileged position as an Afrikaner within racist South Africa.

¹¹ Nelson Mandela also recognises the constructed nature of prejudice and the hope inherent within this construction for a new relationship with the racial/ethnic ‘other’ to be developed. He states, “[n]o one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love” (1995: 749).

notes that the insularity achieved within the Valley¹² is *so* extreme as to appear removed from South African reality, as the non-white majority against which Afrikanerdom traditionally 'protects' itself is entirely absent: "nowhere in the Devil's Valley was there any sign of a black or brown labourer. It might have been somewhere in Central Europe, or on the moon, anywhere but in the South Africa in which I'd been living all my life" (*DV* 36). The insularity of the community suggests an extension of the *laager* mentality, and particularly that of the Apartheid regime, in which exclusivity was the goal.¹³ In her review of the novel, "Escape from Paradise", Lorna Sage describes the Valley as "psycho-history writ large, the physical representation of the land apart that was dreamed up by the culture of apartheid" (8). Thus, the Valley metaphorically represents the ideology of Apartheid, described by Duncan Edmonds and Allister Sparks as "the most determined and systematic attempt at ethnic separation ever undertaken" and provides a means by which to examine "Afrikaner ethno-nationalism" (Edmonds and Sparks n. p.). In "After Soweto", Brink describes the formulation of Apartheid as "conceived initially as an experiment in survival by a small group threatened from all sides" (128). A similar victimology is expressed within the fictional Valley. Jurg Water says that "[e]verybody's hand has always been against us", noting "[t]here were always enemies trying to come from outside" and "[e]very step was taken in blood and suffering. And it still goes on" (*DV* 79). Therefore, the Valley is idealised as a "haven" against which the threats and fears of the outside "wilderness" are opposed (*DV* 178); a binary category designed to encourage the inhabitants to remain within and to resist intruders. Tant Poppie tells Flip, "[w]e really don't want outsiders here. One never knows what they can bring in with them. Diseases, heathen habits, idolatry, unrest, all kinds of things" (*DV* 93).

¹² It is interesting to consider the insularity of this community and the consequences involved in comparison to a text such as Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. Morrison's text inverts the usual privileging of white skin colour, describing a fictional American community in which blackness is privileged and exclusivity is paramount. After the abolition of slavery, 15 families searched for a new home. After rejection from a settlement of lighter skinned residents, they created their own settlement, notably named "Haven" (c.f. the description of Devil's Valley as a "haven" (*DV* 178)). After the dream of a pure settlement disintegrates with the exodus of the young generation (again c.f. Devil's Valley (*DV* 173)), a new all-black settlement of nine founding families is established and named Ruby. This 'paradise' (which in itself necessitates exclusion) must deal with the consequences of such exclusivity, including the effects of interbreeding and the violent protection of their insularity, as found in Brink's text.

¹³ Although the novel is set in post-Apartheid South Africa, it examines issues directly relevant to

This exclusionary mentality exemplifies a fear of the 'other' in the extreme. It is considered safer to resist what is unknown or not understood, than to risk the possible horrors associated with strangers.¹⁴ A system of censorship operates within the community, disallowing those who leave the Valley to speak of it (*DV* 19, 92) and resisting the questions posed by outsiders such as Flip (*DV* 93, 191).¹⁵ For Valley residents, the unknown remains unknown, and therefore feared. Strangers are discouraged from entering the Valley and conveniently disappear or are blatantly murdered if they refuse eviction (*DV* 93, 138). After one such murderous incident, a group of government soldiers was sent to the Valley (*DV* 211ff). One of the female inhabitants of the Valley, Dalena, claims that an ancestor, Mooi-Janna, settled the dispute between the men of the Valley and the hostile outsiders by offering herself sexually to them. After being repeatedly raped by the soldiers, she was rescued by her father and his commandos. Afterwards, she was carried upon her father's back until he reached a cliff where "he stopped, and turned his back to the precipice, and shook her off" (*DV* 214-5). This narrative exemplifies extreme rejection of outsiders and of insiders deemed to be tainted by the outside world or its representatives; Mooi-Janna was emphatically disallowed re-entry into the community she saved: she was sacrificed in the name of insular purity.

Those who attempt to transgress the Valley's boundaries from within, either physically or figuratively, are also punished. The young generation who wish to settle outside of the Valley, perhaps representing those tempted by a world beyond the reach of Apartheid South Africa's strictures, are either restrained, or "written off" as exiles (*DV* 173). Emma describes those who have attempted to

both Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa.

¹⁴ Flip represents a counter-claim to this resistance to the 'other'. He is initially resisted as an intruder, but is soon brought into the confidence of many of the characters. This alteration in status from the outsider to the (temporary) insider is articulated by Tant Poppie when she tells Flip, some way into the novel, "[b]ut of course we didn't think of you then the way we do now" (*DV* 92), although his status is further complicated by Emma's later claim that, "[y]ou won't ever understand. You're a stranger" (*DV* 148).

¹⁵ In particular, those who wish to record an official version of the town's history are resisted, as they pose a threat to the oral master narrative created within the community. Tant Poppie notes that "there was a whole lot of scribes and pharisees or whatever trying to come in to find out all about us, our history, our customs, everything" (*DV* 93). Similarly, within the larger context of Apartheid South Africa, Brink notes of censorship, "certain experiences or areas of knowledge

leave as “all mad, one way or another” (*DV* 263), echoing a traditional literary motif in which transgression of the accepted values of a society is labelled as insanity.¹⁶ Certainly, Lukas-Up-Above’s attempts to fly from the Valley appear insane and yet symbolise the desire for freedom from the constraints of such a community (*DV* 106-7). In association with this image, the imprisoning nature of such a community is exemplified by the absence of the birds which symbolise freedom (*DV* 21, 150).¹⁷ Racial purity is the most crucial of the community’s aims, and for this reason miscegenation is forbidden.¹⁸ This taboo, however, extends not merely to those of “the wrong colour” (*DV* 205), but to outsiders in general.¹⁹ The desire to retain a racially pure ancestry is upheld as a justification for the punishment of those who transgress these sexual boundaries. Emma tells Flip, “[n]o outsider may lay a hand on [the] womenfolk” (*DV* 144)²⁰ and reveals that her mother Maria was stoned to death when suspected of becoming pregnant

were out of bounds to probing in words” (ISN 15).

¹⁶ In the introduction to Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*, José Barchilon relates the methods of exclusion instigated in response to infectious diseases, (described in Brink’s *The Wall of the Plague*) to those enforced upon the insane. He writes: “[a]s leprosy vanished, in part because of segregation, a void was created and the moral values attached to the leper had to find another scapegoat. Mental illness and unreason attracted that stigma to themselves” (vi). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the “rituals of exclusion” (83), derived from the fear of leprosy, extended to “beggars, vagabonds, madmen and the disorderly” and necessitated the creation of institutions of exclusion such as “the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, [and] the approved school” in which the binary divisions of “mad/sane, dangerous/harmless, normal/abnormal” could be upheld (84). Barchilon utilises the image of “Ships of Fools” (vii) as examples of the exile of those who fail to meet society’s standards of reason and sanity, a standard based upon “order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity” (x). Foucault utilises the metaphor of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, a model prison, to illustrate the “homogenous effects of power” in modern society (1977: 86). The panopticon design ensures that each inmate remains both isolated and simultaneously vulnerable to surreptitious surveillance. The inmate’s behaviour is thus self-regulating, as s/he is aware of the possibility of surveillance and avoids punishment by acting in accordance with the regulations of the penitentiary. Foucault recognises that the ideologies of society act in the same way in their creation of an environment in which the possibility of surveillance and the fear of resultant punishment encourage societal self-regulation. Thus, “a state of conscious and permanent visibility [...] assures the automatic functioning of power” (1977: 85). Similarly, J. M. Coetzee’s discussion regarding South African censorship includes a claim that “[t]he ideal system of control, from the censor’s point of view, is one in which the rules need neither be spelled out nor enforced, in which a tacit code is tacitly followed” (1990: 71). Peter Dews summarises that “[p]ower in modern societies is portrayed as essentially oriented towards the production of regimented, isolated, and self-policing subjects” (150).

¹⁷ This bird imagery operates in a manner similar to that of *Imaginations of Sand*, discussed in chapter two.

¹⁸ Although this is technically true, Emma explains that only those who choose to *publicly* flout the law by choosing to give birth to their interracial babies are punished (*DV* 146). The taboo is further undermined by the re-appearance of “throwbacks” (*DV* 205, 231-2), reminders of past miscegenation, although such children are stoned to death.

¹⁹ It is noted, however, that “[i]n later years the bloodline was presumably renewed a few more times” by outsiders entering the community (*DV* 116).

²⁰ Notably, this law applies only to the women, the vessels of future progeny.

to an outsider (*DV* 150, 167). The philosophy surrounding this obsession with racial and ‘insider’ purity, the exclusive nature of the community as a whole, and its relation to questions of power is summarised by Brink in “The Writer in a State of Siege”; speaking of power, he notes that it “is narcissist by nature, *striving constantly to perpetuate itself through cloning, approaching more and more a state of utter homogeneity by casting out whatever seems foreign or deviant*” (173; italics added). Again, this ideology echoes that which was evident during the era of the Apartheid regime, and is portrayed in the microcosm of Devil’s Valley.

Brink’s examination of the Afrikaner notion of nationalist identity gestures towards claims as to the constructed nature of nationality and nationhood. Brink’s microcosmic model of nationhood demonstrates that the exclusionary system under which the Afrikaner *laager* mentality operates is founded upon an *arbitrarily* determined set of binary oppositions. Similarly, in *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes the nation as “an imagined political community” and adds that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (15). He suggests that ‘nations’ and subsequent notions of ‘nationality’ are based upon a series of shared assumptions or mutually accepted narratives which determine their ‘truth’.

Acts of Interpretation

But then, I mean, what is ‘beautiful’?
(*DV* 142)

Throughout the course of the narrative, Flip attempts to interpret the narratives of the Valley. In an excerpt entitled “Prayer Meeting in the Devil’s Valley: *From Our Crime Reporter*” (*DV* 177-84; original italics), he resorts to a means of narration with which he is comfortable, describing the event as it would be recorded in a newspaper article. Noticeably absent is any factual evidence such as dates or data, and the reportage hinges on the reporter’s eyewitness account and extensive quotation. Attempts to lend an air of accuracy and authority to the article include the pedantic notation of the townspeople’s official names, with their common or nicknames included in parentheses. Although given

names are ostensibly endowed with more authority than nicknames, ironically, each speaker only becomes fully familiar to the reader when her/his nickname is included. As Lukas Death explains, “[w]e all have private handles here” (*DV* 33) and notes, “[a]ll of us in Devil’s Valley are related. When we go abroad we’re all Lermiets, but down here it’s just the private handles” (*DV* 34). In a later passage, the narrator describes the events surrounding the death of Piet Snot, also as they may have appeared in a newspaper article (*DV* 310-11). The putative article’s interpretation of the death as accidental contrasts with the murder described within the primary text (*DV* 298-313), and is lent further ironic significance when the claim that “foul play is not suspected” (*DV* 310) is compared to the section’s subtitle, “Foul Play” (*DV* 310). The use of italics within the ‘article’ also acts as a cue to the reader to read the text in a certain manner; in this instance subversively, or ironically. Further ironic foregrounding of interpretative acts include the italicised inserts in the section entitled “Sorely Missed”, in which Flip risks his own life to rescue Emma from drowning, and imagines his heroism reported (*DV* 196-7). In each case, the reportage is foregrounded as inaccurate and/or inadequate as the alteration in form and tone emphasises the subjective, multiple and transient nature of narration and interpretation. Ultimately, these ‘factual’ forms of narration act as ironic reminders, within the text, of the inability to communicate ‘fact,’ of the impossibility of interpretation resulting in any one ‘truth’, and chart the narrator’s own development of thought as he comes to this realisation.

Excerpts such as these also act as reminders to the reader to remain alert to the subjective and partial stance of any narrator. Although the text is, on one level, presented as a series of differing personal and historical narratives concerning the Valley, ultimately the entire narrative is filtered through Flip’s voice, and is therefore a reflection of one view, albeit ostensibly multiple. The reader responds not to the personal accounts of the townspeople themselves, but to their narratives, filtered through the narrator, (who is in turn created by the author). Thus, the reader must question whose ‘truth’, if any, is being represented. Further complications in the levels of narration include the multiple retellings of the community’s historical narratives or myths: stories have been passed down through and mediated by many generations of ancestors before being

retold to Flip.

On an authorial level, in the Author's Note Brink acknowledges his utilisation of passages from "the journal of the Boer woman Susanna Smit", the inclusion of stories based on "old Khoisan and Boer narratives" and the source of episodes regarding Hans Magic's life (*DV*). The inclusion of materials such as these instils the text with an intertextual awareness and richness which again subverts binary categories such as 'truth' or 'fact', as opposed to fiction, and foregrounds the manner in which all narrative is derived from past 'facts' and 'fictions'. Also under scrutiny are the authorial and narratorial techniques and interventions which determine the final shape and content of the text and guide reader-interpretation. The inclusion of the word "subtext" (*DV* 77), for example, albeit utilised in a seemingly innocent context, nevertheless alerts the reader to a certain mode of reading, in which a subversive interpretation and response are invited. Thus, in numerous ways the text foregrounds and explores the processes of narration, interpretation and authority and asks, as Flip does, "where is the boundary between observation and engagement?" (*DV* 156).

Postmodernist Multiplicity

All is possible, but all is in doubt.
(*TW* 29)

Flip's search for facts is confined to delving into the oral history of the Valley's inhabitants, which offers diversity and discrepancy, rather than uniformity and conclusion. His ostensible attempts to clarify and conclude are countered by comments such as: "[t]here are many endings to the story [...] Does it really make any difference?" (*DV* 193). He still attempts, however, to sort fact from fiction, and initially uses a tape recorder to record his findings. He tells the Valley's water diviner, Hans Magic, that he will "catch voices with it" (*DV* 223), betraying, in his choice of words, his ongoing need to capture 'truth'. Flip later reminds him, "this thing hears everything, and it never forgets" (*DV* 228). Ultimately, however, the tape recorder fails (*DV* 235), as do all of the narrator's attempts to reduce multiplicity to a single conclusion or 'truth': a fixed recording. The narrator bemoans, "[a]ll I have, I the historian, I the crime reporter, in search

of facts, facts, facts, is an impossible tangle of contradictory stories" (*DV* 352), and he wonders, "[h]ow would I ever tie all the fucking threads together? What I was trying to find was a network; all I'd found so far was a damn crow's nest" (*DV* 171).²¹ Later, in an extension of the image, he admits, "I gathered as much as I could but it's only a handful of feathers" (*DV* 270). Flip wishes for a neat and regular set of linkages and relationships between the townspeople, which will lead to an ultimate 'truth' about the people and their lives. Instead, the complexities, differing versions and multiple perspectives involved in the town's historical narratives are represented by the disordered intertwining of the many elements of a crow's nest. This image illustrates that the multiple narratives, woven in such a manner, are irreducible to their separate components, and that the narrator's notion of 'truth' is ultimately impossible and, in effect, non-existent. Rather, he will discover that 'truth' is represented by the crow's nest in its mutable entirety, a construction which will be continually added to.

In a postmodernist manner, Brink creates and emphasises a palimpsest narrative in which competing or contradictory versions operate in the same space and, as much as is possible, no one claims dominance or precedence over another. When Flip complains that "[e]very word spoken here is a bloody new invention. This is how the writer of Genesis must have felt" (*DV* 45), he unwittingly foregrounds the manner in which *all* narratives, including authoritative master narratives, are products of creative acts of interpretation. In acknowledging this correlation, the text challenges the authoritative stance assumed by singular forms of narration such as official historical records.²² The reliance upon conversations, rumours, myths and personal diary entries to tell the stories/histories of the Valley allows a multiplicity not afforded by a more traditional linear and singular historical record. Due to the absence of recorded information in the Valley (*DV*

²¹ The deliberate excessive usage of narratorial expletives is a striking feature of the novel and suggests more than Brink's attempt to characterise Flip as a hardened reporter. Flip appears to believe that the language available to him requires the additional emphasis provided by obscenities. Through the course of his narrative, however, there is a marked decrease in the number and strength of vulgarities. Firstly, as Flip begins to realise that *all* language is an inadequate method of expression, he begins to discard that which is most clearly extraneous in language, namely his profanities. Secondly, as he gains a certain empathy with the women of the Valley and their narratives, his vulgarities, many of which are offensive references to women, are recognised as inappropriate, and are rejected.

²² The critique of history (as an archaeological record of fact) is a familiar motif in Brink's work

44) these multiple narratives do not *refute* any authoritative history, but rather undermine the possibility of the authenticity of one. The text adopts a postmodernist stance in challenging the notion of one 'reality' or 'truth', resisting such closure as arbitrary. The reader's attention is consistently drawn to the constructed nature of 'truth' and the 'factual' or 'real' is revealed as merely one (usually privileged) of many possibilities. This deconstruction enforces a more overt and active reading role, resisting complacency. Like the paintings of the Valley's artist Gert Brush and the multiple slave narratives of *A Chain of Voices*,²³ judgement is simultaneously placed with the reader and withheld. The reader is given no *legitimate* position from which to judge the versions in any hierarchical manner, as each is awarded validity, both in its own right, and as a part of the whole.²⁴

Thus, as I suggested in the introduction, Brink proposes that it is only when the multifarious is given precedence over the singular that any meaning, and therefore any Truth (in the Brinkian sense), can be gleaned. Flip momentarily lends credence to the concept of multiplicity when he states, "from all those bits and pieces I managed to patch together a fuller picture" (*DV* 312).²⁵ Brink's usage of seemingly random excerpts from the text to introduce each passage act as recurrent structural indicators of this thematic concern. Each subtitle holds little intrinsic meaning, except when inserted within the text from which it is derived. Often the subtitle chosen is a single word or phrase, derived from the text mid-sentence, and it is only when the text is read in conjunction with the subtitle that any relevance, and therefore meaning, is revealed. The subtitle "Smudge Of," gives no indication of the noun to which it is appended until the text reveals the word "snot", and the boy to whom it belongs: Piet Snot (*DV* 45). Alternatively, the most plausible meaning implied by a subtitle is often inverted when read in the context of the passage from which it is taken. The passage entitled "Quite Normal," for example, may suggest normalcy of events; the passage to which it relates, however, is a description of a woman with four breasts, one pair of which

and will be further discussed in the chapters related to *Imaginings of Sand* and *A Chain of Voices*.

²³ To be discussed in chapter three.

²⁴ And yet, it is the ongoing juxtapositional and creative act of reading that, it is implied, is Truthful.

²⁵ Notably, he gains a "fuller" picture, rather than the *full* picture.

appear “quite normal” (DV 27). Similarly, the passage entitled, “Nothing Happened” (DV 352-3) contains the phrase “*It doesn’t mean that nothing happened*” (DV 353; original italics), countering the originally negative connotation with a positive one. Thus, the text’s postmodernist encouragement of misreadings by the reader draws attention to the act of (mis)interpretation, prompting the reader to address her/his own acts of reading and illustrating that both context and multiplicity of meaning are crucial to an understanding of any given element, including that which the narrator may label ‘fact’. The subtitles also act as cues to encourage a postmodernist consideration of the text in which multiplicity and fragmentation counter singularity and wholeness. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale notes that:

[t]he physical discontinuity and spaciness of postmodernist texts is often further highlighted by the use of titles or headlines, in a more prominent typeface, at the head of each short chapter or isolated paragraph [as is the case in *Devil’s Valley*]. Such headlines tend to corroborate what the spacing already implies, namely that each short segment constitutes an independent unit, a miniature text in its own right, thus in effect completing the physical disintegration of the text. (182)

Representational Mediums

‘Why should a film be the same every time you see it? [...] It’s mere convention that won’t allow us to expect anything but the predictable’.
(AT 415)

The way in which the multifarious continues to take precedence over the singular is most powerfully portrayed by the imagery related to Gert Brush’s artistic endeavours to capture the townspeople on canvas. These references to artistic creativity act as a series of *mise en abyme*,²⁶ and thus provide the reader with a model, or encourage the adoption of a reader-position, with which to address or relate to the novel as a whole, a model which encourages critical and subversive readings of the text and its claims. When Flip catches a glimpse of

²⁶ *Mise en abyme* is a French term, “borrowed from heraldry”, and is described by Wenche Ommundsen as “an embedded self-representation or mirror-image of the text within the text” (10). Katarina’s diary functions similarly.

Gert's attempt to paint his first female portrait, for example, he notes that "[t]he face showed some detail, but the rest of the figure was little more than a smear, as if he hadn't decided yet whether it should be a nude or a woman in a full-length dress. *Perhaps both*" (*DV* 140; italics added). The painting reflects two of the multiple possibilities of representation by the artist, and interpretation by the viewer, enabled by the real-life woman upon whom it is modelled. Thus, the text upon the canvas attempts to resist the stereotypical or singular readings of women and their roles often perpetuated within the patriarchal society of the Valley.

Unfortunately, however, this attempt is undercut by the restrictions inherent within this society, and within the text itself. To represent the figure as either fully "nude" or in a "full-length dress" upholds the formulaic representations of women as either sexual objects, or as property to be protected from outside temptation, respectively. Each of these stereotypical roles is perpetuated within the patriarchal limitations of the Valley. The sexual objectification of women is a constant, and includes the description of Flip's initial sighting of Emma, described in a mode which highlights her sexuality and focuses on her nakedness, her sensuality and, most specifically, her breasts (*DV* 26-7).²⁷ The policing of sexual boundaries and racial purity is also illustrated, as Emma explains to Flip that the men are "jealous of their possessions" (i.e. women) (*DV* 144) and Lukas claims, "[i]t is the woman in her weakness who has to be protected. You must realise that we set much store by our women. Their honour is our honour" (*DV* 167). Thus, the multiplicity of representation, in this

²⁷ Similar criticisms can be made regarding the description of women in many of Brink's works and have led to a critique of not only Brink's male narrators but of the author himself. Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Olga Taxidou claim that a similar stance in regard to women is exhibited in *A Dry White Season*. They note the "male gaze" within the text, "one which is cast on – and posits – a female 'other' as an object of appropriation and reconstruction. As is the case with the 'racial other', the female exists in Brink's text only to the extent that it can facilitate, trigger, unleash the protagonist's desire for growth and fulfilment" (46). This criticism is supported by the text, in which the narrator stares at the nude female protagonist, Melanie, and states, "it was as necessary for me to gaze as it was for her to be gazed at" (272). Laura Mulvey, a feminist theorist whose work focuses on cinematic representations of women, develops the Freudian theory of "the gaze"; Nick Mansfield summarises: "the representation of female bodies and characters, both within film and in the culture that surrounds it, are subordinate to the desperate meaning-making procedures of the masculine subject" (97). He notes that, in the terms described by Mulvey, "woman functions [...] not as a category of living people, but as a representation alone, whose function is to reassure or encourage the subjective self-definition of masculinity" (97). Kolocotroni and Taxidou note that in claiming access to "the female body and sexual experience, the text, however 'honourable' its intentions may be, enacts those very power structures it initially sets out to criticise" (48). I will consider questions regarding Brink's representation further in chapter two.

instance, is limited by the patriarchal confines of both the subject and the artist. Perhaps the problematic nature of female representation within patriarchal society explains Gert's prior focus on solely male portraiture. He explains, "[y]ou see, I've never painted a woman from the Devil's Valley before" (DV 140).

The dual possibilities inherent within Gert's single portrait provide one of many examples of multiple representation within the painting motif, and emphasise the importance of multiple readings, not only of the canvas, but also of text and narrative as a whole, including the narrative of everyday life experience. The "hint of earlier figures lurking in the layers of paint" (DV 140) evident within the single female portrait is also to be found in a painting of Lukas Death:

like most of Gert Brush's work it had been overpainted many times: on the top layer was Lukas Death as one saw him today, thin and righteous, with his hang-dog face. But clearly visible underneath was another portrait of the same face, only much younger. More shadowy in the background, in deeper half-obsured layers, loomed the ghost of yet another, a quite frightening face with two red glowing eyes. And behind this one still more shadows. (DV 136-7)

There is a practical explanation given for the existence of shadowy images of the past, and yet the metaphorical connotations are also evident:

[o]n the floor, with their faces to the wall, stood a dozen or so canvases on which, Lukas Death had told me, Gert Brush had painted, over the years, the portraits of all the inhabitants of the Devil's Valley. As soon as he'd completed a round of canvases he would start again at the beginning, overpainting the previous portraits. It was his habit, as it had been his father's and his grandfather's, to dilute his paint quite excessively with linseed oil, for reasons of parsimony rather than aesthetics, as a result of which *all the earlier faces remained vaguely and disconcertingly visible, staring up at one as if through a bloody glass darkly*. (DV 52-3; italics added)

The Biblical reference to opaque glass²⁸ draws attention to a postmodernist concern with the medium through which images are viewed or known and thus foregrounds the inevitable mediation involved in viewing or reading any artistic form. Thus, the conveyance of meaning through mediums such as the 'dark glass' of language is subverted. As Flip notes: "[s]ilence lay spilled across the space between us. There was something superfluous about words, or perhaps a lack. Same difference" (*DV* 324). In consideration of the role of language in literature, in "Literature and Offence", Brink notes:

the literary text [...] is *not* a transparent glass through which a 'world beyond' can be observed. The qualities of the glass itself – its opacity, thickness, coloration, convexity or concavity, its smoothness or otherwise – demand the attention of the spectator [...] in the final analysis it is the *density* of the literary experience which determines our way of looking 'through' it at the world beyond. (122; original italics)

Similarly, in his introduction to *The Novel*, Brink utilises this metaphor of a window to discuss texts in which language is central. He states, of the authors he considers:

[i]n not a single one of their texts does language dissolve into the legendary transparency of a picture window through which the reader's gaze can wander, unchallenged, across the landscape of the story beyond: on the contrary, in each of them, in one way or another, the self-awareness of the medium presents the reader with startling new discoveries and challenges. (19)

Ommundsen utilises a similar mirror-metaphor in her discussion of textual representation: "the one thing a literary text *cannot* do is imitate or reflect the world through a mirror-like self-effacing medium" (24). Whilst discussing Alain

²⁸1 Corinthians 13:12, King James Version: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known". In various translations the word "glass" is replaced with "mirror". The Worldwide English Bible translates the passage as follows: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known".

Robbe-Grillet's "The Secret Room", she notes that "it works to denaturalise techniques of representation, forcing the reader to concentrate on the representational surface instead of passing 'through' it to the represented" (36). In these terms, Gert's portraiture can be read as a symbolic representation of the artistic medium, highlighting, in the residue of previous creations, the constructed nature of the finished artwork, whether in terms of the paint of artists or the language of authors.

Memory

the history one tells, via memory,
assumes the form of a narrative of the past
that charts the trajectory of how one's self came to be.
(Freeman 33)

The mediated nature of artistic endeavour, whether in portraiture or narrative, is also linked to that of memory. Gert claims, "I always paint from memory" (*DV* 140), and his paintings act as a repository for his memories of the townspeople, providing, in association with the myths and stories of the inhabitants, an alternative model of historical record to that of the usual official written records which the town resists. In "Stories of History", Brink discusses the crucial role played by memory, stating:

the confluence of innumerable records and recordings of memories determines the publicly sanctioned account, which debouches into history; facts, as a Kantian *Ding an sich* [thing-in-itself], remain forever inaccessible except through our versions of them – and these versions are dependent on memory. (30-1)

In her novel *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood extends this account of memory as a communal record to include the personal, noting, "we are what we remember [...] we are also... what we forget" (406), an idea Brink appears to endorse in his citation of Atwood in this article (*SOH* 35). The collection of memories symbolised by Gert's paintings provide a model by which to explore the nature of memory and its role in relation to the past. The attempt to capture an image on canvas is usually associated with the desire to retain that image as a record of the

past or in order that it may act as a prompt to remembrance in the future. The act of overpainting previous portraits, however, symbolises the desire to eclipse elements of the past with more recent versions, and thus the retentive nature of art and memory appears undermined. Paradoxically, the reappearance of shadowy images of the past, behind the more recent portraiture, subverts this reimagining, and suggests the manner in which memory may resist censorship and editorial intrusion.

The lack of control over memory is therefore emphasised, and resonates within the text, particularly when Flip, impossibly, attempts to take ownership of a moment in order to control the memory that will result from it. He narrates: “[m]emorise this, I thought, remember, hold on to it, against all the nights and days and delusions to come, when I might be tempted to distort and betray it, to lie about it” (*DV* 352). Such reclamation, premised on the notion that memory is pure or absolute, is precisely what the novel denies. As in Gert’s paintings, in which the image captured can never be entirely true to the original, the relationship between a memory and the event upon which it is based is also foregrounded as one of misrepresentation. Memories are unreliable in their subjectivity and transience as Tim Keegan acknowledges when he states, “human memory is given to error, misconception, elision, distortion, elaboration and downright fabrication” (qtd. in Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool 91).²⁹ When Flip attempts to recall the details of a conversation with Emma, for example, he compares his confused memories to Gert’s indistinct images, stating, “[i]t’s like Gert Brush’s paintings, with the ghosts of lost faces looming up through all those layers” (*DV* 303). Thus, the paintings provide a model of both the possibilities of multiplicity and, paradoxically, the limitations, both in relation to memory and to the theme of multiple representations as a whole. The significance of this conception of memory will be crucial in the readings of Brink’s novels which follow.

²⁹ However, Keegan does not dismiss the role of memory entirely. He states, “in the narratives of ordinary people’s lives we begin to see some of the major forces of history at work, large social forces that are arguably the real key to understanding the past” (qtd. in Minkley and Rassool 91). Minkley and Rassool further explain that “memory represents more than individual experience and stands for collective social and economic experience” (91).

Censorship

We have written them [indigenous peoples] out of our history.
[...] An entire history [...] of errors.
(17490)

Brink refuses to render multiplicity as a simplistic and unproblematic concept. Although Gert Brush's paintings appear to offer multiple representations, and thus invite multiple interpretations, they are bound by elements similar to those which restrict his representation of women. When Flip views Gert's work, he notes:

[w]hat struck me, like on the other paintings by Gert Brush I'd glimpsed before, was the weird use of colour: everything was done in whites and pinks, like fucking marshmallows, so that all the portraits looked seriously sick to the point of unworldliness. (DV 137)

Flip suggests, "I'm sure with only white and red you're never going to get it right. Shouldn't you mix in something darker? Brown, perhaps?" Gert's response is emphatic, "[b]rown? [...] But I'm painting *white* people" (DV 137).

In each of Gert's representations, the limitations of the artistic medium and societal censorial impediments result in his failure to provide an accurate reflection. Thus, each of his renditions is a further *version*, rather than an exact copy, of the original. It is suggested, therefore, that all representation is a version and that no one version can be 'truthful'. This revelation is given further emphasis when considered in relation to Brink's frequent use of mirror imagery, to be discussed further.

Like Gert's portraiture, the accepted version of the community's history excludes darker pigmentation, claiming racial purity. In contradiction to this claim, towards the conclusion of the novel Seer Lukas makes a confession to Flip regarding the community's ancestry. He says, "[w]hen we trekked in here [...]"

this whole valley was full of enemies [...] there were Bushmen and Hottentots³⁰ all over the place" (*DV* 285).³¹ He also admits that his second wife was a "Hottentot" and that the biracial "throwbacks" the community exterminates are a result of this union (*DV* 285). Typically, he justifies the interracial relationship, the appropriation of another man's wife, and his renaming of her, in Biblical terms (*DV* 285). He also articulates his mastery over the original inhabitants stating, "[w]e had to get rid of them to clear a spot for ourselves" (*DV* 285). Although ashamed of his wife's colour, he appears proud of the act of appropriation of both woman and land, boasting "[w]e fucked the whole Devil's Valley white" (*DV* 286). The discrepancy between this version of events, and others in which the indigenous Western South Africans are wholly absent, illustrates the manner in which extremist ideals of racial purity determine the way in which representation is rendered and accepted.³² The revelation of previously absent elements resonates within the imagery related to art, acting as a reminder of the censorship imposed upon the artist and his subject alike.

Gert's continuous repainting of earlier images may be viewed as an act of protest against this censorship, as he readdresses earlier forms of representation and attempts to formulate new and more 'truthful' images;³³ earlier representations cannot be wholly concealed, however. Like Flip's description of Emma's extra pair of breasts, the earlier artistry is still evident: "like small smudges on an artist's paper, something first drawn, then erased, but not quite, not altogether" (*DV* 27). When questioned about his overpainting, Gert replies:

[a]g, man, the more I try to paint out the old ones the more they come back. Yesterday, for example, you couldn't see young Lukas Death at all.

³⁰ "Bushman" and "Hottentots" are denigratory terms used by Afrikaners to describe the indigenous tribes of the Cape region of South Africa. Bushmen are now usually referred to as the San, and Hottentots as the Khoi, although the two terms are often combined as the Khoisan; a term which is in itself politically insensitive, as the two tribes consider themselves distinct (Paton, 105-108).

³¹ C.f. Tant Poppie's claim that "if there was any of them around it must have been long before the Lermiets came in" (*DV* 95).

³² Traditionally indigenous and/or non-white South Africans have been silenced or absent from the literature and historical narrative of South Africa, an absence which will be further addressed in chapter three.

³³ Gert's images are more 'truthful' in the sense that they attempt to capture a more recent version of reality. Paradoxically, however, the new images remain bound by the same restrictions which

Nor his father, old Lukas Devil, looking over his shoulder there. But you can see for yourself, today they're back. (*DV* 138)

This image is reminiscent of the painting imagery utilised in Brink's earlier work, *Imaginings of Sand*, (discussed in chapter two). In this novel, Rachel, locked in the cellar to hide the shame of her illegitimate pregnancy, paints the walls of her dungeon from floor to ceiling with a multitude of lewd images (*IS* 89). The paintings originally resisted the censoring actions of Rachel's parents (*IS* 89-90), and in the narrative present the "Rorschach stains of those indecipherable paintings" (*IS* 8) resist both erasure and interpretation. Ultimately, little is known of Rachel's narrative except for "the silent evidence of her paintings that no one could ever expunge from the basement walls – reappearing after every attempt like stigmata" (*IS* 108). In *Reinventing a Continent*, a collection of non-fictional essays, Brink notes a similar event:

[i]n the Western Transvaal, during the War years, a farmer painted two huge swastikas on his barn to scare off the Jewish pedlars who used to visit the place and sell their wares. The pedlars informed the military authorities, who ordered the farmer to paint over the swastikas. This was done. But today, more than forty years later, and after hundreds of coats of paint, the swastikas still reappear, like Stigmata, every time it rains. Some things can never be obliterated. Some experiences are constantly reborn to haunt the human mind. (38)³⁴

Thus, it is suggested, artistic endeavour is both limited by and paradoxically resistant to censorial impediment. Brink's artistic imagery demonstrates that Truth lies, not in any singular representation, nor in the multiple representations symbolised by Gert's many layers of paint, but in the act of resistance against dominant discourses. Thus, the swastikas and Rachel's lewd paintings are not in themselves 'truthful', but contain a Truth in their ongoing contestation against the censorial.

inhibited the originals.

³⁴ Brink also relates the reappearance of images of the past to "the persistence of memory" (*HOI* 43); a theme which will be discussed in more detail in the chapter related to *Imaginings of Sand*.

Reflections of the Past

[I]t is not the past as such that has produced the present or poses the conditions for the future [...] but the way we think about it. Or, even more pertinently, the way in which we deal with it in language. (80H 33)

In further explorations of historical 'truth', the reoccurrence of images of the past provides a recurrent motif throughout Brink's oeuvre and is represented in many forms, including the frequent use of mirror imagery. In *An Act of Terror*, for example, the Landman family's heirloom mirror holds within it shadows of the past in a manner reminiscent of Gert Brush's paintings, acting as a repository of memories. The mirror has travelled with the Landman ancestors for many generations, as Thomas explains:

[t]hirteen generations of Landmans [...] have looked into that mirror. It travelled into the interior in oxcarts. It survived Bloukrans, where the Zulus murdered the *trekboers*. Even the angel Gabriel, if one can repeat the Landmans' claim without committing blasphemy, appeared in it. (AT 188)

From an early age, Thomas is convinced that the cracked and "mottled" (AT 190) mirror is a repository of his family's ancestry, a reflection of their lives and their collective experiences:

'[o]ne can't see it with the naked eye, Mum. But I'm sure they're still somewhere in this glass. They're soaked into it. And if only one knew how to look, they would still be there, looking back at you'. (AT 190)

Further mirror imagery throughout the text reinforces this notion, including a passage in which the narrator's girlfriend, Nina, wonders, "[d]o you think it's possible, [...] that something of us will be left behind in this mirror, deep inside?" (AT 262). *Imaginations of Sand* develops this possibility further, representing the mirror not only as a reflective device, but also as one in which images are captured; a memorial record. Kamma frequently disappears for long periods of

time, never failing to take the mirror with her, despite punishment:

[a]s far as Adam could make out, after many interrogations, she'd taken it with her so that the Khoikhoi she encountered could be shown in it the reflection of the Oosthuizen who had adopted her. But whether it really worked that way remained a mystery. Certainly, when she tried to show Adam the reflections she'd brought back from the people she had been visiting there was nothing but his own face in the mirror. (*IS* 188)³⁵

After Adam exiles Kamma from his property, however, her claims are proven:

[a]s he came past the mirror in the voorhuis he stopped. What he saw there was, surely, impossible. Yet there it was: Maria's face. Kamma's. Not clear and sharp like his own, but a vague smudge, as if she was looking at him from very far away, like a face seen under water, but unmistakably hers. (*IS* 191-2)

The mirror imagery thus acts as a reflective device, in both senses of the word, by which to view the past, and illustrates Brink's thematic concern with the interrelationships between the present and the past and the indelible traces of the latter within the former. In *An Act of Terror*, the narrator articulates this relationship when he states, "the here and now of it, one only grasps through what is either past or yet to happen; on its own, each moment is devoid of meaning" (*AT* 375). The deliberate disruption of a linear timeframe within the text, as in many of Brink's novels, foregrounds the manner in which past, present and future intermingle with and affect one another. The cyclical nature of the narration in *Devil's Valley*, in which the concluding dialogue repeats the opening words, and Flip's stay in the Valley is enclosed by his journeys into and out of the Valley (*DV* 3ff c.f. *DV* 351ff), exemplifies this temporal intermingling in narratorial terms.³⁶

³⁵ This image resonates with theoretical allusions as to the inability of the dominant 'self' to view the 'other'. Robert Young labels this "reduction of a 'person' to a 'nobody' to the position of 'other' – the inexorable plot of racism" (2). The 'other' is thus invisible and yet, paradoxically, is rendered invisible by virtue of visible markers of difference, such as darker skin colour, or, in the case of a woman, the lack of a penis. Mulvey records that "ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, *the visually ascertainable absence of the penis*" (96; italics added).

³⁶ Brink addresses this phenomenon in his essay "Sentimental Journey": "[h]ow strange that lines,

As Flip states, “all this was still waiting to happen. Yet in a way it was already there” (DV 8), and “[i]n a way everything that happened afterwards was somewhat second-hand” (DV 74).

As in the mirror imagery of *An Act of Terror*, the painting motif of *Devil's Valley* also serves to emphasise the perpetuation of the past and the continuing presence of ancestral ties, illustrating that each member of the community is viewed not merely as an individual, but as a product of their ancestry. The paradox is that this ancestry is *precisely* that which the Valley's inhabitants wish to refuse or ‘white out’. Brink utilises the image of a “woman's navel” (DV 345) as a reminder of the irrevocable ties to one's ancestors, and emphasises each member's role within the community as defined both by ancestry and inheritance. Gert Brush, “like all the other men in the settlement [had] taken over the job from his father” (DV 52) and when Ouma Liesbet is prompted to tell Flip “more about the Valley” (DV 105), her response is a recitation of names in both Biblical and patriarchal form, which begins, “Lukas Seer begat Lukas Nimrod, and Lukas Nimrod begat Lukas-up-Above [...]” (DV 105). Similar demonstrations of the importance of ancestral identification permeate the literature and culture of South Africa. In *Country of My Skull*, for example, in which the aftermath of the Apartheid regime is depicted, Antjie Krog records the testimony of Chief Anderson Joyi appearing before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and notes the way in which he also begins his narrative with a recitation of his lineage. He tells her: “[t]heir names give my story a shadow. Their names put what has happened to me in perspective [...] Their names say we have the ability to endure the past ... and the present” (208). Naming oneself and one's ancestry is a mini-narrative of identification and belonging and creates an immortality beyond the physicality of death. In a manner reminiscent of the *Maori* of New Zealand, in which a recitation of one's *whakapapa* (i.e. lineage) narrates a person's place within their family and community, encapsulating both genealogy and cultural identity, each member of Devil's Valley is placed within what is ostensibly a clearly defined contemporary and historical framework.

given enough rope, tend to shape themselves into circles. Always this return to beginnings. Never quite the same, but we seem to need these moments to take stock, to examine ourselves, to rediscover where we were, have been, may be going to” (246).

Despite the significance of ancestry to characters in the novel, any ancestral framework is complicated by incestuous relationships, the birth and extermination of throwbacks to non-white forebears (*DV* 205, 231-2), and doubts as to the paternity of various members of the community. These complicated relationships refute a linear ancestry, challenging the narrative of racial purity and ancestral ownership of the Valley that is upheld by the majority of its inhabitants. The presence of rock paintings in the area (*DV* 21, 353) and the endurance of indigenous custom and myth (*DV* 104-5, 177, 298) provide evidence of non-settler South African inhabitants within the Valley and the settlers' contact with them. The present townspeople claim these myths as their own (*DV* 105), despite obvious blends of local tribal myth and Biblical characterisation (*DV* 104-5, 171-2, 244-5), illustrating the paradoxical nature of the town's history. The most powerful reminder of the townspeople's biracial ancestry is provided by the "throwbacks" who are born intermittently within the Valley. These children, who exhibit the darker skin of their non-white ancestors, are executed by the townspeople, so that they may not be reminded of the non-white ancestry which they have long since denied (*DV* 205, 231-2).³⁷ However, just as the past resurfaces in Gert's paintings, the denied past of miscegenation shines through. As Oom Lukas notes, "the problem with yesterday is it never stays down, you got to keep stamping on it" (*DV* 286-7). The eradication of these children thus represents a censorial act which fails to erase past narratives of miscegenation. Like memories, the "throwbacks" constantly return.

Similarly, the walking dead of Devil's Valley ensure there is little opportunity for the past to be forgotten, and represent the act of re-memembering. These spiritual presences act as traces within the text, foregrounding the absent and silent narratives of the past and reminding the reader to remain aware of these interstices. They therefore maintain a constant awareness that any version is

³⁷ Again, an interpretative act is emphasised within the text; interpretation of the physical colouring of a child determines whether they may live or die. Similarly, children afflicted with lameness are scrutinised, and those judged to have the same affliction as Lukas Lermiet are "removed from the bosom of the congregation" (*DV* 165). The affliction must "be exactly the same as the lameness the Seer suffered after the Devil struck him on the hip" (*DV* 168). Notably, Lukas Death states that "it takes a good eye and guidance from above to recognise" (*DV* 168). Ironically, he also quotes the Biblical warning, "[j]udge not, that ye be not judged" (*DV* 169).

redolent with alternatives, and act as markers to remind the reader of the interconnections between binary pairs such as absence and presence, living and dead, past and present. As Tant Poppie states, “it’s a pity we can’t get away from our yesterdays” (*DV* 326). Rather than merely haunting their survivors, the dead have an interactive relationship with those still living. Lukas Death recognises this ongoing symbiosis when he explains to the narrator that the history of Grandpa Lukas is “unadulterated” (*DV* 165) because “[t]he man this history happened to may have died, but he is still in our midst. Grandpa Lukas. He makes sure that we keep to the truth” (*DV* 165). Much later, Flip begins to acknowledge the unique relationship between living and dead, present and past, commenting:

[f]or the first time I began to understand something more about the way in which the dead continued to haunt the living. In a sense they are more real than the living, because the living merely pursue their own lives, but we assume the dead. It is only through us they can work through the unfinished business they left behind. (*DV* 242)

Thus, the walking dead act in a similar manner to the “throwbacks”, symbolically foregrounding the manner in which the past continues to affect the present. Flip recognises that although every effort is made by the majority of the townspeople to ignore or eradicate elements of the past, especially those of which they are ashamed, the past continues to haunt the town as effectively as the walking dead do. In describing a typical day in the Valley, he illustrates the manner in which past and present ‘realities’ merge:

Isak Smous counting the money he’ll never spend. Job Raisin at his stands of drying tobacco and raisins, branch in one hand to chase away the birds that disappeared from the Devil’s Valley a century ago [...] Peet Flatfoot [...] hiding in the thickets beside the dried-up water holes to spy on the naked girls who have long stopped swimming there. (*DV* 32)

Passages such as this, in which the narration leans towards magic realism challenge the usual privileging of the present moment or ‘reality’ over the past or

'fiction', and thus question such privileging, resisting the reader's attempts to cling to 'facts', 'truth', or conclusion. As in *Imaginations of Sand*, the usual binary distinctions between 'reality' and illusion are blurred to create a 'surreal' environment. The effect is to maintain a reader-stance in which perspective is consistently altered and interpretation constantly undermined. The text is shaped in such a way that the reader's search for the meaning or 'truth' of the text is refused; the reader is instead directed to assess the nature of the construction of the text, rather than focussing purely on its content. As past and present merge, the reader is prompted to challenge the manner in which each is rendered.

The Silences of the Past

custodians of the past
(J. U. Jacobs 1989: 32)

Historical reminders such as the walking dead and the "throwbacks" ensure that the past remains a living presence within the community, yet each fails to effectively speak the silences or revisit the absences within the town's histories. Even in death, there is doubt and ambiguity, as exemplified by the grave markers in the cemetery. Flip notes, "[t]here were more High Dutch verses from the Bible than names, with no date anywhere in sight [...]" One stone was totally blank, except for a large question mark" (*DV* 47). He also discovers that the grave assigned to Lukas Lermiet appears empty (*DV* 47-8) and notes, "[t]hey accompany us everywhere, the legions of the dead, all of them, mostly invisible, inaudible, but always there, all the voices *silenced*, all the stories *forever unfinished*" (*DV* 272 italics added).

It is the women (and the indigenous ancestors) of the community whose stories are most obviously absent from the official oral narratives, and whose voices are most often silenced. This silencing is most effectively portrayed by the fact that "[w]omen are not allowed to speak in church, except to address the Lord in prayer" (*DV* 317). Dalena tells Flip, "[t]hey [men] took our whole history [...]" There's always a woman in the background. Not that you'd know if you only listened to [the men]" (*DV* 206), and later continues "[t]here were many remarkable women among us" (*DV* 217). She then proceeds to tell an alternative

version of the Valley's history, in which women play a key, and often heroic, role. Mooi-Janna, in particular, is characterised as a heroine who saved the Valley from certain destruction, although her heroic actions resulted in her death at the hands of her father and the community (*DV* 211-15). It is clear that Dalena's version is, in some sense, a feminist response to the patriarchal ideology in terms of which official versions of the community's story have been constructed.

In addition to the blatant statements made by Dalena above, which prompt the reader to question patriarchal forms of history within the text, Brink also punctuates the text with ironic references to the way in which women are positioned within the community. In one such instance, Mooi-Janna is described as knowing "the mountains like the inside of her father's hand" (*DV* 212). Her own identity is thus highlighted as subservient to that of her father, a notion which is reinforced by the naming processes within the Valley, in which women are named after their fathers until a husband's name supersedes (*DV* 262).³⁸ Officially, Katarina, an ancestor to Annie-of-Alwyn, represents another historical silence, yet her story has also been passed on through the female generations and is now entrusted to the care of Annie. When Annie prompts Flip to promise that Katarina's story will be written up exactly as she told it, she explains, "[t]hen *somebody* will at least know about her, you see. And perhaps about me too. It's terrible never to have been known about" (*DV* 264; original italics). Katarina was ignored by patriarchal history and her diary has survived only through its inheritance from one female generation to the next. Despite the diary's survival, the text lacks any "dates" and is so "wrapped in religious meditations" (*DV* 267), that Flip asks, in frustration, "[w]hat was there really to glean from those cryptic entries in an old-fashioned copperplate handwriting?" (*DV* 267). It appears the narrator finds the written form as difficult to interpret and verify as the oral narrative, and continues to exhibit a preference for 'facts' such as dates and figures. He concludes, "I was following Little-Lukas' example, I thought wryly, who'd copied Immanuel Kant in his exercise book without ever understanding a word of it" (*DV* 267), and rejects Emma's assertion that "[i]t's not necessary to understand" (*DV* 145). Thus, despite the diary's existence, Flip's failure to

³⁸ A practice still largely upheld in contemporary society.

understand Katarina's narrative relegates it to the silences of history or, at best, to the account of the reporter-as-historian.

Postmodernist Meaninglessness?

an endless gliding from one to another.
(DV353)

Flip's concern with the inability to extract meaning from the Valley's multiple narratives continues throughout the text, and is apparently in accord with a common theoretical criticism posed in relation to the postmodernist advocacy of multiplicity. On the novel's penultimate page, he says of his experiences in the Valley:

[a]t the time I still thought that perhaps one day I could manage to put all the bits and pieces together and make sense of them. Now I'm no longer so sure. Not because there are so many stories I've not yet heard, but because *I suspect that even if I were to know them all there would still not be a whole, just an endless gliding from one to another.* (DV 353; italics added)

Some contemporary theorists argue that the apparent freedom offered by an endless array of alternative narratives results in a correlative constant and infinite deferral of meaning which can only result in *meaninglessness*.³⁹ However, although the acknowledgement of this danger is made, the text utilises the positive elements associated with this notion in two crucial and interrelated ways. Firstly, a postmodernist leaning towards diversity offers positive elements such as the

³⁹ In conjunction with this concern, questions are raised as to the validity of the medium through which attempts to express meaning are articulated. The Derridean notion of the endless deferral of meaning inherent within language, for example, which "refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning" (Toril Moi 9), represents a similar postmodernist *meaninglessness*. Jacques Derrida coined this phenomenon 'différance', in a pun which plays on the French verb 'différer', which means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. Différance describes "the perpetual slippage of meaning from sign to sign (or from moment to moment) in the linguistic chain" (Ted Honderich 201). In *The Logics of Disintegration*, Dews notes that "[f]or Derrida the movement of *différance*, language as writing, undermines the interpretive aim of grasping the coherent and unitary meaning of a text, of revealing its definitive truth" (11) and adds that "Derrida's view is not that meaning is *inexhaustible*, but rather that any specification of meaning can only function as a self-defeating attempt to stabilize and restrain what he terms the 'dissemination' of the text" (13).

freedom of multiple alternatives, and thus provides a means by which to critique traditional forms of narrative in which metanarrative closure is often in operation.⁴⁰ This critique is crucial to Brink's exploration of and undermining of singular narratives such as those associated with Apartheid South African society. Secondly, the confusion and doubt resulting from multiplicity are countered by a *layering* of experience which permits the many differing identities of each individual and situation to permeate the text. This permeation, Brink seems to suggest, creates a richness and diversity of experience that is Truthful in contrast to a singular narrative in which questions as to *whose* 'truth' is being presented must be asked. Towards the end of the novel, Flip momentarily recognises the value of this endless gliding of non-factual narrative, acknowledging its relevance in the shaping of individual and communal identity, and in providing comfort in an often meaningless world:

[w]ith the lies of stories – all the lies, all the stories – we shape ourselves the way the first person was shaped from the dust of the earth. *That* is our first and ultimate dust. Who knows, if we understood what was happening to us, we might not have needed stories in the first place. We fabricate yesterdays for ourselves that we can live with, which make the future possible, even if it remains infinitely variable and vulnerable, a whole bloody network of flickerings, an intimate lightning to illuminate the darkness inside. (DV 287; original italics)

This "infinitely variable and vulnerable [...] network of flickerings" is the Truth which Flip ultimately discovers, far removed from 'factual' evidence. Reinforcing the proposal made within this text, Brink has commented on the relationship between traditional historical and fictional forms, suggesting that "fiction acquires an amplitude that information lacks" (RLH 139) and emphasises that "a story, when it is really worthwhile, encapsulates a truth that transcends mere fact" (qtd. in Joyce). Jonathan Rosen also honours the Truthful nature of narrative when he states:

⁴⁰ In his introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard refers to postmodernism's "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). According to him, it is precisely the challenge to and refusal of metanarrative authority that characterises postmodernity.

all the arcane things a writer discovers about his craft aren't really arcane. Everybody has to make the inner descent into himself, everybody needs metaphors to live by, and everybody has to order the chaos of experience into some kind of narrative, if only in the depths of dream-fashioning sleep. (n. p.)

Within Brink's text, Dalena's plea to "[t]ell me anything [...] even if you have to make it up. I want to know everything. I know nothing" (*DV* 203), exhibits an acknowledgement that even within an imagined reconstruction there is some Truth to be gleaned regarding her deceased son. Likewise, within the larger context of South African history, Yassir (Mark) Henry, who testified in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission trials, claims "I tell this in order to have some kind of continuing" (qtd. in Krog 79). Personal identity is thus viewed as inextricably linked to narration. Flip's query: "am I beginning to grow into my own story like a toenail?" (*DV* 353) and his recognition that "[i]n the end we grow into the stories laid out for us like clothes for a new day" (*DV* 241) demonstrate the inextricable ties between ourselves and our personal and collective narratives.

The Truth

The truth, almost the whole truth, and nothing but.
(*DV* 28)

As suggested above, *Devil's Valley* epitomises a textual exploration of the conventional notion of 'truth'. In his deconstruction of a hegemonic discourse such as that propounded by the patriarchal and white master narrative of the Valley (and Apartheid), Brink demonstrates that unitary, linear or fixed narratives are not Truthful, as they deny the experiences and voices of a multitude of others. Similarly, I have argued that in undermining the veracity of the 'factual', Brink lays claim to the possibility of alternative 'truths'. Acts of representation, symbolised in images of painting, mirrors and memories, emphasise thematic concerns with the representation and recording of 'truth'. Brink's novelistic and often postmodernist disruption of binary thought and his usage of tactics which ensure the reader remains aware of judgmental and interpretative acts, foreground

the manner in which 'truth' is a *constructed* and often oppressive narrative. The reader is therefore prompted to remain alert to the imposition of dominant discourses and the prejudicial bases upon which these are formed. Thus, in the larger context, the singular and fixed notion of 'truth' upon which Apartheid South Africa was constructed is *de-constructed* and revealed as *arbitrarily* racist and genderist.

I have also argued that, in response to the version of 'truth' espoused by authority, Brink foregrounds a notion of Truth which is multiple, non-linear and inclusive. Brink offers a series of imagined narratives of the oppressed; the women of the Valley and the non-white South African ancestors, whose narratives have long been denied, are given voice within the text. As demonstrated within *Devil's Valley*, Brink proposes multiple narratives in which all voices have representation, and in which the pre-eminence of any one version over another is denied. In this model, dominant discourses are countered by the continual interplay of a variety of voices, or narratives. As I have proposed above, and will continue to argue, this is Brink's Truth: not something that can be discovered, but rather an ongoing *process* one enacts.

CHAPTER TWO

“STORIES OR HISTORY?:”¹
 FEMALE COUNTER-NARRATIVES
 IN *IMAGININGS OF SAND*

She was a multitude. I am. We are.
 It is a very basic arithmetic I am learning.
 (IS 333)

¹ (IS 88).

Narrative Remembrance

Two things had helped him, he used to say.

Laughter and stories.

If you have those, he maintained, nothing can kill your spirit. It said in the Talmud, he told me, that God had created people to tell Him stories; but later, sadly, they forgot about Him, they even forgot that they themselves were stories first told by God. And ever since, if old Moishe was to be believed, men and women have been telling each other stories.

(1892)²

In a manner similar to that of *Devil's Valley*, Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* also investigates the nature of 'truth'. In this chapter, I will further explore Brink's undermining of hegemonic discourses in order to demonstrate his adherence to the principles of a notion of Truth as an ongoing act of narration which favours multiplicity and resists closure. In *Imaginations of Sand*, the challenge to the dominant discourse and its narrative claims is voiced almost exclusively from the female perspective. In response to the master narrative of patriarchy, the text consists of an (imaginative) series of female narratives which resist linearity, singularity or closure. Commenting on the novel, Brink notes, "I [...] attempted a subversion of male historiography and linear genealogy by transforming dominant historical discourses into the inventions of the (female) imagination" (SAP 489).³ These imaginative narratives act as symbolic representations of the voices of *all* those silenced by dominant discourses, and thus will be revealed as equally relevant to discussions regarding other forms of prejudice, such as racism.

The exploration of personal and collective female identities and their constitution in narrative thus also comments on discursive identity formation within other groups (both dominant and oppressed). Considering Brink's imagery clusters, in which memory and narration are the focus, I will examine his postmodernist refutation of the 'factual' or 'truthful', and illustrate his favouring of multiplicity and doubt within the text. Given Brink's acknowledgement of the mediation of 'truth' found in representational forms such as language, however, it will also be necessary to discuss his seemingly paradoxical claims as to the

² Similarly, Elie Wiesel is reported to have said, "God made humans because he loves stories, and our lives are the stories he tells" (qtd. in Andrew Greely).

³ As will be argued, however, in creating a matriarchal challenge to the dominant discourse of

inherent Truth in narrative.

As in *Devil's Valley*, and exhibited within the larger context of South Africa, the role of memory in relation to narrative, history and identity is again emphasised in this text. In both texts, remembrance is figured as a means by which to search for personal and collective 'truth'. I will also argue that language, naming and narration are represented as modes by which silence is both enforced and potentially countered, and thus also play roles in representing both the 'truth' of master narratives, and the counter-Truth represented by the Brinkian model of contestational narration. Throughout the chapter, Brink's notion of Truth, in which multiplicity of voice and narrative are crucial, will be foregrounded.

Immediately prior to the first South African democratic elections in 1994, Kristien Müller is summoned back to South Africa to the beside of her dying grandmother. Ousted from a state of self-exile and confronted with a nation on the brink of cataclysmic change, Kristien is forced to renew her acquaintance with her homeland, and acknowledge her own troubled identity. When Kristien's sister, Anna, telephones to say their grandmother is seriously ill, she urges Kristien to come, saying, "she has stories to tell you" (*IS* 12). As Kristien decides whether to return to South Africa to her dying relative, she notes, "[w]hat swayed me, ridiculous as it might seem, was what Anna had said about the stories" (*IS* 13). Stories have always been an integral and binding element in the relationship between Kristien and her grandmother, Ouma Kristina. Kristien notes that "[h]er stories always resolved everything, without disturbing the miraculous nature of the world. Which was why I could never have enough of them" (*IS* 5). When Anna asks Ouma "[h]ow far back do you know the story?" Ouma replies:

[f]ar enough. In our family we've been fortunate in always having storytellers around. You have me, I had Petronella, she had Wilhelmina, and so on, far back, all the way to the one who had two names, Kamma and Maria. That makes nine of us all told. (*IS* 174)

Kristien decides, "it is time to return to older kinds of knowing, to withdraw again

to that desert where Ouma and her spirits have roamed and where they are now in danger of extinction" (*IS* 15). In an interior monologue, Kristien pleads:

Ouma Kristina, tell me about the woman with the hair as long as a river – the girl who killed herself in the cellar – the woman who built the palace – the one who was as strong as a buffalo – the one whose tongue was cut out – the one who came from the water – the one who wrote in sand –

[....] I'll listen to every single story you wish to tell me: don't let them die with you. (*IS* 5)

Kristien has been chosen as a receptacle for the narratives of her female ancestors, which represent the collective memory of a matriarchal lineage. She notes, "[f]or as long as I can remember Ouma Kristina has claimed to have recognised 'something' in me that marked me as the one chosen to receive all her accumulated stories" (*IS* 86) and describes herself as "the one elected to take over, from her, the burden – or the delight, depending on how one looked at it – of the family's memories, recollections, fantasies" (*IS* 8). Ouma's claim that "I have an amazing memory. At times I even surprise myself. I can remember things that never happened" (*IS* 4) foregrounds the importance of re-membling. Her comment is suggestive of a paradox reiterated throughout the novel: memory is both endorsed as a precious repository of Truth *and* undercut by questions regarding its reliability and addressing its limitations. Ouma further underscores the transient nature of memory when she concludes an otherwise emphatic statement with the qualification, "if I remember well" (*IS* 174). The danger of forgetfulness also undermines purist notions of memorial narrative, and is an ongoing concern for the characters of the novel. Kristien claims, "I haven't forgotten, you'll see" (*IS* 5), but is later challenged by Ouma, whose reliance on Kristien's memory to ensure the continuation of their ancestral narrative prompts her to say:

'I think you've forgotten most of what you knew, you were away too long. But I'll give you back your memory.'

‘You know I won’t forget you. Not ever.’

‘It isn’t me, Kristien. It’s all the others, the ones before us. You dare not forget them now.’ (*IS* 57-8)

As in much of Brink’s oeuvre, memory is here viewed as personal and collective, an antidote to forgetting and the means by which the past may be reclaimed. In the epigraph to his collection of essays entitled *Writing in a State of Siege*, Brink quotes Milan Kundera’s claim that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (7). The quotation foregrounds Brink’s understanding of the redemptive nature of acts of remembering. *Re-membering* achieves a bringing together of different members or parts to form new wholes. The collation of memories allows the past to live on, enabling one to interpret the present with a fuller awareness of one’s origins. When Brink accepted the Martin Luther King Memorial Prize for his novel *A Dry White Season*, he spoke of the award in terms which are also true of memory and narrative. He noted that through the award, “contact is established, across the barriers of time and space, and across the barrier which separates life from death, between people of different times [...] and the experience of one is revalidated in terms of the experience of another” (*WAS* 204). Nonetheless, in his writing, Brink never permits a simplistic view of memory as a means to gain ‘truth’ to obscure its problematic nature; in his novels doubt and unreliability consistently counter access to ‘truth’.

Ancestral Identification

I’m from here. From always.
(Marq de Villiers xxi)

It is only when Kristien returns to the country of her birth, and renews the storytelling relationship with Ouma, that the true relevance of these ancestral narratives becomes clear to her. She states that previously, “I must confess I never saw any special significance in her jumble of stories” (*IS* 86). When she admits to Ouma, “I thought it was just a story” Ouma replies, “[y]ou should have known better. Nothing is just a story” (*IS* 175). Ouma also tells her, “[w]hen you

were a child you thought they were stories. But one way or another they all fit in" (IS 88). Kristien realises that "what used to be stories has suddenly begun to coalesce into a history, hers, ours, mine" (IS 126). In the words of Wenche Ommundsen,⁴ in narrative acts such as Ouma's, she "is not recording history; [but] is inventing the past" (53), fulfilling her duty "[t]o foretell the past, the way prophets foretell the future" (IS 175). When retold the story of her ancestor Kamma's children, Kristien notes, "[i]t was a story I had heard before, in one form or another, when it had still been a story, a diversion, *not yet gathered into our history*" (IS 302; italics added). Thus, the stories, when placed within an ancestral context, develop a meaning relevant to Kristien and her family. This context is exemplified in the following exchange between Kristien and Thando Kumalo, a former colleague in the ANC resistance movement with whom she has become reacquainted:

'Go well' I tell them all.

'*Salani kahle*,' says Thando. 'Stay well.'

'Why do you greet me in the plural?' I ask, intrigued.

'Because you're not alone. You have all your ghosts with you.' (IS 269)⁵

Thando extends this notion of ancestral identity and the sense of belonging inherent within it when he describes the place where he grew up: "[a]ll those hills are inhabited by the ancestors now, they never go away. And while they're there I can always go back. Just to sit there and look out over the sea. So I know I belong here, it's my place" (IS 253).⁶ (One is reminded here of the walking dead ancestors that move among the community of Devil's Valley). Kristen begins to realise that her identity is also connected to that of her ancestors and notes, "[n]ow

⁴ In *Metafictions?*, Ommundsen discusses, *inter alia*, conventional historical fiction as compared to contemporary historiographic metafiction, which "flaunts its violation of ontological boundaries and its anachronistic treatment of the past, calling attention to itself as an imaginary construct, but by so doing questioning the validity of the versions of history we are accustomed to regard as factual" (52).

⁵ Notably, in "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature", Brink records the inspiration for this passage, noting that South African poet Mazisi Kunene, "in taking his leave from someone, [...] would never use the singular form *Sala gahle* ('Stay well') but always the plural, *Salani gahle*. 'Because no-one is ever alone,' he said. 'You are always accompanied by all your spirits'" (25). Brink describes this manner of thought as "a more holistic way of approaching the world" (25).

⁶ C. f. Galant's mythological identification with the land in *A Chain of Voices*, to be discussed in

I am obliged to meet them only in the *imagined* selves of [Ouma's] stories" (*IS* 165; italics added). As she listens to Ouma's narratives, they become a part of her sense of 'self'; she notes they are "gathered into my past" (*IS* 302). Ouma tells her, "[t]hat's why you had to come [...]. To know where you come from. To have something you can take with you. Perhaps to help you understand" (*IS* 175). Thus, Kristien's immersion in the matriarchal narratives instigates not only a recognition of the possibilities of her own narratives, but also a discovery of her own place within the matriarchal rememberings and an acknowledgement of her responsibility to ensure their continuance for future generations. At Ouma's bedside, she says:

[t]he uneasiness comes [...] I think, from the simple fact of being here, at last, alone, with her, with all the memories contained and defined by that meagre little bundle of skin and bones and tendrils of hair. I know the extent of my responsibility, and what it means to be exposed here to past and future alike, conscious of possible origins and possible endings. (*IS* 59)

As she watches Ouma die, Kristien notes the way in which her ancestors are evidenced in Ouma. She states, "I see her sinking slowly, see the flickering ghost-images of many faces passing through hers as if she tries them on and merges with them; see her falling from body to shadow to ever-changing names, cascading through time in a present that never ends" (*IS* 325-6).

Kristien's identification with the narratives of the past also instigates a return from "the misery, real or imagined, of exile" (*IS* 154). In her autobiography, *A Far Cry*, Mary Benson utilises a phrase from T. S. Elliot's *Four Quartets* to articulate a similar cyclical return to one's origins and its relationship with identification:

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time. (9)

In returning to South Africa, Kristien is forced to re-evaluate her place within the country and her identity, both as a South African and as an individual.⁷ In self-exile, she “remained an outsider” (*IS* 310): “I soon learned, in an instinct of self-preservation, never to put down roots, never to get fond enough of any one place to think of it as ‘mine’” (*IS* 42). In a moment of frustration, she asks Anna, “[d]o you think it was easy for me to leave everything behind, to start again from scratch, to build a new life, to try to deny what I was?” (*IS* 49). Until now, she has been unable to make a commitment to “this fucked land” (*IS* 140), South Africa, and admits, “I could no longer bring myself to think of it as ‘back home’” (*IS* 153). Her love for her country is obvious, however, as is her need to formulate a means of connecting with her place of origin. She describes South Africa in terms which emphasise its resistance to interpretation, noting “its still indecipherable hieroglyphics of scrub and stones” (*IS* 20); it depicts:

[a] space impervious to chronology – or, rather, tuned in to a different kind of time, not that of days or weeks or years, appointments or contingencies, but a cyclic motion, summers that blend and merge, that repeat one another without ever being exactly the same, the kind of time that sculpts contours and moulds hills and gnaws away at ridges. Ouma Kristina’s landscape. This expanse, this spare beauty, this deceptive emptiness. I gaze at nothingness; nothingness gazes back. In an inexplicable *atavistic* reaction I go down on my haunches, find a twig, start scratching haphazardly on the hard, bare soil. It comes from the guts; it is all I can think of doing. To exorcise that emptiness. A dialogue beyond, or far below, language. (*IS* 229; italics added)⁸

⁷ This concern with the exiled South African is a fundamental theme within white South African literature and critical commentary. The Afrikaner, in particular, is doubly exiled. Even whilst resident within South Africa, the Afrikaner may feel exiled from her/his roots. As a white South African, s/he represents both the colonised and the coloniser, struggling to formulate an identity, find a ‘home’ and develop a sense of belonging in an often hostile environment. When in exile, (whether enforced or voluntary), the Afrikaner lives physically removed from her/his roots. Thus, the complexities associated with notions of identity and a sense of belonging are crucial to both the Afrikaner and her/his writing.

⁸ This atavistic claim is, however, problematic, and conceptualises the paradoxical nature of the Afrikaner within South Africa, articulated by J. M. Coetzee: “[i]s there a language in which people

The narratives of her ancestors provide Kristien with a means by which to relate to both them and her country and to exorcise her own feelings of emptiness. She accepts her role in South Africa's "ancient writing, a story whispered among the others in the wind" (*IS* 20). In an internal dialogue addressed to Ouma, she states:

you have given me back a memory, something to make it worthwhile to have gone away, and to have suffered, and *to have lost my meaning*, and now to have come back. I used to think only other people had histories. History belonged to Father. Or to those in the Struggle: it was a train that came past, and I boarded it, and got off, it was never mine. (*IS* 325; italics added)

In the narratives of her grandmother a place is constructed where Kristien may belong. She moves from the *displacement* of exile to a position of belonging, stating, "this is my place" (*IS* 350) and acknowledging her need "to reassume an identity suspended when I left this place, recovering the self that remained behind" (*IS* 31). Towards the end of the novel, she says:

there is a difference between taking a decision because it is the only one, and doing it because you would have chosen it from any number of others had they been available. I have chosen this place, not because I was born here and feel destined to remain; but because I went away and then came back and now am here by choice. Perhaps for the first time in my life it is a decision that has not been forced on me from outside, by circumstances, but which has been shaped inside myself, like a child in the womb. This one I shall not deny. It is mine. (*IS* 349)

of European identity, or if not of European identity then of a highly problematical South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa?" (1988b: 7-8). In claiming an indigenous identity and relationship with the land, the Afrikaner draws on more than three centuries of habitation, heritage and history in South Africa, but problematically refutes the true indigenous peoples' rights to their homeland, denying the Afrikaner role as settler and coloniser. Brink notes that "[i]t is important for an understanding of the Afrikaner today to realize that, for more than three centuries, he has regarded himself as a 'native' of Africa" (AS 133). In essence, the Afrikaner *re-colonises* and *re-appropriates* South Africa in claiming an indigenous identity and foregrounds the desire to belong, as well as to claim ownership.

The Presence of the Past

voices from the past
(Doireann MacDermott 179)

As in many of Brink's works, and particularly in *Devil's Valley*, the continuing presence of the past is foregrounded in *Imaginings of Sand*, exemplified in the insistence on the existence and participation of ancestral spirits or ghosts. These spectral presences act as metaphorical reminders of the past, and lay claim to the "persistence of memory" outlined by Brink (HOI 43). As Kristien and her guests gaze at the "palace", Kristien explains that the house is now empty, stating, "[w]e only have ghosts now" (IS 264). These spirits are present both within the narratives told by Ouma and as ghosts and birds within the house and its grounds, symbolically representing traces of previous narratives and alternative versions to that which is considered 'real'. Kristien asserts, the house is "[a] place where anything and everything was possible, might happen, did happen. At night it was visited by ghosts and ancestral spirits – I know, I've heard them, felt them, seen them, believe me" (IS 9). When Kristien visits the graves of her parents for the first time, she recalls "Ouma Kristina's firm belief that before leaving a graveyard one should always sit down for a while inside the wall, so that the spirits disturbed by the visit could return to their rest; otherwise, she used to say, they would follow one" (IS 43). Ouma makes nightly visits to the graveyard to share news with the spirits (IS 165), and thus they become as much a part of the living world as they are a part of the spiritual, similar to the way in which the dead of Devil's Valley exist amongst the living. Inside the house, Kristien also notes:

[t]here are cold and sudden draughts, barely perceptible currents of air wafting along the corridors. They may be ghosts, I tell myself. The ones who followed me from the cemetery. Ouma Kristina has always lived among the dead. They mean no harm. They belong here. (IS 60)

As a child, Kristien once asked Ouma, "[a]ren't you afraid of the ghosts?" She replied, "[o]f course not [...] I know them all" (IS 10). Despite these statements, however, which culminate in the novel's closing passage as Kristien converses with her deceased grandmother (IS 351), she has to be convinced of the existence

of spirits in any physical form. Kristien refuses to believe that the spirit of Wilhelmina is visiting Ouma in her bedroom, and states, “[s]he isn’t here, Ouma [...] I don’t see anyone”. Ouma responds, “[t]hose are two quite different things” (*IS* 270), thus foregrounding the chasm between appearance and ‘truth(s)’, illuminated within Ouma’s narratives and the text as a whole. Similarly, the continuing presence of the past disrupts the linearity traditionally associated with narrative and is further emphasised by the imagery related to space travel; Kristien says:

Relativity. It seems that in the mysterious region of space-time one can travel into the future or into the past, and through the journey change what has been or may yet be. One can go back there and kill one’s parents before one is even born, cancel oneself, switch roles, try out other possibilities. (*IS* 295)

Thus, the ghosts of the past fulfil several interrelated roles in the novel. They ensure that both temporal linearity and the ‘real’/‘unreal’ dichotomy are subverted within the text in order to present the possibility of alternative accounts. They also act metaphorically, representing the manner in which past events affect present and future experiences and identities, and in this manner foreground the role of memory.

Further spiritual presences within the narrative are figured in the form of birds. Ouma, in particular, is surrounded by birds who provide her with protection and comfort as she dies. When Kristien first visits her grandmother in hospital, she is instructed to open the window, and the room is immediately invaded by a great number of birds (*IS* 23). A multitude of these different species of birds also accompany Ouma to and from the hospital. Kristien recalls the journey to the farm:

[t]he day was hot and bright, yet we travelled in deep shadow as we progressed under a moving cloud of birds overhead, accompanying us all the way from the hospital to the farm. There they descended on the incongruous mass of trees that mark Ouma’s place on the expanse of the

veld; many swept in through open windows to perch on what remained of the balustrade of the marble staircase we ascended to Ouma's new room, leaving only, in a whirr and flutter of wings, after she had been comfortably installed with drips and tubes and monitors and other gadgets supplied by the hospital staff. (IS 58)

Kristien is similarly protected when she is frightened by the appearance of a man with a knife in his hand. She commands him:

'Stay where you are. Don't move. Don't you dare use that thing.' And instantly, as if it were a magic incantation, help arrives. In the form of an owl. Two owls. They appear, whooping, from the cavern of the stairwell and sweep down on the unfortunate man who, terrified, and desperately trying to hide his face from their flailing wings and clawing talons, drops the knife and crouches down. I pick up the knife. As if that is what they have been waiting for, the great birds hurl themselves into the dark again. (IS 65)

Kristien is unsure, however, whether the birds really exist. In the hospital she notes that the nursing staff "pay no attention to the birds" (IS 23), as if they do not see them, and wonders, after the owls come to her aid, "[p]erhaps they had never been there at all" (IS 65). These scenes, in which the distinctions between 'reality' and 'fantasy' are blurred, initiate a 'surreal' framework which permeates the remainder of the text and is echoed in *Devil's Valley*. This mode of narration and the reading it encourages refuses singular notions of 'truth' and deconstructs binary distinctions such as the opposition between 'reality' and 'fantasy' by both inverting and blurring binary boundaries.⁹ The birds are not merely feathered creatures of 'reality', for example, but also symbolic representations of death. The peacock, in particular, is a "bird of death bearing the evil eye on his tail" (IS 261), and Ouma believes that the birds are "the spirits of dead women" (IS 239). Likewise, they encapsulate apparently dichotomous notions such as freedom and

⁹ Godfrey Meintjes notes that the text "breaks out of the (colonial) mould of master narrative and logical linearity and finality. According to [Stephen] Slemon the postcolonial text specifically utilises magic realism in its 'resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems'"

entrapment, having the ability to fly, but also to be encaged, and exhibiting both protective and predatory traits at various times within the text (*IS* 65, 179-80).

The utilisation of bird imagery to describe humans also emphasises this subversion of singular 'truth(s)' and binary oppositions by extending the deconstruction associated with the birds to the human sphere. Ouma is described as "an ancient withered embryo peeled from a shell" (*IS* 22), and the life cycle of humankind is likened to that of birds when Ouma comments, "[o]ne gives birth, then the child grows up, and leaves the nest. In many ways we too are a species of bird. A rare one at that" (*IS* 216). This connection between the spheres of birds and humans culminates in the disappearance of Ouma's corpse and the simultaneous appearance of a bird (*IS* 344-5). Ouma's death, and consequently, her life, is effectively retold or readdressed with this transition. Rather than the usual burial and decay of a corpse, the death-narrative of Ouma is overwritten by an alternative story of an afterlife, removed from religious or traditional beliefs, and instead framed by Ouma's matriarchal narratives in which it is possible to "become a tree" (*IS* n. p.), or transform, after death, into a bird (*IS* 239). It is for this reason that Kristien rejects the traditional engraving of the date of death upon Ouma's tombstone, proposing that "the space might be left open" (*IS* 340), and later recording: "the date of her death is still blank, as it will now remain" (*IS* 350).

Multiple Versions

not to privilege, as has so often been done,
a few master narratives that offer a sense of unity
at the cost of ignoring the fracture and dissonance.
(Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee 14)

Essentially, Ouma's narratives are ghosts themselves, as is the novel as a whole. Each of the narratives or memories is a ghost, or the spirit of an event, experience or, most importantly, an individual. As in *Devil's Valley*, narration and memory are given precedence over factual evidence, and the implication is that any 'truth(s)' lie(s) in personal experience, memory and narrative, rather than

in historical evidence. This challenge to the usual methods of recording historical 'fact' is foregrounded before the narration of the novel begins. The title, *Imaginings of Sand*, indicates both the nature of the narration and of the thematic concerns of the novel. On a family trip to Namibia, Kristien describes "the Namib, the shifting dunes outside Walvis Bay, where every time one returned one would discover them in new configurations – and yet they seemed eternal and immutable" (IS 138). Kristien expands on this image of transience when she says, of her grandmother, "she retreats into her inner desert again, that place of moving dunes that shift position from one day to the next, *ceaselessly rewriting* their landscape and redefining their space" (IS 197; italics added). The image of Petronella's sandcastles also alludes to the mutability of narrative. Petronella would play by the sea, "building castles on the long clean stretch of beach, or tracing intricate patterns in the sand, then sitting back as the tide came in to watch with fascination as a whole day's work was obliterated; she knew she could always start again the following day" (IS 98). Each sandcastle is similar in material and construction to the last, but each will be a *version* of the last, not an exact replica.

Similarly, within the text any attempt to invest any one version of events with authority, or to construct a singular 'truth', is revealed as arbitrary. The fate of Ouma's ancestor, Benjamin, for example, remains unknown. Ouma narrates, "God alone knows what happened to him" and, after offering many suggestions, concludes, "there are flaws in each of these suggestions; so why opt for any one? He may simply have flown away with the birds one day, or crawled into an aardvark hole never to emerge again: is this really any more fanciful than any other explanation?" (IS 104). Kristien's attempt to locate a clear point of origin for the ancestral narratives is also thwarted by Ouma. She responds, "[a]nd what do you think is the very beginning? [...] No one knows where we began. We go back to the shadows. I think we've always been around" (IS 174).¹⁰ Truth, it is suggested, is not singular, linear or fixed, but rather lies in the endless rewriting of narrative and in the celebration of multiple alternatives to any hegemonic discourse in operation.

¹⁰ C. f. footnote 8, in relation to the Afrikaner's claims to indigenous roots.

Alternative Narrative Models

a new historiography is emerging,
much to the dismay of those in power.
(HOI 38)

Ouma further resolves to “keep the men out of this. They came with verse and chapter. Our story is different, it doesn’t run in a straight line, as you should know by now” (IS 174). Thus, she rejects traditional models of historical narrative such as the patriarchal, religious, or linear. This rejection of linear models aligned with masculinity is emphasised by both Ouma’s and the text’s favouring of non-chronological modes of narration in which past events are narrated as they are required by the text or the reader.¹¹ Kristien acknowledges an alternative cyclical model of historical narration when she takes her niece to have her first bra fitted. She notes:

[i]t is a remarkable moment: not because it repeats so precisely what happened years before, but because so much experience is caught in it [....] It is much more complicated and more fluid than mere linearity. It is recovering, briefly, the child I lost; experiencing myself, my many selves, seeing through the multiple eye of a fly the two of us involved, involuted, implacated [sic] in each other, the girl child eternally on the threshold of womanhood, surveyed by the older woman, innocence and experience, faith and knowledge; and in us, so briefly, in the series of small gestures and actions that connect us, in the covering and uncovering of her not-yet breasts, there is a gathering of past and future. (IS 248)

Similarly, when Kristien asks Ouma how long one of her ancestors lived, she replies, “[h]ow must I know? *Does it matter?* My memory doesn’t depend on dates and places” (IS 175; italics added). Her response is echoed in Emma’s resistance, in *Devil’s Valley*, to Flip’s attempts to cling to ‘facts’. In both novels the ‘factual’ is challenged, revealed as an inadequate recourse to Truth. Kristien

¹¹ In an interview conducted by Shaun De Waal, Brink comments on the novel, “I did not want to write in a linear way. It was a fascinating challenge for me to try and *imagine our history* in a completely different way and from a different angle” (4 qtd. in Meintjes 186; italics added).

articulates this inadequacy when she despairs at the police questioning over her relatives' deaths, saying, "[a] life, seven lives, reduced to a few facts of circumstance, position, place, time, no more" (IS 336). She feels the same sense of dislocation of identity when she visits her parents' graves, noting "the stern headstones with their unimaginative legends" and stating, "[i]t is unnerving to see their lives reduced to these spare facts; perhaps that is why I find it so hard to relate to them" (IS 40). Thus, Kristien begins to acknowledge Ouma's belief that "[t]he means and coincidences are not important. Only the story. *And that goes on*" (IS 113; italics added). Hence, it is implied that the Truthful nature of narrative revisioning lies in its *ongoing* nature.

Despite Kristien's newly discovered identification through re-membered matriarchal lineage, however, the prioritisation of women's narratives is also problematic. Firstly, it is an inversion of a binary opposition, in which the original patriarchal model is overthrown in favour of a matriarchal one, raising questions as to the validity and sustainability of inverted authoritarian relationships. Toril Moi critiques this type of inversion which "runs the risk of becoming an inverted form of sexism. It does so by uncritically taking over the very metaphysical categories set up by patriarchy in order to keep women in their places" (13). It can be argued, however, that rather than offering a new dominant discourse, an inversion of gendered relations of (narrative) dominance has several primary and inter-related objectives. The inversion undermines the current master narrative, revealing its authoritarian stance as arbitrarily constructed and upheld. Further, provided that the inversion is *not* foregrounded as a *fixed* alternative to the current dominant discourse, it can be seen to function as a marker, filling the position of authority momentarily, in order to suggest that such alternatives to current power structures are possible. Concurrently, the temporary positioning of matriarchal discourse as an alternative to that of patriarchy demonstrates the inherent dangers in replacing one mode of authoritarian discourse with another. As outlined in my introduction, the next stage in the resistance to authoritarianism must be an acknowledgement of the undesirability of *any* singular master narrative, and the need for a more diverse and pluralist model. Inversion is, therefore, merely *the initial stage* in a *continual* challenge to dominant discourses. It is the *ongoing* nature of such discursive challenges that, I argue, Brink

emphasises in his claims to narratorial Truth.

A further problematic aspect of the inversion of patriarchal authority by foregrounding women's narratives is their foundation upon a series of gender-specific clichés. In Brink's portrayal of women in the novel, the mind of the female is viewed as fluid and all-embracing, as is her narrative; in contrast, the male model of history is seen as a linear, 'factual' record of events, a rendition which presumes male rationality and authority.¹² In a further cliché of the female condition and of women's responsibilities to motherhood, the women of the novel *nurture* the narratives, carrying them within them, as they would a child, until ready to pass the responsibility onto the next generation. Thus, the question must be asked whether Brink's text merely serves to invert the traditional binary opposition in which the authority of the male is dominant while maintaining conventional gender assumptions. Do the gendered clichés in the novel in fact undermine such an inversion? If the latter is the case, then binary inversion must ultimately be viewed as an unsatisfactory means of challenging relations of power and authority, yet no alternative model is offered. This is a problematic aspect of Brink's writing that has resulted in numerous challenges to his representations of women.

¹² This is a relatively common set of claims articulated by many writers and theorists including Virginia Woolf, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray. Moi notes that "it is [...] patriarchy [...] that insists on labelling women as emotional, intuitive and imaginative, while jealously converting reason and rationality into an exclusively male preserve" (123). Essentially, masculine thought and writing is opposed to that of the feminine. In *Subjectivity*, Nick Mansfield notes that "Irigaray's argument revolves around the distinction between the masculine idealisation of the singular and unified, in contrast to the feminine immersion in plurality and difference. The feminine gender is thus separate from the totalising logic of oneness that so mesmerises masculine culture" (69-70). Mansfield also records Kristeva's problematic account of the "impulse to fragmentation, ambiguity and ambivalence that is connected with the maternal" (6, qtd. in Mansfield 89). He continues, "[t]he idea that anything may have a dynamically changing or inconsistent identity, or have contradiction as its very essence or animating principle, is defined as monstrous and abominable to a phallic culture that can tolerate only the homogenous, the defined, knowable and consistent" (71). Robert Young describes the twin positions available to women in a patriarchal society in similar terms: "woman seems to be offered an alternative of either being the 'other' as constituted by man, that is, conforming to the stereotypes of patriarchy, or, if she is to avoid this, of being an absolute 'other' outside knowledge, necessarily confined to inarticulate expressions of mysticism or *jouissance*" (6).

Memory: the Repressed Subconscious

Beloved, do not die. Do not dare die!
I, the survivor, I wrap you in words so that the future inherits you.
I snatch you from the death of forgetfulness.
I tell your story, complete your ending.
(Antjie Krog 39)

The thematic concern with memory is emphasised by the imagery related to Ouma's house, "Sinai" or "The Bird Place" (*IS* 9). In Kristien's words:

[t]he whole house was a living treasury of stories, unto each room its own, but all culminating in the ghostly presences and imaginings of that lugubrious cellar, inhabited – still – by the long-dead Girl, its walls bearing the Rorschach stains of those indecipherable paintings, her memory now stained and splotched by the markings of time and the droppings of rodents and of the odd bird that has blundered in there through crevices and broken airvents. (*IS* 8)

As Kristien explores the house, "reclaiming from memory one room after the other" (*IS* 30), she descends into the basement and notes:

[e]ach room and lobby had its corresponding space down here, *like a subconscious mind, a memory of the house above*, in which each event and gesture, each coming and going from the official world could be echoed and mimed, in minor key or mirror-image, all clad in shadows and redolent of must and dry rot and mouse droppings and dust; a space frequented by the spirits of the dead. (*IS* 8; italics added)¹³

In this passage, the realm of memory is aligned with that of the subconscious, in Freudian terms in which masculine models such as patriarchal society and the superego are opposed by the repressed 'feminine' subconscious or memory.¹⁴ In

¹³ In his second collection of essays, Brink describes the "ostrich town" of Oudtshoorn, which seemingly inspired the surroundings of *Imaginings of Sand*. Of the Oudtshoorn houses he notes, "each room in the house had a kind of 'double' below it, a dark complement, a secret subconscious built to exactly the same dimensions and contours as the room above" (HOI 27).

¹⁴ Toril Moi notes that in "psychoanalysis the human subject is a complex entity, of which the conscious mind is only a small part" and "experiences cannot be understood other than through the

acknowledging the existence of the basement and its correlation to the house above, Brink acknowledges both the existence of the commonly silenced or absent, and its role in that which is voiced or visually present. The basement represents a less clearly defined mirror image of the house above, obscured by shadow and dust, symbolising the relationship memory and narrative have to 'reality'. Concurrently, the image operates as a metaphor for the palimpsest of (often contradictory) versions suggested within the text, and framed in postmodernist terms; the house and its image occupy the same space and therefore neither is granted precedence over the other.

The challenging distortions of memory are exemplified in scenes in which Kristien reacquaints herself with the surroundings of her childhood memories. As she approaches "The Bird Place", she notes, "it appears, somehow, less outrageous in its proportions than I have remembered it" (*IS* 29) and the loquat tree seems "now somehow not quite as enormous as it seemed long ago" (*IS* 27). Memories also provide solace within the novel. In the laundry with Trui, Kristien finds comfort within a familiar childhood environment: "I needed the feeling of freedom offered me by the fragrance of that little room, the clean whiteness of the starched sheets, the warmth of the iron [...] a reassurance more comforting than I could have expected; a recovery of a space in myself I'd thought I'd lost" (*IS* 245). There is also consolation in the ongoing sense of belonging evoked by the store of serviettes left untouched by the fire:

[e]very person who has ever sat down to a meal in this room has had a serviette assigned to her or him; and no matter how long one stayed away, weeks or months, years, decades, if ever you returned you would be sure to have your personal serviette awaiting you. (*IS* 60-1)

Kristien's journey home "is a journey that confirms memory, yet allows space for new discovery" (*IS* 60), allowing "the rediscovery of all those places from summers I've come to think of as lost and possibly invented" (*IS* 126).

study of their multiple determinants - determinants of which conscious thought is only one" (10). Noteworthy is the way in which the subconscious represents the *repressed*, and the link this provides to the silencing and absencing of the 'other' within this text and Brink's oeuvre as a

Women's Counter-narratives

simply to acknowledge that I am there
(IS 301-2)

The 'rediscovery' of the past is most powerfully portrayed by the matriarchal nature of Ouma's narratives, a *herstory* which inverts traditional patriarchal accounts in which women are "sidelined by history" (IS 98). In a review of *Imaginings of Sand*, Michael Kerrigan claims that Ouma "works herself out in words" (22), yet she is also working through the ancestors of the past, giving words to those "condemned unheard" (Chris Miller 33). Brink notes, in "Reinventing a Continent", that Ouma acts as the "mouthpiece of a long line of silent and/or silenced women in South African history" (242). Her accounts give voice to her female ancestors, focussing on the heroines, for "Ouma had little interest in heroes" (IS 65). Wilhelmina's physical altercation with Cloete, for example, "made no difference at all to the course of history. It was not even recorded" (IS 290), and survives only due to Ouma's memory and stories. Similarly, the inscription "LEENDERT PRETORIUS PASSED HERE 28 NOVEMBER 1837" (IS 282; original emphasis) may be all that survived of *Mrs Pretorius*, were it not for Ouma's historical narratives: "[h]ow ironical that she herself should not feature on the inscription" (IS 282). Ouma articulates the purpose of the women's stories when she tells Kristien, "I'm only asking you to listen to me" (IS 109), expressing the need for the ignored, silenced or absent to be heard. She adds, "we [women] can shout our heads off but no one pays any attention. Not because we don't speak, but because no one will listen" (IS 115). Kristien concludes:

[t]his is the inevitable consequence of Ouma's stories. To transform oneself into a tree, to drown in shit, to await a flood in a coffin, to paint on the walls of a prison, to scribble on a surface: nothing, nothing is innocent. Below it lurks the shadow, that little investment in darkness we can call our own; one day it must break out.

Centuries and centuries of struggling and suffering blindly, *our*

whole.

voices smothered in our throats, trying to find other shapes in which to utter our silent screams. (IS 332; italics added)

These “other shapes” take on many forms within the matriarchal rememberings. Amongst the storytellers are many other creative women. Their acts of interpretation and expressions of identity and experience range from the artistic paintings of Rachel (IS 8, 84, 88-89, 107ff) to the prophecies of Petronella (IS 101), the musical talents of Louisa (IS 116) and the healing capabilities of Wilhelmina (IS 274, 278). The insistence on the need for articulation, despite situations in which vocalisation is impossible, is a recurrent concern in Brink’s non-fictional works. In “The Writer in a State of Siege”, he describes the manner in which illiterate Chilean women developed their own means of articulating their experience:

beginning in Santiago, then spreading across the whole country: women – the most ordinary women, labourer women, washerwoman who can neither read nor write – have risen in protest against the silencing and the disappearance of their relatives and friends. They streamed to textile factories where they begged for reject bits of cloth and wool. From this they make tapestries and appliqués which silently but spectacularly proclaim the simple terrible truths of their naked lives. (191)

One of these women is quoted as saying, “[w]e have lived through much and we must explain it. We must find some way to say it” (WSS 191). In “Reflections on Literature and History”, Brink notes of the women’s artistry that “[t]his form of visual literature was their way of countering silence: ultimately of countering death. Which is the primordial function of literature” (142).¹⁵

In *Imaginings of Sand*, Lottie is perhaps the most powerful symbolic representation of the search for a means by which to communicate identity;

¹⁵ The female desire to counter silence with creative endeavour is a common notation, summarised by Linda Otto Lipsett in *Remember Me*: “It was not a woman’s desire... to be forgotten. And in one simple, unpretentious way, she created a medium that would outlive even many of her husband’s houses, barns and fences; she signed her name in friendship onto cloth and, in her own way, cried out, *Remember me*” (qtd. in Stewart 112; original italics).

“swept away” from her home by a commando force, she was taken “so swiftly that her shadow had remained behind” (*IS* 305). For the remainder of her life, she searches for this shadow of ‘self’:

[s]he could never come to rest before she’d found it, so she had to leave messages everywhere [...] at first sight it seemed like writing, but it was no ordinary human script. The codes she used sometimes resembled the trails of snakes or lizards on the sand, or at other times the tiny tracks of ants, or birds, or fieldmice, or meerkats. All day long she would write these messages for the small creatures of the wild to convey to her shadow: signs inscribed on the leaves of succulents, the bark of trees, the mottled surfaces of rocks, or on tracts of sand.

It didn’t bother her that these were invariably effaced again [...] She would always return, her patience as inexhaustible as her resourcefulness, attempting every time to contrive new languages in the hope that someone would understand and would transmit the messages. And if no one ever understood? asked Hermina. Even then, said Lottie, smiling, it wouldn’t ultimately matter. As she had no shadow *any* sign she could leave of herself, of her whereabouts, of having been there, would do. (*IS* 305-6)

After her disappearance, little trace of Lottie’s existence is found: “[a]ll that could be recovered of her were the inscriptions she had left on bark and sand and stone; her own tracks no one could follow, they were invisible, as if her body, hulking as it was, had had no weight of its own, not even the weight of a shadow on the land” (*IS* 308). Like the imagery related to the “The Bird Place” and its basement, Lottie’s shadow is also a mirror image of herself and a metaphor for the palimpsest of versions in operation.

In a further representation of women attempting to find voice, Kamma/Maria provides a traditional rendition of women muzzled by patriarchal history¹⁶. Originally an interpreter, fluent in the languages of both humans (*IS*

¹⁶ The character of Kamma/Maria is modelled on an historical indigenous South African woman

186) and animals (*IS* 182), she is rendered inarticulate, recalling J. M. Coetzee's Friday:¹⁷ "[s]he didn't speak a word. She couldn't. Her tongue had been cut out" (*IS* 191). Similarly, Anna is representative of another form of female silencing, entrapped in the roles of marriage and motherhood, and without the ability to speak with her own voice. Kristien notes:

[h]er only power was the power to destroy herself [...] If your tongue is cut out you have to tell your story in another language altogether. This carnage is the only sign she can leave behind, her diary, her work of art. She couldn't have done it alone. Countless others have converged in her to do this, *to articulate this*. (*IS* 333; italics added)

Clearly, a search for identification through 'voice' is crucial to both contemporary and ancestral characters. This imperative to voice that which has been silenced, to tell 'other' stories, is a central and recurrent motif in Brink's work.

The text speaks out against enforced silencing and against singular narratives of belief aligned with patriarchy, giving voice to an alternative and traditionally undervalued series of (imagined) narratives, by remembering and acknowledging the women "resuscitated in Ouma's stories" (*IS* 265).¹⁸ Ouma's counter-narratives, her memories and her imaginings thus fulfil "the need to record, the need to bear witness", expressed by Brink (*NWO*, n. p.), utilising language and narrative as weapons against the enforced silence of otherness. As Brink states in his introduction to *Writing in a State of Siege*, "A Background to Dissidence", "[t]here lies a peculiar satisfaction in countering the tactics of secrecy with exposure: the dark fears nothing quite so much as light" (35). This idea is emphatically linked with notions of nation building, through purgative

named Krotoa, renamed Eva. Her story has often been retold in both 'historical' and 'literary' contexts, and thus exemplifies acts of narration. Further examination of this character, her historical counterpart, and the various narrative versions, is beyond the scope of this article. However, Pieter Conradie's essay, "The Story of Eva (Krotoa): Translation Transgressed", provides an overview of representations of Eva/Krotoa, including that of Brink, and offers a comprehensive bibliography.

¹⁷ Friday is arguably the strongest representation of the tongueless subaltern within South African literature, representing the 'black hole' of non-white narrative which Brink gives voice to in *A Chain of Voices*.

¹⁸ Meintjes notes that "the narrative process in this text becomes an affirmative (eco)-feminist act

recollection, by Krog: “[s]torytelling brings freedom from the past, healing, reconciliation and *an end to the silence*” (219-20; italics added). Notably, the notion of writing and/or articulation as a response to silence describes Brink’s own relationship with the South African censorial regime in which his literature has operated, and is exemplary of the manner in which voice has begun to counter enforced silencing within the post-Apartheid nation as a whole. Voice in the artistic, political and business realms is now the right of *all* South Africans, and is the means by which both personal and collective notions of nationhood can be developed and expressed.

Presence Defines Absence

[an] inherence of each in the other
(TN 28)

Brink’s text, however, does not merely *write back* against this silencing, articulating the “roar which lies at the other side of silence” (TN 167), but also discloses the manner in which any narrative is informed both by its inclusions and its exclusions, its presences and its absences. Imagery related to astronomy suggests the extent to which presence is defined by absence. Jacob Bonthuys is curious about the nature of black holes and asks Kristien, “[i]f you can’t see them, then how do you know they’re there?” She replies, “I read in a book that it’s like a man in black clothes who dances in the dark with a girl in a white dress. You see only the girl, but from the way she dances you know the man must be there” (IS 243). Although the skin colour of the dancers in the image is not identified, it is implied here: for this image to fulfil its potential, the man must be ‘dark’ and the woman white. The image thus resonates within the South African context in revelatory ways. Arguably, if there were two people of differing race dancing together,¹⁹ the historical expectation would be for a white man to dance with a black woman, in accordance with the traditional appropriation of indigenous women by the colonial oppressor. The inversion of this expectation implied in the image undercuts this power-relation and grants the black man access across boundaries of colour and gender that were carefully policed and controlled during

of remembering or ‘un-forgetting’” (184-5).

¹⁹ The rarity of this situation in itself makes comment on the historical realities of Apartheid South

the Apartheid regime.²⁰ Despite this allowance, however, the 'dark' man remains visually absent, a non-person. He represents those absent in the narratives of the colonisers of South Africa; absent in their government, legal systems, art and literature.

In *The Novel*, Brink discusses Jane Austen's *Emma* as an example of a text in which "the very silence that surrounds the hidden world [...] charges that absence with meaning" (109) and notes of the poor, "in their *absence* they remain uncomfortably present" (111). In *Imaginings of Sand*, the correlative relationships between absence and presence, silence and sound, are also foregrounded: "[the palace's] silence is replete with all its concealed life" (*IS* 97) and Ouma notes when telling Samuel's story, "[m]ore silences than words surround this part of the story" (*IS* 215). Silence, it appears, is the aural/oral equivalent of absence, existing only due to its relationship with its binary opposite, sound (and vice versa). In insisting that the reader remain alert to the formative or signifying nature of absence, the text offers not only a protest against singular narratives such as those of traditional patriarchy, but also challenges the simple inversion of any such dominant narrative. *Any* narrative is exposed as limited by its absences and silences, and the reader is cued to remain aware of the potential supplement of what is absent within each text. Indeed, those obfuscated may 'speak' more clearly than the included or voiced:

[j]ust like those others, the nameless dark servants – barefoot, helping to

Africa, reflected upon from the relative comfort of its post-Apartheid state.

²⁰ This transgression of racial boundaries is exemplified in Brink's *An Instant in the Wind*. Based upon Sidney Nolan's *Ur-text* of the Eliza Fraser story, the novel explores the development of sexual and emotional bonds between a white settler woman named Elisabeth and a non-white convict named Adam or Aob. Brink notes that "[r]acism almost invariably goes with male chauvinism – it's why I've been fascinated in several books by the relationship between a white woman and a black man. Part of what draws them together is the common experience of oppression" (qtd. in Murray Waldren 8). In "From Eliza to Elisabeth: André Brink's Version of the Eliza Fraser Story", Sue Kossew describes Brink's depiction as "resisting one of the basic tenets of apartheid" (127), the taboo of miscegenation. Similarly, in an essay published in 1985, Andre Viola notes that "since this relationship has 'an existence beyond history' [*IW* 14], it gives the lie to the official truth that would apply to past and present" (67). Within the text, Adam chides Elisabeth, "[t]hey'll never forgive you [...] If their white women start doing this sort of thing: it undermines everything in which they've got to believe if they want to remain the masters in the land" (*IW* 231). Notably, it is white women who are disallowed the opportunity of miscegenation, in contrast to the evidence of much fathering of half-caste children by white men. Also noteworthy is the way in which the characters of *Devil's Valley* address this concern by attempting to create an insular and thus 'protected' community of racially pure members.

preserve the tribe, loading the guns, healing the sick and wounded, fighting and dying alongside the men, then returned to the shadows while the men assumed what glory there was [...] Theirs the monuments for the ages; ours, at most, the imaginings of sand. (*IS* 332)

Here the voiceless women of the past are aligned with the non-white peoples of South Africa “both of whom share, in their own ways, a kind of enslavement” (Kossew 1998: 127).²¹ These silent, “nameless dark” figures act as signifiers of lost narratives, and thus fulfil the role of wardens of what J. M. Coetzee labels “a submerged history” (1990: 66). And yet, the text ultimately encourages speech, communication, articulation of experience and storytelling to counter silence, and presence to overcome absence, albeit that the newly articulated must itself be challenged by that which it silences. Without such an injunction to ongoing contestation, *Imaginings of Sand* would itself become merely an inversion of traditional historical narrative: the dominant discourse would merely be replaced by the previously subjugated one. Hence, the text is vulnerable to criticisms of reverse sexism such as those proffered by Moi, discussed above. Crucially, to counter such criticism, inversion can only ever be the first stage in an *ongoing* process of challenge and counter-discursive voicings.

Language’s Failure

the prison-house of our language
(*ICO* 202)

The danger of simple inversions of prejudicial and oppressive pairings must be considered in the context of questions regarding language operation. Ultimately, Brink is confined by the same limitations of language which affect any author/speaker and which are the subject of so much contemporary theory. Brink’s literary attempts to subvert binary pairings are inevitably voiced in language which is constructed upon the very oppositions he sets out to critique. In “The Intellectual and His World”, Brink quotes Roland Barthes to explain how language imposes values upon that which is named:

²¹ Brink’s concern with the narratives of the non-white peoples of South Africa is most eloquently portrayed in *A Chain of Voices*, to be discussed in my final chapter.

[i]n the Stalinist world, in which *definition*, that is to say the separation of Good and Evil, becomes the sole content of language, there are no more words without values attached to them, so that finally the function of writing is to cut out one stage of a process: *there is no more lapse of time between naming and judging, and the closed character of language is perfected.* (202-3; italics added)

Thus, the temporality, or *process* of language and of narration is insisted upon. He suggests that “our own society” (202) operates in a similar manner to that of Stalinist Russia, in that language is inherently judgmental, based upon inescapable and “facile polarities” (203). Thus, language represents “the perfect instrument of Empire” (not cited, qtd. by Barker and Hulme 1985: 197, qtd in TSF 211) in its retention of the void between ‘self’ and ‘other’. He notes that:

[words] exist not so much to circumscribe meaning as to manipulate or even to camouflage it. In other words, language is not primarily representational [...] but a *condition* (and even a strategy) for the construction of reality according to the needs or designs of the speaker or the inclination of the reader. (TN 66; original italics)

Encapsulating the impossibility of utilising language devoid of connotations is Canadian author Ursula Le Guin’s novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In an attempt to collapse gender difference, Le Guin created characters who have the ability to become either male or female at the time of mating, and are consequently asexual and non-gendered at other times. However, Le Guin failed in her attempts to discover a suitable pronoun by which to describe her characters in linguistic terms. The usage of ‘she’ or ‘he’ encapsulates a variety of gender-based assumptions the text sets out to avoid. Similarly, the usage of ‘it’, as an alternative, has connotations of an inhuman nature. The only alternative is to create a new language/terminology; however Le Guin felt this would unduly affect the reader’s connection with the text and, more importantly, the term would soon develop connotations of its own. In this way, the human tendency to frame language in binary pairs, and the prejudicial judgements resulting from these

pairings are exemplified. It is precisely this problematic and inevitable aspect of language use that Brink battles against in his attempts to figure narration as potentially Truthful.

Further hindrances to linguistic expression involve “an absence of finality in meaning” (TN 12) which Brink labels “the terrifying, ultimate impotence of language” (TN 165). His recognition of “a territory between ‘life’ and ‘name’ where language cannot venture” (TN 165) is expressed in terms of the notion of Derridean *différance*, in which an endless play between signifier and signified counteracts any possibility of absolute meaning. Brink’s literary endeavours may therefore be viewed as “raids upon the inarticulate” (TN 167) which paradoxically undermine his attempts to voice that which has been historically silenced.

Naming as Narrative

What is your name?
Who gave you this name?
(The Catechism qtd. in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* 167)

The questioning of language also extends to the act of naming, which plays a role in challenging patriarchal modes of narrative and history. The act of naming is a mini-narrative, establishing a relationship in which identification is claimed with the object being named. This relationship is one of inequality, in which the power to name grants control over the named, a form of *author-ity*. In the larger South African context, for example, both naming and taming are means of control over such terrifying realities as the vast and empty South African landscape²² or the unknowable ‘other’ of the non-white South African peoples, as articulated by many South African authors and theorists. J. M. Coetzee, for example, notes in *White Writing* that the South African “landscape remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it” (7). Further, Ingrid de Kok draws attention to the manner in which the language of Apartheid “conferred power by naming, ranking, and classifying by race, gender, and class” (68). Similarly, in *Giving Offense*, J. M. Coetzee records the

²² Notably, Kristien records her mother’s “dire warnings” about “the more *nameless* terrors of Africa” (IS 139; italics added).

role the colonisers played in constructing binary oppositions to label 'self' and 'other':

[w]hen Europeans first arrived in southern Africa, they called themselves *Christians* and the indigenous people *wild* or *heathen*. The dyad *Christian/heathen* later mutated, taking a succession of forms, among them *civilized/primitive*, *European/native*, *white/nonwhite*. But in each case, no matter what the nominally opposed terms, there was a constant feature: it was always the Christian (or white or European or civilized person) in whose power it lay to apply the names – the name for himself, the name for the other. (1; original italics)²³

In his essay "On Culture and Apartheid", Brink also notes the role of derogatory terms in the naming process, stating, "[a] word like *kaffir*, *Bantu*, *boy* or *girl* is a denial of the human individuality of another person" (89; original italics).²⁴ In *Imaginings of Sand*, both Anna and Ouma protest against the patriarchal notion of lineage by addressing the issue of naming. Anna states, "I don't even have a name of my own. I started life with Father's. Then he passed me on to Casper. Like some object of barter" (*IS* 319). As in *Devil's Valley* (*DV* 262), this patriarchal act of naming signifies possession and control, disallowing the individual identity of the named. In "Writers and Writing in The World", Brink states that "once a man's identity is denied, a struggle is initiated which cannot end before he has found his place *and his name* again" (47; italics added). Ouma dismisses the relevance of such patriarchal labels within her alternative ancestral narrative(s), stating:

²³ In *Giving Offense*, Coetzee also discusses the way in which the appropriation of names inverts the power-role associated with naming, as exemplified by his exploration of the term 'settler': "[t]here is nothing inherently insulting in the name *settler*. It is a word from one of the whites' own languages. But in the discourse of contemporary South Africa it is a word appropriated; it comes from another's mouth, with a hostile intentionality behind it, and with historical baggage that whites do not like. For the first time in their history (a history which, in important senses, was no longer theirs to make or write) the whites who heard 'ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET' found themselves in the position of the ones named. Part of their outrage was at tasting an impotence of which being-named is the sign" (2; original emphasis).

²⁴ Notably, groups who are disparaged by the use of derogatory terms often attempt to re-appropriate the language of their abusers. The word 'nigger', for example, traditionally used as a denigratory label for African-Americans, is currently being reclaimed. Randall Kennedy's upcoming book *Nigger* reportedly outlines the traditional derogatory usages of the term, records its current usage and argues that such usage will gradually exorcise the negative associations of

[t]he surnames are of no importance. Those have all been added on, you can't rely on them. Every time a man becomes a father he's all too eager to get his surname into the picture. But how can he be sure that what he put in is the same as what comes out? We're the only ones who can tell for certain, and sometimes we prefer to keep it a secret. It's us I'm talking about. The womenfolk. I told you it's my testament. (*IS* 174)

In this inversion of the traditional patriarchal lineage, the right to name is recovered by the women, and the model becomes a matriarchal one.²⁵ The women of Ouma's narratives are granted the right to their own names and to their narratives and, in this sense, the interpretative acts of naming and narration are restorative. This desire to communicate one's identity and to prove one's existence in the act of narration or writing is exemplified by Kristien's act of inscription: "the table is covered with a film of dust and fine black ash which invites me to write my name on it. Many rooms of this house must bear the inscription of my name and those of cousins, traced in dust, scribbled in pencil or coloured crayons, even incised in beams and floorboards" (*IS* 60).

Acts of Writing and Reading

reality has never not been hyperreal;
it has always been 'constructed' in the sense that it has been validated, made
intelligible, through fictional transformation.
(Ommundsen 51)

Brink's demonstration of the relationship between acts of imagining and writing and his symbolic representation of Ouma as 'the act of writing' operate in conjunction with instances of inscription and narration, highlighting the role of narrative in searching for identity and 'truth'. Krog believes, "[w]e make sense of things by fitting them into stories. When events fall into a pattern which we can describe in a way that is satisfying as narrative then we think that we have some

America's "paradigmatic ethnic slur" (qtd. in David Kirkpatrick).

²⁵ This model can be viewed as not equalising the traditional oppressor and oppressed relationship, however, but merely inverting it.

gasp [sic] of why they occurred” (299).²⁶ Likewise, Brink records his belief in “the *need to storify*” (RC 243; original italics). His frequent utilisation of intertextual referencing, Brink claims, is an exploration of this concern with narrative as a means of self-identification. He notes of *Imaginations of Sand* that Ouma’s narratives require no “‘evidence’ or ‘references’ of any kind: her narratives are their own *raison d’être* and derive from the individual’s need to insert herself or himself, through storytelling, within the larger contexts of space and (historical) continuity” (RC 242). His playful usage of historical references, in which imagined references operate within the same sphere as those accepted as historical ‘fact’, suggests an attempt to abandon that “reality identifiable outside the discourse itself” (Van Wyk Smith qtd. in RC 243).²⁷

Kristien employs the act of writing as a means of control, attempting to render experience in language and derive meaning from it. She notes:

[Ouma] sleeps [...] leaving me to pick my way through the maze of her narrative as once I crept through the corridors and dead-ends of this fantastic house, exploring its treasures and banalities; and again I have the impression that the more secrets are disclosed the more impenetrable the mystery becomes. (*IS* 295)

She claims, “I have listened to her, I have written it all down, I’ve appropriated it, claimed it as my own” (*IS* 126). She also attempts to clarify and interpret experience as she renders a particular moment in time: “I write: I get up, I look through the window, the shadows of clouds move across the landscape. But what I ought to be writing is: I write that I get up, look through the window; I write that the shadows of clouds move across the landscape, and even as I write it is no more” (*IS* 197). This passage’s concern with the ephemeral nature of the present

²⁶ Literary theorist M. H. Abrams records that “[i]n recent years, some cognitive psychologists and literary and cultural theorists have proposed that narrative, or the telling of diverse ‘stories’ about how one thing leads to another, is the basic means by which we make sense of the world, provide meaning to our experiences, and organize our lives” (174).

²⁷ Brink notes that in *Imaginations of Sand*, for example, his intertextual referencing includes the usage of the “informal” diaries of Susanna Smit, the transference of the historical figure of Krotoa into the novel as Kamma, and the usage of a character from his previous novel, *An Act of Terror* (RC 243).

moment, and its focus on levels of narration, serves to highlight the way in which life is structured as narrative. It suggests that one's only means of interpreting life experience is with recourse to narrative devices which must, necessarily, interpret moments which have already passed. Thus, narrative as a means of communication and interpretation of the experiences of the past is foregrounded. Breyten Breytenbach acknowledges this correlation between life and narrative when he states, "[e]ach life is a novel" (82), as does Russell Hoban when he explains, "[w]e make fiction because we ARE fiction" (qtd. in RC 243; original emphasis). These sentiments accord with Brink's claim that:

we perceive ourselves, our lives, as narrative, as *story*, a perception that derives, among other things, from our discovery of a language-shaped world, that is, a world shaped 'like' language, a world shaped 'by' or 'through' language – and most pertinently by and through language ordered as narrative. (*TN* 14; original italics)

He continues: "language imposes on us the need to perceive, interpellate and interpret the 'real'" (*TN* 14) and, in his essay "Reflections on Literature and History", notes the way in which "we turn everything into language: at the end of each day, as we review it, we transform the events of that day into story; each of us is perpetually involved in making a story out of our own experiences: it is the only way in which we can *interpret* the world to ourselves" (141). In a similar way, Kristien's utilisation of narration and writing allows her to interpret experience. She says, "I must try to catch hold of it all; to grasp it before it totally eludes me and recedes into nightmare" (*IS* 329). Ouma warns Kristien to remember through narration: "[y]ou must write it all down before I go. [...] it's my testament" (*IS* 71). Her story, and those of the women before her, are the legacy which she endows to her granddaughter. Stories such as Ouma's are, in essence, "[t]he tales which interpret your world for you" (*CS* 56):

Father, I know, and Mother, too, would have been shocked by this; their stark Calvinism did not allow for such invention. But have they not denied, in the process, precisely this surge of the imagination which links

us to Africa,^[28] these images from a space inside ourselves which once surfaced in ghost stories and the tales and jokes and imaginings of travellers and trekkers and itinerant traders beside their wagons at night, when the fantastic was never more than a stone's throw or an outburst of sparks away? How sad – no, how dangerous – to have suppressed all this for so long. (IS 97)

Her legacy enables Kristien to identify her place within her world, as a woman and as a (problematic) South African, and gives her permission, indeed author-ity, to create her own narratives and find her own 'truth(s)'.

The role of acts of writing and narration as a means of constructing identity and 'truth' are complicated, however, by Kristien's depiction of the transferral of narrative between Ouma and herself. She says:

[s]ometimes her voice fades away all together. I cannot even be sure that what she says is what I write. And what I hear her whisper merges with what I remember, or seem to remember, from earlier times when she told similar stories. Yet I have the impression that our communication is not dependent on something as extraneous as a voice. *There is a more immediate insinuation of what she says into my consciousness; she articulates my writing hand.*

I have the feeling, both unsettling and reassuring, of recovering something: not the story as such, snatched from what may or may not have been my history, but this strange urge of the real towards the unreal, as if it must find its only possible justification there. (IS 97; italics added)

²⁸ This description of the link to Africa as one of the *imagination* provides some answer to the problematic question of the Afrikaner's indigenous claims, as previously discussed, and further enhances the text's concerns with issues of identity, nationality and nationhood. In association with the novel's title, imaginative links to South Africa are offered as an alternative to further acts of appropriation, enabling a sense of belonging without emphasising the ancestral right to such a claim. Similarly, when Ouma says to Thando, "[s]o you're here to close the old books and write the new chapter," he replies, "[w]rite a new chapter, yes [...]. Close the old books, no. We can't *imagine* the future by pretending to forget the past" (IS 266; italics added).

Although Kristien continues with the act of writing her grandmother's story, the direct conveyance of meaning suggested here by Ouma's communication with her suggests a return to essentialism or unmediated transmission of 'truth' as a means of conveying meaning. This passage thus negates the necessity for oral or literary narrative so powerfully endorsed within the remainder of the text and within Brink's oeuvre as a whole. In this problematic fusion of (mediated) writing and (unmediated) intuition lies perhaps the most contradictory of Brink's claims regarding the act of narration.

Brink's Truth

Truth will out.
(MM 167)

My discussion thus far suggests a paradox in Brink's representation of narration, one which permeates his oeuvre. On the one hand, Brink foregrounds the *mediated* act of writing. Kristien's indeterminate record of what "may or may not have been" (IS 97) and what she "seem[s] to remember" (IS 97) undercuts the *factuality* of the story and is indicative of the flawed and partial processes of memory and oral transmission under exploration. It is suggested that the memories and narratives upon which personal and collective identities are constructed are flawed and mutable; the impossibility of any fixed or singular 'truth' is foregrounded. Similarly, the text's "urge of the real towards the unreal" (IS 97) renders 'truth' (as the 'real') inaccessible. Each of the metanarrational elements operating within the text ensures that factual 'truth' remains intangible, distant, mutable or blurred. The ability of narrative to record or reclaim (factual) 'truth' is therefore undermined and the *unreality* of (narrated) 'reality' is highlighted in a postmodernist manner.

On the other hand, as discussed in my introduction, Brink claims an idealistic role for literature as a means to convey moral Truth, most emphatically in his non-fictional writing. Once again, the discrepancy between 'truth' as fact, and Truth as a process of contestational narrative, must be recalled. 'Truth', as verifiable fact, is scarce within Ouma's narratives and yet, paradoxically, they are inherently Truthful, encapsulating a diversity of (often alternative versions of)

experience and the ancestral heritage of generations of women. Njabulo Ndebele's comment regarding national narratives in South Africa seems particularly apt here and suggests the relevance of Brink's concerns in the novel to the political context of his nation. In "Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative", Ndebele states that in post-Apartheid South Africa, "[t]he resulting narratives may have less and less to do with facts themselves and with their recall than with the revelation of meaning through the imaginative combination of those facts" (21). When Kristien begins to analyse Ouma's narratives, she questions their veracity: "the truth masquerading as so many sad lies; immaculate conceptions and revenge rapes; the fantasies of a frontier world, all larger than life, the exaggerations of a mind on the threshold of death, or a vision of some deeper darker truth?" Ultimately, she answers, "[d]oes it matter, does it make any difference?" (*IS* 126). In a symbolic moment when Kristien climbs over the fence at the boundary of the property, she notes, "[t]he limit of one space was simply the beginning of another; it was possible to go beyond. I knew then, yes, that I should go. I would leave the margin and move into another territory. Its name was history" (*IS* 149).

Jacob also acknowledges a narratorial Truth removed from verifiable fact when he speaks of Langenhoven's books. He comments:

I wasn't always sure whether he was telling the truth or just lies. But in the end it didn't matter, you know. Because in a way it *is* true. You can say I also went away on that tram with that elephant. It's like another life Mr Langenhoven gave me. Many other lives. (*IS* 300; original italics)²⁹

Through Ouma, Kristien has also experienced many other lives, lives which are now a part of her own past. "Men", she writes:

have come and men have gone, she is still here, she has survived, nothing can surprise her. Through all their sophistry and power games, their

²⁹ In "Interrogating Silence", Brink notes of C. J. Langenhoven, "as early as the twenties, he wrote, in deadpan, naturalistic fashion, about a visitor, Loeloeraai, from Venus; and about journeys undertaken in a caravan pulled by an elephant. The outrageous, the wholly unexpected, the truly

explanations of the world and why it has to be the mess it is, *she has calmly persisted with her own inventions. Behind and below history* she has continued to spin her secret stories of endurance and suffering and survival, of women and mirrors and shadows and coffins and flood and shit and divine messengers and rape and incest and suicide and murder and love. The configurations may be interchangeable; the myths persist, she has lived them into being. *Why demand the truth, whatever that may be, if you can have imagination?* I've tried the real, and I know now it doesn't work. The universe, somebody said, and I know now it is true, is made of stories, not particles; they are the wave functions of our existence. (IS 325; italics added)³⁰

The Truth

Does truth have a gender?
(Krog 271)

As in *Devil's Valley*, therefore, Brink's Truth is again to be discovered in the multiplicity of narrative voices, rather than in any one dominant version: in the pluralistic and inventive *process* of imagining. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that in *Imaginings of Sand* female narratives – *herstory* – contest the proclaimed fixed and unitary 'truth(s)' found in the patriarchal narrative of historical record; these narratives revisit and represent the interstices of recorded history. In her exploration of these female narratives, Kristien narrates a symbolic journey of self-discovery in which the historically silenced and exiled may regain personal and collective identification through ancestral memory and imaginative narrative. Although restrained by the binarial implications of the language in which he must frame his fiction, the often conflicting narratives of Brink's text represent both a postmodernist resistance to categorisation, dichotomies and 'factuality' in favour of multiplicity and, ultimately, Brink's ideal of Truth. As I have argued, this Truth, although here framed in gendered terms, also provides a commentary on other modes of categorical prejudice, and thus represents a refutation of all modes of enforced silencing or 'othering'; dominant discourses of

miraculous, informed much of his fiction" (26).

³⁰ Brink foregrounds this notion in an epigraph to his novel *Devil's Valley*, quoting Muriel

all kinds are therefore rejected in favour of Brink's notion of Truth as contestational narration. His critique of the manner in which language, naming and narration are utilised as modes of enforced silencing is countered by his demonstration of their ability to militate against such dominance and reclaim both voice and narrative. The Brinkian model of Truth thus provides a means by which to "shout against silence" (*CV* 505).

CHAPTER THREE

“WHO ARE YOU?”:¹ THE SEARCH FOR PERSONAL TRUTH IN *A CHAIN OF VOICES*

locked in an inescapable chain of voices. (LCO 198)

¹ (CV 271).

Chained

... perhaps someone will hear us calling out, all these voices in the great silence, all of us together, each one forever alone. We go on talking and talking, an endless chain of voices, all together yet all apart, all different yet all the same; and the separate links might lie but the chain is the truth. And the name of the chain is Houd-den-Bek. (CV441)

As in *Imaginings of Sand*, in which an historical chain of narration operates, and *Devil's Valley*, in which the valley's many occupants are given voice, *A Chain of Voices*, as its title suggests, utilises a variety of interconnected narratives as a means to explore Brink's notion of Truth. This earlier novel foregrounds the narratives of the non-white slaves, and initially appears to adopt similar strategies of counter-narration to those found in *Imaginings of Sand* and *Devil's Valley*. In contrast to these two novels, however, in which the narratives of women and of the Afrikaner are foregrounded, *A Chain of Voices* provides a more diverse and multifaceted historical rendition. Although predominantly concerned with giving voice to the slaves upon whom silence has traditionally been enforced, the novel adopts the variety of perspectives imaged in the title, allowing each member of the 'chain' to speak and revealing how each is silenced, or rendered inarticulate, in diverse ways. Thus, the focus is not restricted to any one oppressed group. Rather, the novel explores the interactions between the various groups and the manner in which each is in bondage to another, both in terms of fellowship and oppression. The exploration of 'truth', therefore, is in this context an investigation of the manner in which humans interact with one another; and it is demonstrated that the composite 'truth' that results from this interpersonal interaction is more revealing than the statements of each individual. *A Chain of Voices* thus draws together elements explored within *Devil's Valley* and *Imaginings of Sand*, in terms of 'T/truth' and of prejudice and oppression in their various forms, and it is for this reason that it has been chosen as the final text under discussion.

Brink draws on an historical event to form the basis for his exploration of 'truth' within this novel. In his essays "Of Slaves and Masters" and "Reinventing a Continent", Brink discusses the historical events upon which *A Chain of Voices* is based (158ff; 239ff). In 1825, in the Cold Bokkeveld, twelve slaves and a free

man revolted against their white South African masters, killing three men and wounding a woman. The documentation related to the criminal trial of the accused forms the historical basis for Brink's narrative.² Brink frames his novel with an Act of Accusation and a Verdict, inserting an imagined pre-history of the events leading up to the revolt from a variety of perspectives, creating a patchwork of thirty narratorial voices, each of which offers a different narrative version of events.

As in his later novels, *Imaginings of Sand* and *Devil's Valley*, this palimpsest of narratives refutes linear modes of narration and the historical; a refutation which, in *A Chain of Voices*, has as its basis the original documentation itself. Commenting on the recorded accounts of the trial, Brink notes that, "[w]hat struck me [...] was the way in which the depositions of all the witnesses and accused in the trial had been *transcribed* by court officials (and, in fact, the scribe(s) had left more than one version of his/their transcriptions behind)" (RC 239; original italics). This ostensibly 'factual' historical documentation, therefore, is revealed as tainted with inaccuracies and uncertainties which Brink expands into his own narrative. He emphasises and embellishes discrepancies between the respective narrators' versions and also between these versions and the Act of Accusation, challenging the reader's desire to search for a singular 'truth', and highlighting the impossibility of one. Brink instead foregrounds the act of interpretation and the role of perspective in attempts to search for 'truth'.

Silence

a brief shout against silence
(CV505)

As in the two texts previously discussed, this novel also counters the threat of silencing. Traditional acts of silencing, particularly those of an oppressive and censorial regime such as Apartheid, are symbolised by the farm of Houd-den-Bek. The farm represents a place of refuge to which Grandpa Van der Merwe, the ancestral patriarch of the Van der Merwe family, trekked after quarrelling with

² In "Postcolonial Imaginings", Godfrey Meintjes notes that these events are also "recorded and documented" in *Piet Retief se lewe in die kolonie* [Piet Retief's Life in the Colony] by J. Franken

authority. Translated as “Shut Your Trap” (CV 501), the name appears to disallow any voice to those who would refute its own authoritarian stance. As Grandpa Van der Merwe stated when officials came to summon him from his self-appointed kingship, “[i]n this place your word counts for nothing [...] No one but I have the right to speak here” (CV 33). Notably, the farm and its symbolic associations are constructed in opposition to the notion of a chain of voices³ and thus represent the censorial authoritarianism in operation both in the fictional heterocosm of seventeenth century South Africa, and the Apartheid regime during which the novel was written (1982).

Although given voice within the pages of the novel, the slaves have little or no agential voice within the action of the fictional heterocosm. Denied the right to vote or to speak against their masters, their only means of articulation is in acts of rebellion. Galant, a slave and instigator of the rebellion, notes, “[o]nly through killing can I, perhaps, be heard. I have no other voice” (CV 508).⁴ In words which are echoed in *Imaginings of Sand*, in regard to Anna’s final violent acts (IS 333), Galant expresses the frustration experienced as a result of the enforced silence of the oppressed. The trial of the accused which concludes the novel completes the cycle of silencing enforced upon Galant; the court notes that “we have the evidence of the prisoner’s co-accused and of those witnesses who have appeared before us, *to stop the mouth of the slave Galant* about these charges” (CV 516; italics added). Thus, Galant represents the non-white voices repressed by official history, the narratives of those who were disbelieved,

and in *Towards Emancipation* by Isobel Edwards (173).

³ Galant, however, speaks of the farm in terms which depict it as a chain of bondage. He notes that he and his followers attempted “to break the chain called Houd-den-Bek” (CV 501), a phrase which highlights the oppressive Afrikaner power structure symbolised by the farm. Similarly, Galant’s statement emphasises the similarities between the era of slavery in which the novel was set and the Apartheid regime under which it was written, a period which Brink describes as “a modernised state of slavery” (VF 66).

⁴ Benita Parry notes that within a colonialist model, “only the European possesses the word and the ability to enunciate” (151). In response to the muteness enforced upon the colonial ‘other’, theorist Frantz Fanon claims that violence “frees the native from his [sic] inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (74). In his discussion of Fanon’s work regarding subjectivity and its relationship to colonialism, Nick Mansfield further notes that “[o]nly in violence can the native discover the sense of subjective meaning that can stabilise the world and bring freedom [...] Violence is liberating, not primarily because it is able to destroy the structures of a colonial régime, but because it causes a revolution on the level of the subject, who can throw off the degradations and debasements of colonial culture and replace them with a purposeful and historically charged sense of itself and national possibility” (125-6).

ignored or not given the opportunity to speak. Only within Brink's narrative is he given voice, speaking in opposition to the account of his life and actions recorded in the annals of legal documentation.

Brink's desire to tell the stories ignored by official historical records is as evident in this novel as it is in *Imaginations of Sand* and *Devil's Valley*. In "Reinventing a Continent", Brink discusses the original legal documentation related to the Bokkeveld uprising and notes that whilst reading these documents he recognised traces of the slaves' voices within them. He states, "[o]nly occasionally, in unguarded moments as it were, could one hear, in an unexpected or ungrammatical turn of phrase, the 'original' voice of the speaker sounding through the palimpsest of transcriptions" (239). Notably, Brink uses the term "palimpsest" to describe the various narratives, suggesting a myriad of alternatives operating in the same sphere, with no precedence of any one over another. He notes that "[t]his experience brought into doubt most of the official versions of slave history in South Africa. (The very way in which such a significant episode had become 'lost' in official history, speaks volumes)" (RLH 135). Thus, Brink's text narrates against the authoritative historical version.

Speaking of/(for) the Silenced

the impossibility of representation
(Darry 149)

Brink's rendering of the voices of historically silenced 'others', particularly those of the non-whites, is problematic, however. As is the case when he crosses gender boundaries and assumes a female narratorial persona, questions as to his authenticity and right to speak on behalf of another are raised. Rosemary Jolly, for example, warns of the danger for the post-colonial novelist "in assuming access to the historical, native subject and his desire" (52). Regarding this novel, she comments on "the narrative's own fiction of the possibility of access to those others of history, namely, the sexually other and the racially other, the woman and the slave, whose voices the metanarrative assumes it can create, that it can 'reproduce'". She suggests that the narration itself exemplifies "the violence of domination" in its "acts of appropriation" (40) and claims:

[t]he appropriative gesture whereby the fiction 'provides' a history of oppression of the native subject, and its contingent representation of the oppression of the female subject, is exercised, unquestionably, in the fiction's attempt to convey the violence of racial dominance; but through the use of it the fiction itself can be seen to be dominant: a 'master'-narrative. (53)

This criticism regarding (authorial) appropriation is extensively commented on in contemporary theory. Parry's article "Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee", for example, explores "the impossibility of representation" (149), and most particularly "that quandary of white writing's insecurity or dislocation in South Africa" (150). She suggests "that the consequence of writing the silence attributed to the subjugated as a liberation from the constraints of subjectivity [...] can be read as re-enacting the received disposal of narrative authority" (150). American novelist Barbara Kingsolver further comments that such arguments regarding an author's adoption of another's voice are twofold: "[o]ne is that you probably won't get it right. Another is that you are indeed usurping the position of someone who could have told that story better" (n. p.). J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* forcibly exposes the dilemmas of narratorial 'appropriation' of voice. In an apparent attempt to avoid the problems associated with appropriating the voice of another, Friday, Coetzee's protagonist, is rendered inarticulate.⁵ Unfortunately, this muteness is in itself problematic, as Friday's narrative can only be told from the perspective of others; Friday's story, therefore, "is properly not a story but a puzzle or hole in the narrative" (Coetzee 1987: 121). Parry notes that "the consequence [of such characterological muteness] is that the silenced remain incommensurable, unknowable, and unable to make themselves heard in the sealed linguistic code exercised by the narrating self, and hence incapable of disturbing the dominant discourse" (152). She further claims that "[a] failure to project alternative perspectives might signify Coetzee's refusal to exercise the authority of the dominant culture to represent other and subjugated cultures, and might be construed as registering his understanding that *agency is*

⁵ Parry records: "it is intimated that the dumb Friday is without tongue and perhaps without

not something that is his to give or withhold through representation" (151; italics added). Thus, the attempt to speak of the 'other' is problematic, and perhaps irresolvable; Friday can be read as symbolic of that which cannot be spoken (of) by the (white) author.

Tzvetan Todorov offers one possible solution to this dilemma, suggesting that "one does not let the other live merely by leaving him intact, any more than by obliterating his voice entirely [...] Heterology, which makes the difference of voices heard, is necessary" (1982: 250, 251 qtd. in Parry 152). Parry describes this model as one based upon Emmanuel Levinas' ideal of "commerce with alterity as a contact taking place in an intersubjective space where the non-identity of the interlocutors is respected and retained, and which leaves both 'I' and 'you' separate and intact but enhanced" (152). Is such an ideal, "commerce with alterity", possible? And how is it to be represented without appropriation of the 'other'? Significantly, Wenche Ommundsen's consideration of the act of representation includes a caution against assuming representation is inherently appropriative. She states: "[t]he verb 'to represent' is generally understood to mean to 'stand for', in other words to symbolise something which is absent. But to represent also means to 'make present', to somehow restore the absent object to the mind and the senses" (32). In exploring Brink's attempts to narrate the silences of 'others' it is thus crucial to examine the manner in which such representations are rendered, if the charge of appropriation is to be refuted.

Arguably, Brink's most blatantly problematic acts of appropriation relate to his stereotypical fictional representations of women. The majority of his primary female characters are defined as either virginal or sexually aggressive, dual representations which each relate to Brink's own positioning as a male viewing the (female) 'other'. Brink's *A Dry White Season* provides an exemplary basis upon which to initiate a discussion of his representation of female characters. Melanie, who acts primarily as a love interest to the protagonist, is characterised as innocent, childlike and vulnerable. Throughout the course of the narrative, depictions of her as "so young and untouched" (*DWS* 125) and

phallus" (153), suggesting the literal and figurative impotence of the silent/silenced subject.

references to her “petite” stature (*DWS* 114), her apparent youthfulness (*DWS* 115), “womanness” (*DWS* 115) and “vulnerable mouth” (*DWS* 117) suggest an innocence available for male domination and/or requiring male protection.⁶ Melanie’s retelling of her gang-rape (*DWS* 132) further enhances this notion, as does Ben’s description of her: “[s]mall, delicate, like a halfgrown girl with the merest swelling of breasts under her T-shirt, her black hair tied back with a ribbon. No make-up, except perhaps a touch of something at the eyes” (*DWS* 190). The correlation of virginal innocence and sexual availability is depicted in the description of two photographs of Melanie, described in the text’s Foreword. In the first, she appears “[a] girl”, with “[l]ong black hair tied up with a ribbon” and the only hint of further depths is represented in her “rather generous mouth” and challenging gaze (*DWS* 15). The second photograph, however, defines her sexual role within the text and records her naked body intertwined with that of Ben (*DWS* 15-6). Melanie, therefore, exemplifies a stereotypical characterisation of ultimate female desirability: virginal innocence *and* sexual availability.

In contrast to this depiction of the female as available for sexual and/or physical domination or protection, Brink’s depictions of the women who visit Flip Lochner at night in *Devil’s Valley* (*DV* 83, 133) represent a second stereotypical representation of women as sexually threatening, in the mode of a *femme fatale*. The fear of the ‘other’ is thus translated into a Freudian fear of the *vagina dentata*,⁷ which threatens to consume or castrate the male genitalia during the sexual act. Mansfield notes that “[t]he penis is read as a sign of masculine authority, and the threat of its loss defines masculine culture” (181). Frequently, this fear is re-envisioned as a sapping of male strength during sexual intercourse and is centred upon the nocturnal visitation of a succubus. In *Devil’s Valley* the succubi are reinvented as “nightwalkers [.... who] suck you dry leaving only a

⁶ Melanie’s position as a woman protected by a male is addressed when she speaks of her former marriage and the manner in which she rebelled against such a stifling relationship (*DWS* 128-9). Brink’s depiction of her, however, arguably operates within the same confining framework which she resists.

⁷ The *vagina dentata* is a common literary motif, often discussed in feminist terms. In *Women in Myth*, Bettina L. Knapp discusses the myth of Herodias and her daughter Salome, noting that “[m]other and daughter became the prototypes of the archetypal, all-consuming, sensual female” (88). Further notations include Wendy Doniger’s depiction of the mythical sexual murderess as the “poison damsel or the demon(ess) with the *vagina dentata*” (296), the “long teeth” (124) of which consume the male genitalia.

husk behind" (*DV* 176). This fear of the female is a reversal of the usual domination and subjugation found in forcible sexual acts⁸ and thus can be viewed as an inversion of traditional power roles. However, the fear associated with the portrayal of women as sexually dominant is also indicative of Brink's own problematic conceptualisation of the female 'other' and his inability to deny his own entrapment within the 'self'/'other' dichotomy which he attempts to critically undermine. His dual views of women remain steeped in patriarchal assumptions in which the female is deemed either weak, submissive and sexually available or voracious, sexually consuming and whore-like. Thus, it could be argued that Brink's attempts to speak *of* women are as problematic as his attempts to speak *for* them.

Brink's fictional representation of women has been debated extensively. As I have suggested, there is a tendency in Brink's oeuvre for women to be depicted in an either/or manner, as virginal or sexually threatening. In this vein, Jolly critiques Brink's depiction of women in *A Chain of Voices* claiming:

the fiction itself participates, albeit subconsciously, in the practice of male domination, which is such a pervasive feature of the society it attempts to depict [...] [T]he women gain their recognition through their service to men. Their 'independence' [...] or in literary terms, their differentiation as characters, is ultimately dependent upon their allegiances to the men of both races whose action determines the central conflict of the novel. (48-9)

Her critique includes the claim that "the figure of the outcast Bet, trying in vain to get back into the favor of the narrative by persuading Nicolaas to recognize her submission to him, can be seen as emblematic of *the only position afforded women by the exclusive structure of the narrative*" (52; italics added). Clearly, "male domination" is inherent within this text and within many of Brink's others; what is under examination, however, is the *purpose* of this objectification of women. It could be argued that the "male domination" in practice within the text

⁸ These forcible sexual acts operate as a metaphor for the 'rape' of the land or the 'penetration' of the interior during acts of colonisation or the more contemporary forced eviction of non-whites from their homes to make way for new white housing developments during the Apartheid regime.

is a literary tactic in which women are objectified in order to encourage the reader to *recognise* and *acknowledge* their oppression. Hester's protests against the denial of female identity within the patriarchal fictional heterocosm, for example, foreground the societal objectification of women inherent within the text; she states: "[n]o one will think of liberating an ox or a horse. You can only bother about liberating a slave if you think of him as human. So how do you expect men to think of slaves in that way if they haven't even discovered that women are human yet?" (CV 259). Similarly, Alida's insights into the role of women suggest societal objectification of the female; she notes: "here we all were, each woman left with the destiny of the man assigned to her. Hester with Barend. I with Piet. Cecilia with Nicolaas. Not even death could make a difference" (CV 293). The entrapment of women within the patriarchal confines of the society in which they live is thus exemplified and gives context to depictions of women such as Bet who begs Nicolaas to oppress her. It could be argued, therefore, that Bet's position is indicative of the represented *societal* objectification of women, rather than the author's. Hence, the objectification of women *within* the text forms part of Brink's critique of such prejudice, a critique with which the reader is invited to concur.

In an essay entitled "Speaking in Voices", in which he outlines the creation of *A Chain of Voices*, Brink addresses issues of appropriation, defending his right to speak of and for others. Firstly, he claims that to deny an author the opportunity to explore another identity is to impose upon her/him the same limitations as those enshrined in an oppressive system such as Apartheid. He reminds his readers that contact can be made across "artificially imposed barriers" (17) such as those of gender and race. His (imaginative) knowledge of friends and colleagues of other races makes it possible for him, he claims, to vicariously experience "some essential ingredients of the specific conditions termed by others the 'black' or the 'white' experience" (17). He summarises, "[i]t may be more presumptuous to exclude all exploration of the Other than to attempt the hazardous act of discovering in the Other the humanity you share with him or her" (14). In "Literature as Cultural Opposition", Brink further discusses this novel:

[i]t was only when I attempted that dangerous fire-leap from self to other,

that history could become what it had always yearned to be, namely *story*: and for this it was necessary to try to *imagine* what it is like to be a slave who has been promised his freedom and sees that hope frustrated; to imagine what it is like to be a woman who has to sacrifice her independence to the inarticulate domination of a husband, to imagine what it *means* to be fierce patriarch or uncomprehending child or dour matron or protective mother or wild adventurer - slaves, all of them, locked in an inescapable chain of voices. (198; original italics)

In a number of his further essays, criticisms of appropriation are countered by Brink's claim that he acts as a medium through which the voices of the past may speak through acts of *imagining*. Speaking of the original legal documentation in "Reflections on Literature and History", he notes, "I shall never forget those voices addressing me, across a divide of 150 years: the men and women expressing, perhaps for the first time in their lives, the full horror of what it meant to be alive as a slave" (135). In "Speaking in Voices", he adds:

they were *there*, speaking to me: speaking, indeed, across a divide of a hundred and fifty years, *but speaking in their own voices, telling their own stories, exposing whatever truth of their tortured lives they could grope at*: and in this case, to have ignored their voices in favour of either silence or a *Whites Only* interpretation of the event, would have been [...] an obscenity. (17-8; central italics added)

Similarly, speaking of *A Chain of Voices* in his introduction to *Reinventing a Continent*, he notes that his desire was "to allow, as far as possible, the 'authentic voices' of slaves from the past to speak within the apartheid world in which I wrote" (12). He thus counters criticisms of appropriation with claims as to the noble purpose of his expression of other previously silenced racial and gender personae within his works. Truth, it is suggested, is derived from acts of the imagination.

The Chain

one chain from beginning to end
(CV478)

In the novel, each of these voices and versions is linked, either by ancestry or circumstance, creating the 'chain' to which the title refers. Each voice is both an independent link, and a part of the chain as a whole. No one link/voice has the ability to narrate every event, and each is limited by one perspective; the Truth regarding the uprising is represented more fully by the multitude of (often competing) narratives, as are the 'truths' regarding all of the events narrated. Throughout the novel, a series of events are retold from different perspectives, each of which offers a further dimension to the narrative. Barend's decision to live at Elandsfontein, for example, is first depicted by Hester as an act of cruelty against her, making it difficult for her to visit the grave of her father. She states, "to keep me from the grave of my father and the house in which I'd been born he chose Elandsfontein, in this narrow valley between two steep ridges of mountains, remote and austere, here to confine and possess me" (CV 139). In contrast, Barend's rendition refutes this claim, revealing the kindness behind his decision. He recalls, "I brought her to Elandsfontein to spare her the constant memory of her father – but even that failed to please her" (CV 160). The juxtaposition of two counter-viewpoints serves to highlight not only the frustrating series of misunderstandings and misjudgements within the relationships of the novel's characters, but also the roles of perspective and interpretation in searching for the 'truth'.

Similarly, several narrators address the issue of Hester's shorn hair, each infusing the act with her/his own interpretation. Alida, who acts as a devoted adopted mother to Hester, takes great pleasure in brushing Hester's hair and is shocked and upset when she discovers it has been cut. Alida states that, "[o]nce again she'd asserted her independence from me; once again I was reminded that the solace I'd found in our relationship was my illusion only, no part of her reality" (CV 79). Nicolaas also takes pleasure in Hester's hair and records, "[u]ntil she discovered how much I loved to stroke or touch her long dark hair she would absently resign herself to my caressing; but once she'd discovered my

addiction she cut it all off" (CV 91). It is not until each of these narcissistic interpretations has been placed upon Hester's action that Hester herself reveals the reason for her haircut. She notes that Barend's bullying includes pulling her hair, and that "the only way to thwart him was to hack it off" (CV 103). A further revelation, absent in both Alida's and Nicolaas' accounts, is the extent to which this upset Hester herself. She recalls that she lay in bed that night "fingering the stubble in the dark" and crying (CV 103). Clearly, neither Alida nor Nicolaas views Hester except in relation to themselves, and again, subjective misinterpretation is foregrounded.

In this way, each character expresses her/his own beliefs or 'truth', each of which is subsumed by yet another individual perspective. Each individual narrative therefore resonates with traces of previous versions, is viewed in relation to these, and the context within which each operates is revealed. The result is a conglomeration or layering of differing perspectives and beliefs which ostensibly offers a fuller and more 'truthful' account (if not *the* 'truthful' account) than that of any singular narrative. In the collective narrative, the relationships and interactions between characters such as Hester and Barend are more fully revealed than in the *individual* perspectives of each. Similarly, Hester's relationships and interactions with Alida, Nicolaas and Barend are more clearly delineated in the differences between their individual narratives than in each independent version. As in *Devil's Valley* and *Imaginations of Sand*, the multiple is thus prioritised over the singular.

Human Links

my dependence on him
(CV219)

As in much of Brink's oeuvre, human relationships and interactions are a crucial theme within the novel, represented here by the links of the chain. The association with the bondage of slavery, foregrounded in the title, also operates in conjunction with images of unity and togetherness, all of which highlight the essentially co-dependent nature of humanity and its relationships and interactions. Bonds link humanity and thus each individual action has a correlative effect on

others.⁹ The bonds of human relations can be viewed positively, as supporting and comforting links to others; or as links in which humanity is entrapped or restrained from freedom, much as the slaves of the novel are denied their freedom. In creating a chain of voices which speaks out against silencing, Brink figures the chain as an image of bondage *and* reclaims it as a means of allowing the slaves' stories to be told; the chain of voices represents a form of collective power and freedom from the oppressive nature of silence and misinformation rendered in a purely colonial version of history.

Rather than inverting the image of bondage completely, however, Brink maintains an awareness of entrapment not only within the lives of the slaves, but also of the masters, recognising they are "slaves, all of them" (LCO 198), "chained for life" (CV 210). Commenting on the novel, Brink claims, "[a]ll the characters are slaves of the situation, whites and blacks alike – slaves of history, slaves of the land, slaves of their condition" (*World View* 18).¹⁰ Nicolaas Van der Merwe, for example, although a land and slave-owner, feels he lives a life of captivity in the guise of freedom, and describes his farm as "the very land that oppressed me" (CV 230). Upon returning to his farm, he notes, "I had no liberty to do otherwise: the prisoner of a land apparently open and exposed but crushing one in its hard grip" (CV 343). He also confesses to Galant, "[y]ou know I never wanted to be a farmer [...] Barend could never wait to be his own boss and run his farm. To me it was worse than a prison [...] Now I'm chained to the farm" (CV 221). He later continues, in terms which characterise the land as his jailer,

[s]ometimes I try to persuade myself that I have a good life, that I'm free. But the land itself holds me captive. Sometimes I wake up at night and it's like the day the sand caved in; I can't breathe: I want to cry out, and I want to get up and shout curses that will wake up the whole house. But all I can

⁹ Brink often adopts a relational-triad to explore these interactions. Barend, Nicolaas and Hester, for example, form a close triangular unit in which the interactions between any two of the three members also affect the third. The triad formed by Galant, Nicolaas and Hester operates in a similar manner.

¹⁰ In "Reflections on Literature and History", in a further comparison between the situation of the master and the slave, Brink shares his recognition of "the fear and anger and outrage, the authentic suffering, of those – masters and slaves alike – who had all become the victims of what even then was recognisable as an evil system of exploitation and oppression" (135).

do is get up and go out, and walk down to the kraal to look at the cattle or sheep lying there, all those dumb sheep, chewing their cuds, stirring when they see me, too stupid to do anything about it, and then I think I'm just as dumb as they are, locked up in my kraal for the night, driven out in the morning to graze, and brought back at dark. (CV 222)

In this complication of the traditional depiction of the master, Nicolaas conveys his own feelings of helplessness and muteness, aligning himself with the beasts of the land, an animalistic association usually reserved for the non-whites and slaves.¹¹ In contrast, Nicolaas' brother, Barend, claims that *he* was imprisoned by responsibility whilst Nicolaas ran free (CV 415). Clearly, freedom is a relative term, more complicated than the simplistic binary opposition traditionally assigned to the concept and its counterpart.

A further exploration of apparent dichotomies extends to the relationship between master and slave, traditionally depicted as a binary opposition.¹² Nicolaas articulates this relationship and the void between when he states: "I here: you there. Master: slave" (CV 486). The German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, however, describes the master/slave relationship as a dialectic, rather than a dichotomy, emphasising the manner in which each is co-dependent.¹³ The

¹¹ Barend, for example, likens slaves to "dogs that don't take readily to a new master" (CV 162) and "a good team of oxen" (CV 164). Similarly, Cecilia thinks of the rebellious slaves as "[a]nimals" (CV 477) and chastens her husband by comparing his sexual liaisons with his slaves to Du Toit's bestial couplings with the pigs (CV 279). She also notes that the female slaves "have an animal cunning that guides them, knowing exactly how to provoke the weakness of a man" (CV 406).

¹² Hendrik, a member of the Khoi, articulates a further complication of binary relationships such as master and slave, acting as a reminder of those excluded from such simplistic pairings. He complains to Galant, "[o]n one side you have the masters. On the other side the slaves. What about us? We're in between. We get trodden on from both sides. The masters came from far across the sea and so did you. We're the only ones who have always been here" (CV 432). The limitations of the either/or nature of binary thought, and the arbitrary endowment of authority or mastership are thus foregrounded.

¹³ Although clearly relevant to the Apartheid regime in South Africa, this dialectic extends to many other societal relationships. In Marxist terms, for example, the dialectic operates between the employers and the working classes. Theorists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément remark on "a commonplace gesture of History: there have to be *two* races – the masters and the slaves" (70 qtd. in Robert Young 1) and continue, "[t]here has to be some 'other' – no master without a slave" (70-1 qtd. in Young 2-3). Refuting such simplistic pairings, however, is Young's criticism that a Hegelian model of master and slave fails to acknowledge the multiple layerings of prejudice and oppression in operation at any time. He notes that:

if we think in terms of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, then rather than the working class being the obvious universal subject-victim, many others are also oppressed: particularly

master/slave relationship can be viewed as:

the result of an uncompleted fight to the death for 'recognition' or status, and it is marked by a topsy-turvy logic (or 'dialectic') such that the master, through increasing dependence on the slave, and the slave, who develops independence through labour, switch roles. (Ted Honderich 529)¹⁴

Historical commentators Duncan Edmonds and Allister Sparks note "[w]ere ethnic separation physically possible in South Africa, it would have been achieved [during the Apartheid era]. But *the mutual dependency of its different races rendered their physical separation impossible*" (n. p.; italics added). Thus, they claim, "mutual dependency is the central dynamic that drives the South African situation" (n. p.). Within *A Chain of Voices*, Nicolaas' description of Galant and himself as "my shadow and I" (CV 485) foregrounds the manner in which a relationship which initially appears a binary opposition is in fact revealed as a relationship of mutuality; the shadow cannot exist without the object from which it is derived, and the object is incomplete without a shadow.¹⁵ Within the text, Barend acknowledges this co-dependence, recognising that the way of life to which the Afrikaners have become accustomed in South Africa relies upon the inexpensive labour provided by a vast slave-workforce (CV 166).¹⁶ He notes that any frustration felt at the threat of the involuntary emancipation of their slaves must be contained, as "[w]e couldn't even properly take it out on those under us:

women, black people, and all other so-called ethnic and minority groups. Any single individual may belong to several of these, but the forms of oppression, as of resistance or change, may not only overlap but may also differ or even conflict. As soon as there is no longer a single master and no single slave, then the classic Hegelian reversal model on which Marxism depends and on which it bases its theory of revolution (literally, an overturning) is no longer adequate. (5)

¹⁴ See Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Similarly, Cixous and Clément question the apparent dichotomy of the 'self' and 'other' relationship asking, "[w]hat is the 'Other'? If it is truly the 'other', there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorized. The 'other' escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. It doesn't settle down. But in History, of course, what is called 'other' is an alterity that does settle down, that falls into a dialectical circle" (70-1 qtd. in Young 2).

¹⁵ This image is in itself problematic, however, as the non-white/slave is accorded a role in which traditionally accepted binary oppositions operate, inflicting upon the slave associations such as darkness and insubstantiality, in contrast to the more favourable associations of brightness and solidity of the object or master. Such associations resonate within the text; Cecilia, for example, describes slaves as "[l]ike shadows" (CV 124).

¹⁶ Notably, this manipulation of slave labour is justified in religious terms. Barend states, "[w]hy did God give us slaves if not to make things easier for us?" (CV 166). Of the larger South African context, Brink comments on "abuses in the name of Christianity (using the Bible to instil an

we needed them too much; and they were only too well aware of it, and exploited it at every turn" (*CV* 168). Likewise, Cecilia states, "[o]ne wasn't free to be mistress in one's own home while they [the slaves] were around. In their meekness and ubiquitousness they ruled over hearth and home. Because they knew, and I knew, that they were indispensable" (*CV* 124). Nicolaas justifies this reliance upon a slave labour-force by asking, "[w]ho will suffer most if the slaves were to be freed? They've got more to lose than we have. How will they ever subsist on their own? They can't do without us" (*CV* 166). Thus, mutual dependency, it is demonstrated, defines the master/slave pairing.

However misguided Barend's and Nicolaas' beliefs may be, each recognises the co-dependent nature of the master/slave relationship and the manner in which the fate of one determines that of the other. Barend, for example, voices a common Afrikaner concern when he says, "it won't be long before they get it into their heads to free the slaves altogether. And what will become of us then, I ask you?" (*CV* 170). Traditionally, it is assumed that the master wields control over the submissive slave; Hegelian theory, however, suggests that "the master can exist only in opposition to the slave, his 'Other'. The slave is thus an integral definer of the master's status, and vice-versa" (Bloomsbury n. p.).¹⁷ In "Literature as Cultural Oppression", Brink notes "[h]ow disturbingly intimate [is] the relationship between the oppressed and his or her oppressor, the self and the other" (199). Nicolaas articulates this mutual definition when he notes that he and Galant "were no longer heedless boys but master and slave [...]. It was something neither could avoid or even wish undone: the very condition of our mutual survival" (*CV* 220) admitting, "I was his master, he my slave: and [...] in this land neither could survive without this subtle and subjugating bond" (*CV* 234). Further, he recognises "[i]t was the moment, the irreparable moment, when I changed from your mate into your master that I finally destroyed my own freedom" (*CV* 486).¹⁸ Likewise, Campher, whose

acceptance by the oppressed of their fate)" (ISN 15).

¹⁷ In "André Brink and the Censor", J. M. Coetzee extends the Hegelian notion to include societal structures, noting that, "[a] state whose nature is repressive depends for its existence on something to repress" (62).

¹⁸ Noteworthy is J. U. Jacobs' acknowledgement of this effect within the Apartheid regime. Jacobs states, "[b]orn out of fear and a colonialist compulsion to define the 'otherness' of the world, and crystallizing into an elaborate framework of lies and compromise, *Apartheid* has

position as a white freeman allows him a more 'objective' position from which to observe the master/slave relationship, describes "[t]wo sorts of people I'd known in my life: those born to oppress, and those born to be slaves: and each was the condition for the other's existence" (CV 422). Thus, Brink demonstrates that "one man's chains imply that we are all enslaved" (Albert Camus qtd. in NM, n. p.); the enslavement of the 'other' impinges upon the freedom of the 'self'.

Identity

Who are they? [...] Who are we?
(CV 66)

Throughout the novel there is a tension between the desire to break free from binding relationships ('chains'), whether to the land, the past or to other people, and a paradoxical desire to commune with them, each of which is based upon a search for identity or personal truth ('voices'). Galant's initial words, for example, focus on his own indigenous mythological links to the land, his own dream of 'voice':

[h]igh up in the mountains, in the solid rock, lies the footprint of a man. The mark of Bushman or Khoikhoi, says Ma-Rose, imprinted in the sunrise of the world when stone was soft; perhaps the mark of Heitsi-Eibib himself, the Great Hunter of her stories, or Tsui-Goab's, when he came down to shape men from stones.¹⁹ I dream about that footprint. Imagine leaving your mark like that, in stone, forever, come wind or rain. My own tracks cover the length and breadth of the Bokkeveld, the tracks of child and man. (CV 40)²⁰

brutalized its white practitioners as well as its victims" (1989: 27; italics added).

¹⁹ In a manner similar to that of the footprint discovered by Daniel Defoe's Crusoe, the imprint provides proof that one is not alone. This image also resonates with mythology related to a similar human footprint discovered on Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka. This print, also set in stone, "is regarded as the Buddha's footprint by Buddhists, as Shiva's footprint by Hindus, and as Adam's footprint by Muslims" (Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges n. p.).

²⁰ Within the text, footprints may be read as signs in need of interpretation. In an extension of Saussurian linguistic theory, in which the arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified is emphasised, Roland Barthes notes that a second level of signification often operates in which "a sign not only associates an image or object with a concept, it also engenders various feelings in us; signs not only denote, they also connote" (Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill et

He notes that "[t]his footprint in the stone is like my own" (CV 499), articulating a bond with the land that is ironically absent in those who claim mastery over it and enslave him. Galant often views himself as at one with the land; when threshing wheat, for example, he imagines himself as a tree, with roots sprouting from the earth (CV 379). Thus, a series of images are developed in which a mutually beneficial relationship with the land is depicted: 'bondage'.

In contrast, the dominant Afrikaner notion of the land, depicted within the novel, is of a vast, "hostile" (CV 64) and enduring land which must be tamed in order to survive.²¹ Nicolaas notes "how untamed the land still was, and how untameable" (CV 96); Piet describes his attempts at "subduing" (CV 37) it; and Alida notes the "cruel geography" of this "new dimension of intractable land" (CV 69). She also describes:

the violent simplicity of the landscape around us, endless and monotonous, vast, patient, bare [...] It had always been hostile, threatening me not with obscure dangers lurking unknown, unknowable, but with its very assertive emptiness; not with mystery but the absence of mystery. (CV 65-6)²²

There are many Afrikaners within the novel who claim that the land has already been conquered and enact a false bravado of their confidence in their place within it. Barend, for example, claims, "[i]n Pa's youth, and in the time of our great-grandfather, all of this had been wild and untamed. But fighting against savages and wild beasts our race had conquered it, and now it was ours, forever" (CV 417). In contrast, Martha complains, "how crude this land really is. A savage

al. n. p.). Galant's response to the footprint as a symbol of freedom demonstrates this denotation.

²¹ Again, J. M. Coetzee's comments (as discussed previously), regarding "the question of finding a language to fit Africa, a language that will be authentically African" (1988b: 7), address the desire of the Afrikaner/settler/coloniser to incur some order upon a feared land. In each instance, the act is an attempt to 'place' themselves in a hostile/new environment.

²² Similar depictions of the relationship between land and settler permeate the remainder of Brink's oeuvre. In *Rumours of Rain*, for example, the narrator, Martin Mynhardt, who epitomises Afrikanerdom, states, "Africa is a basic and terrifying truth" (353) and records the Afrikaner objective to "civilise this land" (305), claiming that South Africa has been "tamed" (306) by his people. His failed attempt to scrape animal dung from his shoes, however, symbolically acknowledges the inability to extricate oneself from one's bondage to the land: "it wasn't so easy to get rid of it. It was as if part of the farm itself had rubbed off on me, a dirty smear" (361).

wilderness, not fit for whites to live in" (CV 488). Clearly, the Afrikaners' search for a sense of belonging and identity is inhibited by their complex relationship with the land in which they live. Hester demonstrates some sense of identification with the land, and yet is still unable to fully articulate her place within it. She says of the land, "there were the familiar textures: smoothness and roughness of rock, brittleness of grass, the resilience of skin on my upper arms as I held them tightly to contain myself, the reassurance of bones in knees, the gentle hardness of thighs. This was I: yet who was I?" (CV 260). She bemoans, "[b]ut this is not enough. Not only to feel but to know what it feels like to be feeling. Not to feel the surface of the rock against your skin but to know how from inside it feels you" (CV 102). Hester desires a sense of mutual recognition between herself and the land, but this identification eludes her. Any sense of familial identification is also beyond her reach, as the links of her ancestral chain have been severed. She says of her deceased father:

[w]hat I needed of him was more than the touch of his jacket, his crusted boots, his father-smell: I needed his memory of me which they'd taken away [...]. Dad had gone. The memory had gone. There was so much about myself of which I knew nothing: the beginning, the early years, Mother. But he'd been there, he'd witnessed it, *he'd become the custodian of my wholeness and when he died it could not be retrieved*. Everything about me which he'd known had been buried with him. Driving my father to his death that man had obliterated part of myself: there had been Mother, then Tant Nan, then Dad: *in losing him I lost my grasp on them all*. (CV 102-3; italics added)

Galant's identity is also inextricably linked with the land in which he was born and the experiences through which he has lived. His entire body is imaged as a text within which the contours of his life and experiences are depicted; each scar is a record. He says:

[m]y fingers move from one scar to the next, some old, others still covered with scabs. I read myself like a newspaper. Here all my life is written up: every callus, every cut and scar and ridge and hollow, every mark telling

of something specific; all of it carried with me wherever I go. That's why it's useless to trek to the Cape. At last it is very clear to me: one can run away from a place and from some people; but one's body can never be left behind. And in your body places and people are contained [...] One cannot escape. And then there are those other scars, those that leave no mark on the body and which are invisible to the eye, but which remain inside: the ridges and marks you discover in your sleep, in your thoughts, your dreams. This word; that look; that gesture. *You can't go swimming with us today, for Hester is with us.* A lion tumbling head over heels as the bullet hits it. Sitting together under a hairy kaross: Hester, Hester. (CV 326-7; original italics)

The ingrained record of Galant's past denies him the freedom to forget and makes it impossible for him to turn away from his past identity. He states, "I know very clearly: it is impossible to escape. Running away is the solution of a coward and it gets you nowhere, for your body goes with you and everything is right there in the body" (CV 327-8) and adds that, "one cannot get away from one's own place. It's stuck to your footsoles" (CV 352). Thus, as in *Imaginations of Sand* and *Devil's Valley*, the effects of the past upon present identity are acknowledged.

Galant also recognises that his own identity is at once inextricably bound up in his relationships with others and removed from them; both 'chained' and 'voiced', and although resistant towards oppressive relationships such as those condoned by slavery, he also feels drawn towards others. In speaking of his relationship with Pamela, for example, he says:

in this night she has become a part of me without which I can never be Galant. Something in me is now forever chained to her, and willingly. Why does it not choke me then? *Why this feeling that only with this chain on my body can I know the possibility of freedom?* (CV 298; italics added)

In a gesture towards the inextricable ties between binary pairings, Galant unwittingly articulates the dialectical relationship between individual freedom and communal bondage. Later he adds, "I'm not free to go. One enters between a

woman's legs and is caught forever" (CV 327). Likewise, Hester recognises the individual freedom surrendered in communing with another. She says:

[t]o grow attached to anyone means running the risk of forfeiting that part of oneself entrusted to the other. Never again. No one would possess me again. Yielding would mean giving up my only chance of survival among them. I had to live with them; I knew I would have to marry one of them. But I would never belong to them. That I owed to myself and to that of my father which lived on in me: to belong only to myself, separate and intact [...] Nicolaas came close. His gentleness and patience were dangerous, threatening me with the generosity of his small gifts. It would have been so easy to succumb. (CV 103)

Hester's husband is similarly reluctant to make himself vulnerable to domination. Barend states, "[Hester] would remain my adversary until the day of my death; and the only way in which to remain worthy of her was to be as strong as she, never to give in, never to show a tender spot on which she might get a hold, for then she would destroy me" (CV 161). Personal identity, it is suggested, is thus both individual and yet also inextricably tied to communion with others.

Throughout the text Galant continues to question his own identity, particularly after Pamela asks him "Galant, who are you?" (CV 271). This question echoes throughout the text as a reminder of thematic concerns related to identity and personal 'truth'.²³ Galant responds by telling her of his family and friends, attempting to capture his own essence in their stories, but his reply is inadequate and he admits defeat, stating, "those are other people, they're not I" (CV 298). He asks, "[t]o tell her what she wants to know: where do I begin, and how?" [...] *This is me, I, Galant* [...] But can this be all? Surely there must be something more, something which can make others say long after I'm gone: *This is Galant*. And this is what I got to find: with her [Pamela]" (CV 298; original

²³ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that colonialism operates at the level of subjectivity and notes that "[b]ecause it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all the attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" (200-201 qtd. in Mansfield 125).

italics). Ultimately, he decides that it is the chains of bondage which deny him the means of articulation – ‘voice’ - necessary to express his identity and, in answer to Pamela’s question, he replies, “[o]nly a free man can answer that” (CV 402). He continues, “[w]e can’t see properly because we got the eyes of slaves. But once we reach the other side we’ll know for sure. There will be a sun rising. Then I’ll tell you who I am. For the first time we’ll really know each other” (CV 403). Freedom, he claims, is the foundation for personal identification, and it is for this reason that freedom and its associated symbols will become so crucial to him throughout the course of the novel.

Galant’s search for identity leads him to place his hopes of freedom in his progeny. He tells his fellow-slave, Ontong, “there’s a child coming [...] Now everybody will know about Galant”; adding, “[w]e are of today and yesterday; but he is tomorrow’s dawn” (CV 300). He believes, “[h]e’ll be Galant just like me. And from where I stop walking he’ll go on, all the way. With shoes on his feet” (CV 301).²⁴ His conviction that freedom and hope lie in the future is evident in his boast that “[n]o one can take him from us. Not even Nicolaas. There are some things even he cannot be *baas* over” (CV 303). This boast is, of course, ironic, particularly in light of further revelations. This child is to be the second in which Galant’s hopes have been vested and then destroyed; not only did Nicolaas literally ‘take’ a child from Galant when he beat Bet’s son, David, to death after arguing with his wife, but he now usurps Galant’s right to paternity, as Pamela’s son is clearly of Afrikaner blood. Galant articulates his pain and shock at the discovery, stating, “[w]hite. The child was white” (CV 341). Thus, Nicolaas unwittingly pre-empted the same disappointment and frustration Galant will feel when his hopes of emancipation are revealed as unfounded. Freedom, it is suggested, relies not on future progeny, but rather on the personal interactions of the present day.

²⁴ Ironically, despite his own oppression at the hands of the Afrikaners, Galant fails to recognise his own forms of domination and his gender-biased comments. There is no place for a female child within his narrative of hope, just as there is no continuance offered to Pamela in their shared offspring. Thus, Galant exemplifies the oppressed who in turn oppresses those beneath him; a hierarchy of control and subjection most powerfully illustrated in the image of the line of hunters, to be discussed further.

Sexual Union and Identity

he was a rider second to none,
of horses and women alike
(CV146-7)

Galant's consistent questioning of his own identity is also traced in a series of sexual couplings. Soon after Pamela asks him to explain who he is, she slips away from the house to spend the night with him. During their sexual intercourse, he notes, "[i]n her voice I recognize myself. I know who I am. We are together" (CV 299).²⁵ This recognition of identity culminates in his sexual union with his white mistress, Hester, in which he is given a voice in which to render himself. He says, "I raised a hand towards her as if to touch her breast, but I didn't dare, I wouldn't ever, no I did, but only just, a finger on the small shadow of her breast, *and said, I think it was P*" (CV 503; italics added).²⁶ His voicing of selfhood is imaged as dependent upon this communion with another; in recognising and accepting the 'other', he also discovers himself. In transgressing the sexual taboo between slave and mistress, non-white and white South African, Galant claims equality with Hester, refuting the official narrative in which the right to such a claim is denied, and discovering freedom in the act. In comparison to Galant's role as a slave, Hester's identity is similarly muted by the oppressive nature of her role as a woman in a patriarchal society. She is also emancipated by the act, describing their union as "giving me being, a name, [...] setting me free forever, unbearably" (CV 504-5) and recording the resultant "shameless affirmation: I am – I am – I am" (CV 505). She continues:

I am two things that can never be risible: a child, and a savage. We recognized it in one another, from the beginning. And only this once, liberated from the corruptions of both power and suffering, in the madness and violence and destruction of our familiar world, in this terrible merciful total night, are we free to admit and share it. (CV 505)

²⁵ This belief is, however, deeply ironic, as Pamela calls out the name given to him as a slave, rather than his original name.

²⁶ Noteworthy is Galant's initial denial that he would dare to cross these sexual boundaries, followed by his tentative confession that he may, in fact, have transgressed them, emphasising the significance of such an action.

Her cry to “[t]hresh me, break me, shape me” (CV 505), however, is indicative of her recognition that the illusion of emancipation is not based solely upon mutual recognition, but also upon the dominance of one over another – ‘bondage’.

In keeping with the representation of relationships as confrontational, sexual acts within the novel are invariably represented as acts of domination and submission or, alternatively, as attempts at domination met with resistance. This representation foregrounds the oppressive nature of patriarchy in its treatment of women, linking it to that of racial oppression: just as slaves are punished and beaten into obedience, men attempt to subdue women in both physical and sexual terms, literally and metaphorically invading their bodies. These invasions refuse any acknowledgement of the humanity of the ‘other’, instead the female is imagined as an object to be consumed and possessed. In considering the role she must play as a wife and sexual partner, Cecilia protests against this objectification, stating, “*we aren’t animals*. Yet soon, as meek as she [Lydia], I should have to submit and be dominated myself” (CV 120; original italics). In a similar image of submission, Alida describes “Piet’s laborious nocturnal assault on my unresisting but negative body” (CV 79). In contrast, Hester resists her husband. During the most fertile time in her menstrual cycle, she states, “I fought Barend off when he approached me: for that very reason I fought him, as the acceptance of his assuaging seed would seal my submission” (CV 453). Barend himself admits that, “I wanted to fertilize her and see my child grow inside her; I believed that would finally break her in. Pa had always said: ‘The only way to manage an impudent woman is to put her up the pole’” (CV 160). Sexual acts, therefore, symbolically represent relationships of domination and submission both within and beyond the text, in terms of gender, race and colonialism.

Hester also adopts imagery related to the breaking in of horses,²⁷ to further describe the sexual couplings between herself and her husband. She states, “[i]t is a fight of animals, nightly resumed, and as he claws and thrusts to subdue me,

²⁷ Notably, the imagery related to the breaking in of horses is also used to describe the control and punishment of slaves, and thus provides a commentary on the manner in which the mistreatment of women is linked to that of slaves, each of which is oppressed by another. Further utilisation of the imagery includes the manner in which Galant beats the horses under his care in order to vent his frustration (CV 192-3, 201). Thus, the hierarchy of oppression is exhibited.

hoping no doubt to break me in like a mare, I resist in the savage knowledge that he is more vulnerable than I, that even as he rides me there can only be abjection in his triumph" (*CV* 139). Similarly, Barend presages his description of the "forcible subjection" of his wife by recalling the manner in which a pair of farm-horses mate, noting that "[f]or a considerable time they [...] went on fighting, biting and kicking and rearing, but in the end the mare gave up and the stallion covered her" (*CV* 412).²⁸ Speaking of Hester, he notes that "in every encounter I had to tame her anew [...] She would throw me like the grey horse Pa had given me when we were small and who'd refused to allow anyone on his back until in the end Galant had broken him in" (*CV* 160).²⁹ The association between horse-taming imagery and that of sex continues throughout the novel, and is exemplified in the manner in which Galant describes his couplings with Bet. He claims, "I lay her down and ride her so she won't forget she's been ridden" (*CV* 133). As in many of Brink's images, however, the image of dominance and subjection resists binarial closure. Cecilia, for example, discovers a certain power of her own in the sexual act. She claims that "[o]nly in the years to follow did it define itself for me: that through his use and abuse of my body a peculiar power of my own over him [Nicolaas] had been asserted" (*CV* 122). Similarly, Bet claims that, "[o]nly by drawing a man into one's body can one get power over him" (*CV* 390), acknowledging the mutual enslavement between oppressor and oppressed. Just as the oppression of a slave by his master results in a denial of that master's freedom, so too are men and women bound in mutual bondage.³⁰

In addition to the manner in which consensual and/or marital sexual interactions are portrayed, there is a further exploration of the manner in which sexual relationships of dominance and submission relate to racial oppression. This interrelation is perhaps most powerfully portrayed by Nicolaas' wife, Cecilia. Throughout the course of the novel, Cecilia has nightmares in which a non-white

²⁸ Notably, it appears to Barend that these animalistic couplings sexually arouse Hester (*CV* 412); perhaps due to the fact that the only association she has with sexual intercourse is of a violent nature.

²⁹ He also admits, "[n]ot that I would have liked to see Hester docile. Her very wildness increased my desire" (*CV* 160). Barend's admission resonates with the same feeling inherent in the Afrikaner relationship with the land of South Africa, discussed above.

³⁰ The representation of mutual enslavement does, however, resonate with the (patriarchal) male fear of female sexuality or the *vagina dentata*, as discussed above.

man perpetrates “unmentionable horrors” (CV 407) upon her. After these nightmares, she resorts to a ritual of cleansing, attempting, by “scrubbing and scouring”, to “rid [herself] of the stain of that memory” (CV 407). Her fear of interracial rape suggests a fear of the transgression of racial boundaries, a fear given context by a society in which white women, as the vessels of future progeny, must be protected from the taint of racial impurity; as Galant’s fellow-prisoner notes, “[t]he honour of a white woman: there’s nothing can match that” (CV 210).³¹ The constant fear of interracial rape haunts Cecilia and she believes it to be “the worst that could possibly happen to one” (CV 407). During the rebellion, her greatest fear is of “this most terrible of abominations that could be perpetrated on a white woman” (CV 477). When she is shot by one of the slaves, the resultant wound represents Cecilia’s worst fears; “lacerating [...] a portion of the tensor vagina femoris muscle and *exposing* others” (CV 14; italics added), the wound symbolises the act of female invasion and exposure, instilling her with a shame similar to that associated with rape. The conventional demarcations between races and genders are here breached, complicating the usual binary distinctions in which oppressor and oppressed operate. As an Afrikaner, Cecilia is traditionally awarded dominance over the non-whites, and yet, on a sexual level, her role is that of a woman, subject to the desires of men, whether white or non-white, and she is thus placed in a position of submission. In his intermingling of gendered and racial relationships, which culminate in Cecilia’s metaphorical interracial rape, Brink conflates relationships of oppression. He thus highlights the shared foundations of both gender-based and racial oppression, emphasising their arbitrary nature and challenging these constructions.

Ironically, as in *Devil’s Valley*, the policing of sexual boundaries between races does not extend to the Afrikaner men, and they continue to use their slave women as outlets for their sexual desires. Cecilia voices the fear of miscegenation and its possible consequences when she states:

I was amazed to see all the white children among the slaves. And it

³¹ After his sexual union with Hester, Galant says, “I have committed the greatest crime of all: and even if they never find out about it that would still be the reason why they will have to kill me in the end. This is the one freedom that truly threatens them” (CV 507).

occurred to me that if it went on like that we would soon have no other choice but to set them all free. Can you imagine what that would mean? In this land which God has given us we will have become the equals of the beasts of the veld. (CV 280)

Her concerns for the purity of her race are echoed by the inhabitants of Devil's Valley and highlight the 'self' and 'other' dichotomy central to the exclusionary beliefs of Afrikanerdom and the Apartheid movement, which the novel satirises. Cecilia's objections to interbreeding between Afrikaners and the non-white peoples, and her correlative fear of rape demonstrate a desire to physically exclude the 'other' that is echoed in much of the legislature of the Apartheid regime.³² This fear of sexual invasion is emblematic of the fear of penetration by an 'other'.

Physical Oppression

ill usage
(CV 518)

Relationships between the characters of *A Chain of Voices*, particularly those of an oppressive nature, are realised physically, furthering the exploration of the manner in which oppressive acts are invasions upon another.³³ In comparison to sexual acts of dominance and submission, acts of physical abuse such as beatings enhance this exploration of human interactions. Contact with others is thus viewed as an often confrontational and violent situation in which equality has no foothold. Barend, for example, exhibits his power over his slaves and his wife

³² In 1949, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, for example, proclaimed intermarriage between white South Africans and other racial groups illegal and, in 1950, the control over interracial interactions was extended still further with an amendment to the Immorality Act which "prohibited sexual intercourse between whites and other racial groups" (Jonathan Paton 183). Also introduced in 1950, the Group Areas Act implemented "strict residential segregation" (Paton 184), a practice which the leader of the Nationalists, Daniel F. Malan, described as "the very essence of apartheid" (qtd. in Nelson Mandela, 1995: 130).

³³ Levinas views the identification of 'self' in the 'other' and vice versa as a violent act. He believes the act of naming or speaking of an 'other' reduces her/him to an object framed in one's own terms and concepts. Young notes that Levinas' concern is that "the other is neutralized as a means of encompassing it: ontology amounts to a philosophy of power, an egotism in which the relation with the other is accomplished through its assimilation into the self" (13). Levinas thus claims that the only manner in which one may interact without violation is to maintain a respect for the alterity of the 'other', acknowledging the 'other' as that which cannot be conceived.

in a physical manner (CV 143), with what Hester describes as “the arrogance of his superior strength” (CV 252). She notes that this assertion of control will continue into the following generations, silently inciting her son to “[l]ook sharp, Carel, you’ll need this recollection later. *This is what I’m bringing you up for. To do the same to your women one day*” (CV 252; original italics). The most powerful image of the oppressive relationship and its outlet in physical terms is found in the hierarchical structure of the Van der Merwe Family. Piet, the patriarch of the family, holds the most power and exhibits his control over the male members of his household by beating them into submission to his will. His wife Alida, describing an incident in which their son Nicolaas was being punished, notes it was “one of those terrible floggings in which Piet spared neither slave nor son [...] disfiguring a back that had once been babyish and smooth *and mine*” (CV 73; italics added). Thus, Piet claims ownership over the body of his son, scarring it with reminders of his power and disavowing both the mother’s claim and Nicolaas’ own personal identity and worth.

The manner in which this hierarchy of control continues throughout the household is illustrated in an incident which occurs during a hunting expedition. Nicolaas explains, “[w]e’d always hunted in single file whenever we’d gone in search of a leopard or hyena or lynx: Pa in front, then Barend, then I, and Galant bringing up the rear” (CV 96). He adds that Piet had previously “warned us several times not to tread on his heels [...] but we’d been too scared to pay attention” (CV 96). Piet then loses his temper:

‘Barend,’ he shouted, ‘if you bump into me again I’ll thump you!’

Numb with fright, Barend could only mumble: ‘If you thump me I’ll thump Nicolaas.’

(*And if you thump me, I’ll thump Galant.*) (CV 96; original italics)

This is symbolic of the chain of oppression and abuse exhibited both within the novel and within Apartheid South Africa; each link in the chain oppresses the next.³⁴ Notably, the file of hunters is subtly changed upon their return from the

³⁴ Were the file of hunters to be extended to its full potential, white women would be inserted

hunt. Nicolaas states, “we tramped back home [...] I in front, Galant far behind. If I were to stop unexpectedly, there wouldn’t be anyone near enough to bump into me” (*CV* 98). The sense of loss of companionship, inherent within the bondage between oppressor and oppressed, is evident in his description, and is indicative of the altered relationship between himself and Galant. The change in the relationship between Nicolaas and Galant occurs after Nicolaas attempts to win favour with his harsh and judgmental father by taking credit for Galant’s slaughter of the lion (*CV* 97). Rather than gaining the approving gaze of his oppressive father, however, Nicolaas instead enforces his own oppression upon Galant. In appropriating his act of heroism, Nicolaas reminds Galant of his enslavement,³⁵ silencing him by taunting, “[y]ou think he’ll take a slave’s word against mine?” (*CV* 57). The loss Nicolaas feels is indicative of the manner in which relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’ operate, discussed by Brink in his essay, “Literature as Cultural Opposition”. He notes that “when that other falls away, or begins to disintegrate and become diffuse, opaque, amorphous, inchoate, one is threatened, suddenly, by the discovery of a loss of something that has become indispensable to one’s definition of oneself” (199). In this way, Brink portrays an apparently dichotomous relationship between master and slave, or ‘self’ and ‘other’, as a co-dependent pairing in which bondage operates in both stifling and comforting ways.

Brink’s resistance to the categorical also extends to his exploration of relationships of control and submission, however. As in his depiction of sexual relationships, in which the sexually-dominated discover their own measure of power, and in the mutually dependent roles of master and slave, physically abusive relationships are also complicated by aberrations in the hierarchy of

between the lowest ranking white men and the first of the non-white men, non-white women would file behind Galant, and behind him would follow non-white children, and then perhaps animals, in their own hierarchical pattern.

³⁵ The symbolic representation of the hierarchy of power is extended to include Galant’s control over the lion, exemplified in the ultimate act of slaughter. Nicolaas is disappointed that such a powerful creature should subject itself to domination and notes, “it was unworthy of a lion to be like that [...] Its death was the death of something I would have wished to be, something that desperately needed to remain inviolate, something no man should be allowed to relinquish” (*CV* 98). His sentiment is reminiscent of that expressed by Galant in relation to a stallion that eventually surrendered to the process of being broken in. He states, “I swear I’ll never forgive the grey stallion for this. To have allowed himself to be broken in so shamefully” (*CV* 49). Each of these instances of frustration at the submission of the powerful reflects on the slave situation

power relations. Hester's ability to halt her husband's excessive beating of the slave, Klaas, is exemplary. Normally subject to the will of her husband, Hester gains control over him by confronting him in a situation in which he is unable to assume his usual position as her dominator. Her plea to stop the beating is made in full view of other slaves and thus Barend is unwilling to chastise her, as this would relegate her to a similar position to that of the slave being punished, and thus, by association, also reduce his own position. Similarly, he cannot ignore her, as any continued protest would also demonstrate a threat to his position as master. To resolve the situation, Barend discontinues the assault upon Klaas, suggesting that he has been punished enough (*CV* 163-4).³⁶

In *Colonization, Violence and Narration in White South African Writing*, Jolly extensively examines such relationships between 'self' and 'other' and considers the nature of control and submission. Jolly bases her discussion upon the models of inter-relational behaviour posed by Jessica Benjamin, who defines an ideal relationship as one in which independence and respect for the 'other' are equally balanced and a detrimental relationship as one in which sadism or masochism operate.³⁷ She notes that:

Benjamin defines the sadist as an individual who is incapable of accepting the paradox of mutual independence, in which the need for self assertion and the need for recognition of the self by an other are held in balance. The sadist perceives dependency on another's recognition of himself as a threat to his independence. The sadist, then, can receive recognition of his own independence only through violation of an other. (113-4)

Jolly develops Benjamin's discussion of the sadist/masochist pairings in order to examine the master/slave dialectic, and links such pairings to acts of colonisation. She claims that in sado-masochist relationships, as in the relationship of coloniser

within the novel.

³⁶ Similar observations regarding this scene are made in Jolly's *Colonization, Violence and Narration in White South African Writing* (37-8), in which she discusses the analogous relationship between acts of violence and the act of colonisation.

³⁷ Arguably, a sadist/masochist pairing could be viewed as an ideal unit in which the sadist derives pleasure from the power to harm the 'other', and the masochist derives pleasure from the manipulation of the dominator's harmful acts.

and colonised, each role is a means of asserting identity. As in the male/female dialectic of sexual dominance discussed above, each partner gains self-identification through inter-relations with its 'other'; the men/sadists/colonisers exert their dominance over women/masochists/colonised, and the latter gain some sense of self-definition as a result of their control of the (sexual) domination by the former. Thus, each defines the other in a relationship of mutual pathology.

The hierarchy of oppression, exhibited within the novel in abusive physical and sexual confrontations, serves not only to illustrate the manner in which racial and gender-based oppression operates, but also acts as a metaphor for any confrontation between 'self' and 'other', including acts of colonisation. Thus, Brink's exemplification of prejudicial and oppressive relationships also comments on the larger context of South African politics, which in turn addresses prejudice internationally. As in *Imaginings of Sand* and *Devil's Valley*, the Afrikaner position as both coloniser and colonised, victimiser and victim is explored. Barend, in particular, complains that, due to English control, the Afrikaner now "had no proper say on our own farms, and that was asking for trouble" (CV 162). The ultimate symbol of control usurped is that of Piet, bedridden after suffering a stroke. He says:

[t]here's nothing my hands can hold on to any more. Powerless my talons lie on the bed beside me. Before, I had everything in my grasp: farm and people, earth, mountain, slaves, wheatlands, cattle. Now it's pulled away from me like a sheet, exposing my shame. Bare-arsed one comes into the world and bare-arsed one leaves it. There used to be giants in the earth, but their time is past. (CV 497)

Similarly, the slaves view Piet's stricken state as an omen of the impending fall of the masters who enslave them. Galant notes, "I knew it was a sign that the masters were going to be taken away from us" (CV 373), suggesting an apocalyptic future in which relationships of mastery and enslavement, 'self' and 'other', will be redefined.³⁸

³⁸ Oppressive environments such as that of the Apartheid regime often instigate a retaliatory

In each of these disruptions of binary categorisations, Brink challenges both the dominant and their discourses. His critique of roles of power, and the justifications by which this power is attained and upheld, is also a critique of any discourse which disallows contestation. In demonstrating that the 'self'/'other' pairing is a relationship of mutuality, Brink undermines the master narrative of 'self', and lays claim to the possibility of alternative versions, including those of the 'other'. In answer to models in which the 'self' narrates for both 'self' and 'other', therefore, Brink proposes an alternative in which multiple versions operate in refutation to any dominant version.

Clothing and Mastery

The clothes are the man
(Erasmus, qtd. in *Quoteland*)

Further illustrations of the hierarchy of oppression in operation include the symbolism related to clothing and shoes. Galant's place within the farm hierarchy is denoted, for example, in his receipt of the cast-off clothes of the youngest Van der Merwe son (*CV* 180). It is revolutionary, therefore, that he should receive a new item of clothing, the corduroy jacket gifted to him by Nicolaas after beating Bet and Galant's infant son to death. After an argument with his wife, in which Cecilia taunted Nicolaas with his inability to produce sons, he left the house in a fury, tripping over the child who had been forbidden entry to the house and its yard. In a "blinding rage", Nicolaas beat the child so severely that he later died from his injuries (*CV* 186-7). The gift to Galant is thus indicative of the altered relationship between himself and Nicolaas, who suffers under an immense burden of guilt. Galant wears the jacket as a token in tribute to his son, refusing to discard it when it becomes worn and stained and he is eventually nicknamed "Tatters" because of its appearance (*CV* 236). The torn jacket acts as a constant reminder to Nicolaas of his own guilt and shame, and Galant records his attempt to forbid Galant to wear it:

response in literature; apocalyptic fiction, for example, envisages a future in which the oppressed masses usurp the authority of their oppressors. Exemplary is Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, described by Doireann MacDermott as an apocalyptic novel "which foresee[s] a future in which the white man no longer holds dominion" (178).

'Why are you wearing that torn jacket again?' Nicolaas calls after me.
'How many times must I tell you I don't want to see the damned thing again?'

'It's my jacket.'

'You're wearing it just to spite me.'

'I'm wearing it because it's my child's.' (CV 297)

He explains his refusal to discard it by noting, "[a]ll I have to prove that *something* happened is the tatters of my old jacket" (CV 296; original italics). Galant's continued wearing of the jacket echoes throughout the text as a symbolic representation of the inversion of the roles of master and slave epitomised in the slave uprising, and of the dialectical relationship between the two.

Descriptions of shoes and bare feet also form a crucial imagery cluster within the text by which to explore the master/slave relationship, its inversion, and ultimately its dialectical nature. This cluster reinforces the exploration of roles of mastery and slavery, drawing upon iconic images of barefooted poverty as opposed to the shoes of the higher echelons of society and resonating with previous footprint imagery in which the relationship between humans and the land is explored. One of Galant's first attempts to question his enslavement, for example, involves a query regarding footwear; he asks:

'Ma-Rose, why do you and I always walk barefoot?'

'That's how it is.'

'I also want shoes, for the thorns.'

'Only masters wear shoes.'

(CV 40)

Throughout the course of the novel, Galant becomes more and more obsessed with the desire to possess shoes, believing that the symbol distinguishing slave from master, will also symbolise his own freedom. Once again, the transition from childhood innocence to the adult realisation of a racist society is denoted symbolically; Galant records that in childhood the Afrikaner children were as

barefoot as he, except on Sundays when they visited church (CV 40) and notes of Nicolaas that "[t]hese days he always wears shoes; I go barefoot as before" (CV 131-2). Thus, in adulthood his bare feet define him as a slave; he states, "[m]y feet remain bare: it is the mark that brands me" (CV 328) and later declares, "I'll be wearing shoes on my feet like a man. That's what the word of freedom means" (CV 374). The shoemaker D'Alree, when asked to make him a pair of shoes, replies, "[b]ut you're a slave. You're not allowed to wear shoes" (CV 289). Galant remains obsessed with the idea of owning shoes, however, and during the slave rebellion, Moses makes note of Galant's footwear, recalling that "he was wearing new yellow boots on his feet" (CV 496). After the rebellion, Du Toit recounts that when they found the fugitive Galant, he "was wearing shoes, presumably stolen from his late master, whose body had been found barefoot" (CV 444).³⁹

The juxtaposed images of Galant's boots and Nicolaas' bare feet denote the momentary inversion of roles of control and submission within the rebellion. Klaas, for example, is shocked to view the subjugated Barend, saying, "I hadn't expected ever to see a thing like that. This man, ruling over us all so cruelly for so long, now whimpering and grovelling like a scared dog" (CV 455), and Barend recalls his "bare feet torn and bruised by rocks" (CV 473) as he flees from the rebellious slaves.⁴⁰ This inversion is only momentary, however, as symbolised by the description of Galant, upon his surrender; Du Toit records that, "[h]e was barefoot once again, with the shoes of his late master, laces tied together, slung over his shoulder" (CV 445). Galant himself explains that "[i]t's so much easier barefoot; I'm used to it. Anyway, they [the boots] hurt me" (CV 498).⁴¹ Thus, the

³⁹ Notably, being stripped of one's footwear often denotes a loss of respect. Ora Horn Prouser records: "[a]ccording to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, when a man refuses to marry his brother's widow, the widow should approach the surviving brother (called the *levir*) 'in the presence of the elders, pull the sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: 'Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house!' And he shall go in Israel by the name of 'the family of the unsandaled one'" (n. p.).

⁴⁰ Notably, Barend's barefooted nature is mirrored by Cecilia's nakedness when she is forced to allow her slave to tend her wound, after the rebellion. She complains, "I had to lie back and allow the slave women to wash and bind my wound; no end to the degradations" (CV 478). Without the protective mantle of her clothing, Cecilia is vulnerable to the 'gaze' of another, and is thus placed in the traditional powerless position of the 'other'; she is subject to appropriation and objectification, and is thus denied her own subjectivity.

⁴¹ The image of Galant walking barefooted is reminiscent of that of Kristien in *Imaginings of Sand*. She recognises the altered relationship one experiences whilst being in physical contact with the

inversion of power initially signalled by Galant's new jacket and reinforced by the wearing of his master's shoes reverts once again to the former master/slave relationship under which Galant will be tried and executed. In this way, Brink not only images the rebellion's defeat, but also cautions that inversions such as Galant's act of rebellion, in which he becomes the dominator, have only a momentary benefit in challenging the status quo. Such inversions must themselves be further challenged by other voices in order to avoid becoming a new form of authoritarianism. In "Mahatma Gandhi Today", Brink elaborates on this ideal, noting that, "[c]hange involves more than the destruction of what exists, more than the replacement of one system by another: it is a process directed inward as much as outward, to the self as much as to the other" (70). As is cautioned in *Imaginations of Sand*, therefore, any inversion must represent only the initial stage in a continued challenge to master narratives.

Imagery clusters such as those related to clothing and shoes thus provide a metaphorical context by which to examine the binary oppositions in operation within the fictional heterocosm. In each case, the binary relationship is undercut. Inversions, reversions and blurring of traditionally paired oppositions demonstrate the arbitrariness of binary oppositions and, by association, reveal the constructed nature of these pairings. Thus, 'isms' – racism, genderism – are also undermined and found to be *constructed* narratives.

The Power to Name

'What's in a name?'
(Shakespeare *Rom.* 2.2.43)

The act of naming similarly traces the roles of oppression and submission within the text and symbolises those within South African society as a whole.

land, stating that, "it lends a different kind of meaning to motion, to the feel of surfaces beneath my soles, a sensual form of knowledge, a reassurance of somehow being in touch with what matters" (60). She also notes, "the rediscovery of a peculiar kind of freedom is exhilarating in itself. To feel, again, the earth, its secret vibrations, the closeness of its seasons, a kind of peasant joy perhaps, an awareness of the gathering of time in the pressure of my soles. A painful and necessary intimacy" (229). In each of these images, communion with the earth highlights the problematic claims of indigeneity explored within the text, suggesting that those who walk barefooted (literally and metaphorically) have a greater communion with, and therefore claim to, the land.

Achilles, for example, draws attention to the re-naming associated with enslavement, and associates freedom with the right to one's own name. He believes home to be "your own country", a place "where you had a name that was your own, Gwambe [...] Here you are called by another name: Achilles. It means slave" (CV 100). The exemplification of the sense of freedom associated with owning one's name is found in Bet and Galant's naming of their son. Bet explains:

[w]e called him David. One night the Baas read [...] about David and King Saul, and how the king had thrown his assegai at him and how David had got away into the mountains, *knowing the time would come when he would be king himself*. And when he went back to the hut Galant said: "We'll call him David. Because his day will come too. He isn't a slave like me." (CV 150; italics added)

Ontong's identification with the place-names of his ancestral homeland act in a similar manner to the links drawn between one's own name and individual identity. In a mantra-like manner, Ontong draws upon these names as comfort and solace:

I too could, if I wished, recite names that would bring a shiver of pleasure to the spine, musical names that would help me forget the aches of the body. I could say: Jogjakarta, or Madura, or Rembang, or Tjirebon, or Tjilatjap [...] And these would ring in my mind and bring back a view of palm-trees and flying pigeons and the sea. (CV 189)

Rebellion against another's right to name is also elemental in the exploration of identity and the roles of mastery and slavery. When Galant rebels against his role as Nicolaas' slave, for example, he notes that, "[f]or the first time, as I see him coming towards me, I think of him not as *Nicolaas* but as *Baas*" (CV 385),⁴² an alteration given further significance by Cecilia's prior complaint at

⁴² A similar re-assessment of relationship boundaries occurs between Galant and Hester. She recalls that when he called her "Miss Hester", "[i]t stung me. He'd never called me that before" (CV 142).

Galant's "refusal to address Nicolaas as *baas*" (CV 124). This alteration in naming, a movement from the personal to a title, signifies the change in their relationship and denotes Galant's resolve to make a stand against him. The breakdown of the last remaining vestiges of their childhood bond, however, is most powerfully exemplified in the moment when Galant re-appropriates the right to name. He tells Nicolaas, "[c]all me Tatters [...] For you I'm no longer Galant" (CV 386); his request marks his recognition and acceptance that their relationship is irrevocably altered. The name "Galant" represents the innocence of childhood, and the relative freedom and comradeship associated with this time; in contrast, the name "Tatters" represents the adult Galant, including all of the suffering associated with the period following his exile from the childhood idyll of the dam. Galant himself notes that, "at this very dam where our tracks merge they also run apart, his in one direction, mine in another" (CV 51). The beatings, hard labour, the death of David in whom all his hope for future freedom lay, the Baas' appropriation of Pamela and, ultimately, the birth of the white child have all led to this moment when Galant denies Nicolaas the right to call him by his childhood name.⁴³

The ultimate act of rebellion, Galant's murder of Nicolaas, is also explained in terms of naming and labelling. Galant addresses his deceased friend and master:

[i]t wasn't you. It was all those whose places you took as you stood in that terrible silence in the door. Not your father, not Barend, not Frans Du Toit. *You had no name then, no face.* You were all the white men, all the masters, all those who had always set themselves above us and taken our women and called their farms *Shut-Your-Trap*: Houd-den-Bek. (CV 501; italics added)

In death, however, Nicolaas is redeemed from his status as master, and is renamed. Galant notes, "[l]ying dead on that moth-eaten old skin were not the masters of the earth, smothering in their own blood: it was only one man, you,

⁴³ Galant's power is still limited however. Symbolically, if he were to usurp Nicolaas' control

Nicolaas, who used to be my friend and should have been it still" (CV 501). Galant's rebellious act thus represents a momentary equalising between master and slave.

The act of naming, and its links to both identity and control are similarly explored in relation to writing and reading. Like Galant's reading of the map of scars upon his body, the Afrikaners depend upon newspapers from the Cape for their 'truth(s)'. In a land in which they live in disparate settlements, news from 'civilisation' endows them with a feeling of community with their fellow Afrikaners. Since the moment when Nicolaas first began to learn to read, Galant has been fascinated with the power of words, and their relationship with meaning. He recalls:

one day Nicolaas flattens a patch of the clay, and smooths it with his palm, and with a twig draws a series of strange marks on it, lines and curls and squiggles like the tracks of some small animal. 'What's this?' he challenges me. 'How must I know?' I reply. 'Looks like the spoor of a chameleon.'

'It's my name,' says Nicolaas. 'See? – It spells *Nicolaas*.' It still looks rather suspect to me. 'How come,' I say, 'that you can be standing over there and your name is lying in the clay here?' (CV 51)

Galant thus unwittingly articulates the theoretical concern with language as posed by Ferdinand de Saussure, in which the word and its meaning have a wholly arbitrary relationship.⁴⁴ Consequently, he becomes fascinated with the Cape newspapers, recognising the importance they have for his Afrikaner masters, and attempting to decode the link between the printed word and its meaning. After stealing a newspaper from the house, he notes, "[w]ith my fingers I nudge and

entirely, he must command Nicolaas to use his original name, Gwambe.

⁴⁴ *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* outlines Saussure's contribution to linguistic theory as follows: "[t]he meaning of language is determined by a structure of mutually defining units, which is a self-referential and conventional system. The linguistic unit or sign has two dimensions: the signifier and the signified. The radical nature of Saussurian linguistics was to claim that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary: there is no necessary, natural or intrinsic relationship between linguistic forms and their designated meanings" (Abercrombie, Hill et al.).

prod the rows upon rows of small black tracks running like ants across the smooth paper; I even present my face against it to smell it. But it says nothing to me. And yet I know only too well it must be speaking of the marvels of the Cape" (CV 53).⁴⁵ Without context, in this case, the ability to read, the words have no meaning. Galant recognises, in his powerlessness to interpret the text on the page, a familiar refrain in which he is denied the right to access meaning. He notes, "in the silence of that maddening newspaper, spread open on the flat hard rock, I hear those taunting words again: in silence the rows of black ants run across the paper, telling wild stories of the place that haunts my dreams. But all they say to me is: *It's not for you to ask*" (CV 54; original italics). When Nicolaas discovers Galant with the newspaper, he reinforces the gulf between those who control the dissemination of knowledge and those who are denied access to it, as he demands, "[w]hat are you doing with things you don't understand?" (CV 137). The frustration of such denial overcomes Galant, and he asks, "[w]hat have I done, what am I, to be kept in this darkness? [...] The darkness of an attic" (CV 55). He becomes consumed by the meaning entrapped within the printed words:

[t]he newspaper is burning in my hand. By the Blue God, I think by [sic] myself, is there no one in the whole bloody world who can tell me what this damned thing says? I spread it open on an antheap and peer at all those weird small black ants running motionlessly across its pages. They are talking about me, that I know for sure, yet I can't make out a word they're saying. I press my ear so hard against the paper that it hurts, but I still hear nothing. Then something seems to burst inside me and I start tearing it to pieces; I thrust all the crumpled shreds into my mouth. If they won't talk to me I'll eat them up. Perhaps they'll start talking inside me. (CV 295-6)

The direct transference of meaning is, however, impossible, both for Galant and within the text as a whole. The very framework within which the text is constructed emphasises this impossibility, utilising court proceedings to

⁴⁵ Various descriptions of print as "a row of tracks" (CV 136) resonate with imagery related to footprints (CV 59), and their role in leading to personal truth, or identity, suggesting that both language and footprints are signs to be read/followed.

demonstrate the arbitrary nature of interpretation, judgement and 'truth'. The text refuses to prioritise any one narrative over another,⁴⁶ forcing the *reader* into the role of judgement, whilst simultaneously challenging such acts of interpretation. The discrepancies between each of the various characters' statements and the Act of Accusation and Verdict in which they are framed, highlight the impossibility of any one version's access to 'truth', and also the impossibility of any consensus or composite 'truth'. The Act of Accusation, for example, commences with an itemised account of the accused which includes their names, ages and titles (*CV* 9), in an attempt to record a singular, linear and factual rendition. The resistance within the central text to categorise later refutes this itemisation, and instead foregrounds plurality and doubt; the precise legal language and apparently definitive statements recorded within the court proceedings are thus viewed as arbitrary judgements regarding the events which occurred during the rebellion. The court's prioritisation of Joseph Campher's testimony over that of others, for example, is ironically justified by the court because he is considered "a free man and a Christian and consequently entirely trustworthy" (*CV* 516). Within the context of the characters' various statements, the language usage within these passages is also ironic. Words such as "truth" (*CV* 513), "justice" (*CV* 513), and "proof" (*CV* 513), for example, are under scrutiny when considered in regard to the remainder of the text. Similarly, the inclusion of extensive legalese and Latinate phrases, which appear to verify the interpretations made, demonstrates the manner in which the legal proceedings alienate the non-European and are constructed in favour of those for whom this language is familiar. Thus, claims as to "the impartial investigation of the truth" (*CV* 516) are undermined.

Frans Du Toit, whose task it is to officially record the events of the uprising, symbolises this quest for 'truth'. Summarising his investigation of events, he states:

I thought I knew what had happened. I did what was expected of me,

⁴⁶ Notably, Brink's prioritisation of female narratives within later texts such as *Imaginations of Sand* and *Devil's Valley* does not occur in *A Chain of Voices*. The sole narrative distinguished as closer to (a) truth than others is that of the insane (female) slave, Lydia. It is her madness, however, which allows her access to this truth, rather than her gender, and which prompts Galant to ponder "[p]erhaps Lydia isn't so mad after all" (*CV* 468). Thus, this earlier text avoids criticisms related

neither deterred nor encouraged by our several histories. Beyond the passions and terrors of our personal involvement lay, small and sordid, what seemed like irreducible fact. Now, having taken down all their statements, each the summary of an existence, I am perplexed by the obscurity of truth. Where does it reside? In these affirmations and contradictions, this incipient patter, or somewhere in the wild and senseless groping of that initial action preceding the word? Does it evolve from the litany of repetition, or is only the unutterable true? Can the virgin be celebrated except in the act of violation, or innocence established except in its corruption? (CV 442)

Du Toit's gropings towards a definition and foundation of 'truth' encapsulate the novel's concern with the same. He questions the accessibility of 'truth' and its relationship to language, pondering the inception of 'truth' and asking whether repetition determines what is accepted as 'truthful'. Paradoxically he also proposes that language must *fail* to articulate 'truth', citing the oppositional concept of binaries as the only means by which definitions can be made. 'Truth', therefore, appears as intangible within this earlier text as in *Imaginations of Sand* and *Devil's Valley*.

The Truth

It is my truth that frightens them.
(Firdaus qtd. in Miller 14)

Again, Brink offers some answer to the problematic conceptualisation of 'truth', demonstrating that his notion of Truth lies beyond the factual and is not singular, linear or fixed. As in the two previous primary texts under discussion, Truth, in the Brinkian sense, is propounded as multiple and inclusive, rather than singular and exclusive. Brink offers an imaginative series of narratives in response to the historical enforced silencing experienced by oppressed groups such as the non-white slaves of South Africa.⁴⁷ I have argued that the "chain of voices", however, includes not only the voices of the slaves, but also those of their

to the inversion of genderism which may be applied to the two others.

⁴⁷ Galant's narrative, in particular, symbolises the manner in which his 'voice', in the form of

masters who have their own story to tell, far removed from official historical records. Brink's chain of Truth, therefore, is a pluralist response to dominant discourses, employing *diversity* to challenge unitary and/or fixed dominant discourses. The palimpsest of thirty narratorial voices framed by the official perspective of court documents demonstrates the myriad of conflicting perspectives inherent in any one event, challenging any notion of a singular or fixed 'truth'. Each of these narratives represents a character's desire for 'voice', symbolising a search for identification beyond that offered by the master narrative of the time. These voices speak, narrate, interpret and make meaning of their lives and experiences, fulfilling the desire for identification heralded within the text; an identification unfulfilled by the master narrative in operation. Each individual narrative is foregrounded not merely as an independent unit, but also as a link co-dependently tied to the whole, ensuring the privileging of any one account over another is refuted. Each link in this metaphorical 'chain' is thus of equal weight and strength to the next, symbolising a postmodernist resistance to the prioritisation of any one link or narrative over another. Truth, it is suggested, is found not in any one account, or in the blend of multiple voices, but rather in the contestational activity exemplified by the chain of multiple and conflicting voices which refute fixidity and absolutes.

Brink's demonstration of the arbitrary nature of relationships of dominance and submission, symbolising the larger context in which master narratives subsume the narratives of the 'other', also subverts the notion that any one narrative should be favoured above others. I have suggested that the deconstruction of roles of dominance and submission – male/female, master/slave – demonstrated in sexual and physical imagery and the metaphorical inversions related to naming, clothing and shoes operates to challenge the authority of master narratives both within the text and without. Similarly, hierarchical structures of dominance are both exhibited and subverted in the novel's imagery, most specifically in the file of hunters as juxtaposed against the scene in which the murderous Galant stands over the corpse of his childhood friend. Each of the deconstructed binary pairings refutes any justification for a dominant or

submissive subject position, revealing instead that co-dependency and mutuality are the basis upon which relationships are founded. Each relationship is revealed as a dialectic in which the community rather than the individual is paramount, a notion found in the image of the chain which frames the text. Each link is in 'bondage' to the next, inextricably. Truth, therefore, is not found within any of the individual links, including those espoused by officialdom, or in the inversion of such authoritative narratives, but rather within the multitude of different narratives that never settle into one (his)story. The very basis upon which Apartheid South Africa was founded – the belief and adherence to one dominant group's notion of 'truth' – is thus deconstructed and revealed as arbitrarily racist and genderist. In response, stands Brink's chain of Truth.

CONCLUSION

BRINK'S
"BRIEF SHOUT AGAINST SILENCE"¹

To take [...] the world as ambiguity,
to be obliged to face not a single absolute truth but a welter of contradictory
truths [...]
to have as one's only certainty the *wisdom of uncertainty*, requires ... courage.
(Milan Kundera 6-7 qtd. in *TW* n. 4, 332; original italics)

¹ (CV 505).

“Only in the leap from history to story, and from world to word,
 does literature as a form of cultural opposition find its true voice:
 opposition to the lie, opposition to injustice, opposition to the unfreedom
 which in one form or another holds us all”
 (LCO 198).

Brink’s oeuvre stands as a series of engagements with the dynamics of oppression exemplified by South African Apartheid. These dynamics are not, however, merely racial in kind, but include other forms of binary subjugation. Brink asserts that “[t]he writer’s primary engagement [...] is with silence” (ISN 14), claiming that “the word interminably and indefatigably strives to *interrogate* silence” (ISN 14; original italics). I have suggested that, in each of his texts, Brink strives to give voice to those (previously) silenced, emphasising the extent to which imaginative narration is able to refute oppressive and fixed discourses. He argues that:

[h]istory provides one of the most fertile silences to be revisited by South African writers: not because no voices have traversed it before, but because the dominant discourse of white historiography (as well as temptations to replace it by a new dominant discourse of black historiography) has inevitably silenced, for so long, so many other possibilities. (ISN 22)

I have argued that his texts respond to states of occlusion and ‘forgetfulness’ induced by oppressive regimes, encouraging a *constant* state of *un*-forgetting and *re*-remembering. In these terms, Brink notes of the “regenerative powers of [contemporary] South African literature”, the drive

not simply to escape from the inhibitions of apartheid but *to construct and deconstruct new possibilities; to activate the imagination* in its exploration of those silences previously inaccessible; to play with the future on that needlepoint where it meets past and present; and to be willing to risk everything in the leaping flame of the word as it turns into world. (ISN 27; italics added)

His (re)imagining of the narratives of the ‘other’ simultaneously encourages an

exploration of the authoritative 'self', and the relationship between the two. Thus, in examining 'self'/'other', master/slave, male/female pairings, Brink demonstrates the manner in which oppression operates. His treatment of issues of racism and genderism, and his (somewhat paradoxical) depiction of the Afrikaner position, exemplify Brink's resistance to reductive categorisation and his directive to embrace multiple narrative possibilities.

In this endeavour, Brink investigates the nature of 'truth', exposing the interrelationships between history and fiction, and revealing the reliance of each upon memory and language. Throughout his oeuvre, he emphasises narratological process in terms of both structure and content, substantiating Sarah Nuttall's and Carli Coetzee's claim that:

the representations of history repeat, in almost every detail, the processes of fiction. In this activity, [...] history, memory, and language intersect so precisely as to be almost indistinguishable: the 'origins' of history, as recovered through memory, are encoded in language, and each of these three moments becomes a condition for the others. (32)

However, as I have drawn out in the preceding discussion, there are various paradoxical and/or problematic aspects to Brink's revisionary project. It can be argued, for example, that his ostensible use of postmodernist techniques, in which notions of 'truth' are challenged and even refuted, operates in contradiction to his claims as to the Truthful nature of fictional writing. As I have suggested, Brink's model of (the fiction writer's) Truth offers a response to this apparent paradox: he posits the Truth of fiction as an ongoing contestational activity in which imagination counters categorical certainty. While this appears in accord with many postmodernist practices (contestation of grand narratives, refusal of narrative closure) Brink cannot *simply* be labelled a postmodernist writer. As I have argued, Brink is selective in his use of postmodernist fictional devices, utilising only those most relevant to his political purposes, and abandoning them when necessary, particularly in the arena of *ethical* claims.

Issues of appropriation within Brink's work are similarly problematic.

Brink's position as a white South African speaking of/for the 'other' makes him vulnerable to criticisms of appropriation of voice. Sue Kossew describes this situation as the "messy involvement of the narrating voice in the very structures it is seeking to subvert" (1999: 22) and summarises Cherry Clayton's claims that "it is hard to view the involvement of white writers in representing alterity (in particular, their representations of indigenous peoples) as anything other than a 'speaking for' rather than a 'speaking of', given the machineries of power in which their voices are heard" (1999: 25). In these terms, 'white writing' is viewed as a further example of "colonialism's territorial appropriation of land, and voice, and agency" (Stephen Slemon 1990 qtd. in Kossew 1999: 21). As previously subjugated groups are granted the freedom and the means to speak for themselves, the position of the white liberal writer becomes more tenuous, her/his interventions 'on behalf of' less necessary (or desired).

In the preceding chapters, I have noted Brink's tendency to privilege certain voices over others, despite his own directive to maintain plurality and therefore equality. As argued, this tendency exemplifies the dangers inherent in revisionary endeavours based upon the inversion of existing power structures: an inversion of a dominant discourse must itself be challenged in order to avoid becoming oppressive. While Brink *seems* to promote such ongoing Truthful challenge, in fact he often stops short, privileging previously silenced 'voices'.

The female voices often privileged by Brink are also problematic. As argued, Brink's female characters are invariably depicted in sexual terms which deem the gendered 'other' as sexually vulnerable and/or aggressive. I have claimed that such representation demonstrates the author's own pre-conceptual prejudices regarding the gendered 'other', and is indicative of similar concerns regarding authorial representation of the racially 'other'.

Brink's recognition of the mediated nature of language presents a further paradox, as his interrogations must necessarily be framed in the very language he aims to deconstruct. David Lodge's claim that "[t]here is never a perfect fit between language and the world" (qtd. in *TN* 149) is indeed reflected in Brink's work. In his demonstration of the temporality of words and the endless deferral of

meaning that results, Brink acknowledges the inability to capture 'truth'. Paradoxically, however, it is precisely this 'failure' of language that also offers redemption, for it necessitates the endless revisioning process which Brink upholds.

As I have argued, this revisioning involves a reassessment of notions of 'truth'. For Brink, Truth is not material, factual or absolute, but rather an ongoing contestational process of narratorial imagining. As exhibited in the texts under discussion, Brink's Truth refutes the singular and linear discourses of dominant and oppressive groups, in favour of multiplicity and plurality. This notion of the necessity of writing and *re-writing* underpins all his fictions and is premised on the need to question received authority and accepted 'truth(s)'.

The Truthful or redemptive process of narration promoted by Brink is analogous to the process of re-membering and the investigation of the function and process of memory is central to Brink's writing. Ostensibly, remembering provides no accurate foundation for identity, as all memories are subjective, mutable and transient. However, these characteristics are also positive. (Re) memorial provides the opening for an imaginative engagement with the past. Paradoxically, it enables the reconstruction of personal and national narratives of identity in ways that are often far removed from the dominant discourses in operation. As propounded by Nuttall and Coetzee, it is through such reconstructive remembrance that "a sense of continuity and unity can be restored in South Africa" (14).

Brink's depictions of oppression serve to demonstrate both South Africa's historical roots, and also the nature of the prejudices within us all. His deconstruction of received 'truth' is particularly relevant in the context of Apartheid South Africa, in which the dominant discourse of white superiority formed the basis for the legalised oppression of the majority of South Africans. As Shaun De Waal notes:

I think in any country's history there is an awareness of the official version. But perhaps more so than in many other societies that would hold

true for ours, especially among Afrikaners, having imposed this dominant myth on the whole historiography of this country. (3 qtd. in Godfrey Meintjes 185)

The “supposedly objective discourse” (Kossew 1998: 128) of history, in which ‘objectivity’ and ‘fact’ are cited as markers of authenticity, is refuted by literary deconstruction such as Brink’s. He records that, “South African fiction began to interrogate history – not just different *versions* of history, but the very notion of its ontology, status and structure – well before the rigorous certainties of apartheid began to crumble” (RC 233). Thus, past, present and future history is revealed, not as *the* representation of ‘reality’, but as text: “the world-as-story” (ISN 22).

Brink utilises the racist and sexist environment of Apartheid South Africa as a microcosm in which to present imagined alternative narratives that question and challenge dominant discourses. I have argued that in each of his narratorial re-imaginings, Brink foregrounds the constructed nature of all belief systems, and challenges all dominant positions and in this respect his writing bears relevance beyond its particular location in South Africa. Brink notes, “‘facts’ themselves are suspect, and approachable only in a textualized form. ‘History’ is not a series of events but a *narrated* (and manipulated) series of events; and at any moment in the series a mixture of orientations towards representation and invention is evident” (ISN 21). “Through perceiving the world as a story to be told and *endlessly reshaped*”, Brink claims, “the reader is actually encouraged to act upon the world. Once the world is perceived as story, with an *endless capacity for renewal, metamorphosis, and reinvention*, literature becomes more, not less, potent” (ISN 19; italics added). Thus, Brink’s narrative imaginings encourage the same contestational activity in his audience; his work is a directive to shout against silence. Speaking of J. M. Coetzee’s *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, Brink notes that such a text

does not set itself up as a ‘correction’ of silence or of other versions of history; but through the processes of intertextuality set in motion by its presentation it initiates (or resumes) strategies of interrogation which prompt the reader to assume a new (moral) responsibility for his/her own

narrative, as well as for *the narrative we habitually call the world*. (ISN 23; italics added)

It is Brink's demonstration of the *constructed* nature of our world and the closed narratives that circumscribe our understandings, which is crucial. The Afrikaner mythologising exposed and explored within *Devil's Valley* is indicative of the construction of a prescriptive dominant discourse such as that which formed the basis of the Apartheid regime. Similarly, *Imaginings of Sand* demonstrates and challenges the constructions upon which patriarchal dominance is founded. *A Chain of Voices* also explores each of these oppressive constructions, and examines the interrelational complications of various forms of oppression in operation at any time, delving into the origins of such oppressive belief systems. In each of these texts, an exploration of 'truth' reveals constructions rather than 'facts', and demonstrates that our understandings are resolutely narratorial.

The core of Brink's liberal initiative, therefore, is not merely his proficiency in describing the results of the injustices of oppression, but rather his mastery in revealing the framework behind professed 'truth(s)', including his own. In an essay discussing postmodernism in South African literature, Brink concludes: "what I have offered [...] is one side of the coin; what matters is neither this side nor the other, but the coin" (SAP 489); this claim is equally relevant to his oeuvre as a whole.

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