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**“The Host of Vagabonds”: Origins and Destinations of the Vagrant in
Cape History and Ideas**

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Abstract

South African history in the crisis of the early 19th century, and South African literature ever since then, have been preoccupied with the vagrant in much the same manner and degree as was the European Renaissance.

The subject of this thesis is the history and culture of vagrancy, and specifically the trajectory by which the Renaissance idea of the vagrant becomes transposed to the indigenous population of the colonial Cape and works itself out in literary and historical texts of that society and its successors. It has as its central thesis the claim that a history of the vagrant is not properly to be sought in social and economic realities, but first in the cultural (and here especially textual and literary) forms of the idea by which the vagrant is brought into being. In advancing an apprehension of vagrancy as the ideological accusation of hegemonic order, this thesis argues that the vagrant figures in ideology as the inordinate, and in so doing becomes metonymic for inordinate historical passages – especially revolution and the frontier, moments of rupture and narrative loss, or moments where history’s character of mutability reaches its extreme. Above all, the vagrant represents the inordinate event of history itself, and exemplifies the necessity of a scholarship in which historicist literary criticism and textual analyses of history are conjoined.

Renaissance representations of the vagrant are forged in the nexus of feudal dissolution and capitalist emergence, and themselves belong to a rapidly developing culture and economy of textual commodification. There exists a marked correspondence between these representations and the development of colonial representations of the indigenous ‘other’, a correspondence by which the colonised is anticipated as a vagrant and thus cast as an extension of the disorderly lumpenproletariat from which imperial capitalism most profitably, and with state sanction, recruits its labour. The first half of this thesis traces exemplary instances of the transfer of vagrant attributes to the colonial subject, and then looks to the manner in which, especially between 1828 and 1834, the idea of vagrancy comes to dominate cultural and political delineation in the Cape. From the Renaissance schedules of Harman, Awdeley and others, through the canonical accomplishments of *King Lear*, to texts of the historical record in the Cape, and the doggerel squib of A. G. Bain’s ‘Kaatje Kekkelbek’, the vagrant is pursued into the more explicitly literary occasions of the thesis’s latter half. Here we find the vagrant at the centre of Fugard and Coetzee, major authors preoccupied with history and indebted to it. A consideration of the vagrant’s persistence at the core of 20th century South African literature offers insights into the ‘destination’ of the vagrant idea, which is to say, just what the depth of the practice of that idea may be, and why – and the thesis concludes by discovering the particular correspondence between vagrancy and history itself.

Acknowledgements

A PhD thesis has long roots, whether deep or shallow, and whether the tree is crowded out as a sapling or goes on to cast a shadow. The roots of this one go back to the copy of a document given to me almost in passing by Elizabeth Elbourne, which has never lost for me its numinous quality, and which is the trove over which this tree was planted. I look back at scraps of that document in chapter three.

Terry Ranger was behind Elizabeth's collegial nudge, and not surprisingly; he it was who first taught me how else history might be written *in my hand*. He, and my friend Richard Drayton. But it was Ranger who first showed me that vagrants were what I was wanting to write about. There have been many who have shown me how history and literary criticism might be written if only I had a hand as good as theirs: to the fore among them my supervisors, David Schalkwyk and Nigel Penn (and before them, André Brink, Ian Glenn and Patrick Harries). In the best tradition of supervisors they have brought me to friendships, futures, fixtures, and I can only hope that *they* know how well I know how much I owe them.

There have been a good many friends of this thesis; generous heads of department, firm friends, indulgent students. I can only name here those who were more or less formally engaged in assisting me with getting the job done: the University of Cape Town for the sabbatical which put forth leaves, Simon van Schalkwyk, Lauren Hemmes, Tori Foxcroft for labours, Lance van Sittert for unsolicited interest and countless acts of remembrance and encouragement, Richard Drayton, Margaret Rigaud, and Angela Briggs for years of interest and badgering, and, above all, Betony Adams, for matching the care and intelligence of my formal supervisors, and for keeping me tidy, and Tamsyn Lancaster for the long haul.

There is one other long root I need to demonstrate. In the mid-1990s I befriended a couple who lived in the parking lot below my work at David Philip Publishers. She told me the stories of both their journeys, separately from Cookhouse and Cradock to Johannesburg, and then piecemeal, together, down to Cape Town. His story was distorted by the damage of a stab-wound to the head (though we could laugh together after he took a bullet to the buttock in a taxi affray). I thought of telling their stories, but when I left publishing I realised it was in part to say something about how many and how related are the ways in which people fall silent, and are silently felled. I would not publish W and V, and this thesis does not account for them, but I remember them.

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I want to set down some general remarks about tramps. When one comes to think of it, tramps are a queer product and worth thinking over. It is queer that a tribe of men, tens of thousands in number, should be marching up and down England like so many Wandering Jews. But though the case obviously wants considering, one cannot even start to consider it until one has got rid of certain prejudices ... there exists in our minds a sort of ideal or typical tramp – a repulsive, rather dangerous creature ... The very word 'tramp' evokes his image. And the belief in him obscures the real questions of vagrancy.

George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Chapter XXXVI

Die wereld is wyd en hy't vier hoeke, en die mense loop daar tussen swart en wit – maar ons, ons ...

Vagrant, Mowbray, Cape Town, 1988

Introduction: On the Place of History

Like the foxes

At a meeting in the Kat River Settlement in 1834, the record of which looms large in this thesis, one inhabitant after the next spoke of the difficulty of being Khoisan in the Cape at that time. That difficulty arose in compromise and crisis – in accepting the citizenship of the colony, but being betrayed in it, in belonging to before and after colonisation, in inhabiting the indigenous landscape of the Xhosa and the liberal fantasies of missionaries, in answering the military muster of the colony and the racist derogation of white settler ambitions, in single lifetimes passing from independence to the bonded servitude of the Caledon Code to the liberty of Ordinance 50 to betrayal, mutiny and court-martial. What theory might account for a good life in such a pass? The Khoisan invoked Christianity and the Cape and imperial governments, they invoked the ‘Hottentot Nation’ and the power of literacy, they invoked their smart clothes and progress in a capitalist economy of commerce and farming.¹ In the crisis of the War of Mlanjeni in the early 1850s many invoked the cause of free African peoples and resistance to colonisation, and joined the Xhosa struggle. A century and a half later, Piet Draghoender would invoke the complex and ancient compound of the ‘bloedgrond’: blood and land.² In all this, acutely, the Khoisan were beleaguered by history: conflict, compromise, contradiction, confusion, confession, contingency. Glad though the 1834 Khoisan were for the written record of their accounts, a history of their history, one left an unintended caveat to the accounts of posterity, that (with ironic hindsight) now urges us to keep it foxy, and not to go to ground: ‘Mr Antoni Peterwaand said before the 50th ordinance we were like the foxes, – but the foxes have holes where they can rest, which we had not.’³

This thesis is not a work of history in any traditional sense; it does not set out to tell the discrete story of a people in a place. Instead it is a work of interpretation (as indeed, history always is) indebted to a variety of literary critical practices by which it seeks to bring to light the complex cultural nexus of what is familiarly called ‘vagrancy’. It does so specifically within the ambit of an interest in the South African instance and its relationship to metropolitan culture in the process of colonisation and colonialism. At times it applies the interest of history (in the process of time) to the accomplishment of literary texts, at other times it applies the interest of literary criticism (in the arrangements of language) to the archive, and it constantly seeks to

¹ ‘Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston, 5 August 1834’, CA, A 50.

² J. B. Peires, ‘Piet Draghoender’s Lament’, *Social Dynamics* 14, 2 (1988), 6–15.

demonstrate the rhetorical aspect of history and the material history of literature. That it does so piecemeal – proceeding contingently – is a scruffiness of process intended to keep methodological faith with its subject. It is not the business of history to tidy up the past, and especially not into anticipated narratives or theoretical tableaux. As it concentrates upon a sense of the event (that is also a place) of the frontier (here the eastern one) in Cape society in the early 19th century, and extends that frontier back into the interstices between feudal and early modern Europe and forward into the domains of class in a later, capitalist, colonial and post-colonial society, it is always arguing that the human subject of the frontier needs to be sought not in the false ideology of the breach, but in the truth of the frontier, which is revolutionary interaction. In the Cape the inhabitants of the frontier are less exemplarily Xhosa and colonist (who represent the binaries that *precede* the frontier, what brings it into being, the prior orders) than the people of the middle, as I would like to style them: the runaways and recusants of no side in particular, the deserters and the shipwrecked, the interpreters and the spies, the mutineers – and the vagrants. As Nancy F. Partner writes of any history that refuses an anticipated end or contour: ‘All non-narrative history has this quality of ‘middleness’ – a quality which unites all forms of history in common search for a story subtle enough to satisfy modern minds.’⁴

Recent scholarship on the Cape’s eastern and northern frontiers has clearly expressed this alteration in focus. Ever since the first Africanist histories of the Sixties restored to frontier scholarship an awareness of the African compact in the frontier, and stressed the zone of interaction – the failure of the political frontier as one with the success of the economic encounter in a rapacious colonial capitalism – we have been headed this way.⁵ Since then, however, the emphasis has fallen more and more lucidly on the frontier agents of the middle. In the 1970s Martin Legassick’s advocacy of the frontier’s nature as a ‘zone’ (particularly of commodity exchange, following, if revising S. D. Neumark), anticipates this focus.⁶ The classics of South African historiography in the past three decades have tended this way. Jeff Peires’s towering enquiry into the Cattle-Killing emphasised the syncretic moment in Xhosa cosmology and traced its effect in the exemplary go-between (and complex subjective crisis) of Willem Goliath/Mhlakaza and his mouthpieces at the Gxara river.⁷ Feminist criticisms of Peires persist in a focus on the subjective crisis of women in circumstances of radical social change: the way in which Nonqawuse and Nonkosi are compelled in Xhosa patriarchal discourse (and rebel) and are

³ ‘Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston, 5 August 1834’, CA, A 50.

⁴ Nancy F. Partner, ‘Making Up Lost time: Writing on the Writing of History’, in Brian Fay *et al*, *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings*, 73.

⁵ Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson’s *Oxford History of Southern Africa* is the *locus classicus*. See volume 1, chapter 6, ‘Co-operation and Conflict: The Eastern Cape Frontier, especially from 238.

⁶ Martin Legassick, ‘The Northern Frontier to 1820: The Emergence of the Griqua People’ in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society*, 243–290 (revising and condensing his 1969 PhD thesis); S. D. Neumark, *Economic Influences on the South African Frontier*.

⁷ J. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*.

then 'brought over' into colonial discourse.⁸ Similarly, Janet Hodgson has concentrated on figures and circumstances of the syncretic moment, such as the Ngqika divine Ntsikana and the Zonnebloem-educated daughter of Sandile, 'Princess Emma'.⁹ Following Susan Newton-King and Candy Malherbe in tracing the particularly intractable condition of 'betweenness' that characterises the colonisation and resistance of the Khoisan,¹⁰ and Hodgson's scrutiny of syncretic moments among the Ngqika, Elizabeth Elbourne has revived the archive on the frontier Khoisan by exploring the 'middleness' of conversion narratives and evangelical discourse in Khoisan testimony. Robert Ross has turned to a classic 'middleman' in his recent exposition of 'a life on the border' in the figure of Hermanus Matroos/Ngxukumeshe.¹¹ Similarly, Nigel Penn's *Rogues Rebels and Runaways* explores earlier Cape society and the northern frontier through those subjects who characterise more its 'among' than its 'between'. And recently, new syntheses and interpretations of the Cape frontier, epitomised in Alan Lester's *Imperial Networks*, have sought to integrate that frontier thoroughly within the 'networks' linking metropolitan Britain and the Cape in shared and entailed processes of identity formation in both places (and beyond). Indeed, for some time now, it has been fair to remark a general trend in South African historiography towards biographical or social-historical expositions of exemplary 'middlers': this is true of Charles van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine*, as of Shula Marks' *Not Either an Experimental Doll*, and it is recapitulated in popular and political memorials, such as Mandela's renaming his presidential residence 'Genadendal' (after that interstitial mission place) or the University of Cape Town naming a computer laboratory in memory of the Mendi drowned – African colonial subjects caught between the devil of an imperial World War and the deep blue sea.

This is a study of vagrancy begun in an insistence that vagrancy is the accusation of those who are themselves not vagrants, and that vagrancy is thus firstly a discursive entity. Thus it is a study of the representation of vagrancy. It is a study in the (evolving) continuities of the vagrant, across space and time, and particularly between the early modern advent in Europe and the colonial circumstance at the Cape, down to the present time. It shows that the interest in the vagrant coheres around the character of the 'other', replicated in the encounter with colonised peoples, and that the interest straddles both poles of vilification and desire. The urge to know the vagrant, as impossible as that is in strict terms, is one with the urge to subordinate what I am in this thesis calling the *inordinate*, as also the contrary, imaginary (perhaps Romantic) urge to be subordinated to the inordinate, to become inordinate oneself. The interest in vagrancy follows

⁸ H. Bradford, 'Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c.1806-70', *Journal of African History*, 37 (1996), 360–368; 'Framing African women: visionaries in southern Africa and their photographic afterlife, 1850–2004', *Kronos*, 30 (November 2004), 70–93.

⁹ J. Hodgson, 'Ntsikana'; *Princess Emma*.

¹⁰ S. Newton-King, *Masters and Servants on the Cape Eastern Frontier, 1760–1803*; Newton-King and V. C. Malherbe, *The Khoikhoi Rebellion in the Eastern Cape, 1779–1803*.

¹¹ R. Ross, 'Hermanus Matroos, aka Ngxukumeshe: a life on the border', *Kronos*, 30 (November 2004), 47–69.

discernible lines, above all that of an interest in language itself, where the vagrant is forever supposed to ravel and unravel sense (their other world) in a skein of code-like language, either profane or sacred. But vagrancy also betokens the liberty of the subject thus accused: if the object of the accusation is to order the inordinate (and to reaffirm the accuser's obeisance also, to pledge discursive compliance), then the implication is that the accused 'vagrant' has slipped the bounds and bonds of the society whose power is chastening. To the imagination – and hence to writers – such a state is intriguing, because it enacts what the imagination also does, which is to move in other and alternative spaces and times. At some or other level each of us suffers the constraint of the power to which we subscribe for our share in the resources of human society and its appropriation of the world. Whether we are brought into consciousness of the 'contradiction' under which we labour (and, indeed, whether it is a contradiction or a witting compromise) by crises that arise in the split discourse of a 'mirror-stage' of our psychological development, or by the id's breaching our ego, or by political intervention and conflict in pursuit of our class interests, will always be a matter for speculation and argument. This study applies models variously, as best elucidates any given instance. But it does 'begin' in an intuition of the general human compromise, as fundamental as our willingness to bring children into life despite our own reluctance to die, and everywhere enacted in the countless reconciliations we make with our environment, and in the certainty that we will make each one differently next time.

It is instead of the aspiration to monological truth that I am in this thesis indebted to the 'listening' practice of what new historicist approaches have adopted from the example of Clifford Geertz's 'thick description'.¹² Instead of seeking to have the elusive and 'errant' practice of the vagrant conform (yet again) to the contours of an ideology that can never be his or hers, I am inclined to go after what I am going to call the 'deep practice' of vagrancy – which is to say its fullest expression in culture. This deep practice belongs neither to vagrant nor to accuser, though aspects of it may be adduced from what the critical scholar sees (in glimpses, many, thickened into description), but to the entire range of cultural expression that is the practice of the vagrant. A central tenet of this thesis is that the vagrant occupies literature (and the archive, the oath on the street, the anecdote) in a way that the vagrant, by definition, putatively occupies nothing – neither place nor date – in the accusation of hegemonic 'reality'. In that occupation we find the vagrant settled into deep practice, a significance to culture (history, economy, ideology) that is complex and various, even to the point of contradiction (to the obvious extent: one cannot settle the matter of vagrancy, the language refuses the project).

¹² Clifford Geertz's donation to the new historicism is widely manifest. The 'thick description' epithet arises out of his *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative theory of Culture*, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*. As David Schalkwyk points out, the term belongs to Gilbert Ryle. D. Schalkwyk, *Literature and the Touch of the Real*, 239.

The practice of the vagrant lies in an indefinite locus between accuser, accused and a host of representations. Conditions of plurality and 'middleness' are key to the entire concept. The plurality of vagrant practice works its way out in the host that vagabonds always seem to be. Middleness is expressed in the absence of the vagrant from work or from home, but the contrary presence of the vagrant in acts of trespass and 'infestation', the manner in which vagrants 'squat', and despite their absence are an 'eyesore' (in any number of representative pages from the *Southern Suburbs Tatler*, week after week in the months that this thesis was written). In framing this approach I am following David Schalkwyk's recent exposition of Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and his relation of Wittgenstein's objection to an anthropology (or history) that is wholly interested in causal explanations.¹³ Schalkwyk applies Wittgenstein's objections to Frazer in order to redeem the exemplary 'anecdotal' practice of Stephen Greenblatt from the charge that new historicist accounts, in their deft confluences of history and text, are anti-historical, at worst anachronistic and self-servingly selective.¹⁴ In summary, Schalkwyk writes of how Wittgenstein

responds to the problem of anthropological narrative by pointing out that by destroying wonder, causal explanation tends, paradoxically, to lose its fundamental purpose because it destroys the response to the *depth* of an alien cultural practice. According to Wittgenstein, Frazer misses precisely this depth in primitive magical practices, because he treats them as mistaken scientific or causal hypotheses, and then tries to explain them through his own causal or scientific explanations. But for Wittgenstein magical ritual is not a mistaken scientific or causal hypothesis; it is a different kind of language-game.¹⁵

For my part, I am not asserting that the vagrant is alien, or even 'an alien cultural practice' (though to some extent the vagrant *is* that, certainly s/he is a practice of cultural alienation), but I am intrigued by the assertion that causal narrative (classic history) runs the risk of losing the depth of the practices of its subjects. It is in pursuit of that diffuse and uncertain deep significance, whose provenance is not specific and whose destination lies in the keep of no one agent, that this thesis is undertaken. The implications of this pursuit of 'deep practice' for my present project's conception of a 'contingent' history, outside of monological imperatives, will become evident later in this introductory chapter. It is sufficient to cite here Schalkwyk's formulation of the hazard of (causal) historical account:

¹³ Schalkwyk, *Literature and the Touch of the Real*, especially chapter 5, 'Greenblatt and Wittgenstein'.

¹⁴ One way of formulating this might be to note that the deep disquiet of critics ultimately proceeds from the anecdote's appearing *extracted* from history.

¹⁵ Schalkwyk, *Literature and the Touch of the Real*, 194. I think Wittgenstein is somewhat unfair on Frazer, whose 'deep' object might be the 'thin' description of hegemonic religious claims – by thus 'thinly' describing across a massive range of 'primitive' practice to 'thin' the claims of 'civilisation' and to 'thin' the accusation of primitivity.

It is indeed *one* way of assembling the data. But its way of assembling such data leaves certain questions untouched. These are questions that concern the ways in which such practices touch our own lives: in our experience of the depth of a practice, or what Greenblatt calls our 'wonder' at a cultural practice or artifact.¹⁶

Darkness and opacity may be dispelled by light, but they are not understood by the discoveries of light; to understand darkness or opacity one must have a dark or opaque language. This has always been the project of poetry, specifically, – poetics – but it is the project of all art. It supplies a good argument for the discovery of vagrancy not by the light of causes only, but by the darker-seeming language practices of texts also, in which vagrants arise and have their deep significance. If it is in and through language that we discover our humanity and disclose it to ourselves as that which marks us out from the generality of creatures, then it is to texts that we must go if we are to discover the peculiarly human practice and significance of vagrancy (or anything else). My history, then, seeks to disclose the origins and destinations of vagrants as much in the theatre of ideas as in that of the social economy. It is an enquiry into an institution that compels and chastens our humanity, and is fraught with contradiction, across centuries and continents. In being both an engine and an artifact of that humanity, such a history of vagrancy holds out for me the hope that I share in Christopher Hill's vision of the historical project generally, when he says: 'All knowledge of the past should help to humanise us.'¹⁷

History and historicism

We must persist with historiography (and historians) a little longer. Marc Bloch: 'The word 'history' is very old – so old that men have sometimes grown weary of it.'¹⁸ It is a strange thing to contemplate the ageing of history, or of the language that transmits it, when the historian's task and skill is to inquire after the process of ageing. But what Bloch is saying goes to the heart of this study and its methods, for the ageing of the word 'history' is historical, and the knot of paradox with which Bloch would have us grapple is that history is always and everywhere two things at once. History is the process by which the present is realised, and the two histories turn together upon the two senses of the word 'realised', that is (a) 'made to be' and (b) 'made aware (of)'. In other words, history is simultaneously objective, of transcendental character, and subjective, of conscious character. Traditionally the historian has gone after the former, with

¹⁶ *ibid*, 195. Schalkwyk is following Frank Cioffi here.

¹⁷ C. Hill, *Change and Continuity in 17th Century England*, 283.

¹⁸ M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 20.

caveats and constraints, while the latter has fallen more and more to the niggling prerogative of critics familiar with the philosophical fallouts peculiar to the study of language and literature in the past century. One important consequence of this duality is that the two disciplines have increasingly come to penetrate one another. Formerly the historian might apply to the critic for cultural nuances or for tips on style, and the critic to the historian for a sense of context usually of the sophistication of a 'backdrop'. Now the historian must understand the evidence of language itself, and the critic the very historical occasions of power that lie behind the event of each word or sentence.

Thus it is that historians have begun to accept their own implication in history, to become wary of the division between history and historiography, to notice their roles in translating the texts of the archive into the texts of their syntheses and analyses. To a greater or lesser extent the philosophical implications of the literary turn begin to show in their writings. Nancy F. Partner writes of history as many a literary scholar would like it to be thought: 'History is meaning imposed on time by means of language: history imposes syntax on time.'¹⁹ Given the textual plasticity that this kind of reckoning allows to the reading and writing of history, it is not surprising to note Hayden White's corresponding complaint about the slowness of literary scholars to properly understand the implications of their own insights for the field of history (and for what that field might therefore mean to them), noting, ironically, that

Nor is it unusual for literary theorists, when they are speaking about the 'context' of a literary work, to suppose that this context – the 'historical milieu' – has a concreteness and an accessibility that the work itself can never have, as if it were easier to perceive the reality of a past world put together from a thousand historical documents than it is to probe the depths of a single literary work that is present to the critic studying it.²⁰

The rebuke to literary theorists is more pertinent, now, in my experience, than the challenge to historians. Literary critics persist, by and large, in treating history as a tableau of context against which to read literature (like a Da Vinci Code or a hot light source which develops invisible ink), when the most ancient principle of history is that time inclines the world and experience to change, that there is a dynamism inherent in things. Clearly the values of mutability and variability, of conflict and revolution, which are so important to history, have implications for the study of literature (as among history's productions, as among that which produces history). And yet the chief interest of history to literature remains its assumed *anchorage*, the way it stabilises and confirms readings by bridging reader and text. In all, White's rebuke provides

¹⁹ N. F. Partner, 'Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History', in B. Fay *et al*, *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings*, 75.

²⁰ H. White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', *ibid*, 22.

something of the context of incentive towards a richer literary and theoretical engagement with history, such as now broadly goes by the name of 'the new historicism', and which is itself internally various in attitudes and practices, but broadly proceeds from the nexus of literary and historical exchanges in the last half of the last century. (Some would call this nexus a dialectic, others a muddle, and neither would be wrong). If such an historicism is indeed 'new' then it is long overdue. Both historians and critics must long ago have noticed the common interest in their sources: the Bible makes claims to both literature and history, so does Homer, so does Shakespeare, so does Defoe, so (locally) does the Bleek-Lloyd archive of /Xam texts – and so, I hope to show, do various other South African works, as do all artefacts of human culture. In truth there is nothing 'new' about the kind of historicism that this project applies. Literary studies have always been historicised, implicitly if not explicitly. Even the most stringent quarantines of the New Critical kind are themselves historically arrived at, and the value they refuse history is, in fact, an anxious measure of the force of history upon author, critic and text. What is 'new' in the so-called (and no-longer) 'new' historicism is the often paradoxical confluence of determinist historical positions (specifically Marxism) and potentially relativised (post-)structuralisms. It is a struggle underway in Althusser, but negatively, where Marx is transplanted from history into structuralist soil, and Lacan, similarly at pains to graft structuralist linguistics to other systems, here psychoanalysis. But these instances, and perhaps those like Jameson and Lyotard, differ most profoundly from the 'new' historicist position in their persistent aspiration towards 'a single, theoretically satisfactory answer' to the questions of the world.²¹ This theoretical disquiet is not one of value, but one of extent; it is not the usefulness of systems of thought that is challenged, but the ambition to total truth. It is the hazards of that ambition that have made the 'thick description' out of Geertz so attractive, and that have urged the empirical contours of the anecdote, a small and local claim, not to the proof of truth, but to what is exemplary of it, not to the truth of causes, but to the truth of meanings.²² In this, and throughout this study, I am at one with Stephen Greenblatt when he writes: 'For me the study of the literary is the study of contingent, particular, intended, and historically embedded works; if theory inevitably involves the desire to escape from contingency into a higher realm, a realm in which signs are purified of the slime of history, then this paper is written *against* theory.'²³

Of course, this study, like Greenblatt's own work (as that of any 'historicist' or historian) is chased with theory, in greater or lesser degrees implicitly or explicitly. How is it possible any longer to write an English with words like 'subject', 'power', 'class', 'discourse' and so on –

²¹ The phrase is Greenblatt's, and is locally directed (at Lyotard and Jameson), but I use it more generally. S. Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture' in H. Aram Veaser (ed.), *The New Historicism*, 5.

²² Here, again, I am embroidering upon the significance of deep practice, as I derive it tangentially from Schalkwyk's exposition of continuities between Wittgenstein and Greenblatt in *Literature and the Touch of the Real*.

²³ S. Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists' in P. Parker and G. Hartman, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, 163.

words that were once innocent of their later significance through theory – without a (no less theorised) awareness of the heteroglossic field in which one writes, and the fact that the field is a forcefield? One is always calling down, in inevitably imperfect, time-worn versions, the concepts of other theories as they have passed into a wider parlance. My simile would be this: any such word is like a cricket ball, it remains consistently itself, is no other ball, but with each passing minute and each delivery is changed, firstly by the dialectic of bat on ball, which alters not only its current trajectory, but also itself, softening and roughing the ball, and accommodating it more to the opportunities of the batsman (this is the dialogic instance in utterance, after Bakhtin/Voloshinov), but changed also by the action of bowler and fielders who shine one face of the ball to enhance its swing through the air, who pick the seam to produce irregular bounce, who might tamper with it in other illegal ways (this is the complex, even vexed, instance of authorship and intent). The ball is the same ball being bowled, but different every time it is.

This analogy deters me from monological theories, or rather from the monological aspirations of theory. It does so because it describes a process of imperfection, and because it is a metaphor (thus a mode of imperfection: a thing not truly itself), and, as must be the case with any metaphor, because it is itself inevitably imperfect. It is not only total accounts of the world that can dispel the thrall of other total accounts. I am inclined to fossick in theory, not for the truth, but for what it might help disclose of the truth (another metaphor, with biblical debts: theory is not the light, but it helps to bring things to light). Thus it is that I am attentive to Marx, for example, and cannot help importing such terms as he uses; I may not be convinced of their truth, but I am eager to accept their value. I am in awe of Marx's understanding of history, but less enamoured of his tentative configuration of the process of cultural determination – that relationship between base and superstructure, of 'conditioning', which has spawned so many of the Heath-Robinson contraptions of 'late' Marxist theory around cultural production.²⁴ Although this study is never far from a Marxist apprehension of the dialectical and materialist outlines of history, then, it does not preoccupy itself with the cultural materialism of a Williams. This is where it turns more to the historicism of the 1980s, and after the (complexly held) example of Foucault.

The donation of Foucault is easier to discern: it lies in a preoccupation with discursive forms and relations, and discursive power, it is interested in genealogies (though that is an arch term I do not use here, for all it underlies my history of the idea of vagrancy across and through social, political and literary fields), especially as these genealogies produce the palimpsest of successive histories, and make of the act of history its intrinsic subject. Foucault may be

²⁴ James Holstun offers a particularly lucid criticism of 'the Gordian complexities' of the passage in Marx's preface to *The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in which the latter adumbrates the tenet that 'The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.' The irresolution

discerned throughout the 'new' historicism (indeed, the persuasively charming James Holstun, in his recent polemic against the 'new' historicist corrosion of Marxist theory, has it that 'New historicism is literary Foucauldianism.'²⁵) – perhaps chiefly in the instance of the 'anecdote' (a word whose innocence has been lost to the new historicism) and its descent from the Foucauldian preference for the *petite histoire* over the *grand récit*, as also its particularly *literary* habit of discourse.²⁶ Joel Fineman remarks that '[t]he anecdote ... as the narration of a singular event, is the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real'²⁷, but one might also say that the occurrence of the real and the literary is singularly evident in the anecdote. For any historian concerned with the textuality of history, the anecdote represents the proper unit of research and historiography. Fineman wants to make of it a 'historeme'²⁸, which is an act of theory too ambitious of a total model for me to trust – but the debt to Foucault is there writ large.

Perhaps my greatest fondness for the Foucauldian legacy in the 'new' historicism lies in my own awkwardness of mind. How is it that I who recognise the very great imperfection of my thinking – its frequent inability to grasp, its frequent dubiety, both good and bad (suspicious of the emperor's new clothes as much of his new historicism), but insufficiently confident (or hubristic) to say so with certainty – how is it that I should pretend to certain knowledge? For that reason I rejoice in the *implication* of 'new' historicist writing, that my own writing practice and purpose is of one substance with the past or the texts, or the text-pasts, that concern me. Not only is this *mea culpa* a proper estimation of each act in history, but it is liberating. It is true, too, to the hesitations and what-ifs that govern our experience of ourselves in history, and which the comprehensive theories consider beneath their purview, or, worse, ravel up in aggregate determinations that are in danger of teleological fallacies and which do not render any account of the individual whose actions are plainly not the will of God or fate or material conditions. Such determinations dismiss the most interesting aspect of all history; its chief subplot and its reason for being, which is the story of the cut against the grain, or struggle, unless, that is, they make of history its first character of loss, and the annihilation of the individual (as opposed to the triumph, if it *is* that, of the aggregate), in which case we are approaching a point at which history might fairly be read as tragedy. I would not have a history careless of the individual's struggle against power and the power of time itself, or one that subsumes its subjects in forces of such vast corporation as to extinguish the subject of history itself, and to repeat in acts of scholarship

that besets the blurry word 'conditions' are what makes the knot soft and slippery. See Holstun's 'Base, Superstructure, and Hierarchies of Determination', *Ebud's Dagger: Class struggle in the English Revolution*, 90ff.

²⁵ J. Holstun, *Ebud's Dagger*, 50. I am indebted to Holstun's delineations, which persuade by their clarity, even though I do not share his point of view. Thus, though I do not join his polemic, and precisely because I do not share his interest in theory, nor his wizardry with the subject, I am led to adopt his sense of the relations between theories: what he would *not* want me to call his genealogy of theory.

²⁶ J. Fineman, 'The History of the Anecdote: Fact and Fiction', in Veaser, *The New Historicism*, 44–76.

²⁷ *ibid*, 56.

²⁸ *ibid*, 57.

what it might be the privilege of scholarship to condemn in history. We must not colonise the past and the dead, because it is not the business of the historian to wield power in history, and we must not do so by draining practices to the shallows of their causes, when it is the depths of those practices that make – or made – them human.

Contingency

In 1944, at an acute juncture of history and when the numerous dead were unusually present to the living, T. S. Eliot wrote

there is coming into the world a new kind of provincialism which perhaps deserves a new name. It is a provincialism, not of space, but of time; one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their turn and been scrapped, one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares.²⁹

It seems impossible that any scholar of the past or of past artefacts could join in the ‘bunking’ of history,³⁰ but the world that is shown to us as ‘actuality’ in the ceaseless reportage of television news networks has begun to make history more present than it is. By this I do not mean that history is not present – it is only ever present – but that new media serve to erase the distinction between the past and history, in a manner which suggests to most people that we are now capable of recording our ‘presents’ perfectly for posterity. In other words, it appears that our information competence has ‘saved’ our recent pasts and demonstrated our dominance over more remote ages. The fault lies not only with the technological capacity for ‘real-time’ verisimilitude, but also with new grammars (many of them visual) by which both the media and the recipient of data make information.³¹ One danger of the (correct and scholarly) assertion that history belongs to the present is that it, too, flattens the contours of time and slews the relative

²⁹ T. S. Eliot, *What is a Classic?*, 30.

³⁰ I am playing with Henry Ford’s infamous dismissal, and intending by it to mean both ‘debunking’ and truant evasion (and possibly reporting even with the echoed splash of a witch-stool dunking).

³¹ Such grammars work to ‘hasten’ history in the more and more ‘efficient’ transmission of narrative; in the process they flatten the contours of time and produce anachronisms in which the present dominates the past. Examples should be unnecessary, but one might reach out to any filmic treatment of pre-film texts to perceive the flattening and its effects. In the films of Austen’s novels, for instance, epistolary time is sacrificed to epiphanic time – plots (and human emotions) are represented as the devices of sudden dialectical catastrophes, often of the gaze of character and camera. Thus Lizzie Bennett’s (highly textual) progress towards affection for Darcy, and the notion of maturation, are lost to simpler developments, more modern in tempo and mores. When Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth kiss on the streets of Bath, what we see is a 20th century shorthand for matters that Austen writes in order to make more complex rather than to simplify. Whether we are concerned with sex, gender, class or money, present representations impose the present on that past. Above all, what is lost is a sense of time true to the text: film is violently disruptive of 18th century time (by which is meant the 18th century experience of time); indeed, one of the reasons that we do not live in the same age as Austen is because new representations and their grammars have sundered her (experience of) time from ours.

presence of the present in the past and the past in the present. Thus, even scholars need to be wary of the inadvertent distortions they cause simply by being in history, let alone in practising it. More serious, however, is the risk of distortion posed by methodologies that are monological and held as articles of faith. These do a disservice to their subject by overlaying the intrinsic hazard of narration (the primary method of history, selective and editorial) with teleological 'ends'. This makes for wrong stories (history written backward, in a retrospect untrue to the experience of it), but also for a false witness to the subjectivity of history, the way time subordinates individuals, and societies, even languages, to loss and erasure. This 'present prospect' of the loss of history is a recurrent anxiety – I hesitate to say theme – in this study, and it the more propels me to the kinds of contingent methods for which I argue here.

An excursion, then, in propositions:

1. History is the present occasion of the past.
2. History is the accomplishment of past data in present information.
 - 3.1 The hazard of theory is that it puts data to the service of information in such a way as anticipates information, when information, by definition, cannot be anticipated, but must be disclosed in itself.
 - 3.2. The hazard of theory, put another way, is that anticipation is teleological.
 - 3.2.1. In history, which is an account of causes, nothing is more hazardous than to confuse aetiology with teleology.
 - 3.2.2. Because theory seeks to encompass the subjects of knowledge it has *an end in sight*.
 - 3.2.2.1. Events and their causes are thus arranged in narratives, i.e. towards an end, to an end (at worst a specific end, but any end is wrong), which makes the aetiology of narrative in fact teleology. (Auden's anecdote of the lady at the Left Book Club, who, when pressed for the point of her speech, asks how she can possibly know what she is going to say until she has said it. This woman cannot lie, because she intends nothing except to hear what she has to say.)
 - 3.2.2.2. Teleologies: Galen, Augustine, Lamarck, Cuvier, Marx. By contrast, Newton's dilemma is the Prime Mover, and his greatness is to refuse to know what it could be – to refuse to know what is teleologically supposed. Darwin's brilliance is exactly his refusal of teleology – and yet he is most commonly misunderstood by the teleological imputation of end-agency in the 'selection' of 'natural selection' or in the 'fitness' of those which dominate. (This misrecognition is why some feel able to dismiss him as 'theory'.)
 - 3.2.2.3. The Second Law of Thermodynamics is not about last things, but has such profound implications for those things that it might wrongly appear teleological. Though it presumes to know the end of things, it produces that knowledge by causation. It does not account for thermodynamics by knowing how things will end up.

4. Within the Second Law, life itself arises as a contingency, temporarily. Ultimately, the energy required to organise life in chemical complexities and structures like cells (let alone poems) is offset against greater losses in heat, from food-fuel, to the environment as we go about breathing and being warm. The Law holds for life as well as for the universe: the progress is to disorder and entropy. However, life is not a closed system and 'borrows' (at a losing rate) the energy of other systems to make for its (therefore contingent) semblance of order, or information.³²

I am attracted to a contingent method primarily because it keeps faith with the experience of its subject. Human life – all life – arises against the grain, in conditions of unlikelihood, and persists in a character of randomness and surprise, wastefully and at the expense of others and the environment. Determinations of likelihood make sense in broad canvas, but not at the seam where past and text intersect (as I have insisted they are always doing, as history, two-in-one). Secondly, it seems to me that the relation between two dynamic fields – call them text and context – must necessarily multiply each field exponentially. William Empson noted wryly to I. A. Richards that 'It is a familiar paradox; any serious attempt at establishing a relativity turns out to establish an absolute'³³. He was amazed at how Einstein's theory of relativity had fixed the velocity of light, but the implications of his observation for 'relativist' theories remains: they must keep contingent.

Thirdly, even where aggregative history perceives inevitability or necessity, the unit of likelihood conducive to such outcomes must remain unfixed in each instance. Only a contingent method will reveal the detail of such aggregate 'truths', and, perhaps, the depth of value, the degree of 'truth' in them. One might see contingency then as the *pressure* in history, that play of force, locally variable, which occasions necessity in wider accounts. An example: seen retrospectively, through a Marx-glass, the truth may be that the majority of members of a social class adopt an attitude of 'class interest' towards a given event; however, there are simply too many variables at play to be certain of what constitutes that class (half of them are women; throw in one transgendered man and you have replaced class with gender). History is always read backwards, in circumstances of afterness; against that condition of knowingness, theories that claim to know should be held cautiously.

³² Paul Davies, on whom I am drawing here, is provocatively useful for the work of the Humanities, since he is at pains to relate the processes of life to the science of information (both of which operate as excursions against the current of entropy, but both, equally, as contingent progresses, reliant upon net losses in order (and energy) in wider systems). The provocation to the Humanities (particularly to the historian) lies in the overall apperception of the necessity of life's exporting its waste chaos in return for local order. This being true, there is a waste cost to every poem and every city, in excess of the expense in creating each. A Marxian progress – *any* human progress – only works at greater cost to other reservoirs of energy. This casts a pall upon progressivist apprehensions of history and culture, and suggests that greater disorder, rather than order, is the destination of our forms and our histories. P. Davies, *The Origin of Life*, especially 26–32.

³³ C. Ricks, 'William Empson and "The Loony Hooters"', *Essays in Appreciation*, 347.

Nor do I subscribe to any faith in the independence of particularly *literary* texts from the vicissitudes of time and time's essential condition of variability. The literary blinkers awarded the text by the now well-established, if latent, habit of the New Criticism has great advantages in concentrating the scrutiny of the reader and in asserting the importance of internal evidences, but the exclusionary gaze, too, is only contingently valuable. There comes a point at which the insistence upon the text's independence of author or reader, for example, effects a kind of theft and a kind of historical erasure of the sort practised by totalitarian school history books. Texts are never free of the 'sudden sharp hot stink of fox', as Ted Hughes has it,³⁴ and can never be cleansed of the stench of history, or of the scent of author and reader. The text is resolved as many things, in countless moments, contingently. It moves from dream to labour to commodity to sexual display to dispute and so on and back again any number of times in its life and in any one day on the steps of the university where I teach, where students sit in the sun and hatch novels, jot in their notebooks, buy books off each other, show off their library borrowings, quarrel over books or extend them in daydream. In each of these moments the text is free in different degrees. In each of these moments the relative 'presence' and power of author, text and reader is different according to a host of contextual considerations, but that does not expunge the essential being of any one of them. All it does is show that the text is better thought of as an event than an entity; it is more something that occupies time than the thing in space. It is historical (temporal) to a degree exponentially greater than the material holdings of all the libraries, or the material volume of its part in the commodity economy. The clue to the historicity of the text is its variability, since variety is a powerful marker of time (as Darwin realised), but history is not the end of the text, its reckoning, any more than the variability of species *needs* to produce *Homo sapiens* or ends in us. History is no more the measure of literature (or any text) than texts are of history, but the two are entailed, not as sides of a coin, but perhaps more as strands in a molecule, whose architecture is the expression of information encrypted in their relation to one another.

Hedgehogs know one thing thoroughly and forever, foxes many things more-or-less and as and when occasions arise. But one might also say that the scale of hedgehog purview is as of the verb '*savoir*' – theoretical knowledge, knowledge in principle –, while the local investigations of the fox permit it '*connaitre*' – actual knowledge, knowledge in fact. That is the last of my claims for contingency – for applying a rattlebag of techniques in interpreting the past and its texts, the text that is the past. It is a way of knowing more suited to our neighbourhood with history, and to the local nature of a study of this size. Total theories (even absolute relativities) are ambitious to reduce the instance of history to pattern. The correlative image of people as numbers (in a set, a field, a geometry) disturbs me; the greatest casualties of the knowing accounts are those

³⁴ Ted Hughes, 'The Thought-Fox', *Selected Poems*, 13.

elements already subordinated in society: the poor, women, vagrants and the like. The majority of the world's people are children; because they are powerless they figure as a subset of adults. They are as under-represented in this thesis as in the world, and yet we were all children in the past. If childhood represents our universal biographical history, and yet goes largely neglected by both history and literary studies, then it is because we have one big idea about children, for right or for wrong. That idea is the ideological figure of 'minority', which we should remember was once as unquestioningly extended also to women (and black people, slaves, and so on). Children are less subordinate than inordinate, not numbered among the priorities of (adult) history and literature. And yet, in our own lives, locally and in detail, children are profoundly important. Relating the 'reality' of such different attitudes requires contingent thinking. How can children be both neglected by our accounts and yet head the undertakings of our affections? How can light be both wave and particle? How can history be both what happened and its account? How can Shakespeare be of his age and for all time? How can vagrants be plainly on the street-corner and yet not exist (as I will be insisting)?

Just as the answer to any of these conundrums begins 'Well, it depends', so, too, does the nature of all our reading and writing. This is not an instance for the rehearsal of the endless vagaries of context; what I mean is rather that the quest for rigorous monology, attributive of theory, is not the proper means by which scholarship should proceed in the humanities. Even scientists recognise the groundlessness of hypothesis, and the difficulty of reconciling empiricism and rationalisation. Paradoxes arise out of the profitable confutation of theories, as a progress of the evolution of thought and knowledge. They do not reflect failure, but advance – or, rather, the failure in paradox is in fact what drives the progress of knowledge. Thus theoretical progress is achieved contingently, by small (or large) incremental adjustments, consequent upon the elimination of demonstrated error. At any one time it is possible for a variety of methods to be advancing the front of an irregular field, co-operatively in competition, to varying degrees. When I speak of contingency, what I mean is that I do not subsume these many methods to any one rigorous pattern, save the 'pattern' of dialogue which allows theories and methods to correspond, and which permits the criticism essential to knowledge. In all this, broadly, I am following Popper, whose cleanliness of thought and expression often describes a common sense that is not at all the suspect ideological gloss which common sense might be to an Althusser or other latter-Marxist writers.³⁵ In writing I am only ever trying out a truth; the expected

³⁵ I am thinking here not only of Popper's stricture of falsifiability, but more of his refutation of 'historicism' (by which he means 'an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principle aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history.') That this 'historicism' is diametrically opposed to that use of the word in this thesis, as in a good deal of 'new' historicist writing, must be evident. Popper's evaluation of the appropriate and inappropriate applications of theoretical and empirical modes of enquiry is influential to my attitudes, and particularly his formulation of the theoretical as that which undertakes 'to *explain and to predict* events'. It is the predictive function of theory which appears evidentially tenuous and logically spurious; what is more, it imitates the

destination of what is written is falsehood. It is the act towards truth that is the scholar's object; truth itself is not his or hers. Thus my interest is in meanings before causes, though causes help constitute meanings. This study is a history of the meaning of vagrancy, not simply a history of vagrancy. As it passes from the European Renaissance through the colonial encounter in the Cape in the 19th century and beyond, it is never far from the texts, literary and otherwise, in which the vagrant is practised. The depths of that practice that my mode seeks to disclose go beyond causal narratives, although they follow them too for what they achieve of meaning. Here, for example, I mean to disclose that the Abraham man of early modern Europe is, in deep practice, the Abraham of capitalist modernity, the signifying figure of the new working class brought out of Ur and into the promised land of a new god, and that he is an avatar of the colonial 'other' and vice versa, that the minutes of a colonial meeting in 1834 mean more than they say, are a palimpsest of subjectivities, an act of underwriting the colony, that 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is not a skit but an act of revenge describing the deep practice of culture in time of war, that Lena is Athol Fugard's (and South Africa's) 'Homage to Clio'³⁶, that Michael K and Vercuiel and the barbarian girl are the revenants of Coetzee's sepulchral (Romantic) 'heartland' (possibly the colony, again).³⁷ By 'deep practice', as I have suggested, I mean those cultural practices whose meaning is not disclosed in the broad canvas of narrative accounts, in the 'thin' description of those who tell the stories of other places or times to their own ends, but rather in the 'thick' descriptions that such practices are in themselves serving to tell their own practitioners and participants. The intelligence of such practices may verge on the atavistic; they may occasion incredulity or wonder or dismay. But when they 'add up' it is not out of the linear sums of time's subsequent accountants, but rather synchronously, as an answer that is derived of their own reckoning. That reckoning is what these pages are after.

directive nomination (what I have called the 'accusation') of the vagrant, the colonial indigene, and others, as it were 'predicting' them into roles that are really the state's anticipation. Much of Popper's objection to 'pro-naturalistic' models of social evolution is really an objection to popular misunderstandings of those processes (a misunderstanding common to Marx's thought), which tend overwhelmingly to perceive a 'law' where Darwin, most pertinently, only saw agents that were specifically random and arbitrary (natural 'selection' is nothing of the sort; it has no destination, but where it arrives and when it does). K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 3, 35.

³⁶ I am borrowing the title of Auden's poem; I mean that the deep practice of Lena, the female vagrant, is that of the muse of history.

³⁷ For the 'deeper ... heartland' see chapter 5, and J. M. Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 92-3.

1. The host of vagabonds: origins and correspondences

The Land of Nod

From the first expulsion to the tramping of Orwell, western civilisation has enjoyed a constant preoccupation with the wandering state.¹ The movement of peoples or individuals offers not only the first correlative for narrative itself – a progress through time that is then matched in a progress through space – but also a host of elaborated metaphorical possibilities. Wandering might be – and has been – turned to connote any number of social or psychological events. These have been realised in various ways and in various times in the genres of exile narrative, quest tale, travelogue, pilgrim's progress, *bildungsroman*, shipwreck adventure, picaresque and road trip. Wherever one turns, the mandarin and the popular literary tradition is flush with accounts of wandering. The Old Testament tells the story of a pastoral people passing into agricultural settlement and struggling with the vicissitudes of a small 'nation' in that progress through time and space: Adam and Eve wander in a wilderness, Cain in the Land of Nod, Abraham is sent walking from Ur to a promised land, Noah floats adrift, the psalmist sits down to lament captivity in Babylon, for forty years the Israelites wander out of Egyptian exile through Sinai. This is a people among whom the most settled social form, of marriage, is signalled by the removing and proffering of a sandal. The New Testament tells of the wandering ministry of a messiah who urges his disciples to forsake the material economy of settlement and to walk among people, and whose death and resurrection propels a handful of Jews into a flurry of travel that brings them to shipwreck and as far, some say, as India. It is the story of roads, the roads of Galilee, the road to Jerusalem, the road to Calvary, the road to Emmaus, the road to Damascus. Even the stories within that story – the parables – are full of travellers, whether certain men or Samaritans, and a travelling prodigal son is set to advantage against his stay-at-home brother. In the tradition of classical antiquity we find in the *Odyssey* a hero whose name is wedded to his peregrinations in the English word for a great and momentous journey. That tale is a narrative of exile and a travelogue, a picaresque before its time, with shipwreck and marvels thrown in. In Dublin on June the 16th 1904, Joyce set Leopold Bloom wandering the beaches, baths, cemeteries and red-light districts – as much of his own soul, and his own soul's suburbs of

¹ We might include eastern civilisation too, given the trajectory from Siddhartha Gautama through Bashō to Mao's Long March. However, it is not our focus, save in the later implications of the overall argument of this thesis, which shows the transfer of vagrant attributes to a colonised people (and to some extent vice versa), in a process with global ramifications.

language – after the pattern of Homer and in what has become the exemplary monument of literary modernism.

The English tradition is begun with Anglo-Saxon poems of exile and wandering. Its canon is consolidated in the pilgrimage of Chaucer's haphazard company to Canterbury. *Piers Plowman* goes 'wyde in this world wondres to here', and is followed centuries later by Bunyan's Christian. Among the everything that Shakespeare gives us are Hamlet's suffocating inaction, and Lear's runaway dissolution: two poles of human movement that show the infinite range of the stage, from immovable point (the castle, the island) to an unfolding frontier (the heath, the cliffs of Dover). (Contemporaneously, on the continent, Cervantes engenders the novel in the picaresque of *Quixote* and Panza.) Defoe journeys through the whole island of Britain, and wrecks Crusoe on another. Even the reasonable and stout Dr Johnson bestirs himself for a trip to the Hebrides in congenial company. The Romantics make walking and poetry conditions of each other, in a compact that hasn't yet unravelled, especially if we are to judge by the strongest holdouts of romanticism, in popular culture, where Tolkien's plodding hobbits are adored, the casual lovers of rock stars are called 'roadies', and the Beats have inaugurated a rite of passage in the road crossing of the United States. (As I write this there is a movie advertised for release in which the journey across America is welded to the journey across gender orientation, it is called *Transamerica*, and centres on the 'travail' of transsexual identity.)

In the past century Orwell tramped and Beckett brought tramps to a standstill. Bruce Chatwin romantically urged the deep practice of humankind in a loosely conceived nomadism, especially in his *Songlines*, and by century's end the accomplishments of population genetics had described a long march of *strandloppers* out of Africa some 50 000 years ago, and terminating most visibly (and anciently) in the Australia that fascinated Chatwin.² In the same past century, humankind went to the moon, and Hollywood went far beyond that (and received visitors from elsewhere, and sent them home when they were duly homesick, or killed them if they were not). The age-old and now intrinsic fascination with human movement, with going places and seeing things, with going home and finding oneself the object of all our journeys, is far from over. But, it might be argued, our journeys have settled down. We have derived of them our several genres and these we repeat after the kitsch formulae of an age of mass reproduction. Nowhere is this more evident than in the emergence of the genre of 'reality' television, among whose pioneering instances have been shows which replicate the circumstances of old literary genres: Crusoe's shipwreck sponsors *Survivor*, while *Around the World in Eighty Days* underlies *The Amazing Race*. In part this is the consequence of the world's shrinking and the fact that travel itself is no longer as

² The best digest of our wandering genetic history is Spencer Wells' *The Journey of Man*.

exotic or as hazardous as it once was. More people travel further, faster and more frequently than ever before. Electronic media relay journeying as a virtual experience. All this means that it is now harder either to discover anything or to get lost.

But one kind of travelling remains out of sight, precisely because it continues to be beyond the pale in a world where few physical obstacles remain. This is vagrancy: the errancy of a wandering poverty. In fact, a vagrant need not strictly wander in space; it is sufficient that he or she be homeless to produce the supposition of movement. When we say 'without fixed address', we have never meant only that the dwelling at that address be a permanent structure; we mean also that the address – the nomination – be fixed in the registry of society. Vagrancy is an ideological wandering before it is a physical one. The movement with which it is associated describes as much the difficulty of society in 'pinning down' the phenomenon and its subjects as it does the physical translocation of people. One of the successes of the idea of vagrancy – to the hegemonic interests that wield it – is the way the imprecision of the idea is transferred to its targets, as one of their putative failures. A similar success, and just as hazardous to any scholarly treatment of vagrancy, is the monology of the idea. The erasure of difference within the category of vagrant serves to simplify and stabilise the idea. If – as we must – we acknowledge the different experiences of those classed as vagrant then we admit of variation across space – geography – and across time – history. A geography of vagrancy implies environmental or political complexity to the idea, the possibility of causes that lie outside the subjects so classified, and a history of vagrancy implies origin and, possibly, destination.

A first statement, therefore, needs to be that there are not vagrants. Vagrancy is an idea whose very definition – of errancy and elusiveness – proceeds from the elusiveness of its sponsoring interests. At all times it is vital to remember that a medieval pilgrim making for Santiago or a Mozambican migrant labourer travelling to Johannesburg might 'become' a vagrant according to ideological processes outside of their agency. Vagrancy is the designation of another. A second statement, proceeding from a contingent acceptance of the category 'vagrant', needs to be that there have not always been, nor always need to be, vagrants. A third, similarly, that vagrants do not always move, or trespass, or lack homes. These complexities, and others, mark the history of vagrancy with the great historical figure of conflict, or contradiction, and they elucidate the designation of vagrancy in ways that resist it and in ways that discover the meaning of those who use that designation.

Relatedly, a fourth, if subordinate, statement needs to be that the term 'vagrant' covers a variety of circumstances, imposing on them a monological contour that is not truly there. It is the project of the ideology that invents the vagrant simultaneously to simplify the category to the

point of apparent obviousness.³ This is done the more easily to secure the assent of people to the ideological form, but also for reasons to do with the purpose of vagrancy to ideology itself. Where the vagrant is imagined – fashioned – as different to the social ‘home’, it is desirable to erase the figure of difference *within* the concept itself, partly in order not to supply the kind of detail to which query and thought might attach, but also in order to accentuate the binary opposition between self and other. If the category of other is permitted complexity, then so might be the idea of self, and the structural equilibrium is threatened. This is important in itself, but not least because it might be applied to that central thesis of this study, which aims to show the ideological ‘unity’ of metropolitan vagrant and colonial subject, in a single discursive skein, as part, also, of one project in a global capitalist social economy. Because we are working always with that ideological donation it is possible to use the ‘whole’ and ‘composite’ notion of the vagrant here, but strict history could not, and needs to be wary of it. Perhaps the most important internal difference within the concept is described by the language of North American usage, which differentiates between the ‘hobo’, the ‘tramp’ and the ‘bum’.⁴ Broadly speaking (as is ever the case with vagrants) a hobo is a migratory worker (and thus not strictly a vagrant, though generally implicated as such). This figure, and the term, is disappearing from metropolitan contexts, but is still notable in post-colonial societies, not least South Africa, though with local and interesting differences. A tramp, by contrast is a migratory non-worker, a beggar on the move, closest in type to the vagrant or vagabond of early European designation, and as it is transposed to the Cape circumstance in the 19th century. A bum, however, is the most common type of vagrant on the contemporary social landscape; this is the figure of the non-migratory non-worker, a down-and-out, a street person, with a well-recognised neighbourhood, often centred on a local bottle store or charity provision.

The wide latitude of the word ‘vagrant’ is inherited from its occasion in the comprehensive aspirations of legal control, but the catch-all ‘blur’ useful to social and legal prescriptions is hazardous to scholarship, unless it is kept to the forefront as one of its subjects. When we recognise a ‘vagrant’ on the streets today, what exactly are we seeing? The vagrancy of this hypothetical subject imputes a common experience that is not necessarily there. The ‘street person’ in Cape Town is not necessarily a ‘*bergie*’, as we ‘know’ intuitively (for one thing, a street

³ In broad canvass I am following Althusser in my application of ‘ideology’ here, concerned as I am with the interpellation of subjects and those processes of erasure (or obfuscation) which hide ideology and leave only the seamless unities of ‘common sense’. L. Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 149–173.

⁴ In this I am following the lucid ‘grounded typology of homeless street people’ begun in D. A. Snow and L. Anderson, *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People*, 37ff. Even in this the American example provokes an awareness of differences between itself and the occasions we are concerned with here, and that, again, disturbs the monologous category of ‘the vagrant’.

person is often a child, but a *bergie* is an adult, unless, perhaps, the child of *bergie* adults, and then probably a '*bergie* child'). What we see may be a wandering tramp or a neighbourhood alcoholic, or something in between. Past circumstances accentuate this, especially in South Africa, where the blur between migrant labourer and vagrant indigent has never been easy to descry – indeed, has been deliberately conjured to the ends of that economic colonialism which profited by it, and by state coercion and control of it.⁵ What is more, the boundaries between migrancy and vagrancy in South Africa reach back to early colonial representations of the Bantu settlement of the subcontinent in its latter stages, especially as articulated in historiographical myths of 'the empty land'. History shows that these boundaries are extremely permeable, both legally, in the era of 'influx control' and passes, and socially, in the widespread trajectory of urbanisation, which is to say, in the passage from a rooted rural poverty into an unrooted urban one.

If we recur to textual origins, the figure of the wanderer (not yet a vagrant, but implicated in vagrancy, as we shall see) is begun as the structural shadow of what he or she is not. Cain is in the Land of Nod *because* not in Eden; his wandering is thus correlative of those values which are taught by the binaries among which it works, that pit garden against wilderness, settlement against movement, ease against effort, obedience against disobedience. The great choice that the children of Adam and Eve embody is not only theological (whether to recognise God or not) and moral (whether to be peaceable or violent), but also social and economic (whether to be transhumant pastoralists or settled agriculturalists) – and that is a matter of history. There is no way that we would today recognise in Cain's pastoralism the figure of vagrancy, but that is precisely what the translators of the King James Version imposed upon him, and exactly what colonisation transferred to the pastoralist Khoisan: 'a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth'.⁶ Similarly, as Odysseus is propelled around the Mediterranean, his wandering records the horror of a farming people in a settled political dispensation (even as it anticipates, in fascination, the power that will accrue to that people through travelling among the islands and across the Mediterranean). Odysseus's journey signals the unravelling that comes out of warfare and heroic individuation; its antipodal figure is that of Penelope's loom: social, domestic, female, (re)productive, manufacturing. Again, social and economic history underlies the Old English elegies of 'The Seafarer' and 'The Wanderer'. Too easily we consider these to be evocations of an intrinsic melancholy in a dark age, where the bonds of fealty and honour, and an uncertain Christian faith, are all the consolation there is before death. We forget that the rise of an Old English literature is coincident with a similar

⁵ The argument is well-established. See F. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa*.

⁶ Gen. 5, 12.

passage out of pastoralist migration and into the agricultural settlement of the island. The elegies are sprung from a dismal sense of the insecurity of wandering and a fear that personal exile will return the individual to that dark time, fraught with danger and discomfort and where the brevity of life is accentuated. How easy to see that old life as the mortal path, and to begin to fashion the now centuries-old image of the Merry England of settled village life, as a kind of heaven, in which the green is ever an Eden, at whose centre grows the Oaken Heart, a tree of life and of knowledge, the tree of Jupiter, of the druids, of the British navy, and the secure doors of Oxford staircases or of burrows in Hobbiton in the Shire.

Outlandish and strange beggars

That the King James version should find its way to condemn the vagabond within its first few pages is indicative of the Renaissance preoccupation with the vagrant. We are reminded that R. H. Tawney said that the 16th century lived 'in terror of the tramp'.⁷ Indeed, by that later century, and fuelled by a burgeoning literature of roguery, the vagrant had become the kind of bogeyman upon whom mothers called to terrify their wayward children: 'Take him, Beggar, take him!' they would cry.⁸ The reasons for this preoccupation, and this structural vilification, are legion and recur to inform much of this study, but not the least of them is that the vagrant was a new figure in the social landscape, a Renaissance invention, both in material and ideological terms. The groundswell of economic change that broadly heralds modernity, and in which we now recognise the advent of capitalism (though here specifically mercantile), and that threw up the commodity culture of individualism, realist representation, an aesthetic of harmonic proportioning (after classical example and mathematical practice) and a relish of 'worldly goods',⁹ is also that which accompanies, and promotes, the emergence of the vagrant on the highways and byways of European consciousness.

The reasons for the new figure of the vagrant are various, but they include, as major factors, the rise in European population and the dissolution of the feudal mode (both at the level of production and at the level of social relations).¹⁰ These, in turn, have causes, and remain the subject of some of the more intense economic and social scrutiny. It is not our business to

⁷ R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, 268, cited in W. Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 33.

⁸ P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*, 24.

⁹ The phrase is not Lisa Jardine's, but I use it after her example, to mean the aesthetic delight in material commodity, and particularly the commodities of the exotic (which is also to say of the greatest exchange differential – still a shaping force in the arena (we say 'market') of art today). L. Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*.

¹⁰ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 5–8, 37–54.

explain the demise of medieval Europe and the rise of the modern, other than tangentially, and we will not single out here the relative priority of the three field system, the steel plough, the plague, the rise of long-distance trade and towns, alterations in the money economy, and so on.¹¹ What is important is to note the coincidence of the pressures which produce a nascent capitalism (and its attendant ideology) and the pressures which produce itinerant poverty, and, perhaps even more important, a cultural celebration (both positive and negative) and amplification of that vagrancy. That cultural invention is itself bound up with the ideological event of the Renaissance, in such ways that connect, for example, protestantism to vagrancy (say in a complex articulation of the place of works (labour) as opposed to (passive) grace, in the shaping of the human soul (individuation))¹², or make for a familial lineage connecting humanist individualism to the picaresque and, thereby, to vagrancy. These articulations are complex, but readily discernible, at least in broad outline.

Paul Slack has noted the explosion of ordinances dealing with the regulation and relief of the poor across western Europe between 1520 and 1550. His list includes Nuremburg, Strasbourg, Zurich, Mons, Ypres, Venice, Lyons, Rouen, Geneva, Paris, Madrid, Toledo, London, Brandenburg, Castile, as well as national ordinances in the Netherlands, England, France.¹³ In England, particularly, he notes the doubling of the population in a century, from 2.3 million in 1524 to 5.3 million in 1656.¹⁴ Such 'surplus population', it is argued must make for the single overwhelming propellant of vagrancy, forcing a poor and workless class onto the roads in search of jobs and in hope of a better charity than that of exhausted local agencies. In addition, Slack notes a sixfold inflation between 1500 and 1640, as the demands of a growing population pushed prices up. Against such a background, he disputes the contribution to vagrancy of the dissolution of monasteries, arguing that the dissolution does not logically enhance the mobility of the poor so much as it does the depth of local poverty. In summary,

particularly in areas of mixed farming [p]eople were pushed onto the roads, probably moving first to areas of waste, forest and pasture, and then, from the later 16th century, to towns.¹⁵

¹¹ Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, discusses 'The General Crisis' of feudalism in the 14th century, 197ff, but his preceding chapter, 'The Feudal Dynamic' is no less significant in accounting for dynamics of accumulation within the mode, and the structural limits to that accumulation which conduce to the crisis (and emergence of capitalism), 182ff. His debt to Rodney Hilton, Georges Duby, and others, is closely accounted in his footnotes.

¹² J. M. Coetzee emphasises this discursive context, perhaps excessively, or at least to the neglect of others, in his 'Idleness in South Africa'. His concern, of course, is with the expressly moral category of 'idleness', which encourages a location within religious discourse. But the term applies to a lack of work, and that surely has first to do with economic productivity. *White Writing*, 12ff.

¹³ P. Slack, *Policy and Poverty*, 8-9.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 44-5.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 44.

This description is important because, as we shall see, it is the trajectory of Lear and Edgar, and of the strolling player, at times the players who acted Lear and Edgar. It is the trajectory of Shakespeare (very broadly), Kaatje Kekkelbek, Boesman and Lena, and Michael K.

I want to argue, moreover, that this route through the wilderness – the route called vagrancy – is from one mode of production to another. As such, it is a sublimatory metaphor for revolution, deferring and diminishing the general threat in a local part-truth. The privations of the vagrant, the hazards to and of the vagrant, the repression of the vagrant, the subversive tactics of the vagrant – all the stages of the vagrant excursion – are the figures of class war writ in biography, in the *seemingly* isolated figure of the margin. The hysteria of the early moderns, as of the colonial ascendancy at the Cape in the early 1800s, as an hysteria against ‘the host’, the feared combination of the poor. After all, what is a vagrant but a poor person *on the march*. When two or three are gathered together, there you find a class *mobilised*.

For Marx vagrancy was an inevitable and necessary state under capitalism, in part effecting the transition from feudal relations, loosening the bond between land and labour, but also working ultimately to produce and sustain optimally mobile and cheap labour. To this way of thinking, society’s hostility to the vagrant – its view of vagrancy as a social ill – is only the paradox of ideology, for the relentless derision with which the vagrant is met in turn produces the legal and economic harassment that drives the vagrant into service at the least cost to the employer. Thus Marx in *Capital*: ‘agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, [were] driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system.’¹⁶ The first of these transitions – out of feudalism – is revisited by Christopher Hill, looking back to the depopulation of the English countryside by the Black Death, and noting how that circumstance offered land and the opportunity of paid labour for the serf adventurous enough to slip his bonds: ‘Vagabondage was then the route from serfdom to liberty.’¹⁷ As a motor for the new mobility, this is the direct contrary of the ‘surplus population’ that Slack comes to argue is its cause and engine. But what Slack looks to is the latter part of the same transition: not out of feudalism, but into capitalism. The alterations in population produce disequilibrium. That imbalance may work to the interests of one class or another, but the net effect – and over a considerable period – is one of change, and of change characterised by the enhanced mobility of the poor, and the rendition of a culture of that mobile poor. The textual concerns of this study are spun around this instance, and so thicken it. We do not set out exhaustively to reproduce the cause and

¹⁶ K. Marx, *Capital*, 808–9. The argument and quotation is supplied in W. Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 7.

character of early modern vagrancy, but because of the manner in which that vagrancy became attached by transfer to the indigenous people of the Cape, it is necessary to keep in mind the contours of the social economy of early modernity, and to look at the kind of culture and literature it made of vagrancy, or, we should say, of which it made vagrancy.

The arrival of the vagrant in culture is in part the uneasy reconciliation of contrary discourses of poverty. In the Christian theocracies of the middle ages the example of Christ's own itinerant poverty encouraged some respect for the figure, always remembering that the strict bond to the land in feudal serfdom made the wandering poor a rare circumstance. The mendicant wayfarer was more likely to be in some degree of holy orders, after the fashion of the friar, or, by the time of *Piers Plowman*, counterfeiting that role. When Luther himself supplied the introduction to the first 'canonical' schedule of vagrant types in Europe, the much-repeated *Liber Vagatorum* of around 1510, it was the counterfeiting of poverty that brought down his ire. That counterfeiting is begun in the fraudulent friars and the grifters of the pilgrim routes, and it is odious to Luther and his contemporaries not only because it is a fraud, but because it is a fraud of blasphemous reach, faking the Christian example, not in order to lose the world, but to gain in it. 'But as to outlandish and strange beggars they ought not to be borne with, unless they have proper licences and passports', he wrote, reflecting, among other things, the general increase in vagrancy and the problems of control posed to the technologies of the state – but also, importantly, that the very category of vagrant arises in competition to itself, as a structural opposition drawn between the deserving and the undeserving poor.¹⁸ From the outset vagrancy is a moral category involving judgement and discernment (hence *Liber Vagatorum* itself), begun in the moral distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor, as a reconciliation of contradictory attitudes to poverty. That contradiction lies between Christian reverence of Christ's example and capitalist reverence of material gain. And it lies within Christianity, as a distinction between real and fraudulent poverty.¹⁹ Moreover, the discernment of vagrancy is the prerogative of state authority, whose technology of licence and passport is the only guarantee of the 'true' beggar. By contrast, what characterises the undeserving are qualities of the 'strange' and the 'outlandish', both of which words have a nebulous aspect suggesting oddity, but also a concrete application in denoting foreigners, those who are strangers or who come from out of the land, where land is metonym for state. This is a central observation, for it binds the undeserving poor in a union with the 'other', by means of an automated discursive association.

¹⁷ C. Hill, *Liberty Against the Law*, 47.

¹⁸ Luther's introduction to *Liber Vagatorum: Der Bettler Orden*, ed. D. B. Thomas, trans. J. C. Hotten, 65.

¹⁹ The observation is common to the literature of poverty in early modern Europe. Slack, for example, has chapters concerning 'The Respectable Poor' and 'The Dangerous Poor' – obviously not his own determinations, but those common to the currency (and affecting the response) of the day. *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*.

At a time when the description of vagrancy and the description of a newly encountered world are coincident, this association has far-reaching consequences, for it begins to suggest how the figure of what becomes the colonial indigene is anticipated, or at least prefigured, in the exclusionary and morally judgmental discourse of early modernity, and arbitered by political and religious authority.

The early modern vagrant, then, is caught in a complex web of accusation. In part, he or she is blasphemously traducing the Christian example. In part, he or she is defrauding the Christianly obligated alms-giver. In part, he or she is estranged by the accusation of strangeness, and at the heart of that strangeness is the accusation of counterfeiting, something to do with fraud, but also something altogether more threatening, which is the dissimulation of appearances, dissembling, the disqualification of discursive practices by which the truth may be construed, hence the dissolution of truth itself. In this aspect, the vagrant's error, or sin, is against the monological, by which the poor may be known always for the poor, as are always with us. The assault upon monology reaches into the grand discourses sustained by monology, and threatens by extension the unitary state or monotheistic faith. Vagrancy is a cipher of plurality, of uncertainty, of contingency, and the vagrant occupies another 'order', a shadow society, with its aliases²⁰, its 'secret jargon'²¹ and 'fraternity'²², as if set up in gnostic, and diabolical, opposition to the established rule. This has an obvious correlative for us in the post-modern conception of language, as something structurally undermined, a semantic sprawl, and it is not too much to say that the vagrant, whose own character is homelessness, unhousedness, wandering, is an early marker of the threat to discursive coherence. What is more, early modern responses to vagrancy – the scheduling of a 'bettel order'²³, the issuing of licences and passports, estrangement or 'othering', moral condemnation and violent repression – passing from the linguistic through the legal to extreme physical violence, suggest something of the place of the phenomenon *within language*, and also something of the violence with which breaches of the linguistic limit are met. Before the Renaissance, when vagrancy applied to a manifestly different kind of mobility, we find at the time of the military and cultural subjugation of the Welsh, for example, ordinances against 'Bards, Rhymers and other idlers and vagabonds'.²⁴ The hazard of the vagabond is allied to that of the poet, and particularly in the figure of the colonised, but resistant, 'other'. The irony of that ordinance's formulation is that rhyme operates to confirm the conjunction of binaries; its danger (and its 'poetry') lies in precisely the manner in which it

²⁰ P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 97.

²¹ The phrase is C. J. Ribton-Turner's (1887), but it reflects the common contemporary apprehension of canting. *History of Vagrants and Vagrancy*, 467.

²² As in Awdeley's *Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561).

²³ As in the subtitle of *Liber Vagatorum* (1529).

can unite under one logic things that are contrary under another. We have this often enough in common parlance, where values are rhymed for dissonance, as subversion – think only of ‘rich’ and ‘bitch’, but we can invent them as easily (say, ‘sinister minister’) or apply to the canon (say Blake’s ‘briars’ and ‘desires’). Rhyme – and bards and vagabonds – is always a reminder that another structure might be used to express correspondences, and the possibility of that alternative structure dissolves the monological, and thereby authoritative, claims of any prior (or successive) structure. Poetry is a violence done to language; by it language does violence to what it otherwise sustains in order.

Contemporaries were very clear that vagrancy posed a categorical threat. The proliferation of a literature against vagrancy (but profiting by it) in the English Renaissance displays, in itself and in its tenor, a hyperbolic concern. In A. L. Beier’s formulation, the literary idiom of vagrancy ‘described a netherworld of vagabonds poised to overthrow society.’²⁵ The objection to vagrancy reached far beyond concerns with the manifest petty crime that attended it²⁶, or with the burden imposed upon local agencies of poor relief. Vagrants were not only ‘a burthen, an eye-sore and a scandal,’ wrote Francis Bacon, but also ‘a seed of peril and tumult in the state.’²⁷ There is a certain material sense to the statement, given the numbers of vagrants who were sprung from the ranks of ex-soldiers (and hence figure as a potentially mutinous rabble, not least because these soldiers might be the ‘disordered rabble’²⁸ of those private ducal armies gradually dissolved in the Tudor consolidation) or runaway apprentices (confounding the economic order at the level of labour relations).²⁹ But vagrants rarely gathered in the gangs that might be thought threatening evidence of any ‘fraternity’. The exceptions are illuminating: on the one hand there were gypsies, rarely classed as vagrants, because clinging to their own designation, but always in communities; on the other hand there were the Irish³⁰. Whether one thinks of them as refugees or not, the Irish moved in groups across and beyond England, manifestly foreign, and to some extent already serviced with the mythography of such accounts as Spenser’s.³¹ As Slack has it,

²⁴ Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 35.

²⁵ A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men, The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640*, 7.

²⁶ ‘... poor strangers and wanderers, known vagabonds, were in actuality very often involved in crime.’ P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*, 92.

²⁷ J. Spedding (ed.), *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, iv, 252. The quote is supplied by Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 100.

²⁸ The term is Goneril’s, of Lear’s hundred, associated by her with ‘a tavern or a brothel’ (I, iv, 253, 242).

²⁹ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 97–8.

³⁰ A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men*, 57–68.

³¹ Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (written by 1596, 1633).

Sometimes naked and begging ... in the early 17th century these groups of foreigners, moving towards the south-east and thence occasionally into France, did more than gipsies or canting rogues to perpetuate fears of the dangerous vagabond.³²

The aspect of foreignness must be accentuated, not only because it conduces to the 'otherness' of the vagrant, and thus expediting the particularly spatial management of the vagrant (by nation or parish, in stocks or expulsions, with passports, and so on), but also because it enhances the apparent continuity of the metropolitan vagrant with peripheral populations, and especially those of the colonial periphery as it arises. Thomas Harman's *Caveat for Common Cursitors* (1567) includes a list of 'walkers' known to the author and 'their true names'³³, and it is notable just how often the foreign origin of a vagrant is underscored, as in such examples as 'John Welshman', 'Archie Douglas (a Scot)', 'John Reynolds (Irishman)', 'James Lane (with one eye; Irish)', 'John Gyllford (Irish with a counterfeit licence)', or is implied in such forms as 'Richard Ap Price', 'John Ap Powis'. Indeed, Harman concludes his list with the note that

There is above an hundreth of Irishe men and women that wander about to begge for their lyving, that hath come over within these twoe yeares. They saye they have beene burned and spoiled by the Earle of Desmond ...³⁴

Clearly among the local effects of colonisation is the displacement of indigenes; metropolitan society sees these as vagrants.

To cant: to can't

It comes as no surprise then to find that the 'secret jargon' of the vagrant is generally denominated some bastard form of a foreign language. What the English sometimes call 'Pedlar's French' is 'Rotwelsch' to the Germans and also 'Red Welsh' to the English, 'Germania' to the Spanish, 'Jargon' to the French, 'Gergo' in Italy, 'Fantesprog' in Scandanavia, 'Hantyyka' in Bohemia.³⁵ It is a Tower of Babel, but founded on the exclusionary accusation of nationalist self-interest. Samuel Rowlands in 1610 held that 'their language they spun out of three other

³² Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 98.

³³ T. Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors* (EEBO, 26–9), and in G. Salgado (ed.), *Cony-catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 140ff.

³⁴ *ibid.*, (EEBO, 28), 146.

³⁵ D. B. Thomas (ed.), *Liber Vagatorum*, introduction, 5.

tongues, viz. Latin, English and Dutch.³⁶ This, Harrison tells us in 1577 'they name Canting but other's pedler's French a speech compact thirtie years since of English, and a great number of od words of their own devising, without all order or reason.'³⁷ There are several operations to be discerned in the attribution of cant. The first is that it is a *language*, intrinsically and explicitly the attribute of another people, and to use it is to place oneself beyond the writ of English, and therefore, effectively, of English rights and customs, English interests and the subjective orientation of Englishness. Secondly, it is a language whose otherness is pointed up in a complex web of European counter-affiliations, some of which may have specific causes (for example, Anglo-French rivalry), and others of which may simply connote marginality (as, say, Wales is to Germany). The important thing is to note that the attribution of a vagrant language is made within the once vestigial and now rapidly evolving discourse of European nationhood, allied as that is to the interests of mercantile capitalism. Thirdly, the unintelligibility of the language has to do, not with the poor capacity of metropolitan society for translation, but with the deliberate obfuscation of those who speak it. According to those who accuse cant, its purpose is secrecy. Thus cant is more than a language; it is a code, whose purpose is to confound others in the pursuit of confounding their interests. In this it is imagined as an inherently hostile language, a language *against* metropolitan non-speakers, rather than simply a language *for* those who speak it. Lastly, and relatedly, we must revisit Harrison's assertion that cant is a language 'without all order or reason', for although this speaks of the impenetrability of the code to outsiders, it says something else besides, and that is in concert with what we have already noted about the categorical errancy of vagrancy. Here, again, we note that the wandering state confutes the maps of the fixed order, which is also the fixed order of maps themselves. The language of the vagrant, like the subject it serves, entails categorical dissolution, it is a code encrypted by no discernible formula, but randomly. Just as the vagrant moves unpredictably, so does cant – to such an extent, in fact, that the term for the language is unfixed, even in the case of 'cant', which is often given as 'canting', as if speech were speaking, as if the language were only ever realised in the present moment of its uttering, existing as a thing done in the instant and in the mouth, where the gerund keeps the action of a verb present in the nomination, rather than as the secure, the settled, domain of a noun, whether common or proper.

There is no certain etymology for the word 'cant', unsurprisingly. It may derive from the chanting of religious mendicants, becoming applied to the wheedling tones of the beggar generally. There is a suggestion that it derives from the Irish and Gaelic *cainnt*, meaning 'language'

³⁶ Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 467.

(which reinforces the alien and alienating essence of the word).³⁸ It is not thought to share in the etymology of its homonym meaning 'side' or 'edge' (as in the Afrikaans *kant*), but the coincidence of the words also ascribes a semantics of boundary, margin and exclusion. So, more adventurously, we might harness the refusal implicit in the word 'can't' to suggest something of the hegemonic denial – specifically the refusal of action – encoded in 'cant'. When one reads Harman's lexicon of the 'pelted speech' of cant, which he notes is to be found 'being half mingled with English when it is familiarly spoken' (a cipher, if ever there was, of bastardy or miscegenation), it is salutary to witness his construction, thus:

to cante, to speake

or, more ready to our eye, as it appears in the later Dekker:

to cant, to speake

for as one reads across the line in hegemonic English, that same English insinuates in the reader an ideological complicity in the prohibition of cant speech.³⁹ We find the willed action of the infinitive stalled in the impossible grammar of refutation: 'to can't' (as we momentarily read it) has the forbidding imperative 'can't' interrupting the half-, but un-spoken infinitive. And that infinitive, as we find it completed, is 'to speak'. Even in setting forth the cant verb 'to speak', Harman's established English, and its exercise in translation, interrupt to silence that speech.

What is recorded of cant suggests a rather impoverished lexicon, hardly sufficient to be thought a language.⁴⁰ Much of it is self-evidently derived from other languages, as in 'bene' for 'good' (Latin) or booze for 'drink' (Dutch), again suggesting the provenance of the cultural 'idea' of vagrancy in the 'otherness' of nationality and language. Given the persistence of some cant terms, like 'booze' or 'filch', in modern English, it is surprising that scholarly attention has not placed cant well within the evolutionary trajectory of English itself – a trajectory as typically full of alliances and extinctions as any language, and particularly at precisely this point in English history, when the nation state is consolidated under the Tudors, when the printing press has

³⁷ Harrison (1577), Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 467. There seems a virtue in recording the charge of 'oddness' in the 'od' spelling of the original, which demonstrates the actual flux of the hegemonic order against which cant is negatively arrayed.

³⁸ OED.

³⁹ Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors* (EEBO, 29), in Salgado (ed.), *Cory-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 148. Dekker, *O per O Se* (EEBO, 49).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors*, 146ff, or R. Greene, *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage*, in Salgado (ed.), *Cory-catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 175ff.

begun to incline the language to orthography, when literacy and London begin to play their overwhelming role in monologising what is thought of as 'Englishness'. Against such a background, cant is but a speech-canton of immigrants and those exposed to foreign tongues (like sailors or soldiers), in an instance thickened by the margin's propensity to slang, where slang forever serves to establish identity and forge community in the besieged margins of the social economy, and where slang also serves, by excluding the dominant, to conserve meagre resources that are otherwise lost to the rapacity of power. The mid-16th century pamphlet, *A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play*, displays pretty well the chasm across which rival apprehensions of cant are strung. Two interlocutors 'discover' for the reader the 'manifest' truth of the underworld, after a remotely Socratic example. One exchange runs thus:

R. What meane ye herby? Have ye spoken brod English al this while, and now begin to choke me with misteries and queint termes?

M. No, not for that but always ye must consider that a carpenter hath many termes, familier inough to his pretensis [apprentices] that other folke understand not at al, and so have the chetors [cheats], not withoute greate nede, for a falsehood, once detected, can never compasse the desired effect.⁴¹

The first position holds that cant (or, here, specifically, the jargon of dice-cheats) is a lethal (choking) mystery; the charge comes close to blasphemy, as if speaking the name of God backwards. The response adopts a functionalist rationale, according to which the jargon is derived by the economies of the closed shop and the desirability of opaque speech in conserving trade secrets. However, the dialogue runs on, discussing terms for whoring and robbery, to produce this summation in which the argument begun in functionalist terms, evolves into the dire political and metaphysical implications of the deception so 'innocently' begun:

R. But what is this to the purpose, or what have chetors to do with hores or theves?

M. As moch as with their very entere frende, that hold all of one corporation. For the first and origynall ground of Chetinge is a counterfeate countenance in all things, a studdy to seme to be, and not to be in deede ... Who hath a great[er] outward shew of simplicity then ye pickpurse, or what woman will seeme so fervent in love as wil the common harlot? So, as I told you before, the foundation of all those sortes of people is nothing els but mere simulation and bering in hand. And like as they spring all from one rote, so tend they al to one end: idely to live by rape and ravin, devouring the frute of other men's labors. All the ods betwene them be in ye meane actions, that leade towards the end and final purpose.⁴²

⁴¹ Gilbert Walker, *A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play* (EEBO, 13), and in Salgado (ed.), *Cory-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 40.

⁴² *ibid.*

This is a charge constructed out of gnostic architecture, and founded on the neoplatonic scheme by which all iterations correspond within 'one corporation'. To counterfeit any thread in the fabric of that 'one corporation' is to unravel the universe, however petty the deception is begun. Thus we see that cheaters are one and the same with whores and thieves, and that the crime of harlotry is not sexual but rather fraudulent, in *seeming* most fervent in love. What is more, that fervour of love (the spiritual ideal) is counterfeited for money (materiality), and thus the ideal universe is betrayed to the dross matter of the demiurge's creation. (Today we reprove this with the condemnation 'commodified'.) And what is begun as counterfeited love corresponds with (becomes) the intense inversion that is 'rape', as, too, the 'simplicity' of the pickpocket has its outworking in 'ravin'. This is the logic of Bacon's 'seed of peril and tumult within the state'. We are not confronted merely with the notion of an offence against any one correspondence within a 'chain of being' being translated across its correlatives, but with something more perniciously systemic, either cancerous (a seed, a root) or wasting (devoured fruit, tumult). The role of language in sustaining the system that is the universe is not hard to see: if by language we signify the idea of material entities, then language spans (and translates) across the two creations, if by language we forge the metaphors that bring about relation (making a man a pig, for example), then it is in language, again, that correspondence is achieved. The gross offence of cant – why it can't – is that it is a language of deception, of negative correspondence, undoing the fit between things and ideas. Where language is made in the body by producing in the throat a signifier for some known entity, cant chokes (the body politic) with mysteries and contradictions. John Donne's epigram on 'A Lame Beggar' demonstrates exactly the accusation of riddling paradox – of nonsense – (but also the specific capacity of poetry to deliver its sense):

I am unable, yonder beggar cries
To stand or move; if he say true, he lies.⁴³

The double-speak goes straight to the heart of vagrancy, since it concerns idle immobility and mobility (standing or moving) and the deceptions of a beggar's speech (since you cannot be simultaneously immobile and mobile, to appearances). And yet (it is the revolutionary capacity of poetry which shows it) the beggar may not be lying (through his teeth) but lying (down). Sense is restored through the deceptive figure of the pun, which contradicts the rhyme's association of the beggar's cries with lies. In two lines Donne encapsulates the offence of vagrancy and its speech – but also its defence, wrought in the errant semantics of poetry, which disorders

language to the ends alternate orders meaning, and which displays thereby its affinity to vagrancy, and a cause of literature's long interest in the subject.

In a related fashion Stephen Greenblatt has traced the central charge of deception in Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) as that book set about exposing the treasonability of a series of catholic exorcisms in 1585–6.⁴⁴ The point he is at pains to establish is that Harsnett's argument runs on the fraudulence of exorcism, and that this deception is treasonable because it dissimulates the sacred power of the state. Fraudulent spectacles of faith, Greenblatt argues, work as a 'seed of peril in the state', because they undermine faith in the monologous priority of the state, and because they affect to compete with that state, whose prerogative is the sacred. The use of Greenblatt's argument here is precisely that it exceeds that state's own characterisation of the charge (Catholic recusancy) by hazarding an analysis of the discursive threat held out by exorcism particularly. And at the heart of that threat is the same charge of deception that is levelled at vagrants and at cant, at much the same time. What is more, Greenblatt's argument (following an interest in Harsnett's emergence in *King Lear*), is quick to yoke the charge of deception in religious 'posture' to the business of the (discursively powerful) theatre of Shakespeare's time. That has implications for our argument down the line, when we come to consider the stage and *King Lear*, and their relationship to vagrancy, but for now we ought to note at least Harsnett's characterisation of the exorcists as 'vagabond players, that coast from Towne to Towne'.⁴⁵ Greenblatt does not pursue his argument into the contemporaneous 'dissembling' of vagrants, nor does he note thereby the continuity or the depth of the reproach against deception in the discourse of early modern England (as it shakes off centuries of pretenders and conflict, in inventing the modern state), but we may resuscitate and extend his argument here.

The neglect of cant in the standard treatments of Tudor and Stuart vagrancy – A. L. Beier, Paul Slack – is salutary. Cant is noted, of course, as is its particular place in the *representation* of vagrancy, and that we have little evidence of the extent or occasion of its actual use.⁴⁶ But there is no substantial analysis of this most fascinating of attributes in the 'ethnography' of the vagrant. In part, this is the consequence of a paucity of resources (in which case, one might argue, how much more fascinating the *lostness* of the language); in part, it is the consequence of the suspicion that cant belongs more to *accounts* of vagrant life than to that life in reality (in which case we have evidence of an instance in which the vagrant is invented, and in which it is

⁴³ John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, 150.

⁴⁴ S. Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists' in P. Parker and G. Hyman, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, 163–187.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁶ see Beier, *Masterless Men*, 125, for the nature of the evidence and the kind of analysis that is undertaken.

not cant that deceives but the account of cant that is itself fake). Mostly, however, the neglect of cant proceeds from the empirical method and material concerns of history. What can be known of a subject whose intent existence is deceptive, encrypted and lost? How does one count or measure or evaluate the evanescent and ephemeral tissue of language? The usual noises are made: that cant 'suggests the existence of a marginal group'⁴⁷, that 'once the language [of cant] ... had a literary embodiment it became ossified and stereotyped'⁴⁸ (which may well not be true: the trajectory of a word like 'booze' or 'dude', from cant into English slang and the popular English is dynamic and various). Beier dismisses cant by noting that '[I]t is doubtful whether Pedlar's French represented an alternative ideology. It provided a means of communication, but its parameters were quite narrow.'⁴⁹ All this falls into the trap of presuming that accounts of cant actually treat of the subject they claim to. In fact, what accounts of cant do is very different from supplying a lexicon or grammar of a language or dialect. What they *do* tell us, is of the desire of literary and ephemeral representations, widely popular in their time, to envisage the vagrant as 'other', as secret, as a conspiracy, as foreign, and as symbolically antithetic to the plain-speaking writ of English (or any other 'whole', rational and transparently disclosed language), and, by extension, itself embroidered of neoplatonic 'mystery', also antithetic to the monotheistic centre of the Logos itself. The crime of cant is against logocentric order. Cant is the 'frowsy'⁵⁰, 'pelting', 'lewd, lousy', miscegenated inheritance of Babel.

Paul Slack remarks of the historical interest in Harman and others, that 'they have been treated seriously by more perceptive historians because they seem to hint at the existence of a distinct culture of poverty, not unlike that which some sociologists have detected in twentieth-century societies.'⁵¹ But this is to mistake the value of representation. Harman and others necessarily tell us more of themselves and their context than they do of those they configure. There is an important sense in which they do not represent the vagrant. It might be more accurate here (as in many instances in which the word 'represent' is used) to speak of their *presenting* vagrancy rather than *representing* it. Slack continues at pains to argue that the witness of the literature and the pamphlets is material, but cannot really commit himself on why or how far:

We have already seen that there was some truth in the picture which these authors presented. It was most firmly rooted in fact, though even then not entirely so ... The canting language had a real existence ... and that means that different kinds – if not quite 'orders' – of rogue were probably

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁸ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 105.

⁴⁹ Beier, *Masterless Men*, 126.

⁵⁰ Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 501. The form, as it appeared in 1864, was 'the frowsiest English'. See below, 228, for the full quote.

⁵¹ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 104.

distinguished by rogues themselves. It is dangerous to go further than that, however. Although we are groping in the dark in this...⁵²

The security of traditional history embodied in such markers as 'truth', 'fact' and 'real' is undermined by so many conditional modifications, like 'some', 'though', 'not entirely', 'not quite', 'probably', 'dangerous', 'however' and 'groping'. And yet what is a (real, true) fact is that these accounts were made and read. They reflect, if not a certain truth about their subject, then the certainty that things like cant or the 'orders' of vagrant were of interest to the mind of the author and, he presumed, would or should be of interest to his reader. If we proceed with the prevarications of Slack, thirsty for a 'serious' history that is 'perceptive' of the popular and subordinate, then we must begin by acknowledging that we are, as it were, knowing the Germans through Tacitus or the Xhosa through Alberti. More worrying is that a history which shapes its concerns, its subjects, as they are found in its archive, is missing the point that it is the shape of the archive that tells us first and more, not only about the value of itself, but also about itself as a subject. The interest in cant is to hand in the record; cant itself is not so easily grasped. Even in writing about it we find the subject slippery: is it 'cant' or 'Cant' or 'canting', Pedlar's French or Red Welsh, language or dialect, popular slang or a mandarin invention, an Esperanto?⁵³ Cant, like the vagrant, is handed down to history in the accusative record of those who do not speak the language. That is all we know: that cant and its history belong not to the vagrant speaker, who is silenced, but to his or her accuser instead.

Above all, we detect in the literature of vagrancy – whether representation of invention, or in what degree a combination of both – three things: the recognition or manufacture of an 'other', a rage to order, and the particularly literary pleasure of discovering or inventing a theatre for moral and aesthetic exercise. Indeed, all three things are entailed in each other, but worth isolating thus, because of the way in which they inform the relationship of vagrancy to colonialism, and of both to the humanist moment, with its nascent empirical inclination (collecting, measuring, accounting, translating). Moreover, all three – other, order and pleasure – inform the enduring relationship of vagrancy to literature itself. The interest in cant, as also the interest of cant, lies in the way it describes all these bridges, for a 'language' is the inventive

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Orwell offers a chapter of 'some notes, as short as possible, on ... some of the cant words now used in London'. The chapter is four-and-a-half pages long and its throwaway tone perpetuates the dismissal of history's proper interest in the subject (not least that it fuels Orwell's interest and is sold on to his readers in a book). His concluding paragraph reveals both this dismissal and its dissimulation (as Orwell pretends cant to be only a subject of linguistics):

These are a few notes that I have set down more or less at random. It is a pity that someone capable of dealing with the subject does not keep a year-book of London slang and swearing, registering the changes accurately. It might throw useful light upon the formation, development and obsolescence of words.

mirror in which an other is found, it is the first grammar of order, it is the measure of man, and the tissue of literature. That a language should be discovered at the secret heart of vagrancy points up the significance of the subject, and alerts us to the fact that what we have been taught lies at the margins of social experience is in fact central, a metaphor for that grand project (or tragic banality), the human condition.

In South African terms the proper correlatives for cant are such forms as *tsotsitaal* and *slaaitaal*, dialects of the periphery in which a sector of an underclass, and its purpose, is defined in speech-practice. In the imagination of the powerful, these 'languages' facilitate conspiracy, but their rate of development, and, indeed, of delivered utterance, suggests that they are better suited to the short-lived events of petty crime than to treason: what they signify is the backstreets, and what they facilitate is the hustle. Their syncretism marks the proximity of the poor to the truly various conditions of reality (a fact that the category-dependent ideologies of nation, race, class or sex would seek to conceal) and the truth that language evolves out of contrariety. There is an historical correlative for cant in South African history, too, a dialect whose early occasions are held by scholars to include Andrew Geddes Bain's 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', itself a satire of vagrancy in the 19th century Cape: that dialect is, of course, what we know today as the Afrikaans language.

As early as 1925, in the context of a nationalist concern with the proper place of Afrikaans, the literary provenance of the language was being noted in the instance of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'.⁵⁴ Attracting the popular attention of *Die Huisgenoot* in 1945, the '*besondere belang*' of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' lay in '*die omstandigheid dat dit as een van die vroegste stukke moet geld waarin Afrikaans gebruik word.*'⁵⁵ The poem and its accompanying sketch are the focus of our concern later, but for now it is worth remarking that the *Huisgenoot* article (commenting specifically on the distinct tone of the patter of the sketch, in which the Afrikaans of the piece is altogether more evident) spoke of its tone as being '*nou plat, grof, vol lelike woorde en naakte toespelings*'.⁵⁶ This description of a flat, thick, rough speech, full of ugly words and naked references, recalls with surprising similarity the 'lewd, lousy language' that Harman called cant.⁵⁷ Stephen Gray, in his charming misreading of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' (see chapter 3) says of its eponymous heroine that 'she was, as every Afrikaans-speaking pupil knows, also making an early and vital contribution to the origins of the Afrikaans language.'⁵⁸ Kaatje's contribution he terms a 'regional lingo' and a 'linguistic bredie',⁵⁹ terms which share in the (mildly derogating) relish and 'regional' or proto-

G. Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 187, 191.

⁵⁴ 'G. S. N[ienaber]', *Die Huisgenoot*, 26 October 1945.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors*, Salgado (ed), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 146.

⁵⁸ S. Gray, 'The Frontier Myth and Hottentot Eve', *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, 52.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

national fascination of early accounts of cant. It is the same old story. In the 1830s Bain (and probably Frederick Rex) put Afrikaans in the mouth of a Khoisan woman, not as speech, but as 'speetses'⁶⁰, a language learnt by Bain or Rex from the Khoisan example, and not, as the *Huisgenoot* would have it, 'van die boere in die omgewing', who would not pronounce it thus.⁶¹ Kaatje Kekkelbek is the *locus classicus* of the 'hotnotsmeid', the feckless, lewd and strident woman, who refuses her intended servitude and her virginity in rejecting the maid's place in any language. In the years when Afrikaans was projected as a central claim to the nationhood of Afrikanerdom, we find that same nationalism refuting the language's provenance among the 'geel nasie' of the Khoisan.⁶² In his poem, 'Die Afrikaanse Taal', J. Lion Cachet establishes a lineage: Afrikaans is a 'Boerenol' fathered by Dutch of a French mother.⁶³ But he cannot avoid admitting what everyone says and knows to be true: *Hul skel my uit vir Hotnotsmeid*. It is not just that Afrikaans would thereby become miscegenated (in the terms of a racially obsessed nationalism), but that it would become the language of vagrants, a Pedlar's French, cant, a deception and an illusion, and at best a dialect, not a language, and no claim to nation.

The significance of vagrant language, whether cant or Kaatje's, persists throughout these pages, but we cannot pass from our considerations here without advancing one observation central to this thesis. It is in the instance of language that vagrancy offers its greatest, if not its first, interest to literature, for language is the seam suturing the two. In language and its quest for the limits to expression, or in the quest to explore and extend those limits, literature and vagrancy meet. Certainly there is, to literature and the culture it participates in, a lasting interest in the figure of wandering, supplying as that does the metaphor for any number of social, psychological or existential excursions. But all literary treatments of vagrancy recur to the theme of language also, as if this is the means by which the text and the vagrant both wander. We expect this: the unit of rhythm, that marks time in poetry, is called a foot. The vagrant does not only walk away from society (or seem to, to literature), he also speaks away from it. In this the language of the vagrant becomes orphic and avant garde, and attracts the narcissistic attentions (and the philosophical, to be fair) of those whose art is linguistic. The potential of vagrant utterance is enviable: it may occur in mania, where the true audience is the self or the imaginations of schizophrenia, it investigates taboo by breaking the same, it proceeds from the libidinal and riotous unconscious, speaking directly and with relish of sex and scatology, it enjoys (at a price) the licence of the Fool to condemn and shame and taunt, and especially to give and take pleasure and pain at the boundary between the two. Its lexicon is forbidden, its grammar

⁶⁰ A. G. Bain, 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'. This is our subject in chapter 3.

⁶¹ 'G. S. N[jenaber]'. *Huisgenoot*, 26 October 1945.

⁶² *ibid.*

disordered, its tenor irregular, its occasion inappropriate. Its subjects are precisely what are forbidden in the officers' mess: politics sex and religion. In form and content it is subversive.

The fraternity of vagabonds

In fact, what we have begun to sketch is the correspondence between the 'invention' of vagrancy (or at least the early modern fascination with it) and the transposition of vagrant attributes (of behaviour, language, appearance and so on) to the indigenous inhabitants (and particularly the Khoisan) at the Cape in the colonial era.⁶⁴ Early accounts of the Khoikhoi revel in the same language of the fabulous as do the sixteenth century schedules and descriptions of vagabonds and rogues.⁶⁵ Such European descriptions are themselves the consequence of the relative novelty of vagrancy – at least of such degree – in the social landscape of a youngly capitalist Europe, but they are also descended from a notable lineage of European – or Western – representations of the 'other'. Books such as Thomas Harman's *Caveat for Common Cursitors Vulgarly Called Vagabonds* (1566) and John Awdeley's *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561) reflect the common Renaissance preoccupation with the wandering and newly landless – or, rather, homeless – poor of the new order, no longer joined to the land by the tributary ties of the old.

The Renaissance texts are an industry derived of the crisis for personal productivity in the transition to capitalism. The flurry of pamphlets represents the quest for profit in the individuated humanism of the times, a quest encouraged by the printing press, itself among the first technologies to manufacture its own market, and a mass one at that. The scale of the enterprise in publications around vagrancy may be gleaned not only from the number of related titles, but from the fact that several went into second and third editions in short order.⁶⁶ They were pirated, borrowed from each other and traded on each other's success. 'The pamphlets were a great publishing success', notes Beier, '...[b]etween 1590 and 1630 the literature

⁶³ J. Lion Cachet 'Die Afrikaanse Taal', D. J. Opperman (ed.), *Groot Verseboek*, 14.

⁶⁴ Although I don't go into it in any detail here, there is every reason to read a reversed transposition at play in the characterisation of the European vagrant. (Indeed, we have already seen the donation of 'Irishness' to the idea.) Attributes of the colonial indigene might just as well infiltrate the discourse of metropolitan vagrancy as the other way around, and probably there is a two-way traffic, itself blurring distinctions in the creation of a global underclass. By way of an example, it is as easy to see vagrant branding conflated with scarification in colonised populations, but equally necessary to recognise that the genre of the tattoo is elaborated through the metropolitan contact with tattooing cultures. The Khoisan may look like Bedlamites, but then the tattooed vagrant also looks like a Polynesian, and may, as a sailor, have picked up his marks there. I do not want to suggest that all agency is metropolitan, though the power gradient of colonisation inclines us to construct our sentences that way.

⁶⁵ For a brief account of the early images of the Khoisan, see E. Boonzaier *et al*, *The Cape Herders*, 8–9; see also S. Gray, *South African Literature*, 42.

boomed'.⁶⁷ There is about the bustle of the presses much that those presses projected of the vagrant: the often invisible author (Harman said of cant that 'the first inventor thereof was hanged'⁶⁸ – the ultimate effacement and yet another mark of the treasonable), the economy of coterie, the regularity of order (so a 'fraternity' of vagabonds, scheduled as types, equates with a 'family' of type fount, for example), the mass (of print run and of vagabond horde). Even the passage of the pamphlet imitates that of the vagrant in passing unpredictably from hand to hand, in congregating in the taverns, in travelling the length and breadth, highways and byways, in eluding the law, in its inherent transitoriness and ephemerality, in its loudness, in asking for money, in its association with the economy of the pedlar and the culture of the strolling player. (So, a little later, we might remark the deep coincidence of the origins of colonial literature and the travels of individuals to and into the Cape.)⁶⁹ At the heart of the Renaissance accounts lies a deep sense of the 'trade' of vagrancy. William Harrison used that term of it in the 1570s, but the accounts all share an inclination to describe the methods and orders of vagrants, as if describing the techniques of guilds (we will recall how even cant was likened to the technical vocabulary of carpentry). This template of the guild is blent with 'fraternity' in a manner that anticipates freemasonry, even as it harks back to the (dissolute, ruined) monastic orders of the pre-Reformation landscape – a manner somewhat ominous and alienating.

The descriptive schedules of the Renaissance are thus a kind of ethnography of the underclass, fascinated by the nationally alien and the fundamentally different trade of 'tradelessness'. Their accounts of the types of vagabond are full of the extraordinary and the repulsive, and shot through with the assertion of the fraudulence of the vagrant's poverty. The best example of these descriptive accounts, and not least because it is the first, is the *Liber Vagatorum*. There one is acquainted with, for example, the 'Voppers ... for the most part women, who allow themselves to be led in chains as if they were raving mad'.⁷⁰ In an equivalent Austro-Italian schedule one encounters such dubious marvels as the 'Accaponi, or Ulcerated, who made

⁶⁶ see, for example Salgado (ed), 'Note on the Texts', *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 25–6.

⁶⁷ Beier, *Masterless Men*, 8.

⁶⁸ Salgado (ed), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 85. As an illuminating aside, it is worth noting (as I have not yet seen it elsewhere) that Harman's surname is a cant term also. The 'harmans' (by his own account) is cant for the stocks, and a 'harman-beck' represents a constable. I know of no reason to doubt the veracity of Harman's name (nor any reason to believe it), but it is serendipitous that the surname of the accusing author should share in the cant denotations of the constraining agencies of the law (against vagrants). And here, again, the author and his undertaking is entailed in, and prospers by, the culture of vagrants. In modern parlance we might say that 'Harman' looks like a canny brand-name.

⁶⁹ Ian Glenn has insisted upon the seminality of Le Vaillant to much of South African literary (and other) culture. Mine is not a point he makes directly, but it is indebted to his outlook. See I. Glenn, 'The Man Who Invented Safaris', *New Contrast*, 130, 62–70, and, in which he traces the significance of shipwreck and travel narratives, 'The Future of the Past in English South African Literary history', *Quarterly Bulletin of the SA Library*, 38–46.

⁷⁰ *Liber Vagatorum*, 105.

ulcers on their legs with powder, toast and blood'.⁷¹ By the time such schedules filter into the English productions we are taught to distinguish (and how to) between a Ruffler, a Rogue, a Wild Rogue, a Mort, an Autem Mort, a Doxy, a Prigger of Prancers, a Frater, a Palliard, a Bawdy Basket, an Upright Man, an Abraham Man, a Dummerer, and so on.⁷² Awdeley's *Fraternity of Vagabonds* is even more exotic in flavour: its names are deeply imbued with cant, its descriptions curt and the more knowing, sure of themselves, for it. Even more powerful is the way his schedule appoints proper nouns to the classes of vagrant, as opposed to Harman's common nouns. The effect is to elevate these denizens of the underclass to the level of notables, as if of some realm-sinister, a gnostic anti-state. Awdeley's knaves, thus, take titles like 'Troll and Troll By' ('he that setteth naught by no man'), 'Troll Hazard of Trace', 'Troll Hazard of Tritrace', 'Chafe-Litter', 'Obloquium' and so on.⁷³ Such forms imitate the toponyms of an aristocracy and the Latin of a 'clerisy'. The Latin forms are revealing. 'Obloquium' emerges from the Latin 'to interrupt', 'Nunquam' from 'never': they exploit the numinous and authoritative language of Latin to impress upon the vagrant the essential characters of negativity and disruption. If these are meant to appear as names emerging within the 'other speech' of roguery (not exclusively vagrants here), then they are also imbued with the refutation and contradiction of the hegemonic language in which they are begun. They signify, thus, the discursive 'seed of peril', of riot and destruction, that is in 'vagabonds' (as Awdeley broadly conceives them), but they signify also the determination of hegemonic discourse to interrupt and never to allow that peril to germinate. Awdeley has another knave called 'Choplogic', which suggests exactly the linguistic hazard posed by the underworld to the semantics of power. His description extends the offence of 'Choplogic' from a servant's expatiations, a wordy cheek, to something altogether more dangerous, the darkest negation of approved discourse:

Choplogic is he that when his master rebuketh him of his fault he will give him twenty words for one, else bid the devil's pater noster in silence.⁷⁴

Abstraction and actuality (or seeming actuality) are so mixed up in the schedule as to blend moral categories with the proper names of people. Awdeley's popular editor (Gamini Salgado, for Penguin) provides glosses for the Latin and obscure words, but accepts at face value the opaque 'Gyle Hather', 'a pickthank knave that would make his master believe that the cow is wood' (another instance of the dissembling character of rogue discourse: nothing is as it appears

⁷¹ Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 557.

⁷² Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors*, Salgado (ed), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy-Baskets*, 81ff.

⁷³ Awdeley, *Fraternity of Vagabonds*, Salgado (ed), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 72ff.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 76.

to be, language is unreliable to know the world).⁷⁵ Although Salgado makes no gloss upon 'Gyle Hather', one Martin Markall in the 16th century accounted Captain Giles Hather the first Gypsy leader in England.⁷⁶ The historical figure is hearsay, but we see a putatively real Romany king muddled up with a knave servant whose own art is the art of muddling. The schedules claim to represent an attempt at making clear this state of confusion, but in effect what they do is generate it. Their inventions – suffused as they are with cant-like borrowings from European languages, the forms of hegemonic titles, the blurring of proper and common nouns, concrete and abstract – work to fulfil their own prophecy of rogue peril, the hazardous confusion of a world turned upside down and inside out, a by-blow world of the demiurge, a world spoken backwards.

Yet they pretend an order, and do so after the long example of other accumulations, the quantitative authority of collections, of lists. At a glance, these checklists of vagrant types remind us of the litany of German tribes besetting the Roman empire in Tacitus, or of Herodotus's records of those beyond the Greek ken. It is an enthusiasm for type and kind present in Mandeville's fantastic travels, and familiar to the medieval mind – and beyond – from the pages of the bestiary or the collations of the herbarium. It replicates itself in the pseudoscience of the 'Discoveries', of the sort we find in the early accounts of the indigenes of the Cape. Dapper's (1668) *Kaffraria or Land of the Kafirs, Otherwise named Hottentots*, begins with just such a schedule:

The principal peoples, then, whom our country men have up till now discovered in the southernmost portion of Africa, are the following: the Gorachouquas, Goringhaiquas, Goringhaikonas, Great and Little Karichuriquas, Hosaas, Chainouquas, Kobonas, Sonquas, Namaquas, Heusaquas, Brigoudyns, and Hankumquas.⁷⁷

Ten Rhyne's *Short Account of the Cape of Good Hope and of the Hottentots who Inhabit that Region* (1686) follows the same template. Despite the details which follow each list, the effect is primarily one of fabulous estrangement: a fusillade of nominative fireworks, apparently belonging to each other by the signs of internal coherence, echoes and parallelisms, but utterly alien, a cacophony of hisses and bangs.

Inherited also from early European example is a sense of the vagrant population, as also the indigenous populations of the Cape, as threateningly numerous. Stephen Greenblatt summarises Herodotus's seminal projection of the Scythian presence (or absence) in Greek history and culture, noting among other things the evocation of a horde, an inchoate mass

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 75.

⁷⁶ Beier, *Masterless Men*, 59.

disturbing the peripheral vision of settled Greece.⁷⁸ In addition, and tellingly, he points out the fundamental correspondence between Herodotus's vision of Scythian barbarianism and their nomadism.⁷⁹ This is no less true of later representations of the barbarian invasions of Roman Europe and Africa, a point famously collected by C. P. Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' and adopted (in a fictional circumstance redolent of both Roman North Africa and the Graaff-Reinet frontier of landdrost Maynier) by J. M. Coetzee's novel of the same title. What is significant here is the manner in which European vagrants, by virtue of their habits, carry and transmit the idea of the 'horde without' and the otherness of the nomadic life in the ideologies of settled and agricultural political economies.

Perceptions of the numbers of beggars in early modern England encompassed a considerable body of itinerants on the land and in the towns. William Harrison's 'Description of England', heavily indebted to Harman and appearing in Holinshed's widely read *Chronicles* (1577), claimed that

It is not yet full threescore years since this trade began: but how it hath prospered since that time it is easy to judge, for they are now supposed, of one sex and another, to amount unto above ten thousand persons, as I have heard reported.⁸⁰

An accurate census may not be possible, nor is it strictly necessary. We are concerned with perceptions:

Whatever the actual numbers, contemporary observers, from pamphleteers to the Privy Council, felt that the problem of beggars was real, acute, and rapidly growing. As early as the 1530s, Thomas Starkey had written that "this is sure, that in no cuntrey of Christundome, for the nombur of pepul, you schal find so many beggaris as be here in Englund, and mo[re] now then have bin before time."⁸¹

A rhetoric of number seems inevitable in any account of the 'other', where a contrary force is implicitly being reckoned, and particularly where that 'other' is a moving field, uncertain of census and multiplying itself in repeated journeys, which, though iterations of the same population, come to seem different not in occasion but in essence. The transhumance of the Khoisan marks their first kinship with the itinerant in early modern Europe, but, likewise, it binds the two in an apparent fecundity of population. Thus a rhetoric of number is certainly a

⁷⁷ O. Dapper, *Kaffraria or Land of the Hottentots*, in I. Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 7–8.

⁷⁸ S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 122–128.

⁷⁹ Greenblatt notes that he is following others in this, most notably Francois Hartog (*The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*).

⁸⁰ W. Harrison, 'Description of England', Salgado (ed.), *Cory-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 10. Beier, *Masterless Men*, 8.

priority in early descriptions of the Khoisan: the Sonquas, says Dapper, 'are a people dwelling in massive mountainous country. They number several thousands,' and the Namaquas are 'strong in numbers, and with many children'.⁸² But it is in the nineteenth century, for reasons that we shall come to later, that the rhetoric of number really conflates the Khoisan and the vagrant. We hear again and again of 'the number of Vagabonds always roving about the Colony'⁸³, of 'numerous gangs of Vagabonds roving about the Colony'⁸⁴, of those who 'roam through the country in numbers without any ostensible means of livelihood'⁸⁵. We hear that 'great Numbers of Coloured Persons without any means of livelyhood [sic] are constantly roaming ...'⁸⁶ and that the country (here the Roggeveld) 'is infested with numbers of wandering Hottentots and Apprentices, who assemble together in Hordes, without the least visible means of subsistence, roving about from place to place ... lawless vagabonds.'⁸⁷ At Graaff-Reinet locals complained, '[t]hat the immediate vicinity of this town is infested with gangs of people of colour, chiefly Hottentots, who are in a state of poverty and who have no visible means of subsistence.'⁸⁸

This 'Host of Vagabonds' is characterised by a lexical field: words such as 'gangs', 'bands', 'horde', 'banditte', 'host', 'roving', 'wandering', 'roaming', and 'infest' recur again and again.⁸⁹ Besides accentuating difference by the amplification of threat, these are words that connote bestiality, criminality, and mobility. In the context of the Cape, they echo contemporary phrasing in the instance of the Mfecane/Difaqane beyond the colonial borders, where over and again the spectre of 'the Fitcani horde' is conjured up.⁹⁰ The implication of vast numbers consolidates the alien as a threat, of either animal or human dimensions, a swarm or, most potently, an army. The chain of connotation implies those animals (or even plants) which inflict pain or poison and which overwhelm by numbers. The lexical shadow of an army is complex: as 'gangs' and 'bands' it is a guerrilla insurgency which is discerned, as a 'host' or 'horde' it is a vast infantry on the move. Both work to suggest the threat to the state and its citizens, with the smaller units imputing treasonable intent, in the specific sense of configuring a threat from within. It is worth noting, however, that strict and precise military nouns are not used: words like 'army' itself, or 'regiment', say. That such terms are not used displays the deeper untruth of those terms which hint at the military, or any degree of organised insurrection. In the breach of their

⁸¹ Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 31–2.

⁸² Dapper, *Kaffraria or Land of the Hottentots*, 31, 37.

⁸³ J. H. Van Reenen, 'Memorial', Cape Town, 2 September 1839, CA, CO 4002.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ C. Plessis, 'Memorial', Colesburg, 1844, CA, CO 4022

⁸⁶ J. P. Van der Walt, 'Memorial', Colesburg, 10 Oct 1844. CA, CO 4023.

⁸⁷ W. A. Visser, 'Memorial', Middle Roggeveld, 3 Sept, 1839. CA, CO 4003.

⁸⁸ 'Memorial, Inhabitants of Graaff-Reinet', 1 December 1828. CA, CO 3938.

⁸⁹ Any of the CO files from which these representations are drawn will demonstrate this. 'The Host of Vagabonds' is the phrase of J.H. van Reenen, 'Memorial', Cape Town, 2 September 1839. CO 4002.

(non-)use we are able to recognise the essential character of imprecision and sprawl that attends the figuration of the vagrant or the colonial indigene. In part, this is an accusation of a disorder within the realm, but it is also a characteristic that works to alienate and to intensify the danger of the alien: as the saying goes, better the devil you know than the devil you don't. An army might be known, precisely, but a host or a horde or a gang – these are things whose very imprecision is part of their horror.

Already by the seventeenth century, accounts of the Cape indigenes, and particularly the Khoisan, evoke the numerous, the curious and the spectacular, according to the established template of pseudoscientific description. In this they are associated with the categories of 'otherness' attending European vagrants in a lineage descended from the early European literatures of travel and history.⁹¹ But there is also evidence of the transmission of moral attributes associated with the Renaissance vagrant. For example, the rhetoric of idleness which J. M. Coetzee has discussed in the context of European attitudes to the Khoisan is one familiar to almost all accounts of European vagrancy of the time, and one that lasts from late medieval Europe to contemporary South Africa.⁹² Coetzee is at pains to trace the opprobrium attending idleness to the uncomfortable resolutions of Christian attitudes to work and contemplation, particularly in the context of the Reformation and its relationship to (an early capitalist) Renaissance.⁹³ His inclination is to locate the charge of idleness in wholly discursive practice, running from Catholic orthodoxy, through Protestantism and the Enlightenment: that is, he sees it proceeding from the history of ideas first and foremost. He makes only passing mention of the adjunct history of actual 'idleness' in metropolitan economy and society – the problem of the workless poor in a new social order.⁹⁴ In part, this is the right attitude to adopt, because it insists at the outset upon the *invention* of vagrancy (though Coetzee does so only implicitly). There remains the danger, however, of treating the discursive practice as if it floats free of any cause in real conditions. A history of ideas alone might neglect to see the real social and

⁹⁰ See below, 101ff.

⁹¹ Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions* provides a pointed exposition of the tradition, some of which is detailed above. See his chapter 5, 119 ff.

⁹² J. M. Coetzee, 'Idleness in South Africa', *White Writing*, 12 ff.; Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, vii, and throughout: English laws concerning vagrancy generally refer to idleness as notable among its supposed evils (ordinances of Henry VIII, 73; Edward VI, 89; James I, 132; Cromwell, 161). In Cape history, the 1809 Caledon Code, a foundation of Khoisan constraint and the local ideology of vagrancy (and itself an antipathetic colonial correlative to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807) sought to be 'an encouragement for preferring entering the service of the Inhabitants to leading an indolent life, by which [the 'Hottentots'] are rendered useless both for themselves and the community at large.' (*Proclamation*, 1 Nov. 1809.) V. C. Malherbe has noted that the earlier 20th century historians of the Khoisan, such as Hodgson and Macmillan, have subscribed to their representation as 'idle', Hodgson (1924) going so far as to refer to "his vagrant propensities". ('The Hottentots in South Africa', 613 - 21, cited in Malherbe, 'The Cape Khoisan in the Eastern Districts', 11ff).

⁹³ Coetzee, 'Idleness in South Africa', 19–20.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 20–21.

economic correspondences between metropolitan vagrants and colonial subjects, such as the way in which both imply (to a Whig outlook, for example) similar burdens upon the welfare of the free market, or the way in which both occupy the constructed margin of economic relations that Marx called the lumpenproletariat, being thus bound in what some might argue to be one class. Here, as elsewhere, it is as if the Khoisan are inserted into the European apprehension of vagrancy, marginalized by association, or associated by marginality. In a global economy established by 'free trade' (not least in slaves) and colonialism, the real (as opposed to wholly discursive) correspondences are more manifest to the eyes of the 21st century. Idleness is an ideological category, to be sure, and of that degree of resolution that we call 'moral', but it also signifies (with moral spin) the economic reality of unemployment. When early commentators berate the Khoisan for their idleness we need to be sure that what is criticised is only the easy way of life of those moving in an economy without landed property or agriculture, and not also their 'uselessness' to a metropolitan economy in which they have not been commodified as slaves or otherwise subdued to the productive relations of capitalism. (Once either happens, the charge of idleness persists, though now as a goad to enhanced productivity and as the false consciousness of subjection).

There are other attributes associating the Khoisan with the early modern vagrant – indeed, very few are noted by commentators of either that are not shared. These are starkly delineated in one of the most popular and enduring 'types' of European vagrant – and almost certainly the one with the deepest reach into culture generally. This is the figure of the Abraham Man of early modern Europe, who 'walketh bare armed and bare legged' and 'fayneth hym selfe mad and caryeth a packe of wool, or a styke with baken on it, or such like toy, and nameth himself poore Tom.'⁹⁵ This figure remains familiar to us today, in French he is *le fou*, he is the Poor Tom of *King Lear*,⁹⁶ he certainly dominates the passenger list of the Ship of Fools, and is everywhere to be seen on Cape Town, or any other, streets in the same guise today, often dreadlocked, patchworked or in hessian sacking, spectacularly arrayed in costume and in gesture, carrying a staff, oracular in his schizophrenia or borrowed mania, somewhat frightening and frequently aggressive. He has changed little since the sixteenth century: 'he goes without breeches; a cut jerkin with hanging sleeves in imitation of our Gallants – but no Sattin or Chamlet elbowse, for both his legs and armes are bare ... a face staring like a Sarazen; his haire

⁹⁵ Awdeley, *The Fraternity of Vagabonds*, Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 593), Salgado (ed.), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 62.

⁹⁶ Carroll offers an excellent reading of Lear's Fool as a Tom O'Bedlam, in which, among other things, he points out the depth and breadth of the Poor Tom tradition after 1605, and the sentimentalisation of the Abraham Man over time. *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 180ff.

long and filthy knotted ... a good Filche (or staffe) of grown Ash or else Hazel ...⁹⁷ Certainly he is the same as the 'Loving Mad Tom' or 'Tom O'Bedlam' of the great anonymous poem, first appearing just twenty years after Shakespeare's death. In Tom we find a figure of manic energy (the rhythm of the poem is full of it), hyper-sexual, threatening, epileptic (or something like it), a stockthief, a lunatic, an oathbroker, a wanderer. We know that he has been incarcerated. He drinks. He sings (implicitly in this Mad Song). His song is propelled by rhythm, as a dance is. He spews arcane knowledge. He rants. His language, in his madness, darkens with an opacity like that of cant. His social reference accommodates 'gypsies', 'punks', 'the cutpurse', 'roaring boys': that is, wanderers, whores, pickpockets and gangsters. Moreover, he threatens 'an host .../ Whereof I am commander', and with this army 'To the wilderness I wander'.

How similar are later representations of the Khoisan. The Abraham Man's 'stick with bacon on it' becomes the offal draped on Khoi shoulders⁹⁸, and perhaps also, by association, the animal fat with which the Khoi body is dressed. 'When going about, they usually have in the one hand an ostrich feather, or a stick with the tail of a wild cat tied to it.'⁹⁹ By 1832, the ordinary dress of the precolonial Khoisan is sufficient to indicate vagrancy: in prosecuting Jan Vlink on the charge of vagrancy, the state drew attention to his dress (reported as 'a sheepskin kaross and no undergarment whatever') alongside his theft of wood.¹⁰⁰ The *Grahams Town Journal* noted in the same week Saul Ruyter, also charged with vagrancy: 'His appearance ... was rather that of a wild beast than a human.'¹⁰¹

The moon-familiar Tom is echoed in the Khoi's alleged cult of the moon: 'The moon, as has been said, they worship by dancing', '... they shave their heads into full moons, crescent moons, or stars'.¹⁰² Dapper noted that '[t]hey also appear to have some superstition about the new moon; for when this is seen, they all turn towards it in groups, and make merry the whole night, dancing, jumping, singing and clapping their hands, and also murmuring in their mouths.'¹⁰³ Even in early accounts (and widely in later ones) the Khoi drink and crave tobacco, they 'hanker very greedily after brandy and Spanish wine, as well as tobacco; although they become sated and drunk from only a little, when they create a tremendous tumult of shouting

⁹⁷ Thomas Dekker, *O per O Se*, (EEBO, 41ff), and cited (with editorial adjustments) in Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 191 (note). Dekker's description is extended below.

⁹⁸ See, for example, O.Dapper, *Kaffraria or the Land of the Hottentots*, I. Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 53, 61.

⁹⁹ Dapper, *Kaffraria or the Land of the Hottentots*, Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ *Graham's Town Journal*, 1, 4, January 20 1832.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* We return to the theme of vagrant dress, 167ff below.

¹⁰² Ten Rhynne, *Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, Schapera, (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 141, 119. Schapera points out that the 'worship' of sun and moon may well be a misconception of the worship of a creator deity acknowledged in these bodies (119).

¹⁰³ Dapper, *Kaffraria or Land of the Hottentots*, Schapera, (ed.) *Early Cape Hottentots*, 77. It is worth noting the image of murmuring or mumbling also. Vagrant language is discussed below.

and babbling.¹⁰⁴ By the 1830s, when colonial agitation for a vagrancy law was at its height, as we shall see, such iconography of disorderliness is pervasive in accounts of homeless indigenes. And it seems no coincidence that this same period – the 1830s, in the years between Ordinance 50 and the failed campaign for a vagrancy ordinance – sees something akin to a craze for temperance societies and activities in colonial society.¹⁰⁵

Poor Tom is a stockthief, just as the Khoisan and later the Cape vagrant are represented to be, as we shall see with 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'. 'They are great plunderers and marauders,' reports Dapper, 'They steal from other Hottentots all the cattle they can get'.¹⁰⁶ Ten Rhyne concurs: 'They are so addicted to theft, that one neighbour does not stick to enrich himself by stealing the cattle of another.'¹⁰⁷ The eternal corollary of vagrancy is stocktheft, or theft of some sort at least. In all the memorials with which the Governor was plagued in the years following Ordinance 50, the chorus of stocktheft follows complaints of vagrancy as inevitably as vagrancy's first two vices – the entwined and intriguingly antithetical attributes of idleness and mobility.¹⁰⁸

It is possible to apply a similar comparative reading to representations of such attributes as sexuality and madness, and these might be sketched more fully in the context of Cape literature's own Tom O'Bedlam – Kaatje Kekkelbek – as we do in chapter 3. Vagrant sexuality follows in the broad swathe of 'disorderliness', but under the constraints of patriarchy. Female 'vagrants' turn out to be arrested for vagrancy when their 'offence' is actually prostitution.¹⁰⁹ Male vagrants are sexually aggressive: Saul Rondganger (the name itself means 'vagrant') is prosecuted for breach of the peace when, drunk, he draws blood in his fight with a woman.¹¹⁰ Much later, in the figure of yet another Mad Tom, here 'Blinkwater Johnny' from Table Mountain, we recognise a suite of attributes, not the least of which is his sexual charisma: his popularity with other male vagrants seeming to have been in inverse ratio to his popularity with their wives, a state of affairs that involved him in many arguments.¹¹¹ If we go back to the

¹⁰⁴ Dapper, *Kaffraria or Land of the Hottentots*, Schapera, (ed.) *Early Cape Hottentots*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ See for example the *Graham's Town Journal* of this period. Early numbers of the first volume are full of the temperance issue (1, 7, February 10 1832 & 1, 10, March 2 1832).

¹⁰⁶ Dapper, *Kaffraria or the Land of the Hottentots*, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Ten Rhyne, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, 123.

¹⁰⁸ Once again, any of the Colonial Office files containing the many memorials on the subject during the 1820s, 30s and 40s will demonstrate this.

¹⁰⁹ *Graham's Town Journal*, 1, 4, January 20 1832. *Rex v Lys Sampson* and two others for vagrancy.

¹¹⁰ *Graham's Town Journal*, 1, 5, 27 January 1832 (which includes a long editorial against 'vagrant hordes').

¹¹¹ W. H. Crump, 'Blinkwater Johnny', *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 47, (1944). I am indebted to Lance van Sittert for this and several other insights into the specific history of the true *bergie*. It is a partly anachronistic instance, but the anachronism serves the purpose of the argument in extending the temporal (and geographical) range of the 'Cape vagrant' under consideration. For example, it is very worth noting that 'Johnny would often go down to Camps Bay and being fond of poultry, would frequently obtain a bird from one or other of the Camps Bay residents, though the resident at the time might not have been aware of it, being more or less a sleeping partner in the transaction.' There is an account of Blinkwater's oracular and 'mad' religious impulse in the same article (it imitates the story of Abraham and Isaac). Throughout it is worth noting both the worthiness of the article (it holds

record of early European representations of the Khoisan we come across plenty that is sexually prurient, most famously the obsession with the female genitalia (the case of Saartje Baartman is most pertinent, but Krotoa, called Eva, is also remarked upon for her ‘intemperate vice’ or lust – as also her drunkenness), which is too well described for this paper to repeat.¹¹² Suffice, here, in keeping with the record of early accounts reflected here, to note this observation of the Khoisan by Ten Rhyne, that ‘[t]hese lawless barbarians and immoral pagans practise only those habits to which a blind impulse of nature irresistibly impels them ... Abandoned as they are to every vice, they practise the rite of Venus *a posteriori* ... Thus after the fashion of the beasts they rush on their mutual embrace.’¹¹³ Kaatje Kekkelbek flirts with the soldiers at Jolly’s canteen; her friend is Saartje Zeekoegat (a caricature, it would seem, of Baartman: the surname is lewd: ‘Hippowallow’, ‘Hippohole’). The records of the Resident Magistracy in the frontier town of Grahamstown in the 1830s, Kaatje’s context, abound with cases of ‘public indecency’: nakedness, exposure, lewd language.¹¹⁴

What of Tom’s madness? He, like many of his kind, is afflicted with ‘the palsy’. It is worth noting the association of vagrancy and epilepsy (although in the case of the Khoisan it may only really be related to aspects of ‘trance’ experience and of the perception of Khoisan language as a kind of stammering – discussed below). Whereas “knaves with the falling sickness”¹¹⁵ were perceived as a popular beggars’ deceit in sixteenth century Europe, it is likely that many vagrants did, and do, suffer from the illness. About 10% of the total sample of a 1982 survey of Cape Town vagrants reported suffering from epilepsy (reflecting 22% of all illness recorded).¹¹⁶ Of course, it is a small step from the perceived social ‘disorderliness’ of the vagrant to a belief in the psychological incoherence of the subject. The rhetoric of anti-vagrant agitation abounds in such words as ‘injury’¹¹⁷, ‘infested’¹¹⁸, ‘ruin’¹¹⁹, ‘pretence’¹²⁰, ‘runaway’¹²¹, ‘disorderly’¹²², and as the governor Napier himself appears to have remarked in a pencilled comment on one of

folkloric value of some kind) and the tone of mordant irony, at once patronising and legitimating, fond. The point is that hegemonic society, as suggested below, both vilifies and reveres the vagrant, and for the same reason: that the vagrant escapes, exceeds and extends the limits of social practice and experience.

¹¹² V. C. Malherbe, *Krotoa, Called Eva: A Woman Between*. C. Coetzee, ‘Krotoa, the Uncanny Mother’. E. Elbourne, ‘Terrible Ambiguities: Khoisan Visits to London in the Early 19th Century’.

¹¹³ Ten Rhyne, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, Schapera, (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 127.

¹¹⁴ ‘Albany: Criminal Record Book, 1835–7 CA, 1/AY: 3/1/1/1/3. We consider this fully below, 80ff.

¹¹⁵ The phrase is in Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 545.

¹¹⁶ M. Nash and B. Kincaid-Weekes, *The Rains are Coming*, 18.

¹¹⁷ ‘Memorial, Inhabitants of Albany’, 24 September 1829 (received), CA, CO 3941.

¹¹⁸ ‘Memorial, Inhabitants of Graaff-Reinet’, 1 December 1828, CA, CO 3938. ‘Memorial, Inhabitants of Baviaans River’, 28 August 1828 (received), CA, CO 3938.

¹¹⁹ ‘Memorial, Inhabitants of Albany’, 24 September 1829 (received), CA, CO 3941.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ ‘Memorial, Inhabitants of Baviaans River’, 28 August 1828 (received), CA, CO 3938.

¹²² As mentioned, and widely, but, e.g. ‘Memorial, Inhabitants of Cradock’, 10 November 1828, CA, CO 3938.

the many memorials: 'Everyone knows the Evil – but none the remedy.'¹²³ It is a lexicon associated with illness or hypochondria. Whether we are allowed to associate the Khoisan celebration of the moon with Tom O'Bedlam's literal lunacy is uncertain, though I suggest above that this is a profitable supposition. Perhaps the apparent 'sense' (or senselessness) of indigenous people at the Cape is best examined through European and colonial representations of Khoisan language and speech, for speech after all is the handmaiden of thought, and obviously and necessarily bound up with the encounter between peoples and the history of their subsequently shared experience.

It is a famous commonplace that the name 'Hottentot' derives from the peculiarities of Khoi speech, particularly in the context of their dance and song. Dapper asserts (or repeats) the etymology of the title. 'Their speech', he says 'is full of clicks like those of the turkey-cocks; they clap or clack each word in the mouth, as if a man were snapping his thumb ... Because of this our countrymen, observing this impediment and extraordinary stuttering in speech, have given them the name of Hottentots, in the same sense as that word is commonly used here at home as a taunt against anybody who stutters and stammers in uttering his words.'¹²⁴ Ten Rhyne, who actually encountered the Khoi, notes that '[i]f one listens to them talking, one supposes the age of Pythagoras to have returned, in which the birds were fabled to have enjoyed mutual converse in speech. In sober truth it is noise, not speech.'¹²⁵ In 1839 the colonial perception of vagrancy encompassed 'the innate propensity of our Coloured population ... to congregate together and pass their time in listless social chattering.'¹²⁶ The language and the speech of the other are not just liabilities to those who do not understand, they encrypt the other, are implicitly a tool against the reason of the observer, and they exist to corrupt. Such language plunges its speakers back into the noise of animals: turkey-cocks, birds, chattering apes. 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is onomatopoeia; her surname translates as 'Cacklemouth', something more vicious even than 'Chatterbox'.

So, too, we have seen early European accounts of vagrancy to be preoccupied with the 'Secret Jargon' of the vagrant,¹²⁷ several offering short vocabularies (just as European accounts of the Khoisan and Xhosa frequently do) of what was projected from without to be a kind of international sub- or anti-language. This representation of cant has a long history, as we have seen, but an equal geographical reach. Ribton-Turner's monumental history of vagrancy relays this account of the 'Metropolitan Gypsyries' of Wandsworth in 1864: 'Their language is the

¹²³ See W. A. Visser, 'Memorial', Middle Roggeveld, 3 September 1839, CA, CO 4003.

¹²⁴ Dapper, *Kaffraria or the Land of Hottentots*, Schapera, (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 71, and Introduction, v.

¹²⁵ Ten Rhyne, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots*, 153.

¹²⁶ J. H. Van Reenen, Memorial, Cape Town, 2 September 1839, CO 4002.

¹²⁷ Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 467ff.

frowsiest English, interlarded with cant expressions and a few words of bastard Romany.¹²⁸ A frowsy, interlarded and bastard language recalls Stephen Gray's estimation of Kaatje Kekkelbek's 'linguistic bredie'. The association is more than superficial, for it invests the Khoisan, whether speaking 'Hottentot' or Afrikaans, with the mania and the culpability of cant. As Carroll remarks of the Abraham Man generally: 'Poor Tom of Bedlam is, after all, allegedly someone who has lost his mind ... his language fractured into disordered fragments.'¹²⁹ The language of the vagrant is, like that of the Khoisan, 'noise', unintelligible, disordered and incapable of reason. It is interesting to note how the languages of other nations are confused with vagrant speech (in England chiefly French, Dutch and Welsh), implicitly deracinating the vagrant at home. Similarly, early commentators on Khoisan society note the presence of 'broken English'¹³⁰ and 'Corrupt Dutch'¹³¹ in Khoisan language. And it is interesting to note the elements of cant which penetrate metropolitan English: words like 'booze'¹³², 'prat' (for buttock), 'dudes' (for clothes – whence the sense of dude as 'dandy?')¹³³. These are culled from lexicons of cant; they reflect popular ideas of the vagrant as a drinker, oddly dressed, transgressive (where the buttock is a restricted zone of the body). Without labouring the point, it may well be that the most used Khoisan word in South African English and Afrikaans is 'dagga'.

Negative as these representations may be, there is yet that intrigue to culture of the language of the vagrant, and it is complex, as we have suggested. It is as if in the process of alienating the vagrant, hegemonic society invests him or her with powers of insight (or oversight) and capabilities of speech that are not possible within the pale of convention. The itinerant becomes a cultural interloper and interlocutor, capable of experiencing and expressing experience beyond ordinary ken. Today, as in the historical record, an apprehension of the *verbality* of vagrant culture, and of the *boundlessness* (disorder and folly) of its utterance, persists. Capetonians, for instance, are fond of reciting instances of 'Bergie' monologue and dialogue. (Bergie female wheeled by male in a shopping trolley shouting, 'Ek soek 'ie jou seks 'ie; ek soek jou liefde!', or one cursing another 'Jou ma skuld my bond sakgeld!') The perceived attributes of 'Bergie' speech include a rich tradition of cursing and oath-breaking, scatology, and (perhaps inadvertent) aphorism. Of course, curses, oaths and scatology lie outside the bounds of polite convention, they represent transgressive utterance, just as the vagrant's very being represents a transgression of the dominant modes of property-holding, privacy, settledness, ownership and so on.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, 503.

¹²⁹ Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 194.

¹³⁰ Dapper, *Kaffraria or the Land of the Hottentots*, 73.

¹³¹ Ten Rhync, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, 155.

¹³² Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrancy*, 468; *Liber Vagatorum*, 149.

¹³³ *ibid.* 468.

All the literature in this study represents the speech of vagrants as it is held significant to the project of literature. There is not properly any vagrant speech, for it is always invented in the accusation of vagrancy by those who do so not least in order not to be vagrants themselves. In representing the speech of *bergies* we are beginning to participate in that accusation, for our own ends, scholarly-literary, which are untrustworthy in precisely the degree to which they seek also to profit by the accusation. This study becomes complicit in the invention of the category it seeks to show is invented and not real; it needs at least the invention to be real enough to sustain its fortunes. For this reason, no less than we have made enough of a beginning, the time has come to turn, not yet to literature, but to a local history and some consideration of the way vagrants have been said to be and say in the particular context of the Cape in the 19th century, when the contours of 'modern' South Africa are traced, and when the issue of vagrancy assumes an uncommon prominence in the tracing of those contours.

Shouting in the wilderness

By way of conclusion, and by way of an introductory context to the South African texts to which we must now pass, it is expedient to travel a little further in the company of the Abraham Man, and to descry in him something more of his seminality, not only to the lineage of the vagrant, but of the vagrant to literature. The *locus classicus* is really not so much 'Loving Mad Tom' as the Poor Tom of *King Lear*, and because the heath of that play stands for the stage itself, the theatre of literature (as we shall see in Chapter 4), and Poor Tom therefore for the malleable subject of literary imagination, *King Lear* is really the text from which the literary vagrant issues. What is more, Shakespeare's play is self-evidently an artefact of the same Renaissance crisis in which the modern vagrant is invented, and shares, therefore, in the social and cultural export of vagrancy to the new colonial periphery. Indeed, that conjunction of marginalities is anticipated in the Globe's proximity to Bedlam itself, both institutions across the frontier of the Thames, in Southwark.

For every figure projected by literature there is the test of accommodation. Whatever the circumstances of that figure's invention, he or she must proceed within them to success or failure, must come to grips with events or fail to come to grips with events. This is the ideological destination of stories, imitating (but concealing by substitution) the arbitrary destination of history. The tragic hero fails in this project, the simply good succeed, the existential hero achieves a more conscious death and a moral, if pyrrhic victory – but for all who

would survive, whether in flesh or spirit or in the moral lists of ideological posterity, the object is some accommodation – I use the word deliberately – that wholly reinvents the ‘character’ or subjectivity of the sufferer. If that accommodation is not made, then the subject is ‘unhoused’ and returned to history without the carapace of ideology (firstly of language) that is essential for surviving it. It is a commonplace of the Lacanian heritage to speak of this pass as that of a ‘subject in crisis’, whose recourse is threefold: to a reactionary acceptance of the status quo (which is to say the repression of those contradictions that cause suffering, and in their stead a measure of self-blame), a revolutionary engagement with the circumstances of suffering (in Marxist terms, history) to change them, or a continued passage in the state of crisis, which provides for the kind of exposure, ‘unhoused’ in my term, that is unendurable and propels the subject into a parenthetical space, conscious of contradiction but incapable of action, that amounts to madness and produces for the Lacanian therapist his or her client.¹³⁴ By these lights it becomes possible to see (as we shall come to in Chapter 4, though we must begin to speak of *Boesman and Lena* already) Fugard’s Boesman as the collusive repressed, Lena as in crisis but drifting back towards the patriarchal ‘coherence’ that Boesman imposes on her, or Lear as propelled through ‘unaccommodation’ to madness, then insight, then death (too late – that is the tragedy – to effect any but the most local change), Gloucester as mauled into ‘sight’ of what his hand has done, Goneril’s party as those who seize the moment of crisis to effect the hegemony of their own supplanting ideological inflection (in some ways theirs is the revolutionary engagement). Edgar it is, however, who adopts the guise of the vagrant, and the vagrant it always is whose erratic wandering, whose ‘touched’ speech, whose being absolutely without property, and whose being in so many ways ‘unaccommodated’, conspires to mark the passage of the subject through the liminal zone of social and subjective crisis. As with Lena in Fugard’s play, *King Lear*’s conclusion suggests Edgar’s (and a general) recourse to the established hegemony, though he has been a student of thunder and feels the ‘weight of this sad time’, yet he recurs to obedience (‘we must obey’)¹³⁵. It matters not whether the lines should properly be Albany’s, as in the Quarto, for the ‘obedience’ need be to no person in particular, but rather to the ideological imperative at large, and all the structures and strictures that it compels. By contrast with Lear’s journey (and perhaps Edgar’s), but altogether in keeping with his consistency (that is, constancy to ideology) throughout, Kent concludes with an extension to his journey: ‘I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;/My master calls me, I must not say no.’¹³⁶ It is of a piece with his goodness of character, which is really to say his ideological soundness. Simple

¹³⁴ J. Lacan, *Écrits*. Catherine Belsey’s *Critical Practice* offers a succinct application of Lacan’s diffuse and opaque approach, especially from 85ff.

¹³⁵ V, v, 322.

analysis of his tiny speech declares its ideological purport: it is an heroic couplet according to an ideology that prizes heroism, and one whose pat rhymes enact not only closure but precisely the kind of bond, seeming natural and inevitable, that he does homage. The feudal knot is tied in the possessives by which he acknowledges both his task and his overlord (his labour and he who controls that labour, these are in feudalism the currency by which possession is transferred). The priority of the overlord is inscribed in the order of the second line, as also in the kind of moral prerogative that attends the master's (positive) call as opposed to the servant's (negative) imperative, not simply to obey, as Edgar has it, but (even more negatively) 'not' to say no. Hegemonic codes are employed in the appellation 'sir', which means more than a title of respect, being as it is derived from precise patriarchal and feudal attributes. There is even the figure of ideological self-chastening in the negative imperative, 'I must not say no'. That is the reactionary recurrence in two lines.

And yet Lear's madness and Edgar/Tom's feigned madness have both thrown up from the heath's stalled and extended crisis several possibilities for a revolutionary insight. Why does Edgar not go 'forward' with the project of subjective revision begun there? And how does this passage across the thundery heath of insanity and violence school us in reading the recurrence and collusion of *Boesman and Lena's* curtain? The answer lies in the growing difference between the vagrant of literature and the vagrant of history, the vagrant accused and the vagrant condemned.

Poor Tom is an Abraham Man, a Bedlam beggar, whose guise has attracted its own share of critical attention. However, there is an all-important point hidden in this identity, too little remarked upon. Greenblatt notes it somewhat in passing¹³⁷ and Carroll addresses it, but not to any profit¹³⁸, and it is that the Abraham Man has about him, not only the exotic charisma of mania, but also the essential condition of fraud. This makes Edgar's choice of disguise a clever one, since any lapses into sanity need not expose him – he is meant to be bogus, what he is faking is faking, he is a fake fake. Shakespeare's use of the Abraham Man is more than simply the use of a vagrant; it is of a type that specifically calls into question the veracity of appearances and should put us in mind of the multiplicity of deceptions which drive the play at this point – and all plays, substantially. In turn, this Russian doll of deception betrays the figure of ideology in the text, and particularly in the text that is 'the vagrant' to literature and other arts. The transfer of feigning is intrinsic to Edgar's part, and to Edgar's (fictional) psychological coherence. (Indeed, Edgar the fiction even alters his disguise from beggar to peasant during the course of the play).

¹³⁶ V, v, 319–20.

¹³⁷ S. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 117.

¹³⁸ Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 190–194, and see footnotes, 194.

We need to remember that 'Edgar' is composed of a succession of lies: an actor feigns Edgar, Edgar feigns Poor Tom, Poor Tom feigns mad, madness feigns sense. The dizzying succession of pretence keeps Edgar elusive, not only to us, but also to (him)self, and this readiness to be moulded is what makes him succeed as a subject, not only of Lear, but of ideology, and so survive, and survive without psychic fragmentation. Edgar's feigning Tom's feigning madness is what saves him from madness, for just as we said that the transfer of feigning is intrinsic to Edgar's part, so the transfer of feigning is intrinsic to all ideological subjectivity, in which, to use the inevitable language of the drama, one plays ones part.¹³⁹

How different his position is to that of Boesman or Lena we shall come to see – and yet fundamentally not, for they, too, are ultimately actors, literally, in the occasion of the play's performance, and so too within the drama of their own society, even the society of their own (and Outa's) company. At the heart of Fugard's play lies the reminder to witness, to give audience in good faith. This is Lena's plea. At the heart of so many of Shakespeare's plays is the play-within-the-play, occasions that remind the audience of its audience: the mirrored nature of *Hamlet*, the lanthorn moonshine of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the illusion of justice in *Lear's* farmhouse chamber, the masque in *The Tempest*, and so on. There is every reason to attend these lengths to which Shakespeare (and Fugard, for there are examples of acting *within* the action of his other plays) goes in making plain the layered realities of the stage even as he is taken to be discoursing on life itself. Somewhere along the line it becomes necessary to conflate these formal exercises in feigning with whatever 'truths' may be sought in the content of the texts themselves. It is not simply that life is as illusory as a player, but that life is succeeded at in playing. Tragedy comes to Macbeth in the instant of his recognising this, in the moment in which he is propelled into an audience of his own strutting and fretting. Shakespeare even goes so far as to show us that a forest is also *played* in the theatre; Macbeth has the prophecy realised not in the reality that has given him such sure and certain comfort, but in the feigning of camouflage, the business of props. In a topsy-turvy world, of 'to-and-fro conflicting', it is those who best to-and-fro, placing themselves at the disposal of power, that survive. And this is what Lena knows, shouldering her bundle to follow Boesman off. There is no heroism in the tragedy that is history, only survival. You do not stand up to the vast processes that subsume individual agency, you rub along, or get rubbed out. The truth of the vagrant in history is that there is no gifted insight from the margins. Vagrants are not embarked upon recusant excursions beyond the bounds of property and propriety (though this is what the authors use them to imagine), in truth they are clinging

¹³⁹ Similarly, as we have suggested, by extension Southwark, the borough *beneath* London, the borough of the Globe and of Bethlehem Hospital, is where London is feigned, and Albion also.

desperately by the few threads they have left, and every journey into the heath or bush is, deep down, an expulsion and not a refuge.

In both Fugard's play and Shakespeare's the Land of Nod into which the characters are expelled figures also as a psychic passage. We will come to the social, dramatic and particularly historical dimension of the heath and bush (and forest), but first we must acknowledge also its psychic metaphor, and the relationship of that psychological 'space' to the processes of history that shape it. Without pretending to a psychoanalytic reading of these texts, there is no getting around the exhaustive treatment of madness in *King Lear* (a kind of madness that goes some way beyond the hysterical object at the centre of Freudian insight) and the grim realism of Boesman and Lena's (and Outa's) psychological accommodations. In Shakespeare's play we find folly in the Fool (itself a complex 'social' madness, articulated of contraries in the discourse of power), feigned madness in Poor Tom, trauma in Gloucester, and the catastrophic psychological dissolution that is Lear's madness, and which manifests a range of psychotic (as opposed to neurotic) symptoms, like hallucination (for example, in the mock trial of his daughters), mania (as in the futile contention with the storm), paranoia, and so on. For Charles Lamb it was the reach of Lear's madness, and the peculiarly literary schizophrenia that moves the character – mad on stage, but brilliantly sensible on paper – that made the king unplayable: 'in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind bloweth where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind.'¹⁴⁰ This drawn-out agony of irony seemed to Lamb impossible to endure in its whole, making Lear a character better read than seen, and whatever the merits of his opinion, it usefully points up the intellectual complexity of the audience's concession at the heart of the play, when they must yield to nonsense of varyingly ironic degrees, and 'make sense' of it by holding in mind (when all the minds on stage are letting go) the various levels of 'truth' and feigning that attend the madneses of the characters. Lamb's sentence supplies the kind of vocabulary that the audience must sort into alterity to produce the space of difference by which Lear is to be understood in what he says (and becomes): Lear's condition and his purport of speech are produced against the (favoured, positive) circumstance of 'we', 'power', 'reason(ing)', 'might(y)', 'exerting', 'ordinary', 'purposes', 'will', 'mankind', by a schema that is not endogenous to Lear, but rather reactive to that circumstance, as in such markers as 'aberrations', 'irregular', 'immethodized', 'listeth', 'corruptions', 'abuses'. These (unfavoured, negative) markers might as well apply to the semantics of political power, and offer a clue as to the aetiology of Lear's madness, which in turn affords us the premise upon which

¹⁴⁰ C. Lamb, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare', *Selected Prose*, 56.

sense might be recovered from Lear's nonsense. It is because we know why Lear is mad that we know what his mad utterance is addressing; of the cause of his nonsense we are able to read across it to the sense that he speaks about that cause.

Edgar is different, for his mad discourse is not constructed of a binary irony, but of a triangulated one. He speaks not on two levels, but three (I am ignoring for now the important fact of his being first an actor, also), speaking as Edgar, as Poor Tom, and through Poor Tom as another Fool. His speech inhabits, thus, the discourses of reason, folly, and madness, and the audience must juggle with all these to produce the simultaneity out of which he 'is'. (To recur, in fact the audience must juggle also with Lear's levels, and the Fool's, and the fact that all are actors acting in the first place). May we take these three discourses to represent the language of, respectively, hegemony, crisis, and revolt? It would be pleasing to do so, but first necessary to establish the contrariety of the Fool, or the Fool's position, which is obviously both explicitly critical of power and irreverent of it, but also loyal to power and complicit with it. The conditional nature of the Fool's licence (and that it must emanate from a licensing authority), is common sense, but the role remains also a volatile and potentially insurrectional one. There is a long history of riot sprung from the (sanctioned, constrained, licenced) carnival, whether in medieval Europe or the colonial periphery.¹⁴¹ We can at least say that the discourse of folly offers ambiguity and potential hazard, not only within itself, semantically, but also in its relationship to the hegemony it 'serves'. Whether or not it obeys the authority that calls it into being is not wholly up to the Fool, for the Fool belongs to the people as well as the king, and may, in his ambiguity, claim to be witting in one direction and unwitting in another. The 'disappearance' of the Fool, in disguise, for example, but also in the exercise of the drama, where he comes and goes mercurially (and, usefully, in the explicit '*Ndicincilili*' of the Xhosa *imbongi*, which means 'I disappear') reminds us that he is always ready for flight.

Thus Poor Tom's madness emblematises the dialectic of the historicised psyche. Its historical character may be confirmed in the figure of the Abraham Man, whose actual representations have not yet found proper analysis. The name itself speaks of originating, of the kind of primacy that we denote as 'Ur' and that signifies beginnings, prototypes, something akin

¹⁴¹ Or, indeed, in the metropolitan centres of the post-colonial era: one need only remark on how frequently London's Notting Hill Carnival has provoked latent colonial conflicts between immigrant Londoners and the Metropolitan Police. But the history of riotous carnival is long and wide. The *locus classicus* is E. Le R. Laturie, *Carnival: A People's Uprising at Romans, 1579-1580*, trans. Mary Feaney. In the Caribbean, where carnival remains a vital core of popular culture, insurrection has often accompanied calypsos and dancing: see for example, John Cowley, *Carnival, Caboulay and Calypso*. And locally Shamil Jeppie has traced the contours of social and political ideological tensions across class, race and gender in the attenuated (or attenuating) carnival at the Cape, observing that as late as 1989 (at the height of liberationist insurrection in South Africa) May Day celebrants in Athlone sang the Internationale 'to guma beat ... and the unions marched in klops (coon) style'. S. Jeppie, 'The Class, Colour and Gender of Carnival: Aspects of a Cultural Form in Inner Cape Town, c.1939-c.1959', 32.

to Platonic forms. The biblical Abraham sponsors the Abraham Man's appeal to a kind of patriarchal authority and to a religious one also, for Abraham it is to whom God speaks. But the origin of the name is obscure. The OED suggests that it is 'an allusion to the parable of the beggar Lazarus' in which Lazarus is raised to Abraham's company in heaven, while a rich man is condemned to hell, not least, it is implied, for his neglect of Abraham. Thus an Abraham Man is an implicit reproach to wealth and an inducement to alms-giving, besides forging an association between the patriarch and the beggar. In the case of *King Lear*, then, Poor Tom is not simply a beggar, but a beggar who stands for the Christian condemnation of wealth, and, potentially, in that degree the more pointed a challenge to property.

In many representations the name 'Abraham Man' is contracted to 'Abram Man', as if the patriarch from Ur were being willed into the first man, Adam. Of course, the contraction is natural enough to speech, but one must remark it, if only because whether or not the contraction is produced by phonology or idea, nevertheless the meaning is altered. A related, but demonstrative instance is the passage from 'Bethlehem' via 'Bethlem' to 'Bedlam', in which the (heavily sentimentalised) birthplace of Christ becomes instead a cipher of chaos and riot. Both 'Abraham' and 'Bethlehem' are powerful markers of origin in a Christian society; in this both point up the deep practice of the Abraham Man as significant of the birth of the modern – and particularly of the engine of modern wage labour. That Abraham's progress out of Ur is a wandering one is no coincidence. The Biblical patriarch passes across territory as a cipher of the Israelite progress out of pastoralism toward and into settled agriculture (the bounty of the promised land). This (revolutionary) trajectory across modes is recapitulated in the institution and culture of the Abraham Man (just as Bedlam configures the riot in revolution, and hegemonic condemnation thereof).

The conflation of Adam and Abraham is especially important when it comes to the habit of the Abraham Man, because the staff-carrying, bearded patriarch contributes only part of the guise. Awdeley's description, above, is augmented by Dekker in his *O per se O*, in an account we have already seen some of:

he goes without breeches; a cut jerkin with hanging sleeves in imitation of our Gallants but no Sattin or Chamlet elbowse, for both his legs and armes are bare ... A face staring like a Sarazen; his haire long and filthy knotted ... a good Filche (or staffe) of growne Ash or else Hazel ... and sometimes a sharpe stick on which he hangeth Ruffe-pecke, bacon ... Some make an hollow noise hollowly sounding, some whoop, some holler, some show only a kind of wild, distracted look.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Thomas Dekker, *O Per O Se*, (EEBO, 41ff)

The Abraham Man is wilder than the first Abraham; his clothes are scant and ragged and they call more attention to his nakedness than they do to cover it. The matted hair and wild speech reach back to the boundary between the animal and the human – in a Christian age something to be reconciled (however awkwardly) with the myth of Genesis. If the Abraham Man is like the first of men, then, like Adam, he is cast out of the (enclosed) Garden to wander and suffer, specifically in the lowest occupations of labour. Perhaps this Adamic donation also contributes to the presumed promiscuity and fecundity of the vagrant generally, given Adam and Eve's role in breeding all humanity.¹⁴³ The 'hollow noise' amplifies contemporary Renaissance paranoia about vagrant canting, shot through as that was with suspicions of secrecy, spying and the fear of the 'other'. Indeed, here that 'other' is given specifically as the ancient enemy of Christendom, but also in a figure that confirms semitic associations.

In what literature there is actually concerned to analyse the form of the Abraham Man, Carroll writes engagingly of the feigned markings of authority upon the body of the Renaissance vagrant, counterfeit tattoos of institutional status in which he finds the ultimate reach of hegemony (the indigent mutilating himself in order to place his body within the signifying practice of authority)¹⁴⁴. He quotes Dekker's account of the Abraham Man's 'mark of Bedlam' and how it is faked 'with burnt paper, piss and gun-powder' rubbed into lesions made in the skin.¹⁴⁵ The tattoo may be faked in the instance of the Abraham Man, but (as Carroll points out) it is copied from the script of authority as written on the body of the subject. That tattoo is more than just a mark assigning identity as the subject of power. It is done by violence. Unsurprisingly, though with uncanny accuracy, the accomplishment of 'the mark of Bedlam' is repeated in the torture of colonial Khoisan. In 1812 the Bethelsdorp missionary James Read complained of the practice of 'pickling' (*'ingesouten'* is the term he cited), whereby Khoisan in colonial service were whipped and then had their wounds rubbed in a solution of salt, gunpowder and urine.¹⁴⁶ Surely there is more to either practice than inscription or torture. Each becomes the other, and the ingredients work to accomplish both, and more, simultaneously and variously. Burnt paper connotes the erasure of the literate record – the loss of licence to a Renaissance beggar, and the expulsion from history that underlies all vagrancy. Salt is more than astringent; it preserves dead tissue, laying claim to the body even beyond death. It is this antiseptic property which is taken to the extreme in Scipio's order that Carthage be ploughed and sown with salt: it renders barren. Gunpowder expresses both the spirit and the actual force

¹⁴³ Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar* (1996), 90.

¹⁴⁴ Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 193.

¹⁴⁵ Dekker, *O per se O* (EEBO, 42).

¹⁴⁶ Read – Cuyler, 5 September 1812. CA, CO 2582. It is not possible to distinguish, in the original, between 'urine' or 'wine'.

of those whose power derives from firearms. It signifies the means of physical oppression. And urine connotes the derision of the oppressor for those he subjugates, as the application, by sympathetic magic, of the attribute of waste, rejection. What we are dealing with is more than functional; evidently these are also practices of a symbolic and ritual character, anointing the body with signs that stand for the particular articles of subordination. Even their triune formulae work to call down the exemplar of authoritative Christian ritual.

Meanwhile, the clothing of the Abraham Man, demonstrative of nakedness, is specifically significant. We shall see the deliberateness of Fugard's costuming his vagrants, and Shakespeare is just as intent with his (Edgar even tells us what he is wearing and when he is putting it on and off)¹⁴⁷. The Abraham Man, for all his rags, is liveried in explicit and implicit ideology. The nakedness signifies autochthony and innocence, yes, but also poverty (as do the rags). That is an explicit figure, of the vagrant's devising, a form for his function. But there is more to the costume, more to be understood by it. Dekker's description offers inadvertent pointers in the language of its representation. For example, the association of 'without breeches', 'bare' and 'gallants' might be argued to conspire towards a (masculine) sexualisation of the figure (we should recall that a male cat is a tom, and sexual prowling is 'tomcatting'). It is a sexualisation which we find recapitulated in Poor Tom's sexually nuanced account of his background ('serv'd the lust of my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with her')¹⁴⁸. So, too, does 'Tom O'Bedlam' deliver a highly sexualised subject; sometimes the poem is called 'Loving Mad Tom', and it repeats the ominously disingenuous refrain 'Come dame or maid, be not afraid'. Most significantly, the poem has Tom state explicitly that his nakedness has to do with the project(s) of 'love', as figured in a kind of ravishment by a 'rogueish' cupid: '... the roguish boy of love where I lay/ Me found and strip'd me naked'. The Abraham Man thus discloses the threat of masculine sexuality, in part the only power remaining to him, for though he is expelled from the hegemonic prerogatives of property or contracted labour, yet he remains sustained as a man within patriarchy. Dekker accentuates this by telling us that the Abraham Man is 'more terrible to women and children than the name of Raw-head and Bloody-bones, Robin -good-fellow, or any other hobgoblin.'¹⁴⁹ His formulation applies specifically to the subordinates of patriarchal society, and his invocation of folkloric archetypes and hobgoblins is widely accessible to a Freudian analysis (though not our business here). All this has an oblique bearing upon our concern with *King Lear*, for it deepens the contrasts by which the problem of gender and gender conflict may be discerned in the play, and so contributes also to a reading of Edgar as the subject

¹⁴⁷ II, iii, 5-21.

¹⁴⁸ III, iv, 84-5.

¹⁴⁹ Dekker, *O Per O Se*, (EEBO, 41). Carroll cites this in *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 191-2.

most obedient to hegemonic ideology, even as – or perhaps because – he counterfeits himself as Tom. And it bears more directly upon our later interest in *Boesman and Lena*, for the interaction of the vagrants there is an explicit exposé of the way in which patriarchy is the fundamental ideological figure, generative of the first and last cleavage in social relations: after Boesman has lost shack, employment, all, yet he still enjoys the clientage of Lena. (One might argue instead for the fundamental ideological priority of race, since Boesman presumes superiority over Outa too, but the play – rightly – shows Boesman troubled and ambivalent in that encounter).

The near-naked, hair-matted, staff-wielding figure of the Abraham Man, with his wild speech and flitch of begged or stolen, somehow 'found', bacon and (in 'Tom O'Bedlam') drinking horn, is most of all the image of the prophet in Biblical tradition, and especially John the Baptist. The gospel image of John is of a man wearing camel hair and a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey and 'shouting in the desert'.¹⁵⁰ *Veldkeos* and honey we shall encounter again (and Michael K's diet of insects) but for now we should recall the London Missionary Society Superintendent, John Philip, rhetorically asking: 'Was not John the Baptist a Bushman?'.¹⁵¹ Quite how John wore the camel hair is not disclosed, but the popular iconography has assumed of it simply the character of coarse clothing, a rough and rudimentary shift or cloak. This proceeds to or from the 'wild' look of the Abraham Man, and with it a presumption of hirsuteness. In our next chapter we shall see how the passage from nakedness into clothing configures the Khoisan entry into colonial society, but we have already seen how the *kaross* of precolonial costume is identified with the clothing of the Renaissance vagrant. Conversely 'the *kaross*' or 'taking the *kaross*' appears in the colonial record as a euphemism for wholesale social recusancy on the part of the colonial (and especially European) subject. When, in the early years of the 19th century, Colonel Collins reported on his travels to the country of the Xhosa, he told of finding a deserter called McDaniel from County Clare (again, it is the Irish) living on the beach in a mixed settlement with Xhosa, Khoisan and slaves, with houses constructed in both European and Xhosa design.¹⁵² McDaniel wore, Collins noted, only a ragged jacket and breeches, and told him of a similar figure known to him only as 'Peter', who had gone over wholly to Xhosa society. This Peter, he told Collins, 'wore the Kaross, and lived in every respect like a Kaffer'.¹⁵³

Most suggestive, for the character of the Abraham Man, is the 'shouting' of John, and its prophetic imperative. Again, it seems central to the evolution of the Abraham type that at the heart of John's mission was the exhortation to alms-giving: 'He that hath two coats, let him

¹⁵⁰ Mat. 3, 3. Mark 1, 3. Luke 3, 4. John 1, 23.

¹⁵¹ J. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 2, 13. Nigel Penn delivered the quotation to me, via his *Forgotten Frontier*.

¹⁵² Collins – Caledon, 30 May 1808, CA, CO 4438.

impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him to likewise'¹⁵⁴. But there is a broader point to the 'crying' or 'shouting' and it is that this behaviour is egomaniac and conventionally antisocial, connotative of clinical states of mania. The common assumptions of shouting would include alarm, threat, imperative, urgency, warning, distress and so on, all of which might hasten the 'paying-off' of such a beggar, but all of which also lend a heightened emotional and imaginative colour to the figure. The ranting of the Abraham Man, then, is allied to prophecy and, particularly, to the power that is in human speech (mildly as rhetoric, the power of persuasion, but extremely as glossolalia, for example, the action of the Spirit upon speech). This power is of considerable significance, for it underlies the interest of the vagrant to literature, and the literary presumption of the oracular vagrant, as well as the literary assumption of the vagrant as oracular vehicle. To be sure, this power is the recourse of the indigent poor, otherwise so powerless, but its extent is suggested by the general and great presence of vagrants throughout literary history. It is the power that Lamb finds in unreason, the power of speech 'immethodized', stripped of the semantic practice of grammar, and falling, variously, back into noise or forward into music. Here we have 'matter and impertinency mix'd/ Reason in madness.'¹⁵⁵ In this the ranting of the Abraham Man – or the canting of the vagrant generally – becomes akin to poetry, which is, indeed, how the mad prose of Edgar (or Lear, or the Fool) comes across, and is why it is the text's being poetry that so well sustains the visionary tenor of 'Tom O'Bedlam'. In fact, if literary criticism recognises a text of deep illogic as literature, then it is usually as poetry.¹⁵⁶ This may be in cases where the intent of the text is manifest and controlled within the sight of the reader (as in, say, Donne's 'Song' ('Go and catch a falling star') or several of Shakespeare's songs¹⁵⁷) or in cases where the text is itself manifestly the production of such unpredictable psychologies as we call 'mad' (as in Smart or Blake, for example). And this is why fools sing, and why Edgar does, and arguably also why Lena does (for though she is not mad, she is a vagrant, which to literature means 'touched' or, at the very least, licensed to poetry).

Aristotle held that there be song at the centre of tragedy, though this was in all cases choral, and only in some the song of individual characters.¹⁵⁸ In the case of the Shakespearean tragedy, the chorus is shrunk to the Fool (or others, as in *Macbeth's* witches and porter, who

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Luke, 3, 11.

¹⁵⁵ IV, vi, 174–5.

¹⁵⁶ One excellent example is Kermodé on *King Lear*, III, iv: 'This scene is in prose and yet it is poetry of the highest quality.' *Shakespeare's Language*, 191.

¹⁵⁷ Gimini Salgado suggestively launches his introduction to an anthology of Renaissance underworld accounts by applying a cant reading to Autolycus's song in *The Winter's Tale*. *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, P. Murray, *Classical Literary Criticism*, 72.

represent the privilege of the groundling's angle by conflating their own prophecy with the audience's dramatic irony) – himself the embodiment of the *vox populi* in the 'theatre' of the court. It is among the tasks of the Fool to sing – and to rhyme, to make poetry – as it has equally become expected of the vagrant to sing and dance (as Kaatje does, as Lena does, as Tom O'Bedlam does) on the makeshift theatre of the roadside camp. Again, we need to remind ourselves of the project of the song/poem in this context (as, perhaps, most contexts). The heightened register of lyric utterance connotes insight, whether this is merely ironically mad or the deliberately gifted tongue of the commentative chorus. The formal constraints of poetry and of music shape language in such a way as to suggest the imperatives of a higher semantics, as if the poet or singer were being spoken through by the kinds of forces of plot (which is to impute time, narrative, history) which shape the tragic circumstance. In the elevated register and the formal organisation, the lyric exceeds our expectations of the *vox populi*, and of those who give it expression. This, in turn, works to imply a numinous value to the utterance, as if fate or history or the gods had laid hold of the speech of the actor/character. For this reason we must discern in the instances of lyric a point at which the screens of textuality are unusually thin, and at which the authorial purport comes closest to declaring itself. Here are those moments in which the author may be seen moving behind the illusions he is conjuring, and reveals instead the kind of belief he invests in his concepts of time and history – those things he manipulates in the contrivance of his plot so as to effect the appearance of reality in the play's enactment. The lyric is given as summation and commentary, as if by glossolalia, the emanation of the Logos itself. As such they are instances where the text of the play is briefly brought parallel to the text of history itself – that ur-utterance of Genesis and John's gospel, and all subsidiary theology. In Platonic terms, these are moments where the shadows plainly attach themselves to the bodies they represent, and both are visible together. In our terms these are moments where the deep practice of the text – its fullest and indigenous cultural purport – are uncommonly to the fore. It is the 'ur-' formulation which attaches what is radical about Abraham to what is radical about the Abraham Man: both mark the deepest practice of the social form, the history, that each begins.

In *Boesman and Lena*, Lena's song provides a telegram of the action of the play as well as precisely this revelation of the play's deep practice (of history, of vagrancy). It tells us not only what Fugard would have us notice of his play, but also what he understands of its origins as action and its relationship to real history. When Lena says she 'danced the moon up and the sun down'¹⁵⁹, her verbal construction takes on something of the generative prerogative that was in her insistence that she and Boesman 'helped write' the paths in the veld, walked them into being,

¹⁵⁹ Fugard, *Boesman and Lena*, 279.

even as it recollects Khoisan 'worship' of the moon, or Tom O' Bedlam's. Her dancing becomes a creative act, or at least an act of mythography, making place of space, and making history of time. It arranges and reveals, and so *relates* the world – just as Sartre held human consciousness to do:

Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a 'revealer', that is, it is through human reality that 'there is' being, or, to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested. It is our presence in the world which multiplies relations. It is we who set up a relationship between this tree and that bit of sky. Thanks to us, that star which has been dead for millennia, that quarter moon, and that dark river are disclosed in the unity of landscape ... With each of our acts the world reveals to us a new face.¹⁶⁰

Sartre's imagery is spatial, but his observation applies to temporal experience too. It is the act of relating – an act of witness – that discloses lives and events in the unity of history.

As she moves towards her song, Fugard has her humming the infantile monosyllable 'da' over and over again, by which we are brought to consciousness of the song's shaping itself in the primitive impulse to vocalise.¹⁶¹ It is as if the music is there – a universal imperative, akin to Shelley's intellectual beauty or the Pythagorean harmony – awaiting the God that will fill its vessel with speech. When the song comes it parses itself into quatrains with a limited rhyme scheme, both of which supply an order that is not in her life, but for which she might yearn. The concision of the metre, as well as its trochaic character, enact her limited life and the dolorous burden of it, a walking passage whose feet are leaden and stress-laden. But in all, the song cannot be hers, or, that is to say, it cannot belong to the same Lena who shortly before was incapable of recollecting her journey. Here, instead, is a literary figure of extreme organisation, all of whose simplicity is an elaborate authorial deception. The first two lines of each stanza begin with the names of places along her journey, the third with her own name. The end-words of each line station in each verse deftly integrate semantic unities: the third-line ends read 'bruises ... Boesman ... again', the second-line ones 'bait ... salt ... river'. The opening toponym of each stanza repeats the percussive labiopalatal 'k' or 'c'. All of this speaks for a high degree of organisation, of a sort *out of character*, which means of a sort exposing the authorial presence and therefore to be associated with a content revealing Fugard's own ideological project. What one notices, again, is the obsession with listing place and the rudimentary economy of Lena's life (in other words what Fugard understands of Lena's 'history' is a tension between place and space, inhabiting and occupying, property and vagrancy, as also her economic marginalisation, as we

¹⁶⁰ J.-P. Sartre, 'Why Write?', in D. Lodge, *20th Century Literary Criticism*, 371.

shall come to later). Similarly, Lena's song shows Fugard's explicit attribution of her suffering to the operations of patriarchy and race: 'Cause' and 'So' bind 'bruises' to 'Hotnot meid' and 'Boesman' to 'Lena's fault'. The song supplies markers of Fugard's own understanding of the way in which ideology operates; perhaps the most fascinating of these is the manner in which Lena's historical suffering is versed in the grammar of possession. 'Lena's got her bruises', she sings, and, 'Lena's got a Boesman', just as the various places she names have 'got' whatever material resource they afford her. Fugard advances a theory of ideology in which the consciousness of the capitalist subject is sufficiently conditioned by the 'natural' imperative of 'ownership', that even when she owns nothing, yet still her grammar 'explains' her misfortune to her as possession. One might also notice the logic of parallelism by which Lena in every third line 'occupies' the semantic and versified space of the places that precede her in the lines above. This reiterates Fugard's central thesis as to the toponymic crisis of the vagrant, and, by extension, of the centrality of spatial history to the identity of people. We are not *what* we are, but *where* we are, or, to put it in a manner more revealing of ideology, we are where we belong. As I have shown, that 'belonging' is linguistic (toponymic) and historical (as space becomes place, is written in the actions of people in time). Lastly (though this is not exhaustive), it is worth noting Fugard's apprehension of the subject's inclination to blame, which is the cipher of ideology's operations in securing the subject's collusion in its own exploitation and consent. All of Lena's song presents her circumstance as inevitable, just as inevitable as places being where they are. (In fact, of course, the audience has seen in Lena's confusion just how unreliable the human experience of space may be, and we are soon to discover from Boesman's confession to breaking the empties he has blamed on Lena just how unreliable history-telling is too.) We may surmise some irony in her presentation of things as they are, but the net effect of the song is to re-secure precisely that consent to abuse which the song (for the audience) highlights as her tragedy.

*'This time. Next time. Last time.'*¹⁶² These are the 'steps' by which Lena moves towards her dance, much as 'da ... da ... da' begins her song. The formula links all of what she says, and all of the point of her artistry, to history, for that is what is contained in it. As Edgar succeeds the Fool, in III, vi, his nonsense repeats the ambiguous sense that the Fool has sought to utter since brought to the pitch of song by the pass that Lear has come to (for the Lear and the Fool imply that he has not sung much before this)¹⁶³. This, and it is significant, is tomfoolery. What he produces by way of lyrics is notable first for its apparent puerility (signifying his idiocy, but also

¹⁶¹ Fugard, *Boesman and Lena*, 280. One could argue that this 'da' is the ur-phoneme of patriarchy.

¹⁶² *ibid*, 280.

¹⁶³ I, iv, 167-8.

Lear's, and the new childhood in social relations, through which all must grow in the child's domain of the heath) and for its wide-ranging and manifest intertextuality. This latter characteristic is the most significant of all, for it points up another, and relevant, attribute of poetry itself, which is that its formal construction depends upon sets of rules established in wider society. For all that poetry is often thought of (especially since the Romantics) as pre-eminently the genre of individual self-expression, yet, in fact, it is the most rigorously social of all literary discourses. Lena's song, no less than the intertextual scraps and improvisations of Edgar (or the Fool), is conceived within the broad ambit of this social reference, of which we are allowed to note, for instance, a provenance in the poetic tradition of English (in her context a coloniser's tongue, which is Fugard's first), and a more specific provenance within the folkloric of the ballad in English. In fact, her ballad is not at all strict ballad metre, but akin rather to the trochaic inversion of it applied to in some of the most powerful and enduring of English poems. Although hers is a curial line, her metre is in the mould of 'The Phoenix and Turtle', or Blake's 'Tyger', or Auden's 'Lullaby' – all of them sharing the insistent trochaic that is at once dolorous and propulsive, contributing both gravity and the nagging stridency of either madness or misery. That is worth setting down to the balance sheet of Fugard's orchestrations, if only for its own sake, but more generally it supplies a textual truth, and one that is beyond the range of authorial direction, and it is that the condition of Lena's art(istry), as also Edgar's or the Fool's, whether it is the effluvia of madness or prophecy, is necessarily begun in social intercourse rather than in lonely genius. The forms and occasions of poetry remind us of this in themselves, as do the scraps of Edgar's songs culled from the popular tradition of romances, folktales and other dramas. It is precisely of this textual motley that all subsequent texts are constructed (not least *Lear* itself, out of *King Lear*, Holinshed and more before that, or *Boesman and Lena* out of Fugard's notebooks, *King Lear*, Beckett, Camus, and so on). In this, poetry, as the motley of language, figures exactly as does costume in both these plays so pointedly obsessed with it. Here we have 'lendings' again, and again they demonstrate the social construction of the subject, but now not only in the quotidian business of the political and economic life – the material, as clothes are – but also in the vauntedly cerebral or philosophical – the ideal, as poetry is.

We are ultimately, in Coetzee's Michael K, to pass to a vagrant, or a vagrancy, that is mute, or very close to it, refusing (or incapable of) the society of speech, and so it is important to establish the context of that silence as the contrarily voluble and oracular vagrancy of Poor Tom (in his various iterations) and Kaatje Kekkelbek and Lena. Earlier we began (as we will go on) to establish the intrigue of vagrant utterance to hegemony and literature: the (apparent) lexical disorder of canting, encrypting and decoding the language to new forms and purposes,

the international reach of vagrant language and its universalising pretensions (and colonial incursions), the licence to prophecy, the licence to scatology and oath-breaking, all forms of forbidden speech, as if a kind of social Tourette's Syndrome, speaking against the restraints of repression, and therefore speaking of and against and about power. It is precisely this linguistic carnival that first attracts literature to the figure of the vagrant, even before the figure of spatial (social) disorder, falsely conceived of as the liberty of the subject, enjoins its particular appeal. And yet that carnival, like the apparent liberty of the wanderer in the landscape, is profoundly a condition of exactly those social rules it appears, or seeks, to escape – or at least in significant part. When Kermode speaks of the 'wild linguistic excursions' of Tom, the Fool and Lear, we may note that 'wild' and 'excursions' are words that attend the condition of vagrancy.¹⁶⁴ Poetry and song are means of semantic production owned by the language as it appears in orthodoxy, and those who regulate that orthodoxy in succeeding institutions, like schools or *Books of Common Prayer*. If one attempts to make sense by other means then that sense goes unrecognised, because the monopoly on sense is a monopoly. Yet it has always been the dream of poetry, its hope, that it discovers new ways of saying things, and with that new things to be said. In consequence there are two ways to read the speech of Edgar or of Kaatje or Lena. On the one hand we might essay interpretations of such instances by way of seeking in them the hooks and burrs which attach them to common discourse, and thereby to descry in them what it is they are 'really' trying to say. Such an analysis (always remembering that analysis is itself a dominant and hegemonic discourse, and kin therefore to other semantic orthodoxies, part of the monopoly) presumes that the disorder of mad or prophetic or cant speech is always a subordinate aberration of the 'normal'. On the other hand one might attempt to read such speech on its own terms, by means of repressed semantic means, often libidinal, pleasure-eager, punning, unstably ironic, musical, 'empty', 'childish', 'silly' (the terms bear the imprint of capitalist and patriarchal dismissal) – recalling, for instance, Coleridge's dictum that '[t]he elder languages were fitter for poetry because they expressed only prominent ideas with clearness, the others but darkly ... Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood.'¹⁶⁵

It gives most *pleasure*, and if we would have a sense of pleasure – a sense of the *sense* there is in pleasure, that pleasure proceeds sensually, then by pleasure poetry makes most sense. This is a way of thinking contrary to all expectations of language that turn upon the genius of its logic. In the pursuit of logical certainties, to be not perfectly understood runs the risk of being perfectly misunderstood, for the perfectability of the system is integral to – in the sense of at one with – the act of understanding. The vagrant wanders out of the established trajectories,

¹⁶⁴ Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, 185

especially out of settlement. That errancy attends the vagrant utterance also, and so too cant. A language that does not belong to vagrants, but which is intrinsically vagrant – wandering, errant, inordinate – such a language would be poetry, which is that language governed by its own laws before those of sense, and that language considered supremely literary. Poetry and cant – and song, music, the feigning speech of the theatre – all shouting and crying in (or out of) a wilderness of sense – these things are intimately related.

As we pass now to South African texts, and specifically, first, the lost wax of historical utterance, of the sort that the archive reports but rarely relays (and when it does, then with all the hazards of transmission), it is worth keeping in mind this proximity to poetry of vagrant speech. One good reason to do so is because the historian, the scholar, is no less beguiled by it than the generality of people. That said, however, another reason would simply be to alert ourselves to the unlikely presence of an historical poetics, and the stimulus and challenges such a thing might pose, both to history and to literature.

¹⁶⁵ Coleridge, 'Notebooks (Anima Poetae: 1799–1801)', in S. Potter, *Coleridge*, 156.

2. 'I became a schelm': the crisis of colonial vagrancy

Laughing at Mr Magerman

When Mr Magerman rose and spoke to a meeting held in the Kat River Settlement in 1834, the story he told was a familiar one. To those whom he addressed, the litany of assaults, abuses, setbacks and frustrations he recounted was as commonplace as it was grieving. To posterity, which has little enough record of the testimony of those subordinated by colonisation between the 17th and 19th centuries, Mr Magerman's story represents a witness all the more striking for its relative scarcity among an archive dominated by the colonial account.

I was 'ingeboecked' for ten years, when I was young (here showing his height then) to my 'Baas' Dawid van der Merwe in the Camdeboo – my Baas promised then to bring me up and instruct me as his own children – but I had to be among the dogs in the ashes – I was many a time lifted out by the arm and flogged well so that when I ran from the fire hearth the ashes were strewed and the coals after me, and the dogs alarmed would pursue me – I got no instruction and no clothes – I know nothing – my Mother was obliged from bad treatment to run away and leave me – and my Father soon after – and when he would attempt to get a sight of me – the dogs were sent after him – O! My poor Father! – I got so little to eat from my 'Baas' that I had to steal to support life – yes my friends I became a 'schelm' – I was tied hand and foot and beat unmercifully. Why do you not speak in this strain my friends? Why do you keep back? Yes I am 'bont geslagen' – the fire is in mel (here he clapped his hands together and stood mute) – I had to run away from my Baas, through the wolves and the lions, to my mother in the neighbourhood of the Cape – yes I had to leave all my cattle and all my father's cattle in my Baas's hand – I became a *paardewagter*, and after I had taken long charge of the horses, I thought I would ask my Master for some wages – he told me to bring the horses together which I did – he told me to point out to him what horse I would like – I pointed to a young Mare – but my master did not answer one word – no my friends what means that if you ask a thing and the person gives no answer? (a person here answered him 'unwillingness') – yes – I stop[p]ed some time longer but seeing I was to receive nothing I ran away again, and found my father in Graaff Reinet, and now am I and my Mother and my young brother here – there is he (pointing to a young lad in the Meeting) – I never thought I would have seen him again (here some smiled) O, do you laugh at me! – O, this is not laughing matter if the vagrant Law passes – Today we sit in the shade and you know if you go out of the Sun into the shade, and go back into the Sun again then you feel the sun still more – and if this Law passes then we will feel it more than ever – for then we must stand the heat of the Sun, and the 'Baas' above all – I was always naked but now that I have come

here I appear to be something like a human being (showing his red jacket) -- my friends I desire to remain here, and not run away any more, therefore I hope the Law will not pass -- [sic]¹

Magerman was the last to speak before the meeting adjourned and the details of the record are real enough (one can hear the Dutch/Afrikaans through the translation of the scribe, excellent as it is, in figures of syntax, and the drama of the testimony is caught) for the meeting's dissolution to be imagined. The voices of the record are diffused into the lunch hour that follows it (the meeting began at 10 a.m.) and the reader is left straining against the passage of time to hear the threads of conversation that are now lost. Magerman's testimony echoes with the interactions of his 'friends', and writing this now may be thought of as a scrap of conversation, not recovered, but reinvigorated.

The historian will fall upon this trove for its rare verbatim witness to the condition of Khoisan servitude in the colonial Cape, and for the 'truths' it tells about the condition of 'schelm' life, the life of the 'runaway' and the vagrant, at a point in the history of the Cape when the matter of that condition is of acute interest. But the record offers more than Magerman's testimony: it offers us also the witness of those who witnessed it. Indeed, it is more immediate in this inadvertent witness of a gathering in 1834 than it is in its collation of the accounts of those 'witnesses' who attended it to address their recollections and concerns. We do not know the colour of the mare that Magerman tells us he liked, but we know that he wore a *red* jacket to the meeting. We do not know the reason for the silence of Magerman's 'baas' on the matter of the horse, nor even Magerman's theory as to its cause, but we know that someone at the meeting thought it an 'unwilling' silence. We do not know exactly what Magerman felt when he was beaten black and blue, but we know that years later the recollection left him mute. We do not know whether he was burnt by the coals and ashes strewn by his flight, but we know that the image of them flares up in Magerman as the correlative to his emotions as he remembers his youth in his deposition. And we know that he was laughed at around noon on August the 5th 1834, by those he called his friends and who knew his story well.

The laughter at Magerman's deposition reminds us that the historical text before us was once of the character of 'utterance'², locally and contingently significant in ways which belong to history (the past) as much as the 'text' now appropriated for History (that is, the written record)

¹ 'Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A 50. The minutes were substantially reproduced in the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 3 September 1834, as part of John Fairbairn's campaign against the proposed Vagrancy Ordinance. See below.

² The word is no longer innocent after Bakhtin (*Marxist Philosophy of Language*), and aspects of that theoretical precept inform my use here, though not every occasion of the word's use. In particular I apply to Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogical context. Thus it is that the minutes of the meeting -- contrived though they may be for future

putatively cautious of subjectivity, striving for the *grand recit*.³ What Magerman leaves to the record is good coin to the business of writing an account of Khoisan experience in the early 19th century, but so is the laughter of his fellows at him. Not only is that laughter a kind of evidence disregarded, even suppressed, in conventional histories, founded as they are on an Enlightenment confidence in transparent and rational causes – privileging testimony over witness, the conscious over the unconscious act, intent over accident – but without it they are greatly diminished. The laughter and the testimony encompass each other. Together they make a whole text greater than the sum of its parts. In the laughter we catch the flash of a submerged attitude, an attitude complicitly repressed by the normative historical account on two grounds: firstly, that it is so contradictory to the process of sense in the circumstance as to mark an aberrance, a narrative ‘error’, and, secondly, that it is to be ‘known’ for the ‘trivial’ expression of social and psychic energies in a tense, heterogeneous, uncommonly formal situation, and one in which we are blind to the total chiaroscuro of which irony is produced.

But are we, or need we be, blind – either to the deep practice of Magerman’s testimony or the deep practice of the laughter he provokes? There should be possible an historical criticism of laughter under a circumstance so minutely observed and recorded. Certainly, unless the record has falsely joined the laughter to the testimony (and it is clearly the recorder’s and Magerman’s impression that they are of the same instance – the best evidence of that is the secretary’s euphemistic version, where the word ‘smiled’ is intended to douse the laughter before it gets too cruel; we see him here self-consciously anticipating the chair), we have on our hands a moment of irony, where this is ‘not laughing matter’. Irony is generated across poles of changed meaning. It depends upon change as its motor, just as history does, and the linguistically critical historian should seek to know that change.

What Magerman relates has common cause with those who hear him, and his experience is common with those of his generation. There is nothing in the content of his account provocative of laughter. But we have evidence of the idiosyncrasy of his delivery, and a clue therefore to a possible disjunction between the content of his account and the form of its presentation. Certainly this disjunction will prove revealing, but first there is the proper content of Magerman’s deposition – and the address of that content – to disclose. Magerman’s testimony is not only against Boer abuses under the old labour dispensation of the Colony. It is also explicitly against Khoisan reticence and silence. ‘Why do you not speak in this strain my

publication – differ substantially from their reprinted instance in the pages of the *South African Commercial Advertiser* (3 Sept. 1834): their dialogical context alters perceptibly, and with it the deep practice of the utterance.

³ The elevation of the ‘h’ from lower to upper-case has been used to signify such a distinction before. W. H. Auden was fond of the practice in the 1930s – but there his sense of History was of the purposive sort that Popper refutes and Auden himself became wary, or terrified of. See Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden*, 304ff.

friends? Why do you keep back?' he asks. The answer to his question is produced in his asking it and in the laughter that eventually cannot be held back. The charge that Magerman makes is to the shame of Khoisan subjectivity, and doubly so. In the first instance, his testimony is an account of the widespread humiliation, the shaming, of the Khoisan. But, in a further and more immediate instance, it is also witness to the consequence of that humiliation in the ashamed reticence of Khoisan victims. What is done to these people is a shame, but they are now left ashamed. That second blow – that the Khoisan subject is ashamed to have been so shamed, ashamed into inertia – is the irony of the circumstance and the root of the tension in the meeting.

Every aspect of Khoisan identity iterated in Magerman's account – the minority subjectivity of children, the corporal punishment, the likeness to dogs in the hearth, the failures, the clientism, the 'bont' appearance, the runaway, the nakedness, the 'schelm' – all these persist (as he implicitly accuses the meeting) in Khoisan reticence to witness and act upon their former abuse. This reticence is begun in the shaming itself, but the greatest irony of all is that it is itself a colonial attribute, a restraint imposed by the law that needs to be asked permission for the meeting to happen in the first place, taught by mission education, and held up as a test, a benchmark, by metropolitan champion and adversary alike, of the experiment in a free citizenry of the Khoisan. In short it is the price of co-option, and Magerman's charge is one of complicity. It should be remembered that when the London Missionary Society superintendent, John Philip, rallied the humanitarian cause against Ordinance 50, exciting Stockenström and others with the idea of the Kat River settlement, the going slogan for the 'improvement' of the Khoisan was 'Fit to be Free.'⁴ The minutes of the meeting at which Magerman spoke are redolent of the language of this clientism. Indeed, the meeting itself follows the example of so many instances in white colonial society. It is called 'to consider the propriety of Memorializing His Excellency the Governor and the Honourable the Legislative Council', which formulation is shot through with grovelling and an obeisant estimation of colonial authority. This subjectivity differs from being 'among the ashes with the dogs' only in degree, and that degree of freedom is won by a new form of being 'ingeboeked' (in the sense of entering the 'books' of colonial power practice).

History knows that this tension of 'compradore' subjectivity runs through the Kat River Settlement, because of the overwhelming 'rebellion' of the Settlement in 1851, during the course of the War of Mlanjeni. Then the Khoi leader Willem Uithaolder spoke of the 'ruin of the

⁴ J. Sales, *Mission Stations and the Coloured Communities of the Eastern Cape, 1800–1852*, 86. Stockenström told the Select Committee in London that the general idea of the Kat River Settlement was, 'Show yourselves worthy of freedom

coloured and poor of this land, a land which we, as natives, may justly claim as our mother land'.⁵ This is language whose nationalist overtones refute the 'originating' subjectivity of the Settlement and the mission stations that went before it. Uithaolder was himself a pensioner of the colonial forces, and his mutiny provides a clue to another intriguing detail of the minutes of the 1834 meeting: that Mr Magerman's jacket was red. This jacket is the livery of colonial subjectivity. As Magerman says, it makes him 'something like a human being', raising him out of the bestiality of his former existence, when he was 'always naked before', but on colonial terms still. The redness of that jacket is a detail like the giggling in the meeting. It breaks through the ideological charter of the minutes like the hole of a small flame in paper. Perhaps the redness of the jacket indicates nothing, but it must surely suggest an interest in clothes and the precision of choice in assembling a costume. We shall see this again in analysing the clothing of Fugard's Boesman and Lena. It is always dangerous to presume anything of something as culturally infused as colour, but in 1834, on a heavily militarised frontier on the eve of war, and in a society where one of the major routes into colonial subjectivity for indigent male Khoisan was through the corps and commandos of the colonial forces, we are allowed to remember that the common term for a British soldier was a 'redcoat'.⁶

Laughter is a highly variable phenomenon, but it is always ironic. The laughter at Mr Magerman is of the character that we may call 'deferred'. We recognise his disposition as embarrassing to those he is among (chiefly we do this because of the heightened sensitivity of the record to his non-verbal signals, which sensitivity imitates the experience of acute attention that is embarrassment), even if we do not read, as we may, his distress in being so laughed at. It is not simply that he has made an ass of himself – his testimony is far too serious for us to believe that any kind of normality would find it funny. There is something particularly in the exchange of testimony and its witness by others that is embarrassing. I have suggested the major factor of an implicit charge of co-option and complicity, but we may seek more from the form of his address, aspects of which compound and complicate his accusations discomfortingly. Magerman's general disposition may be recognised as something akin to the witness of evangelical gatherings.⁷ There is about his delivery a pronouncedly performative aspect, and the

and your further improvement is in your power.' *Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, 1835–6, 28 August 1835, 154.

⁵ T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, 239.

⁶ For an extended treatment of clothes, see 167ff below.

⁷ Khoisan on the LMS stations were familiar with such evangelical institutions of witness as 'experience meetings', and proselytising by conversion narratives. George Barker, the resident at Theopolis, an outsider of Bethelsdorp and from which many Kat River Settlers were drawn, alludes to both in his Diary, SAL, MSB 57, and one may gather something of the emotional tenor of LMS spirituality from such entries as September 11, 1816 or January 19, 1817. Elizabeth Elbourne tackles mission spirituality in 'Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity', *Kronos*, 19 (November 1992), in which she cites the case of Andries Stoffels (whom we revisit in later chapters), itself

'high colour' of a discourse simultaneously managed as rhetoric and abandoned in glossolalia. He shows his jacket, points out his son, expostulates, claps, and stands mute. His emotional engagement is cast in the mould of evangelical discourse when he attests that 'the fire is in me'. In all he presents a figure familiar in form to the spiritual witness, or possession, of evangelical Christianity. That this form has been identified with drunkenness since the original glossolalia of Pentecost, and that drunkenness is the stereotypical and repeated charge of the Colony against the Khoisan 'vagrant', as we shall see, highlights both a general historical and a local historical irony in the instance of Magerman's 'performance'. Taken like this, his testimony is shot through with a number of apparently contradictory strands of significance, and the text of identity he is weaving (even as he speaks for and against it) is excruciatingly reminiscent of the Khoisan circumstance itself. Magerman's evangelicism is a borrowed robe, but he wears it, ironically, to confer authority in condemning its authority, however unwittingly. He is, as they say, all of a muddle, a contradictory composition. We already know that robe – that identity (and its crisis) – as the glaring circumstance of a red jacket. Raised voices and muteness, friends and enemies, nakedness and clothing, religiosity and drunkenness, bastardy and parentage, all these are warring in the moment to the discomfort of all present. The laughter is deferred in being directed at him, but the joke, such as it is, is the life of the colonised, those who here laugh. In popular parlance, as in practice, this sense of 'joke' is a figure of dismissal. In this instance the laughter is a species of corporate self-deprecation. The poet Adam Zagajewski has the tenor of Magerman's moment exactly when he writes

Who has once met
irony will burst into laughter
during the prophet's lecture.⁸

But what is it that we dismiss with a joke, and what libidinous pleasure is it that rushes to climax when we have put off whatever it is the joke puts off? Adam Phillips reminds us that

'We can only laugh,' Freud wrote, 'when a joke has come to our help.' It is as though we need something to release, or permit, the laugh that is already inside us. It is through the joke, Freud suggests, that we are momentarily released from the obstacles we have imposed on our pleasure.⁹

indicative of the highly expressive and often fraught attitudes of witness. One caveat to my point here, implicit and explicit in much of Elbourne's argument, is that there is good evidence for the syncretisation of precolonial Khoisan spirituality and that of the evangelical missions; this need not refute what I am suggesting, indeed, it may thicken the instance of the irony, as Magerman's behaviour becomes yet more historically layered. See also Elbourne's 'A Question of Identity: Evangelical Culture and Khoisan Politics in the Early Nineteenth-Century Eastern Cape', *Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, vol. 18.

⁸ A. Zagajewski, 'Ode to Plurality', *Selected Poems*, 25–7.

The joke *here* is that Freud is also right: it is not the obstacles that the colony has imposed that give way to the joke, but the obstacles that the Khoisan have imposed themselves. That *is* the joke. 'And rescuing pleasure, in Freud's terms, is a form of remembrance.'¹⁰ This makes sense of the laughter at a deposition of witness, and of witness to abuses, and particularly of witness to repression. We may begin to see in the laughter at Mr Magerman not *his* dismissal, but the dismissal of the obstacles to pleasure – something potentially liberating, certainly mutinous. 'Jokes, like dreams, are the saboteurs of repression,'¹¹ says Phillips, pointing up Freud in a manner most useful to our consideration, where Freud thought jokes

make possible the satisfaction of an instinct (whether lustful or hostile) in the face of an obstacle that stands in its way. They circumvent this obstacle and in that way draw pleasure from a source which the obstacle had made inaccessible ... The repressive activity of civilisation brings it about that primary possibilities of enjoyment, which have now, however, been repudiated by the censorship in us, are lost to us. But to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost.'¹²

Freud's word 'tendentious' is a happy irony for our argument, almost a joke, suggesting as it does the kind of agenda behind the joke recorded in the minutes. And we might as well permit the collusion of lust and anger in a lustful hostility, given the contrariety of Magerman's attitude(s), the way he is split between lust for his jacket and anger at the subservience with which it has been bought. Of the 'repressive activity of civilisation' we have noted the censorship in the minutes' euphemistic 'smiled' and its occasion in parentheses. Perhaps we should raise an eyebrow, not without a smile, at the meeting's adjournment at this stage.

What is the part of laughter in a thesis about vagrancy in literature and culture, five centuries of itinerant poverty and its recurrent figure in our stories? Only this, that laughter begins for us a history of consciousness perhaps even better than literature, for unlike deliberate representations its spontaneity guarantees its truth. Historians and literary critics alike are bound, overwhelmingly, to the deliberate record. This does not mean it is always the literate record, though it usually is, but it does mean that they are always working with representations, with accounts that already presume to mean. Laughter is not intended to mean; it is a sensory ejaculation, the record of pleasure (it may seem only of relief) erupting in the breach occasioned

⁹ A. Phillips, 'Looking at Obstacles', *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 90.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² S. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, SE VIII, 101. Phillips, 'Looking at Obstacles', *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 90.

by some irony. To be sure, there are instances in which laughter may be manipulated, directed at the discomfort or comfort of another person, but this would then, by definition, be false laughter, a representation of laughter. True laughter has the character of a sneeze or a yawn in participating in the body's repertoire of somatic reflex. But it differs in one all-important aspect: although, like a sneeze or a yawn, it is produced by difference in the body and the body's inclination to homeostatic equilibrium, yet laughter arises in consciousness (broadly put, for we will allow that it arises in the 'unconscious', if that is to say 'the mind', in some sort). Animals do not laugh. Laughter is human, but true laughter, though it strives to become speech, is before speech, without intent, yet full of significance.

Whenever a subject of the category 'vagrant' speaks for the record, we must remember that he or she is never *themselves* a vagrant (that is imposed upon them) and that they are a vagrant only to the record. This means that their utterance is not properly their own, and only recovered on the wavelength of the interest they hold out to that record. This, in turn, means that we cannot have a history of vagrants that is 'true' to the experience of those thus designated. That is why this study overwhelms its history with the interruptions of culture, that are texts. The vagrant may seem real to the record, but the vagrant subject knows he or she does not exist, is only a representation. The 'true' significance of the vagrant lies outside of what the record intends him or her to mean, in the act of that intending, or in the act of resisting that intent. At the level of text we find the resistance of the vagrant to his or her textual 'intent', to what is intended for him or her, not in any textual participation, which signifies co-option and acquiescence to the order of the record and its intent, but in lustful hostility. As mutiny and rebellion is to history (in 1851), so laughter is to the text (on the 5th of August 1834). It hardly comes as a surprise, then, that when the Kat River Settlement was riven by its allegiances in 1851, Ourson Magerman was of the party of the rebellion, siding with the Xhosa against the colony.¹³

Skellim speech

Vagrants cannot be said properly to exist. They are an invention of those who describe the circumstance, not for its own sake, but in order to use the category for their own interests, sometimes within a rhetoric that professes the interests of the vagrants thus described, and

sometimes without any pretence to altruism. In this way vagrancy is an essentially negative condition, a condition generated in the breach of some 'prior', or at least prioritised, order. This real absence of the vagrant, where the vagrant is ideologically configured as absent from home or work, is itself ironic, and swells like discomfoting laughter through the 'minutes' of this study.

Such observations are hardly original this late in the post-structuralist, post-colonial day, nor very hard to come by. The forever unhappy designation of 'the subject' in history is a linguistic business as much as a material one (or, rather *than* a material one, if you are strictly post-structuralist): currently (and I think unfortunately¹⁴) the going designation for the kind of subject of which I (cannot) speak is 'subaltern'. Gayatri Spivak asks, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in her article addressing precisely the point I am concerned to make here, but there is an extent to which the designation 'subaltern' pretends that such a 'subject' (she is concerned to deny the subject as an entity; it is more the fetish category of humanism) can indeed speak.¹⁵ The 'subaltern' designation is produced in order to liberate such a category from the strictures of those who derive it. But if we forsook the neologistic appropriation, 'subaltern', and called the figure of such an underclass (though we must not presume the prepositional orientation of underness, nor the received truth of class) something like 'subordinate' or 'inordinate' (without order, which I use frequently to denote the relation of the vagrant) or 'insubordinate' (which might be better yet), then perhaps we could speak more freely. To some extent this is simply to resist becoming 'implicated in theories' (the term is Hazlitt's and the verb is loud)¹⁶, but it is also to suggest that we should allow, as I have hoped to put it, the common sense of the impossibility of a vagrant utterance, or at the very least, a deep disquiet at the nature of such a thing, before we resort to such theoretically-implicated language as Spivak's formulation, which has it that 'subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the elite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it

¹³ Clifton Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865*, 84, 181. Crais relates also how Magerman was struck by a white settler in 1850 (172).

¹⁴ Not least because the term is so dominated by homonymic cognisance in the discourse of the British military. I find the 'playful' etymology of the word, with the emphasis on alternation, more gaseous than useful, particularly in the way in which the term becomes capable of any condition. That this is a post-structuralist triumph, I am aware. For the provenance of the term in Gramsci, and its subsequent history, see De Kock's expositions, in note 15, following.

¹⁵ G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 271-313. I am indebted here to Leon de Kock's uncommonly lucid presentation of this argument, following the equally admirable Roger Deacon, in his conference review, 'People, Power & Culture' and the Ethics of Historical Representation', *South African Historical Journal*, 27 (November 1992), 243-253. R. Deacon, 'Hegemony, Essentialism and Radical History in South Africa', *SAHJ*, 24 (May 1991), 166-184.

¹⁶ W. Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', in P. P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 8, 70-77.

that the subaltern's subjectivity is available to us only in the signifiers by which it was both constituted (discursively cathected) and simultaneously effaced. In Derridean thinking, a signifier's meaning is constituted by its difference from other signifiers. Consequently the signifier's meaning is an act of 'erasure' (saying what the thing is different from, or what it is not). Given the density of colonially-inscribed discursive layers through which South African historians are compelled to apprehend the subjectivity of subalterns, one can easily engage in unwitting acts of neo-colonial complicity by presenting discursivity as 'fact'.¹⁸

On the one hand this is why laughter in history might be so useful, because its significance is begun on the far side of colonial inscription, even if it is mediated to us through the colonial record. In my terms, laughter is 'insubordinate', which is why irony is ever the first tool of truth. On the other hand, it does not take theory to show us the 'difficulty' or perhaps 'impossibility' of subaltern testimony. The (colonial, hegemonic, ordinate) archive of vagrancy shows us this in the paucity of verbatim records of the vagrant (a cipher of non-existence, if ever there was), none of which few exist ever laying claim to the designation 'vagrant' in any case. A word like the 'schelm' that Mr Magerman employs is far more useful. It has the connotative resources that Gramsci and his heirs would seek from 'subaltern', being a compound of trickster and criminal, something fluid and out of focus, whose first character is that slipperiness so beloved of post-structuralist writing, as it goes about its impossible business. The Xhosa chief Ngqika called the Neutral Territory – that liminal zone, between colony and Xhosaland, the frontier, where the Kat River Settlement was established – 'only a place for white, as well as black *skellims*',¹⁹ and he meant by it every sort of insubordinate agent, any recusant subject of the history produced, as it is policed, by treaties and the wars and the *grand rait*. It is a word that will do nicely, not least because it binds the frontier and vagrancy in a common lexical occurrence, a clue to the historical 'truth' of vagrancy in the Cape and useful to our way of framing the idea.

Moreover, the 'skellim' nature of the frontier, of liminality, reminds us that Spivak's concern with the (im)possibility of subaltern speech reaches beyond the ordinations of any one discourse and into the relation between exclusive societies, discourses, however we figure them. Paul Carter, in his pioneering *Road to Botany Bay*, where he invents spatial history, and by it the possibility of a history of discursivity (since what he is concerned with is the *place* of Australia, a consciousness, rather than the *space*, a Cartesian entity), is right to refute any 'grounds for presuming that aboriginal history can be treated as a subset of white history', and to do so noting the exclusivity of unengaged languages (he is speaking primarily of precolonial aboriginal

¹⁷ G. C. Spivak, 'Introduction', *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 11.

¹⁸ L. de Kock, 'People, Power & Culture' and the Ethics of Historical Representation', *SAHJ*, 27 (November 1992), 247.

history).²⁰ There is – and it is evident from the record available to empirical history – too much that remains untranslatable. This is reflected not only in the paucity of accounts, but in the explicit account of muteness (in Magerman's testimony), in the imposed muteness of the accused in the legal record (as we shall see below), and representations of vagrant muteness from the 'Dommerars' of early modern Europe to J. M Coetzee's Michael K (as is our subject in Chapter 5).

Inevitably, then, it is not surprising to find that the records of vagrancy, the archive of that condition, are overwhelmingly the production of those who 'accuse' the vagrant, rather than those who thus find themselves described. To an obvious extent, the technology of record tends not to overlap with the diagnostic circumstance of the vagrant. Where the archive is the production of the literate and the settled (who can write and store a record) it must exclude the voice of the illiterate, itinerant poor. Furthermore, where literacy and settlement are privileged by and with social power, then the agencies of social power will privilege the literate and settled: the law, the processes of justice, access to education, publication in newspapers and books, all these accrue to the literate and settled, as the powerful, in positive terms. And it is their impression that is left in the historical record of all these agencies. These are simple truths about the production of the empirical data that historians have at their disposal, related to, but not yet encompassing, all that is meant by Spivak's 'cathexis of the elite', which is the enforced fulfilment of hegemonic desire in respect of the 'Other'.²¹ The vagrant, by definition (for that is all she or he is) is recorded negatively, as absence and as other. The record of the vagrant is not able to be his or her own.

Certainly we find instances of the vagrant addressing the literate record, in newspapers or court records, for example, but these are instances in which the vagrant becomes a vagrant in responding to the accusation of being one. We only hear from the subject what is solicited from him or her in the occasion of being bought to book, as the phrase felicitously has it. There are records of this nature (though they remain fewer than the records of those who first describe 'them') and they have their place in the account that follows. What we do not hear is what the 'vagrant' says when he or she is not a vagrant, among the unrecorded and unrecording

¹⁹ Evidence of T. Phillips, 17 August 1835, *Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines, British Settlements*, 73.

²⁰ P. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 325, 327.

²¹ Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 18. How are we to deal with these theoretical (non)entities? I use 'other' here, cautious of the accentuating capital 'O', howsoever it may seek to put that entity on an equal footing with the (presumably known and named) 'Self'. I don't like, but am grateful, for the inverted commas.

community. The 'vagrant', as a designation of that ideology which fails the vagrant, or which the vagrant fails, is intrinsically a spoken subject rather than a speaking one.²²

That is not entirely true, and not least untrue because the distinction between the speaking and the spoken, as also the active and the passive, distinguishes precisely that breach in which the subject may recognise his or her contingency, as also that breach in which we may locate the subject passing between poles of alterity, 'in crisis'. There exist among the records of hegemonic society, the newspaper reports and court records, snatches of reported speech of the kind that is so elusive – speech, that is, before the accusation of vagrancy. Inevitably, the record of that speech corrupts it and is itself corrupt. How far we may trust it is uncertain, for the record is itself part of the accusation of vagrancy, and often what is recorded is evidently edited to the purpose of that occasion. Nonetheless, what is to hand is what the accuser (ideology, the interpellator) records as spoken by the speaking subject, momentarily, in enacting the 'transgression' which brings about the accusation, then the silence of the spoken-for, and the insertion of the accuser's speech.²³

In the records of the resident magistracy at Grahamstown in the 1830s, where a colonial town is growing into its second decade, fraught with the politics of an imperial frontier and an emerging colonial economy, we may read again and again of pleas 'guilty' or 'not guilty' by the accused.²⁴ The accusations and pleas revolve around the various charges of petty larceny that attend that sector of the population then and now 'recognised' as vagrants, and whose interests the ascendant, white, settler population then sought to constrain to their own under a hoped-for and sought-after 'Vagrancy Ordinance'. The rhetoric of that campaign, and of the opposition to it, is the substance of this chapter, for it marks a definable and significant contribution to the rhetoric of vagrancy in South African life and letters.²⁵ However, the thing to be noted first of all, is that only one phrase escapes the 'noise' and 'riot' and the legally circumscribed utterances

²² The formulation is, of course, Lacanian, developed widely through the *Écrits*, and underlying much of my argument following. See especially, J. Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I', 'Aggressivity in psychoanalysis' and 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis', *Écrits*.

²³ I am using 'accuse' where Althusser has 'interpellate' because the vagrant subject is less called into being than forced, and because the violence of the accusation is sufficient, in Lacanian terms, to produce both the splitting of the subject and his/her and our awareness of it. Moreover, again after Lacan, the subject in crisis may not 'recognise' his or herself as he or she is interpellated, but – radically, hazardously – 'misrecognise' the calling, refuse the accusation, plead not guilty, or, as we shall see, curse (*méconnaissance*).

²⁴ See, for example, 'Albany: Criminal Record Book, 1835–7', Cape Archives, 1/AY: 3/1/1/1/3, 'Albany: Criminal Record Book, 1837–8', CA, 1/AY: 3/1/1/1/4, 'Albany: Magistrate's Notebooks, Records of Proceedings in Criminal Cases, 1835–7', CA, 1/AY: ¼.

²⁵ I do not propose to set forth here a strict history of the proposed Vagrancy Ordinance, which is exemplarily accomplished by Elizabeth Elbourne in her 'Freedom at Issue: Vagrancy Legislation and the Meaning of Freedom in Britain and the Cape Colony, 1799 to 1842', *Slavery and Abolition*, 15 (2), 1994. My interest here is of a more literary and cultural inclination, but I am also indebted to Elbourne personally for first drawing my attention to the records of Khoisan opposition to the proposed ordinance, which are the substance of this discussion. See also H. C. Botha, *John Fairbairn in South Africa*, 97ff, for an account of the legal fortunes of the proposed ordinance.

of the pleas of these accused in the 1830s.²⁶ Even this phrase, it should be said, is repeated so routinely in the notebooks of the resident magistrate that it surely figures as exemplary, even symbolic, as much as it is actual. In the melee of circumstances in which these overwhelmingly Khoisan (then 'Hottentot') are brought to law – drunkenness, breach of the peace, riot, assault, indecent exposure – there is time and again the record of 'obscene and indecent language, to wit the word "moers kont" and other similar expressions'.²⁷

The utterance that still today identifies a vagrant on the streets of Cape Town (where 'Jou moer' or 'Jou ma se poes' are now held to be the prevalent forms) is thoroughly historical. It has been brought within the cultural matrix of hegemonic South Africa, quoted with relish, most famously in a widely circulated cartoon by Zapiro, in which a down-and-out on Cape Town's Grand Parade comments, knee-deep in the litter left behind by the party anticipating the announcement of the 2004 Olympic city, 'Athens se ma se @*#%!'.²⁸ But even as I write, the lampposts are adorned with posters for the Cape Town Festival, and those advertising the stand-up shows shout 'Jou ma se comedy'. The cartoon generates its humour by recourse to the discourse of the gutter, associated with hangovers and irreverence, and by flirting with the transgressive 'indecent' of that speech. The manner in which the word 'poes' is translated in the convention of a typewriter's (now keyboard's) top row's upper case is itself illuminating of the deep practice of obscenity, for it describes the fingers' errancy, their wandering away from the closed order of the 'qwertyuiop' alphabet to the random donations of the symbols which themselves *stand for something else*. This is the language, not of abbreviation, but of transferred hieroglyph. The Rosetta Stone by which we read it is made common through the intertextuality of comic books and the like, but it relies also upon a locally common cultural code in anticipating not just the swearword, but that the word is precisely 'poes'. That common cultural code, productive of laughter because it enables irony, is forged in history and it serves historical purposes. What people say, like 'moers kont', or 'poes' or 'vagrant', may offer a simple denotation, but its connotative significance is far greater, in all these instances entirely overwhelming the denotative value. 'Vagrancy', as we shall see again and again, stands for something else.

²⁶ 'Riot' is a common charge applied to drunken affrays. The manner in which it conflates social misdemeanour with wholesale treason is of obvious significance here. I discuss this kind of linguistic manoeuvre in the textual life of vagrancy below. 'Noise' is another frequent charge. An exemplary instance: the case against Coenraad Buis, Michael Branders, Kiewiet Barker, Klaas Gert, Frederick Dirk, Saartje Oerson and Jacynyn Jason (21 November 1835) where 'riotous conduct' and 'making a great noise' are charged (as well as an instance of the use of the expression 'moers kont' – see below). CA, 1/AY: 3/1/1/1/3. The names of these accused (as with so many in these records) anticipate Bain's creations in 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', as we shall see. 'Frederick Dirk' and Bain's 'Diederik Dik' could be phonic cousins. The surname 'Barker' is possibly derived from the London Missionary Society resident at Theopolis, George Barker.

²⁷ The 'moers kont' formula is common to the 'Albany: Criminal Record Books', CA, 1/AY: 3/1/1/1/3ff. See, for example, the case against Franscina Scheepers and others, for 'Affray and indecency', 6 April 1835 (1/AY: 3/1/1/1/3).

That the phrase *'moers kont'* is again and again the single donation of the criminal record to the archive of the utterance of accused while at liberty is especially interesting. These two words represent the linguistic frontier between that liberty and the accusation that curtails it, in other words the frontier between the subject and the state. Together they represent offence to the body politic, as such anticipating evidence of danger to the state. How does the invocation of the female genitals, as attributed to the character of some other party in an instance overheard by the public, constitute this threat? How does the figure of the mother relate to the danger of the utterance? How does the vigorous colloquiality of the expression intensify its threat?

The obscenity of the word *'kont'* is anciently established (in English *'cunt'* has been legally obscene for a good 300 years, and its first dictionary appearance was as late as 1965)²⁹, and clearly it has something to do with the word's direct invocation of female sexuality. There is a long tradition, reaching back to Genesis, of the hazardous power of female sexuality, simply interpreted as a complex of myth displacing the real occasions for male domination in patriarchy. The precise nature of that is not our subject here, save to note that once again we are tracing the figure of a threat to the (patriarchal) hegemonic order. Attempts to suppress mention of (particularly female) sexuality on the grounds of propriety are ideological gestures pretending modesty and protection of the 'gentle' sex, but, in fact, suppressing evidence of women's power in the lives of men and the male state. An Afrikaans definition of *'kont'* refers revealingly to a woman's *'skaamdeel'*³⁰ – part of shame – an expression embodying modesty in the form of shame, which shame, it must be remembered, reaches back to Eve's putative role in the Fall. These are commonplace arguments, but we may take them further. The *'plat'*³¹ or vulgar language which *'kont'* is held to represent extends the hazard of the word by summoning the discourse of the popular, which is to say the common mass of humanity, by numbers and by 'vulgarity' (which is to say uneducated coarseness of manner and speech) antipathetic to the elite preserve of power. That *'plat'*, or 'flat', discourse is an extreme form of plain-speaking, of calling a spade a spade, which is the discourse that asks questions uncomfortable of hegemonic history: When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman? To yoke such an assertion of female sexuality to the figure of the mother, the primary figure of production in human life, the central means, is to redouble the challenge to male priority. What is more, the *'plat'* form *'moer'* is homophonically cognate with the verb *'moer'*, to beat up (thus a latent cipher of violence), as also the noun *'moer'* representing the dregs (thereby reinforcing the class ascriptions of the use of the

²⁸ *Sowetan*, 8 September 1997.

²⁹ In the *Penguin English Dictionary*. The OED spurned it. E. Partridge, *A Dictionary of Historical Slang*, 231.

³⁰ F. F. Odendaal et al, *HAT Verklarende Woordeboek*.

³¹ *ibid*. We will relate 'plat' to the colonial accusation against the Khoisan in greater depth in our next chapter, especially in the instance of the name 'Plaatje'.

'plat' form 'moer' for 'moeder'). In the circumstances of affray, where one subject of 'the dregs of society' is beating another, and both are drunk, as if enough to slur such a word as 'moeder' so that the public, or history) might hear 'moer', and in a population friable under the duress of colonisation, miscegenating, migrating, to the extent that one category of it is called 'Bastaard', by which we must imagine that parentage is an uncertain but politically potent matter, is it not inevitable that this is what should be said – 'moers kont'? The phrase poses a suite of complex challenges to the scheme of appearances that scaffolds the public order – what we would call 'ideology'. It is shot through with attributes of class and sex (possibly even race) antipathetic to the claims to right of the status quo. Above all, however, if we are distracted by the content of the vulgar utterance then we miss its most hazardous attribute of all, which is the form, the utterance, itself. In speech, and particularly in vulgar speech, if by 'vulgar' we mean not 'obscene' (as hegemony has it) but common and popular, there exists the possibility of revolt – the statement of the untruth of things and protest at that – and of revolution – the restatement of the way things are as the way things might be, the reissue of truth. What is dangerous about 'moers kont', and marks it as the frontier between subject and state, is that it says things the way people say them to themselves and know them to be in reality, it is the language of the people, libidinous, charged with conflict, honest about power, rather than the language of propriety, erased of contradiction and conflict, which is as the state legislates it.

At the expense of the public

In the 1830s at the Cape 'vagrancy' came to stand for a social subjectivity antipathetic to the interests of the emerging colonial state. In particular it came to figure as a kind of lexical antithesis to Ordinance 50, the statute passed in 1828 to liberate the colonial indigene – essentially Khoisan, but also those of mixed parentage – from the legal minority imposed by colonisation and consolidated in the Caledon Code of 1809.³² Before Ordinance 50 the Khoisan in the Colony were without the rights of citizenship, subject to 'apprenticeship' (*inboekseling*) as children (which differed little from the condition of slavery), and forced as adults to enter into the service of colonists. Movement required the provision of a pass by the master of 'free' Khoisan. Tenure of land and some freedom of self-determination was limited to those Khoisan

³² See V. C. Malherbe, 'The Cape Khoisan in the Eastern Districts of the Colony Before and After Ordinance 50 of 1828', Elbourne, 'Freedom at Issue: Vagrancy Legislation and the Meaning of Freedom in Britain and the Cape Colony, 1799 to 1842', *Slavery and Abolition*, 15 (2), 1994. The historical sketch that follows is indebted to these two authors, as also the lucid summation of Tim Keegan's *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, chapter 4, and especially 116–128.

living on the mission stations. The missions, in turn, were resented by colonial whites and regarded warily by colonial government – especially those of the London Missionary Society in the east, where Johannes van der Kemp, and after him John Read, established settlements (notably at Bethelsdorp) provocative of Khoi independence and liberty, a sense of rights, and a radically inclined Christianity. There the Khoisan were hounded for their 'opgaaf' tax, and, whenever they left the security of the mission, for their passes and, implicitly, their labour and possessions.

Ordinance 50 represented the triumph of a liberal humanitarianism running through metropolitan British politics but reaching to the edges of the empire in such institutions as these missions and some quarters of the press.³³ In principle it provided for the free citizenry of the colonial indigenes, as colour was abolished as a category of discrimination in any legal matter. The former 'Hottentot' labour category fell away, and with it the conditions of bonded servitude it regulated. Theoretically the Khoisan were free to own land and to participate in the limited representational government of the colony. In practice, few had the resources to move out of service and into self-employment. What was more immediately significant, however, was the possibility of exchanging labour freely – a reform which encouraged migration and limited the power of both individual masters and the whole class of employers. It is not hard to see, in outline, just how welcome the ordinance would be to its beneficiaries, nor the extent to which it would be resisted by those whose former power it curtailed, or threatened to curtail.

Every instance of public disorder in the years immediately following the promulgation of Ordinance 50 has a double value because of this context. On the one hand, a breach of the peace is simply that minor offence it is 'recognised' to be. But in the archive, as in the rhetoric of the time, each such instance stands also for a condemnation of the liberal (dis)order and is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) adduced in the campaign for the retraction of the liberties of Ordinance 50. By 1834 opposition to the new dispensation was consolidated in a concerted campaign to bring about a 'Vagrancy Ordinance', putatively to constrain the most socially offensive and conspicuous excesses of the 'Hottentot' population, but effectively to restore the economic foundations of the colony under the Caledon Code and in the era of slavery, concluded with emancipation in the same year. 'Vagrancy', then, comes to stand not only for the free movement of the indigent poor, but for any liberty of ownership, labour, movement, or even of race as a principle of association (which becomes more conspicuous as a category of Khoisan consciousness in the wake of the demise of the 'Hottentot' category in law). This raises

³³ Elbourne, 'Freedom at Issue'. Alan Lester's *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* sets forth an admirable estimation of the (inter)penetration of metropolitan and colonial humanitarian discourse.

the centuries-old type of the 'vagrant' to a new and particularly local level of significance, and with marked implications for the culture and literature of South Africa. It is in this nexus that the repeated figure of the vagrant is brought into Cape literature and culture, where he and she remain pointedly represented to this day.

Thus it is that the criminal records of the 1830s make interesting reading as they go about representing what is not called 'vagrancy' in legal discourse, but which constitutes that offence in a clamorous popular rhetoric. Overwhelmingly, the records of the Resident Magistrate in Albany (which is where we concentrate our scrutiny, because it is where Kaatje Kekkelbek emerges, and the propaganda she serves) mark out theft as the single greatest offence against the propriety of law. As a representative sample, 42% of the cases in 1835 concern theft, with another 2% concerning the fraudulent evasion of tolls or market regulations.³⁴ There is no mystery about this: the common law objection to theft is ancient, and property is everywhere the first concern of the propertied, especially where there are neighbours living in poverty. But what is stolen in Albany is generally petty: a sheep here and there, sugar, flour, workman's tools, palings, firewood, candlesticks (and one more audacious wagon).³⁵ What is of greater interest is the rest of the offences, which constitute the unlicensed sale of liquor and gunpowder (serious offences and the only ones to affect obviously white subjects, 6%), drunkenness (8%), assault (often in drunken affray, or marital, 14%), riot and affray (21%), obscenity or indecent exposure (often associated with 'riot', 11%).³⁶ The thieves work alone, but virtually all other offences are committed in groups.³⁷ This latter is important, for the nature of these offences is significant. These are not offences against the strict right of any individual, as in the case of theft (and in the case of assault, but that, though not mitigated by it, is significantly associated with the blur of melee). Instead these are offences against the body politic, and really against its ease and convenience, its comfort and where that thinly overlaps with its mores. These are offences of 'unsightliness' or disorder, and the objection to them is as much symbolic as it is real. For these offend against the fragile achievement of community, founded as it is upon a degree of sober orderliness, sexual caution, the kind of moral order that underpins the civic organisation, and which, though buttressed in law, is somewhat beneath that law's contempt. These are offences committed by those who have no stake in that *civitas*, and who therefore do not share its mores. Insofar as they are offences not against the private rights of individuals, but against the *civitas*, they are offences not against property, liberty, life and the like, but offences against the way

³⁴ 'Albany: Criminal Record Book, 1835-7', CA, 1/AY: 3/1/1/1/3.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

things are, the status quo –the state. In this, as we have seen in early modern Europe, the offence of ‘vagrancy’, as a latent and comprehensive category, is political.

The political nature of vagrancy is important, because in a society like that of the colonial Cape, and even more of the South Africa that emerges from it, the law of person is uncommonly political, which is to say uncommonly extended into the political life of the state. The most obvious focus for such a conflation of the personal and the political, in the South African instance, is race, a theme infamous to every aspect of that society. Anticipating that focus, colonial society turned to vagrancy as its scandal, and donated a related, poorly observed, but no less enduring theme.

No sooner was Ordinance 50 proclaimed than the colonial citizenry of the Cape began a concerted campaign to have it revoked. Particularly in 1828, and in 1834 when the ‘Vagrancy Ordinance’ was keenly anticipated, but in all the years between (and afterwards, too), colonials petitioned the governor on the subject of vagrancy.³⁸ The memorials came in from every corner of the colony, telling the same story of wandering gangs and their depredations, in words so similar from one representation to the next that in a more sophisticated society one would suspect a conspiracy. In fact, the language of these memorials was founded in the language of law as it emerged in the daily work of local officials: field cornets, civil commissioners and resident magistrates, many of whom stood close to the composition of these representations on behalf of their districts, where the legacy of the Dutch system brought the civilian population together in neighbourhood units of civic administration and defence. Moreover, the rhetoric became grounded in that of the forum supplied by the press, with *De Zuid Afrikaan* and, from 1831, the *Graham’s Town Journal* leading resistance to Ordinance 50 and sponsoring measures towards vagrancy legislation, and with Fairbairn’s *South African Commercial Advertiser* taking a contrary stand in the vanguard of the humanitarian campaign for the rights of the Khoisan.³⁹ Towards 1834 the concert of memorials was enjoined by the formal submission of LMS director John Philip’s memorandum on the subject to civil commissioners for comment.⁴⁰ This measure brought about public meetings and the semi-formal depositions of the 1834 memorials – on both sides of the debate, although inevitably the Khoisan position is thinly represented by comparison with that of most European colonists.

The inhabitants of Baviaans River complained in 1828 that they ‘have been and still are greatly amazed by a band of runaway Hottentots and Bosjemans who have infested this Veldt

³⁸ Several are cited below. We note there also that in 1834 memorials were solicited, which complicates the discursive instance variously: it codifies and conventionalises the memorial even further, it ‘fakes’ the appeal to government (since that appeal is sought), it presumes the gravity of the subject of the memorials. This context and its implications urge historiographical caution.

³⁹ H. C. Botha, *John Fairbairn in South Africa*, 97ff.

Cornetcy for several years in which period murders, and destruction of the livestock the property of the memorialists, have been committed.⁴¹ It is words like 'band', 'infested', 'runaway', and 'property', as well as 'outlaws' and 'banditte' (which occur in the same memorial) that disclose something of the 'offence' of vagrancy: the semantic field they occupy shares corners with those of physical malignancy and warfare, and the interpolated 'property' cunningly conflates these interests of the body politic with the fundamental concern of the individual in an economy of ownership. When the inhabitants of Cradock added their voice a few months later, they did so under the guise of seeking a resident magistrate (where 'resident' is itself the antonym of 'vagrant', and 'magistrate' the contradiction of 'outlaw'), protesting that 'the indolent and disorderly daily trespass with impunity on the rights of the well-respected'.⁴² Here one may note the 'moral' tenor of the objection, where indolence and disorder are not illegal, and where the legal offence of trespass is yoked in a nebulous and metaphorical manner to the abstract 'rights' of those whose value is once again moral, being 'well-respected', rather than those of a strictly legal plaintiff. We are meant to assume that the trespass is on the property of the inhabitants, to which those inhabitants have a legal right, but that is not what is actually written. Such sleights of hand betray the project of propaganda.

So too does the disclaimer heading the memorial of the inhabitants of Graaff-Reinet a few days later. 'Your memorialists beg leave to premise their statement by disclaiming in the most solemn manner any feeling of hostility against the Hottentots, Bosjesmans or any other nation or tribe...', they wrote.⁴³ That 'solemn manner' protests too much, not least since the memorial goes on to discriminate precisely on the matter of race, noting

Hottentots, who are in a state of poverty and who have no visible means of subsistence, but whose sole dependance [sic] appears to be in a series of depredations which are daily or indeed hourly being committed on the property of the inhabitants and which are for the most part of a petty description, but forming in the aggregate an annoyance which has at length become insupportable that the immediate vicinity of this town is infested with gangs of people of colour, chiefly

and going on to suggest 'that regulations may be passed to prevent any persons from vagabondizing about the country'.⁴⁴ There is a distinction between the vagrant and the vagabond that is blurred here: it is the distinction between what might be the petty work of those in a state of poverty and the aggregate undertakings of gangs about the country. That confusion is

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 97–9.

⁴¹ 'Memorial', (received) 28 August 1828, CA, CO 3938.

⁴² 'Memorial', 10 November 1828, CA, CO 3938.

⁴³ 'Memorial', 1 December 1828, CA, CO 3938.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

common to much of the rhetoric, and what it blurs follows the contours between the person and the state. There were sixty-odd signatories to the Graaff-Reinet memorial, and only one with an English name: Andrew Geddes Bain. In Grahamstown, where Bain and his 'Kaatje Kekklebek' would later appear, the settler inhabitants fell upon a nuanced, metropolitan notion of liberty, claiming that '[a]s Englishmen memorialists would be the last to call for any abridgement of personal liberty, but they humbly submit that in England, the most salutary effects result from the Vagrant Laws, and that was there a similar restraint upon the idle and dissipated of every class in this Colony, it would be attended with the most beneficial effects and tend materially to lessen the grievance.'⁴⁵

Such representations were the tenor of colonial responses to Ordinance 50 and they were redoubled when governor Benjamin D'Urban submitted a proposed vagrancy ordinance to the fledgling Legislative Council at the Cape in May 1834 and simultaneously gazetted it for public perusal and comment.⁴⁶ Again, the disclaimers of the respondents were pronounced: 'we do not allude to those who have any means of subsistence but solely to vagrants and thieves', wrote the farmers of the Koue Bokkeveld in 1834, signally using the term 'vagrant' itself.⁴⁷ Similarly, the inhabitants of Cradock returned to their earlier theme, but protested 'that your memorialists by expressing themselves ... of a certain class of Coloured people, they are not in the least meaning the peaceable people who are seeking a permanent abode amongst the inhabitants under proper permits from the Field Cornet or other authorities, or who are driven by famine into the colony, neither those who are quietly travelling along the Public Roads with their product to market – but only those who are wandering about or nestling together without proper means of subsistence or fixed abode.'⁴⁸ This memorial, besides applying the bestial implication of the word 'nestling', attached to the synonyms for 'vagrants' such terms as 'marauders', and invoked the prospect of war (in fact very real on the frontier at that time, with the War of Hintsá just months away) in describing these persons ('of Colour') as 'wandering about armed and unarmed'.⁴⁹

Back in 1829 the 'English' memorialists from Albany had already invoked the spectre of war, noting that their losses 'chiefly result from the incursions of the Caffres, and the number of idle Hottentots now wandering about the district in every direction, who, preferring a life of

⁴⁵ 'Memorial', (received) 24 September 1829, CA, CO 3941.

⁴⁶ Botha, *John Fairbairn*, 97ff. This is probably the best account of the precise passage of the proposed legislation, from D'Urban's commissioning the Attorney General, through submission to the Legislative Council, public canvass, delay, second reading, submission for the legal opinion of the Cape judiciary (twice), submission to the King-in-Council, and ultimate rejection.

⁴⁷ 'Memorial', 24 March 1834, CA, CO 3968.

⁴⁸ 'Memorial', 17 May 1834, CA, CO 3969.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

vagrancy to that of honest industry supply their wants at the expense of the Public.⁵⁰ A separate memorial accompanied ~~the~~ that of the settlers'; it represented the case of the Dutch farmers, averring that 'at present we suffer more by those Hottentots than by the Caffres ... [that] they are a ruin to themselves and an injury to the country ... it is at present very dangerous to attack and make prisoners of such troops of vagabonds'.⁵¹ The conflation of Xhosa 'incursion' (which is left loosely to mean anything from cattle raiding to piece-jobbing to outright invasion) with the general category of vagrancy is not only rhetorical; in time the 'threat' of Xhosa warrior and Khoisan recusant will coalesce into South Africa's racial hatred, as the interests of both are subsumed in the single category of the underclass in a racially described capitalism. Both figures arise not simply to threaten the individuals here protesting their respective material losses, but more treasonably, 'at the expense of the Public'. Such wider contexts – of war, Xhosa incursion, the immigration of Africans, the emigration of Boers, the liberation of slaves, the revision of vagrancy legislation in Britain – are significantly conducive to the apprehension of vagrancy's general danger to the state, and are to be considered below.

The young newspapers of the Cape Colony constituted its chief political forum. Fairbairn's *Commercial Advertiser* marked a spirited champion of Khoisan interests, with a disproportionate influence in the governmental reaches of colonial and even metropolitan society. Ranged against his liberal humanitarian stance (consolidating the positions of the liberal wing of the LMS, supporters of slave emancipation, and whiggish elements of professional and commercial Cape Town) were *De Zuid Afrikaan* and the settler advocate *Graham's Town Journal*. The tenor of the debate is important because it demonstrates the depth to which 'vagrancy' penetrated colonial consciousness and culture at exactly the moment when colonial identity was becoming established as a recognisable entity in such agencies as a local press and Legislative Council, and because the rhetoric of this debate therefore does much to shape ongoing latent perceptions of vagrancy and its relationship to the colonial (and extra-colonial, to-be-colonial) indigene. The very first issue of the *Graham's Town Journal* (itself formed, to a degree, out of the clay of 1828, as an artefact of the changes wrought, or thought to be wrought, by that year)⁵² carried a long report on the meeting of a proposed Temperance Society – a correlative concern of 'vagrancy' and one that runs in prominent parallel to editorials, letters and reports on the

⁵⁰ 'Memorial', (received) 24 September 1829, CA, CO 3941, item 16.

⁵¹ 'Memorial,' (received) 24 September 1829, CA, CO 3941, item 17.

⁵² See Robert McKend 'A journal among them': Colonial Discourse and the Creation of an Imaginary Community in the *Graham's Town Journal*, 1831–6' for an account of the circumstances and role of the *GTJ* in consolidating settler ideology. Some historians doubt the reach and impact of Ordinance 50 (and its related Ordinance 49), at least in material terms. Its discursive reach was (and is) considerable. Elbourne, 'Freedom at Issue', 133. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 104.

broader subject in the colonial press.⁵³ By the seventh issue the paper was publishing the vituperatively anti-humanitarian letter of 'A.B.', which asserted that some twelve to fifteen thousand Khoisan were 'loosed' upon the Colony.⁵⁴ Was this Andrew Geddes Bain? The next letter published is signed 'X.Y.' and is a useful curb on the potential significance of the first two letters of the alphabet (as happen also to be Bain's initials). Moreover 'A.B.' attacks the *Commercial Advertiser* (for which Bain himself wrote). On the other hand the journal has a letter two months later that is very much in Bain's tone and style, condemnatory of 'infamous Philipines'.⁵⁵ In our next chapter we shall see that the coterie and politics of the *Grahams Town Journal* were more conducive to Bain's interests than the *Commercial Advertiser* on which he began as a journalist. Indeed, when the war of 1834–5 broke out and the *Advertiser* underplayed the devastation it wreaked upon the Albany settlement, Bain was among the several hundred who used the pages of the *Graham's Town Journal* to petition 'all who would not wilfully be made instrumental in stifling the cries of the widow and the fatherless for protection, – to use their best endeavours to suppress circulation of that paper, during the continuance of the present awful crisis.'⁵⁶ The point here is to delineate the debate – and usefully to complicate that delineation, to gainsay its lines: the *Grahams Town Journal* published a response to 'A.B.' that took issue with the implicit politics of the paper:

12 a 15, 000 Hottentot gypsyng? *Domine dirige nos!* were [sic] are they? A Hottentot may lay hold now and then of one sheep, but suppose it should have been a wolf? ... poor Tottee must bear the blame, he is always the rogue; and yet Tottee was living all over the country when the English came. He was naked and hungry, yet the sheep were not stolen. He was uneducated also! Now he is educated keeps himself cloathed instead of being idle ...⁵⁷

The piece was signed 'Levitas', which pseudonym might well signify irony; certainly such a position was antipathetic to the *Journal* in general and well-calculated to fuel the fire of settler hysteria on the frontier. By contrast, the *Commercial Advertiser* was constrained to such formulae as the claim that '[a]t this end of the country we hear little of Idleness and less of Vagrancy ... [o]ur Friends on the Eastern Frontier, however, are, it would seem, in less easy circumstances.'⁵⁸ Again, the prevarications are a rhetoric calculated to castigate and excite. Fairbairn took up his stance against the exaggerations of the 'vagrancy' caucus most provocatively in 1830 when he

⁵³ *Graham's Town Journal*, 1,1, 30 December 1831.

⁵⁴ *GTJ*, 1,7, 10 February 1832.

⁵⁵ *GTJ*, 1, 18, 27 April 1832.

⁵⁶ *GTJ*, 4, 158, 2 January 1835.

⁵⁷ *GTJ*, 1, 17, 20 April 1832.

⁵⁸ *SACA*, 5, 318, 30 June 1830.

and John Philip toured the frontier and were feted on the mission stations and reviled among the colonial whites. Fairbairn wrote:

Government may give itself no more trouble about Vagrant Laws, or any new method of preserving the peace and good order of the Country Districts. When they hear of any outcry, they have only to give a hint that Dr Philip, or the Editor of this Paper, are about to make tour in that direction, and iniquity will hide its head ... with a few exceptions, such as the following: –

When they arrive at Bathurst they proceed to the bush, said to be infested by a thievish set of Hottentots, and they will find it not to be a forest, in which troops of stolen cattle may be concealed, but a bower formed by a few stems and branches of thorn, close by the road, or rather in or on the public road; and within it they will find *one* Hottentot, his wife and a child, and, at half-past ten o'clock in the morning, an Englishman, quite drunk, trying to persuade the Hottentot to enter his service at six dollars a month⁵⁹

The colonial citizenry of Albany smarted at such sarcasms, complaining, for example, of the *Advertiser's* 'burlesque [sic] mode of our speeches at the Graham's Town meeting on the subject of vagrancy', and, more threateningly, accusing Fairbairn and Philip of complicity in provoking the Xhosa invasion of December 1834.⁶⁰ The latter charge was founded on the putatively inflammatory tour of 1830, as well as the humanitarian advocacy of the *Advertiser's* columns; it is significant in framing the defining division of colonial, and later South African, political life, but also for the manner in which it discloses the particularly discursive nature of history. Fairbairn and Philip's visit to the frontier is thus cited as 'among the causes of a confederacy of your savage enemies, which has ruined your country' – an accusation which converts the currency of information (which was the object of that tour) into the 'hard' history of the war.⁶¹ By this we gain some sense of the extent to which even contemporary colonial commentators understood the history of their times to be produced not in the circumstances of an exterior Xhosaland, but in the discursive contingencies that go by the name of the frontier. The same 'A. B.' wrapped up the general accusation – of causing the war by the means of words – in the intrinsically discursive character of conspiracy: 'The columns of the *Advertiser* have been open to letters said to be written by the chiefs.'⁶² In the occasion of war this is, of course, an accusation of treason, and marks the ascription of significant historical agency to the life of language *within the Colony*. At the time Thomas Pringle came under the same attack (news of his recent death in Britain had not yet reached the Cape) for those of his poems imaginatively sympathetic to the Xhosa. The

⁵⁹ *SACA*, 5, 290, 24 March 1830.

⁶⁰ *GTJ*, 4, 163, 6 February 1835. The author of the letter cited is again the uncertain 'A. B.'

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

journal even published 'Makanna's Gathering' alongside a vituperative attack on Pringle, calling him 'another Satan' at the head of 'the legions of the kafir pandemonium', and a 'heartless traitor'.⁶³ And again the charge ran to conspiracy and the discursive production of war – high claims for what is usually recognised as the beginnings of South African poetry in English:

Did I say, Mr. Editor, that this blood-stirring harangue *could* be interpreted to the Kafirs to excite them to war upon us; – I say more, Sir, it is whispered, or rather murmured in the town, that it *has been done*, and more ready belief is given to this surmise, since all the satanic advice therein contained, appears to have been acted upon by our barbarous foes almost [sic] to the letter.⁶⁴

'Makanna's Gathering' is itself an account of the rhetoric of the wardoctor, Nxele, before the battle of Grahamstown in 1819. The trajectory before us runs from Xhosa ideology through the syncretic Christianity of Nxele's exposure to the missionaries, through Nxele's speech, the account given to Pringle, then Pringle's poem, its appearance in various pages (not least those of that issue of the *Journal*), its alleged recitation in Xhosa society and its alleged application in the war of 1834–5, the circumstances of that allegation made in whispering and murmuring on the streets of Grahamstown, the recounting of those allegations in the letter of C. J. Gray to the *Journal*, and the reading of that letter (alongside the poem) by contemporaries (and, in deeper history, by this author and his readers). The palimpsestic manner in which the poem and Nxele's speech are conflated in Gray's mind echoes the manner in which Gray's own letters (more followed in successive issues) participate in the murmuring on the colonial streets. It is a thick instance of discourse, tangled with the contradictions, erasures, deferrals and misattributions, by which ideology manipulates and even reverses historical truth: we may note that poetry is made one with wardoctoring, for example, or that charges of conspiracy are typically begun in whispers and murmurs, even as we are meant to believe conspirators communicate among themselves. Here we are to hear ancestral voices prophesying war (and through it Pringle's recent friendship with Coleridge)⁶⁵ as what Pringle calls 'a sound from far' (and is both Jehovah and the Xhosa creator, Uhlanga).⁶⁶ This knot of language, involved of one string, demonstrates the process of history as 'thickening' into what I have been calling 'deep practice', as a process of simultaneous complication and solidification, as the intellectual apprehension of events, in becoming more complex, works to make them (seem) more real, even to the extent that a high-order artefact of language, such as a poem, might effect as real an instance – at the sharp end of

⁶³ *GTJ*, 4, 158, 2 January 1835.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ They met in 1828. Coleridge certainly knew the poem. See E. Griggs, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Pringle', *QBSAL*, 6, 1 (September 1951).

history – as the Xhosa snapping their assegais for the short work of close combat. That snapping short is one with the poet's whittling a quill; it plays among the discourse that rates pens against swords, or words against sticks and stones.

The War of Hintsa has a pronouncedly discursive character because the newspapers defined themselves around it (as did the report of the Select Committee on Aborigines sitting in London at the same time), but both were following in the discursive grooves begun in the instance of vagrancy. As 'A. B.' attacked the *Advertiser* in successive letters to the *Graham's Town Journal*, he made sure that the comprehensive character of the war was understood, and that the frontier lay, as we are here asserting, not between colony and Xhosaland, but within such attitudes as we now call ideology. Those attitudes were shaped by the newspapers' caucuses on vagrancy, as 'A.B.' reminded his readers:

... where are the vagrants now? Precisely where it was predicted they would be; in the ranks of the Kafirs. The decent orderly Hottentots from the schools, those that were at service, or honestly earning their bread, and which the provisions of a Vagrant Law would never have touched more than yourself, Mr. Editor, these are enrolled and staunch men, but the idle hordes are no where to be found except among the Kafirs.⁶⁷

Such 'idle hordes', like the poet Pringle, are treasonous and satanic; they belong to what Bain called 'the murderous ... angels of Mr Fairbairn and Co – the Kafirs'⁶⁸, and Bacon, centuries before that, held 'a seed of peril in the state'.

The wandering context

There is a wider context to the thickened instance of 'vagrancy' after Ordinance 50 in 1828 and before the failure of the proposed vagrancy law in 1834. Most of it is entailed in the same history, whether directly or indirectly related. There is a conjunction, first of all, between the colonial circumstance at the Cape, embedded as it is in the wider imperial context, and the metropolitan circumstance of Great Britain. This study vaults from the seminal 'discovery' of vagrancy (in its recognisably modern sense) in the Tudor era to the crisis at the Cape in the early 19th century, but the later 17th and 18th centuries in Britain also work to condition the idea of

⁶⁶ T. Pringle, 'Makanna's Gathering', *Poems Illustrative of South Africa*, 48.

⁶⁷ *GTJ*, 4, 163, 6 February 1835.

⁶⁸ *GTJ*, 4, 168, 13 March 1835.

vagrancy and its application in the Colony. The problem of the poor and of the social amelioration of poverty is inevitably related to vagrancy. In Britain the ongoing history of vagrancy is bound up with the development of poor law – broadly, those initiatives aimed at both the regulation of poor people within capitalist society and the provision of charity or opportunity to them. There is a long history of the progress from the parish-based provision of poverty relief to the establishment of a wider and more centralised government responsibility. In very broad canvas, the transition – that may yet be too strong a word – is effected across the two great Poor Laws, of 1601 (the Act of Elizabeth, with its 1662 adjunct Act of Settlement) and (the ‘New’ Poor Law) of 1834. The dates are not arbitrarily coincident with our focus here. The first represents the culmination of the crisis of the new poor of early capitalist Europe (against the backdrop of an unravelling feudal fabric), while the second date represents the culmination of another suite of crises, broadly coincident with the industrial revolution, but also expressive of continuing changes across the intervening centuries. The 18th century saw vagrancy statutes that

added a significant accretion of offences to the traditional crimes of vagrancy. Over and above the old categories of wilful idleness, begging, pedlary and the tramp, vagrancy was applied to ‘endgatherers’, that is, to those who travelled the country collecting oddments of wool or cloth (1744), to those *suspected* of committing a felony (1752), to those apprehended with housebreaking implements (1783), to Thameside pilferers (1799), night poachers (1800), spoilers of wood (1805) and, finally, to the very amorphous category of ‘suspected persons’ (1802).⁶⁹

The point that Rogers is making is that the category of vagrancy evolves alongside the conditions that throw it up in the first place. As agrarian and industrial capitalism advance, so new conditions of labour regulation emerge to be met with new laws. That these laws are applied through the category of vagrancy, as the by now traditional hold-all, is once again to assert the centrality of the putative margin to the social economy, and its history and culture. It also reminds us, in the amendment of vagrancy, of the extreme plasticity of the concept, and thus its supremely historical and ideological nature. As Rogers says, ‘vagrancy laws were used in a variety of ways in the eighteenth century to render labour more tractable and proletarian, to strike a balance between mobility and social order’.⁷⁰ There is an obvious correspondence between this observation and those of historians of the 1809 and 1812 statutes at the Cape, concerned as they are with describing the ‘regulation’ of the Khoisan in terms of bonded labour.

⁶⁹ N. Rogers, ‘Vagrancy, Impressment and the Regulation of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 15, 2 (1994), 105.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 111.

The general crisis of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries – the Napoleonic Wars, the industrialisation of Britain – casts a long shadow at the Cape. John Graham's Zuurveld campaign of 1811–12 ought to be thought of as a far front of what was truly the first world war. The British settlers established on the frontier in its wake were the eager volunteers to be found in desperate circumstances. They left behind them, as they thought, the turbulence of war, mill-wrecking, Peterloo, and what would become the Reform Bill crisis of 1830–2.⁷¹ The manifest instability of the British working class in the early 1800s, and the compounded problem of the poor, now of the two sorts of the transition – the derelict agricultural labourer and the unassimilated urban immigrant – prompted, in 1832, the appointment of the Commission that came to write the Poor Law Report of 1834 and motivate the Act that followed it.⁷² The significance of this to the circumstances of the Cape at the same time is various. It needs to be remembered that the 1820 settler population was procured of the same social economy, the same crisis, as the New Poor Law, and was, in its very being, steeped in the discourse of that crisis and the ideologies that framed it. The journalistic battles over vagrancy at the Cape are informed by the metropolitan context as much as by purely local circumstances. The humanitarian advocacy of Khoisan interests is sprung of the same stock as the evangelical concern with social amelioration in Britain. The English language through which Cape vagrancy is (ultimately) discovered, debated, or even effected, is the language of the 18th century statutory expansion of vagrancy, of the promulgation of the Reform Act and Poor Law, and of protest against them, of the 'seed of peril' planted in Bacon's vision of vagrants and perhaps blossoming on the field at Peterloo or from the staffs of Luddites. The spectre of the New Poor, of faraway mills and cities, and the sordid crofts of a lost agrarian England, is not far from the minds of those concerned with vagrancy in the Cape. The Select Committee on Aborigines in London, at which the evidence of Andries Stoffels and James Read is heard – the same people as address the meeting in the remote Kat River in August 1834 – is contemporaneous with the Poor Law Commission. Perhaps the most lasting and significant effect of this contemporaneity,⁷³ compounded as it is with the vigorous rhetoric around colonial vagrancy, is that it implicitly associates the colonial indigene at the Cape with the metropolitan poor. In this it continues the association begun in early modern discourse, but projects it into the new arena of industrial class conflict. The implications of this for strategies of resistance in South African (and elsewhere) is evident in recent history and even contemporary politics. For the Khoisan of 1834 it translates

⁷¹ S. G and E. O. A. Checkland (eds), *The Poor Law Report of 1834*, 23–6.

⁷² *ibid.*, 2–47.

⁷³ The contemporaneity effects an ongoing association in the historiography (as here) – see also Keegan's immaculately scholarly footnote on the New Poor Law philosophy, *Colonial South Africa*, 323. Again, it may be useful to at least suggest that local circumstances might also have informed metropolitan ones too.

their donated vagrancy into a role within industrial relations, at best as an anticipated proletariat, but classically as a lumpenproletariat, of the sort familiar to us as Boesman and Lena. This is a second instance in which the colonial indigene is colonised by what I will call the anticipation of history – is inserted by metropolitan discourse into a yet unresolved future, which, though unimagined is discursively imaginable. This is a major point, since it puts pressure on the historian's notion of history as a collectable past only. Although the history knows nothing of the future, yet the discourse of history (and not just determinist models) anticipates the future historically. As discourse, history may be read into the future, and people who are imagined a certain way according to accounts of their past or present (or those in analogous circumstances) may find themselves fulfilling the prophecy of false pasts.

The metropolitan influence upon the Cape's articulation of vagrancy is exemplified in the miniature history of a scheme to place some twenty London boys in Cape apprenticeships. The Dickensian-sounding Society for the Suppression of Juvenile Vagrancy attracted the 'high approval' of government in its plan to ship the boys out to local indentures, especially 'as agricultural servants', and so save them from a life of 'actually running wild about the streets of the metropolis'.⁷⁴ This would, it was held, 'enrich and strengthen that Colony by an importation of free labourers while they are in a pliant and teachable age.'⁷⁵ What is being envisaged here is nothing less than a combination of transportation and *inboeking*, the extant Cape institution of the enforced apprenticeship of Khoisan juveniles. In thus uniting metropolitan juvenile vagrants with Khoisan juveniles, London vagrants are rendered as colonial indigenes (and a projection of free labour is enabled), while Khoisan youth are anticipated as vagrants. That is the implicit correspondence. To be fair, the British government, who paid half the costs of the scheme, was somewhat queasy about the legality of it all, urging the necessity of the boys' consent.⁷⁶ What happened only confirmed their anxieties, even as it exported them to the Cape. In May of 1834, that significant year, the Chairman of the Committee of Management of the (sympathetically re-named) Children's Friend Society reported that on arrival in Cape Town several of the boys had refused to be apprenticed, and that doubts as to the legality of the arrangement were now an open problem.⁷⁷ Brenton was writing from Exeter Hall, the address that became metonymic of evangelical humanitarianism itself, and which Bain sent up derogatorily in 'Kaatje Kekklebek', as 'Extra Hole'. Brenton quoted the Honorary Secretary of the Society in Cape Town:

⁷⁴ Goderich–Cole, 18 January 1833; Wilson–Hay, 6 March 1832, Government House General Despatches, 1832–3, CA, GH 1/93.

⁷⁵ Brenton–Goderich, 19 December 1832, CA, GH 1/93.

⁷⁶ Hay–Wilson, 15 March 1832, CA, GH 1/93.

⁷⁷ Brenton–Hay, 6 May 1834, CA, GH 1/93.

Some of them have positively refused to go to the only masters who applied for them, or to work at the only employment for which they were in request. They also succeeded in unsettling the minds of the younger boys with whom the Committee never found any difficulty before... This behaviour alarmed the minds of the masters of the lads.⁷⁸

That secretary in Cape Town was none other than John Fairbairn of the *Commercial Advertiser*, the vanguard of the humanitarian side in the vagrancy debate locally. And Fairbairn recommended the suspension of the scheme. Surely Fairbairn's association with the scheme was in concert with its origins in the humanitarian camp. It may be that the scheme had more to it than the interests of the boys – that it was also a publicity exercise intended to demonstrate the humane management of vagrancy and to point up metropolitan vagrancy in an effort to expose the racial agenda of the clamour at the Cape. But if so, it is extraordinary that the scheme should have so followed the contours of the unhappy institution of *inboeking* young Khoisan, and gone ahead to the extent of bringing out some 700 boys before the 1830s were up.⁷⁹ By thus 'perpetuating pauper apprenticeship, which had long been abolished in Britain'⁸⁰ the association of vagrant and Khoisan is intensified rather than diminished.

Both Khoisan and metropolitan vagrant shared, too, in the military conscription of empire and colony, and associated by the fact and the experience. One notes, for example, the prevalent impressment of vagrants in Britain in the 18th century and the raising of Khoisan levies to wage the colonial struggle.⁸¹ The first initiative of British sovereignty after the conquest of the Batavian Cape in 1806 was the establishment of a Khoisan corps, the Cape Regiment, which fell to John Graham's command.⁸² Graham noted that 'we can get as many of them as we please'.⁸³ Khoisan servants had, in fact, long served as substitutes for their Dutch masters in the conscripted commandos raised to pursue San raiders or police the northern and eastern frontiers at times of ferment.⁸⁴ The advantage to the colony of Khoisan auxiliaries lay not only in their bodily presence, but especially in their practise of the kind of guerrilla tactics suited to local conditions.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, with extract from Fairbairn dated 8 February 1834.

⁷⁹ Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 125. E. Bradlow, 'The Children's Friend Society at the Cape of Good Hope', *Victorian Studies*, 27, 2 (1984), 155–77.

⁸⁰ Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 125.

⁸¹ Rogers, 'Vagrancy, Impressment and The Regulation of Labour'.

⁸² B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 23.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, 20, 30–1. M. Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to 1820', R. Elphick and H. Cilliers, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1820*, 260. B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 26–7.

⁸⁵ J. Peires, *The House of Phalo*, 150.

Back in the 18th century, furthermore, impressment brought the metropolitan poor into contact with the colonial margins, much as transportation did. Any number of 'vagrants' might have found their way onto the transport ships for the kind of offences that run alongside the overall accusation. France (admittedly rarely) transported vagrants; a Jacobin decree provided for the transportation of 'vagabonds' to Madagascar.⁸⁶ In this case one marks the bizarre figure of a circuit in which metropolitan indigents – those who do not work – are returned to the point of origin of so many slaves. Wordsworth's 'Female Vagrant', begun in 1793 in the heat of his Revolutionary enthusiasm and only completed in (his dourly conservative) 1842, sketches a passage into vagrancy that is accelerated by a disastrous naval excursion to 'the western world'. The drum to which her husband responds is not the lead cosh of the press gang, but his option is scarcely more free for that. The point is that in Wordsworth's poem, again, the figure of the vagrant is conjoined with the catastrophe of the colonial margin, the latter functioning as a correlative for the subject's travel beyond the limits of society. This, in turn, is mixed up with military activity. So too, in Austen's *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* it is the local invasions of gypsies and redcoats which disrupt the placid surface of a gentry life in the counties.⁸⁷ If, as is so often the case, vagrants are a host or horde or gang, then what they take after, and what they threaten to become, is an army; this is why they are a 'seed of peril'.

The chord struck by Mr Magerman's red jacket back in 1834 is complex, but its military associations have been noted. In various ways it signifies allegiance to the colonial project, a will-to-subjectivity under that order. It resonates because Khoisan identification with the colonial military ran deep. As late as the 1980s, claims to the land of the Kat River Settlement, alienated piecemeal right down to the last days of apartheid, lay in its character of *bloedgrond*.⁸⁸ To Piet Draghoender in 1984, military service through the frontier wars, the Boer War and the World Wars was the solder of the bond between Khoisan self and colonial land: '*Hierdie grond was afgegee deur bloed*. This ground was washed clean by blood.'⁸⁹

More immediate, and most significant, as a context to the rise in vagrancy agitation, was the emancipation of slaves in 1834.⁹⁰ Indeed, Ordinance 50, itself a monument to the agitation of evangelical humanitarianism, is of a piece with the anti-slavery movement, and the rhetoric of

⁸⁶ A. Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor*, 88.

⁸⁷ I am indebted to Andre Brink for one half of this observation. The eruption of the gypsies, as he suggested, is a libidinous figure no less than a social one (pers. comm.), and this has implications which ought to be held in mind when it comes to considering both Kaatje Kekkelbek and Lena, both of whom entail a sexual response in their authors. I am associating the travelling of gypsies with the flux of military movement, the rapid encampment and departure, in England in the Napoleonic Wars and Austen's novels.

⁸⁸ J. Peires, 'Piet Draghoender's Lament', *Social Dynamics*, 14, 2 (1988), 6–15.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁰ Although slaves were strictly 'emancipated' by stages, passing through a period of 'apprenticeship' before achieving full freedom of person and movement. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 110–15, 122–4.

each is complexly shot through with the other. Alan Lester has recently charted the matrix of imperial and colonial humanitarianism, and highlighted the extent to which the cause of the Cape indigene informs the broader campaign for the liberty of imperial subjects.⁹¹ One might reach back to the account of the Frenchman, Francois le Vaillant, for a Revolutionarily inflected indictment of colonial abuses of the Khoisan at the Cape. Ian Glenn has argued convincingly for the seminality of much of Le Vaillant's representations, and certainly no account of the humanitarian engagement with Cape society, and its relationship to the wider issues of slavery and liberty in the empire, can ignore the frame of Rousseau that Le Vaillant first brings to bear upon the scene at the Cape, nor, vitally, the prior influence of Kolb's *Beschrywing* upon Rousseau himself.⁹² However, it is in the quotidian experience of Cape society that the slave and the Khoisan become married in the figure of vagrancy, and it is in major part also the prospect of emancipation which compounds the colonial clamour for a law to regulate movement and punish vagrancy. We are not directly concerned with arguing the agenda of labour relations that underlies all this, but we need to be reminded not only of the proximity to slavery of the Khoisan labourer before Ordinance 50, of the proximity of that ordinance to the emancipation of slaves, and of the proximity of accounts of runaway slaves to those of the 'vagabondizing' Khoisan of the colonial margins.

Mohammed Adhikari has shown how the circumstance of slavery became welded with the common identity of the category 'coloured'.⁹³ Indeed, it is only amplifying the implicit emphasis of his argument to assert that the acculturating mechanisms by which a markedly heterogeneous slave population is brought within the common weal of coloured identity have overwhelmingly to do with those aspects of colonial life shared with the Khoisan population at the time, and these centre inevitably on liberty and labour. The negative correlatives of bonded servitude within the ambit of the law of property are free trespass and free exchange, pretty much what is held under the single category of vagrancy. This applies specifically after emancipation, when there is clear evidence of the mobility of ex-slaves and of their gravitation towards the freeholding pockets of the mission settlements.⁹⁴ But it applies also to the representation of escaped slaves, whose crime is one against property and in which a subject rebels against a labour designation, by flight and continued mobility, away from metropolitan nodes and towards the margins. It is a circumstance that imitates the condition of vagrancy, as it is imagined, and to such an extent that one must suspect that the imagination of vagrancy is in

⁹¹ A. Lester, *Imperial Networks*, and Andrew Bank before him: 'Liberals and their Enemies: Racial Ideology at the Cape of Good Hope, 1820–1850'.

⁹² I. Glenn, 'The Future of the Past in English South African Literary History', *QBSAL*, 38–46.

⁹³ M. Adhikari, 'The Sons of Ham: Slavery and the Making of Coloured Identity', *SAHJ*, 27 (November 1992), 95–112.

part begun in it. Perhaps, too, it is possible to adduce vagrancy as a seminal instance in the forging of 'coloured' identity, as the primary site of the correspondence of slave and Khoisan designations in colonial discourse. It is as though vagrancy is where slave and Khoisan go once they are free to, it is where they associate, it is where they have common cause and are of one 'nature' in colonial projections.

The title of Nigel Penn's collation of exemplary micro-histories, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways*, anticipates precisely the historical conflation of vagrancy with Khoisan mutiny and slave escapes, and in 'Droster Gangs of the Bokkeveld and Roggeveld, 1770-1800' this is precisely his focus. The common Renaissance synonym for the vagrant, 'rogue', consorts with the spectre of Khoisan rebellion in 1803 and 1851, as with the perennial bogeyman of the escaped slave in a slaving society, and the saucy academic alliteration binds all together in one logic. What is more, the three categories announce exactly what is objectionable in vagrancy: the moral turpitude of the rogue, the political insurrection of the rebel, and the social antipathy of the recusant deserter. Indeed, Penn's vignettes, concerned as they are with the picaresque renditions of errant subjects of the colony, share the texture of any study that encroaches upon vagrancy – a compound fibre of the literary and historical, as if the warp and the weft of one cloth.

Colonial disquiet at the liberation of slaves made common cause with the rhetoric of vagrancy aimed at the repeal of Ordinance 50. In June 1834 the government at the Cape saw fit to issue a circular for distribution by colonial officials in which anxieties about emancipation were addressed. It promised that 'laws will be enacted, having in like manner for their object the prevention and punishment of vagrancy ... and for securing a sufficiency of labourers to the Colony, by compelling, not only the liberated Apprentices ... but all others, who ... may be inclined to lead an idle and vagabondizing life.'⁹⁵ We need to recall, also, that 'slaves' had, since the 'Amelioration' campaign of the 1820s, itself anticipating emancipation, shared the 'apprentice' designation of the Khoisan under the Caledon dispensation. Indeed, slave complaints of abuse, recorded in the advent season of emancipation, share a common tenor with those of the Khoisan through the witness of the missions and the Select Committee on Aborigines in London in 1835-6.⁹⁶

Nor was the metropolitan context of labour and vagrancy, and the emancipation of slaves, by any means the last of the ciphers of unrestrained mobility that plagued those with

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 108-9.

⁹⁵ Colonial Secretary – Civil Commissioners, 7 June 1834. Letters, Colonial Office – Civil Commissioner, Albany, CA, 1/AY 8/23.

⁹⁶ See, for example, W. Dooley, 'Slavery and Amelioration in the Graaff-Reinet District, 1823-30', *SAHJ*, 27 (1992), 75-94.

vested interests in the colonial status quo. In complex, but explicit, relationship to the liberalized labour dispensation of Ordinance 50, thousands of Dutch-speaking colonists emigrated beyond the frontier. These 'Boers over the boundary are the vagrants', said the Khoisan in response to the white colonial rhetoric of vagrancy⁹⁷. A correspondent to the *Graham's Town Journal* recalled 'Our frontier ... of old abandoned to wandering and half-civilized borderers.'⁹⁸ And the Kat River meeting of August 1834 noted how the 'Settlers', too, could cross the frontier with apparent impunity.⁹⁹ There is plenty of evidence for Settler activity beyond the frontier – particularly in the putatively forbidden 'Neutral Ground' between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers.¹⁰⁰ A. G. Bain wrote of this breach of the frontier as a highlight of settler life, offering profit from ivory hunting and trading. 'I made a trip to Kafirland' says Bain's 'British Settler',

And tried to act the dentist then, which no one can do now again;
I drew the Kafir's ivory teeth, at risk of hempen collar, sir,
Which at Graham's Town on the market brought me full 300 dollars sir!

My second go was but so so, although the trade was brisk enough;
The patrols nearly boned me in a secret maze.¹⁰¹

Maqoma, the Ngqika chief whose land was expropriated for the Kat River Settlement, told a meeting of the settlers there,

I see no Englishman in the Kat River, there are none in Grahamstown, and where are they? I have got them all in Caffreland, with their wives and children, living in safety and enjoying every protection: and yet I am accounted a rascal and a vagabond, and am obliged to come here by stealth.¹⁰²

The colonial government tried to police the line, but it was always permeable, and, indeed, invited its being crossed for the dividends of the risk. The authorities in Cape Town were appalled, for example, at the prospect of the trekkers removing their slaves from the Colony on the eve of emancipation, threatening transportation to any 'whosoever takes or sends a slave

⁹⁷ The comment derives from the 1834 meeting at Philipston as it was resumed on August 12, and as reported in *SACA*, 6 Sept. 1834. Elbourne, 'Freedom at Issue', 131, 149.

⁹⁸ *GTJ*, 4, 162, 30 February 1835. The correspondent was again the uncertain 'A. B.'. Does the term 'borderers' suggest a Scots usage, such as Bain might have employed?

⁹⁹ Andries Stoffels, 'Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston', 5 August 1834, CA, A 50.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, P. Anderson 'The Human Clay', M.Litt thesis, Oxford, 1993, 116–121.

¹⁰¹ A. G. Bain, 'The British Settler', in M. Chapman (ed.), *A Century of South African Poetry*, 47–9.

¹⁰² *Graham's Town Journal*, 17 October 1833. J. Peires, *The House of Phalo*, 93.

over the frontier'.¹⁰³ This conspicuous movement, and anxiety about it, in the northern and eastern districts of the colony is set side by side, in the record, with such observations as that 'a large number of Hottentots and Bastards have migrated to [the Kat River] Settlement from several parts of the district of Graaff-Reinet'.¹⁰⁴

If Dutch Masters and Khoisan servants were on the move, and settler smugglers and hunters, and slaves about to be, perhaps the most significant turmoil of all lay beyond the borders of the colony, but occasionally and increasingly penetrating those too. As a companion to Ordinance 50 the government promulgated Ordinance 49, a law dealing with the constraint and control of 'Native African Foreigners' in the colony.¹⁰⁵ In part the growing presence of such individuals within the social economy of the Cape was the consequence of increased pressure on the borders of independent Xhosaland, the simple fact of the colonial conquest of the Zuurveld in 1812 and, effectively, of the Neutral Territory in 1819. An important footnote to this general progress of the crisis in Rharharbe Xhosa circumstances was the eviction of Maqoma's Ngqika from the fertile basin of the Kat and Koonap Rivers in 1829, in order to provide for the foundation of the Kat River Settlement. Drought and loss of land drove frontier Xhosa into the colony in search of livelihoods. Colonial traders, canteens, and the prospects of a role in the freehold economy of the Settlement, provided inducements. So too did the novel pressure of Mfengu settlements along the frontier line after 1835, when the missionary Ayliff brought these refugees out of Xhosa clientage and into an even more precarious role on the margins of the colony.

The Mfengu mark the figure of an even greater force at work, and one with profound implications for the spectre of vagrancy. As a background to these profound alterations to the social economy of the colonial indigene and of those independent peoples sharing the colonial frontier, the subcontinental hinterland was itself the site of turmoil and mass migration in the twenties and thirties of the 19th century. The origins and true nature of the Mfecane/Difaqane, and the historical debates that follow upon obscurity, yield a picture of dislocation and tumultuous movement. That picture is often to be found in the history books in the guise of a map of Southern Africa overgrown with a vine of arrows, each tendril lashing out and then looping back on itself in what seems a graphic parody of the ability of maps to narrate. Whether and why these streamers are ejected from the south-eastern hinterland is not our concern here; what is, is that the southern Africa of the time was sharply characterised by movement and by

¹⁰³ Colonial Secretary – Acting Civil Commissioner, Albany, 14 February 1834, CA, 1/AY 8/23.

¹⁰⁴ Colonial Secretary – Acting Civil Commissioner, Albany, 18 April, 1834, CA, 1/AY 8/23

¹⁰⁵ The phrase is laced with those paradoxes that will confound such measures in history. It dates specifically from 1837, but may be applied here. Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor – Civil Commissioner, Albany, 18 March 1837, CA, 1/AY 8/50.

conflict related to that movement. Colonial representations of the 'event' tend to share with ancient and modern images of the other a familiar sense of threat and of overwhelming numbers. The 'Ticani horde' swarms in colonial consciousness as we have seen the Scythians did for the Greek, the barbarians for the Roman, vagabonds and Irishmen for the Renaissance English, and the Khoisan for the colonial Cape from the 17th century on. In 1834 colonial Khoisan felt themselves explicitly associated with the 'Mantatees' in the colonial imagination. Gert Sampson asked the Kat River Meeting, 'why class us with the Mantatees, or them with us?'¹⁰⁶ The answer to that question lay in the occasion of the meeting itself: because the peoples of the Mfecane/Difaqane were a horde on the move, and thus correlative of the Khoisan as 'vagrant'. That the eruption of the hinterland and the liberty of the Khoisan (and slaves ultimately) should be contemporaneous worked to amplify the correspondences perceived between both in the colonial imagination.

A. G. Bain, whom we have already begun to discover at the forefront of that imagination, crossed the frontier in 1834 in pursuit of 'a number of wild animals, birds and other specimens of natural history' and found himself an actor on the fringes of the Difaqane.¹⁰⁷ In 1838 his 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' was offered as another such 'specimen', subtitled as it was, 'Life Among the Hottentots', much after the pseudo-anthropological habit of Bain's own earlier reports in the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, on 'the Nature, Extent, and Promise of the Trading Intercourse with the Transgaripeine Nations'.¹⁰⁸ It is of such confluences of discourse that the Khoisan are welded to other histories of movement in the broad character of vagrancy. Thus also the Mfengu, after 1835 abutting upon the Khoisan of the frontier, and rubbing along uneasily with them in the colonial economy and in ambiguous relations with the Xhosa, were themselves of the 'Ticani horde', displaced by the upheavals to the north of the Cape, and of an acutely similar position to that of the colonial Khoisan. In the social geography of the frontier (and by extension the colony) the Mfengu represent several things: commotion, the press of 'native foreigners', the colonial client whose 'settlement' is effected by evangelisation, conscription and labour. It is overwhelmingly Mfengu who trouble the Resident Magistrate in

¹⁰⁶ 'Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston, 5 August, 1834', CA, A50

¹⁰⁷ 'Memorial', Bain – Colonial Secretary, 10 April 1834, CA, CO 3968; M. J. Lister, *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain*, 138ff for his 1834 encounter with Mzilikazi, and for his 1826 excursion, 52ff.

¹⁰⁸ *SACA*, 2, 2, 11 January 1826. The reports continue through the year, some of them more evidently by Bain than others, though there are good stylistic grounds (such as that characteristically wooden and parodistic 'transgaripeine') to find Bain in them all.

Grahamstown with the prosecution of Ordinance 49.¹⁰⁹ It is overwhelmingly Khoisan who trouble the same with what other classes of offence fell to that office of justice.¹¹⁰

There is one last contextual figure to consider before we turn to the precise characterisation of the vagrant in the 1830s, and it is the recurrent and, particularly in the mid-1830s, looming spectre of Xhosa invasion. Of all the figures of movement – all of them directly or indirectly presaging colonial loss – the most dramatic is surely this. What is more, the most dramatic single instance of invasion occurred at the end of 1834, as the Xhosa filed rapidly into the colony, burning farmsteads and driving off cattle, until in Albany Grahamstown and Fort Beaufort alone were not abandoned.¹¹¹ The War of Hintsa consolidated a colonial landscape underwritten with the figures of fire and ambush and cattle raiding, and with the coming Xhosa set down as an ‘infestation’¹¹² or ‘irruption’¹¹³ or ‘a hurricane of savage inroad’¹¹⁴. It is a landscape fraught with the jeopardy to property and settlement, with the loss of stock to dark-skinned indigenes, with the actual ‘murder’ that is so often attached to the list of unfounded allegations against vagrants in the colonial memorials of 1834. Indeed, we have already seen vagrants ‘predicted ... the ranks of the Kafirs’¹¹⁵. Especially, it is a landscape in which, again and again, these historical passages are attached to the environment of ‘the bush’, which is the refuge, or the adventure, of the vagrant Kaatje Kekkelbek (and Boesman and Lena, and Michael K), as we shall come to see.

Thus it is that to the received iconography of the European vagrant the Khoisan are attached in a particular fashion, and most especially in the circumstances of the years between 1828 and 1834 or 1835. If the attributes of the early modern vagrant in Europe are ‘discovered’ in the encounter with the Khoisan, then it is this period in the early 19th century that contributes additional, and local, inflections in the construction of the vagrant as he and she emerge in the literature and culture (and history) of the Cape, and, ultimately, of South Africa. To those aspects of the figure of the vagrant familiar to European discourse are added the ambiguities of political liberty in a colonial circumstance, as well as the correlative conditions of the tumultuous 1820s and 30s: the dissolution of slavery (implying racial and cultural heterogeneity, and the hazardous liberty of the formerly oppressed), the rebellious emigration of the Boer colonists, the outlaw

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the case against Charles Griffith for employing ‘Fingoes’ (1 September 1835; February 1836), and others. There are some cases against Xhosa as well (see Oct 19 1836), who are to be ‘removed beyond the limits of the Colony’. ‘Criminal Record Book, Albany’, CA, 1/AY 3/1/1/1/3.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ J. Peires, *The House of Phalo*, 145.

¹¹² H. Somerset – H. Smith, 19 August 1829, *Native Inhabitants*, 2, 47, gives one example of the word ‘infested’. It, and correlatives, is common in representations of Xhosa incursion.

¹¹³ R. Godlonton, *Narrative of the Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes*, whose title also attaches the attributes of the horde, shared by the Mfecane and by vagrants.

¹¹⁴ J. Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage of Observation ... and a Campaign in Kafferland*, 423.

adventuring of British settlers on the frontier, the marauding 'horde' of the Mfecane/Difaqane, and the invasion of the colony by independent Xhosaland, an adjunct indigenous people, with profound ties to the Khoisan, of blood, politics and economy, and a shared history of pernicious encounter with European colonists. The years when the idea of vagrancy dominated colonial conceptions of the colonised in the colonial order were themselves years of profound and agitated movement across the landscape of the subcontinent. Perhaps we should note that even the colonial record of the subcontinental hinterland at this time is the result of colonial excursions across and beyond the frontier. Bain himself – the man who will come to supply a 'Life among the Hottentots' and all but inaugurate the literature of the Cape vagrant – made four substantial journeys beyond the colony, in 1825, 1826, 1829 and 1834, trading, mapping and encountering refugees of the extra-colonial upheavals wherever he went, and afterwards set about his famous road building, itself a symptom of a generally enhanced mobility.¹¹⁶

The loss of history

The Khoisan told their own stories of mobility. Such accounts thicken the contrast between the accusation of vagrancy and the experience of the Khoisan. They do so in part because the Khoisan version is different in emphasis, setting out to refute the colonial designation by emphasising the distress of colonisation and colonial subordination. These accounts are common to the records of the London Missionary Society, as also the formal inquiries into 'Conditions' among 'Native Inhabitants', and they are well-documented.¹¹⁷ But those Khoisan versions that pay attention to the figure of movement, of passage through the landscape, thicken the contrast also because they have a metaphorical significance, or significances, that extend the purport of the record. These are important here, not only because they complicate or contradict the colonial designation of the vagrant as we read it, historically, but also because they consort with that designation in ways which those laughing at Mr Magertman recognised. That meeting, in 1834, at the height of the vagrancy agitation, supplies a series of instances in which the Khoisan account of their own mobility is exemplary of just this.

¹¹⁵ *GTJ*, 4, 163, 6 February 1835.

¹¹⁶ Lister, *Journals*, xv–xvi.

¹¹⁷ The testimony of LMS missionaries such as Van der Kemp and Read in their correspondence with government is one source for the period up to 1812 (see CA, CO 2577, 2582 files for the landrosty of Uitenhage for the period). Elbourne has looked in detail at Khoisan witness in her 'Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity'. There is also the evidence of the *Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants of Southern Africa, 1835*, and the *Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines, British Settlements, 1835–6*.

‘I came into the Kat River only with my knapsack on my back,’ Mr Hendrik told the meeting.¹¹⁸ Mr Winvogel Smit recalled seeing ‘his Father going with bow and arrows – he saw his Mother tied to a Window and branded by a Boot, and after she got loose she had to flee through the wilderness among the wild beasts’.¹¹⁹ Mr Magerman desired ‘to remain here, and not to run away any more.’¹²⁰ ‘I ran away to [the missionaries] only with my dog,’¹²¹ said Andries Stoffels, who would shortly tell the Select Committee in London that ‘We lived in the mountains till the missionaries, then I came amongst human beings.’¹²² Both Mr Hendrik and Mr Bergman (whose name means ‘mountain-man’, though the Minutes recorded specifically that he was ‘a Bushman’) spoke of being ‘brought into the Kat River by Stockenström’. These are statements of Khoisan movement, but they are also representations of the movement through time that is history. The point I am making is that Khoisan accounts of their passage, inflected by an awareness of such designations as running away, being brought, coming to, and all the accoutrements of that passage, are also narratives, whose assumptions and strategies are clues to a contemporary consciousness of history. Simply put, to ‘run away’ marks a fugitive narrative, to ‘be brought’ marks one of passivity, to ‘come to’ implies a destination in history that is the origin of narrative (in other words, a retrospective foundation). Such orchestrations of tense and agency are a beginning. Succeeding them are intriguing dispositions of pronouns. It is noticeable, for example, that the third person possessive of Mr Winvogel’s testimony belongs to the secretary reporting what happened to ‘his’ (i.e. Smit’s) father and mother, but that the third person ‘he’ and ‘she’ which succeed the use of the possessive might emanate from the subject position of Smit or the secretary (or the rest of the meeting); by this we desecrate the ‘sympathy’ of the testimony and the record of the testimony (and its recorder, and its recorder recording the ‘sympathy’ of the meeting), and we may advance the suggestion that this signals the political figure of solidarity. In Andries Stoffels’s testimony before the London Select Committee we should ask what occasions the passage from the ‘We’ who lived in the mountains to the ‘I’ that came among humans: in fact, he tells us (or the structure of his discourse does) that this agent was the missionaries, who lie at the ‘until’ between clauses and punctuated by the pause recorded as a comma. Turned around, we might begin to argue from the evidence of the discourse that the missionaries render the collective ‘we’ into the individuated ‘I’ – an observation that consorts well with the protestant liberalism preached and promoted by the LMS and like bodies. The record of the 1834 meeting has engaged scholars of the Khoisan with its frequent references to

¹¹⁸ ‘Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston, 5 August 1834’, CA, A 50.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² June 1836, *Select Committee on Aborigines*, 583.

the 'Hottentot Nation', and been cited among the germinal instances of a Khoisan proto-nationalism that flickers and falters in the history of the Kat River Settlement.¹²³ Indeed, at the 1834 meeting, Stoffels was among those who framed his testimony, in highly deliberate and formal narrative terms, by reference to the occasion of 'nation': he 'rose and said that this was the first day and the first place that he was allowed to speak on behalf of his Nation'. Then he went on to thank God, the King and his council, Governor Lowry Cole, John Philip and Stockenstrom – a litany of imperial and colonial factors that reads like a Great Chain of Being, and conduces to the argument observed in the discourse, that the progress from 'We' to 'I' is a progress out of precolonial society ('We') and into colonial subjectivity ('I'), and one, moreover, in which a new and markedly European collectivity is sponsored to replace the old indistinct and mountain-dwelling forms (of bows and arrows, nakedness, wilderness and so on). The 'nation' recognised in these accounts is of 'Hottentots' – a European designation.

It is no less intriguing to note how thoroughly and variously these Khoisan accounts share in extant discourse of vagrancy – especially through the suite of texts already characteristic of the figuration of the vagrant. The knapsack on Mr Hendrik's back is a particularly iconographic instance, where the knapsack reaches back to the signifying costume of the traveller, perhaps explicitly begun in the pilgrim's scrip of the European Middle Ages. It is more than functional, that knapsack, and one way of knowing this is to remember that the word 'knapsack' is the donation not of Mr Hendrik (in all likelihood), but of the secretary translating as the minutes are recorded (or re-recorded in translation). 'Knapsack' is a peculiarly fey word in South African utterance (we must be careful of speaking across the centuries, but it is not a word that has flourished in local conditions). Its connotations – of jolly wayfaring, the picnic – are enjoined to deflect the accusation of vagrancy and stocktheft (you cannot stuff a sheep into a knapsack). But it is important to remember that this is not Mr Hendrik's strategy, and rather that of the meeting, through its officers. Perhaps most of all, it is necessary to discover the address of the utterance, by noting that the manuscript minutes in fact take the form of a letter, folded to expose 'Mr J. Fairbairn, Cape Town' as the recipient.¹²⁴ Fairbairn himself is not the true destination, however, but its agent. The minutes are meant for publication in part or whole in the *South African Commercial Advertiser* and thus form an instance in the propaganda war of 1834. They are prefaced with an appeal to 'Mr Editor' in 'which if you have the goodness to publish you will oblige us', and in which the text is referred to, illuminatingly, as 'these speeches', which formulation implies a rhetorical project beyond the straightforward biographical witness. It is

¹²³ S. Trapido, 'The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of a 'Hottentot Nationalism', 1815–1834, *Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, vol. 17, ICS.

¹²⁴ 'Minutes of a Meeting Held at Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A50.

hard to know the extent of the common purpose at work here, how much, for example, each interlocutor knew of the destination of his utterance. But it is certainly possible to recover the progress towards that destination in the fashioning of each sentence as it is set down, displaying the mixture of registers that arises in the act of recording (and translating). Across those disjunctures – a matter of tenor, or sometimes errors of concord – we discern the individual entering politics, or, to our purposes, biography becoming history.

The interdiscursivity of the Khoisan witness describes the process of history in the way in which it essentially marks a change from one way of stating to another. The fusion of references has parallels in the interruption of Khoisan life, or in the interregnum between precolonial independence and colonial clientage. What is sketched is the passage between subjectivities, of linguistic self-recognition and self-expression. Like the errors of concord that attend the pronouns of Smit's story, these intertexts have the character of the frontier – of a place where concord is forged across the fractures or 'errors' of history, as are perceived by (implicitly monological) hegemony. Thus Smit's mother's passage through the wilderness and the wild beasts bespeaks the semantics of a colonial subjectivity, in which are figured a gnostic distinction between civilisation and wilderness, humanity and bestiality, and one in which salvation is effected by the transfiguring discourse of Christianity – for, after all, the roots of that gnostic binary are biblically established and developed. The wilderness is the Land of Nod (and the Kat River Settlement thus Eden – it was sarcastically known as the 'Hottentot Arcadia')¹²⁵; the wilderness is the Sinai through which a chosen people are 'brought' by their Moses (here Stockenström); the wilderness is where the prophet John is shouting, girt in *kaross* and eating *veldkos*, the wilderness represents the trials of a faithful Christ. This wilderness is the mountains out of which the Khoisan have come, naked, into the fulfilment of civilization: clothes, nationhood and (very significantly) literacy. Several speakers at the 1834 meeting registered their satisfaction at the written record of the proceedings, and acknowledging this writing as power. Andries Stoffels even gestured to the three scribes present, urging them, 'write children' and later 'write on children'. Indeed, Winvogel Smit, counterpoised his memory of his mother's flight through the wilderness with this contrary: 'but today am I here where I see one of my own Nation sitting and writing [sic] in the Chair, and the children reporting behind, for which I

¹²⁵ Thus Bain employed the phrase in his letter to the London Geological Society, 29 April 1844. As 'utterance' a lucrative instance, given the contemporaneous role of geology in disproving an Arcadian past, or the *ex nihilo* creation in Eden. That Bain's contribution was to a science whose broadest ramifications would erode the foundations of the racism inherent in the sarcasm is why one studies history and literature (and science) together. Of that irony we receive the *trigonometric* subject – a Bain who is, as we say, 'three-dimensional', being caught in contra(dicto)ry foci. This instance is thickened in our next chapter. M. Lister (ed.), *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain*, 226.

thank God'.¹²⁶ The Christianity of the recording discourse, and its implication in power, was made explicit by Cubedo Oerson, a visitor from the LMS station at Theopolis, who stated that 'If the Word of God had not come, the Nation would have been extinct ... but we thank God that the Hottentots have been taught to write and to defend themselves.'¹²⁷ (Nor is this revealing only of the centrality of Christianity, for Oerson refers specifically to 'the Word of God', which formulation weds Christianity to language itself, after the example of the Johannine Doctrine of the Logos, and that has notable implications for the relationship of the vagrant to language and, though language, to history.)

But the wilderness is also what the Khoisan are returned to without the Law that is Ordinance 50. In Smit's account of his mother the wilderness is what she is precipitated into as she flees captivity in a Boer home. In a colonial state policed everywhere by the subjective failure of 'vagrancy', to be on the land 'having no fixed place of residence or honest means of subsistence' (as is the formula of the magisterial record books)¹²⁸ is to be in a subjective wilderness, alone, beset by the wild beasts of rough justice, naked under the gaze of authority, painfully marked out as if by a brand, 'loose' and in flight. It is a state of disarray, to which the redemptive opposite is the collectivity of the missions and the Settlement, the legal exculpation of Ordinance 50, the clothes that are repeatedly mentioned at the 1834 meeting, and which cover both the nakedness of the precolonial self and the brand of colonial subjugation, and the fixture of writing, especially as embodied in the image of 'sitting and writing', so radically removed from fleeing the brand of others. When Philip and Fairbairn were given a public dinner at Bethelsdorp in 1830 the inhabitants spoke at length of the transition into the colony. Gert Windvogel anticipated the tenor of the 1834 meeting at Philipston in recording '[t]hat things that were long past came again fresh to his thoughts ... he was carried back to the time when he roved through the country in different parts of Africa', and Paul Keteldas likewise remembered how they 'formerly had no resting place, but now they sat under their vities and figs in the greatest security.'¹²⁹

As we chart the semantics of the category 'vagrant' and draw connections between the semantics and social economy, it is important to consider how the designation is achieved of a conflict waged not only in language but over language itself. That is, the vagrant and the diffuse condition that is putatively vagrancy, are not only described *in* language, but also described *by* language. We should suspect this, given the intrigue of the vagrant's language to hegemonic scrutiny, and the way in which vagrant utterance is represented as occupying the discursive

¹²⁶ 'Minutes of a Meeting Held at Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A50.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ For example, 'Criminal Record Book, Albany, 1835-7' CA, 1 /AY 3/1/1/1/3.

extremes, as if on the frontier of discourse, where what is tolerable and what is possible are at their limits. Thus vagrant speech trembles upon blasphemy, scatology, madness and prophecy – which alone is sufficient to secure the interest of literature. At these limits, where the compound of society and language is most friable, we find the occasion that is intrinsically interesting to literary representation precisely because it poses a speculative opportunity to do with the relationship between language (the stock-in-trade of literature) and both social power and individual self-consciousness. As this study shows in various ways, the figure of the vagrant is always (even in mute silence) loudly and intrinsically about these things. However (and this is the more significant because it traces the complicity of literature in the designation – the invention, the manufacture – of the vagrant), among the greatest of the ‘errors’ of vagrancy is in language. We find the accusation in various guises, as we have seen and will yet see – as the raving of the Abraham Man or the muteness of the Dummerer¹³⁰, as the ‘indecent’ of swearing and oath-breaking, even of the raised voices that constitute ‘riot’ or ‘affray’ and ‘a tremendous tumult of shouting and babbling’¹³¹, as ‘listless social chattering’¹³², and above all as the ‘Secret Jargon’ of canting.

But these are not simply the observations of a detached empiricism; what is happening here is the ethnography of the vagrant, an act of description that, in the instance of using language to designate and describe the vagrant, simultaneously detaches the subject of that designation from a proper share in exactly those signifying practices which invent him or her. Just as the vagrant is made sense of in language so he or she is rendered insensible by definition, and the describer profits by the monopoly on signification, by which he or she is not only accorded the first and last word, and the accused silenced, but by which the describer is established as rational, reliable, literate and deliberate – in the fullest sense ‘sensible’, which is to say conscious, and thus human, where the insensible is implicitly not. Hence, as we have seen, we find such silence in the legal records of vagrancy. And hence we find speaking and, especially, writing to be of particular, even intense, interest to those attending the meeting in the Kat River settlement in 1834. We need to grasp that the meeting was not only addressing vagrancy in its explicit content, but that, properly understood, it was an implicit refutation of the charge of vagrancy in its form, that is, in itself. The technology of the public meeting is inevitably linguistic, and of several forms. There is the speaking, itself highly elaborated in its genre conventions, and there is the writing of minutes (and, in this instance, the business of translation, and even of

¹²⁹ *SACA*, 5, 290, 24 March 1830.

¹³⁰ See chapter 5.

¹³¹ O. Dapper, *Kaffraria or Land of the Hottentots*, 57.

¹³² J. H. van Reenen, Memorial, ‘Memorials Received, 1839’ vol. 3, 3 September 1839, CO 4002.

interpretation when Jan Uithaolder, for example, 'spoke in the Hottentot language'¹³³). It is the explicit purpose of the public meeting to produce sensible and effective discourse, and it is regulated according to measures that suppress noise, dissonance, nonsense and so on. In this case, it was also the implicit purpose of the meeting to produce transmissible and transmutable text, that would travel from speech to handwriting to type, and from the Kar River to Cape Town and out into the Colony. Those are progressive journeys, far from 'listless', and determined by the project of destination. Above all, as the bifurcated sense of the word 'minutes' alerts us, the access to text, so contrary to the definition of the vagrant, is also an access to significant time, which is what we call history. In this way we recover perhaps the most invisible, the most hidden, of all the losses that define the vagrant in the negative estimation of the society that describes him or her: without sensible speech, without writing, there can be no 'minutes', no measure of time, and thus no way to begin in history.

This is the sense of 'recording behind' so precious to Winvogel Smit. That it should arise contiguously with the sense of 'nation' hardly seems surprising, because 'nation' is, of course, the historical projection of such common social experience as takes nouns like 'cause' or 'purpose', as in 'common cause' or 'common purpose'. Thus Andries Stoffels avers that 'this was the first day and the first place ... to speak on behalf of his Nation', or, as the meeting's chairman put it in opening proceedings, 'we have this day the great privilege of assembling in a lawful way to speak about the state of the Hottentot Nation'. Both formulations link historical consciousness (the deixis of 'day' and 'place', which is fashioned to the momentous) with the capacity to speak 'on behalf of' or 'in a lawful way', in other words, within the writ of that social purpose, donated by the colony as the dividend of colonisation, but raising, as a potential destination of that purpose, the spectre of the 'Hottentot Nation'.

The converse of 'recording behind' is the threatened loss of history. When Cubedo Oerson predicts the extinction of the 'Hottentot Nation' without 'the Word of God', he means more than that the political agency of missionary humanitarianism (wrought in the rhetoric of grace, of Godly intervention) has been instrumental in securing Khoisan interests. Of course, primarily, he does mean just this – that without the refuge of the mission stations all vestiges of an independent Khoisan existence would have been lost to the erasures of a brutal colonisation. But he also means (we have already cited the significance of his choosing to frame the Christian intervention in terms of the Logos) that the missionaries have entailed literacy and education, and thus access to the 'recording' technologies of the colonial history to which the Khoisan would otherwise be lost. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy, since this is indeed exactly what is

¹³³ 'Minutes of a Meeting, Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A50.

happening in this instance, now, as Oerson's 'extinction' is salvaged from the record of the meeting he spoke at in 1834, and through a process whose continuities include the use of English, a belief in the value of writing and of history, an operation within the broad discourses of 'nation' and 'humanitarianism', and so on. There is an exemplary instance of the kind of extinction to which Oerson refers, and which we are here amplifying, in the same record that recovers him to history. At one point an old man called Hendrik Joseph told the gathering of what he could recollect (that is the translation of the word he used) of 'this part of the country' when he was young, noting that there were 'only Gona Hottentots here to be found'. The claim he makes is for autochthonous priority in a country dramatically colonised in a single lifetime. But the revealing moment follows:

— I once had a place called —— but where is that place now? — a Boer occupies it — I had nothing.¹³⁴

We must presume that he named the place he once had, but that the name was lost on those 'three Hottentot young men' who were recording proceedings. The name is not recorded because it is not recognised, and is not recognised because it is no longer used. Thus it is that the eviction of Joseph happens at three levels: as the eviction from a piece of land, as the eviction from a language and a toponymy by which he first described his world, not *occupying* but *inhabiting* it (the verb he chooses for the Boer who replaces him is pointed). And lastly, it happens as the eviction from history itself -- for without the name of the place there cannot be any record, which we may literally see in the expunging slash that replaces the name in the record. And Joseph anticipates this loss to history, in its fullest implications, when he asks 'but where is that place now?', for although the *space* may still be there, occupied by a Boer, yet the *place* that he inhabited is lost, because inhabiting, which turns a space into a place, is a cultural act, an act of consciousness, done by language. History, in telling stories, is such an act too, and one always implicated thereby in collateral displacements and replacements. That slash, just as it marks a loss to history, is an act of history too.

For us, then, the confusion of Joseph's final sentence, turning as it does on a verb whose tense is hard to *place*, is deeply informative. The statement, 'I had nothing' must, for its sense, lie somewhere between the time of having the place he has lost, and the present in which he would be constrained to say 'I *have* nothing'. Perhaps, therefore, he is speaking of a time between then and now. But there is a profound sense in which Joseph had nothing all along, for without the name — the language — to record, he has no history of possession, no recorded certainty. To this

end, he could be expected to use the present tense 'have' to indicate his present bereftness, but Joseph's condition goes deeper than that. He is speaking not only of the current loss of a story, as if something *misplaced*, but of the fullest implications of irreversible loss: that the loss expunges itself too, to the extent that one cannot show that one has lost anything, and so far as the record is concerned, one has *had nothing in the first place*.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

3. The vagrant text: A. G. Bain's 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'

The problem of origin

In the manuscripts collection of the South African Library, Cape Town, there is a photostat copy of an autograph draft of Andrew Geddes Bain's 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' (or 'Caatje Kekelbek' as it is spelled – but not titled – there).¹ The copy was donated to the Library by Bain's great-granddaughter, biographer and editor, Margaret Lister, who then had possession of the original.² There is also a 'Background File' to the Bain photostat, with various photocopies of obvious articles to do with Bain and the poem. But at the very back of the folder, and hitherto unremarked upon, is a miscellany of photocopies held together by a paperclip and under the cover of a page of brown paper. On that page is written, evidently by a librarian, 'Property of Mrs E. M. Woodcock' and the observation: 'found in books given to Mrs Woodcock by an old gentleman. No clues.' There are two phone numbers dating from at least the 1970s (they are only six digits long). Among the papers is a photograph of several torn rectangles of paper written on in two 19th century hands alongside a box of Magic Tape (as though the photograph was taken to demonstrate a conservation technique). Stapled together are four pages of photocopied manuscript, easily discernible as the reconstituted fragments in the photograph. There is also a copy of a letter from Frederick Rex to his father, George, in 1834, filed as a specimen of Fred Rex's handwriting. On another page a librarian has begun a systematic comparison of three texts of the same work, typed with a manual typewriter.

The photocopied manuscript is that of the complete text of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', as it appears in print in the *South African Sentinel* on 4 March 1839. In other words, unlike the Bain draft of the poem only, this manuscript includes all the spoken interludes and the extra stanzas as they appeared in the music-hall sketch. Fred Rex has long been established as a probable co-author of the sketch (though not of the original verses) and the sample of his handwriting on file is sufficient to suggest that he wrote some of the unattributed manuscript. There are capital 'M's and 'P's that are identical, though other letters that are not such satisfactory matches. Rex's

¹ The modern orthodoxy is 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', which is used here only when referring to the 'persistent' text or modern editions. 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' refers to the original printed version of the complete text, patter included, and to the presumed text of the original performance (and the Woodcock MS in the SA Library), and 'Caatje Kekelbek' refers to Bain's autograph MS (SAL, MSB274).

² J. Du P. Scholtz, 'Outeurskap en Ontstaanstyd van 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'', *Standpunte*, 17, 5, 12–17.

handwriting, then, might well cover the verses, but the prose interludes are in a radically different hand, a script that is upright rather than sloping markedly, as just one example. It would seem, though, that the pen is the same throughout, and it doesn't take very long before one wonders whether the very great difference in handwritings is not because they are, in fact, by the same hand, i.e. two scripts made radically different by one writer in order to mark each generic shift, as if instructing a printer's typesetting. Without the original, of course, there is no watermark to limit the earliest possible date of the writing. Nonetheless, the manuscript is flawless and highly deliberate in preparation (as the two scripts suggest): thus a fair copy or a transcription. But we cannot know whether it precedes or postdates the text's appearance in print. The Rex handwriting, itself far from certain, and a few textual inconsistencies – vagaries, perhaps – are the best clues to the provenance and significance of the manuscript, as knew the librarian who first began the enthusiastic search for Rex's handwriting and variant texts in MS and in print. However one construes the dual scripts in the single text, the likelihood of this being an authorial manuscript persists, for who but an author would so pertinently wish to signal the alteration in register as is accomplished by the two hands? Who but Rex (by far the lesser known of the two men) might want to point out not only the fact of collaboration, but the division of labour and each author's share in the harvest? Where is the original now and why was the quest so short-lived?

As gnawing as these questions are, they obscure a more useful truth: that the literary record, and literature itself, is an historical contingency. The Kaatje who departs her text in search of the Governor is forever disappearing from her audience, even if only to re-enact her picaresque in other theatres and other texts. That she would have us imagine the cheeky improbability of her *settling* matters through the agency of any government is for her to deter us from the government of literature itself, as it is configured in the agency of canons, the operations of 'closure', the considerations of authenticity, the pretence of transparency. Kaatje's government is the government of history – as is all of ours – and that is where her story and Bain's poem and Bain's and Rex's play – provenance, subject, manuscript, text – are all one.

Kaatje Kekkelbek wanders out of the Kat River Settlement, across the farms of the colony, through the bush, into and out of the courts, jails and canteens of Grahamstown, into its provincial music-hall and onto the printed page some time in the later 1830s.³ Today she is as

³ 1838 is now conventional. Questions of dating may be worth elaborating, they shed light on 'foundational' obsessions and claims, as well as, obviously, the historiography of the text. The complete text is relatively easy to date, from internal evidence. There is only a small window between some of the references and the performance and publication. But a draft in Bain's hand could reach back further (it is watermarked 1835) save for the fact of a doggerel squib against (or rather, cautioning) Col. John Hare on succeeding Stockenstrom as Lieutenant-Governor in August 1838 (and see below for a full treatment of Stockenstrom's significance to the poem). Hare was patron of the amateur theatricals at which 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' was first performed. Perhaps the squib was intended for delivery there also (and maybe it *was* delivered). The poem's implicit condemnation of Stockenstrom and his

readily a subject of Afrikaans scholarship as English. She has a prominent place in the mythography of the South African vagrant, but, significantly, no less of a place in the mythography of the 'coloured' woman. One of her characteristics is her endurance – an ability to persist despite the odds (or because of them), and to prevail. This has to do with the 'rebound' of Bain's satire, in part, but also the way in which her historical value is transmuted as myth, by what we call 'literature'.

There is a habit in the scholarship of 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' to remark the slightness of its literary merit, but this is a provincial hesitance and one which guards against the historicity of literature, as if the measure of worth is necessarily historical transcendence.⁴ In fact, the historical poem (or play) that is 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' is of more than esoteric interest as a footnote of South African popular culture or language studies; it is a compelling text of vigorous and ambitious language, drawing a central character who disrupts the project of her author to charm audiences to left and right of the political position she is meant to mark, and across well over a century and a half. It is this elusiveness of the subject – Kaatjie Kekkelbek – that marks the extraordinary interest of the poem – that, and the place of the strange creole forged in the service of her elusiveness. Both Kaatjie and 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' are indeed kinds of forgery⁵. This is the problem they pose to the stable and authenticating pretensions of literary studies, and to the 'literature' invented by that discipline,⁶ but this is also the richness of the text, for only a problem can truly represent the knot of South African history and the tortuous strands of experience and ideas that are bound in the figure of colonialism.

Kaatjie is a figure of crisis in the personal and social subjectivity of her race, class and gender, and the poem that bears her name is a broadside in the ongoing crisis of colonialism and the struggle to establish ideological hegemony across the manifest contradictions of war and rebellion, dispossession and religious conversion, African and European languages, old and new clothes, old and new languages. 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' is a problem text and a text addressed to a

administration (see below) gathers force in the context of Hare's accession. Is it coded a warning to him of the scope and scale of white colonial ire? See Lister, *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain*, 193–201; 'G. S. N[ienaber]', 'Oor Kaatjie Kekkelbek', *Die Huisgenoot*, 26 October 1945.

⁴ See, for example, 'G. S. N[ienaber]', 'Oor Kaatjie Kekkelbek', *Die Huisgenoot*, 26 October 1945; J. du P. Scholtz, 'Outeurskap en Ontstaantyd van 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek'', *Stadspunte*, 17, 5, 12–17.

⁵ The word 'forgery' is deliberate. I use it to suggest the force of the crisis in which 'Hottentot' subjectivity is developed: cognates would be 'hammered out', 'in the vice', 'on the anvil' and so on. They express the nature of the event. But 'forgery' also suggests counterfeiting and I want to annex this option also, for it suggests something of the relationship of myth to history, indeed, something of the entire project of ideology. And especially, this sense of 'forgery' attends the witting falsification of 'Life among the Hottentots' (as the poem/play is subtitled) by Bain and Rex.

⁶ To some extent I am following Foucault in perceiving the object of the discipline as invented by the discipline. There are two senses in which 'literature' moves conceptually. The one is the original work of art; the other is the object of critical attention. They may concern the same text, but they are not the same thing. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 82.

'problem', as the crisis that Kaatje represents, both personally and socially, has been styled.⁷ The difficulty that attends the text – problems of authorship, date, genre, versions – is the difficulty of provenance. In this the text bears a marked correspondence with its subject, for Kaatje's passage is a *turn* and an *interlude*: she is arrested by her audience (as by the colonial law) only momentarily before she resumes the picaresque that is her life and a social history and that lies outside hegemonic order, or at least tangential to it. Indeed, her wandering on stage and then off again (or her bursting into song in the literary record of the colony only to fall inevitably silent) is a kind of meteoric passage. We who orbit the body politic are briefly witness to her pass; it takes history to know whether she has fallen like a meteor or wandered like a comet, and it is the brilliance of the poem that both possibilities are sustained.

The problem of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is first to be sought in the claims that are made for it. It has long been held to demonstrate early signs of the emergence of Afrikaans.⁸ It now finds its way into the first pages of anthologies of South African poetry in English.⁹ 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is reckoned central to the elaboration of an iconography of the Khoisan and especially the colonial Khoisan and Khoisan women.¹⁰ In part these ascriptions of seminal significance are because of Bain's foundational role as a geologist and engineer. It is inevitable that the literary issue of a man who was at one time considered to be the European who had ventured farthest north in Southern Africa will share in a measure of his pioneering reputation.¹¹ The Bain that wrote 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' (or part of it) was to become the Bain who discovered and described and won fame for the first collection of fossils from southern Africa (and this as an autodidact who first read Lyell's *Principles of Geology* within months of the *Beagle's* rounding the Cape) as also the Bain who was to engineer the roads of the Colony and the first great passes, not least the one that bears his name still. These undertakings, at once foundational and monumental, are joined to his poem in the general biography of their author, and conduce to an anticipation of the poem's originality in various fields.

⁷ Principally, as this thesis shows, the 'problem' of emergent Khoisan identity in the colonial context, but I am thinking of those iterations of this as 'the Cape Coloured problem', and which proved agonising to segregationist theorists, from the period under consideration here right until the tricameral dispensation of the P. W. Botha era. Sarah Gertrude Millin infamously epitomised the accusation of 'muddled' blood in the miscegenation behind 'colouredness' (see J. M. Coetzee, 'Blood, Taint, Flaw, Degeneration', *White Writing*, 136–162), but the charge persists: Botha's daughter, in the 1980s, pitied the psychology of 'coloureds'. Even in progressive or revisionist writing one encounters the formulation: there is Lewis's *Between the Wire and the Wall*, for example, a formulation laden with a sense of contradiction, of being in a vice, a circumstance of dilemma.

⁸ This is even recorded as among the poem's significances in Bain's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. See also J. C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur*, 35, 48, and E. Lindenberg et al, *Inleiding tot die Afrikaanse Letterkunde*; Lister, *Journals*, 193.

⁹ See M. Chapman, *A Century of South African Poetry*, in which it is accounted foundational, at least implicitly, 19, 47–52, 372.

¹⁰ S. Gray, 'The Frontier Myth and the Hottentot Live', *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, 50–8.

¹¹ Thus Arrowsmith recorded Bain's 1826 journey in his (1834) map as the northernmost European journey. Lister, *Journals*, xv.

The claims made for the poem are indicative of the problem it presents not because they are untrue, or insufficiently true, but because they erase the complex interplay of history. The foundational value of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' makes history out of the artefact, when of course the poem is also itself an artefact of history. Myths of origin have as their business the representation of a state which is the cause of things, but not itself caused; this is true not only of the state, or subject of the myth, but also of the myth itself, of course, for in representing a history the myth is disinclined to situate itself as the product of that history.¹² Thus the poem's entry into the canon of South African literature is also a suppression of its historicity and of all its sponsoring texts and discourses. We labour under the sheer fact of it, a kind of settlement that accords ironically with the 'Settlement' of the Khoi at Kat River, a settling into fact that is described against the truth of the poem: that it is not a fact in the sense of a settled artefact, but rather a text of great variability in version and provenance, that it is not a poem only, but also a play and a song and a performance, that it is not sprung, autochthonous, from Bain's genius, but anticipated in all sorts of small ways, from the tune that runs alongside it to Bain's invention and use of the names 'Sabina Seekoegat' and 'Christian van Donderwether' in 1830.¹³ Most of all, the literary settlement that is effected in the collection of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', and in the reasons that sponsor its collection and the claims which flow from it, entails a suppression of the contested nature of the history from which it is sprung. What the literary 'fact' achieves in isolating and reifying the text is a symbolic stabilisation of the corresponding context. The consequence of this is that it becomes ever harder to recover the text out of the context, since the latter is now anticipated in the image of the former. A cycle of self-reference is begun whose cumulative

¹² This is why myths are supremely ideological: in Althusserian terms they are not only obviously the objects of ideology, but also agents of its apparatus. They demonstrate precisely the attribute of self-obfuscation that Althusser identifies. The character of myth is worth thinking about in these terms, because 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is itself entailed in the mythography of Kaatje, the type handed down to posterity. In the case of the poem, the obfuscation is achieved by a particular sleight of hand and by its pretensions to lightness and levity. The sleight of hand is accomplished thus: the figure presented is openly caricatured, so that the audience believes itself conscious of the text's deliberate ideological intent, laughing not only at the figure of Kaatje, but also at the ambitions of her author. The precise mechanism might be termed 'the excess of reason'; it generates irony and the humour familiar to irony. Seduced by the pleasure of that humour and under the illusion of regarding its reason *knowingly* suspended, the audience is disinclined to perceive any more than the manifest ideological agenda. The deeper purport of the text, that which outlasts reading or performance – and the historical moment – is accomplished invisibly and in silence. The contradictory positions of scholarship on 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' – that it is on the one hand foundational and on the other of little literary merit – is the dim retinal signature of this ideological sleight, a significant contradiction.

¹³ *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, 2 July 1830. Lister notes this and that the style and Graaff-Reinet address of the correspondent, though anonymous, point to Bain's authorship. Lister, *Journals*, 199. Indeed, reading *De Zuid-Afrikaan* and *The South African Commercial Advertiser* (and later the *Graham's Town Journal*) of this period one soon picks up Bain's reportage or correspondence, where anonymous, from the peculiar character of its style – droll, mordantly ironic, playful with names. Other correlations suggest his presence too – a penchant for court reporting (with witty asides) and for controversy, an interest in litigation, and in executions. See, for example, *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, 2 July 1830, 8 April 1831, *South African Commercial Advertiser* 11 January 1826 (for an account of his travels), 11 October 1828 (for litigation), 26 November 1828 (where Bain is foreman of a jury), 6 December 1828 (where the tone is exemplary, reporting on Justice Menzie's circuit court in Somerset), 10 February 1830 (exemplary of court reporting, and executions), 24 April 1830 (the case of Caatje Mianie), 31 July 1830 (where Kaatje [sic] Mianie is hanged). In late 1834 the *Graham's Town Journal* reports on *Bain v Van Ryneveld* appear (going on tone) to be by Bain himself.

effect is to sunder the artefact from history, and to privilege the text in the divorce, so that its literary status exceeds the accident of its historical origin – or *should* do so, since apologies for the literary merit of the work show that history continues to cling to the text. This, in turn, is surely because the colonial circumstance (and its conflict and crisis) persist and complicate the history of the poem's reading as much as its writing. The priority of information in reading history and in reading historically is always dogged by the historicity of texts and of reading. It is not properly possible to know history from artifacts that require historical insight to be known themselves; all history founders on the opacity of the record, the fact that the texts belong to history and may not therefore be used to elucidate it.¹⁴ In practice, of course, this is not common sense, for we proceed by processes of critical enquiry that involve the ceaseless interaction of induction and deduction, and which work at least to describe what may not be entirely discovered. (Franco Moretti makes sensible claims for the place of the negative virtue of Popper's condition of 'falsifiability' in the pursuit of a knowledge that is less hesitant about its claims to truth in the scholarship of the humanities;¹⁵ one recalls that Popper himself is concerned about the integrity of the loop of induction and deduction in scientific process, but also that he is antagonistic to the comprehensive theory of history that has Marx as its locus.) What is important here is to note that while we should not despair of knowledge of 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek', nonetheless we need to be alert to the ways in which the literary text displaces the historical one, and displaces also our knowledge of that history, for it is by the text that we come to the history, which is a reversal of the historical fact, that is, that it was by history that the text came to be.

The claims that are made for 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' as an instance in the germination of Afrikaans are exemplary of the kinds of problem that arise when one locates history by the text. The poem-play's reputation in this regard ultimately rests less on internal factors (i.e. evidence of the mutation of the forms of Dutch, the evolution of a language) than on externals: what the linguist presumes of the text lies not inside it but without. For what the poem offers is a fictional instance binding colonial indigene and an erroneous Dutch, and these are 'read through' as a presumptive history of the language, when, in fact, they are only a history of Bain's forgery.¹⁶

¹⁴ Every undergraduate knows the hazard – or should – of needing to know something of Renaissance England to understand their Shakespeare, but needing Shakespeare to know something of Renaissance England.

¹⁵ F. Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, 21–27.

¹⁶ Examples of apparent linguistic mutation that might be no more than instances where the poem switches from Dutch to English, or where the Afrikaans ear 'hears' Afrikaans instead of Dutch might include 'a kleine beetje' where 'a' sounds like the Afrikaans indefinite article 'n', rather than the Dutch (one notes that Bain's manuscript draft has 'ein kleine beetje'), or even the first line of the poem whose English forms permit a retrospective Afrikaans pronunciation ('My name is Kaatjie Kekkelbek' as in the Afrikaans: my names are Kaatjie Kekkelbek. It is quite easy to imagine this inflection in performance, and just as easy to infer from Bain's erratic Dutch spellings that even he intended the line as Dutch, hearing the last vowel of 'name' elided into 'is'. Conversely, in the fifth line he uses 'Myn' rather than 'My', but this is before a vowel; to the ear it is possible to construe identical Dutch pronunciations for the first two syllables of 'My name' and 'Myn a.h.c'. Indeed, Bain's shifting languages pose

Because the Khoikhoi and Afrikaans are errant forms within the colonial hegemony, it tends not to be remarked that Bain is a Scotsman among Dutch Boers and colonial Khoikhoi and that the 'error' of Kaatje's patois is first and foremost the accident of his own haphazard Dutch. One need only look to the poem's various early versions for this haphazardness – it is there even in the spelling of Caatje/Kaatje – to realise that what is evolving is Bain's own creole rather than the whole language. The modern orthodoxy spells Bain's heroine 'Kaatjie'; reading back from that position generates the inclination to perceive the drift from 'Caatje' to 'Kaatje' as evidence of linguistic evolution, but this is not necessarily the case. The settlement of the literary artefact produces its own history, potentially false.

It is as if the possibility of Afrikaans – being 'African' – can only be realised in indigenous African utterance, and as if the 'error' of a patois must be a reproduction of the 'transgression' of miscegenation. Thus the self-recognition entailed in the establishment of a language (the moment when dialect becomes opaque, or when it refers against a parent tongue) is the product of historical consciousness, for the African foundation of the language and the

editorial problems: the published transcription of 'Caatje Kekkelbek' mistakes Bain's handwriting on this score, offering 'one' for 'ons' ('And what he vould not give, one took' is, in fact 'ons took') and, as rex may have done to Bain, correcting Bain's ear by spelling what Bain wrote as 'onrigt' more properly as 'onregt'. There is one point where Bain's draft does produce a form more appropriate to Afrikaans than Dutch, which is corrected back to Dutch orthography in the Bain/Rex version: Bain wrote 'Ses maanden's lekker leven', but the performed text has 'Zes maanden lekker leven'. Interestingly Lister mis-transcribes the MS draft without the possessive 's': 'Ses maanden lekker leven'. Together the three variants demonstrate the presumptiveness of authors and editors, and work to collapse the stability of the text as evidence of an accuracy with regard to language. The point is simply that Bain, initially, is producing a text that relies on a Dutch that is overheard rather than known as a mother tongue, and on an English that is itself a late Teutonic derivation and whose forms therefore already anticipate many of those to come in Afrikaans. The internal evidence for a record of creolisation is not as strong as it seems, since Bain may be the creoliser, is certainly a dubious ear and transcriber, and is heavily over-written by (probably) Rex and later editors. There are words like 'karbonaatje' (which the *Verklarende Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (1985) does not recognise, while *A Dictionary of South African English* (1980) does) to account for, and, in the full version 'banjan' ('baic'), which is hard to refute as a true instance of Malay articulation, but these are few and far between. A better case for the 'Afrikaans' of the text might be derived from the spoken interludes of the performed version because there the markers of dialectal pronunciation are more clear and deliberate (and one suspects more accurate, for Bain's MS version is inconsistent and frequently 'corrected' in the full version- 'kleene beetje' becomes 'kleine beetje' for instance, which is a chastening reversal of Bain's 'ear'). Fred Rex appears to have perceived the humorous opportunity provided by Bain's initial 'code-switches' and to have amplified these with phonetic transcriptions of a Dutch-English that records not so much the progress of Afrikaans than something parallel to that, the confluence of languages in the mouth of an other, specifically, the articulation of European languages by a Khoikhoi person of the early 19th century. Thus Rex's forms, such as 'maskie' 'Gorment', 'binjan', 'dacha', 'Temper Syety' and 'Extra Hole', 'moerhond' and 'moervreter' are of genuine interest, but they speak more to the occasion of Khoisan adoptions and adaptations of European languages, and the relationship of this to vagrant 'cant' and its provenance in social marginality and spatial and social mobility and migration. If one looks (and listens) hard the text carries perhaps more information about the general Babel in the 19th century Cape: there are strong echoes of Bain's Scots ('juist', 'aye'), of German Jewry ('And wat he vould not give' and 'hombogged' – in MS -, 'Das ist alles flausen and hamboggerij' in the full text), Malay ('banjan'), some embedded indigenous languages ('Kowie', perhaps 'Dik') as well as Dutch and English and the inflections of indigenous languages in the pronunciation of those two tongues ('maskie', 'speetes', etc.). This riot of language is evidence of the Cape's character of migration and plurality, aspects of history in which the vagrant necessarily participates in the extreme. What 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' tells us is of the brokerage of the vagrant in articulating and accelerating the evolution of languages. The danger of looking to the text for signs of any recognised language is that we then fail to recognise the language in play historically, an extraordinary compound, that is Kaatje's medium for self and social consciousness, her medium for the experience and negotiation of history. See treatments of cant and Afrikaans, and of 'skellim' speech, above.

related metaphor of miscegenation are ideas of history that the scholarship of Afrikaans presumes of the text. With hindsight one is able to remark the crisis in Cape history between 1828 (Ordinance 50) and 1835 (the War of Hintsa), and that it encompasses the abolition of slavery, as also the emigrations of Cape Boers (a move into Africa) and the establishment of the Kat River Settlement (the Colony's great commitment to a free citizenry of its marginal populations, not least what were then called 'Bastards'). The proximity of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' to this crisis encourages the reader to adduce the poem as evidence for the particular arrangement of history, as myth, that sponsors the occurrence of Afrikaans in the creole populations of the frontier zone – as is presumably recorded by Bain in the poem. But Bain and his text are unconscious of these trajectories for they have not yet happened, and innocent of this idea of history for it has not yet arisen.

What Bain's Dutch – in Kaatje's mouth – does signal is something less clear cut, but no less interesting in the history of the evolution of Afrikaans. The history of the Khoisan between 1809 and 1834, and especially after 1828, articulated primarily in the record and discourse of the London Missionary Society and its evangelical allies, provides the first acute consciousness of 'nation' in colonial southern Africa (alongside the extra-colonial rise of the Zulu state, then dimly discerned).¹⁷ The 'voice' found by Khoisan (and 'Bastard') activists, even where the record is not held in Dutch or where the activists are not themselves Khoisan, corresponds with the emergence of a new 'tongue'. Dutch became the dominant language of the Kat River Settlement, the language in which its residents spoke repeatedly by 1834 of their nationhood, even as their indigenous languages fell into disuse.¹⁸ This is what 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' has captured – not so much a new language as a ripeness for language, and, ironically, but significantly, the language with which she calls the Boer 'schelm', and speaks of her 'right' and her redress to government, is Dutch. Whether the Dutch she speaks is barbarised in her mouth or whether she is the oracle of an independent Afrikaans is of less concern; what is certain is that Bain and his character, awkwardly inhabiting the same history, are constrained by the limits of their history only to interact in Dutch. For both, like history, this is imperfect – a contingency.

That 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' has attracted the attention of scholars of Afrikaans, and that this interest is made popular in the pages of *Die Huisgenoot* in the high season of Afrikaner nationalism,¹⁹ suggests that mechanisms of social conflict (matters of class and race and gender) and the pervasive rhetoric of 'othering' that is one of these mechanisms, are profound in the establishment of a language. What claims are made for the Afrikaans of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' are

¹⁷ T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, 121, and see 000 above.

¹⁸ This is evident even from the English transcript of the minutes. 'Minutes of a meeting held at Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A50.

¹⁹ 'G. S. N[ienaber]', 'Oor Kaatje Kekkelbek', *Die Huisgenoot*, 26 October 1945.

Judged less in the internal life of the poem's language than in the history of the poem and the history of the language and the society that finds expression there. If there is a truth about the emergence of Afrikaans in 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' then it has to do with an Afrikaner nationalism inextricably linked through the rhetoric of otherness to the nationalism and nationalist expression of the Khoisan and 'Bastards'. That reflexivity may attend the Dutch names of Bain's poem too, as we shall see, and the way they speak simultaneously about Boer and Khoi, Dutch and Khoisan languages, and the English-speaking Cape Scotsman who coined them and found them funny.

The humour of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is derived of a satire fashioned chiefly for the English-speaking community of the Cape, and primarily, but not exclusively that of the eastern frontier at its most intense. It is to the tradition of that community, originating variously in 18th and 19th century England (and Ireland and Scotland, and even elsewhere in Europe) that the poem and the play belong, and it is that tradition which has made of the poem what it has become. In the first edition of South Africa's most comprehensive anthology on historical principles, *A Century of South African Poetry* (1981), its editor argues for the importance of Bain within terms that presage the 'culture wars' of the end of the 20th century. Bain, Chapman urges, offers 'a stimulating option to the 'educated man's affair' that has for too long been regarded as the mainstream of South African English poetry.'²⁰ He sets this option against 'a line of liberal humanist literary activity' initiated by Pringle, but at the same time appears to recuse himself from acknowledging the weight of purely historical interest in the poem (its illiberal counter to the rhetoric of Pringle) by holding that his 'criteria for selection have been primarily 'literary' rather than 'sociological'.²¹ What Chapman's formulation signals is the anxiety of history.

Stephen Gray's pioneering essay on 'The Frontier Myth and the Hottentot Eve' marks a first attempt at a serious exploration of the origins and development of myth and of the historicity of texts that accumulate to derive the 'type' of literature.²² His argument errs, however, in its generosity towards Bain, whose political prescience is overstated. In fact, as we shall see, Bain was very much a member of the conservative majority of colonial settlerdom and 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' foresees little except the fulfilment of its propaganda's own prophecy. The text's endurance and the manner in which it escapes, even overthrows, expectations of the vicious racism of South Africa has much to do with its being divorced from its context, and much to do with its inadvertently happening upon a subject that is historically and enduringly ambivalent. Nevertheless, that Gray situates Kaatje within a lineage of representations is correct;

²⁰ M. Chapman, 'Introduction', *A Century of South African Poetry*, 19.

²¹ *ibid.*, 13, 19.

²² Gray, *Southern African Literature*, 38-71.

it reminds us that the anxiety of history is best reckoned with by the practice of good history too.

The 'canonicity' of 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' constitutes a field of claims – literary merit, popular tradition, periodicity, 'linguistic inventiveness'²³, historical 'colour' – which shed light upon the relationship between history and literature, as also upon colonialism and coloniality, and, specifically, the virtue of the poem's character of problem. Indeed, there are ways in which the very awkwardness of the text, disorderly (if not drunk) within the government of the canon, defies the pretensions of that writ in a satisfying sympathy with the career of its subject. Everything that is historically volatile about Kaatjie Kekkelbek – that is to say everything about her that undermines social hegemony, here colonialism, from her linguistic imprecision and error, to her theft, her drunkenness, her aggression, her vagrancy, her sexuality – all might find correlatives within the fortunes of the text in the 'society' of the canon. Thus, by analogy, the text is also linguistically imprecise and error-ridden, it filches from the tradition of popular song²⁴ and the iconography of Khoisan indigenes (and European vagrants), it is uninhibited, polemical, drifting from version to version and eluding the archive, and, to reader and scholar alike, seductive.

The attitude of literature to the historicity of 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' is divided thus: there is the historical interest of the text, that is, its internal history of provenance and emendation, publication and reception, as well as its own value as an historical artefact, and there is the interest of history, that is, the text's representation of incidents in Cape history. As the truth-value of the latter diminishes according to unfolding research (or ideological change) and interest in the history in the poem is forced back more and more on the operations of the poem's representation, so, effectively the interest in history becomes indistinguishable from the poem's historical interest. This is not simply to reiterate the continuities between text and history, but to

²³ The phrase is Chapman's, as a quality of the literary, according to his application of selection criteria. Chapman, *Century of South African Poetry*, 13.

²⁴ This is not treated here. Kirby makes two intriguing voyages into these waters, and turns up one fascinating footnote on a card index in the *English Folk Dance and Song Society*, where the song directed by Bain/Rex as supplying the tune to which the verses of 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' are to be sung carries this information: 'This song of c.1839 was taken to S. Africa by a London Missionary Society. The tune later became part of an African native song.' As Kirby notes, the date of 1839 doesn't make for any pointed connections with Bain, being simply too proximate, but it is given as circa and there are reasons to think it late (not least that 'a' London Missionary Society is probably 'the' London Missionary Society, whose operations are on the wane by 1839, but which represents the epicentre of humanitarian agitation in the Cape, and to whose resident Director, John Philip, the poem was facetiously 'Dedicated and presented by the Uitenhage Philosophers' when it appeared in the *South African Sentinel*. Uitenhage was the site of the LMS mission at Bethelsdorp, the most significant station and the one from which most Kat River Settlers were drawn – including the missionary James Read, another witness at the Select Committee in London (see below). Should Bain have first encountered the tune (it is also, pretty much, that of 'Sing a Song of Sixpence' – a later setting) in South Africa and in the throats of, say, his Khoisan troops (again, see below), and knew of its LMS provenance, then even his choice of tune becomes barbed. P. R. Kirby, '“Calder Fair”, “Kaatjie Kekkelbek” and “Sing a Song of Sixpence”', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, 22, 2 (1967), 42–51; '“Calder Fair” and “Kaatjie Kekkelbek”: A Study in Long-Range Research', *QBSAL*, 24 (2) (1969), 202–205.

point up history's character of problem and to suggest that this makes for a good deal of the hesitancy with which a poem like this one is to be met by the intrinsically stabilising and putatively stable field that is thought of as 'canon'. History, plainly, is a deterrent to canonicity (one need only remark the fortunes of Shakespeare's history plays in the secondary school classroom, for example, and the corresponding attention that is enjoyed precisely by those of his plays that most easily may be pretended to be 'for all time' – especially those in the wooziet register, where historical circumstance is obliterated in atmospherics: *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*) with only the special exception that is held out in respect of texts that instruct about literary history. Just as Kaatje's errant vulgarity and vagrancy is shadowed in the low comedy and instability of Bain's poem-as-text, so the problematic character of history itself attends both the 'problem' of the vagrant Khoi woman embodied as Kaatje Kekkelbek, and the problems of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' as a text, and it is to these that we now must turn.

Name and address

'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is no easier to locate than the social subject that is her central character. Here is a text that defies generic categorisation (to a degree associated with relegation to the category of 'popular', 'low' or 'infantile') – a poem that is not a poem, but a play, or a song. It is a text that flits in and out of performance and print, in and out of speech and song, in and out of Dutch and English. The kinds of term used to describe such works of modal variety, ease and brevity – terms like 'sketch' or 'turn' – resonate with implications of imprecision and ephemerality. The defiance of category is a defiance of the canon's prerogative and will to order, which is by analogy precisely the threat posed by the elusive subjectivity of the vagrant, and especially the racially indeterminate figure. Similarly, the loose gestures of the sketch and the ephemerality of the turn are challenges to the canon's prerogative in fixing the cartesian dimensionality of literature – literature's 'place' in space and time. This is why the canon inclines towards works of 'gravity' and 'reach' (works that assert their occupation in the space of society, are widely passed around in the coteries, or widely read, or large, dense or solid) as also works of 'endurance' and 'finish' (works that appear to either transcend or embody time, but in either case actually serve to stabilise the vicissitudes of time, which is to say history). Such values lend tenure and permanence to the society that recognises itself in the literature. It is a closed loop of reference, a ruse that works only so long as it holds off disruption. Again, the vagrant is

hazardous to society in like manner. The offence of the vagrant is against the discipline effected by social order (a discipline derived to propel subordinate subjects into the control of the powerful – for labour, breeding, consumption). Eluding the cartesian co-ordinates, which are the primary technology of location, frustrates the state's ability to plot the trajectory of the subject and, therefore, to manipulate and discipline that life. This underpins the hysteria against vagrancy of the colonial hegemony in the wake of Ordinance 50.

What we are speaking of here is the address of literature and the manner in which this is kin to the address of the subject. When we pass into any domain the information most immediately sought from us is our name and address; this is true even of life itself, as can be judged from any birth certificate. A vagrant is someone without an address and, often, without texts of identity (an identification document, a pass, a passport), perhaps even a name. But what leaps off the page of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is the priority of her name and address ('My name ... I come from...?'), and we should extend to 'address' both senses of the word because it is not only the fact of her having a local habitation and a name, but the manner of her asserting it up front, that is of interest. Bain's poem assigns Kaatje a name and address in accordance with the value he wishes to have ascribed to her. It is as if he were settling her subjectivity in much the same way that Stockenstrom, after Philip and Read, sought to secure the subjectivity of the colonial Khoisan with their settlement at Kat River (and sought thereby, also, to settle the frontier).²⁵ It is necessary to stress that the name and the address belong strictly to Bain and not to Kaatje, not only obviously in the sense that she is his creation, but also in that her name is assumed within a language that is not hers and in that her address connotes her imposition on the landscape, as a consequence of colonial politics and social engineering. Both name and address are the donation of the colony.

This attribution of subjectivity is a deeper matter than that which literary criticism once pursued as 'characterisation', for it demonstrates the participation of literary texts in the making and managing of real social relations. It is the priority of Bain's poem to arrest and correct the historical evasiveness of the vagrant by giving her a name and address; this says much about his purpose and the text's function. The same thing is true, precisely, of the ballad called both 'Loving Mad Tom' and 'Tom O'Bedlam', where the latter of these two titles looks exactly like an attempt at overwriting the former with a name and address. Even the semantic project of the

²⁵ Indeed, one should not lose sight of the character of frontier in everything to do with not only Kaatje Kekkelbek, but vagrancy in general. There are various directions to the mobility of the vagrant, away, around, about, among, between. Kaatje, both as literary figure and representative social subject, occupies much of the liminal social and subjective space that Homi Bhabha rather obviously denotes as the 'inbetween'. In fact, 'betweenness' is configured of a relation to finite points; there is something more blurred about being 'among', which is thus better suited to the inordinate character of vagrancy, being more suggestive also of a fluid field of relations, of precisely that opaque imprecision which the invention of vagrancy would seek to make transparent and precise, 'in between', but cannot wholly. Bhabha's 'unruly' debt to Frederic Jameson is given in H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. 212ff.

animal, debased, insignificant, out of line. In concert with the value of cackling, these apply to a malign and manic femininity.

To grasp the full effect of the name 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', however, it is necessary to recover the aural experience of the words and their utterance in performance, for 'Kaatje' is also a homophone of *katjie* – little cat, or kitty, or kitten. As with Tom, the implications of a kind of sharp-toothed, spitting and scratching cat lie only a little way behind the name. There is about Kaatje much that is feline – her career as a stockthief, for example, her sexual aggression – and specifically something feral. Her passage across the colonial farmsteads, into the Kowie Bush, through the courthouse and gaol, into the canteens down the alleys of Grahamstown, is of a piece with the progress of a feral tabby. This image fits colonial projections of the other very accurately. Of the Xhosa, Harriet Ward wrote in the 1840s, 'Like the lion, the tiger, the panther, and all the roaming tenants of the bush, the mountains or the kloof, the Kaffir has become identified with the country to which he now belongs.'³² Kaatje might well figure, thus, as a *katjie*, 'roaming tenant of the bush', Little Cat Cacklemouth. Again, felicitously, the country to which she now is meant to belong is (since Bain so freely switches language, freely reverses his 'C' and his 'K') Kat River, Cat River.³³

Her name is Kaatje Kekkelbek and she comes from Kat River. What makes her so precious to the cultural history of vagrancy is precisely this presence and address, the entirely contrary manner in which she is given to assert herself and does not vanish in anonymity and groundlessness. This is contrary because it is not, overwhelmingly, the historical condition of the vagrant. It reminds us in the very fact of her name and address that she is a fiction, both in the literary sense of an artefact and in the historical sense of a falsehood, a myth. But there are, within the poem, truths that belong to her history as well as those that belong to Bain's, as we shall see. To disentangle these is to fulfil the obligations of both historian and literary critic, for what is laid bare is the interactive operations of literature and history, the common ground called myth. We come to know what the myth is and also how and why it operates. Since the literature that is 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is begun in the figure of Bain, no less an historical subject than Kaatje, we need to pursue him also, and not least because authorship, the address of the text, 'Kaatje', rather than the address of the subject, Kaatje, is the greatest of all the telling 'problems' of the poem.

³² H. Ward, *Five Years in Kaffirland*, vol. 1, 122.

³³ This treatment is extended in chapter 4.

Bain is the name we are freely ascribing to the author of 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek', but this is not the whole truth. As we have seen, there is a strong presumption of the collaboration of Fred Rex, most likely in the revision of Bain's poem and the writing of the spoken patter of the performed version. Rex's collaboration is deduced from remarks by early historians, his presence in Grahamstown around the time of the first performance of the sketch on 5 November 1838, and his marriage to Bain's daughter two months before that.³⁵ In addition, there is the likelihood of the Woodcock manuscript of the full text being in Rex's handwriting: not proof of authorship (since it is a fair copy and does not show the compositional evidence of a draft), but important circumstantial evidence.

Besides the addition of the patter – clearly essential to the performance prospects of the poem – the ultimate version omits the third stanza of Bain's draft (about the gullibility of the English settler) and adds a final stanza referring to Andries Stoffels (one of the major witnesses at the Select Committee on Aborigines in London in 1835, himself a Kat River settler and Khoisan leader) and alluding to the exhibition of Saartjie Baartman in London and the popular representation of 'Hottentot' racial and sexual character. Both the omission and the addition point to the poem's preparation for performance, for the criticism of English settlerdom (the effective audience) is moved from the cortical, tissue of the poem, with its more transcendent register, its *ex cathedra* formulations, into the seemingly impromptu and throw-away business of the patter alongside, and the final stanza is more expressly in sympathy with the acute political orientation of its audience, and besides, contains an embedded stage direction, without which the force of the conclusion is lost.

Neither Bain nor Rex puts his name to the piece. The younger man, whose contribution is subordinate to the priority of the poem, and who was, after all, Bain's son-in-law, was likely always to follow the practice of Bain, so it is no mystery that his authorship should have become less well known. That Bain's authorship is accepted is evidence of the common knowledge of the sketch's authorship at the time. That Bain chose not to declare himself (or Rex) in the

³⁴ The phrase is from Bain's poem 'The British Settler'. Some versions give 'climes', but that makes no sense. Chapman (ed.), *Century of South African Poetry*, 47–9.

³⁵ Lister gives a satisfactory history, but does not seek to elaborate the precise part played by each in the composition of the text. There are interesting indications of possible revisions by Rex which point up the humour somewhat (and which suggest a better ear for Khoisan Dutch than Bain may have had – as Lister notes, Rex served as an interpreter for mutineers of the Cape Mounted Rifles in early 1838), for example, where Bain's draft has 'byaar' (for 'baie'), the printed version (and the MS in what looks to be Rex's handwriting) has 'banjan' – a rendering more saucily inflected with forms derived from the exposure to Indonesian languages). This accords with the forms 'banjan' and 'binjan' that occur in the prose interludes. The shift from 'byaar' to 'banjan' is sufficiently pronounced to suggest the emendation of a co-author, as does the 'personality' of the *predilection* for the latter form in the text. Ultimately 'banjan' is funnier, probably more accurate, certainly more vigorous as satire. Lister, *Journals*, 193–202.

matter of the poem and play has to do with history – Bain's own, and the history of the colony in the early 1800s. His anonymity – his lack of address – is an historical strategy, just as his ascription of these markers of identity to Kaatjie is also an engagement with history, that is, with the particularities of conflict and crisis in Cape history at the time – not least the settling of Khoisan subjectivity, the settlement of the land, the imposition of culture and language, the interpellation of Khoisan subjects as Dutch-speaking vassals of colonial markets and landscapes and law, a laborious process of bondage (of which the poem is itself one labour).

Bain's anonymity begins in the experience of the litigious society of his time and ends in a strategy for the deferral of his satire, a way in which to make the poem/play speak for an entire constituency. In this strategy, what Bain has to do is insist on the non-literary value of the text in order to pull it away from the politically neutralising, anti-historical gravity of the literary canon, so that the text might function as the volatile political agent it is intended to be. Bain's text, in 1838, shares none of the inert character of 'high' or 'imaginative' literature, the recollections of tranquillity. To refuse authorship to a text is to strip the text of its provenance in the higher or contemplative attributes of the human: that which is broadly termed 'soul' and which is entailed in all our ideas of individuality. Not to be authored is not to be individuated, thus not to be of the soul, thus not to be literary, thus not to be subject to the tradition and its apparatus, government, law, education, religion and so on. 'Kaatjie Kekkelbek' resists the tradition because it is a text aimed at chastening those in power.

Bain was twice involved in libel cases in the 1830s, once when Gerhardus successfully sued the *South African Commercial Advertiser* for remarks made by Bain in reporting a threat of assault made to him by Maritz.³⁶ In real terms, Maritz's triumph was symbolic rather than luctative, but Lister describes Bain as 'crest-fallen' in a note written to the *Advertiser's* editor.³⁷ More threatening was a suit brought against Bain by the Civil Commissioner at Graaff-Reinet, in response to Bain's pathetic account of a commado sent against Koranna raiders. The Van Rynveld *v* Bain trial, which went to the Supreme Court in Cape Town, found in Bain's favour, but the damages sought were £1000, and must have disquieted a frontier saddler and occasional traveller and trader.³⁸ More broadly, Lister rightly notes that the first half of the 19th century at the Cape was markedly litigious; social prominence went hand in hand with writs.³⁹ Keegan notes that 'litigiousness had become an integral element of political life, arising from the ascendancy of the printing press as an instrument of political agitation.'⁴⁰ Though not in the van of colonial society, the younger Bain was always associated with the press, writing for the *Advertiser* and *The*

³⁶ Lister, *Journals*, xiv.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, xvi–xviii.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 152.

Graham's Town Journal (whose editor, the anti-liberal agitator and local mandarin, Robert Godlonton, became a close friend of Bain's). His journalism went unsigned (but usually headed 'From an Intelligent Correspondent at Graaff-Reinet'), whereas his doggerel squibs were attributed – as was 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' when it first appeared – to 'Klipspringer'.⁴¹ It may be that anonymity insulated him somewhat in the Maritz case, but it did not in the case brought by Van Ryneveld. In the small world of frontier society the identity of an intelligent correspondent from Graaff-Reinet must always have been an open secret. Nonetheless, anonymity implies seeking a degree of cover from the liabilities of public speech. In as much as it marks an effort at eluding the public, legal and political gaze, Bain's anonymity is an intensely historical engagement – a disengagement (as it appears) intended really to free up the subject in social relations, and to render him more versatile and deft, light on his feet, in the sparring ring of social conflict.

It is precisely this sure-footed gymnastic ability that is suggested by the *nom de plume* 'Klipspringer'. The name of that small antelope suggests its capabilities in difficult terrain (and the priority of those capabilities in its interest to humans). Bain's 'Klipspringer' is a portrait of the writer and his context, as Bain envisages it: an agile creature, elusive, thriving on rocky ground. But there is a dimension beyond the manifest attributes of this totem. To Bain's Scottish ear, raised on English, the word 'klipspringer' carries also the potential of its homophones and half-translations. For example, it is possible to half-translate it as 'stone springer' and invoke images of catapults or slings and, by extension, David and Goliath. This permits a latent aggression to Bain's writerly subjectivity and enhances the totem by making not only the name a disguise, but the word also – and not only the word, then, but the animal too (for it is now a hunter got up in the skins of the hunted). What is more, the ammunition of the sling is continuous with the terrain of the klipspringer, a perfect formulation for the satirist, whose material is social, whose texts are obviously sprung from their context.

There are also the English homophones. A clip is a device (often effected by a spring) for binding together. A 'clip springer', thus, might be something that unbinds the embrace of force. A satirist does this, or means to, in seeking to undermine and so undo whatever 'pinches', but particularly the force of hegemony. Conversely, a clip is also a clout, and so to spring one would be to deliver the kind of smarting redress intended by the satirist. Or a clip is a cut, a nip, and the dividend to the *nom de plume* persists. The name 'Klipspringer' not only signifies the agile and elusive creature, but is itself deft and elusive in its signification, and like the name 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' it participates in the character of the frontier by its manner of code-switching and creolising, its ambuscades of meaning, its propensity to plunder, its denial of responsibility, and

⁴¹ Lister, *Journals*, 194–5.

above all, by the way in which it figures as spoor: we can track it as certain evidence of Bain, to the frontier between author and text, but we lose it there.

There is one puzzling line in 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', supposedly evincing the shoddy literacy of the mission-schooled Kaatje: 'But A. B. ab or I. N. ine,' she sings, crudely anticipating the rhymed contrast of 'brandewyn'. In fact, the line is an encryption of authorship. 'A. B.' supply not only the eponymous launch of the alphabet; they are also Bain's initials, and the only possible sense of the following 'I. N.' lies in the construction of a simple anagram of the name 'Bain'. Bain's 'joke' lies in her inability to spell his name (of which, of course, she is not witting), and in the manner in which he induces the dramatic irony of her prescience about the authorship that brings her into being. In this she is a ventriloquist's dummy. Once again we have Bain hiding himself behind the disguises of his creation, and enacting thereby the essential circumstance of a colonial subjectivity hammered out on the uncertain anvil of the frontier. The 'truth' of Bain's device runs far deeper than he supposes, for it suggests the colonial co-option of the Khoisan in many guises – as servants, as frontline soldiers and settlers, as scapegoats – and also the manner in which the historical culpability of the coloniser is hidden in anonymity behind the loud protest and protestation of the compradore client.

At the end of 1835, in the aftermath of the War of Hintsa, Bain was stationed at a military post on the new frontier line of the Thyume river as the officer commanding a corps drawn from the Kat River settlement. On November 5th he intervened in a raid by Maqoma's Xhosa (dispossessed by evictions in 1829 as the Colony sought land for the Kat River Settlement) on a Mfengu kraal on the frontier. In the attack Bain gave permission for a subordinate officer to fire upon one of the Xhosa, who was killed, but fell, significantly, on the Xhosa side of the Thyume. In the face of threats by Maqoma to return to war over the incident, Bain was placed under military arrest and duly court-martialled.⁴² Tensions between the Governor, D'Urban, and his commander on the frontier, Harry Smith, over the incident did not augur well for Bain, but ultimately the doggedly anti-Xhosa and anti-humanitarian stance of both ensured that Bain was exonerated and even commended for his general officer-like conduct.⁴³ However, the case needs to be set against three other events in order to yield its significance: two of these are acutely historical – the murder of Hintsa and the Glenelg Retrocession – and one is diffusely historical, but more acutely so the deeper into Bain's life and context one reads – and it is the performance and publication of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'. It is pertinent that the poem is a representation of the Khoisan settlers among whom Bain pursued his brief military career, whose settlement, as much as anything, prompted the War of 1834–5, drove the wrath of Maqoma and prefigured the Mfengu settlements and co-option, and whose political fortunes

⁴² *Graham's Town Journal*, 4, 204, 19 November 1835.

were inextricably bound up with the humanitarian cause at the Cape and in London, especially as effected in the administration of Andries Stockenström as Lieutenant Governor.

The court martial of Bain would mark a footnote in the history of the frontier, but for the fact that it provides an uncanny parallel with the case of Hintsa's murder earlier that year and the fallout that followed. Indeed, the tensions arising over the Bain matter between the otherwise like-minded Smith and D'Urban are symptomatic of the kind of panic that lurks behind what is today called a 'damage-limitation exercise'. That panic is grounded in the humanitarian outcry against the killing of Hintsa, the Inquiry that followed, and the damage done to D'Urban's reputation and policies, and the aspirations of white colonists, by the incident.

Paramount chief of the Xhosa, Hintsa did not take his Gcaleka into the War in 1834–5, but did accept for safekeeping the herds of the Rharhabe when they invaded the Colony in late 1834.⁴³ When, in mid-1835 Harry Smith's column penetrated Gcaleka territory, Hintsa, offering no resistance, was placed under guard. Accounts arising out of the disaster that followed are more than usually murky, but at some stage Hintsa 'escaped' his watch and was gunned down, despite pleading for mercy before he was shot. It is accepted that his body was subsequently mutilated, though accounts vary as to how. It seems likely, on the evidence of eye-witnesses and reliable secondary informants like Charles Stretch, that his genitals, ears, lips and some teeth were hacked from the corpse.⁴⁴ Initially D'Urban crowed that Hintsa had got his just deserts,⁴⁵ but the incident rapidly became a scandal in London (though Glenelg, the Secretary for Colonies, initially seems to have covered it up as far as possible)⁴⁶. An unsatisfactory Court of Inquiry followed. Ultimately, however, the incident fuelled the humanitarian cause at the Select Committee on Aborigines then sitting at Exeter Hall, and surely contributed to Glenelg's reversal of D'Urban's appropriation of the Xhosa country between the Fish and the Keiskamma (and its tributary Thyume, where Bain was stationed during that brief dispensation).

Bain's case must have alarmed him, because of the very real risk of its escalating into a political scandal. His exoneration – pretty much at the behest of Smith and D'Urban, who saw the need of the court martial for appearance's sake, but were hardly disposed to come down on an officer of Bain's diligence and inclination – would have bound him all the more clearly to their party in the rapidly widening division of colonial politics. A letter from Harry Smith to Bain

⁴³ Lister, *Journals*, xix–xxiv.

⁴⁴ Peires, *The House of Phalo*, 94.

⁴⁵ Stretch represents an uncommonly humanitarian voice on the frontier. He was outraged by Hintsa's killing and his journal (and later notes appended to it) present evidence of Hintsa's having pled for mercy before being shot. He cites the allegations of mutilation, but his attributions do not accord altogether with those of eyewitnesses. See notes immediately below. B. Le Cordeur, *The Journal of Charles Lennox Stretch*, 95–7.

⁴⁶ Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 143.

⁴⁷ J. Milton, *The Edges of War*, 141.

suggests just this ideological and personal congress, and it does so in implicitly linking Bain's case with that of Hintsa's murder:

Angry with you certainly not. I regard you as a Pillar of my State which these infernal rumours agitate ... We shall be most happy to see you ... I am now in the midst of a Mass of Papers and references and dispatches as to Hintza – Southey will come off gloriously, it was literally an act of Self-defence. Ever truly and faithfully yours be assured, H. Smith.⁴⁸

The threat held out against Bain by the humanitarian ascendancy cannot have endeared him to that cause or its agents. 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' needs to be read against this history. One of Bain's sons-in-law certainly helped him write it. Another – William Southey, who was to marry his daughter Henrietta in 1839, just as 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' first appeared in print – was the man who cut off the ears of Hintsa.⁴⁹ And Southey's brother, George, was the man who shot dead the Xhosa chief.

The revocation of the short-lived province of Queen Adelaide, the so-called Glenelg Retrocession, was a bitter blow to acquisitive colonists and to the politics of racial domination and imperial conquest. It was a personal blow to Bain, for in 1835 he had been granted a farm of some 3000 morgen in the newly conquered territory. He sold his Graaff-Reinet property and invested the proceeds in his new venture. The Retrocession, effected locally under the authority of Andries Stockenström, lost him this farm and threatened the social prominence he was beginning to achieve in frontier society closer to Grahamstown. He received no compensation (though his daughters went looking for some after his death).⁵⁰ For a saddle-maker, newly come up in the world as ivory trader, military officer and farmer-to-be, the loss must have stung. And there were others who suffered in the same measure: among those who lost land with Bain were William Southey and Duncan Campbell.⁵¹ The humanitarian victory at Exeter Hall, The publication of the LMS resident director John Philips's *Researches in South Africa* in 1828, the opprobrium that followed Hintsa's murder, and the Glenelg Retrocession and Treaty System that resulted, all conspired to consolidate colonist antipathy towards London and its agents and unleashed the most vicious barrage of invective, criticism, satire and propaganda yet seen in the Cape. In the face of endless vilification Andries Stockenström sued civil commissioner Duncan Campbell for libel, but lost. Among the texts of invective were, most obviously, *The Graham's*

⁴⁸ Lister, *Journals*, xxiii.

⁴⁹ Henry James Halse, present at the death, recalled this in his memoir many years after the event (Cory Library PR 3563). Berning notes that the details are those of an eye-witness and there seems no reason to doubt the veracity of Halse's account. M. Berning (ed.), *The Historical 'Conversations' of Sir George Cory*, 122.

⁵⁰ Lister, *Journals*, xxiv.

⁵¹ Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 152.

Town Journal, and its editor Robert Godlonton's *Narrative of the Irruption of the Kaffir Horde*. There were the painter Frederick Pons's *Aquila Caricatures: The Rise and Progress of a Lieutenant Governor*, a series of cartoons commissioned by military officers and attacking the humanitarians and their causes, and above all, Stockenström. One of these showed 'Romance and Reality, or Hottentots as they are said to be and are', which recapitulates an iconography of drunk and slatternly Khoisan widely available in the colonial record, as also in Pons' own paintings.⁵² And there is 'Kaatje Kekkelbek'. It is the welter of anti-humanitarian propaganda, not a benign music-hall charade, that is the real literary context of 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', and it is essential that the text be read among the concert of propaganda if it is to yield its true worth. Elsewhere, recalling this era, Bain wrote that one of the central occupations of the settler's 'gay and rambling' life was 'Whigs abusing', and that is what 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' set out to do.⁵³

The great hazard in the criticism of satire, such as 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is, is to mistake subject and object. It is easy to confuse the subject of the poem – the Khoi woman, Kaatje – with its object, or target, and it is very wrong to conflate the two. The character of Kaatje is the blow delivered by the club of the text; the intended victim is the humanitarian ascendancy and its triumph in the Stockenström administration. This is the object, or target, of the satire and Bain's choice of subject is founded on that. The political tide turned in favour of humanitarian interests with the proclamation of Ordinance 50 in 1828; this was the first great battle won in the liberal cause. The establishment of the Kat River Settlement in the following year flowed directly from the Ordinance and the consequent possibility of a free citizenry of indigenes. The Settlement was a monument to that possibility as well as the home of its hopes. It needs to be thought of as a Jerusalem or Canterbury, somewhere spiritually and politically numinous within contemporary discourse. The government agent whose project it became was the Commissioner General for the Eastern Districts, at that time Andries Stockenström.

The Kat River Settlement, as the locus of that freedom obtained by Ordinance 50, becomes, in white colonial invective, also the point of origin of the vagrant – that icon of unbonded labour and competitor for property. Kaatje's origination in the Kat River Settlement establishes her as representative of the whole project, indeed, she is identified as continuous with it even by the alliteration of 'K's, linking her name to the Settlement, just as, indeed, her name is the diminutive of 'Kat', its cub. The vagrant, more generally, is a negative metonym of the liberty achieved by Ordinance 50: however much the colonial might seek to derogate the vagrant, there

⁵² There is not space here for a sustained treatment of the iconography of the Khoisan at this juncture of their interpellation as colonial subjects (or their accusation as unruly vagrants). Chapter 8 of *The Cape Herders* (ed. Boonzaier *et al*) offers a good thumbnail sketch along the way (and reproduces the Pons cartoon on p. 112), though an analysis of the iconography is not its explicit project. For examples of Pons (and a full catalogue, see L. Alexander, *Frederick Pons Retrospective Exhibition*).

⁵³ Bain, 'The British Settler'.

is no denying the essential element of liberty inscribed in the idea. What Bain's poem reaches through Kaatje to do battle with is this political liberty: the liberty of movement, of property and of labour. The criticisms levelled at Kaatje are all criticisms of liberty and of the regulation of liberty. Bain targets these by excessive negative emphasis; what he is concerned with, though, are things like education and law, gaols, representative government, and assembly – the inheritance of European modernity. The poem does not set out primarily to attack Khoisan women; what it vilifies is mission schooling (associated explicitly with the humanitarian John Philip of the London Missionary Society), liberal justice and gaols, the right of the citizen to make representation to government, to meet and associate freely. The political undesirability of these freedoms is figured in negative extremes: education yields cynical sophistry ('I've as much right to steal or fight ...') and barbarised language, free assembly yields gangs (Klaus, Diederick, Saartje and Kaatje) and promiscuity and drunkenness, liberal justice yields the indiscipline of 'Zes maanden lekker leven', and political equality – equal representation – yields 'check' and the transgression of class.

It was Stockenstrom who founded the Kat River settlement in 1829 and Stockenstrom who in 1838 assumed the government of the Eastern Cape, as Lieutenant Governor, and specifically the administration of the so-called 'Treaty System, which regulated contact with the Xhosa according to protocols that recognised their sovereignty. Stockenstrom was the star witness at the Select Committee in London. The settlers of the Kat River represented him in messianic terms: 'Mr Bergman (a Bushman)' told the meeting to protest the proposed vagrancy ordinance in 1834: 'I was also brought onto the Kat River by Stockenstrom' – a phrasing that suggests a kind of Mosaic deliverance.⁵⁴ Stockenstrom's interest in the Settlement was personal as well as official. He drew up detailed plans for the design of houses, down to the level of the correct number of panes of glass for the window, and he even donated a colt as a prize for the most industrious.⁵⁵ On both the official and the personal plane any attack on the Kat River Settlement is an attack upon Stockenstrom. In the mind of the white colonist, Stockenstrom was identified with the fortunes of the Settlement and of the Khoisan generally, and to such an extent that almost anything to do with Stockenstrom's administration is cross-referenced to the 'Hottentot'. Thus colonial carping about the 'Treaty System, which sealed the frontier to the pursuit of stolen cattle, frequently focussed on the injustice of constant 'Hottentot' to-ing and fro-ing, particularly at the Kat River Settlement, and this transit over a selectively permeable frontier becomes another figure in the charge of vagrancy. Thus the furore over vagrancy in the

⁵⁴ 'Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston', 5 August 1834. CA, A50.

⁵⁵ Few settlers managed to live up to his ideal, but the ideals are fascinating. See 'Plan upon which the Commissioner General has Proceeded in the Granting of Lands in the Kat River Settlement,' 9 October, 1831. CA, DSGEP 82 and also 'Regulations for the Kat River Settlement (amended)', DSGEP 82. I have written on the

early 1830s is extended to opposition against the Treaty System, and both are embodied in Stockenström.

The truths of history

'Kaatje Kekkelbek' is a catalogue of encrypted charges against a government established in Stockenström as much as by him. The volumes of evidence given at Exeter Hall, some of it by Andries Stoffels of the Settlement, much of it by Andries Stockenström, become equated with the character of Khoisan loquacity. This is political 'kekkel', 'done in *Extra Hole*'. We have already seen how this volubility is derogatorily feminised in the form of 'cackling'; it is interesting now to note the obscenity of the pun in 'Extra Hole', as if utterance at the Select Committee sitting in Exeter Hall is to be understood to be of a kind somewhere between the characters of the various possibilities of 'hole'. Again, the biology of women means that the charge of this squib falls mainly to them, and the Khoisan are thereby feminised (as they are in the character of Kaatje herself), as is Stockenström and the entire humanitarian court at Exeter Hall. Humanitarianism itself is rendered feminine, derogatorily – something weak, fallen and promiscuous. And this follows upon the poem's castigation of liberal values and government as essentially aimless, in the guise of the vagrant: wandering, drunk, disorderly, improper.

To historicise the poem means more than locating the temporal and biographical references. It is necessary to uncover the ideological correspondences between the subject, Kaatje, and the target, humanitarian government. To do this requires reading the poem against its surrounding texts, in order to decipher the 'lost' discourse and so become able to translate the poem across time: an exercise somewhat after the example of the Rosetta Stone. A few, exemplary, instances demonstrate that Kaatje Kekkelbek and her world – her landscape and her associates – are far from inert or decorative, but, rather, are charged with meaning that is not only historical but so necessary as to suggest that history *is* meaning itself. This is the deep practice of the poem – it is the effect of Bain's revenge *in* history as much as *on* history.

Landscape is ever the first context of the vagrant, the wanderer. 'We next took to the Kowie Bush', says Kaatje, 'found sheep dat was not lost, aye', relating her exploits as one of a gang of stockthieves. At first glance this is Bain's portrait of a rapacious vagrancy, a sketch of brigands in the bush. But we should be suspicious of those sheep, they are the clothes of wolves, for sheep are grazers, not browsers, and have no more business in the xeric kaffrarian thicket, as

ideological value of these plans and regulations in 'The Human Clay: An Essay in the Spatial History of the Cape Eastern Frontier, 1811–1835', MLit thesis, 1993.

it is now known to science, than Kaatje's gang are meant to have. The contemporary resonance of the line was far more complex and ominous. But the 'error' is Bain's and not Kaatje's: she would not pretend to find sheep in the bush, nor, significantly, would she interpolate the broad Scots 'aye' to keep up the merry jig of a ballad. That is a giveaway.

The Kowie Bush is one of a set of imprecise terms for the thicket that attends the deep and serpentine river valleys of the eastern Cape. There is also the Fish River Bush, the Addo Bush and so on – what is cumulatively just 'the bush'. A military surgeon, writing during the War of Mlanjeni in the early 1850s, tried to explain the Bush to his magazine audience in Britain, in terms that unwittingly concur with our present suspicions about Bain's range of reference:

The word Bush is, as it were, conventional only in this colony, and what is generally taken as its meaning at home is inexplicable here. A sheep refers to a single member of the sheep, so a bush signifies a part of the Bush. The extent of the Colonial Bush cannot be estimated by any conception of one who is a stranger to its features. A small clump of bushes gives one almost no conception of infinity.⁵⁶

Besides its semantic impenetrability, of course, the bush is a physical obstacle to the progress of the Colony. It frustrates survey and agriculture, the passage of roads and so on, and – especially – it is a military nightmare, for in war after war the bush favoured the local knowledge and guerilla tactics of the Xhosa. To colonial writers the bush becomes a theatre of reversal, a space in which the light of the 'civilised' undertaking of colonisation founders on opacity and gloom. The surgeon, W. T. Black, writes of how 'the darkness of night cannot afford a deeper screen for deeds of blood than the tangled thickets of the Fish River Bush'⁵⁷, while Harriet Ward, writing during the War of the Axe in the 1840s, demonstrates how even language seizes up in an *et cetera*, is swallowed by the darkness that is human congress and upon which history would pretend to shed light: 'Suddenly, in this horrid shade, the combat opens hand to hand, &c.'⁵⁸ An officer in the 1835 War of Hintsa, J. Alexander – aide de camp to Harry Smith – echoes the dark and stormy night and the brigands around their fire:

⁵⁶ W. T. Black, *The Fish River Bush, South Africa*, 9. Black's articles were subsequently published as a book – nearly 50 years later, in 1902, no doubt against the Boer War background of popular interest in the military conditions of South Africa.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ Ward, *Five Years in Kaffirland*, vol. 1, 293.

It rained in pelting showers; the dark and dangerous Fish River Bush was below on the left; and we rode along green hills. It fell dark ... A strange dog which had accompanied us, pushed forward into the obscurity ...⁵⁹

The Xhosa waged war through and in the bush, as far as possible. There they neutralised the advantages of firepower and other technologies of the Empire and Colony (save for the indigenous allies of the Colony: the Khoisan and, later, Mfengu).⁶⁰ In Ward's pathetic account of one officer's sortie into the Bush: 'Poor Captain Bambrick's last words ... were, "This is no place for cavalry."⁶¹ For the Xhosa the bush was synonymous with war. One young soldier noted that 'they have a saying that there isn't space for two parties in the bush.'⁶² Indeed, the bush was a metonym for war: on the day that Bain's ensign shot the Xhosa raider over the Thyurne river 'Maqoma instantly sent off a message to Colonel Harry Smith at King William's Town threatening to 'take to the bush' which meant recommence hostilities.'⁶³ The expression was not original.⁶⁴

Thus when Kaatje says 'We next took to the Kowie Bush' she is signalling more than the poaching of a sheep or two. In the ear of the colonist she is prophesying war – or more than that – threatening or declaring it. What is more, she is also provoking a lasting colonial fear of Khoisan mutiny – one that was ultimately to prove justified in the War of Mlanjeni, when numbers of Kat River Settlers, formerly the front line and most effective of colonial forces, went over to Xhosa.⁶⁵ Specifically, Bain's 'Kowie Bush' refers obviously to the country around the Kowie river and its tributaries, which flow from either side of the watershed in whose lee lies Grahamstown and down through the Zuurveld to Port Alfred. This was pretty much the axis along which the 1820 settlement was laid out, and at Christmas of 1834 it was the bush out of which the Xhosa erupted, burning settler farms and driving every white person off the country – and driving after them, through the Bush and into independent Xhosaland upwards of 40 000 cattle and 100 000 sheep – more than a lost sheep or two.⁶⁶ What is more, that sheep are Kaatje's target reflects a new and vital polarity in colonial social economy, for the rise of fine-wool farming is above all what separates the ailing Albany settlement of 1820–1835 from the

⁵⁹ Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, vol. 2, 31.

⁶⁰ Peires, *House of Phalo*, 150.

⁶¹ Ward, *Five Years in Kaffirland*, vol. 1, 256.

⁶² Lumley Graham, MS diary, Rhodes House, Oxford.

⁶³ Lister, *Journals*, xx.

⁶⁴ The archives and histories employ it frequently. See P. R. Anderson, 'The Fish River Bush and the Place of History', *South African Historical Journal*, 53, 2005, 23–49.

⁶⁵ Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 237–40.

⁶⁶ These estimates are rounded down from probably exaggerated colonial claims, but they offer scope. See A. C. M. Webb, 'The Agricultural Development of the 1820 Settlement', 160ff. The returns of losses provided by Settlers to the Government Commission responsible for relief claimed 11 418 cattle lost and 156 878 sheep and goats. *GIF*, 4, 208, 17 December 1835.

expansive, aggressive and enriched settler oligarchy of the years thereafter – settlers with names like Southey, Godlonton, Bowker who sought drier, less disease-inclined pasturage in vast hinterland farms, and the labour to run them.⁶⁷ The ‘sheep’ in the bush are not the hardy fat-tailed sheep of the Khoisan pastoralist, they are the merinos that produce what Pringle prophesied would be ‘a mine of inexhaustible wealth’⁶⁸, and which by 1842 have overtaken wine as the chief export of the Colony.⁶⁹ These sheep represent, then, not just themselves, but the new order of the coming men, a rapacious capitalism that will alienate indigenous polity for land and labour. Kaatje’s gang in the bush are messing with more than sheep, and their being in the bush is about more than vagabondage.

Bain’s friend Godlonton, writing in the wake of that ‘irruption’ in 1834–5, just as Bain was when he wrote ‘Kaatje Kekkelbek’, underscores the association of the Xhosa enemy with the bush by noting that they ‘are distinguished by the more distant tribes, by an appellation signifying a ‘Bush Buck or native of the thicket’.⁷⁰ The sheep that Kaatje is presumed to find in the Bush are not ‘natives of the thicket’. Bain’s mistake – if it is that – occasions one of the little rebounds that frustrate his satire, for it permits the suspicion that the charges against Kaatje *et al* may, in fact, be trumped up. This, in turn, thickens the instance of the word ‘schelm’ that is used to describe the Boer that arrests her, by pushing it some way away from Kaatje’s subjective utterance and towards a more objective judgement, the judgement of history. Is this a clue to the real history? It is certainly the beginning of a description of the way in which Bain’s satire rebounds on itself, ultimately to liberate Kaatje to her wandering through history, her sentimental picaresque, and to her kind of incorrigibility that Lister and Butler and many others are delighted to find.

The historical ‘truth’ of the image of Kaatje, lies as much in the rhetoric of anti-humanitarian (which is to say the majority colonial) discourse as in the established record of ‘Hottentot’⁷¹ behaviour. We find her avatars in the pages of the *Graham’s Town Journal* in more or less every issue through the 1830s. Saul Ruyter, for example, is ‘apprehended on suspicion of theft’, having ‘absconded’ from his life as a ‘contracted servant’ at Bloukrans (deep in the Kowie

⁶⁷ An account of the new wool agriculture is given in Webb’s ‘Agricultural Development’, chapter 5. For a succinct account see L. Bryer and K. Hunt, *The 1820 Settlers*, 63–8.

⁶⁸ T. Pringle, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, 210.

⁶⁹ Webb, ‘Agricultural Development’, 183–8.

⁷⁰ R. Godlonton, *A Narrative of the Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes*, 9. His book was collated from his running account as editor in the *Graham’s Town Journal*, where the phrase first occurs on 9 January 1835, *GTJ*, 4, 159.

⁷¹ The term ‘Hottentot’ should perhaps be recovered, since this is the name under which proto-national sentiment began to stir in the Kat River Settlement at the time of the threat of the Vagrancy ordinance. As a term originally European it accommodates the very un-Khoisan circumstances of the community imagining itself coherent as ‘Hottentots’ – a ‘nation’ of Khoikhoi and San (or Bushman), with the admixture of much European blood, as well as Xhosa and Mfengu elements. Keegan points out that even ex-slaves fell to calling themselves ‘Hottentot’. Today we would say ‘Coloured’ or ‘coloured’, but this is not what the subjects of this community – a community they explicitly imagined as a ‘nation’ – called themselves). Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 121.

Bush) – ‘he said he had been living in the bush. His appearance, which was rather that of a wild beast than a human being, verified his statement.’⁷² Jan Vlink, ‘(a sheep-skin kaross and no undergarment whatever)’, is condemned to 24 lashes for stealing wood and vagrancy.⁷³ Lys Sampson and two others, charged with vagrancy, yet ‘pleaded guilty to the charge of being common prostitutes, and of having been guilty of indecency in the public streets’.⁷⁴ One week after these cases Saul Rondganger (the surname is Afrikaans for ‘vagrant’) is prosecuted for breach of the peace:

Whitaker — I am a Constable. I apprehended the prisoner on Saturday about five or six, he was fighting near Webber’s Canteen with a woman, his fingers were bloody, he said he beat her because she had taken from him a Shilling. I ordered him to go home and leave the woman alone; – he was very abusive, and he would teach me my duty, he was a freeman, and as good as any Englishman, – I left him; he followed me and said he had not done with me yet, he had a stone in his hand. I took him into custody, he made great resistance, and tried to tear my trousers off ... The Prisoner was drunk.

Prisoner’s defence — I have nothing to say but that I was drunk. I had money in my pocket, and thought I dropt it, so went to pick it up, but made a mistake, and got hold of a stone.⁷⁵

The texture of these lives is one with Kaatje Kekkelbek – except that they are not lives, but accounts of lives, representations, and Kaatje is really ‘Kaatje Kekkelbek’. Indeed, ‘texture’ is the right word, for it is the *texts*, the woven artefacts, that are one, as also their centre of origination in the propaganda of the colonial majority. ‘Kaatje Kekkelbek’ is a composite of these many strands (‘text’ from *texere*, to weave), a totality constructed of all these other instances of living in the bush⁷⁶, stealing sheep, drinking at the canteens of Grahamstown, pinching a shilling (or a Rixdollar), getting into scraps. Her language is no more her own than is her life: how accurately Saul Rondganger’s drunken boast in the wake of Ordinance 50 (‘he was a freeman, and as good as any Englishman’) anticipates Caatje’s ‘For Hottentot is vryman’ (in the omitted stanza of Bain’s draft). Likewise, Rondganger’s attempt at debagging the Constable is an illuminating emphasis on the power of clothing, those artefacts of European culture and acculturation so significant to the Kat River Settlers, as we shall see in our next chapter, and so pertinent to Kaatje’s sense of her own power, not least over the masculine colony and London.

⁷² *GTJ*, 20 January 1832.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *GTJ*, 27 January 1832.

⁷⁶ ‘A Decayed tapster’ bemoaning temperance initiatives (see below) in the same edition as the report on Saul Rondganger complained that he could ‘hardly get a Hottentot to chop my firewood, without paying him either in

Even in Rondganger's ingeniously circumspect defence, where a 'truth' is built of alarming elisions and drunken misrecognition, slippage – what he calls 'mistake' – there is that facility of bending the language (Dutch, by presumption, but not necessarily) into new forms, whether they be Afrikaans or the peculiar dialect that is all Bain's and Rex's, loaded with *double entendres* and coded references. Just as one example, the poem's '*Temper Syety*' associates alcohol with aggression – via temperance.⁷⁷ May we not hear Rondganger asking for the case to be 'dropt'? If the uncertainty of the original language forbids it, then at least we should hear in his defence a perfect telegram of the Khoisan experience of colonisation, dispossession and resistance (much of it yet to come): 'I had money in my pocket, but thought I dropt it, so went to pick it up, but made a mistake, and got hold of a stone.'

The truth of Kaatje Kekkelbek – at last we hardly know whether to insert the inverted commas, whether character or poem – and of all who people these texts is a discursive event, a kind of resonance, and very far from transparent. Indeed, this 'truth' defies the illusion of literary transparency (and should therefore refute the 'type' that 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' proposes), being, instead, historical, which is to say 'thick', knotted, opaque as reality. The literary scholar, for example, is content to analyse the rhyme of 'Plaatje' with 'karbonaatje', and thereby to draw out the association of the 'Hottentot' with gluttony and stocktheft. At one level deeper, we might remark the feminine rhyme and its coincidence with the Dutch suffix of diminution, and the way a patriarchal triangle is established, binding 'Plaatje' to femininity and childhood, and to the domesticated 'pet' status that both are accorded in some patriarchal interpellations. Linguistic scholarship will yield other riches: that 'platje' denotes 'wag, rogue, scamp, sly dog, card, mischievous child'⁷⁸ and that the word *plat* ('flat') modifies, for example, '*plat Hollands*' (colloquial Dutch/Afrikaans), '*plat taal*' (vulgar speech), '*plat boer*' (simple farmer) – all of which inflect the character of Bain's poem, and remind us of the deft and significant construction of the text, at the most detailed levels. There is no explicit history in this yet, but history creeps in anyhow.

For the name 'Plaatje' (or 'Platje') is familiar to the records of the Kat River settlement and to the records of the magistracy in Grahamstown. One Jannetje Plaatje indecently exposed

money, or in victuals for his cubs in the bush.' The 'cubs' evoke fears of predation and rapacity, just as we would now expect to find located 'in the bush'. *GTJ*, 27 January 1832.

⁷⁷ Temperance joined vagrancy in the vanguard of colonial rhetoric against Ordinance 50 and the ill-effects of liberty. Schemes and societies flourished in the early 1830s – to the horror of the canteen owners. The role of liquor in prompting Kaatje's loquacity and (im)pertinence – alcohol's relationship to cackling – is significant. We have seen how profoundly the aimless wandering of the vagrant is figured in the totter of the drunk. The drunk's uninhibited thought and address likewise echoes the defiance and 'cheek' of Kaatje's patter, everything that Butler, characterising her for his *Cape Charade, or Kaatjie Kekkelbek* in 1967, called 'irrepressible, cheeky, vulgar, vigorous' (viii). But alcohol is an explanation that draws the sting of 'Hottentot' speech and renders it intemperate, the effect of drugs, a kind of madness. The 'alcoholism' of textual representations is kin to the ensnaring 'dop system' of the Cape farms, a local and intense form of colonisation, and one that makes stupid any opposition, in person and thus in character – a pernicious but effective logic.

⁷⁸ D. B. Bosman *et al*, *Tweetalige Woordeboek*, 414.

himself on the 7th of January 1836, an Eva Platjes was drunk on the 18th of February of the same year, Platje Windvogel was alleged to have received stolen goods in December of 1825, Anna Platjes was drunk on April 12th of 1836, Platje Lynx (lately a soldier) was involved in a breach of the peace on the 30th of March 1837.⁷⁹ Alongside these Platjes we find Kaatje Draghonder, 'wrongly and unlawfully making a riot on High Street' on 11th March 1836 (and again on 21st march, and again on 24th May, and again on 25th August).⁸⁰ Kaatje Galant lay drunk in the street on 21st March 1836, and Kaatje Leander threw stones in May.⁸¹ Klaas Frederick and Sarah Eva stole a sheep off Joseph Wilmot at Zuurkloof on the 2nd of May 1836. Bain's own reporting recorded 'Platje, sen, and Platje, jun, Hottentots' convicted of theft in Graaff-Reinet back in 1830.⁸² Even more suggestive are magistracy records for Spielman Platje, 'a private soldier in the Cape Mounted Rifleman – refusing to work in obedience to a military court martial and using abusive and violent language' (26 November 1836), and Platje Dirk, 'now or lately a labourer and now or lately in the employment of the Engineer Department at the Eccca Heights' – which was Bain's first project as a government road-builder (he was attached to the Royal Engineers in April 1837)⁸³ – who stole a government gun on the job on 27th June 1838.⁸⁴

How good it would be, for the historically inclined scholar of literature, to discover that an original existed for the 'Uncle Plaatje' of the poem, and that he was uncle to a woman called Kaatje who appears on the Grahamstown court roll for 1837. Besides satisfying curiosity, such an origin for the poem would comply with determinist models of history and neatly satisfy the scientific inclination of those who work with strict notions of aetiology. But would a real model for Kaatje or Plaatje really offer us more than we have? More than the limited, formal observations of textual criticism – yes. More than the imprecisions and generative ambiguities, the useful truths, of history – no. The very contingencies of history may teach us more than its certainties, when it comes to literature, for literature – even political literature, which is to say literature self-conscious of its historical operations – is the expression of history in myth, the means by which history is edited and emended, amplified and oriented, in social construction. Of course, this makes the writing of all history a deeply literary business also. 'Literary history' marks an ambiguous reference at once to the history of literature, but also to the nature of history. But the two are entailed in deep practice, as the literary history of the Plaatjes shows.

When Bain was guarding the frontier at Block drift in the aftermath of the war of Hintsas – that period when the occasion of the frontier most personally affected him – he once had

⁷⁹ 'Albany Criminal Record Book, 1835–7', CA, 1/AY 3/1/1/1/3.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *SACA*, 25 September 1830.

⁸³ Lister, *Journals*, xxiv.

⁸⁴ 'Albany Criminal Record Book, 1837–8', CA, CO 1/AY 3/1/1/1/4.

occasion to pursue the spoor of some stolen cattle up into the hinterland of Maqoma's country, past Fort Cox, where he overnighted in the company of Stretch, the local officer in charge. This was in August, some months after Hinsta's death and some months before Bain's fateful attack on the raiding party. Stretch's diary records his visit, but in the shadow of the far more significant, ongoing negotiations between Colony and Maqoma:

Monday 31st August. Macomo sent Platje to ascertain if Captain Warden had arrived. Captain Bain, who arrived here on Sunday evening, returned to his post Block Drift.⁸⁵

That Thursday Stretch records 'a fresh instance of Macomo's sincerity, in that 'Macomo sent Platje, his counsellor, this morning to inform Major Cox that ... several horsemen had passed ... towards Umhala's country with cattle ...', and the next day 'Platje informed Major Cox that he had succeeded in getting the horses'.⁸⁶ By Friday Harry Smith has arrived with 'terms' for negotiation with Maqoma. 'Of this circumstance they were immediately informed, and requested to meet the colonel at the usual place, called by Platje the 'praat plack' [talking place].'⁸⁷

Stretch calls Platje Maqoma's 'counsellor'. He was certainly Maqoma's interpreter, and as such a pivotal figure in this southern African crisis. Earlier in August Stretch refers to him as 'Platje, Macomo's interpreter', continuing, 'and Platje, Botma's [Bhotomane's] interpreter, both arrived at the camp this day with messages to Cockey [Cox].'⁸⁸ That there were two Platje interpreters to two major Xhosa chiefs thickens the instance, and that the astute Stretch should have perceived Maqoma's Platje as in some wise kin to a counsellor is also pertinent, for surely it signals a valuation of the political role this man played. Le Cordeur, Stretch's editor, calls him both 'counsellor and interpreter' and cites Charles Brownlee's *Reminiscences*: 'Maqoma had employed Plaatje Onci, a Gonah Kafir, to tamper with the Cape Corps who formed part of the garrison at Fort Willshire ... Old Plaatje was a well-known character in Fort Beaufort, having resided for many years on the Barouka stream...'⁸⁹

On the other hand Charles Stretch's most trusted sergeant was Stoffels Platje.⁹⁰ This man led details of his own, was sent to arrest the insubordinate, and placed to guard threatened prisoners. He appears the model of the 'Tottie' soldier, indispensable to colonial military success and a beacon for colonial strategies of Khoisan co-option.

⁸⁵ B. Le Cordeur (ed.), *Journal of Charles Lennox Stretch*, 129.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 129–30.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 122.

⁸⁹ Le Cordeur (ed.), *Journal*, 181; C. Brownlee, *Reminiscences*, 23–4.

⁹⁰ Le Cordeur (ed.), *Journal*, 58, 96, 103, 108.

Bain's 'Uncle Plaatje'⁹¹ is historical in partaking of all these instances. He is a composite of the independent Khoikhoi who is absorbed into Xhosa society, the colonial recusant who crosses over to the Xhosa council and interprets the Colony for it, and the co-opted colonial subject, loyal to the limited future the Colony holds out for him, and the colonial subject whose alienative crisis drives him to various options: the theft of a gun, military insubordination, or drunken dissolution of the Grahamstown streets. In being so composite he is especially historical, for the history of the Khoisan at this time is one of the dissolution and composition of subjectivity in the forge of crisis. Bain's Plaatje is capable of extremes (which was precisely the colonial nightmare of the 'Hottentot'): *enserfed*⁹² as an '*inboekseling*', then contrarily '*vryman*', settler and vagrant, friend and foe, front-line trooper and mutineer. These were the Plaatje's Bain met and knew and spoke about in the mess, they participate as *one* in 'Uncle Plaatje', because in him they unite, not the history of a precise character, but precisely the character of contradiction that is in all history, and particularly the history of the 'Hottentot', so ambivalent that even the word takes inverted commas.

Inverted commas are rightly mocked as an academic tic, but, of course, they arise in scholarly discourse for good reasons as well as bad. The temptations of 'discourse' (with inverted commas) promote their use, since what scholars say is always a cautious and usually minor amendment of things said before. So we are always quoting, if not directly, then discursively – to type. Sometimes the inverted commas arise out of introversion and excessive tentativity. But sometimes, as in this historicist treatment, they have to appear in order to signal the inflections of words according to their character of greater or lesser historicity, greater or lesser textuality. It is not a postmodern nicety; even traditional histories must confront the historical variability of linguistic forms – how, for example, Kaatje is also Caatje and Kaatjie, and Hottentot is also Khoisan or 'Hottentot', according to usages which signal inflections of historical significance. It is vexing to have to shuttle between these inflections and their forms, but that vexation is in the character of history. Here, what we have attempted as history (or historicism) is a reading which seeks as much to inflect history with literature as literature with history, not to collapse disciplinary boundaries for the sake of it, but for the effect which permeability might yield. The technique is ancient to science, where the reactive proximity of agents, deliberately effected in catalysis, has long been an essential basis of empiricism. So it is here.

⁹¹ In Dutch/Afrikaans 'uncle' figures as a familiar term of respect for a senior male, but that familiarity may be extended to effect a 'softening' intimacy that need not be there for both parties. An example of this (often racialised) imposed intimacy is 'Uncle Tom'.

⁹² The term is used by V. C. Malherbe, 'The Cape Khoisan in the Eastern Districts of the Colony Before and After Ordinance 50 of 1828', 43. Its evocation of 'enslaved' goes a long way to closing the gap between the anachronistic 'serf', the euphemistic 'bonded labour' and the technically incorrect, but substantially accurate 'slave'.

The effect here yielded, moreover, is of the greatest value. It shows that history is far from simply the context of literature, as stable as gold is chemically, or any kind of gold standard against which to reckon the claims of literature. Instead we discover history to be shot through with literature, effected by it and written by it, itself contradictory and polysemous. The relation of history to 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' demonstrates that the certain character of either lies in the relation between the two, and is one, and is what I will here call the character of 'gainsaying', by which, after a literary fashion, I mean several things simultaneously, but all of them *relational*. If we read history and literature thus, as gainsaying, we read *again*, we read *against* and we gain by a process in which both *gain*. History re-reads literature (again), it contradicts literature (as when Bain's satire is referred against him and itself), and it thickens the literary instance (with a gain in information). Literature rewrites history (again), it contradicts it (as when by fiction it is able to write against the lies of the powerful, called truth, and history gains by it not only the artefact ('Kaatje Kekkelbek' is a thing in history) but also the example, for better and for worse.

And so it may amount only to another instance to be contradicted or gainsaid, or it may be that we gain by saying it, reading again the *Graham's Town Journal* of 1835, when Bain signs the petition against the *Advertiser*, has his 'misfortunes' beyond the northern frontier reported, 'describes the whole country, from this to the Tarka, as one scene of ruin and commotion'⁹³, becomes the subject of reports on the affray over the Tyhume⁹⁴ and a regular correspondent, to discover also a report on the Graaff-Reinet Circuit Court, which formerly Bain covered for the *Advertiser*. There we learn that on 8 September 1835, a few weeks before Bain's own arrest and court martial, two Platje's, a Meitjie and a Kaatje, among others, were arraigned on charges of receiving stolen goods, to wit, two cows, an ox and four horses, and found guilty. The men were sentenced to a year and the women to six month's confinement. The presiding officer was Justice George Kekewich.⁹⁵ Kaatje Kekkelbek, we will recall, had a 'gekke Tante Meitjie' and an 'uncle Plaatje'. Her crimes were finding sheep that were not lost (that is, of receiving stolen goods) and of 'stealing os and hamel'. And then, in due season of the circuit court,

The Judge came round, his sentence such
 As he thought fair and even,
 'Six months hard work,' which means in Dutch,
 'Zes maanden lekker leeven!'

And the judge himself is well-selected, for as Kaatje reminds us:

⁹³ *GTJ*, 4, 158, 2 January, 1835.

⁹⁴ *GTJ*, 4, 204, 19 November 1835.

⁹⁵ *GTJ*, 4, 199, 15 October 1835.

maar ons Hot'nots, will jy g'loo is banjan slimme. – ons weet wel wanneer ouw Kekwis rond kom –
dat steel ons de meeste, want zyn straf is altoos 'Six months hard labour'

History is the story of precedent. Whether Kaatje Kekkelbek has an actual precedent or not, 'Kaatje Kekkelbek', the sketch, most certainly has. Its precedent lies not in the courts or jails or the Kat River Settlement (for it is a text and not a character), but in the pages and voices of the frontier, the court reports, the oaths on the streets and the minutes of meetings in the Kat River Settlement. What has not been remarked before is that 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' has a literary precedent, too. For in December of 1835, that busy year for Bain and all the frontier, the *Journal* published a 'Dialogue between 'An Assertor of the Natural Rights of Mankind', and a Hapless Hottentot', in which the philanthropic Assertor is exposed for a hypocrite who finds the Hapless Hottentot smelly and tuneless, and cannot abide the 'reality' of the latter's drinking and smoking, and his disinclination to political action. The hapless Hottentot says, markedly anticipating Kaatje,

Story! Myn lieve Baas, I have none to give you,
Only, last week, passing by a sheep-kraal,
I was plenty hungry, I tink I like to taste
Small bit of mutton.

De constapples come, to bring me 'fore de maggestraat;
Dey give me little bit of flogging in de tronk, sir,
But give me plenty to eat; I eat not so good
Since I last left him.

Myn lieve Baas, give me den a little bit tobaccol
Or monies 'nough to buy for me a soopiel
But for myn part I was never luff to meddle
Mit politics, sir.

And the Assertor, indignant, 'kicks over the hapless Hottentot – breaks his fiddle – exit[s] ... in a flare of republico-millenarian enthusiasm, and universal philanthropy.'⁹⁶ The identity or anonymity of the author was the subject of some arch irony in succeeding issues. Could it be Bain? All that matters is that Bain surely saw it, for the picaresque of Kaatje is

⁹⁶ *GTJ*, 4, 208, 17 December 1835.

indebted to it, as is the formal invention of the poem's patois and its progress to humour. It is not a literary detraction to challenge the originality of Bain's poem and to assert its historical precedents – or should not be – but it is a necessity of understanding both the literary and the historical to gainsay each with the other, or better yet, to gainsay that each is other at all. In bringing the text and history into their proper and properly muddled proximity we are restoring to all human undertakings, whether deliberate inventions of accidental experiences, that unity in which matters are integrated, and which thus has integrity and must pass for the truth that is the object of both historian and literary scholar.

4. 'Here? ... It's dark.': Implicit and Explicit in Fugard's *Boesman and Lena*

The blasted heath

We come to understand the vagrant as a figure of economic history, but firstly, and in the popular imagination, vagrancy is a spatial condition. The vagrant is *intended* to mean, and thereby *meant* into being, by an erratic and apparently aimless trajectory through space, and is exiled from the concourse of power by travesty of the order and propriety of space – itself the domain in which the state finds its imaginative corollary. Inevitably the literature of the vagrant (or, perhaps better, the literary history, the historical literature, the *culture* of the vagrant) becomes, therefore, also a literature or a culture of space.

Because Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* is a provincial text – provincial within the (metropolitan) canon, and provincial in subject matter – it imitates the colonial vagrant in appearing ungrounded, unfixed by metropolitan gravity.¹ Lacking the imprimatur of weightiness, impressed as that is by the downward pressure of the tradition, of successive texts, the play runs the hazard of not being able to bear the burden of the concerns it would have us consider serious. It is as if its tragedy, such as we expect on the main stage, were relegated to the make-do backrooms of the fringe. But it is far from marginal, and the best way to demonstrate this is to read the play through the metropolitan centre against which, or from which, it is derived. At the heart of that canon lies *King Lear*, and at the heart of *King Lear* lies the heath, itself a spatial idiom, and the stage for literature's best-known vagrant. What is it about a heath?

Mostly we are inclined to read the staged space of drama (or any genre) connotatively. The porter's badinage in *Macbeth* is really all about the great door he takes so long to open, and through which the actors and audience are to pass, as time does, to the revelation that is history (the history of the foregoing night), and which door, here, is ultimately the door of mortal sin, the gate of hell itself. Similarly, a heath, such as lies at the heart of *King Lear*, and which well matches the wind-cropped thornscrub of the flats between Addo and Algoa Bay, is, at first glance, a thematic tableau, a kind of connotative arena suited to (and secondary to) the purpose of the action. The dimension of space is forever subordinated to that of time in literature, and unsurprisingly, since literary representation (with the exception of lyric poetry only) has time as its medium – it progresses by story. The heath then represents the 'space' (in contemporary popular parlance) into which the action and its characters have come. It is above all an undifferentiated space, characterised by the absence of landmarks, chiefly horizontal. In *King*

gypsy eyes or the opacity of their connection with a rumoured Liverpool (where, Terry Eagleton points out, the great press of refugees from the Irish Famine became concentrated, creatures from beyond the pale)⁴. Everything about the moor is wuthering: fluid, erratic, unsettled. The gorse and heather deter incursions upon their ground. Water runs too freely and too wide: heaths are often bogs, treacherous ground. In all these things the heath deters the interest of property. Whether to a feudal economy or a capitalist one, the heath is wasteland, and the interests of power decline it. It falls generally to the common weal, and this is its most important historical attribute. Even in Britain today the great heaths are national conservancies. Heath is commonage. And commonage in a context, as Victor Kiernan reminds us of contemporary Britain, let alone Tudor society, 'where one per cent of the inhabitants own more than half of the land'.⁵

The heath, thus, carries historical connotations also. It is the place where even a king's law may falter, as his agents are sucked into the bog or retreat from the weather. It is a place where the poorest inhabitant, by virtue of his isolation, may find himself all but a king though encircled by another kingdom. And where the law does reach the heath it finds the ground in common hands through ancient neglect. Again and again, in *Lear*, it stands against the king and his kingdom. Conversely it is that space which only a madman would want to inhabit, indeed, which might be the only place where a madman could inhabit. As an unsettled ground it is home to none but the unsettled; where else might a vagrant settle? William Blake makes the heath that place where the chimney sweep is 'happy', a zone contrary to the city where life is 'charter'd', which is to say taken in measure and possessed by the purpose of that measure, but also chartered as an apprentice is in submitting to the writ of contract, thus fettered to the project of power.⁶ Wilderness of this sort (as also the thickets of ancient forest, or desert, for example) is the habitat of the outlaw of every sort. Fernand Braudel, writing of the French landscape, called the forest 'a world upside down, a paradise for bandits, brigands and outlaws ... a refuge for the weak'⁷, noting thereby both its historical nature and its historical character of subversion. Shakespeare's proclivity for such carnivalesque spaces as forests, islands, and Illyrian shores has also to do with this recognition of the realm of the imagination in such ungoverned spaces. Julia Briggs reminds us that 'forest' in the discourse of English Renaissance landscape is not strictly forest, that is, not necessarily thickly overgrown. Instead, it is a general category, containing the binary opposite of 'fielden', 'being nucleated, close communities, usually farming arable lands, often with a high proportion of enclosed land.'⁸ Conversely 'forest' landscape implied more open systems of settlement, with sheep pasturing, mining, cottage manufacture, charcoal burning

⁴ T. Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 3.

⁵ V. Kiernan, *Eight Tragedies of Shakespeare*, 34.

⁶ W. Blake, 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'London' (*Songs of Experience*), *The Complete Poems*, 123, 128.

⁷ F. Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 147-8.

and so on.⁹ In other words, Shakespeare's forests connote looser social organisation and a wider range of economic occupation than the strictly feudal and manorial landscape of 'fielden'. In extreme circumstances that looseness of government is like the heath, and, indeed, much of the great 'forests' of England were always, as they are still, in good measure open ground, clothed in no more vegetation than bracken and gorse. What attracts a Robin Hood to Sherwood is not literally concealment, but a complex and ancient refuge from hegemony. Braudel's observation need not apply only to forest, but to kindred spaces like the heath, and also to the mudflats and scurf scrubland of the hinterland of Port Elizabeth.

Where Boesman and Lena wander is as wide and as flat as Lear's heath and as subject to the same conditions of weather and neglect. Not for nothing is Port Elizabeth known as 'the windy city', and no-one who has driven past the Union Carbide factory and the *dolosse* of Algoa Bay, out into the eastern Cape towards Grahamstown or Cradock, has not looked across the low thorn thicket and the sandy valleys of successive rivers, easily gouged through quaternary sandstone, fossil dunes, towards the shore, and not thought the land flat and bleak and unyielding. A fit place for saltpans and no loss, as landscape, to the Kxurha/Coega harbour project that is now churning much of it into earthworks and roadworks and so on. The xeric thicket is stunted by the wind and characterised by the kind of tenacious plants that prosper in thin soils: thorns and succulents, aloes, *spekboom*, the silvery-leaved, light-reflecting scrub of *Rhus*. Across these plains the litter of the national road and of peripheral Port Elizabeth is blown, so that the thornscrub and the fences are flagged with plastic packets, shredded in short time. An offhand description from a soldier recollecting his arrival in 1846 suggests that its character has changed little in the eyes of those who behold the ground for the first time: '[t]he country through which we went was very sandy with small stumpy bushes – very desolate and uninviting.'¹⁰

This is the beginning of what is widely called 'the bush' in the colonial archive and still today: the south-westernmost extent of the valley bushveld (or xeric kaffrarian thicket) of the eastern Cape, an environment long identified with the persistence of the Xhosa (and free, then renegade, Khoisan) in the encroached space of colonial occupation.¹¹ This persistence is begun in the colonial 'problem' of the Zuurveld, which was the tenuous nature of trekboer settlement within the transhumance range of Ndlambe and Gqunukhwebe Xhosa, and Gonaqua Khoi before that. Colonel Collins's 1809 visit and report on the area fixes the association, particularly in its quarrelsome recitation of Maynier's prophetic warnings about the hazards of a frontier through the bush. The Graaff-Reinet landdrost complained that

⁸ J. Briggs, *This Stage-Play World*, 34.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ M. Bering (ed.), *The Historical 'Conversations' of Sir George Cory*, 51.

¹¹ As we have seen in our treatment of Kaatje Kekkelbek's excursion in the 'Kowie Bush', above, 136ff.

The plan of driving the Caffres and Hottentots beyond the Great Fish River, so much favoured by some, I have always disapproved. And maintain, that whoever knows the state of that part of the country where they live, and the immense woods and dens which offer a safe retreat to them, will look upon such plan to be unwise, because greatly difficult to be accomplished and still more so, to confine them there, and cruel, on account of the hardships which they must consequently suffer. — And I feel the most perfect conviction that peace may be procured with these Creatures by fair means, and with little trouble.¹²

This is of the ideological lineage that Andries Stockenstrom succeeds to and by which the Kat River Settlement, and such 'Creatures' as Kaatje Kekkelbek, is envisaged. But in 1811–12 the plan of eviction was executed and the record of Graham's clearance in the war of the Zuurveld, in which 'the bush' becomes an explicit military problem for the colony, harbouring and aiding the Xhosa, extends the association of indigenous persistence with the bush¹³. Out of this occasion is amplified the long metonymic association of the bush with the Xhosa, the (non)colonial 'other', by which attributes of tenacity, opacity, impenetrability, prickliness, hazard, wilderness and so on are transferred from the environment to the Xhosa, and attributes of opposition, resistance, conflict and so on are transferred from the Xhosa to the environment. This transfer of attributes, a process of 'muddling', underpins the landscape of the bush and marks it as frontier within the discourse that produces that landscape (where landscape, *landskep*, of course, is an artefact of human contrivance rather than the donation of nature itself, a place rather than a space).¹⁴

We have seen already, in the case of Kaatje Kekkelbek's passage through the Kowie Bush, this conflation of the indigene and environment in the construction of landscape, but it is worthwhile here to remind ourselves of Harriet Ward's formulation: 'Like the lion, the tiger, the panther, and all the roaming tenants of the bush, the mountains or the Kloof, the Kaffir has become identified with the country to which he now belongs.'¹⁵ Not only is the indigene bestialized, but also 'entered' as Dan Wylie coins it,¹⁶ which is to say conflated with the very earth itself, dross and without design. Yet at the same time, the figure of the bush is peculiarly and intensely animated: this is the realm of those big cats which prowl all the margins of European empire, Africa, America, Asia. And their chief attribute, shared with the Xhosa (and the Khoisan) is a roaming tenantry, vagabondage. Out of this frame tread the 'dread feet' of

¹² Collins – Caledon, 30 May 1808(9), CA, CO 4438.

¹³ See below. The Colonial Office file on the landrostry of Uitenhage in these years, CO 2582, contains the record and provides the substantial archive for Ben MacLennan's regrettably unreferenced *Proper Degree of Terror* (1985).

¹⁴ The word arises in Renaissance Flemish in conjunction with the 'landscape' genre of pictorial representation. The stem '-skip' shares etymologically in the verb 'to create'.

¹⁵ H. Ward, *Five Years in Kaffirland*, vol. 1, 122.

¹⁶ D. Wylie, 'Language and Assassination: Aspects of White Writers' Portrayal of Shaka and the Zulus' in C. White (ed.), *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, 71–103.

Blake's 'Tyger', the principle of energy itself, to all but Blake a hellish visitation, like the vagrant to be 'fearful' of, a stockthief, creature of stealth and ambush, rapacity and 'forests of the night'. How well Blake understood the contrariety of spaces like forest and heath to the 'chart'rd' order of the land, where the lamb is raised and a population settled. We need to remember that he was a contemporary of Ndlambe and Graham, and more likely than most to recognise the Fourth Frontier War for the far-flung front of the French Revolution that it might usefully be conceived of today. Not only the chimney sweep is happy in the unchartered margins, but so too 'on the barren heath/Sing the honey bees'¹⁷, whose energy is manifest in both honey and the sting, and which is surely the ultimate reach of Ndlambe's riddle on the banks of the Sunday's River. Above all, albeit not to first appearances, these are contested spaces, regions of honey and the sting, where history, progression, is wrought by contraries. Once again, as the young soldier, Lumley Graham, reported to posterity: 'they have a saying that there [isn't space] for two parties in the bush'.¹⁸ The statement is pointed even to the extent that it is impossible to fix the reference of the pronoun. Just who 'they' are that have this saying – whether Xhosa, colonists, Johnnies, Khoisan, Boer or Brit – or whether the saying comes across to one 'they' from another, is as moot and wide open as the heath, as intractable and entangled as the bush. Like these spaces, the pronoun produces a crisis of attribution.

All of this serves to amplify the points made hitherto about the English heath as a zone connotative of the social margin, of the levelling of the gradient of power, of the refuge of the powerless and disorderly – a space correlative of the vagrant's passage, a theatre for revolution. While we address the identification of the colonial indigene with the metaphoric complex called in South Africa 'the bush', we should recall that Heathcliff's name is itself a compound of the landscapes that mean despair to Lear and Gloucester respectively, and that connote frontier and the vision of frontier that is afforded the disguised Edgar. Heathcliff is similarly conflated with his outsider's landscape: Catherine Earnshaw recognises in him an 'unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation: an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone'.¹⁹ He is the heath and the cliffs, 'unreclaimed' because unclaimed, as uncultivated in person as the heath is in fact. If his name is deliberate, then does not the same degree of social exile, of outlaw, attend John Gay's Macheath, the (marginal, colonised, Scots) son of the clan of heath? Such a reckoning of the heath, and kindred wildernesses, may be extended to the bush in eastern South Africa by providing a sketch of a local history of the space which accentuates its place as a colonial problem, in which colonial solutions are derived and imposed on the landscape, which is to say for bush and indigene simultaneously and metonymically. Not the least of these solutions, and one with significant echoes in the history of commonage in the British Isles, is that of clearance.

¹⁷ Blake, 'The Argument' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), *The Complete Poems*, 180.

¹⁸ Lumley Graham Diary, MS, Rhodes House, Oxford. See above, 138.

We should not forget that Graham's conceptual rhetoric in the Zuurveld campaign was contemporaneous with that of the Highland clearances.²⁰ Nor does the rhetoric of clearance end there, as numerous colonial accounts reflect.²¹ Harriet Ward, the officer's wife, likened operations against the Xhosa to a battle against weeds or the fecund thicket: 'As fast as they were put down in one place, they started up in another.'²² In all of this the bush, like the heath, represents the place of history – somewhere uncertain but active, where things happen like weather or war, and problems lurk until they are cleared, often by violence to the powerless and with hazard to the powerful.

Clearance itself, however, is not enough. Firstly this is because clearance is a solution predicated upon a desired outcome, it serves a solution implicit in the clearing. Secondly this is because history and historical space are not static; what is cleared may not stay so. However one constructs the 'problem' posed by commonage or the Zuurveld to the respective agents of power that cleared them, it is undeniable that the clearance served the ultimate acquisition of that ground for the powerful, newly interested in land that was formerly not useful. This has to do with the securing of the space, certainly, but also with its exploitation as new technologies, or new populations, or new priorities, render it valuable. In each case clearance is followed by enclosure. In turn, enclosure entails property and boundaries, the chartering of space to the ends of its alienation (not least *from* nature and *to* society, but primarily from a former usufruct to a latter and more exclusive one). This is as true of the simple commons of England as it is of the Highlands, and also of the colonial settlement of the Zuurveld and the establishment of the district of Albany. Enclosure is important here because it represents not just the physical or legal circumscription, alienation and (re)attribution of space, but also the ideological. Enclosure signifies also the 'closure' of space as place, the way it is brought within the tight writ of hegemonic ascriptions of meaning, as landscape. And these have bearings upon what the heath and bush might 'mean' in *King Lear* or *Boesman and Lena*, because for all they are primarily kinds of 'flat' and 'open' space, in all ways, nonetheless they also carry, for the audiences of both plays, powerful intimations of historical closures, and are thereby as thick with threat for the powerless in history as with hazard for the powerful. It is a problem shared, but unequally.

Thus it is that for *Boesman and Lena* the scrub flats outside Port Elizabeth are no escape from the inevitable enclosure of colonial history. Boesman even thinks of them as 'my place' and threatens Lena with violence for yielding place to Outa.²³ 'You'll end up with a tribe of old *keaffers* sitting here', he complains, ironically summoning the ghosts of the amaNdlambe and amaGqunukhwebe (and perhaps especially the latter's chief Chungwa, murdered in his sleep by

¹⁹ E. Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, 141. The point is begun in Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 4.

²⁰ B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 161–2.

²¹ P. Anderson, 'The Human Clay', chapter 2.

²² Ward, *Five Years*, vol. 1, 289.

Graham's forces, just over the Sunday's river)²⁴ in the person of Outa. His place he fears will be made 'a *kaffer nes*'²⁵, in an image essentially colonial in the way it recapitulates both the bestialisation of the Xhosa and their metonymic hold upon the landscape. Lena, however, reaches towards 'that darkness' out of which Outa emerges, and it is one with the bush, but ultimately a zone of loss. 'That's where the sun goes', she says of Veeplaas, '[b]ehind it there into the bush'.²⁶ Later she recounts a yearning for the mountains, somewhat after the example of the Psalmist who lifts up his eyes unto the hills:

It's my eyes. They're not so good any more, specially when the thing is far away. But in the old days ...! You know those mountains out there, when you walk Kleinskool way. In the old days so clear, Outa. When we were resting I used to put my finger on a point, and then up and down, just the way it is.

[Demonstrates tracing the outline of a mountain range.]

I haven't seen them for a long time. Boesman's back gets in the way these days.²⁷

It is a speech that recalls the testimony of Andries Stoffels to the Select Committee on Aborigines in London in 1836: 'We lived in the mountains till the missionaries, then I came among human beings.'²⁸ For Stoffels, too, the mountains and the bush represent what is lost in attaining colonial subjectivity. 'He could find 'no rest' in his old life,'²⁹ Elizabeth Elbourne recounts of a subject clearly in acute crisis at the time of his conversion, quoting James Read:

He then went among the farmers, where there was dancing and merriment; but was pursued by his conscience; he returned to Bethelsdorp; but his convictions were deepened by the word of God, and often had he to rise from his seat and run out of the chapel to the bushes and the thickets, weeping aloud, and spending hours and even days from men, praying to God for mercy.³⁰

What Lena traces is the contour of a history that is imagined begun in freedom in the mountains, a pre-lapsarian rest-state of 'the old days', that progresses by 'up and down' to 'the way it is', 'these days'. Now Boesman's back represents 'human beings', which is to say the subjectivity of the colonial state (whose prerogative is 'humanity' itself). His back is what she

²³ A. Fugard, *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*, 259.

²⁴ MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 112–13.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*, 248.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 263.

²⁸ Evidence of Andries Stoffels. June 1836. *Proceedings of the Select Committee on Aborigines*, 583.

²⁹ E. Elbourne, 'Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity', *Kronos*, 19 (November 1992), 26.

³⁰ J. Read (snr), 'The African Witness: or, a Short Account of the Life of Andries Stoffels', 109, in Elbourne, 'Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity', 26.

follows and what bears the burden. In turn, her myopia is cognate with the closure of her world in the little web of confusion and places, and with the sun's setting in the darkness of the bush, and with the obtrusion of Boesman's back into her view, its effacing the landscape. The place names enclose her, Boesman's back encloses her, these days enclose her: property, patriarchy, history.

There is another reason why enclosure is important to this consideration, and that is because enclosure is a concept which admirably describes the compass of the stage itself. Clearance and enclosure are the historical expressions of the same passages that in the playscript are written as entries and exits. Lena reminds Boesman that the two of them have helped write the paths through the veld, and in so doing she ought to have hope of her audience realising that she is talking as much about the cast's constituting the imaginative realm of the stage, as of the historical truth of her observation. The ideological geography of the stage is constituted of its enclosing and clearing (and re-enclosing) a problem, whether that is construed as social, existential, or historical. The powers which perceive that problem and which devise and impose a solution for it across the space of the stage are, in the instance of the play, hegemonic, and they are given as a plural here because they are both author and audience, acting in concert. The players labour for them, and do the bidding of both. Exeunt. The problem and the solution are staged: they are put on a stage as a play, but they are staged also in being faked to the purposes of the occasion. Lena asks 'Here?' by way of invoking the place of her history, but she has no choice. The audience (and the economy in which they are the market) have decided for her, it is inevitable, and it is inevitably fake. It is not her history, but ours. It is not her place, but ours. At its best the strategy works to conflate audience and coloniser and to make the audience complicit, after a Brechtian fashion. But more worrying is the lie told in the image of a history that may be enclosed in a finite account and a single order of meaning. This reminds us again that there are those two vastly different histories; one happens more or less without purpose to real people, and one is staged on purpose for the regard of people who pay money to others to write and to act it.

The architecture of the stage is therefore landscape also, a place bound by the purpose of its construction to effect that construction. Its rounds are islands, its arches the gates of hell, its flatness heaths and mudflats. The famous metaphor in *Macbeth*, of life as a poor player on the stage for a short hour, is effected across precisely this correspondence between the actual space in which life happens, the space of a life, and the meaning that is made of that life, its staging. Shakespeare's metaphor reaches back to Bede's account of the metaphor of the Anglo-Saxon prince, who saw the individual life as a sparrow crossing from darkness to darkness through the brief firelight of the hall, where we may be sure the warrior clan sat not just at meat, but at play, staging song and riddle, perhaps even the history of a people in the throat of its scop. The point

of Shakespeare's metaphor is not simply that life is rendered a folly by the catastrophic clearance – or enclosure – of death, but also that what we make of life is not what really happens. It is not simply the brevity that is appalling, but also that we have no way to express life save in staging it, if we are to make meaning then it is by memorialising, by 'putting on' our lives in playing, strutting and fretting.

What is more, there is an ancient correspondence between the vagrant and the player (and the player-writer). As far back as the middle ages, the British state has conflated the two. Edward I produced ordinances against 'Bards, Rhymers and other idlers and vagabonds'.³¹ Both are habitues of the heath, and both stand in kinship with the seditious art of poetry. The concentration of such assaults upon vagrancy under later monarchs and into Tudor times continues the association, and it culminates in the concerted Puritan suppression of playing, in which the rhetoric insists that players are to 'be taken to be Rogues'³², and which at times forces the players out of London and onto the road in a kind of prophetic self-fulfilment of the vagrant exile. The 'Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds' of 1572 directly associated players with vagrants and propelled the development of companies under secure patronage.³³ Indeed, the theatre itself was routinely condemned 'as a destabilizing site of potential sedition where "masterless men" might gather'³⁴, which is to cast the audience as idle, according to a protestant work ethic, and to equate idleness with sedition. The stage becomes a heath, the more dangerous for being the very opposite of marginal, for although the playhouses are pushed to the edge of the city, yet they remain at the centre of the kingdom and at the centre of the crowd's gaze.

In every way, then, the stage is itself a space congruent with the heath, the mudflats or the bush. Perhaps the most useful effect of this congruency is to teach us that these spaces are never so much marginal as liminal. To conceive of them as marginal is to enact the exclusions of hegemonic ideology. Conversely, to think of them as liminal is to insist upon an orientation which sees them not as an outermost thing, but rather as a 'between' space, and so to enact the agencies of both sides of that between. Best of all, liminality goes further even than this Janus orientation, for the very notion of a threshold implies the *activity* of coming and going that characterises it quite as much as its architectural placement. This is to recognise the temporal dimension of human acts, which is to say history – and all these places are profoundly historical. This landscape – of the heath, the bush, the stage – figures, thus, as the context of literature itself, which is to say, as history. It is the picture of history developed out of events, and here must frame our consideration of what follows, for it is the accretion of history and literature compounded.

³¹ C. J. Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants and Vagrancy*, 35.

³² Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 35, 155ff.

³³ J. Briggs, *This Stage-Play World* (1997), 251.

³⁴ W. Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, 2–3.

Explicit cause

As an undergraduate I pressed Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* upon an English friend interested to know some South African literature. His response to it was damning. Fugard was derivative and gauche, he said, the exemplar was Stoppard, and even in this Fugard fell short, for he lacked Stoppard's wit and philosophy. At the time I was crestfallen. What I experienced, not for the first time and not for the last either, was the humiliation of the provincial. The success of Stoppard lay in everything that was metropolitan about him: his learning worn as a kind of 'knowingness', his ability to make an enquiry into humanity somehow entertaining, to make thought pleasurable, his slickness, his familiarity with Continental existentialism, his necessary descent from Shakespeare and his presumptive right to hang about in the company of sages and masters. Stoppard, it was implied, was an habitue of the cultural coteries of Europe – from the alehouses in the shadow of Renaissance theatres, the coffee shops of 17th and 18th century London, the salons of Enlightened France, down to the Left Bank cafes and the dives of New York in modernity.

Fugard, one gathered, lived in a cottage near a beach, some way out of windy Port Elizabeth. He produced plays in the townships, which activity drew the suspicion of the apartheid state. His harassment by police and bureaucracy made him the kind of case that draws the attention of PEN International. This was the ground of his claim upon international recognition. He was political.

In time it has come to seem to me that it is precisely the provincialism of Fugard's work, and particularly *Boesman and Lena*, that makes for its greatness. Indeed, had I only been wiser as an undergraduate, I would have recognised in my own sense of humiliation an echo, even an extrapolation, of precisely those historical dynamics which drive Fugard's vagrants out of metropolitan Port Elizabeth, through the little towns of the urban edge, to the Swartkops mudflats that are the kind of place where you can run but you can't hide. There is a particularly historical progress and that is a truth less easily hidden by the artistry of metropolitan ideology when one is living and watching the scruffy lives of the periphery. What is more, the 'truth' of *Boesman and Lena's* occasion makes their peregrinations tragic rather than absurd, for they represent the material suffering of humanity, the consequence, at some levels, of human flaw, and not the psychological distress capable of the whole human condition, into which justice does not enter and which is never a progress.

The provinces are where the small scale of society makes contradictions more evident. Here are the remote farms where the contours of power are traced not in the anonymous

hordes of rush-hour, but in the domestic round. The provinces are those places just within the margin, just behind the far frontier of metropolitan hegemony, which frontier is not only a spatial limit, but also the hot seam, the brushfire, of the metropolitan conflict with the beyond. This conflict is historical, in the sense of being both real and productive of real change, and has, in that, the character of history generally. Its 'hot' nature on the frontier makes it visible in a way that metropolitan ideology 'at home' serves to obfuscate. Thus a vagrant in London appears to its citizens a glaring misfit, to be explained as feckless or touched, whereas a vagrant on the frontier is evidently a refugee, of some sort, a condition both familiar and inevitable, even proper, to the time and place. The provinces, however they enact their local conflicts, are always conscious of their own provenance in conflict (however much they are also striving to suppress that origin, to become like 'home'). They are places where history is not yet hidden. At the outset of this study I suggested that vagrancy marked the passage from mode to mode, or at least an excursion along the margins of a mode of production, and was, in this, a revolutionary figure. Here I would extend that, insisting that the frontier is always a seam of revolution – a spatial sign of the conflict between modes (different to a *border*, which is a frontier consented to by hegemony). The provinces, closer to the frontier, are also closer to revolution.

For Boesman and Lena, as for Fugard and his South African audience, even his metropolitan one, there is no mistaking the reality of their wandering for an idea. They are not characters of an idea, stuck on a boat, going nowhere, on which they may get up and move about a bit, but neither interrupt their journey nor know its end. For Boesman and Lena powerlessness is no less terrifying than it is for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, no less existentially entailed (we have Lena's panicked confusion about her whereabouts to show that), but Boesman and Lena's suffering has a knowable cause and an aetiology that we should call history. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inhabit Newton's universe just as Newton gave it to science: explicable in behaviour, but without cause. Their troubles are ideas, as ethereal as Newton's hypothetical medium. Their context is the theatre of European ideas, specifically the manifest intertext of *Hamlet*, from which they are sprung. In this they are imaginary, and doubly so, being creatures by Stoppard's imagination out of Shakespeare's before him. By contrast, the medium of Boesman and Lena is history, as rank and clinging as Swartkops mud, and this is their context.

The inclination to read Fugard's play as a creature of ideas is sprung from the anxiety of the provincial. Literary hegemony insists upon the priority of the metropolitan and so what is first discovered in *Boesman and Lena* is its seeming fidelity to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the modern drama of the absurd. Here is reiterated the interiority of action, the psychological as opposed to narrative force, the spartan stage appropriate to a drama whose philosophy is of stoic lineage, the wardrobe of motley signifying the condition of folly, the gnomic utterance, the

claustrophobic slow-motion dialogue, repetitious and abusive, of people locked in a *danse macabre* on absurd ground. This version is given, for example, by Russell Vandenbrouke:

Fugard writes, 'I don't know if there is or isn't a God. What I do know is the question is the most idle and meaningless I could ever find.' In *Boesman and Lena* a prime mover is absent, but also missing is any explicit cause of Boesman and Lena's plight. It is, simply, in the nature of things, a consequence of the fact that they are alive. It obeys only its own imperatives.³⁵

Besides citing Fugard at his most Camusesque, and not taking to heart what he is actually trying to say³⁶, Vandenbrouke's formulation is wrong because it is begun in a wilfully anti-historical reading, of the sort conditioned by metropolitan ideology and an expectation of Fugard's (or we should say, *Boesman and Lena's*) client status within modern drama. Indeed, reading the play against Fugard's *Notebooks*, there are times when Fugard himself is guilty of divorcing the play from its context, as if deliberately trying to expunge the provincial and historical anecdote from the play's significance to the *longue duree* of literature. There are times when he seems to want to winnow the specificity of the various men and women who inform Boesman and Lena from the characters as they appear in the play.³⁷ And there is an evident inclination to locate in the specifics of the South African historical mire (Swartkops) an existential swamp ('Swartkops') with application or pretension to universal significance.

But Vandenbrouke should not read the play under contract to its author's intentions, whether philosophical or artistic. The truth is that *Boesman and Lena* is full of 'explicit cause'. Firstly we have the history – and the historicity – of the play's conception in Fugard's published *Notebooks*, reiterated, focussed and expanded in his much-recycled 'Introduction'.³⁸ And secondly there is the internal evidence of the play itself, with its explicit acknowledgements of 'cause', both in the diegetic content of the text and in its form, as text and as production.

The relationship between Fugard's notebooks and those excerpts edited by Fugard and Mary Benson and published as *Notebooks* is as intriguing as it is problematic. Benson notes that the first appearance in print of the notebooks was in Fugard's 'introductions to his published

³⁵ R. Vandenbrouke, *Truths the Hand can Touch*, 70.

³⁶ Fugard's statement is strictly agnostic: it is the *question* that is idle, not any answer that might arise. For Fugard the problem is the impossibility of the enquiry rather than the impossibility of a God. *Boesman and Lena*, as we shall see, and by his own admission, is shot through with a kind of Christian striving that approaches a sacramental understanding of drama and words. Vandenbrouke errs in presuming Fugard to be adopting the Nietzschean posture, when what Fugard specifically means is the philosophical idleness of playing Prometheus to a Nobodaddy.

³⁷ Any of Fugard's notes suggests this, for his characters are rendered of his many encounters, and rendered in the direction of the stereotype (which relates them, by ideology, to vagrants before and after them). His characters, for one thing, are isolated under the laboratory conditions of the stage – they do not occur in the sprawl of nature: random and arbitrary, both more noisy and more silent in that it is less coherently oracular than Fugard–Boesman–Lena.

³⁸ The 'Introduction' prefaces various editions in which the play occurs; it is substantially repeated in Dennis Walder's introduction to Fugard, *Athol Fugard*. Its method – the recourse to Fugard's notebooks – underpins most

plays',³⁹ and there is every reason thereafter to assume that the edited selection will recapitulate this sense of the notebooks' priority of significance to the plays. But *Notebooks* is far more than a sourcebook for Fugard's drama (which is an excellent thing, for it affords us instead a classic record of provincial South Africa in the decades of provincial isolation and shows Fugard as the writer of exquisite prose, in the manner of someone like John Berger) and it is evidently shaped by editorial interests reflected in the selection. There is Benson's political interest to account for the history of Fugard's attitudes to the cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa, for example. There is a similar political inclination to recount Fugard's involvement in the experiments and productions of the township drama groups. Above all, there is Fugard's admiration for Camus to account for the publication itself (after the example of Camus' *Carnets*) and for the selection's predilection for accounts of suffering and violence, sun and sea and wind, reflections upon time, and upon the necessity of, and limits to, social engagement and compassion.⁴⁰ It is the *Notebooks'* imitation of Camus, along with the explicit adulation there⁴¹, that has inclined critics of Fugard's plays towards reading them as excursions in the Absurd, and, in so doing, has tended to suppress the obvious extent to which the plays, and *Boesman and Lena* in particular, are drawn from life – that is to say, history.

Fugard's deeply historical sensibility is evident in his own 'Introduction', which begins 'I was born in Middelburg, a small village ... on 11 June 1932. My mother is an Afrikaner, my father an English-speaking South African'.⁴² His sense of self is historically characterised – a function of spatiotemporal circumstance and of lineage; it invokes an 'address' much like that which Bain imposes on Kaatje Kekkelbek. This is the method upon which he constructs his account of the origins, the causes, of *Boesman and Lena*, as we shall see. Fugard goes on, in that opening paragraph, to describe Port Elizabeth as 'very representative of South Africa in its range

critical treatments of the play, including Vandenbrouke's, and, even recently (2000, 2005), Fugard's own, as we shall see.

³⁹ M. Benson, 'Introduction', *Notebooks*, 8.

⁴⁰ See, for example, any of '1963' (68–109), during which Fugard is much taken with Camus. Fugard reflects on things like his pleasure in spearfishing ('Time to talk about the Kill' (108), the weather ('And now, at the end of today, the wind is blowing – judgement with compassion' (100)), and so on: what he constitutes in so doing is a world resonant as a kind of existential metaphor: 'A walk this evening just after sunset The streets in the fading light, the wind and a tumultuous, feverish sky - particularly in South End where poverty added an ambience - a human ambience - to everything. To one side of the bridge over the Baakens River two women sat The water in the river is black.' (100).

It is instructive to note the admiration for Camus of another South African writer preoccupied with this tenor of South African life, Stephen Watson. In 'A Version of Melancholy' he begins, 'It can come in several forms, no matter where you live' (*Selected Essays, 1980–1990*, 173). Richard Drayton, imperial historian (and Barbadian) has responded to Watson's essay, noting that this melancholy was a familiar effect of the colonial periphery everywhere, having its roots in the dis-ease of the provinces (pers. comm.). Watson dismisses as 'trivial' the suggestion that the cause of melancholy might be political (178), but he is writing in the 1980s, when the political turbulence of the moment precludes a proper evaluation of history (the *longue durée* of politics) and its relationship to such soft contours of ideology as 'mood' or 'temper', things like 'melancholy' (even the word Watson chooses is sufficiently archaic and redolent of literary emotion to suggest nostalgia and lament, conditions of exile).

⁴¹ 'Resumed reading Camus' *Carnets*. I would be happy to spend the next ten years deepening my understanding and appreciation of this man ... Reading Camus is like finding, and for the first time, a man speaking my own language' *Notebooks*, 94. This is far from the only instance of Fugard's express admiration.

of social strata ... I cannot conceive of myself as separate from it. It is the setting for all three plays in this book.⁴³ And Benson, in her introduction to the *Notebooks*, recapitulates this version. She begins, 'Athol Harold Lannigan Fugard was born on 11 June 1932 in the Karroo village of Middelburg. His English-speaking father was of Irish/Polish descent and his mother was a Potgieter.'⁴⁴ Again, evidently, the 'where' and the 'when' – the historical dimension of the playwright, are of paramount significance.

In her first paragraph, Benson goes on to quote Fugard on his ancestry, of which he notes: 'I recognise my bastardised identity.'⁴⁵ The point of his lineage, read against the preoccupations of the racial South Africa in which Fugard works, is that it is a history of creolisation – a process of miscegenation, translation and wandering. The existential concerns of *Boesman and Lena*, thus, are all prefigured in Fugard's own sense of self and the way in which his own history corresponds with that of the colonial periphery. Before it is about life, *Boesman and Lena* is about lives. Its concerns depend first of all upon a sense of biography that is alert to context, and we shall see that it is profoundly anchored in its time and place, to a degree that greatly limits the universal pretensions of the Absurd or any philosophy with less than some interest in history. As to Fugard's own sense of the play's provenance in place (by which I mean historicised space), we have the record of his adamant statements on the specificity of the work. Recalling the filming of *Boesman and Lena*, he spoke of the project as telling 'that Faulkner-regional story; not to be ashamed of ourselves and the facts about our world, our specifics ... we were conscious of trying to tell a simple South African story.'⁴⁶ Indeed, in the same interview, Fugard expanded on the 'decisive influence' of Faulkner and 'this one remarkable discovery',

that, where I'd been looking at American plays and where I then found myself looking European plays and European experiments, suddenly he gave me total security to turn around and look at the specifics, the humble specifics of an Eastern Province world – well, made me secure in my love of those specifics, made me hand myself over to my love, love of a region, of a place, of my passion for it ... He gave me a total sense of security in the specifics of my place and my time.⁴⁷

Those 'specifics' are what we call history and they are not only one way of expressing the 'explicit cause' in Fugard's work, but they become, indeed, what the play is about. In *Boesman and Lena*, ironically, the dizzying flight of Lena's subjective crisis – her agoraphobic confusion, listing and relisting the permutations of her journey – is the consequence of a total sense of *insecurity*

⁴² 'Introduction', *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*, vii.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Notebooks*, 7.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Barrie Hough, 'Interview with Athol Fugard (Port Elizabeth, 30 November 1977)', *Theoria*, 55, October 1980, reprinted in Stephen Gray, *Athol Fugard*, 128.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 126.

in the specifics of her place and her time. The specificity that Fugard learns is a sense of identity; his route to it lies in art, the historiography of self and place. Lena will come to that momentary security also through her art – in the song she sings, that gives shape to her self's passage in the place in which she finds herself, that 'tells' herself, and that imitates Fugard's playwrighting by imposing upon her listeners within the play the role of audience (as the listeners without are to Fugard), whose function is to bear witness, specifically, the witness of history.

Texts, textures, textiles

Fugard tells us that work on *Boesman and Lena* began in October 1967.⁴⁸ He 'shelved' the play soon after that to write for the BBC a script for *Mille Miglia*, about Stirling Moss and the great race. When Tom Stoppard saw the programme in August 1968 he considered it 'the experience of the week. More accurately, it was the combination of Athol Fugard's play and the discussion which followed it in *Late Night Line-up* that made the experience.'⁴⁹ For what intrigued Stoppard were the implications of Moss's dismissal of the television play ('Utterly fictional and bad fiction at that'⁵⁰) directly after its screening:

Ever since, I have been trying to resolve my own dialogue:

Was the play invalidated as a true statement?

Yes, of course.

Would it have been if I hadn't watched *Late Night Line-up*?

Yes, but I wouldn't have known it.

Would it have been if the two men had been named Jones and Robinson, driving in a fictitious race?

Ah.

But the thing gets more subtle. Here's a quote: "There's nothing very exciting about battling down the straight at 180 miles an hour. What is exciting is to take a 70-mile-an-hour corner at 71, at the very outside edge of tyre adhesion. Then you feel like a great painter who with one flick of his brush paints in the smile of the Mona Lisa, and turns round to the rest of the world and says, 'There, you bastards, match that.'"

The whole feel of Mr Fugard's creation is in that quote. But it does not come from the play; it occurred in an interview with Moss published years ago in *Time* magazine, and it made such an impression on me that (I think) I have recollected it word for word.

⁴⁸ 'Introduction', xx.

⁴⁹ Tom Stoppard, 'Fact Fiction and the Big Race', *The Observer*, 11 August 1968, reprinted in Stephen Gray, *Athol Fugard*, 78.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

It is nothing to build a case on, but it is arguable that, even if the surface of Mr Fugard's play was indeed a travesty, he might have got to at least part of a deeper truth than Pathe News could ever show or Mr Moss admit to ...

Stoppard's intrigue is useful in drawing attention to problems of historicity and in reminding us that embedded in the period of *Boesman and Lena's* composition was this excursion into an even more 'specific' history – the most literally historical exercise of all Fugard's undertakings. It would be peculiar if Fugard at this time had *not* been thinking of the problems of history to the playwright, although the published *Notebooks* do not reflect this directly. What they do reflect is the loss of Fugard's passport (mentioned in May 1968, alongside the *Notebooks'* only mention of *Mille Miglia*, the passport was in fact withdrawn in June 1967), encounters with the Security Police (June 1968) and embroilment in the politics of the then-emerging 'cultural boycott' of South Africa (May 1968).⁵¹ That Fugard could not but be conscious of the press of history is scarcely in doubt. That he was struggling towards a 'true statement' of history is the evidence of *Boesman and Lena*.

But Fugard ('I'm very bad on dates, Barrie')⁵² remembers the origins of *Boesman and Lena* incorrectly. He says, 'I first began working on *Boesman and Lena* in October 1967. I find these two entries in my notebook', and goes on to cite entries from that month of that year.⁵³ If by 'first began working' he means something more programmatic than these notebook entries, then perhaps he is to be trusted, but the evidence of the published *Notebooks* is that the idea of the play was emerging in December 1966 and that he was actively developing it.⁵⁴ His first idea is of an empty stage onto which a coloured couple emerge carrying the goods and chattels of poverty: 'Out of breath they then stand and watch the demolition of their house off-stage. 'Bulldozer!''⁵⁵ Before he has named the 'coloured derelict and his wife' Boesman and Lena, Fugard has hit upon the figure and 'name' of Outa and is already turning phrases that survive in the play, not least the litany of place names, at this stage Fugard's own list rather than Lena's or Boesman's, for by contrast with several snatches of dialogue, given in inverted commas, the places are not interpellated as the utterance of either character, are not in inverted commas. The question that ultimately becomes Lena's interrogation of her own identity and being, and the relationship between them, is first posed and answered as a problem of the playwright's art: 'Where would they go? Bethelsdorp, Missionvale, Veeplaats, Kleinskool.'⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Notebooks*, 158ff, 234.

⁵² Barrie Hough, "Interview with Athol Fugard (Port Elizabeth, October 1977)", 124.

⁵³ 'Introduction', xx.

⁵⁴ *Notebooks*, 146–7.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

Lena's search for the grounds (the idiom is apt) of self is precisely Fugard's own. If we read back into September of that year, 1966, we find him grappling with his writerly identity in terms that knot together the notebooks, his identification with Port Elizabeth, political commitment and a yet earlier image:

I want to write but I am helpless until the right image surfaces. Reading through one of my notebooks has added to my frustration – there is so much! What it did also do though was sharpen my perception of this world (P.E.) – its textures. Slowly rediscovering the smell and feel of it.

Also my desire, with the country in its present state, to commit myself more deeply.

Themes: Norman and Cradock. The old woman ...⁵⁷

These 'textures' are the Swartkops mudflats and the scrub thicket of the Addo bush all around, but the word signifies also the 'specifics' of history, the operations by which time shapes space into place, foregrounding not the world that seems natural to us, smooth and seamless, but rather our 'perception of this world', a thing textured according to its etymological kinship to the idea of 'text' itself, an artefact of human culture, a production of history.

Among the many avatars of Lena (many more of them than of Boesman) that Fugard records in his notebooks, the earliest is 'the old woman near Cradock on the drive back from Norman's trial. 'Put your life on your head and walk.'⁵⁸ As an origin of the play this incident takes us yet another year back, to August 1965, when Fugard travelled to Cradock for the trial of Norman Ntshinga, one of his colleagues in The Serpent Players, a theatre troupe with which he was involved during the sixties. Ntshinga was charged (and found guilty and imprisoned) with 'furthering the aims' of the recently banned African National Congress.⁵⁹ The old woman was encountered some way out of Cradock, ('she was carrying all her worldly possessions in a bundle on her head and an old shopping bag. About fifty years old. Cleft palate')⁶⁰, and given a lift by Fugard and his companions. The spirit in which he records this encounter is not that of researching source material (when he returns for Ntshinga's sentencing a little later, he collects the incident that supplies *The Coat*, and the tenor of his notes is differently purposive), but rather something akin to acknowledgement. He notes of her journey: 'Finally only this to say: that in that cruel walk under the blazing sun, walking from all of her life that she didn't have on her head, facing the prospect of a bitter Karroo night in a drain-pipe, in this walk there was no defeat – there was pain, and great suffering, but no defeat.'⁶¹ Fugard's language here could as easily be applied to Ntshinga's circumstances, or those of anyone snared in the noose of

⁵⁷ *Notebooks*, 135.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 166.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 233.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 123–4.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 124.

repression that tightened around resistance to apartheid in the aftermath of Sharpeville at the beginning of the sixties. It is a political rhetoric that he employs – not exactly fighting talk, but certainly a eulogy of resistance. In capital letters Fugard concludes his note on the encounter, simply: 'THE WALK'.⁶² There is in that some striving towards the possibility of art, for the capital letters in amplifying the phrase are, of course, amplifying its possibilities, enhancing its reach and resonance, as Fugard persuades the allegory out of the instance. 'The walk' is an ancient metaphor as it applies to quests and pilgrimages, certainly, but under the hot sun of the Karoo it recalls wandering in the wilderness, as Adam and Eve do out of Eden and Cain in the Land of Nod, the first political exiles, and as the people of Israel do to and from Babylon and Egypt. It is the *via dolorosa*, the walk of suffering, often of the condemned, but towards triumph. After the Bible, South Africa's best-selling book is *The Long Walk to Freedom*, by Nelson Mandela, only the most famous of the thousands sentenced in smaller courtrooms across South Africa at the same time as Ntshinga.

Soon after the conviction, Fugard returned to Cradock for Ntshinga's sentencing. 'He called me as a witness in mitigation,' he wrote.⁶³ It is the tenor of witness that characterises Fugard's notes on the old woman outside Cradock, and perhaps even 'witness in mitigation'. It is witness, as we shall see, that governs the whole of *Boesman and Lena*, witness that binds the three characters together, and witness that binds the audience to the play and the play's lives, mimetically. What I am suggesting here is that Fugard in Cradock was variously and consciously a witness: as audience in the public gallery of the court, in giving testimony in mitigation of sentence, in recording the walk of the old woman (even to the degree of listing her personal effects: 'In the old shopping-bag I spotted a bottle of tomato sauce and Barney spotted a packet of OMO'⁶⁴), and that this instruction of attitude commands *Boesman and Lena* when it comes to be written, in part because it is bound up with the play's origins, and in part because the point of the play – caught in the travails/travels of the old woman and their continuities with Ntshinga's suffering – is the necessity of witness in human lives, both as a precept of the philosophy of social subjectivity and, thereafter, as a kind of psychology. The point of the play is not only that this needs to happen, ethically, but that it does so in the happenstance of the play itself. The play is a machine for witness.

In the years after giving the old woman a lift near Cradock, and even after the completion of *Boesman and Lena*, the figure of 'Lena' (as he names her) recurs again and again in Fugard's *Notebooks*. Or, one should say, various women are recorded in the notebooks, aspects of whom are consolidated in the figure of Lena, or, later, recapitulate her. For there is a difficult truth here, in that for all the 'specificity' of *Boesman and Lena*, yet its characters are composites, at

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

least superficially. In the language of the play the characters are wrought with great individuality, but as they make their first entrance they are stock types. This is part of the play's power and success: that it renders so particular one moment bracketed by a general and generalising history, permits the 'types' of an historical aggregate to be selves, expressly so that what the audience witnesses is the *fact* of both type and self, simultaneously, and the difference between these. The genesis of Fugard's Lena is an essay in the relationship of history to biography.

Of the old woman at Cradock, Fugard's 'last image of her is the thin, scrawny ankles between her old shoes and the edge of her old skirt, trudging away into the bush.'⁶⁵ His stage directions for the entrance of Lena have generalised such observations, for Lena, like the old woman, 'carries her load on her head', but now, '[a]s a result, she walks with characteristic stiff-necked rigidity'⁶⁶, and the 'old skirt' has similarly become something generic: 'one of those sad dresses that reduce the body to an angular, gaunt cipher of poverty.'⁶⁷ What redeems Fugard's typology, however, is that even in these stage directions his language is analytic and historiographic: the 'characteristic' walk is 'as a result' (of bearing a load, literally and, we come to see, metaphorically); and 'those sad dresses' are generic because what they make the body signify is what they are, ciphers of poverty, the inscriptions of social processes, history. Indeed, what they are reveals the body of the self they are meant to hide, for 'those sad dresses' are materially commodities of capitalist manufacture and consumption, and so ideologically intense that they are a commodity even the indigent poor will acquire: they robe the body of the subject in the uniform of capitalist participation, in a manufacture made 'sad' by the alienation of labour and means in factories and synthetic fibres and dyes, and in the act of clothing the body, which is ideologically to obfuscate, to hide, to cover – the opposite of discovery and disclosure. Fugard's witness to the material culture of the old woman, as also Lena and all those who contribute to her, and not only in the instance of clothes, is pointed. By its excess of detail, and its sense of the etiology of 'things' and actions, dresses and gaits, it draws attention to what ideology would hide, discloses it for our discovery.

Sometime around 1900, when George Cory interviewed him, one veteran of the Cape Corps (that Khoisan militia founded by John Graham in 1806) recalled his march across the Addo Bush and up to Grahamstown as a recruit in 1846, interrupting his narrative with a revealing digression:

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*, 239.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

Our uniform consisted of a green jacket with a tassel in the middle of the (back?), grey woolen cloth trousers, and a hat which had a peak and a horse hair plume. We had a yellow belt. Afterwards we had dark tunics, and our hats were 'Chakus' just like the French.⁶⁸

Again, the intense detail of his recollection displays the attention commanded by costume. The 'coloured' subject ('coloured' is Cory's word) is robed in the highly 'coloured' vestments of an orientation that is more than merely colonial, being also military. That military clothing is extraordinarily conspicuous and yet uniform, simultaneously, expresses precisely the character of ideology in dress, for by conspicuous excess the wearer (the subject) is marked out, and by uniformity hidden away. This is true of clothing everywhere, though in less extreme degree. It is socially desirable to have clothes that are conspicuously your own, but within the strict limit of fashion. The clothed subject seeks to look both different and the same; this is the project of identity in a social species where ideology asserts individuality, but on (generally obfuscated) contradictory terms of conformity. (It might be added that it is across this contradiction that capitalist commodity culture generates the 'desired' plurality of the market, with various brands of otherwise like items competing to press prices beyond value. This way money is 'made'; as a central mechanism in capitalism it profits by 'erasing' the ideological contradiction it generates.)

All this might be just as digressive as the clothing fetish happened on by Cory, if it wasn't for the way in which the ideological practice of clothing precisely describes the way colonial subjectivity is effected – indeed, the way in which the two are integral. When Graham formed the Cape Corps its uniform was uppermost in his mind. Ben MacLennan provides an amusing sketch of its history, but it is shot through with the ideological purpose of costume:

On assuming command [Graham] had written that the regiment's dress was to be 'Green and I flatter myself very neat; black facings and white lace, service trousers nearly the same colour as jacket'. But fourteen months later, in May 1807, the regiment was still waiting for cloth for their uniforms. The men were by this time in rags, with pieces of canvas for belts ... The cloth that did eventually arrive was, to Graham's dismay, material for blue jackets with scarlet facing, and a round hat ornamented with white tape and tuft. It was an outfit, he wrote angrily to his father, 'chosen one would suppose to disgust the men. It is the same as they had with the Dutch, whom they detest, and the same which the generality of the slaves wear in this colony.'⁶⁹

Quite apart from the explicit markers of nationality and class (the detested Dutch and the generality of slaves), Graham's vision is pointedly ideological in its reference to 'service' and the 'neat' turnout that surely stands for conformity (in fact he wanted a uniform 'like' that of English

⁶⁸ M. Berning (ed.), *The Historical 'Conversations' of Sir George Cory*, 27

⁶⁹ B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 29–30

rifle companies).⁷⁰ By contrast, the appearance of the men without uniforms is exactly that of vagrants, a host of vagabonds (and armed). The instance, and the contrast, reminds us of Mr Magerman's red jacket, and, indeed, of the seemingly unrelated, but accentuated interest of clothes to that meeting in the Kat River Settlement in 1834. Magerman complained of not getting clothes during his apprenticeship, and of being 'naked'.⁷¹ An Andries Pretorius complained of the low wage of 6d a day, asking rhetorically, 'could they buy clothes with it?'⁷² Andries Stoffels noted, revealingly, that '[i]t was after this 50th Ordinance that we began to buy more clothes for ourselves and our wives'.⁷³ Mr Hendrik (whom we recall arriving with his knapsack only) complained of something like class consciousness among the Kat River settlers, and did so in terms of the symbolism of clothing: 'It is said there are vagrants among us, and I might also say there are 'Baases' among us, for when I complained lately, one knocked the hat off my head.'⁷⁴ A visitor from the LMS station at Theopolis, Mr Slinger Zwartbooi, 'said, that altho he had on a good blue cloth Trousers, and a white Moleskin Jacket, nevertheless he is very poor', and went on to complain that in seeking work in his old clothes he was inviting imprisonment, by which he meant that if the Khoisan were deprived of the liberty of Ordinance 50 they would find themselves discovered as the vagrants they were now only accused of being.⁷⁵ Then, he said, 'my good clothes will not be sufficient to bring me out.'⁷⁶

Such conspicuous interest in (conspicuous) clothing attests to its meaningfulness, not only as an obvious sign of eager participation in the commodity economy of the colony, but also in the embedded significance of countless ideological markers, whether they be wrought in the properties of colours, or in the opposition between nakedness and clothedness, in the corporate allegiance of military life, or in the adoption of a metropolitan register (as in such words as 'Chakus' or 'moleskin', which have no root in indigenous experience). Above all, the interest in clothes displays firstly the desire not to be naked, that is, to be conspicuously unseen for what one really is, and secondly the desire not to wear the livery of a former subjectivity, that is, not to wear the *kaross*, or anything like it. Boesman's blazer is of one cloth with Mr Magerman's jacket, his cap of the same stuff as Mr Hendrik's hat, clothes that, though they won't keep him from jail, he will be jailed for casting off.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 30

⁷¹ 'Minutes of a Meeting, Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A50

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

The woman on the bridge

Finding the initial phase of writing *Boesman and Lena* (in 1967) 'the most hellish and arid period I've ever experienced as a writer' and berating himself for the play's being 'bogged down because I do not yet have 'images''⁷⁷, Fugard appears to have found his images in a glut in mid-1968. They were of *Boesman and Lena*, but especially *Lena*. It is in July that the *Notebooks* recall the image of the old woman at Cradock and the possibility of an even earlier 'genesis' in an 'image' of 'a coloured man and woman, burdened with their possessions, whom I passed somewhere on the road near Laingsburg.'⁷⁸ (It is salutary to note once again the nature of Fugard's interest in the possessions of the vagrant). Thereafter the images come thick and fast:

Fishing on the banks of the Swartkops River: saw her as we were leaving our spot on the canal wall. *Lena*. Either drunk or a hangover from the previous night's drinking. (A number of bait diggers, coloured fishermen, had spent the night there. It was bitterly cold. Bottles of cheap wine to help them live through it.) *Dook* on her head, faded maroon blouse and an old blue skirt. Barefoot... A face shrivelled and distorted by dissipation, resentment, regrets. Bloated stomach⁷⁹

Again there is the attention to her material culture, her livelihood and her consumption, her body and her clothes. In a later entry recalling this 'Swartkops *Lena*' Fugard noted simply: 'Things' in her world'.⁸⁰ But this time Fugard is in some way expecting her. 'Strangely, no surprise at seeing *Lena*. Just a sense of the possibility of sacrilege, of the demand that the truth be told, that I must not bear false witness.'⁸¹ The quality of his attention has become that of lover at his assignation, albeit a lover who has yet to speak his love, in the way he notes her relationship to him ('She stood to one side and let us go first over the little bridge ... Unseeing eyes, focused, if anything, on the ground just ahead. We were merely 'white men' – nothing could have been more remote from her life.'⁸²) and can summon a sense of obligation to her ('the possibility of sacrilege', the tension between voyeurism and witness) even though she is ignorant of his interest. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that this most detailed revelation of *Lena*, the one that most germinally informs the play, originates in circumstances where Fugard himself is '[f]ishing on the banks of the Swartkops River', a (white) man ignored by a coloured indigent. He has already imagined *Outa*, but there is an extent to which the play becomes Fugard's way of getting this woman to talk to him, to focus on him, and *Outa* becomes his proxy, a mute witness

⁷⁷ *Notebooks*, 156.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 166.

⁷⁹ *ibid*.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 167.

⁸¹ *ibid*, 166.

offered in return for her love, for just that part of a night (as if a prostitute's contract) that is yet also till death does them part (as the more sacred contract specifies it). This revelation is for Fugard of something also angelic ('Walked like a somnambulist ... Strangely, no surprise ... the possibility of sacrilege ... witness'), which is in some measure the function that Lena will provide for Outa. She will keep company at his dying, see him over, and in return he will witness her. His witness, like Fugard's is of two sorts: he is there as the potential testimony as to history – to the fact (and nature) of Lena's existence, but he is also simply her audience. Both of these positions consort with imperatives in Fugard's life: to bear moral witness as a human being, and to secure an audience by writing a play. It is not surprising then to find that the angelic revelation is also that of the muse: 'Back with the play today after a few days' break with a conviction and certainty I don't think I've had before.'⁸³

How pointedly this contrasts with the anguish of Fugard's first months working on the play. We find him in October 1967, almost a year before his vision on the Swartkops, in distress:

My problem (predicament): an almost total loss of all sense of value – my world shrunk, shrivelled to a pathetic core of 'self' and a blind impulse to affirmation which, of all absurdities, has become catching a big fish. My few friends, and worst of all Sheila and Lisa, 'things' of convenience ... Suddenly – my life is without Love and Honesty. Is it any wonder that Boesman and Lena remain frozen in a few trite phrases written and rewritten a hundred times on my immaculate sheets of foolscap. And drinking myself every evening into a wild, maudlin, emotional stupor so as to fool myself that I still feel!

How do I get out of this hell. How do you say to your heart: 'Love!'⁸⁴

And once the apparitions of Lena begin: 'Boesman's self-hatred – his own failures'.⁸⁵ For Fugard's relationship to the play is that of his relationship to Lena, and his part is embodied in the play's two men, Boesman (the failed, the violent, the complicit, the compradore, oppressor) and Outa (mortally oppressed, 'Love and Honesty' embodied). At yet another remove, according to the declensions of South Africa's racial order, Boesman the 'coloured', represents he in whom Fugard may 'recognise my bastardised identity', at once metropolitan and colonial, white and 'non-white', while Outa, whose name connotes age and seniority, represents a pre-lapsarian indigeneity, an autochthonous African self, innocent of art and the woe that prompts it. As Fugard wrote the play his attitude towards Boesman softened with his deepening understanding of 'Boesman's *shame*'⁸⁶, so that once well-set he was able to find 'weeks I've spent almost all my time, energy and consciousness on Boesman. It is now not all Lena. Boesman: There are secrets

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 167.

in my heart as well.⁸⁷ It is a petty lapse, but Fugard does not give this last sentence the inverted commas with which he ordinarily signals sketches for the utterance of his characters. The colon and the capital 'T' indicate the sentence as Boesman's, but according to the usage of its context, the *Notebooks*, it also falls back into the midden of Fugard's own thought and self-reflection there.

Fugard's 'secrets' have common currency with those of Boesman. Whether he is struggling with his failure to produce ('miscarriage'⁸⁸), his drinking, his objectification of people (particularly those he loves), his failure of 'Love and Honesty', his violence ('This killing, the keen excitement I get out of it'⁸⁹), his need to bear witness⁹⁰, his 'failure of imagination'⁹¹, or his sense of place – all of these recur as aspects of Boesman's characterisation, either directly or as he, Boesman, relates to Lena. Of all the 'secrets' the first is that of the imagination: the dependence upon the image of Lena to summon and animate the play. As work progresses that image becomes one of both Boesman and Lena, together, but still the primacy of Lena is never in doubt. Ultimately the images of the historical Lenas and Boesmans are blent into the characters they become and also, importantly, into the background, in such a way as to foreground what was background, and make the place stand for the history that produced it and all the Boesmans and Lenas that walk or ever walked there.

Fugard's inventory of Lenas (and to a lesser extent, Boesmans) is a peculiar record, somewhere between a mystic's collations of the beatific vision and the candour of a Pepys' diary. Each instance contributes to the play's Lena, or elaborates her after the fact, but most importantly, each vision presses Lena against her background, as if testing it, using her humanity to render place from the space in which she is encountered. The visions historicise Lena and they historicise the place of the play, and the fact that they aggregate as they do is evidence also of the aggregative nature of history, most especially in the experience of those who are, as the play has it, 'rubbish', and whose experience of a commodity capitalism that is their failure (in having failed them) is not only of a sense of waste, but of the way that waste, in that economy, *accumulates*. This is what Fugard's *Notebooks* record his seeing:

Another coloured woman who might have been Lena. Lived somewhere in the bush along the Glendore Road. ... I looked back at one point ... and saw the woman, empty-handed and obviously unsuccessful in her search for work, staring up the hill on her way back to Glendore.

That hill, the sun, the long walk.⁹²

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 176.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, 177.

⁸⁸ *ibid*, 110.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, 108.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, 172.

⁹¹ *ibid*, 179.

⁹² *ibid*, 166–7.

The young Boesman and Lena who passed in front of the car one night when I was waiting at a traffic light.⁹³

Yesterday another Boesman and Lena ... around five o'clock they came down the hill ... marching towards the Reserve. Most startling of all, Lena was leading a dog. Typical location mongrel ... A *doek* on her head, the same *doek*, but the blazer had disappeared. In its place, an old jersey ... only two buttons. The man had a large sack (provisions?) slung over his shoulder. Hatless – head shaven bald. (jail?) ...⁹⁴

Another encounter with the local Boesman and Lena ... passed them on the road just outside S'kop ... Looking back in the rearview mirror though ... I saw him pick up a large stone and threaten to throw it at her.⁹⁵

Tonight, Katie Grootboom – another disturbing presentiment of Lena: knife-wound in her head. Her husband, Willem Blau, is living in the bush with another woman. Katie went to him to try and get back the two-year-old child ... came to ask us for a lift ... '*Baas kan kyk,*' showing me her knife wounds, '*Ek het nie eers 'n broek of 'n onderrok.*'⁹⁶

Each avatar occupies the momentary, specific space of the vision; but collectively, called 'Lena', they inhabit a place, somewhere in the plane bounded by Korsten, Veeplaas, Missionvale, Redhouse, Swartkops. It is Boesman's great triumph (and Fugard's too) to know his world and to be able to point it out.⁹⁷ When Fugard encountered the first of the women he recognised as Lena, the one he called 'the Swartkops Lena', among the many things he noted about her – her *doek* and bloated stomach, her downcast eyes – was also '[t]he texture of that place – the mudflats – and its possibilities, exactly as imagined.'⁹⁸ Once released to his project by the annunciation(s) of Lena, he finds, '[s]ignificantly, in my days at this table now, I don't look at the map of P. E. on my wall any more, but at the blank foolscap paper on the table. It seemed impossible to start with – the enigma and mystery of that little stippled expanse beside the washed blue where Boesman and Lena spent the night ... fruitless hours staring at it.'⁹⁹ The writer in Port Elizabeth is about to become the playwright of history. As he looks away from the shallows marked on the map, he looks to the deep practice (which is his, his characters', their landscape) begun on the foolscap. Fugard is by no means the first author to find himself lost in a dark wood mid-way, or to become identified with a place, a city, in which some sense of both

⁹³ *ibid.*, 167

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 178.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 82.

⁹⁷ *Boesman and Lena*, 255.

⁹⁸ *Notebooks*, 166.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 174.

heaven and hell is prefigured. Nor is he the first to act in witness to what two guides walk him through. Nor, indeed, is he the first to come by his vision in the form of a woman met on a bridge, her eyes downcast.

Naming names

There is the evidence of the play's origins in the *Notebooks* and there is the evidence of the text itself. Increasingly, what I am arguing is that the chief purpose of Fugard's undertaking is to reveal explicit cause and to bear witness to it. The notebooks, with their exposition of the development of Lena (and Boesman) from image to idea, and from idea to character, demonstrate an almost Platonic process of causation. Fugard gives some sense of the way in which his 'images' aggregate as his 'idea', when, in passing, he derives this phrase: 'the idea, the complex of central images'¹⁰⁰. Something similar holds for the progress of space (image) into place (idea), and then from place into the 'charactered' space of the stage. Place and people are entangled in a knot that describes their operations upon one another, which is the knot of history. And the *Notebooks'* reflections upon the genesis and gestation of the play need to be set against their acute sense of history, both personal and social: the coming of the cultural boycott, the withdrawal of Fugard's passport, Ntshinga's trial and accounts of his incarceration on Robben Island, Verwoerd's assassination, the Immorality Act, the Group Areas Act, conversations with Govan Mbeki (whose 1962 trial for 'sabotage' Fugard attended)¹⁰¹, vignettes of domestic and social violence, run-ins with the Special Branch – everything from '[t]he troubled state of South Africa at this moment'¹⁰², in the wake of Sharpeville, to the 'landscape of violence and destruction' of June 1976 (or, as Fugard pointedly puts it: 'Background to our work – the horror of the Soweto Riots'¹⁰³). Insofar as Fugard's notebooks are exercises in the anthropology of his 'place', it is this history, as much as the detailed re-iteration of his figures, that 'thicken' his description. With the notebooks' investigation of the material culture and of his 'images', as well as their social relations, their acts of labour and so on, he is able to construct the kind of local history that becomes a philosophical point of honour in the play. Before ever Lena or Boesman are set to disentangle the convolutions and involutions of their 'walk', Fugard does so for himself, and the manner of his so doing is the way in which he discovers the play's argument for the relationship of history to identity, and the ethical necessity of bearing witness to history (or, locally, contextualised biography) in order to share in the social task of unmasking

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 169.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 48.

¹⁰² (1963), *ibid*, 78.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 221.

what ideology leaves 'meaningless' in all lives, but especially those at the extremes of duress. As he sets down the history of his characters he is only beginning to move from Lena's own position of unwitnessed subjective bewilderment – 'dwaal'¹⁰⁴ – towards one where it becomes possible to 'explain' the 'common predicament'.¹⁰⁵ His 'complex of central images' is worked up into the idea of the play as an act of history. Before he writes the drama of one night, he writes the history of his images:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Coega to
Veeplaas | – the first walk. One night in an empty shed at the brickfields. At Veeplaas Boesman got a job at the Zwartkops Salt Works. To begin with rented a small pondok – later built one of their own. Lena's baby born – six months later dead. First miscarriage <i>Three to five years.</i> |
| Redhouse
Kleinskool– | – working for Baas Bobbie – farmer. <i>One year.</i>
Job with Vermaak the butcher. Labourer for building contractor. <i>One year.</i> |
| Bethelsdorp
Missionvale | – Farm labourer. Brickfields. <i>Two years.</i>
– Salt works. Aloes. Lena's second miscarriage. <i>One year.</i> |
| Kleinskool | – Odd jobs. Theft – six months in jail. Lena did house-work for Vermaak. <i>Two years.</i> |
| Veeplaas | – Odd jobs. Saltpan. Chinaman. Prickly pears. <i>Two years.</i> |
| Redhouse | – Farm labourer. <i>Six months.</i> |
| Swartkops | – Building labourer. Odd jobs. Bait. <i>Two years.</i> |
| Korsten | – Odd jobs. Empties. Lena's third miscarriage. Boesman in jail again – knife fight. <i>One to two years.</i> |
| Veeplaas &
Redhouse | – Prickly pears. <i>Six months.</i> |
| Swartkops | – Bait – odd jobs. <i>Six months.</i> |
| Korsten. | – Empties. <i>One year.</i> ¹⁰⁶ |

At this stage Fugard still complains about the opacity of motivation: 'As Lena finally says, talking from inside the experience, it explains nothing. I, though, have reached a point where I need to know – if this is to be another palimpsest with the past blurred behind the present, and in turn blurring it.'¹⁰⁷ From within it may explain nothing, but that is because the technologies of identity which Lena has disposed to her by ideology

¹⁰⁴ *Boesman and Lena*, 243.

¹⁰⁵ *Notebooks*, 168.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

systematically refuse to make sense of herself this way. Her ideological donation offers her identity through agencies like fixed address, property, bank accounts, names, children, and so on – all of which are tenuous or obliterated or absent in her life. The ideology of colonial capitalism does not encourage diegetic excursions as a way to self-knowledge, particularly because narrative dangerously recurs to questions of cause that might expose the oppressive machinations of hegemony. Boesman's formulation is that of the oppressor: 'Forget it. Now is the only time in your life'.¹⁰⁸ (Indeed, the quotidian '*dwaal*' that is most people's experience of life, shaped into (non)sense by the arbitrary – or approved, endorsed – 'narrative' of photograph albums and so on, comes suspiciously close to 'proving' absurdist views of human existence – which is why the philosophy of a Camus or a Beckett, in striving for an ethics, tends to turn back to a vigorous and progressive social commitment.) Stories tend to pose questions that ask 'why' of what happens. Lena's response to Boesman's injunction to forget displays exactly the problematising potential of narrative, the character of history: 'No! Now, What's that? I wasn't born today. I want my life. Where's it?'¹⁰⁹ Stories are descriptions capable of 'thickening' into analytic insights or intuitions (as Fugard's own process of creation shows). Under certain circumstances – specifically the circumstance of 'talking from *outside* of the experience', which we might call witness – the linear (*in*) consequence of a story may be read differently, as a pattern hitherto unseen, and as a pattern capable of revealing contradictions and beginning the process of their resolution, by explaining them.

If Fugard's crude schedule of the history of his images is applied to for its patterns they readily present themselves. There are four co-ordinates to this history, (1) places, specifically the names of places, (2) labour, specifically short-term work, becoming more and more marginal, (3) the death of the child and Lena's subsequent miscarriages, (4) periods of time. In addition, there are three minor categories, occasionally noted, (5) employers, sometimes named, (6) dwellings, specifically to begin with, (7) Boesman's two jail terms. Categories (1) and (4) are the Cartesian dimensions of history, space and time, but here they are importantly local and human. The periods of time are never more than a few years (in a single place, at one occupation) and they dwindle to months towards the end. Even this describes the accelerating progress of marginalisation, as also the contribution of physical aging to the process of poverty. Collectively, Fugard's divisions describe about twenty years of adult life, but the emphasis is on division and fragmentation, as also disruption (jail) and loss (children). The miscarriages (as with the priority of the place names) display an alternative calendar for the reckoning of time, and one notes that the periods of time, besides being given last in the table, as if calculated from ~~the~~ all the

¹⁰⁸ *Boesman and Lena*, 254.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

preceding information, are also italicised, signifying another language or outside emphasis, as if this information or its means of measurement belong not to Boesman or Lena but to the witness, Fugard.

To begin with, the record of employment is specifically Boesman's (and it continues thus, implicitly, with jobs like 'Building labourer'), after the fashion of an apparently patriarchal labour market. However, as Fugard's record progresses, the jobs become less and less gendered, less and less formal and more and more marginal as they recur, in action, to foraging. 'Odd jobs', 'Prickly pears', 'Bait' and 'Empties' are presumably the undertakings of either Boesman or Lena, or both. The last three, in particular, show them having to invent their own occasions for labour, in minute markets, and it seems fair to argue the inevitability of their joint labour in such a small economy. We have, thus, the dissolution of elaborated divisions of labour (in part, argues Engels, the grounds for the monogamous bond and the nuclear family)¹¹⁰ and, instead, a new and extreme necessity for the maintenance of the union. This is an important consideration, because it underwrites speculation as to the existential reasons for Lena's commitment to Boesman and her tolerance of the violence and abuse she receives from him: quite simply, they are economically shackled, and Lena more so than Boesman. It is worth noting also that although foraging becomes their mode of subsistence, yet they do not themselves live off the direct objects of their production, there is no recourse to an atavistic hunter-gathering. Instead, what they forage only has value when passed back through the money economy – most pointedly in the diminishing scale of returns that is the traffic in empties, especially for those who themselves depend upon liquor in bottles. There is an intriguing textual grace-note to this observation and it is that in Fugard's template the descriptions of labour become replaced, in these instances, by the objects of production, so that instead of Boesman being a 'Farm labourer' or Lena doing 'housework', the human agents, and their agency, are subsumed to the commodity. We do not have them 'gathering' prickly pears, or 'collecting' bait, let alone 'selling' it; what we have is their human undertakings effaced by the primacy of the commodity, simply 'prickly pears' or 'bait'. More and more they live in a world of nouns, with all their verbs entailed.

And specifically in a world of proper nouns. Toponymy is of obvious interest to any enquiry into place, since it reveals the most overt cultural inscription of space, the most profound act of inhabiting. The business of naming not only leaves behind it the cast of 'origins' and original occupations, but it is always in some degree an act of dominion, as Adam's prerogative shows. The places among which Boesman and Lena move not only carry the code of colonisation (as implicit cause) in their names, but as names they are also subsumed to the accreted identities of Boesman and Lena as they iterate them. For Lena the confused order of

¹¹⁰ F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

places is one of 'ontological insecurity'¹¹¹, entailed in the commitment to witness properly, and her panic dominates the drama of the first act. Boesman's laughter is the derision of the powerful, because when he says 'I know my way. I know my world'¹¹², what is in evidence is his being within the symbolic code of place, the inscription of hegemonic culture in the otherwise arbitrary space through which they move. In a near-literal sense he is *in possession* of at least his sense of place, and therefore *self-possessed*, whereas for Lena the disordered and arbitrary experience of place has the effect of returning her to an inchoate space, and one with direct correlatives for her own (disorderly and arbitrary) selfhood. Indeed, the play begins with just this confusion and her concomitant dependence upon Boesman as arbiter (and author) of her place in the world. 'Here?' she asks as she enters. The question is asked not only of Boesman, but also of the place, as an enquiry into the ontological grounds of its being. By the end of the play we realise that the question is asked also of reader or audience, and that our silent assent licences the contingent space of the stage, makes of it, by imagination, the place, Swartkops, and in so doing solicits from us an act of complicity that resolves itself as witness. If we concede – believe in – the 'hereness' of the space, then our collective witness ascribes Lena her being; it is an act of community and culture that makes space for the play to take place, and in that community Lena is realised. We are all become Outa, and because we leave the theatre at the play's conclusion, he has to die with the end of the play just as the play has to end with his death.

Lena knows that the names of her '*dwaal*' might become a litany and a creed, given order. She knows that they are made sensible through dialogue, as a grammar, something recognised by the other. When Boesman tells her to 'Talk to yourself', she knows that 'I'll go mad.' But as Boesman points out she has talked to herself since 'our first walk'.¹¹³ Without the symbolic code, the language of place, she is already mad, beyond the cognitive technology of society. She is, as we say, 'in another space'. In the thick of her scrabbling for the journey's order, Boesman knows only too well that what she seeks in the names is her own identity, a sentence that can be understood 'objectively', that is from without, by others, through the grammar of society. She is looking for recognition, and Boesman's knowing this is why he blends her grasping for the order of place names with his provoking fears about her own name: 'One day you'll ask me who you are ... What about Rosie? Nice name Rose. Maria. Anna. Or Sannie! Sannie who? *Sommer* Sannie Somebody.'¹¹⁴ And Lena, who panics, 'NO!', instead of insisting upon 'Lena', drifts, seemingly arbitrarily to 'Mary. I want to be Mary.'¹¹⁵ It could be the transcription of a conversation in an asylum, but for the fact that 'Lena' is, of course, a curtailed form of 'Magdalena', and that the juxtaposition of 'Mary' with 'Magdalena' inflects Lena's wish (at some level) with a sense of

¹¹¹ *Noetbooks*, 173. Fugard follows the phrase with a question mark.

¹¹² *Boesman and Lena*, 255.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 245.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 253.

fallenness and marginality, and a corresponding desire for centrality and grace – and, of course, fertility. But Lena is evidently a subject in crisis, as the Lacanian phrase has it, and her crisis frays the lineaments of her social ‘construction’ in ways that reveal the operations of power as history, in both its senses: as the past, and as the telling of the past.

Neither she nor Boesman (and his name is redolent of colonial ascription) has a surname, what in Afrikaans is called a *van*, a toponym.¹¹⁶ In this they are sundered not only from spatial origins, but from temporal ones also – being without home ground or lineage. Instead, as Lena’s reckoning indicates, they are, as the phrase has it ‘all over the place’: Korsten, Veeplaas, Redhouse, Missionvale, Swartkops, Kleinskool, Bethelsdorp, Coega Kop. And these, or any among these, are also their parents and Lena’s dead children, all the names they have. But the names, so numinous in Lena’s enunciation, are not arbitrary. They reveal, telegraphically, the historical grounds of her vagrancy (all vagrancy), and confound moral or existential theories of her position, for they are carriers of the history of the culture(s) that inscribe them and that fashion her place in the world. Toponymy substitutes for the missing toponyms, and more pertinently. Lacking the closure of a single surname, Boesman and Lena are ‘from’ their environment. Their name, biograph(y), is their part in a wider history. Their signature, as Lena tells Outa, is vagrancy, impossible to signify monologically, being as it is both displacement and unemployment, so that neither toponym (*van*) nor occupation (say, ‘Smith’ or ‘de Boer’) can describe them: ‘Those little paths on the veld ... Boesman and Lena helped write them.’¹¹⁷ Their biography intersects with a wider history as their paths do with the named places, confusedly unable to fix origins and destinations, but, as the names indicate, essentially a history of colonisation: Korsten is named after the Dutch cadet who made good as ‘the Eastern Cape’s first merchant’¹¹⁸ at the turn of the 19th century (the village lay upon what was his property)¹¹⁹, Veeplaas means ‘stockfarm’, Redhouse connotes a prominent brick homestead, Missionvale and Bethelsdorp point to a proselytising Christianity, along with Kleinskool (‘little school’) they remind us of their function as an ideological apparatus for the coloniser, Swartkops and Coega Kop appear to be no more than descriptive of physical features (though Swartkops is animated, albeit accidentally, by the local discourse of race, and is itself an act of erasure – of the Xhosa name for the river: Qagqiwa), and yet Coega Kop, by virtue of yoking two languages, Gonaqua and Afrikaans, reminds us of the creole identity of the frontier, its provenance in colonisation, as a palimpsest of culture (and Coega = ‘(?)//Khuxa, thorny, rich in thorn’¹²⁰, a cipher of the

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ I am indebted here to Robert Shell’s observations in this regard, and to V. C. Malherbe, whose discussion paper on ‘Baptism and Identity Creation at the Cape of Good Hope, 1665–1840’ first alerted me to Shell’s insights. R. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838*, 229–32, and n. 6.

¹¹⁷ *Boesman and Lena*, 264.

¹¹⁸ L. Bryer, and S. Hunt, *The 1820 Settlers*, 30, 66.

¹¹⁹ C. Pettman, *South African Place Names*, 88

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 148.

interest in the nature of land, for agriculture, transport, warfare, since the thorniness of the Addo bush plays a marked role in frontier history)¹²¹ – as indeed does the presence of English in the mix. Encrypted here are the histories of Boesman's own name (the indigene rendered as environment, to be cut back, made productive, farmed) and Lena's (a Christian donation). Here too is the displacement of precolonial society and economy in the triumph of mercantile capitalism (the selling of prickly pears and bait, empties), the hegemony of property and fixed abode (as opposed to vagrancy, the '*vrot ou huisie vir die vrot mens*'¹²²), the coming of towns (-dorp), an ideology of individualism (whereby Korsten achieves his apotheosis), and so on. As data this gazette of places connotes, above all, the element of dispossession that underlies all colonisation. The internal evidence of the play showed this as 'explicit cause' all along: 'Blame the whiteman. Bulldozer!'¹²³

With only a skin on his back

Ross Devenish's 1973 film of the play begins with the eviction that Boesman and Lena only talk about in the play. It reinforces the historical occasion of the action. When Devenish was asked why he'd decided on showing the eviction, his reply shows a determination to cast Boesman and Lena as instances of a wider story: 'Well, what I wanted to suggest with that early sequence was that you see the people dispersing once their homes have been knocked down and the contents set on fire, and you see people disappearing in various directions, and you could have followed any of those groups and there would have been a story.'¹²⁴ Devenish is not suggesting that all these stories would necessarily have been the same, after the fashion of a vulgar determinism, but he is suggesting that Boesman and Lena are not two figures as isolated as their dark night on the mudflats of the stage would lead us to believe. He reminds us of what the drama so easily inclines us to forget – that there is an occasion outside of the played narrative and yet within the literary narrative, and that that occasion has overwhelmingly 'real' and historical correlatives. Most of the play's references to foregoing events have this historical texture (Lena's stillbirth, its biographical intimacy, is an exception): the eviction, the dog, the empties, Boesman's jail term, and so on. All of these are familiar to the quotidian sociology of any South African who has read the newspapers or driven the roads of that period (and the *Notebooks* confirm this, they set down what we have all seen). And the eviction is the most manifestly historical instance of all.

¹²¹ P. Anderson, 'The Human Clay', 54ff.

¹²² *Boesman and Lena*, 254.

¹²³ *ibid*, 240.

¹²⁴ Stephen Gray, 'Fugard on Film': Interview with Ross Devenish (Johannesburg, 13 June 1980), *Athol Fugard*, 133.

Squatter evictions in the South Africa of 'grand' apartheid are but the most immediate of the consistent assault upon the tenure of the poor under capitalism. As we have seen, the origins of modern vagrancy are bound up in the dissolution of feudal tenure and the creation, by clearance, of a mobile and impoverished class of wage labourer. The point is that in the first instance the vagrant is that person dispossessed of customary tenure under feudal obligations in Europe and set loose upon the roads in pursuit of wages and a tenant occupation of the land (often in the 'free' spaces of the towns). This circumstance is intensified with the great enclosures of the commons in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the clearances of marginal lands like the Highlands, and, significantly, the colonial hinterlands. Among the most intense of such clearances, undertaken by a veteran of the Highland exercises in the person of John Graham, was the Zuurveld campaign of 1811–12.

Ndlambe met Graham's invasion with the most glamorous declaration in the centuries-long conflict in the Cape. Responding to Landdrost Cuyler's ultimatum at the Sundays River, Ndlambe rose enraged:

Here is no honey, I will eat honey, and to procure it shall cross the rivers Sundays, Coega and Swartkops. This country is mine. I won it in war and shall keep it.¹²⁵

It is a far cry from the subjection of Boesman and Lena (but, of course, the war to which Ndlambe refers is yet another historical marker, for his victory was over, among others, the Gonaqua Khoi of the area) and just how far a cry may be seen from the extraordinary echo Lena supplies:

Hey, you know what I was thinking just now. *Blikkie kondens milk*. What do you say? If we get lots of prawns. Sugar's not enough man. I want some real sweetness. Then you can be as *bedonnerd* as you like.¹²⁶

And she begins the first verse of her song, 'shuffling out a few dance steps'. For his part, Ndlambe had shaken his spear, 'stamping his foot violently on the ground'¹²⁷. The tin of condensed milk – which Lena pairs with the wine that will get Boesman '*bedonnerd*' – marks a revealing development, for the honey that Ndlambe sought to gather beyond the Swartkops is *veldkos*, the provender of nature, whereas Lena's sweet tooth leads her directly into the elaborations of the colonial economy: her compound of milk and sugar is condensed and packaged in steel, as food goes it could hardly be further from the productive earth. On her

¹²⁵ MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 101.

¹²⁶ *Boesman and Lena*, 249.

¹²⁷ MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 101.

Swartkops she even has to harvest prawns (here bait for the fishing of others) to procure the cash to pay for the milk that has been rendered down and compounded and tinned. This is how far she has been distanced from the productive resources of the ground upon which she stands, and how complex her engagement with the social economy has become. When Graham had cleared the Zuurveld and a settler population was being sought in England, the cartoonist Cruikshank satirised Lord Charles Somerset's propagandistic inducements, ascribing to the Governor's utterance the Biblical promise of Canaan: the Zuurveld was, said Cruikshank's Somerset, '[a] Garden of Eden!, [a] second Paradise ... You'll be up to your neck in milk and honey'.¹²⁸ Meanwhile the missionary James Read explained to Graham the economy of the Bethelsdorp Khoisan, craving Graham to remove the obstacles he was throwing in the way of a people 'accustomed to get their bread by cutting wood, burning lime and gamma ash, seeking honey, shooting game, picking rushes for matts [sic], etc. etc.'¹²⁹ The English metaphor by which 'bread' connotes subsistence here anticipates exactly Boesman and Lena's alienation in the economy of the 20th century eastern Cape, where they forage not for their own honey, but to buy the bread of others.

The history of the Fourth Frontier War is not our project¹³⁰, but its central character of dispossession and its cumulative effect upon, especially, the indigenous Khoisan of the area, underlies *Boesman and Lena*. It was in the wake of Graham that Korsten arrived to set up a salt beef business, with a commisariat contract for British troops in Mauritius.¹³¹ A tannery and cooperage followed, as did a mill, whaling and the first substantial trading store.¹³² By 1819, even before the British settlers arrived, Korsten owned a canteen in Grahamstown.¹³³ All these activities engineer the economic landscape of Boesman and Lena (and even Kaatje Kekkelbek), just as they reiterate one of the 'places' – Korsten – around which they orbit. The canteen in Grahamstown might become Kaatje's or prefigure the one at which Boesman delivers his empties and buys his wine (there was one on the Swartkops by 1817¹³⁴). While Korsten's beef processing anticipates Lena's processed milk, specifically it requires salt, as is still produced at Coega. In 1812 a Commission of Circuit found that the 'lazy and idle' residents of Bethelsdorp mission station should be made productive, as labourers for Korsten and others, or in gathering salt.¹³⁵ Already the destination of dispossessed Khoi is described. The propellants were not only successive dispossessions, at the hands of Xhosa and Colony, but also vicious labour conditions

¹²⁸ G. Cruikshank, 'The Cape of Fodorn Hope' CA, M39.

¹²⁹ Read – Graham, 5 June 1812, CA, CO 2582.

¹³⁰ Ben MacLennan's *A Proper Degree of Terror* is the standard. For the spatial history of the clearance and the settlement of the Zuurveld, see my own MLitt thesis, 'The Human Clay'.

¹³¹ MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 142.

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*, 203.

¹³⁴ MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror*, 175.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, 152.

(testimony of Boer abuses litters the archive of the London Missionary Society¹³⁶, who ran Betheldorp and dominated the later Kat River settlement, as also the proceedings of the later select Committee on Aborigines in London in 1835–6¹³⁷) and especially legal conditions of labour. The Caledon Code of 1809 and Cradock's Proclamation of 1812 variously and intensely curtailed the liberty of Khoi in the Colony, effectively reducing them to bonded servitude and, by criminalising free movement, ruling out the prospect of any alternative within the colonial economy.¹³⁸ Only on the mission stations did the vision of a free Khoi citizenry hold out, and that travelled to the Kat River with the many Betheldorp residents who were the Settlement's pioneers, among them Andries Stoffels, who at the time of Kaatje Kekkelbek, told the Select Committee on Aborigines,

you often see a Hottentot who had spent his days in the service of the government, with only a skin on his back, walking about the streets. The Hottentot has no water, he has not a blade of grass, he has no lands, he has no wood, he has no place where he can sleep...¹³⁹

Fugard knows that the cause of *Boesman and Lena* is colonialism and its South African racial order. His *dramatis personae* is specific about this, describing Boesman, Lena and Outa as only 'a Coloured man', 'a Coloured woman' and 'an old African'.¹⁴⁰ That the chief descriptors are racial is obviously significant, and that 'colouredness' is here offset against the category of 'African' even more so. Outa's being Xhosa and a man do not figure in Fugard's classification, because it is his character of Africanness, with its wider significance that counts. As a marker of continental primordality, a kind of autochthony, Outa's Africanness points up the deracination of the coloured. Even in the divisive and attritional racial order of South African society there is no 'place' for a Boesman or a Lena. But the figure of Africa, ancient, alone, on the cusp of language, is an inadequate *genius locus*. Mawkish to any decade after Johnny Clegg's Juluka, Outa is something that does not even survive a night in the 1970s. The truth is, of course, that the old Africa, that of the romantic evocations of Haggard or Buchan, is long since overrun; more so, that the colonisation of Africa, its clearance and eviction, was undertaken first at the expense of its Boesmans and Lenas, and then with them as compradore agents. This is the key to the madness of Boesman's self-hatred and his cheering the bulldozer, "Push it over, my *baas!*"

¹³⁶ See *Transactions of the London Missionary Society*, or any of the correspondence between Van der Kemp or Read and the government, e.g. Read – Cuyler, 5 September 1812, CA, CO 2582. Even Graham considered the mission stations 'asylums' for Khoisan in the service of 'the Cruel Farmer', Graham – Bird (Col. Sec.), 1 September 1812, CA, CO 2582.

¹³⁷ *Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, 1835–6.

¹³⁸ Malherbe most deftly supplies the history and effect of these laws. V. C. Malherbe, 'The Cape Khoisan in the Eastern Districts of the Colony Before and After Ordinance 50 of 1828', 23, 43, 46–7, 69.

¹³⁹ Evidence of A. Stoffels, *Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines*, 583ff.

¹⁴⁰ *Boesman and Lena*, 238.

'*Dankie, baas!* *Weg is ons*'.¹⁴¹ The absurdity of that position is not existential, it is acutely historical. The history of Bethelsdorp and the Kat River Settlement, of all the frontier wars, is riven with the ambivalent position of the Khoi, caught between Colony and Xhosa, between clientage and resistance. And this, again, is the key to Lena's 'going over' to Outa, and Boesman's panic at her new power then, and especially when Outa lies dead among them, for Lena's act is historically anticipated – it is what the colony calls 'Rebellion', and it brings the forfeiture of even the '*bloedgrond*'¹⁴² and all the sanction against treason. It is an act which chooses a route back into history, but against hegemonic history, and it necessarily entails great risk.

Where Boesman has sided, even against himself, with the *baas* and his bulldozer, Lena chooses the ruined Xhosa man. Her choice imitates that of those 'colonial' Khoisan, at the Kat River Settlement, Theopolis and other missions or townships around the frontier, who 'crossed over' to the Xhosa side in the 8th frontier war of 1851–3. The 'Rebellion', as it was plainly termed, expressed various things: disappointment at white settler hostility to the Kat River Settlement and the project of a free citizenry of colour in the Colony, acute frustration at continued restrictions upon free movement and at colonial agitation for a vagrancy law to encompass all Khoi movement, disquiet about colonial designs upon the land of mission settlements and about relations with traders and employers, and some lasting identification with the Rharharbe Xhosa, especially Maqoma's people, upon whose land the Kat River Settlement was tenuously located and who moved among the Khoisan settled there and who were, often enough, kin of some or other degree. The ideological fallout of the missions, and the founding rhetoric of the Settlement particularly, along with the attribution of citizenship and liberty through Ordinance 50 and then the experience of organised resistance to colonial agitation around vagrancy – all these conduced to a sense of corporate identity that some have argued amounted to some species of nationalism.¹⁴³ The causes of the Rebellion were legion, but in part they were realised by the spatial and historical proximity of *emaXhoseni*, and a sense of Khoisan nationhood somehow to do with a shared history of dispossession, abuse, disappointment, conflict and so on. 'The Kafirs and the Hottentots came together like Bucks and Sheep,' said the Khoisan rebel Windvogel, 'and all I heard was that the war was to be against the Settlers and not against the Government.'¹⁴⁴ The pattern of allegiance between Khoisan and Xhosa was old – precolonial – as was the example of tributary submission and incorporation, and besides – and this is also what Lena acknowledges – on the frontier social categories imitate fortifications and earthworks, paths and squatter homesteads in their universal character of friability: in the duress

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, 240.

¹⁴² J. B. Peires, 'Piet Draghoender's Lament', *Social Dynamics* 14 (2), 1988, 7, 11. And see p. 000 above.

¹⁴³ S. Trapido, 'The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of 'Hottentot Nationalism', 1815–1834, *Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, vol. 17, ICS.

¹⁴⁴ C. Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770–1865*, E. Elbourne, 'Freedom at Issue', *Slavery and Abolition*, 15, 2, (1994), 143

of frontier history, which is conflict, stormy weather, all these become mud. 'Mud! Swartkops!' is how Lena answers her own original question, 'Here?' It is an answer to an enquiry into destination, and as such it treats of origins as well: the dark(er) indigene is the human clay upon which the sea bears down, as a bulldozer churns good ground to profitless mud. Lena's 'Here?' is the occasion – the here present, the summoning – of history. In her construction (and in her apparition, as we have seen) she is a regional and specific Clio – not just Fugard's muse, but his (and our) muse of history. Hers is the share of all those whose 'here' is attended by a question mark, all those, therefore, who are the subjects of history and whose present must prove inevitably uncertain in the mutable truth of History (which is why witness is an ethical imperative) and in the truth of mutable time (which is history as it happens to all of us, the entropic fact).

Historic Highway 101

Recently Fugard has returned to *Boesman and Lena*, both obliquely and directly, and intriguingly after the fashion of this essay, in which the *Notebooks* and the account of creative conception are read as one with the play itself. In fact, this has always been the case in Fugard's presentation of the text of the play – the introduction to its editions has always framed the text within recollection and the record of the notebooks, as if to assert the particularly historical occasion of the play, and to embed it in the witness of fact, outside of the fictive operations of the drama. Now Fugard has written a story, 'To Whom it *Must* Concern', prefaced with 'Pages from a Notebook', each part of one whole, roughly equal in length, and recurring specifically to the instance of *Boesman and Lena* in ways which confirm much of my argument here, although it was developed before Fugard's *Karoo and Other Stories* was published (2005).

'Pages from a Notebook' concerns itself with the process of the subsequent story's conception, but does so within a considerable exegesis of the origins of a thematic interest begun in *Boesman and Lena*. Fugard's latest disclosure of his working notebooks is, in fact, interlarded with excerpts from the same sections of the previously published *Notebooks* that concern the genesis of *Boesman and Lena* and that have been extensively quoted here.¹⁴⁵ Although the latest notebooks and the story are to do with the subject of a woman's apparent suicide and the guilt of the train driver whose locomotive runs her down, yet Fugard's preoccupation remains with

¹⁴⁵ A. Fugard, *Karoo and Other Stories*, 127–9.

Women walking. Pumla Lolwana is not the only powerful and virtually nameless presence in my life. She has sisters. My notebooks record a few other destitute women who have walked across my path leaving their shadows on my walk.¹⁴⁶

And he reaches back to the 1960s, as we have here, to consider their significance. One thing he does not seem to recognise, however, despite his own provocative formulation, 'who have walked across my path', in the context of a story that comes to be written from the point of view of a white train driver called Roelf Visagie, across whose tracks a woman walks to her death, is the manifest correspondence between author and engine driver, and, we may begin to suggest, between playwright and bulldozer. Indeed, the engine of 'To Whom it *Must* Concern' is Visagie's quest for the identity of the woman he has run down, which quest brings him to what Fugard calls 'the world of the pondok' (noting of himself that '*Boesman and Lena* was my first deep journey into the world of the pondok')¹⁴⁷, and to his own annihilation. Visagie's quest for the woman's identity is specifically the quest for a name, which is exactly what the author undertakes, by definition, in seeking to find words to express things. The business of the author is putting words to the world, the extrapolation of naming.

The story that Fugard develops is begun in the actual newspaper report of a woman who throws herself and her children in front of a train on the Cape Flats, but Fugard transposes it to the bush outside Port Elizabeth, the world of Redhouse and Swartkops and Motherwell, again. Visagie tells us, as Fugard might, that

Trying to find out who she was has led me to some strange places and that bush was the first one. Thorn bush hey! ... I walked that bush high and low three times.¹⁴⁸

The bush stands for the opacity of identity in history, for the difficulty of the quest (one of the reasons we know it is a quest is the numinous strangeness of the place, another is the typical three attempts) and, as we have seen, for the pervasive and obdurate character of conflict in colonialism. Fugard himself has been to the bush three times, too: as himself in the 1960s (gestating *Boesman and Lena*), in the play, and now in the story. We are allowed to make these comparisons, as I have been insisting all along, because of Fugard's own thematic insistence upon the concurrence and involvement of history and art. The diptych of 'Pages from a Notebook' and 'To Whom it *Must* Concern' is, in fact, titled 'Fact and Fiction' – that is its overarching concern, even its transcendent theme, and its implicit interest to the kind of criticism Fugard solicits (and solicits from himself in this peculiarly dialogical text).

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 127.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 140.

The deeper reach of this 'deep journey' is more than merely a conflation of the (auto)biographical with the fictive output of an artist. It has to do with the interpenetration of history and art, and with the author's complicity in history, in the act of witness, in brokering this fusion. Now that Fugard is seventy or more, it is perhaps not surprising to find him revisiting the 'explicit cause' of his early work and finding not only history there, but his own history and the sheer fact of himself as historian – as Prospero appointing his island. It was not quite so simple to read *Boesman and Lena* and to discern Fugard in the cab of the bulldozer, offstage, apostrophised as 'Baas' by Boesman, as it now is to see Fugard in the cab of the train staring down through Visagie's eyes at the woman who is always crossing his tracks, beseeching him for her identity before history bears down on her. But the playwright is an agent of history too, sharing in the explicit cause of the bulldozer, driving the play into action.

What Visagie offers the woman, just as Boesman does Lena, and Lena Boesman, and Outa Lena, and Fugard all of them, is witness. It is the irony and the anguish of Fugard's position that he must share in the task of the bulldozer even as he witnesses the erasure it causes. For the writer does not – cannot – lie outside of history. The witness he offers is only ever the witness of history – that these people happened, were happened upon, and in a history that always annihilates what it also makes happen. The author may indict the workings of history in the tragedy of humankind, but he is also historian, who only works with what history has wrought. There is no other way and this makes the cause of art, here *Boesman and Lena*, explicit not only in the sense of being openly disclosed, but also in the bibliographical sense as pertains to the manner in which texts can be (as were once) known by their implicit or their explicit, by their opening words or their closing ones. The implicit of *Boesman and Lena* is 'Here?', the explicit is 'It's dark'. The stage is called into being by the darkness all around it, its witness is 'our little life' and it 'is rounded with a sleep'.¹⁴⁹

'Is it as simple as Stalin's cynical remark that a thousand deaths are a statistic and one death a tragedy?' asks Fugard.¹⁵⁰ Yet Stalin's remark is not so much cynical as realistic. It is not within the compass of human comprehension to accommodate a scale of tragedy beyond the self or the few selves among which the self is constituted. This prescribes the scope of art's treatment of tragedy, but not the scale of its reference. Visagie says of the woman who stands in front of his train: '[b]efore that she was just some woman from the bush.'¹⁵¹ Her place in front of the train is a representative one, it refers her to all who face explicit history, all women walking to their end, from Eve to Pumla Lolwana. For his part, Fugard now finds the archetype of his walking woman in the figure of his mother:

¹⁴⁹ *The Tempest*, IV, I, 157–8.

¹⁵⁰ Fugard, *Karoo*, 103.

Women walking. Always women. Is the reason for that as simple as the early childhood memory I have of my mother, possibly the earliest? She was trudging heavily and wearily up the hill to where we lived and I had run to meet her. She was dispirited and depressed after a bad day at the bakery where she worked and it was a terrible shock to see her like that. She was the central and most important presence in my life. Seeing her defeated meant that my whole world was in danger of collapsing. In the years that followed I saw my mother, metaphorically speaking, trudging up that hill many times.¹⁵²

It doesn't take a Freud to note the creative function of a mother, a creativity no less 'central and most important' in Fugard's life. Her 'bad day' is at a bakery, what is more – a place dedicated to kneading, shaping, leavening and cooking – to creating – specifically bread, the established symbol of life and the body in the Christian world. The terrible shock of his mother's 'dispirited' self is not only the distress of a child at the exhaustion of a parent, but of a believer at the realisation that the spirit is gone out of the body, that the god has forsaken the temple. This is an historical insight – that the progress of time is also towards a consciousness of the dis-spirited nature of our selves. This is the consciousness of history, not as apocalyptic fulfillment, but entropic erosion, not as culmination (in which we are made sense of), but as sprawl (in which we are lost sight of). Similarly, Fugard's 'depressed' mother is connotatively an 'oppressed' mother, in the sense, at least, of a person (a creative person) failing under the pressure of social circumstances. And for Fugard the image, of a Sisyphean mother, expands into the recurrent and enduring metaphor of so much of his art. We need only rephrase that sentence with the alteration of a single preposition to make our argument clear: for Fugard the image expands into the recurrent and enduring image *for* his art.

Bulldozer, train, author: these are the 'terrible instruments'¹⁵³ of history. The project of Fugard's art – to bear witness to the terrible – separates the author from the engines, in intent and in culpability, but not altogether. The witness of art does not mitigate the suffering of history – if anything it makes the suffering more acute by accentuating the tragic character of history, by making that more conscious in ordinary lives. What the author accomplishes is akin to the more 'conscious death' for which Camus strives.¹⁵⁴ He cannot kill or resurrect with his work, nor substantially deflect the course of history, the train, nor dissuade its hapless driver from a course he must take. The best he can do is to make sure that the woman on the tracks, or the evicted Boesman and Lena, are seen and named, and that they more fully realize what is happening to them. Fugard finds in the 'world of the pondok' – that marginal existence, the bush out of which women cross the lethal tracks – his abiding sense of the historical grind.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 136.

¹⁵² *ibid*, 130.

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 116. Fugard uses the phrase of a train.

Again, it is not the annihilation of death that is absurd, but that the misery of life should be to no avail, that the attritional history of so many lives occasions no redemption. When the elegists of the Old English poems looked with horror upon their history of wandering and the prospect of being cast back into that condition, they took their consolation from a combination of Teutonic heroicism, courage in the face of useless odds, and the prospect of a Christian redemption through travail. The Seafarer is called by the migratory cuckoo to the greater reality of a life adrift; for him vagrancy is peregrination. Fugard, like Camus, sees that there is no farther shore, and extends the deep disquiet of all, as the Beowulf poet expressed it, at the unknown destination:

No man can tell,
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran
knows for certain who salvaged that load.¹⁵⁵

It is not death that is absurd, but that the history that bears us towards it, and by which we must endure our going hence even as our coming in, is human and humanly flawed, when this life, and not some other, should offer all we might hope for of the good.

In the evenings, in California (as in Port Elizabeth decades ago), Fugard walks, and his notebooks are filled with the record of these contemplative vagrancies. Usually he takes to the beach, sometimes he walks alongside the railway. In mind of his story about Pumla Lotwana he comes 'to stand between [the tracks] and stare along their length ... those parallel rails ... [t]here is something hypnotic and strangely menacing in the illusion of convergence as they stretched away from me.'¹⁵⁶ Parallel lines are what we write between; the hypnotic but menacing illusion of convergence is the temptation, or the lie, of art. Is what we witness convergence or polarity? Is it the ruse of art to make the eternal character of existence – of division and conflict and separateness— appear, like railway tracks, to have a point, and a point accomplished at the vanishing? Or does art hold out a vision of an integration beyond the horizon of our comprehension? The train bears down regardless, but how we regard the lines (one might say either philosophically or rhetorically) is the ethical summons to, and of, art.

Here is that summons to witness at work in a last walk with Fugard:

Another alternative to my beach walk is along a stretch of 'Historic Highway 101' as it skirts the Pensaquitos Marsh. This one gives me a chance to study the wonderful variety of water birds in the marsh. It is also a very schizoid experience as it involves walking the line between two starkly

¹⁵⁴ A. Camus, 'The Wind at Djemila', *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 73–9. '...I feel certain that the true, the only, progress of civilization ... lies in creating conscious deaths' (77).

¹⁵⁵ *Beowulf*, trans. Seamus Heaney, 50–2.

¹⁵⁶ Fugard, *Karoo*, 111.

contrasting worlds: stretching away from me on the one side is the serene marsh, its self-contained silence broken only by the high, piping calls of curlews and sandpipers, and on the other side, just a few feet away from me as I walk along the very narrow verge, the never ending rush and roar of traffic on the highway. On this evening's walk the birds were all there in the distance waiting in the muddy channels of the marsh for the incoming tide to reach them: herons and egrets, Long-billed Curlews and whimbrels and godwits, sandpipers and plovers. I had my binoculars focused on a Great Blue Heron when a blue and white Coaster rode into its field of vision. Distance and the soft light of the evening had once again made it very innocent, a thing of beauty; it could so easily have been a little toy train on the floor of a young boy's bedroom and not the terrible instrument a despairing soul would use to end a life.¹⁵⁷

What exactly does Fugard witness? Which world? The artistry of his binoculars turns his back on the Historic Highway. It conflates his (binoculars') field of vision and the heron's in a misplaced pronoun ('its' should be 'theirs'), confusing subject and object in that which relates them (call it history, the predicate). It works with distance and soft light once again to make matters 'very innocent, a thing of beauty', something that 'could so easily have been'. The binoculars, too, are a terrible instrument. Through them we discover the Swartkops mudflats to be twinkling with waders in the soft light of distance, another birder's paradise, and by them we risk turning our backs on the national road as it crosses the estuary towards the north-east and the bush and the corrosive, recessive, colonial frontier – the historical highway.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, 115–16.

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5. 'No trace of his living': the vagrant history of J. M. Coetzee

Origins and destinations

We are not done with the origins, the history, of vagrants, but we come now to consider the peculiarly literary business of destination. In the main all vagrants walk out of history and into literature – or at least texts. The vagrant begins in social and economic rupture, is accused of insubordination by a coming order, and in that accusation becomes the lasting artefact of culture. If, in both history and literature, the vagrant begins in ephemera – court records, pamphlets, popular *reçit* – then his and her passage is towards the confirmatory destination of hegemony, as ultimately in the elevated discourses of philosophy and literature, and their intersection. The destination of the vagrant is not the flyovers and railway arches, nor the overnight cell or proverbial ditch: these are places through which the vagrant is always passing, and at which no arriving can happen. The only destination – culmination – of the vagrant is ideological (being ideological) and discursive, and thus is in literature and philosophical literature, perhaps pre-eminently. In an almost-too-obvious sense, this is the only place in which the vagrant is settled.

This study began in the unremarkable observation that the vagrant – that inordinate and thereby negligible social subject – enjoys a radical and disproportionate significance in the artifacts of hegemonic culture. There we find tramping the object of Orwell, and tramps waiting nowhere on nothing in Beckett. Poor Tom erupts out of the storm on the heath at the heart of the tragedy that is (at least to 20th and 21st century tastes) at the heart of the playwright at the heart of English literature. The peculiarly attractive liberty of the vagrant, and the painfully exemplary constraint of the same, make for a subject of great utility to literary 'thought', embodying contradictions with obvious analogies to the existential (and social, political) reckoning of human experience. Overall, and with considerable and complex – and significant – inflection, this is the practice of the vagrant discovered to us by literature (and not discovered by literature *ex nihilo*). In South Africa, this 'high end' literary treatment of the vagrant grows out of ethnographies of the Khoisan, popular representations, the iconography of Khoisan itinerants, both popular and state propaganda against free Khoisan and escaped and freed slaves, and the archival witness of those populations' 'settlement' within the colonial order. It is inflected with Romantic representations of travellers and 'passagers', often lone figures, ranging from the

earliest literature, such as the *Adventures of Colonel Mrs Somerset*,¹ through the caricature types of Bonaparte Blenkins² and Prester John to more substantial refugees like Schreiner's Lyndall or Gordimer's Smaleses (and it revels in correspondences between the colonial travelogue and the vagrant's peregrinations). It culminates in explicit treatments of vagrants which are among the capstones of South African modern literature, in Fugard, and above all, in the writing of J. M. Coetzee.

There are several hazards in using Coetzee's work as a point of conclusion for this study. In the first place, there is sufficient to be said about Coetzee's itinerants to justify an entire thesis, rather than a concluding chapter. Secondly, if anything Coetzee's writing marks as much of a new origin in South African letters as it does the culmination of prior trajectories. And thirdly, critical responses to Coetzee have grown in number and amplitude alongside his own fortunes as a literary figure, and now explode as the industry of the Nobel Prize. This thesis is among the last that might conceivably treat of his work from a point of view that is not dedicatedly specialist. Overall, this represents a considerable 'arrival' for an oeuvre begun in the fugitive offices of Ravan Press in the 1970s, in post-modern feints and thrusts, smoke and mirrors, and, pronouncedly, in the figure of the vagrant (or its avatar) which dominates the three major early novels: *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Age of Iron*. This last observation – of the prevalence of the vagrant in Coetzee, of Coetzee's predilection for the vagrant, in particular, a predilection that I am here going to describe as Epicurean – would alone suffice to justify this study, and in a way it was the origin of this thesis, just as it is now its destination.

I want to conclude with Coetzee not only in order to demonstrate the provenance of his itinerants in the discursive transfer between early modern vagrancy and the figuration of the colonial indigene, but also in order to show, as we have been doing throughout, how deeply the vagrant practises the philosophy of history. Coetzee is exceptionally useful in both cases. His vagrants are discernibly descended from specific European types, and participate in the transfer of those type attributes to representative local people. And Coetzee's 'vagrant' novels have from their outset been explicitly and critically identified with excursions into the philosophy of history. Not only does Coetzee himself point us in this direction with the epigraph from Flaubert that

¹ This extraordinary novel, blent of shipwreck narrative and humanitarian propaganda, traces the encounter of Mrs Somerset with indigenes of the Cape hinterland. It anticipates Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* in important ways: above all in the seminal project of vegetable gardening undertaken by Mrs Somerset among her hosts. Agriculture becomes her great economic and philosophical donation. The figure of Zillah, too, is of the trajectory towards Coetzee – she is an interstitial, racially indeterminate, isolate figure, and in this reconciles the agency of Somerset with the fact of 'other' indigeneity. I. D. Fenton (ed.) *Adventures of Colonel Mrs Somerset*. And see Ian Glenn, 'The Future of the Past in South African Literary History', *QBSAL*, 51, 1.

² C. Bundy, 'Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen', Beinart et al (eds), *Putting a Plough to the Ground*.

appears in his first novel and directs us to the primary importance of the philosophy of history, but critical responses to his work have always presumed a problematisation of history to be among the novels' foremost and persistent (and most valuable) undertakings.³ The correspondence between a repeated interest in inordinate figures (itinerant indigenes or near-vagrants or vagrants) and the philosophy of history thickens the instance begun in Fugard and in which we have seen the Cape vagrant's deep practice discovered as something akin to the author's (and our) muse of history. In Coetzee that relationship is even more fraught than in Fugard, and it marks an opportune 'destination' for this thesis because of the manner in which Coetzee attempts to settle the matter that so unsettles him. Of course, Coetzee is too canny to hold out fixities; that 'settlement' is left unaccomplished, but it is tried and failed at, for reasons which are our interest.

Their tongues doubled

It is a peculiar inevitability of futurist novels that they belong more to their history than to the futures they imagine. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is redolent of the Cold War at its Berlin Airlift-grimmest, but imaginatively adrift of the 1980s. Of course, Orwell was never seeking to predict a specific future, and nor was J. M. Coetzee in writing *Life and Times of Michael K*, but the formal preoccupation with future time, albeit of an arbitrary specificity, has the hazardous effect of intensifying the historicity of the present history in which the book is produced. It is as if, in floating the fantasy of a future that is unknowable, the author has had to subtract from the gravity of the real future and balance the equation of history with a correspondingly redoubled present gravity. Thus it is that *Life and Times of Michael K* is adrift of the actual outworking of the South African revolution, and is now mawkish as a novel about that superficial circumstance – distractingly so – but, instead, is a rich text for quarrying the angst of the 1980s. It is a novel that

³ J. M. Coetzee, *Dusklands*, 'What is important is the philosophy of history' precedes 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee'. The critical field of Coetzee studies is too vast to be gone into in detail here, but since the earliest responses of Stephen Watson (writing on 'Colonialism and the Novels of J. M. Coetzee' before *Age of Iron* was written), David Attwell (now eminent in the field, his PhD on Coetzee coming in 1991, but already addressing 'The Problem of History in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee' in 1990), Derek Attridge (also now eminent, also at work since the early 90s on matters of ethics and politics, essentially historical concerns), history has always been to the fore. Rita Barnard ('Dream Topographies: J. M. Coetzee and the South African Pastoral', 1994) has reckoned with the particularly *spatial* history of Coetzee's vision (which aspect of spatiality is also to the fore of Coetzee's own critical interests in *White Writing*, where he concerns himself with the history of visual genres in representing the South African landscape, and with the topos of the farm, as it effects an Afrikaans tradition, and which lies behind his own work). The appearance of Michael Green's *Novel Histories* in 1997 – although it treats of Coetzee no more or less than other authors surveyed – seems stimulated in no small degree by the historical gravity of Coetzee's oeuvre (of course, this gravity is felt in Gordimer and others also; it is an inescapable force of the acutely historical pass of South Africa in the last half of the 20th century). One contribution of inestimable value in Green's book is the consideration of Romanticism and history (143ff), not specifically in the case of Coetzee, but, as with Barnard's work, in ways that are suggestive of Coetzee's provenances and impasses.

has come to be about itself rather than about what its author sought to represent; this is a general hazard of future prognostications, however arbitrarily they may be projected, and it is one of great use to criticism, precisely for the way in which it accentuates the common and inescapable 'debt' to history. The more an author seeks to evade current circumstance, the more powerfully it incurs upon the text that would be free of it – to the point of becoming the major matter of the work.

At the heart of *Michael K*, then, we find not only an allegory of the individual in history, but something more to do with a representation of white nightmare in the 1980s in South Africa. That the novel is particularly about the agony of the artist's place in political history, called either to apologetics or advocacy, has always been evident, but it becomes more acutely so, more biographically so, with the passage of time. Since the publication of Coetzee's *Boyhood* the landscape of K's Karoo liberty and that of Coetzee's own childhood bliss have become identical. In fact, I would suggest that it is precisely the distortions of passing time – the way in which the emphasis of the novel is becoming thrown upon the Coetzee of the 80s rather than his intended allegory – which have prompted Coetzee's autobiographical excursions in the years since South Africa's transition to democracy. The historical fantasies of his first four novels in particular (*Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K*) – all of which seek by extravagant devices to elude historical fixture, and all of which come to suffer exactly that fixture as history itself is 'disclosed' – have summoned from their author the autobiographical disclosure that he has now made, and have done so because the passage of time has made the books more and more obviously about when they were written and by whom they were then written. *Boyhood* and *Youth* authorise the critical conjunction of biographical, historical and literary interest in the texts.

These autobiographies, then, become the *Confessions* by which we are to read Coetzee's *Social Contract*, or, indeed, his *City of God*. They are not the key to the novels – though Coetzee might wish that they were, that is not what we are after – but they have an interaction with the novels which is (inter)textual and which leaves all reagents altered. My purpose here is limited: I seek only to investigate Coetzee's fantasy of the vagrant, and its relationship to his authorship. To do so, I intend to adduce not only the complex and elusive evidence of the novels themselves (particularly *Life and Times of Michael K*), but also that of the autobiographies in interacting with them (as also Coetzee's own manifest interest in autobiography itself).⁴ How great, for example, and how suggestive is the passage from Coetzee's first sentences in *Dusklands*:

⁴ J. M. Coetzee, 'Truth in Autobiography'.

My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that. Here goes.⁵

to the opening of *Boyhood*:

They live on a housing estate outside the town of Worcester, between the railway line and the National Road.⁶

From the abrupt, neurotically strident first-person declarations of Eugene Dawn we are brought to the dispassionate, third-person history of Coetzee. We ought to remember, also, and at all times, that what follows Eugene Dawn's statement of self is the sentence: 'Coetzee has asked me to revise my essay.'⁷ It is the essay in revision with which we are here concerned, if formally, because it implies or intends the revision of the vagrant. Derek Attridge has recently discouraged the allegorical reading of Coetzee on literary grounds,⁸ but the discouragement arises also, ultimately, because the allegory has proved unfounded in historical happenstance and (I am arguing) Coetzee would now have us believe that the significance of the novels is founded instead in the confessions of the memoirs. For all that *Michael K* is, or *was*, a novel about the evasion of history, the irony is that Coetzee has brought the text firmly back into the camp of his historical intentions for it, re-educating it and us to its 'proper' destination. The vagrant propensities of fiction, of imaginative liberty, have been curbed by the confession of the biographical reality in which the purpose of the fictions is settled. Of course (and Coetzee would be the first to make the effort) there are grounds for doubting the veracity of any history, and for emphasising instead the common textual being of both the novels and the memoirs. That is a kind of muddling in which this thesis has happily participated, but the authority of the author's account of himself nonetheless predominates in the *melée*.

This study has deliberately muddled 'Kaatje Kekkelbek' with its historical context and the biography of its author, and shown how the text itself participates in both, not only as evidence, but also as agent. In the case of *Boesman and Lena*, Fugard's notebooks and layered revisitations of those notebooks, as well as the deeper history of the vagrant in the eastern Cape, have been placed alongside the play (or the text of the play), as well as alongside the 'lendings' of other texts, toponymies, landscapes, historical fragments, in order to elucidate the 'whole' text as it emerges in practice and apprehension. Both textual studies have been intended to explore the manner in which the texts are complicated by history even as they write it. Both, also, have been

⁵ Coetzee, *Dusklands*, 1.

⁶ Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 1.

⁷ Coetzee, *Dusklands*, 1.

⁸ D. Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 32–44.

intended to demonstrate the indivisibility of history and text, not only as a precept of criticism, but also as a real concern for history. Our focus has been the vagrant – a figure whose errancy and truancy are deeply entailed in the interest of society. That interest is compounded of the interest in lives and the interest in history. The idea of the vagrant configures human individuality ‘wrought to its uttermost’⁹, the self fleeing the ends of social and economic destination; at the same time it is an idea of the failure of that flight in history, where history is sometimes imagined as beyond present social and economic destination, and sometimes imagined as identical with it. This is the fantasy of vagrancy that lies subordinated to the canonical condemnation of vagabondage, idleness, desertion and impropriety. If it represents, thereby, the fantasy of subordination, or at least of the subordinate, then we mean by that not something *under* power so much as something *underneath* power, not simply oppressed, but running more to what we have meant by ‘inordinate’. Literature, as a mandarin and speculative exercise, and fundamentally an exercise of leisure, is interested in this liberal fantasy: to some extent Kaatje Kekkelbek evades Bain’s condemnation because he is seduced by her liberty even as he censures it, just as Fugard is at least half in love with Lena and with writing the paths through the bush or alongside the Historic Highway.

The early J. M. Coetzee has a predilection for wanderers in various configurations, and each instance turns also upon some degree of muteness or some relation to silence. The ventriloquism of Coetzee in *Dusklands* works to ‘recover’ ‘*Het relaas van Jacobus Coetzee*’, as also the putative scholarship of S. J. Coetzee, a genetic (and textual) antecedence of silence that runs through all Coetzee’s work, both as theme and as a pronounced stylistic inclination to the lean, spare and muted prose for which he is now famous. The silence – or perhaps the *quietness* is a better term – of the barbarian woman, of Michael K, of Vercueil, of Friday, is of one piece with the outcast and vagrant status of their lives, as they are perceived by the societies in which they move and in which their stories are ‘recovered’. Clearly this quietness, marking some disinclination to speech, stands at odds with the project of writing, however much Coetzee’s prose (and personal reticence) aspires to a similar circumspection of utterance. In these instances we have novels (the most leisured of textual effects) of an extraordinarily deliberate and rhetorical tenor, aspiring to the settlements of philosophy, which yet concern themselves with fantasies of peregrination, flight and escape, and with fantasies of muteness and silence. The contrast between the art and its subjects is so marked as to constitute something like its actual

⁹ The phrase is Yeats’s in ‘Lapis Lazuli’, a poem explicitly concerned with the manner in which the impulse to art is generated in history but against it – not in the anti-historical transcendence of Keats’s Grecian Urn (which Yeats’s poem answers), but in a history of gaiety or wonder that is irreducibly one with the otherwise tragic character of history. *Selected Poems*, 181–2.

theme – the more so with the passage of time and the failure of history to sustain the occasions of the fantasies themselves.

In every case the errant travellers of Coetzee's novels mark the individual intersection with history: at times they lie as on the tangent, without, but in contact, and at times they travel from within the encircling compass of history to the circumference. In all the early novels the history is figured as an attritional colonialism – unsurprisingly, since this is Coetzee's real and pressing context. Where this colonialism and its subordination of the subject were once the 'point' of the novels, however, they have given way to a more lasting interest of those books, a fascination with the possibility of an 'inordinate' self, a self that is no subject, is subject to nothing. The disquiet of Coetzee's texts lies in the author's own apparent yearning for such a state – a refuge from history – and in the ironic but inevitable conclusions that he must draw about the possibilities of that state. Those conclusions suggest that the only possible flight from history lies along a route out of language, which is to say that the only hope of evasion is in not telling the story of what happens. That is impossible for a novelist. What is worse is that the novelist, by practising language in narrative, is an historian, telling the story, and responsible for the being (in history) of precisely those figures he would have us believe seek not to be (by being unknown to history). Thus the author is implicated in history – textual history – after a fashion which is essentially colonial. It is the author who subordinates the character whom he would wish to be inordinate. It is the author who propels the subject into wandering. It is the author who maims into silence, by breaking ankles in torture, by making a hare-lip the 'first thing' of a life, by cutting out a tongue, by pouring liquor down the maw. The authorial disposition of lives in histories is akin to that of the camps where the likes of Michael K are refitted with attitudes and the paperwork for identities with a proper destination in society. It is akin to the mythography of the Vietnam Project. However we are induced to recognise Virgil in Vercueil, yet it is Curren who writes her long letter (and Coetzee an identical book): the author is Dante, Virgil is a ghost at his disposal.

But to what extent do Coetzee's texts chasten, refute or refuse their own power? As their specific occasions have passed into history each novel has come to read more and more as a way of passing the (anguished) time than as any philosophy of history. In this, the fantasy of the vagrant, compounded of history's hostage and history's escapee, becomes an Epicurean one, which is to say that it is one whose 'realism' with regard to the duress of actual history sponsors a resigned pleasure in *the meantime*, which is to say in histories, or in novels. Michael K is constructed to embody the position of Rilke in the First World War: 'Not to understand: yes,

that was my entire occupation in these years.¹⁰ W. H. Auden hastened to insist that this was no 'ivory-tower attitude', claiming that 'to be conscious but to refuse to understand, is a positive act that calls for courage of a high order'.¹¹ But the business of the novel is an attempt to understand history, or, at least, it is premised upon an implicit understanding thereof. By writing *Michael K* Coetzee divorces himself from the project of Michael K (a favoured word in *Michael K* is 'balked')¹². It is a conundrum that necessitates the journal of the medical officer in the camp at Kenilworth, a narrative position closer to Coetzee's own place in history, and attempting to bridge, though ultimately failing to, the undertakings of Michael K and *Michael K*.¹³ That attempt – and that failure – are the business of Coetzee's autobiographies, seeking as they do a similar reconciliation, by conflating landscapes, phrases, moods, postures of the outsider, figures of motion and action, even genre presumptions (so that *Boyhood* is written in an objectifying third person voice, for example). It seems that just as we become suspicious of Coetzee's identification with Michael K – though disinclined to impute that identification without any more evidence than a kind of longing in Coetzee's own prose and, more substantially, the (white, middle-class, professional, liberal, writerly, apologetic) interest of the medical officer – so Coetzee is suspicious of his readers' suspicions, turning out the autobiographies to circumscribe the identification, and to update it, to refresh it with an existential character (the confessed soul of the child Coetzee) to replace the (mistaken) political character of the author beleaguered by the crisis of engagement in 1980s South Africa. Indeed, it is not only Coetzee's memoirs and his critical interest in autobiography which have worked to historicise novels that once had history as their heart of darkness: as the novels have passed into history, into a deeper past than the history in which they were first written (circumscribed), so inevitably has their critical address. We find now that, as Kai Easton notes, the publication of *Boyhood* attracts the review of the historian-biographer, Charles van Onselen.¹⁴ And Easton's own work concerns specifically the history of Coetzee's composition and the influence of historical texts on Coetzee's own writerly progress.¹⁵ Sam

¹⁰ R. Rilke, *Warime Letters*, cited in Auden's review of that book, *New Republic*, 8 July 1940, as in H. Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography*, 308.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 308–9.

¹² 'Someone gripped his arm. He balked, like a beast at the shambles.' (40) 'Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding balked, into which it was useless to pour words.' (110) 'He tried to imagine a figure standing alone at the head of the line, a woman in a shapeless grey dress who came from no mother; but when he had to think of the silence in which she lived, the silence of time before the beginning, his mind balked.' (117) 'You acquiesced in your will (excuse me for making these distinctions, they are the only means I possess to explain myself), your will acquiesced but your body balked.' (163) Coetzee, *Michael K*.

¹³ Indeed, the predilection for the word 'balked' crosses into the medical officer's narrative, *ibid.*, 163, see note above.

¹⁴ K. Easton, 'J. M. Coetzee, the Cape and the Question of History', 20–1.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, and see her PhD thesis, 'Textuality and the Land', which also works up from the compositional histories of Coetzee's novels (and alongside his critical writings).

Durrant addresses Coetzee's work within the exercise of explicit historical witness and redress undertaken by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (itself an intriguing site of the instantaneity of the two histories, made and written, act and fact).¹⁶ Gareth Cornwell looks (rightly) to the historical palimpsest of Salem in addressing the difficulties of *Disgrace*.¹⁷ The point is simply that the author of works which once sought a fugitive, vagrant 'liberty' within abstract and actual history has now become measured by that history and settled in it (the Nobel Prize does this too, settling Coetzee in a lineage that is measured by its annuality, its Swedish monarchical and academic pomp, its proximity to the Nobel dynamite fortune). It is against this work of history that the memoirs arise, as attempts to write over, to overwrite, and in the case of the deep practice of Coetzee's vagrants, to settle them into significance, to settle their significance, not in hovels but in novels whose 'deeper heartland' is now disclosed.

Thus it is that *Boyhood* discovers to us a significance to Michael K that lies deeper and more permanent than the turbulence of the revolution. Michael K seeks more than a conscious refusal to understand history. He seeks a vision of heaven outside of history, such as only a child (without history) is able to glimpse. Actually, Michael K, for all he is privilege to some pretty high-flown musing – 'A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living', and parables of spoons and wells¹⁸ – is chiefly too starved and ill, and too limited in intellect, to properly undertake to understand. He is a child in history, which is an appalling prefigurement of loss, a tragic irony. The novel begins with the infant blighted by disfigurement ('luck', a contingency of history, or the figure of a contingent history itself) and ends with K still an 'orphan'¹⁹, returning to his mother's lodgings.

It is the mother and the Karoo farm that dominate Coetzee's childhood also. Where K prepares to deliver his mother to a kind of peace (and fails) by fashioning a cart 'mounted on a pair of bicycle wheels'²⁰, the boy Coetzee, witnessing his mother's failed bid for independence in riding a bicycle, is brought to a reckoning: 'I will make it up to her one day, he promises himself.'²¹ That promise is fulfilled in Coetzee's elegies, *Michael K* and *Age of Iron*, just as K's filial obligation is fulfilled in restoring his mother's ashes to the dust of the Karoo. What Coetzee 'makes up' in *Michael K* is the briefly regained paradise of childhood, here figured as the Karoo farm. *Boyhood* makes that gesture plain:

¹⁶ S. Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*.

¹⁷ G. Cornwell, 'Disgraceland: History and the Humanities in 'Frontier Country'', *English in Africa*, 30, 2 (2004), 43–68.

¹⁸ *Michael K*, 99, 183–4.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 181.

²⁰ *ibid*, 11.

²¹ Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 4.

The farm is called Voelfontein; he loves every stone of it ... But he cannot talk about his love, not only because normal people do not talk about such things but because confessing to it would be a betrayal of his mother.²²

Thus the confessions of *Boyhood* are addressed to the mother, fulfilling the promise to 'make it up to her' by owning up to the correspondence begun in *Michael K*.²³ Coetzee's childhood rapture at the landscape and daily life of the family farm near Prince Albert is of a piece with K's access to bliss in the same space. There are countless echoes, and these might be nothing more than the unremarkable impression of an author's locale upon his fiction, were it not for their uncanny precision in particulars – a precision that makes one realise how closely and how long Coetzee has held the words to himself, repeating them in talismanic phrases, and for the fact that *Boyhood* succeeds *Michael K*, so that an equally uncanny effect is achieved, as if of nature following art, since the memoir reads as if it were cribbed from the novel. This is not a digression from our focus upon the vagrant 'option' in Coetzee's fiction; indeed, what is being sketched in the relation of the memoir to the novel is precisely the relation of the hegemonic 'real', the history of what happens, to the inordinate imagination, the history as it is told, the story. The angle at which Coetzee approaches this relation – we might say, the problem of this relation – is the angle of the vagrant, that is, wandering and elusive, under duress, fugitive. His memoirs function to school his novels, to 'doctor' them, to bring them back under the authority of the authorial history, precisely because the novels have become part of a history that has erred and strayed from the way of the author, a history that has eluded Coetzee.

And there is a further sense in which the memoir colonises the novel or confines its vagrants. Even as a child Coetzee knows himself and his love of the land to be of a false and tenuous, and supplanting, order. 'The Karoo is Freek's country, his home; the Coetzees ... are like swallows, seasonal, here today, gone tomorrow'²⁴ – this is the disquiet at a threatened expulsion. We have known it all along, though, for when Michael K achieves the Visagies' deserted farm, '[a]s he entered the shed a pair of startled swallows flew out.'²⁵ Thereafter, however, the geographies of the farms, and the affects of Coetzee and K, overlap substantially. The 'square concrete dam' so central to K's tenure recalls Voelfontein's: '[j]ust above the

²² *ibid*, 80.

²³ In significant ways this maternal confession has its origins in Augustine, who is brought out of the error he confesses by his mother, and whose mother's death substantially concludes his account of his life, as if to suggest itself as the solicitation of the *Confessions*. If this seems digressive, then we should recall Lena's stillbirth and the bound and branded mother of Winvogel Smit's 1834 testimony. Michael K imagines an ahistorical existence as 'a woman ... who came from no mother'. History is concretised in the figure of the mother. Fugard, *Boesman and Lena*, 284; 'Minutes of a Meeting held at Philipston, 5 August 1812' CA A50; Coetzee, *Michael K*, 117.

²⁴ Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 87.

²⁵ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 52.

farmhouse ... a stone-walled dam, twelve feet square.²⁶ The medical officer asks of K, 'Did you hunt?'; for the young Coetzee, '[b]est of all on the farm, best of everything, is the hunting.'²⁷ The animals that forage on K's field are 'hares and little grey steenbok'; the hunting boy goes after 'steenbok, duiker, hares'.²⁸ As Michael K starves, waiting for his pumpkins to grow, he reconciles himself to his loss of appetite: '[w]hen food comes out of this earth ... I will recover my appetite, for it will have savour', and the boy Coetzee reckons, '[e]verything in the Karoo is delicious, the peaches, the watermelons, the pumpkin, the mutton, as though whatever can find sustenance in this arid earth is blessed.'²⁹ These are but a handful of examples, and once again: it is not that the novel should draw upon the memories of its author that is significant, but that the memoir should draw those memories in such precise repetitions of the novel's phraseology. It is the particular transmission of the Karoo farm(s) in words that stands out. The evidence is of Coetzee hoarding these words as K does his seeds, and with them to 'make it up' to K and Freek and his mother (and himself), in restoring the lost domain,³⁰ the domain variously colonised by author, Europeans, patriarchy and adulthood – in each and all of which Coetzee shares. By contrast, what Coetzee 'makes up' in K, is the mute and authored subject, not culpable in history, but bearing the brunt of it. This is the attraction (or distraction) of K to literature, but also, perhaps, the inevitable disappointment. K repeats Coetzee's desire for the Karoo farm, as Coetzee later repeats K's words (that were his before). The two recycle each other, or, better, follow each other's footprints in a meandering orbit around the idea of the farm. In this, the authorial reverie, the quest for the lost domain, Coetzee adopts the habit of the vagrant, carrying a hoard of words, repeating his traces, never quite arriving.

The hoarding and the repetition, in rubbing the words, phrases, images against consciousness and, now, against one another's double, burnishes the landscape to its peculiarly numinous radiance. In *Boyhood* Coetzee recalls the shearing time:

He is given a task. He has charge of a tin mug full of dried beans. Each time a shearer finishes a sheep ... each time, the shearer may take a bean from the mug, which he does with a nod and a courteous '*My basid*'³¹

²⁶ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 53, *Boyhood*, 83.

²⁷ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 150, *Boyhood*, 87.

²⁸ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 117, *Boyhood*, 87.

²⁹ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 101, *Boyhood*, 90.

³⁰ Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* supplies the phrase and is the *locus classicus* for fixing the nostalgia for childhood upon a place – a lost domain – particularly a place imagined in the landscape of a prior social order. Perhaps *The Secret Garden* (Frances Hodgson Burnett) with its Edenic yearnings, is the best avatar in English.

³¹ Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 93.

Those beans are like the hard and simple words that Coetzee stores up and with which he counts (*tels*, tells) the world as he finds and loves it. Those beans are also K's few seeds, which stand obviously for all kinds of fertility, but among them also words, for at the novel's conclusion K rhapsodises in a manner that counts words, and makes words count:

The mistake I made, he thought, going back in time, was not to have had plenty of seeds, a different packet of seeds for each pocket: pumpkin seeds, marrow seeds, beans, carrot seeds, beetroot seeds, onion seeds, tomato seeds, spinach seeds. Seeds in my shoes too, and in the lining of my coat ...³²

Coetzee's task shadows the Christian metaphor of the shepherd's accounting, and his recollection associates the distribution of beans with the power of the '*basie*'. It is the novelist's twin prerogative to create a world and to judge the world by his creation (and the world in his creation, and the world of his creation). Such early intimations of a writerly vocation, and its ethical force, may be inadvertent, but the significance of the occasion is immense to Coetzee (a boy 'too excited to eat'), and especially to our purpose:

They are on the farm one September when the shearers arrive. They appear from nowhere, wild men who come on bicycles laden with bedrolls and pots and pans ... Shearers, he discovers, are special people. When they descend on the farm, it is good luck ... the Afrikaans the shearers speak is so thick, so full of strange idioms, that he can barely understand it. Where do they come from? Is there a country deeper even than the country of Voelfontein, a heartland even more secluded from the world?³³

The shearers, whose work Coetzee must count, are *rondlopers*, a gypsying inheritance of the host of vagabonds of the hinterland in the 18th and 19th centuries. A 'special people', Coetzee discovers them, with an impenetrable language that intimates a 'deeper ... heartland ... secluded from the world'. They are at once descended from the Renaissance fascination with the 'outlandish and strange' and an avatar, a precursor, of Michael K, of whom the authorities (history's powerful, perhaps its writers) were '[a]t first ... ready to believe he was simply a vagrant.'³⁴

³² Coetzee, *Michael K*, 182–3.

³³ Coetzee, *Boyhood*, 92–3.

³⁴ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 120. I have more than once heard in Cape Town that Coetzee based Michael K on the well-known figure of 'Jan Lappies', a popular figure from Prince Albert, well-known in Cape Town for his occasional appearances in town (and in the press) in colourful patchwork motley. In his demeanour and appearance (and strict provenance) there is nothing of Michael K to suggest a provenance in 'Jan Lappies'. But there is this: that 'Jan Lappies' demonstrates the continued popular fascination with the 'outlandish and strange', as also the continued type of the Pied Piper, and, likewise, the determination of people to locate fiction in historical provenance – albeit

Of this numinous first encounter with the wanderer, no less momentous than Fugard's apparition on the Swartkops bridge, is begun the long interest of vagrancy to Coetzee's early novels. The silent, suffering, mobile and tenacious figures of K, Vercueil and the barbarian girl all afford their author his tangent upon the deeper heartland abutting the world. But they, too, are in history, not only as Coetzee configures it in his novels, as their central problem, but also in participating in a long history of textual manifestation. Clearly the barbarian girl reaches back to the circumstance of Antiquity collected in Cavafy's poem, just as she is also descended from the Khoisan stragglers of the colonised Cape frontier. So, too, is Vercueil fashioned of the pilgrim company and the questor's guide, but more immediately of the *bergies* of Cape Town, themselves of long provenance, both in history and in text. He is every bit as much a 'Blinkwater Johnny'³⁵ as a Virgil. The *bergie* has long been inducted into with the 'fraternity of vagabonds' by textual association and transmission, as the instance – and particularly the language, manifestly derived from the Renaissance tracts, as it is – of this 1873 account demonstrates:

It is a fact, perhaps not generally known, that a very large number of 'mean whites' are gradually being dispersed over all our colonies. These tramps or vagrants, as a class, are generally strong, able-bodied men, who have been troublesome on board ships and have been left behind at foreign ports by their captains on one charge or another ... With this fraternity some mystic bond of freemasonry exists, and it is wonderful how they eke out a living ... In Cape Town, for instance, there are always to be found some fifteen or sixteen seedy individuals who haunt the back doors of hotels for broken victuals at night, and prowl about the suburbs in couples during the business hours of the day, seeking for the means of obtaining drink at canteens. They are always shabby, always dirty, frowzy and disreputable. They have a hang-dog air about them, and a limping gait, as if troubled by corns, but they can readily tramp many weary miles, and be as saucy and as defiant as any Kafir ... Notably this is the case when they have to deal with ladies whose husbands are away from home. They will then dictate terms and refuse to move away ...³⁶

This might as well account for Vercueil, but it might as well also be Harman or Awdeley writing in the 16th century, so derivative is its language (the author even goes on to claim 'an extensive acquaintance' with 'vagabonds', as is typical of the Renaissance accounts). Here we find recapitulated the conspiracy of 'a class' or 'fraternity' with its 'mystic bond', implicitly imperilling the state. Here, again, is the ancient objection at the idleness of the 'sturdy beggar' (to use the 16th century designation). Here is that antic word 'frowzy' which attended the description of

of an unwittingly synchronous rather than causal sort. The anecdotes that I have heard, in other words, are instances of the deep practice of vagrancy across the culture and history I have been considering.

³⁵ W. H. Crump, 'Blinkwater Johnny', *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 47 (1944), 46–7. See also 61–2 above.

³⁶ 'S', 'Travelling Paupers', *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 34, 6, April (1873), 224.

Wandsworth's 'Metropolitan Gypseries' in 1864 ('Their language is the frowziest English').³⁷ Here, once more, are the staple attributes of odd gait and sauciness, and the threat to women – much of which we find in Elizabeth Curren's encounter with Vercueil. Indeed, Vercueil even has a past as a sailor, or claims to, for Curren is ambivalent: 'A mariner's story. Do I believe it?'³⁸ The detail is important, for it joins Vercueil to the 'extensive acquaintance' of the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, but also, further back, to the 'Fresh Water Mariner or Whipjacke' of Harman and Awdeley, whose 'shipes were drowned in the playne of Salisbury.'³⁹ Vercueil claims that he lost the use of his arm at sea; Harman claims, 'These kind of Caterpillers counterfet great losses on the sea.'⁴⁰

Witting or otherwise, the lineage of transmitted attributes is long, and we see it in process in the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, where the vagrant is 'as saucy and as defiant as any Kafir', that is, at one with the colonial apprehension of the indigenous 'other'. The author of that article asserted that the great injury of the 'mean white' vagrant lay 'not so much by what they eat or steal as by setting a bad example to the blacks.'⁴¹ That 'example' is continued everywhere in the relation of vagrancy to the public and to posterity. The travellers of the Karoo, that 'special people' who emanate from the landscape, overnight, as some autochthonous and immemorial population for the young Coetzee, are, of course, simply the revenants, or remnants, of Ordinance 50, unbonded labour derived of a population alienated from the land by colonisation and the capitalist interest in property. *That* is the deeper heartland: history.

Of course, Coetzee knows this, we hope; he is writing of a child's apprehension. The Karoo remains, however, evidently profound for him, and evidently bound up with the Eden of a (precocious and otherwise difficult) childhood. Even Elizabeth Curren dreams of being restored to a point at the summit of the Prince Alfred's pass, not unlike K's cave: 'I will recognize it when we come to it: the stopping-place, the starting place, the place of the navel, the place where I join the world.'⁴² This omphalos marks, again, the intersection of the self and the world, the deeper heartland and the *journée*, as if the one lies mysteriously tangential to the other. The problem remains: the deeper domain *is* the *journée*, history. Thus it is not surprising, perhaps, to find that Michael K, 'mute and stupid in the beginning ... mute and stupid at the end'⁴³, whose first (passive) engagement with the world is to have his deformed mouth 'prodded open'⁴⁴

³⁷ C. J. Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 503.

³⁸ Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 171.

³⁹ T. Harman, *A Caueat for Common Cursetors* (EEBO, 14). G. Salgado, *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 63, 109.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ 'S', 'Travelling Paupers', 225.

⁴² Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 110.

⁴³ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 182.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 3.

and examined, is also anticipated by a long textual history, for K is what the Renaissance called a 'Dommerar' or 'Dummerer'.

These Dommerars are leud and most subtill people. The most part of these are Welch men, and will never speake, unlesse they have extreame punishmente, but will gape, and with a marvelous force will hold downe their tounge doubled, groning for your charity ... so that with their deepe dissimulation they get very much.⁴⁵

All the patterns of the accusation of and against vagrancy are here: the charge of foreignness, the charge of the 'marvelous', and the charge of 'deepe dissimulation'. In particular we should note that the accusation is brought against the Welsh, for Welsh 'otherness' is usually identified in loquacity, singing and the strangeness of its ancient language. Thus it is that the 'dissimulation' of silence is underscored by the contrary 'truth' of Celtic orality, even Celtic oracularity – such as we have seen, and seen associated with vagrancy, as far back as the ordinances of Edward I against 'bards, rhymers, and other idlers and vagabonds'⁴⁶ (remembering that it is this reign which marks the colonisation of Wales). The charge brought against the Dummerer is itself of a doubled tongue, in that the false silence only makes louder the Welsh (or the Red Welsh, the cant), which is, as it were, the alternate charge. Indeed, the 'marvelous' contortion of the tongue, and the bass 'groning' might as well supply an alienated description of Welsh to the hegemonic ear, as if, by extension, to speak Welsh is a mute idiocy.

The same is true of Michael K, whose reticence is set against the volubility of the Khoisan, and 'coloured', in long tradition. That volubility is enshrined in the name 'Kekkelbek'. It is what Boesman criticises in Lena: '[t]hat *gebabbel* of yours ... [y]our words are just noise.'⁴⁷ It is 'the innate propensity of our coloured population to ... listless social chattering', that a Mr Van Reenen complained of in Cape Town in 1839,⁴⁸ and 'the obscene and indecent language in the streets of Grahamstown' at the same time.⁴⁹ The contrast between K and the voluble type is recovered from the same crisis of subjectivity as that which provoked 'the fire' in Mr Magerman and also rendered him mute.⁵⁰ It is, as Fugard has Boesman characterise Lena's *gebabbel*, 'Die geraas van 'n vervloekte leue', the clamour of a cursed life, a din that occludes sense and proceeds from the same breakdown of sense, the degeneration of language into noise, the sound of sheer

⁴⁵ Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursetors* (EEBO, 17), Salgado (ed.), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 118.

⁴⁶ Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, 35.

⁴⁷ Fugard, *Boesman and Lena*, 246.

⁴⁸ J. H. van Reenen—Governor, 2 September 1839, 'Memorials Received, Volume 3, 1839', CA, CO 4002.

⁴⁹ 'Albany Criminal Record Books, 1835–7, 1837–8', CA, 1/AY, 3/1/1/1/3 and 3/1/1/1/4.

⁵⁰ 'Minutes of a Meeting Held at Philipston, 5 August 1834', CA, A50.

extremity.⁵¹ K associates his muteness first with stupidity ('I was mute and stupid'), but the stupidity he imagines is of a redemptive sort; 'There is nothing to be ashamed of in being simple.'⁵² The argument Coetzee implies is that there is a virtue to being stupid in language, when the extremity of circumstance might wrought 'noise' or 'fire' of language, and by language's centrality to consciousness and well-being, destroy the subject. Thus muteness and stupidity effect what is 'simple' in language, consciousness and being. To pursue language, contrarily, is to invoke the complexity of things, as is the case with the medical officer at Kenilworth, whose journal declines into prolixity as if into an immobilising tar. His last appeal to an already vanished K imagines himself pursuing K with questions into the obscurity of the wattle thickets of the Cape Flats, 'shouting', gasping and panting, seeming a 'madman' as he tries, out of the structural rudiments of language, to make sense of things:

—'Am I right?' I would shout. 'Have I understood you? If I am right, hold up your right hand; if I am wrong, hold up your left'⁵³

It is in language that the subject comes to consciousness of itself, is brought to *relate* itself – to know itself in space and time, is *placed* and *told*. K's left and the right hands are not only the binaries out of which language might be fashioned, but also signal (waving) the mirrored body of the self-recogniser, the split subject, bilateral.⁵⁴ Thus the medical officer is not only summoning K into language, but into recognition of himself, and, thereby, into potential crisis – that is, into history.

What we are discussing – what Coetzee is discussing – is ultimately the relationship of language to history, and we are doing so after a formula which links language to the 'errant' options of vagrancy. The link is implicit in specific representations of vagrancy just as it is in common idiom. The Mr Van Reenen who objected to the 'listless social chattering' of the 'Coloured population' in the 1830s held that no vagrant law would be necessary if the Cape adopted penal reforms along the lines of 'Auburn or Sing Sing in the United States of America where the criminals have to undergo their punishment on the silent and separate mode.'⁵⁵ The ungoverned tongue is the ungoverned subject; the ultimate deterrent is silence – the confiscation of history. So too we find that the idioms by which we speak of speech itself are so readily drawn

⁵¹ The Renaissance authors were clear that the provenance of cant lay in Babel. This is 'babbling', but, of course, it also attaches to cant the indictment of blasphemous pride – and the threat of the destruction of the 'fraternity' in dissension. See Dekker, *O Per O Se* (EEBO image 41)

⁵² Coetzee, *Michael K*, 182.

⁵³ *ibid*, 166–7.

⁵⁴ The allegory applies, in other words, both to Saussurean linguistics and Lacanian subjectivity.

⁵⁵ J. H. van Reenen – Governor, 2 September 1839, CA, CO 4002

from the experience of errant travel: discourse may 'wander' or 'meander' when ideally it is 'direct', it may prove 'halting' or 'runaway', it is either 'off' or 'to the point' (which point is the spatial idiom of the hegemonic 'centre'). Speech, like a vagrant may 'go on and on' or 'stop short', it may, like K, Boesman and Lena, and Kaatje, 'beat about the bush' or 'go around in circles'. The best speech, the culminating effect of rhetoric, gets people 'to their feet'. Only the (equally in subordinate) scatological realm really rivals this semantic field for its idiomatic donation to the acts of language (people 'talk shit', writers suffer 'block', others 'verbal diarrhoea'). That these are begun in commonplace and mimetic correspondences (speech is a trajectory through time, of a pace with walking, and at its simplest it is manifestly linear in passing (in English) from subject over to object through the agency of a predicate – one foot in front of the other –, similarly, speech, as vocalised breath, is an emanation of the body) is of little consequence; what is, is that the semantic fields have become as elaborated as they have, and, in the case of walking, in the (in)direction of vagrancy. This is what I have meant all along by the 'errancy' of vagrancy, by the vagrant as an 'errant' subject, conflating in a pun the vagrant's socio-legal 'error' and his or her inscrutable 'errand', the purpose in wandering. *The Book of Common Prayer* schools the penitent to confess having 'erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep' in following 'too much the devices and desires of our own hearts' (Kaatje's errancy follows sheep that are not even lost). Conversely the knight errant is the exemplary subject of the quest, especially for the Holy Grail, which bears the mystical synecdoche binding wine and blood and eternal life and gnostic knowledge. The erring vagrant is also the errant vagrant.

Here, then, is the further interest of vagrancy to the writer, observant as he or she must be of the often unconfined trajectory of the text in composition and in reception, and of their ambiguous role as both liberator of that 'walk' in language, and also its marshal. Moreover, the 'vagrant' propensity of the text is linked to anciently established correlatives of vagrancy, such as inventive language (composition), 'other' language (translation), modulations of volubility, silence, length, grammar (style), the theatre, 'bards and rhymers' (genre). The instance of vagrancy and writing is a thick one, and as old as any genre, as we traced in the opening remarks of this study. But it is particularly the passage of language into the (all too uncertain) destination of the text, which imitates the vagrant through space, and, once we have corrected that spatial bias with the equal or greater temporality that it represents – that is, with the correction of history – which imitates history itself. History is the fulfilment of time, coming into being in itself, as events find their destination in text, and in those formulae by which texts are arranged to interpretation (loosely: theory). The more deliberate and elaborate a theory is, the more it must treat of history as a text, parsing it, construing it, styling it. In *Michael K* this is the business of the camps, where

'free agents' or rebels are (re)turned to the dominant (colonial) economy and ideology. If the camps are like texts, ordering subjects that are inordinate or insubordinate, subordinating them, then the officers of those camps are the authors of lives, writers and historians – manifestly so in the case of the medical officer whose account of K is also Coetzee's, and whose account is preoccupied with K's evasion of the life he is being donated.

When Harman described the Dummerer, he, too, had recourse to medical authority in discovering the subject. Where K is brought out of his silence and into the text of history by the medical officer at Kenilworth, Harman's Dummerer is exposed by a surgeon:

The Surgien made hym gape, and we could see but halfe a tounge. I required the surgien to put hys fynger in his mouth, and to pull out his tounge, and so he did, notwithstanding he helde strongly a prety whyle. At length he pluckt out the same, to the great admiration of many that stooode by. Yet when we sawe his tounge, he would neither speake nor yet could heare. Quoth I to the Surgien, knit two of his fyngers together, and thrust a stycke betwene them, and rubbe the same up and downe a lyttle while, and for my lyfe he speaketh by and by.⁵⁶

In the end the man is strung from a beam and left to hang by his wrists, and '[a]t ye length, for very payn, he required for God's sake to let him down.'⁵⁷ That the surgeon's office in the tale is no more than that of torturer is revealing, for it is not science but force that underwrites all power, however it may masquerade in ideology. Harman involves the surgeon, he claims, because he is 'cunninge in his science' and represents 'my chauce to com at the begynnyng of the matter', in other words, to discover history.⁵⁸ But, in fact, it is the author-narrator, Harman, who brings the surgeon into the matter and then directs him, and the 'beginning of the matter' is not discovered by science but by letters, the relation of marvels. Harman appropriates the physical expertise of the surgeon for his witness, but more especially he appropriates his system of knowledge, his theory, to imply an order antipathetic to the 'deep dissimulation' of the Dummerer. For his part, the surgeon promises 'you shall see a miracle wrought anon,' ironically appropriating the discourse of religious or magical spectacle. We are reminded again of Harsnett's exposure of exorcism in the 1580s, and of Greenblatt's argument that the crime Harsnett discloses is really located in a battle for the monopoly on the sacred.⁵⁹ Thus it is that here, too, we find the coming discourse of science introduced to produce the 'true' miracles of the age, and to do so in exposing the gullibility of those who believe what is false. The falsehood of vagrants

⁵⁶ Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursetors* (EEBO, 17), Salgado (ed.), *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 119

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ S. Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', in P. Parker and G. Hartman (eds), *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, 163–187. See 33ff above.

is their abiding crime, it prevents us from coming at the beginning of matters, it undoes history. The doubled tongue of the Dummerer is not only folded, it connotes also the forked tongue of the deceiver.

The Epicurean vagrant

Of course the proof of speech is not a tongue, but language, the province not of medicine but of literature. What Harman's surgeon, like K's medical officer, must accomplish is the speech of the captive. In the case of Harman's Dummerer we might note that the subject is not only brought to speak, but, significantly, to speak in God's name, which is to say he is brought into the corporate discourse of the Christian faith and state (as opposed to the diabolical code of cant). That act of calling upon God not only alerts us to the rectitude of the discourse elicited from him by 'correction', but also observes the form of sworn testimony and its oath of truth. This, too, is vital, for it brings the 'confession' within the discursive writ of law and within the neighbourhood of common parlance (refuting the counterfeit forms from which it has now been divorced), and does so just as it exports its guarantee of truth to Harman's account.

Meanwhile it is the objective of the medical officer to show K that '[w]e have all tumbled over the lip into the cauldron of history', and that, for all his evasions, K will not escape history's ultimate destination (literally death, but other forms of annihilation shadow the anxiety of the officer).⁶⁰ But of course K must know this, whose own life is begun with a stumble, a tumbling over the lip, which is his deformity. That brings him into history, as '[t]he first thing the midwife noticed', which is also the first phrase of the novel, the first thing Coetzee sets down and the first thing we read, but also as it expresses suffering, which Coetzee consistently discovers as the moral character of history, across all his work.⁶¹ The 'luck' that the midwife predicts of K's harelip is hidden in the fact that it is K's organ of speech that is damaged, that his lip gives on no history. This conduces to his reticence and teaches him, as an intrinsic consequence of history – both the life he lives and his ability to tell it – the lessons of silence. When the guerrilla force leaves the farm, and K's nerve fails him in his opportunity to join history (as Coetzee sees it, allegorically; in fact, Coetzee joins him to history in the act of writing), his philosophy is Epicurean: 'all that remains is to tidy up and listen to the silence.'⁶² It is Epicurean in pursuing the least engagement with the causes of pain, and in striving to do so by the practice of virtue.

⁶⁰ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 151

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 3.

⁶² *ibid.*, 111.

There is a pleasure in tidiness and silence, for K, accommodated as he is to silence. But there is a virtue in K's practice also, for outside of the clamour of history, the motion of bodies, is the great context of the void and K's option is not to hear nothing, but to listen to silence: they are very different things. Moreover, to listen is to hear attentively: to hear actively, as if for the information in sound(lessness), rather than passively (without intelligence). Thus the silence is not arbitrary, but meaningful, it is not the absence of sound, but the sound of absence. This is an intelligent undertaking and an ethical one, Coetzee reckons – an engagement with history. In Epicurean terms it marks both an affirmation of, and a contemplation upon, the atomic materialism derived of Democritus and projected by Epicurus as the context, cause and object of human life. As K imagines a history where 'hundreds of thousands of people were daily following their cockroach pilgrimages in flight from the war'⁶³, so Lucretius expounded the cosmology of Epicurus in the image of motes in a sunbeam:

You will see a multitude of tiny bodies
All mingling in a multitude of ways
Inside the sunbeam, moving in the void,
Seeming to be engaged in endless strife,
Battle and warfare, troop attacking troop,
And never a respite, harried constantly,
With meetings and with partings everywhere.⁶⁴

This is the 'to-and-fro conflicting' of history as Lear discovers it. The medical officer begins appalled by the void in which the strife takes place (though he comes to crave it, but cannot find it for want of forsaking language), remonstrating with (a mute) K:

there ought to be a plaque nailed to the racetrack wall commemorating your stay here. But that is not the way it is going to be. The truth is that you are going to perish in obscurity and be buried in a nameless hole in the corner of the racecourse, transport to the acres of Woltemade being out of the question nowadays, and no one is going to remember you but me, unless you yield and at last open your mouth. I appeal to you, Michaels, yield!⁶⁵

And we should recall that K's garden has its own long history, reaching back through Candide's to the (Epicurean) Horace who threw down his shield and fled the field at Philippi, turned away from the power he might have had as Augustus's secretary, and gave thanks instead that his

⁶³ *ibid*, 106.

⁶⁴ Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe (De rerum natura)*, 2.116–20, 39

⁶⁵ Coetzee, *Michael K*, 152.

prayers were realised in his Sabine farm. Coetzee, like Horace, Lucretius, and Voltaire, will remember that the good life was espoused by Epicurus in a school that took the name of the garden in which it was held. This is no less where K labours – and Coetzee – than where Candide and his friends do, and it is ultimately where the medical officer, too, would wish to find himself, in ‘areas that lie between the camps and belong to no camp, not even to the catchment areas of the camps – certain mountaintops, for example, certain islands ...’⁶⁶ These are the theatres of the imagination, the appointed isles and blasted heaths beyond the historical pale.

It is the irony of the Epicurean garden that for all its renunciation of the discourse of power it remains wedded to the power that is in discourse, the project of thought-in-speech. For all Candide’s intention to work without arguing, the true upshot of his garden is Voltaire’s (discursive, argumentative) book. For all K intends to listen to silence, what we actually hear in the occasion is Coetzee’s speechy, gnostic speculations. Speech is the garden’s concession to history, it exists as the tribute of the garden to the wilderness around it. This is precisely because the garden is categorically derived of the wilderness of history.⁶⁷ The garden – as sanctuary, retreat, renunciation, closed order – can only be any of these things by organising against the wilderness of history, by marshalling into sense, as language, the sound of ‘endless strife’, which is the sound of history heard through the encompassing silence.

To be left speechless is a passive formulation of the self’s horror at events. To choose to be speechless might therefore be to record that horror aforethought, as it were to speak of the absence that is in history, the central character of loss, the culmination of events in suffering and death. This may be K’s position, but it is the very opposite of the medical officer’s – or Coetzee’s. The perorations of the medical officer, by contrast, signal the existential palliative of words, their function as a ‘cool web of language’, in Graves’ terms, that works to ‘spell away’ the horror at the heart of things.⁶⁸ This system for the closure of significance, for the consolation of knowing, is language begun in the binary signals of the right and left hand that the officer craves of K’s silence. It is fulfilled in Coetzee’s own writing, both in the act itself and in the extensive textual fulfilment of the system, for Coetzee’s writing is as much about itself as about its ostensible subjects. Already we have argued that the beans of the fleece-counter, and K’s seeds, are the figures of words themselves, which aggregate to produce the (even economic) purpose of life, in sustaining information. But Coetzee’s own prose is fashioned to a style that famously modulates ‘virtues’ of reticence, spareness, minimalism into what is ultimately a rich and

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 162.

⁶⁷ Thus the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert perceives himself a ‘barbarian in the garden’ in his essays on Western European culture. The barbarian is, of course, the donation of Rome, after Tacitus, but the notion of the European garden is as much the inheritance of Epicureanism as of Roman Christianity. Z. Herbert, *The Barbarian in the Garden*.

⁶⁸ Robert Graves, ‘The Cool Web’, *Complete Poems*.

numinous whole, rhetoric of a high order. The back-cover 'shouts' of his publishers consolidate this critical observation again and again: James Runcie in the *Daily Telegraph* speaks of the prose's 'lean and terrible beauty', Cynthia Ozick in the *New York Review of Books* speaks of it as 'purifying to the senses', John Banville in the *Evening Standard* of its 'austere beauty'.⁶⁹ Indeed Banville goes on to characterise it (here *Age of Iron*) as writing in which

Little comfort is offered, yet in the end one is comforted. That is the consolation of art.⁷⁰

What Banville means is that although there is no comfort to be had from the content of Coetzee's tale, yet the formal accomplishments of the writing – that 'austere beauty' – provide a consolatory compensation. In fact, the writing is at odds with the content, for its seeming austerity is actually the accomplishment of rhetoric (at its best, as a negative virtue), and is the labour of someone with sufficient time and distance from the experience of his subjects to be able to count beans and plant seeds. The fabled austerity of Coetzee's prose is itself not only an effect of rhetoric, but – as with all rhetoric – an illusion achieved against the background of some pretty high-flown passages. What Coetzee does is to counterpoint a lean style, after Hemingway, with tracts of considerable verbal luxuriance. Here, for example, is a tin full of beans from *Waiting for the Barbarians*:

The air every morning is full of the beating of wings as the birds fly in from the south, circling above the lake before they settle in the salty fingers of the marshes. In the lulls of the wind the cacophony of their hooting, quacking, honking, squawking reaches us like the noise of a rival city on the water: greylag, beangoose, pintail, wigeon, mallard, teal, smew.⁷¹

It is against such hoards of nouns that lines like 'Spring is on its way, one of these days it will be time to plant', come to seem lean and austere. Out of the (rhetorical) juxtaposition Coetzee wins his reputation for the incisive and transparent plain-speaking of his work. It is an important point, not in order to dismiss the accomplishments of extraordinary prose, but in order to explain that 'the consolation of art' is always Epicurean – a moderation of richness and poverty, a golden mean derived of the flight from pain and the pursuit of virtue, and therefore the consolation is also, importantly, a moral one. Coetzee is not Stoic; his novels pursue pleasure in themselves, as a project of the ego, and as the ego is extended in the realm of others – readers – and the effect of their prose is won in the stimulation of feeling, not in Stoic restraint. The cold

⁶⁹ From the back-covers of Penguin editions of *Age of Iron* and *Michael K*.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 57.

and dusty journey of the magistrate and the barbarians, the sordid domesticity of torture – what Hannah Arendt calls the ‘banality of evil’⁷² – these are effected against a landscape that is luridly beautiful, a Pateresque bright and gem-like flame.⁷³ The colours of *Waiting for the Barbarians* are as loud as Coetzee’s characters are taciturn, and they are achieved as deliberate exercises in contrast:

The horizon ahead is already grey, merging into the grey water of the lake. Behind me the sun is setting in streaks of gold and crimson.⁷⁴

The ground beneath my soles grows soft; soon I will be walking on soggy marshgrass, pushing my way through reedbrakes, striding ankle-deep in water in the last violet light of dusk.⁷⁵

The sky has been fading till now it is bone-white with tones of pink rippling in the north. The ochre rooftiles glisten, the air grows luminous, the town shines out shadowless, mysteriously beautiful in these last moments.⁷⁶

The sun turns coppery.⁷⁷

Through the river of dust that courses majestically across the sky the sun glows like an orange but warms nothing.⁷⁸

The ‘mysteriously beautiful’ is no mystery really. It is the accomplishment of design. Coetzee’s grey and bone-white austerities are effected against a rainbow of pink, copper, crimson, gold, violet, orange. We are even told that the sun is both orange and cold; the oxymoron is rhetorical. This contrastedness is the strategy of Coetzee’s writing everywhere. In *Michael K* it occurs in any number of instances, most of them passages of such miniature as to pass beneath the conscious gaze. Consider such a sentence as this:

Since time was poured out upon him in such an unending stream, there were whole mornings he could spend lying on his belly over an ant-nest picking out the larvae one by one with a grass stalk and putting them in his mouth.⁷⁹

⁷² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

⁷³ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, 189.

⁷⁴ *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 132.

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 153.

⁷⁷ *ibid*.

⁷⁸ *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 61.

⁷⁹ *Michael K*, 102.

The image of K in the posture of a foraging chimpanzee is won from *National Geographic* or films about Jane Goodall; though it is a cliché, by it we are inclined to a vision of K as regressed to the point of origin, yet defined by intelligence. Coetzee's prose adopts a mimetic deliberation, putting the words of the sentence – towards its end – one by one in our mouths, in words of single syllables, accumulating a description so minute as to be redundant and therefore like the description of the child that K is becoming. (The preceding sentence tells us 'He returned to eating insects'; that he puts them in his mouth is childishly tautologous.) Against the effect of such tokens of a simplified intelligence we are not inclined to notice the rapturous prose that is Coetzee's other signature and indivisible from his austerities: that unending stream of time poured out upon K is a rich and complex metaphor, wrought in biblical cadences.

What we are arguing is that Coetzee's famously gritty, minimal, prose is the slag of a high-octane furnace. A Stoic posture is revealed as Epicurean relief, won from the twin and contrasting projects of Epicurean practice: the defeat of pain in the pursuit of virtue (here writerly witness, reporting on silence and what is heard across it). Coetzee's prose teaches us a truth about Michael K and the prospects of any who would be envisaged as the recusants of history: that silence is the absence of sound, muteness the absence of speech, austerity the absence of luxury. To accomplish K's silence or his own austerities, Coetzee must first write a book. To quieten the historical dissonance, the noise, of that book, he must write another. There is no way out of the concourse of text, no way without a story, nothing without history. The quietness of K is achieved out of the rhetoric of Coetzee; if one acknowledges K and the prose to be of one creation out of Coetzee, *to be the same thing*, then K is far from quiet, he is as prosy (and of a high order of style) as his author. Most of all this demonstrates that the passage of the vagrant is not away from and out of history, but firmly within history and towards its strictures of settlement – settlement in the resolutions of literary forms that pretend the liberty of their subjects' 'content' (their meaning) even as they dispose them according to authorial prerogative in the text, and dispose *of* them in the commodity that is sold and bought, and settled to its purpose on the bookshelves of middle-class homes, or to a further purpose in the economy of 'information', as in academic theses.

New heaven, new earth

But I have argued all along that there is a depth to the practice of the vagrant that is not only historically derived, but also a figure of history itself. This practice exceeds the accusation of the

vagrant (as idle, trespassing or thieving, variously a threat to the institutions of capitalist labour or property, or, in colonial terms, as a pre-colonial recidivist.) The *depth* of vagrancy lies in the way it astonishes order, and even though literature is among the institutions of order, and orders the vagrant, yet this capacity to astonish might yet unsettle literature – and history.

I suggested at the outset, and have hoped to show along the way, how vagrancy is inordinate, neither one thing nor another, and that this character of ‘middleness’ – even of muddledness – might be thought of as transitional. The vagrant is the figure of the liminal, the figure (stooped, shadowed, cloaked in motley) on the threshold and in the act of crossing it. In historical terms, and noting the conjunction of the metropolitan vagrant of the Renaissance and the ‘anticipated’ vagrancy of resistant or insubordinate colonised populations at the Cape, such transitions and thresholds go by the names of revolution (in temporal idiom) and frontier (in spatial idiom). In a progressivist historical scheme, teleologically construed, such revolutions or frontiers mark a progress forward, an advance of some kind. In such a scheme the vagrant crosses the threshold in one direction only. Against this order, which is too often the order of texts, whether literary or historical, I have preferred the notion of the liminal to the marginal. Just as the history of the frontier in Cape history shows that frontier enacted in not cartography or proclamation, nor in rolling north and east, but in the ceaseless (and ongoing) passage back and forth of the agents of the middle – inordinate, at least insubordinate, figures – so the passage of the vagrant from Renaissance imagination to the historical and literary texts of the Cape is to and fro, rather than doggedly ‘forward’.⁸⁰ To be sure, literature cannot be allowed to pretend the liberation of the vagrant subject – it is an institution of history and subjection – but that is not to say that the vagrant is compelled finally into the ordination of the text. What is settled upon the vagrant – as the terms of his or her inheritance, and in pursuit of his or her obedience to the terms of the legacy – is only ever the ambition of the text. Authors, like testators, die, just as books are closed and shelved, but the idea of the vagrant wanders on. Is it possible to imagine a vagrancy whose disobedience is its own and not the accusation of an other?

Albert Camus, eschewing camps but espousing causes, a radical because he knows that history is never on his side, nor he on its, suggested that ‘[w]hat characterizes our century is perhaps not so much the need to rebuild the world as to rethink it.’⁸¹ In many ways this is the luxurious formulation of the intellectual, but it is also an expression of the fundamentally radical

⁸⁰ In terms of the commodity culture of the book, and specifically books of the vagrant, one might smile at the culmination of Harman, Awdeley and Dekker in the Nobel Prize awarded to a writer of Dutch colonial descent, whose mother tongue was once derided as a kind of cant, and whose major concerns have included those colonial indigenes anticipated as vagrants after the idea of the Renaissance. In this the progress of the vagrant has certainly been to and fro, leaving Europe in the progress that brought Coetzee to the Cape, and returning with them to the podium in Stockholm.

⁸¹ A. Camus, ‘On a Philosophy of Expression by *Brice Parain*, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 240.

capacity of the imagination – such as Robert Darnton notes of the French Revolution’s deep practice in rearranging social reality ⁸²(and which imaginative undertaking so conjoined the Revolution to Romanticism). Fugard’s notebooks show us how attractive Camus was to him in the provincial and fraught Port Elizabeth of the 1960s and 70s; the landscape of Coetzee’s frontier magistrate (and even that of his Karoo) shares in the existential glare of Camus’s native Algeria. When Camus identifies the project of rethinking the world he goes on to note that ‘This amounts to giving the world its language.’⁸³ It is important to be precise, as Camus is, about what he is suggesting. It is not a case of giving language to our experience of the world, of shaping the world in language, of giving the world *in* language. It is not fixing our language on the world. Camus is more radical than that. He is precise in holding that the language is the world’s. If we are to rethink the world then it needs be in the language of the world and not in our language (with which we build the world). The project is almost one of yielding. Human texts, like Coetzee’s and Fugard’s, may rebuild the world (as did the Romantic Fancy) in pleasurable or distressing constructions. We can think about those constructions, but not in them. To rethink the world it must be imagined again. In this latter sense (of the Imagination) it is possible for the vagrant to slip the bonds of his or her significance to hegemony, and to practise vagrancy beyond the ken of the accusation that we recognise and in which the vagrant originates *for us* but not for him or herself. In this, as I have suggested, it is not properly possible to write a history of vagrants – that is only to rebuild the accusation. It is, however, possible to write an account of that accusation and what it means, and it is possible to assert that the idea thus accused into being might be given its own language. In fact, this vagrant utterance is all along the preoccupation of culture. The Renaissance abhors (but sells) it, the 19th century Khoisan translate it into English and laugh at themselves awkwardly, while their colonisers transcribe it as a proto-Afrikaans and laugh at it also (when they aren’t imprisoning the Khoisan for the obscenity of that speech). Fugard puts ‘*gebabbel*’ into the mouths of the many silent Lenas he discovers across the landscape, and Coetzee prods for the tongue of K, and keeps him quiet (but imaginatively voluble). It is the belief of all these instances, whether in horror or in hope, that the vagrant utterance may make another and a further sense. In other words, it is the belief of these instances that the inordinate language of the vagrant may escape its constraint under the textual authority of those instances, and instead, and radically, discover by its inordinate nature a way of giving tongue to what is inordinate, unspeakable, unsaid, unthought, in the world.

We have this belief because in using language to think everything that is the case we know that by language we describe the totality of the world. For the most part that is a comfortable,

⁸² R. Darnton, ‘What was so Revolutionary about the French Revolution?’, *The Kiss of Lamourette*.

self-encompassing circumstance. But, like Camus, '[a]ctually we already know that words fail us sometimes at the very moment when our heart is going to speak, that they betray us even more often in our moments of greatest sincerity'.⁸⁴ John Armstrong, exploring the late plays of Shakespeare, recalls for our attention the problem of 'boundaries, limits, and restraints' which plagues *Antony and Cleopatra* and which derives around the deeper problem of the relation between linguistic and physical bounds.⁸⁵ The famous exchange between Antony and Cleopatra, on the extent of love, has Cleopatra proffering a 'bourn' and Anthony protesting that 'Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.'⁸⁶ It would require a rethought heaven and earth, an apocalyptic imagination, to give utterance to all of human experience. This is the paradox that propels art, and here specifically the negligible-crucial, silent-loquacious, hidden-free figure of the vagrant. Armstrong notes of Shakespeare's last great plays that they addressed

those contrary modes of fulfilment whose reconciliation has ever been the central task both of the poet and of the imaginative life common to all men. Since abstract equivalents are here a weak and imprecise substitute for poetry and art, it will be enough for a moment to say that they correspond to man's perpetual craving for the infinitely various and his need for the sure domicile of a continuing order. And the fact that these human ends are opposed to one another constitutes ... a dilemma of the most fundamental kind.⁸⁷

This is as true of our desire of history as it is of the subjective desire for simultaneous liberty and security. Armstrong offers abstract substitutes for poetry: one concrete correlative, an image of history, and particularly adumbrating (for it can do no more than foreshadow, crossing the threshold) *a poetics of history*, is the figure of the vagrant. The vagrant stands for the yearning towards liberty and the horror of insecurity, s/he stands on the impossible threshold of individual and social identity as it arises in every person. But the vagrant also stands for a yearning towards an escape that is beyond considerations of social constraint and order: s/he stands for the realm of the inordinate, and thus for the deepest questions of history, since it is the project of all historical writing to shape and order the mutability that is in time, but it is the vagrant who reminds us that there may be no order to what happens. In this, the vagrant represents an Epicurean liberty – freedom from the tyranny of gods, the liberty, instead, of an

⁸³ Camus, 'On a Philosophy of Expression', 240.

⁸⁴ Camus, 'On a Philosophy of Expression', 230.

⁸⁵ J. Armstrong, *The Paradise Myth*, 44.

⁸⁶ Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, i, 16-17. Recall also that in the line before Antony notes 'There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd', a line itself recalling Juliet's 'They are but beggars that can count their worth.' (II, vi, 32) In a world turned upside down, the value of things may best be spoken of – reckoned – by those who have nothing, value may best be placed upon things by those who are themselves displaced.

⁸⁷ Armstrong, *The Paradise Myth*, 43.

aimless materialism. That this is an ancient desire in philosophy is known, but so is the fact that to many the prospect is terrifying. For no-one, however, is the prospect of that causelessness so problematic as it is for the historian, the author of causes.

Appendix

'Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life Among the Hottentots'

(ex. M. Lister (ed), *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain* (1949), 198–202, and including footnote glosses by Lister. The text upon which Lister relies is that published in *Sam Sly's Journal* (1846))

(From "Sam Sly's Journal," 1846.)

KAATJE KEKKELBEK

or

Life among the Hottentots

As sung with unbounded applause, at the Graham's
Town Amateur Theatre.

TUNE: "Calder Fair," or, "How Cruel was the Captain."

Kaatje Kekkelbek enters, playing a Jew's Harp.

My name is Kaatje Kekkelbek,¹¹
I come from Katrivier,¹²
Daar is van water geen gebrek,
But scarce of wine and beer.
Myn ABC at Ph'lipes¹³ school
I learnt a kleine beetje,
But left it just as great a fool
As gekke Tante Meltje.

SPOKEN. — Regt dat's amper waar wat ouw Moses in the Kaap¹⁴
zegt van Dr. Ph'lipes zyn school. Hy zegt: "Das ist alles flausen
en homboggery."

Met myn Tol de rol, enz.

¹¹ Katie Chatterbox.

¹² The Kat River Hottentot Settlement.

¹³ Rev. John Philip (1775—1851). Born in Scotland. Superintendent,
London Missionary Society, South Africa, from 1819 until 1850.
Una Long, *Unofficial Manuscripts*.

¹⁴ A pawnbroker of Cape Town.

But a b, *ab*, and i n, ine,
 I dagt met uncle Plaatje,
 Aint half so good as brandewyn,
 And vette karbonatje.
 So off we set, een heele boel,
 Stole a fat cow and sack'd it,
 Then to an Engels setlaars¹⁵ fool,
 We had ourselves contracted.

SPOKEN. — Ja, jong! jy kan myn g'loo, dat on het die Setlaars gehad; en hy denk altoos dat het ander volk is wat zyn goed steel; zoo een Jan Bull is een domme moerhond, een kleine kind kan hom ver k!

Met myn tol de rol, enz.

We next took to the Kowie Bush,
 Found sheep dat was not lost, aye
 But a schelm boer het ons gvang,
 And brought us voor McCrosty.¹⁶
 Daar was Saartje Zeekoegat¹⁷ en ik,
 En ouw Dirk Donderwetter,
 Klass Klauterberg, en Diederick Dik,
 All sent to the tronk together.

SPOKEN. — Regt! so een Boer is een moer slimme ding! Hy was errst net so stom als de Setlaars en Christenmens, *maar Hot'nots en Kaffers het hom slim gemaak!* Ja, rasnavel, ons het die dag so lekker sit kramnaatjes eet, dat de vet so langs de bek aff loop; maar hier kom de Boer by ons uit met zyn vergehaalde haan en sleep ons heele spul na de tronk. Maar nou trek hy weg over Grootrivier,¹⁸ die moervreter zeg dat hy neit meer kan klaar kom met de Engelse Gorment!

Met myn tol de rol, enz

¹⁵ 1820 Settler.

¹⁶ Peter McCrosty, an official in the office of the C.C. & R.M. Graham's Town.

¹⁷ Sabina Seekoegat and Christian van Donderwether are names of imaginary characters found in an unsigned humorous letter from a correspondent at Graaff-Reinet to *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, July 2nd, 1830. The style makes it attributable to Bain.

¹⁸ Orange River.

Drie months we daar got banjan kos
 For stealing os en hammel,
 For which when I again got los,
 I thank'd for Capt. Campbell.¹⁹
 The Judge came round, his sentence such
 As he thought just and even,
 "Six months hard work," which means in Dutch,
 "Zes maanden lekker leven!"

SPOKEN.—So een Jud, hy verteel hom dat hy slim en geleerd is, als hy daar zit met zyn witte kop, wat net so lyk in als die ding waar de Engelse die vloer mee schoon maak, en zyn mantel en bef net als een predikant;—maar ons Hot'nota, will jy g'loo is banjan slimme.—ons weet wel wanneer ouw Kekwis²⁰ rond kom—dat steel ons de meeste, want zyn straf is altoos "*Six months hard labour!*" maar die kwaai ouw, met die rooi bakkies, wat hulle zeg Menzie,²¹ die is beetje straf, hy geef ons twee jaren in de bandiet, en laat ons klop so als in ouw Breslaar²² zyn tyd. De lange speetses van Seur Jan Wyl,²³ daar geef ons niks om! Maar ou' Kekwis het hulle afgeset, om laat hy te goot was voor ons, en Muisgraaf²⁴ in zyn plaats gesteld. Daar is ook een Montakee²⁵ de *Sectaris*, die net zoo goed als Gov'neur in de Kaapstad tegenswoordig. Nieman kan de kerl vern . . . k. Hy laat al de Hot'nota work op de Hard way which is a very hard way of dealing met de poor Hot'nota.

Met myn tol de rol, enz.

De tronk it is een lekker plek
 Of 'twas not just so dry,
 But soon as I got out again
 At (Todds) I wet mine eye,

¹⁹ See note, p. 82.

²⁰ George Kekewich, one of the Supreme Court Judges. Una Long, *Unofficial Manuscripts*.

²¹ William Menzies (1795—1850), Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court, *ibid.*

²² Probably F. R. Bresler, Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet for many years. Appointed to Court of Justice, 1822. G. Mc. Theal, *Records*, XV, p. 32.

²³ Sir John Wylde, Chief Justice of the Colony.

²⁴ William Musgrave became a 2nd Puisne Judge.

²⁵ John Montagu, Colonial Secretary. Instrumental in construction of the "Hard Road" across the Cape Flats by convict labour. W. A. Newman, *Memoir of John Montagu*.

KAATJE KEKKELBEK

At Vice's house in Market-Square
I drown'd my melancholies;
And at Barrack hill found soldiers there
To treat me well at *Jolly's*.

SPOKEN. — Rasnavel, jong! jy kan myn g'loo dat die ouw
dikke kerel zyn brandewyn lekker is! maakie ouw Pratt zyn ook.
Maar ous neem altoos sluk by ouw Todd als ons uit die tronk
kom, dan smaak hy reg lekker!

Met myn tol de rol, enz.

Next morn dy put me in blackhole,
For one Rixdollar stealing,
And knocking down a vrouw dat had
Met myn sweet heart some dealing.
But I'll go to the Gov'nor self
And tell him in plain lingo,
I've as much right to steal and fight
As kaffir has or Fingoe.

SPOKEN. — Dats onregt, het is de grootste onregt in de wereld!
de teef het myn man afgeronseld, en hulle het myn in de
blackhole ingestee! Ik moet gelyk krygen; de Engels Gorment
moet myn gelyk geef, anders sal ik toon wat Kaatje Kekkelbek
kan doen!

Met myn tol de rol, enz.

Oom Andries Stoffels²⁶ in England told
(Fine compliments he paid us.)
Dat Engels dame was juist de same
As our *sweet Hotnot ladies*.
When drest up in my voersits pak
What hearts will then be undone,
Should I but show *my face or back*
(Kaatje here turns round)
Among the beaux of London.

²⁶ A leading Kat River Hottentot who, with Jan Tzatzoe, was taken
to England by Dr. Phillip. Gave evidence before the Aborigines
Committee of the House of Commons. Una Long, *Unofficial
Manuscripts*.

SPOKEN. — Regt, jong! I wish toch dat de *mis-denvaarheid Syety* would send me to England to speak the trut net so as oom Andries* en Jan Zatzoe²⁷ done in *Extra Hole*,²⁸ waar al de Engels kom met ope bek [om alles en te sluk wat ons Hot'nots voortel. I not] want Dr. Flipse to praat soetjes in myn oor wat I moet say, so hy dome met Jan Zatzoe, and ouw Riet met oom Andries. Kaatje Kekkelbek het zelfs een tong in haar smoel en is op haar bek niet gevalle. Ik zal vertel hoe dat de Boere en de Setlaars ons hier vern . . . k en verdruk, en dat hulle een *Temper Syety* hier wil oprigt om ons niet meer brandewyn te laat drink, dan zal ik plenty va'rlands t'wak en dacha kryge om te stop, en brandewyn en halfkroons; want als een mens wil ryk word in England, jy moot maar binjan kwaad spreek van de Duits volk; maar hulle zal voor myn niet laat gaan hulle is bang voor Kaatje Kekkelbek! Maar myn right wil ik hebbe! It gaat verd . . . na de Gov'neur!! — Exit Kaatje.

KLIPSPRINGER.

²⁷ Jan Tzatzoe, son of the headman of the Tinde clan, King William's Town. Without official permission he was taken to England by Dr. Philip and gave evidence before the Aborigines Committee. He and Stoffels spoke at meetings at Exeter Hall and elsewhere in England, *ibid.*

²⁸ Exeter Hall, London. To the Colonists it represented negrophillist opinions because of the extreme views often expressed there at Missionary and other meetings.

* Andries Stoffels, Esq.

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