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The narrative and the commemorative in the ceramic vessels of Hylton Nel, Wonderboy Nxumalo, Grayson Perry

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Introduction

This study explores both the narrative and commemorative within the context of the ceramic vessel. The subject of the narrative, commemorative and the ceramic vessel are inherently complex and vast. The concepts underlying them are inextricably linked to one another and therefore are not easily separated. I have attempted to contain the ideas within the confines of particular themes that form part of the narrative content of the selected artists work.

Surrounding the whole notion of this study is the question as to why one should explore the ceramic vessel as a conduit for the exploration of the narrative and the commemorative? The answer lies in a real need to explore the ceramic vessel firstly within a fine art context and secondly there is a very obvious gap in this area of research within the South African literary and critical context.[1] Therefore the study of the works of Hylton Nel and Wonderboy Nxumalo become a valuable contribution into the future study of other ceramic artists in South African and more importantly within an academic discourse. The exploration of the work of all these artists' can perhaps be said to challenge the way in which we perceive ceramic vessels and hence how we perceive ceramic art and the vessel within the broader sphere of the visual arts.

This study reveals the debate of the relationship between so- called "high art" and low art, which in itself goes beyond the parameters of this study. Generally ceramics has always been perceived to be within the context of the decorative arts, having a functional or quazi -functional purpose. In this study I attempt to place the position of the ceramic vessel within the context of fine art, as a worthy component and extension of the sculptural. Furthermore the ceramic vessel goes beyond the sculptural alone; it extends the parameters of how we view or read objects. It encompasses the concepts of language, text, sign, and image and opens up a dialogue with the viewer in terms of content. The three dimensional form of the internal and the external of the objects allows for a multi focal and multi dialogic reading of the various angles of the work and the understanding of the object as a whole. The surface of the ceramic vessel also involves the understanding of graphic materials that are not traditionally used within the confines of fine art. In ceramic art materials such as glazes, oxides and under glazes[2] reveal innovative and exciting ways of communicating and extending the narrative.

The narratives themselves reveal complex concepts that refer to memory, personal identity and the recalling of past experience both collective and autobiographical. Memory as a concept underlies the narrative, as it is a construct that recalls and sequences events and experiences that are essential to the artist.

Each of these artists is a storyteller, weaving visual tales of their own life experience and worldview. Tirrel (1998: 117) statement is an appropriate one in the light of the narrative vessels of these artists:

> … telling a story is a sort of self examination by self exposure…Telling stories helps us find out who we are…but who we have been…Stories tell us what we are capable of, and so they tell us who we might be. Stories provide a way of exploring, logically and emotionally, actions occurring in contexts, actions performed by agents with particular beliefs, motives and desires…

These artists reveal through their story telling, their identity and sense of place in the world and a way of coming to terms with that world and the challenges that it presents. The well known Jungian Psychologist and storyteller Clarissa Pinkola Estes (19992:469,470) has made an interesting observation:

> Story is not just a story .In its innate and proper sense, it is someone's life. It is the numen of their life and their first hand familiarity with the stories they carry that makes the story medicine.

In reaching an understanding of the work of these artists, it is important to take an inclusive approach. Each of these artists' narratives and personal mythologies reveal an interconnected and complex weave of concepts and ideas that become apparent on the surfaces and forms of their vessels. It is therefore my contention to take a Post Modernist point of view. Kirk Varnedoe (1991:166) states:

> Post Modernism's most salient and valued attributes have to do, not with absolution and exclusivity, but with heterogeneous inclusively and unprecedented open – endedness.

Furthermore if one is to take a deconstructive approach as Norris and Benjamin (1988:7) state:

> To deconstruct is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication with the object of showing that the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means.

This approach allows for an interesting and creative examination of the narratives of the artists vessels and as result I have explored issues of marginality, biography, childhood, sexuality, the didactic and linguistic aspect of the narrative and finally the exploration of the commemorative and nostalgic.

Chapter 1

Definitions:
The Contemporary Vessel, Memory, Narrative and the Commemorative.

The Approach

In this chapter I shall attempt to define and explore the concepts of the narrative the commemorative and the vessel. An understanding and contextualization of these concepts elucidates an analysis and understanding of the work of Grayson Perry, Hylton Nel and Wonderboy Nxumalo. The narratives themselves reveal complex concepts that refer to memory, personal identity and the recalling of past experience both collective and personal. Memory as a concept underlies and binds the narrative and the commemorative.

My approach is to unpack these various concepts from a deconstructionist perspective. Barbara Johnson in her book *Critical Difference* (1981) clarifies the term:

> Deconstruction is not synonymous with" destruction", however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word "analysis "itself, which etymologically means," to undo"—a virtual synonym for "to de- construct" (Cixiuos: 1994)

Hence my research is to analyze the terminology by breaking it down into areas that will reveal meaning in relation to the works of these artists. Furthermore in this chapter I will austensibly adopt a theoretical approach, segmenting areas that will not include any formal analysis of the works. The formal analysis will be evident throughout all other chapters in this study. The motivation behind this approach is to clarify the complexity of these concepts and to place them holistically in a context within this study.

It is therefore necessary to examine three areas that explain and inform the concepts of the narrative and the commemorative within this research.

- A brief explanation of what constitutes the "contemporary vessel".
- The concept of memory within the context of the ceramic vessel.
- The historical and cultural concept of memory.

The Contemporary Vessel

The Webster dictionary (1991:1482) defines the" vessel" as a "hollow or concave utensil, as cup, bowl, or pitcher used for holding liquids or other contents". This definition is not sufficient to give understanding to the notion of what is considered a "contemporary vessel". One needs to distinguish what is meant by a functional pot as opposed to a contemporary vessel. We can regard the functional pot as an object that is required to perform some use in terms of its utilitarian worth and that may or may not have some aesthetic merit or qualities. However in an article by Wayne Higby entitled: *The Vessel: Denying Function*, Higby defines the "contemporary vessel", (1986:25) "The contemporary vessel is an object that presents the formal essence of the pot exaggerated to reveal a personal artistic vision uninhibited by pragmatic issues of function." In this definition therefore the vessel is reneged of its functional purpose and use and is conceived as a form of self-expression. This is not to suggest that functionalism is entirely negated; Nel's vessels are ambiguous, they straddle between artistic self-expression and functionality. It is this enigmatic aspect of his work that also reveals debates on the nature of the ceramic vessel and it's tradition of functionality and aesthetics. Thus one cannot examine the contemporary vessel as being the product of self-expression alone. For the purposes of this study however I shall explore the contemporary vessel as a conduit or vehicle that expresses the narrative from a personal and a socially collective perspective.

The commemorative aspect of the contemporary vessel is somewhat a contradiction. How can a contemporary vessel express commemoration and the past? In this study I wish to explore the commemorative content of the contemporary vessel, where each artist recalls and records events or individuals that are an integral part of their own personal and cultural histories. The contemporary vessel can thus also be perceived as an object of contemplation. Higby cites the example of Brancusi's four large wooden cups made between 1917 and 1920.These objects were not hollow, but carried the image of a vessel. He denied functionality and for him they became objects of "pure contemplation" (1986:26) .For most of the artists in this study the vessel is not merely an object of contemplation. This would imply that these objects elicit a meditative and almost Zen like response from the viewer. The vessels move far beyond the initial act of contemplation, they become the exact opposite. They are the conduits of confrontation, of unease, of challenging known and accepted norms of behaviour and revealing the darker underbelly of society and its disfunctions.

In this regard the contemporary vessels in this study refers to the vessels of Chagall, Picasso and Gauguin. Their ceramic vessels each carried an extension of their personal expression and oeuvre, certainly extending beyond the purely functional[3]. Scott cites Claire Freches-Thory an expert on the Ceramics of Gauguin;

> For Gauguin, the art of pottery was inextricably linked with that of painting. The Brittany sketchbooks show numerous motifs common to his paintings as well as many designs for ceramics. The evolution of his ceramic oeuvre is part of Gauguin's general stylistic development towards an increasing complex symbolism. (2000: 66)

Picasso, Gauguin, Chagall and many other Modernist Artists[4] extended their personal iconography and symbolism to the medium of clay and were able to create another dimension to their work. Whiting (2002: 68) has suggested that narrative vessels "have an intimacy not found in more removed objects such as the painters canvas, or sculptures". Chagall reiterates this when he has stated that:

> Shapes are almost always conceived as two- sided or flattened, because I believe any narrative embodies more than one point of view. There is also then the necessity of the viewer to become the handler as well, to turn and manipulate the vessel and let it enter into his or her own space. (Whitting 2002: 68)

Picasso also used the medium of clay to experiment and his involvement with the medium was once minimized. As Scott remarks:

> To refer to him as a 'visitor' to clay is actually misleading, for to consistently work in a material for over 20 years and produce the range of pieces Picasso did, means that he was not a visitor but a master of the genre. (2000: 72)

Many artists have made use of clay as a medium and have used the services of ceramic studios. It was in the ceramic studio of Chaplet that Gauguin experimented and at Vallaurus, that Picasso and Chagall made their ceramic oeuvre. The interaction with the ceramic craftsmen and the artist is a serious topic, which goes beyond this study, suffice to say that Modernist artists towards the end of the 19th Century have increasingly blurred the boundaries of the visual art disciplines. Picasso subverted the traditional use of the so – called functional vessel. As Bernard Ruiz Picasso (Scott 2000: 72) has remarked:" He used and subverted this ancient tradition: a plate becomes a painting, a pot a face, a newspaper a tray, a plate a plate."

Whiting makes the pertinent observation that the vessel, plate and bowls "create a tableau for participation" (2002:68). The viewer is then not a passive partner in his or her interaction with the vessel, but an active participant that is faced with and confronted by not only the physicality that the ceramic vessel presents, but also with the narrative content that confronts us to review the world as we know it.

Memory and the Ceramic Vessel

The ceramic vessel could be seen as the mnemonic device object that expresses the concept of memory through the story telling, narratives and histories that recall the past or commemorate an event or person. This storytelling manifests itself in images and words on the vessel or conversely the vessel may become the subject of the story. There is an interconnectedness and shifting dynamic between the vessel as subject and the vessel as the medium to facilitate dialogue. In the works of Hylton Nel, Grayson Perry and Wonderboy Nxumalo it will be demonstrated that these artists make use of this shifting interrelationship between vessel form and vessel surface in the unfolding of their personal and cultural narratives.

The history of the vessel as story telling devise or as a means to commemorate an event or person is not uncommon and is found in all cultures and in all ages. The Greek vase is the commonly known narrative vehicle that commemorates and recalls an event or person. However my intention is to extend the idea of the vessel as a story telling narration medium revealing its narrative on the surface of its form. Images are thus signifiers of many other metaphorical, social, historical and symbolic allusions.

The concept of the vessel could also be an object that contains and acts as a receptacle for spirit, story, memory and history, an example of the Luba from the Western Congo refer to the head as a receptacle to memory .In the work of the contemporary Nigerian artist Osi Audu (Mack 2003:25) has spoken of the contemporary evocation of Yoruba memory vessels whereby objects are containers of memory and ”that a sense of self is constructed through memory; the self is a projection forward of remembered experience into present time.”

Another example of objects being containers of memory can be found in the memory jugs in the American civil war that contained emotion and feelings for their makers. The artists applied photographs or relief objects that represented significant commemorative and emotional attachment to the maker.

Furthermore the vessel can form cross-cultural references that deepen the complexity of the narrative in the work of these three artists, who make use of memory not only as a devise to recall the past, but also as a mental palimpsest and appropriation of a greater more universal past and narrative.

The concept of memory in relation to Hylton Nel's work takes on a more complex dynamic, both personal and universal in content. The narrative depicted on the vessel need not be deciphered literally, but rather as a poetic journey of words and images that unfolds with the viewer's recognition and recollection of those images that recall personal experiences or histories. The vessels become a visual diary that records his experiences, feelings and life events. In the work of Grayson Perry the narrative vessel relates to a darker and more ironic sensibility and social commentary relating to sex, abuse, the art world and the fact that Perry is a transvestite. The vessels of Wonderboy Nxumalo arise out of a specific social context of AIDS, love and loss, tradition, personal philosophy and history and yet the themes that he records are universal in form, content and symbolism.

Memory as Cultural and Historical Concept

John Mack has referred to the semantics of memory in his book The Museums of the Mind (2003: 26) as having a wide range of vocabulary in its cultural meaning. He cites the facts that the Greeks referred to memory as personified as the goddess Mnemosyne who after nine nights of coupling gave birth to the muses. In the Greek world memory were the progenitor of knowledge, history, mathematics, astronomy, eloquence and the arts of persuasion. In the Roman tradition memory was attributed to Juno whose task it was to remind, warn and advise .In the Japanese context memory held many nuances of meaning .Of particular interest to me is the interpretation of memory in two Japanese words. The first relates to the word "kinen" which means memory in the physical context as a commemorative object. The second word "omoide" refers to childhood memories and recollections. It is these cultural references to the meaning of memory that have significance to the work of these artists as this widens our appreciation and understanding of how they have used memory as a specific devise and subject matter that narrates, recalls, warns and reminds. It will be demonstrated later how they employ the use of memory with these historical connotations in mind.

Having established the context of memory as a narrative devise within the ceramic vessel and as a historical concept, it is essential to explore what the narrative constitutes.

Defining the Narrative

To define the narrative is a complex issue as it involves some exploration of literary theory and the ideas of memory, time, image, text, sign and language. These ideas are all closely interlinked and are difficult to separate in order to form neat categorization and definition.

The narrative is defined by the dictionary (Webster: 1991), as "a story or account of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious…representing stories pictorially or sculpturally" This definition is not sufficient as it does not include the methods of representation of the story and only hints at the concepts of time, language and image. The purpose and the function of the narrative is also an aspect that is not mentioned. Therefore in investigating a definition or understanding of the concept of the narrative certain essential aspects need to be explored:

- Firstly, the idea of time both cosmic and temporal. This includes the notion of the present, the contemporary condition and the past as in history.
- Secondly, the issue of the narrative and its structure.
- Thirdly, concepts of image, text, sign, symbol and language are also connected to the concept of the narrative.
- Fourthly, the question of what the purpose and function of the narrative is also needs unraveling.

The narrative is augmented as it is to the aural, speech and performance. A story is narrated by oral, written, pictorial and sculptural means. For the purposes of this dissertation I shall confine my analysis of the narrative to the visual: written, textural and pictorial.

Narrative Time and Memory

When one investigates the narrative concepts of time and memory they become an important component in the understanding of the narrative. Fentress and Whickham (1992:50) refer to a story and memory as:

> .. a story is a sort of natural container for memory; a way of sequencing a set of images, through logical and semantic connections, into a shape which is, easy to retain in memory .A story is thus a large scale *aide-memoire*…stories appear to us as just a natural way of thinking about things, a way of ordering our knowledge [or our castles in the air], and representing them in our minds.

Memory is said to operate in two systems. Endel Tulving, a psychologist at the University of Toronto and an authority on memory, as cited in Fentress and Wickham (1992:20) has suggested that memory is “semantic” and “episodic”. The former relates to a’ knowing consciousness’ and episodic as referring to ‘self-knowing consciousness’. Hense Tulving suggests that semantic memory relates knowledge of events independent of our own personal experience. Episodic memory underlies our subjective sense of identity. He further asserts that the distinction between these two systems of memory reflect

> an epistemological distinction between rationally organized memory – that is , memory ordered as a network of concepts- and non – rationally organized experience- that is remembered personal experience , sequenced temporally…, “episodically”

However what is more revealing as asserted by Tulving (Fentress, Whickham 1992: 21) is that semantic memory remembers through symbols and episodic through recalling experience. This distinction recalls the use of myths, fairy tales, bible stories, comic strips, medieval manuscripts and poetry as well as journals and diaries within the recollection of semantic and episodic memory narratives. The influence and manifestation of these genres will become evident in the analysis of the various artworks throughout the dissertation.

The relevance to the understanding of the narrative is such that the works of Perry, Nel and Nxumalo all reflect aspects of both episodic and semantic memory in the narratives that manifest on their ceramic vessels. Hence it is necessary to explore the personal narratives of the artists as a result of their own experiences and the recording of external events that are independent of their personal lives. It is also necessary to take note that there is an interconnection between these two memories and that the categorization is not completely defined. Fentress and Whickham (1992: 24) have clarified that:

> Memory is fluid, and works in ways that in which we are scarcely aware… The categories in which we discuss memory should thus be indefinite enough to avoid any sense of rigid boundaries separating one type of memory from another.

Hence in my analysis of the works I shall select an approach that allows for the interflow of one aspect of memory to another. We are all products of our own experience and however objective one may be in the understanding of the course in which the narrative operates, the individual still expresses his/ her work from a subjective and cultural point of view that is based on their own lived experience.

It is useful to refer to literary theory when deconstructing the concept and relationship between the narrative and time. An aspect of the relationship between time and the narrative emerges from the investigation of the writings of Paul Ricoeur.He believed that historical time unites two senses of time; cosmic time which is the time of the world that unfolds as a sequence of uniform, qualitatively undifferentiated moments in which all change occurs and there is temporal time as defined by lived time, the time of our lives and making use of devices that organize and measure temporal time, for example, diaries and calendars (Dauenhauer:2005)However all lived time has moments that are more important than others such as the, birth of a child or death of a loved one.Ricoeur highlights the paradox that on a" cosmic scale , our life is insignificant , yet this brief period when we appear in the world is the time in which all meaningful questions arise" In a sense as will be demonstrated in this study, this paradox of time and the "meaningful questions that arise", are the very issues of the poignant and humorous content of the narratives of these artists work.

Ricoeur continues to assert that time, "The historical present is the time of actions, the time of the inaugurations of new sequences and arrangement of things"Reinhart Koselleck (Dauenhauer: 2005) has referred to a time that mediates between a "space of experience" and a "horizon of expectation" Throughout this study it will be demonstrated how the artists mediate between the "space of experience " as being their own expression of their lived and temporal experience and its manifestation in the vessels as narrative. Furthermore, the viewer is exposed to the" horizon of expectation" as each of these narratives unfolds.

To give expression to this complex historical present one must have a kind of discourse that can articulate both strings of actions and events and their human context. The suitable discourse to do this is the narrative. Furthermore historical time becomes human time "to the extent that is articulated through a narrative mode and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Dauenhauer: 2005)

This "condition of temporal existence" is one aspect of the content of the narrative that is embedded in the works of these artists. The narrative for these artists is the connection and medium by which they articulate lived experience and manifests to create order out of chaos. The narrative is the sequential unfolding of events, both personal and universal in which time in all its aspects is negotiated.

Structure of the narrative

Ricoeur (Dauenhauer: 2005) has suggested that narrative has certain features that indicate a structure. The narrative brings together disparate and discordant elements into the unity of a plot that has a specific time zone or temporal reality. This is evident in the work of Perry in particular, which reveals a range of disparate images and texts that provides the viewer clues as to the unfolding of the narrative and heightens our sense of expectation allowing the discourse to thus be open to interpretation.

The other feature cited by Ricouer (Dauenhauer: 2005) is the element of surprise. This too will become evident in the analysis particular to all three artists. If one refers to Nel it is evident how he manipulates history and appropriates it into a highly personal narrative and through an intellectual and literary game, the viewer is confronted with a decoding of a very specific language.

All stories are comprised of characters that are engaged in events and actions throughout the narrative. Ricoeur asserts that:

> The narrative constructs the identity of the character, that can only be called his or her narrative identity, by constructing that of the story told .It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character. (Dauenhauer: 2005)

All these artists portray elements of an inner narrative in which they become the principle character of a continual personal narrative that tackles issues of identity and marginality.

Narrative and the Inter-relationship between Text and Image

To understand the narrative as the vehicle of communication there are various obvious elements that are employed as tools or vehicles that are used in the manifestation of the narrative itself. These elements are text and image. Within these two seemingly simple concepts underlie a complex weave of interconnected concepts of language and semiotics. (It is however not my contention to delve into an in-depth study of these disciplines, but to contextualize the works of these artists within the concept of the narrative)

The manifestation of text is recalled in ancient Sumerian and Egyptian clay tablets. These early markings were required for divination purposes and were used as visual signs embodying the things they represented. (Bottero 1987:133-700) Fentress and Whickham (1992:19) have stated that those ancient texts were not perceived as language, but as signs that were representative of things. They state that scholars believe that the “Sumerian ideogram, pressed into clay,

evolved from a direct,'thing to thing' system of representation …cuneiform ideograms continued to be regarded as 'things' and not 'words' Hence one can assume that the origin of text evolved as signs and not as words. The idea of language however, arose out of the interrelationship between the visual signs and came to be ordered in a sequence that as Fentress and Whickham (1992:19) have stated as " syntactically determined: ordered in other words as language" The question that begs to be asked is how this relates to the narrative within this study? I shall approach my analysis of the text within the narrative vessel as a visual sign that represents its pictorial form and as representative of language and its semantic meaning through the use of words.

The use of imagery as sign from a semiotic point of view is regarded by Pierce (Moriarty: 1996) as "an object which stands for another … " and that the word or image stands for some other object or concept .The most basic premise for Semiotic Theory as purported by Pierce, is that all we know is mediated by signs. Piercean semiotics allows us to talk about all signs whether language or non-language. Furthermore if one takes this Piercean approach in understanding the sign, then the exploration of the narrative can be investigated through the mediation of symbols, indices and icons as part of a system of Pierce's concept of the sign. Furthermore the examination of text insofar as its relevance to the narrative vessel will also be examined as a sign. An in depth analysis of this image – text relationship will be examined in two parts; Chapter Three explores the didactic aspect of the narrative and Chapter Four relates to the narrative genres.

Purpose and Function of the Narrative

The function and purpose of the narrative is to firstly, demonstrate some moral or ethical basis for the human condition. The narrative operates as a didactic tool to uplift and motivate, or as a model of improvement within that society. Ricoeur refers to the narrative as having some ethical dimension (Dauenhauer:2005). From a philosophical point of view the ethical dimension of the narrative shifts the emphasis from the self to the other. It engenders a sense of responsibility to others and their well being. This aspect will become evident in the narratives of these artists. The vessels of Nxumalo warn his community of dangers of contracting HIV-AIDS. The classical pots of Perry relate a childhood fraught with abuse and in so doing give us the viewer an awareness of child abuse. There is also another aspect to the ethical in the role of sexual identity. How do we position the concepts of transgression and sexual orientation within the context of the narrative? Chapter Five explores these ideas as they manifest in the works of Nel and Perry.

The second function of the narrative is closely connected to the commemorative History and nostalgia. The narrative can relate or recall an event or person of great import that had significance to that society. The commemoration of that

event or person then records a specific moment in history that is embedded in the psyche of that community, which engenders pride or respect and in some cases as a healing devise. For example in the work of Nxumalo, he records the Anglo- Boer War and the part that the Zulu people played in this dramatic narrative. His sense of pride and respect for his community is evidenced in his renditions, as will be explored later in this study. Nel also records his own Afrikaner History in a fusion of ironic pride. These aspects are also linked to the concept of ethics and responsibility to the community. It is however relevant to define and contextualize the concept of the commemorative.

Commemoration – A definition.

The commemorative is an attempt not only to fix time, but record past events subjectively, which may well disappear, fade and loose importance or veracity. Mack states that Memory is the recall of the fragmentation of a past reality. It is the reconstitution of a time that is reprocessed and redigested. A mechanism of trying to make sense of the present and the future. Fentress and Wickham have stated that:

> … we experience the present as connected to the past. Our experience of the present is thus embedded in past experience. Memory represents the past and present as connected to each other, and consistent with each other, in this way. (1992:24)

Commemoration becomes the methodology of recording, fixing, freezing or containing those histories. It is the very act of recording that determines with time the veracity and significance of that past and in so doing links it to the future and perhaps even determines that future. In chapter six I shall explore the commemorative works of Nxumalo and Nel.

Chapter 2

The Concept of the Child

This chapter is an extremely complex one, exploring concepts and ideas that are interconnected to one another and not always easily categorized. The concepts of Childhood and Biography are an integral part of the narrative content of the work. When one refers to the ideas of childhood and biography it becomes an imperative that we examine allied concepts of the child, the primitive and the naïve which all stem from a long and complex history. How do these ideas connect to the narrative manifest in the artist's works? It will become evident that these artists demonstrate a common thread - the concept of the child. In the case of Nel the child aspect is manifest as a stylistic convention that he appropriates and one that reflects and is bound to the narrative content. For Perry the concept of the child is the subject matter for his own narratives that reveal a deeply traumatic childhood and hence is connected to his biography. Nxumalo has a child like style, but does not record a content relating to the child per se. I shall confine my study in this chapter to the works of Nel and Perry.

In order to understand how the concept of the child as a narrative device and content manifests in the vessels of these artists, I have explored the artists' works in relation to specific key areas. Hence this chapter is divided into several components:

- The Cult of the Child
- The Naïve
- The Primitive and the Romantic Other
- Childhood and Biography

The Cult of the Child

All the artists in this study could be said to relate in one aspect or another to the concept of the child and hence to the child like or naïve. Janis (Bock 1974:5) has referred to a relationship between the artist and the child as manifesting in a particular worldview:

> Whatever the reason may be there are people in the world who always retain an untouched quality, a spiritual innocence regardless of their experiences in life. Somewhere within them is an impregnable quality carried over from childhood, which experience does not assail. It is a

> spontaneous, innate uncommon sense, which remains inviolate in the face of out worldly imposed tensions and restraints.

It is in the work of Nel and Nxumalo, that this spiritual innocence and resilience to the hardships of life, both emotional and physical are evident. It will be demonstrated how Nel appropriates a child like style as well as demonstrating a child -like joy or joi de vivre that manifest in his works. Perry as will be explored later is concerned not with appropriating the formal stylistic devices of a child like style, but rather in relating and recording his own childhood.

The idea of a spiritual innocence, as Baudilaire (Kuspit 1982: 5) once stated:

> Genius is nothing more than childhood recovered at will- a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis, which enables it to order the mass of raw material, which it has involuntarily accumulated.

At the turn of the century the cult of the child and Primitivism was developing. Individuals like Picasso, Klee, Gauguin, Henri Rousseau, Appolinairre, Picabia and the German Expressionists all strove for the concept of the child and a return to a state of innocence. The concept of the child became a Modernist and later a Post Modernist metaphor for spontaneity, freshness, awe, honesty, playfulness and inventiveness.

The concept of the child was a deliberate intention of the thinking of the time to move towards a manipulation and use not only of a romantic return to innocence but as a formal tool to unlearn what society and the conventions of Art at the time had imposed and constrained on the artist. As Novalis (Fineberg 1998:7) said: "Every level of learning begins with childhood. For that reason, the wisest man on earth so closely resembles a child."

Hylton Nel and the concept of the child

Art evolves out of a particular context and Nel is part of that evolving process. His work belongs to this long tradition of the child. From a Post Modernist perspective he manipulates and returns to a process of unlearning and yet paradoxically accumulates the past redressing it and relearning it to suit his own vision of the world. The idea of "unlearning" Werner Hoffman (Fineberg 1998: 7, 8) refers to the following:

> This call for an artistic turnaround, back to infancy…belongs to the same revolutionary climate that provoked the destruction of the political traditions at the end of the 18th Century. For artists, the revocation turns

> into an instrument of revolutionary thinking…The meaning of this is a far-reaching break with the traditions of painting begun by Giotto-the idea of accumulated skillfulness. For the first time, the opposite direction is proclaimed and the artist is authorized to unlearn what he had learned.

Nel's process of unlearning is evident in that he had a formal art training and further reinforces the idea of a deliberate move towards a new language. A comparison can be made with Nels ability to create the spontaneous and seemingly effortless artlessness recalls a statement made by Picasso. Although the statement refers to drawing the words seems appropriate to Nel. ; Picasso once stated as cited in Brett (1987:4)"For me to draw like Raphael was easy, but I had to learn to draw like a child"

Nel underwent a formal art training at the University of Port Elizabeth (currently PE Technikon), if we refer to an example of an early painting entitled *Self Portrait* 1962, (Fig 1) an oil on canvas, we have evidence of an artist fully competent in the formal language of traditional modes of art making, yet he abandons this in a deliberate act .Not only does he discard naturalism and tradition, but painting in the traditional format of the canvas. His plates become his new canvas as he alters the traditions of conventional ceramics and pottery and the overburdened emphasis on function and prettiness.

He states (Hillebrand 2001:37):

> "Most of what I make are plates .The same shape over and over, …That means I don't have to think too much about the shape and can concentrate on the thing that mostly gets me going, namely colour alone or combined with other colours, lines blotches."

If one examines the formal aspect of his vessels in relation to the child -like, it can be noted that there is a discarding of conventional perspective and the use of line and patterning .It is important to examine Nel's work not only as individual pieces, but explored within a group or clustering. By examining small groups of works one can attain a better understanding of his work. In the following examples (Fig2, 3, 4) are three plates. A plate (Fig 2) depicts a scene of a cat holding an umbrella with a schematic and typically child like rendition of the sun, shining happily. Beneath this scene are a few lines recording the congratulatory anniversary message to friends. The lines are like pages taken from a personal diary. This plate reveals the schematization and the simplicity of the line. In the next example, (Fig 3), the plate represents a delft blue cat behind a fence. The fence, wall or barrier that partially obscures the cat becomes a pattern that through the line creates a repetitive effect on the plate, again like the schematic drawings of a child. Another plate (Fig 4) represents a young woman with a bunch of flowers walking up a flight of stairs. The stairs also become a form of

patterning, with the repetitive grid. The discarding of perspective and the simple lines of the steps also recall the drawings of a child. The person, somewhat androgynous, appears to almost totter in high heels whilst ascending the stairs. The precariousness of her gait heightens the humour. The plate commemorates spring in Calitzdorp (his present place of residence) and contains a delightful sense of emotional innocence. In these examples there appears to be a display of a love of life .The exuberance of the child emanates from the surfaces. Melanie Hillebrand states:

> Although his vessels are made to be used, their main objective is to give pleasure. The pleasure derived from their luscious colours, eccentric forms, impertinent subjects, the telling references to historical pieces, and most of all, to their spontaneous joie de vivre. (2001:16)

In this instance Nel demonstrates the ability to recall the childlike in terms of the formal renderings, but also in terms of an attitude that conveys a childlike joy and innocence.

The Concept of the Naïve

The concept of the child is closely linked to the concept of the naïve.
It is appropriate to define what the term “naïve” means in relation to the narrative, in order to obtain clarity in this matter. If one takes a deconstructive approach the ideas reflected by the author Phillip Vann (1986:2) refers to in his introduction to an exhibition of British Naïve Painters and offers an informative explanation and one that could apply appropriately to Nel and Nxumalo. He states:

> The word naïve is derived from the Latin word natives meaning inborn, spontaneous, natural,. It indicates a root sensibility, an original dimension, a prelapsarian state in which the nature being was at home, at ease with the world…The word naïve has the connotation of foolishness, silliness, unworldliness, ingeniousness. We should recall that the word silly at one time meant happy and carefree. The word ingenious… is derived from the Latin word, ingenuous, meaning born free or liberated.

<u>Nel and the Naive</u>

These sentiments could easily apply themselves to the work of Nel. Nel’s work is often crafted in a childlike form, discarding perspective and revealing patterning and child -like renditions of animals and people as has been examined previously. However underlying this simplistic statement belies a sophisticated understanding of Art History of art and literature and human nature. Furthermore his mastery in ceramic technology belies the apparent banality. This creates an

interesting dialectic between the seemingly banal subject matter and the deliberate manipulation of ceramic chemistry and glazing techniques[5] as well as an understanding and manipulation of Art History and cultural appropriation. Nel fuses and integrates these issues in a manner that appears “natural “, “free” and “liberated” and yet belies a cunning and deliberate manipulation of them that creates an “original dimension”. He in a sense liberates himself from convention and at the same time manipulates convention to suit his own purposes.

A plate with a simple, innocuous border (Fig 5) depicts a central motif of a large, heavy penis weighing down a rather innocent delft blue squat chair. The seemingly innocent image belies its wickedly humorous subject matter, the personification of a penis as the torso of a man. The inversion of the banality of domestic functional ware deeply rooted in an English and Oriental tradition reveals Nel’s irreverence and flaunting of societal mores and stylistic conventions. One is not offended by this subject matter, but rather revels in his rebellion. There is a quiet poignancy as the gentle penis rests on the colonial wicker seat and a childlike irreverence to authority. The deceptive spiritual and formal innocence juxtaposed with the sophisticated thinking of the laughing adult rebel heightens the intellectual joke Nel deliberately plays a very intelligent game of cultural appropriation .The game is hidden from the uninformed and made ironic by the formal “naïve” style.

The image of the penis found on this plate can be compared to a ceramic male genital vessel found in Peru. (Fig 6) a male genital vessel of the Vicus Culture, Peru, 400 BC. This penis vessel was very much part of a cultural and ritualistic context of Peruvian society. Nel extracts this image out of its cultural and ritualistic context and creates this paradoxical relationship between form, content and function and challenges issues of cultural boundaries, societal norms, stylistic convention and functionality.

The Italian Renaissance tradition of Istoriato Majolica ware was a particular form of ceramic genre developed in the first half of the 16th Century. It is a genre that depicted the painted narrative on the ceramic vessel. The subject matter ranged from the allegorical, historical, biblical, folk- lore and erotica. Certain narratives were direct copies of famous paintings of the time. (Fig 7), the *Judgment of Paris* is such an example. The intention of the narrative was to inform and educate the public of everyday, moral and religious matters.

The erotic subject matter of Nel’s plate can be compared to the erotic subject matter within the Istoriato erotic genre. Paul Mathieu (2003: 66) states that: “Images carried a power so real that it was thought capable of changing events. Much …of this power is understood today as superstition”. This is evidenced by the use of the penis in Italian Renaissance as a symbol of good luck and idiocy.

A plate (Fig 8) depicts a woman sitting in front of a basket of penises. The inscription behind her states;" come and get your good fruit, women" Although as Mattheui (2003:73) points out, this seems humorous but it alludes to ancient depictions of women holding containers and sprinkling the same with water as if they were growing from the earth. This fragment (Fig 9) of a Greek vase depicts a basket of phalluses. Hence the concept of the penis as good luck was linked to the idea of fertility and progeny. This ensured the survival of the family line. Another example of the penis on the ceramic vessel as having apotropaic symbolism can be seen in (Fig 10) the vessel here represents a winged phallus. The use of the phallus stemmed from a variety of sources in the Renaissance. The use of amulets and medieval church imagery such as wind chimes and pilgrim badges all signified good fortune (Fig 11). The contents of the jar contained some form of aphrodisiac or fertility inducing mixture.

As Mathieu states (2003:66), "It should not surprise anyone that images of the sex organ – sources of intense feelings and instruments for creating life- have carried… potent symbolic significance." These phallic images were not random, but rooted within the societal and moral codes of the times.

The phallus also referred to as alluding to idiocy as Matthieu has indicated (2003:77). If we refer to a plate (Fig 12), the image depicted is that of a face comprising of phalluses. This image was originally taken from a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (Fig 13) .The physiognomy also refers to an Arcimboldesque manner of representation. The inscription on the banderole reads in reverse and in Italian:" every man looks at me as If I were a head of phalluses" The implication from a contemporary point of view takes on a negative intention. As Matheui has stated:

> Although one is tempted to associate this inscription with the corresponding and vulgar expressions- in English [dickhead] and in Italian [testa di cazzo] – according to etymological dictionaries, these vernacular expressions signifying a; simpleton' do not appear until the 19th Century. Never the less, it looks as if this profile of phalluses was meant as a defamatory image. (2003:71)

With these historical and contextual references in mind, Nel subverts the conventional cultural boundaries and fuses them, playing an intellectual game or joke with the informed viewer. The phallus perched on the colonial wicker chair now alludes to a multiplicity of layered intellectual meaning that belies the seeming "naivety" that one first perceives it to be and the deceptive innocence of the image becomes a complex weave of historical referencing and cross referencing. Nel's naivety is ambiguous; on the one hand it is liberated from the constraints of convention, so in a sense it is naïve in the true meaning of the word as Vann pointed out, and it manifests as child-like in its formal renderings. Conversely his work is highly sophisticated and manipulative, the creation of an

individual fully aware of historical referencing and its implications. Within this sophistication lies an ironic connection to the concept of the child.

Primitivism and the Romantic Other

The inclusion of this particular subject is relevant to the narrative in terms of how the artists are located or contextualized within a tradition, which determines or establishes how one understands and interprets their narratives.

The concept of the primitive was highly influential to Western Modernist thinkers, poets and artists, in that the primitive represented a romantic ideal of man and nature, far removed from the realities of their everyday lives. A primitive romantic myth was perpetuated by artists such as Gauguin (1848-1903) who left the dandified Bourgeoisie lifestyle of France to go to Tahiti, or later the German Expressionist Kirchner (1880-1930) who lived his life and his art donning tribal clothes and decorating his home with tribal artifacts. However underlying this attraction to the primitive was an exoticism and a Utopian romantic ideal of man and nature, unfettered by industrialization and technology. A utopia where man could give free reign to his / her feelings and instincts. These sentiments were echoed by the poet Appollainaire (1880-1918) He collected Primitive, naïve and folk art and was one of the discoverers of the artist Henri Rousseau (Samaltanos 1984:2) For the Dadaists and the German Expressionists, the childlike, naiveté and the primitive was a catalyst which could release them from rationalism which in their estimation had failed. It was an avenue that could explore the anti-rational, the child-like and where creativity was based on instinct, emotions, dreams and intuitions.

Romanticism as Cubbs reiterates:

> …embraced an artistic philosophy of escape, fantasy, reverie, and revolt. It also preached dissatisfaction with the mundane everyday world, which it believed could only be redeemed through the mysterious transforming powers of the artist's individual imagination. Exiled from common social life by the myth of their unique creative visions, artists came to be viewed as isolates, rebels, and necessary outcasts from society (Hall 1994:77)

In other words, the Modernists perpetuated a romantic ideal of pure creativity, of a creativity springing from an emotional and instinctual base, free of conventions and authority isolated and free to express their creative outpourings. This romantic primitive myth has in Post Modernism not exhausted itself. From a western perspective, the primitive, the naïve, the gay, the folk artist, the female is viewed from a position of the "other" Any group that operates supposedly on the

periphery of mainstream culture or is marginalized by age, sexuality or mental well-being is perceived as the “other”. A case of “them” and “us”. Randall Morris (Hall 1994:11) states:

> …We seem to need to believe that the noble savage still exists. We need to believe it so badly that we even cut off part of our everyday world and exoticize it to create an “other “ we can collect, embellish with theory, and still seek to control.

The Post Modernist romanticism of primitivism or the “other” can be further reiterated by the comparison of tourism and anthropology. Metcalf has stated:

> Modern society was said to be over civilized, repressive and inauthentic. Modern people came to believe that naturalness and authenticity existed only in other places, periods, or cultures, and the discovery [and preservation] of these places and people became a desperate, modern preoccupation. According to Mac Cannell, this concern for a lost authenticity and nostalgic search for real experience is at the center of modern consciousness. (Hall 1994:216)

Nel and the Concept of the Other

In a sense there is this need to perpetuate this modernist myth of the artist as a lonely, isolated outsider seeking a Utopian reality in a contemporary consciousness. Nel perhaps can be seen to embody this romantic desire to capture a “lost authenticity” and search for “real experience”. There is certainly evidence in both Nel’s art and his life to substantiate these ideas. He has turned his back on the city and has returned to lived for several years in the Karoo and Northern Cape. This wide expansive and culturally isolated move is deliberate. He has in the past several years lived in two rural and isolated places namely Bethulie and his present home Calitzdorp.As a gay artist he could be said to be marginalized and certainly coming from an Afrikaans and Protestant / Calvinistic background, his naïve style and his physical isolation from the metropolis, one could believe in perpetuating the romantic myth of the Primitive, the other and the naïve artist. From childhood Nel’s, marginality is expressed. When recalling an incident as a child, when his grandmother chose a cousin’s picture as being better than his and stating that (Stevenson 2003:13) “Never mind, you were not meant to be an artist” He was subsequently sent to boarding school and as he states (Stevenson2003:13) “Sending me away, I suppose, was meant to straighten me out, make me more bearable and more reasonable…and more manly.”

The perception of Nel as outsider is reiterated in conversation with Stevenson:

> **MS** Going back to rural life – you trod your own path, you always lived in these distant environments. Is that perhaps why your work is so distinctive and can't be confused with any other ceramists work? As an outsider, is there a spirit of back to nature, an unhurried craftsmanship? I never look at your work and think of anybody else's-
>
> **HS** I think that I feel that being queer, as it were, makes one…
>
> **MS** Individuated…?
>
> **HN** Well, you have a sense that in some ways you're not …I've never felt pukka. It puts a kind of handicap on one's development, and one has to deal with that plus make a life…(Stevenson 2003: 40)

The conversation continues:

> **MS** But you think that's why your work is so distinctive?
>
> **HN** because I've had to fight – you know it's almost as if you're born crippled and you have to learn to walk – that's how it seems to me…(Stevenson: 2003)

In these words Nel creates the perception of the isolated Gay artist marginalized and crippled by his gayness. His isolation both geographically and sexually sets him apart and in this isolation he is able to create distinctive and unique work. Whether he creates these sentiments deliberately to perpetuate the myth is debatable. He echoes the words of Mac Cannell, quoted above when he refers to a desire to make his work "real". As an artist he alludes to a desire to seek a "lost authenticity" and "real experience" in his work and life and in so doing also perpetuates the romantic myth of the "other". He states:

> **HN** I not only try to make it real, I believe it is real, you see, and I don't of it terms of art which you put on some sort of pedestal and label it .At the time of making and while it's with me it is just a real extension of one's life as it were …(Stevenson 2003:48)

<u>Perry and the Concept of the Other</u>

Perry can also be said to be an artist that perceives himself to be marginalized. He refers to his name as a starting point for his "otherness" He states (Jones 2006: 31) "It meant 'bailiff's son' .A highly unusual name was self defining; even

at the offset I felt different." He identifies with the writing of Hans Christian Anderson. He refers to them as being (Jones 2006:5,6)

> autobiographical in varied ways. I sympathise with him in that his psychology seeps out, often undiluted, into his fables. I thought about this recently while decorating a vase called *Internal Conflict* because I was referring to a drawing I did of a giantess towering over a street scene .I imagine parents on the school open day were looking at the art display area and whispering, 'Look at his drawing, he's fucked up!" I see the chattering parents nudging each other and agreeing, "The mad boy in the class!"

Perry, in this statement sets himself apart in terms of his mental well being and in terms of his emotional honesty. However he has many other aspects that set him apart. Firstly he is a transvestite, secondly he works in a discipline of ceramics that has always been perceived as the stepsister to fine art, a decorative art, Thirdly his attraction to the work of the outsider Henry Darger.

As a cross dresser Perry inhabits a peripheral world that tests and extends the boundaries of sexual behaviour. It is this sub- culture that in a sense marginalizes him from dominant culture. He joined the Beaumont Society, a support group for "trannies", where they all share as he states " the pain of being forced to cope with transvestism"(Jones 2006:148). Furthermore it is the very marginalized world of the "trannie" that will be examined in Chapter Six, as this is the very subject of his true inner narrative that confronts the viewer with issues of gender identity, transgression and queer politics. These are the narratives that Perry shares courageously with his viewers through the medium of his vessels.

Finally in terms of Perry's marginality as far as ceramics is concerned; it is the perception of pottery as being an "underdog" He states that he was attracted to pottery because it represented another context for artmaking that did not sit comfortably within the borders of so called fine art. He states (Jones 2006: 192,193): "I was attracted to pottery because it was naff; that was the subtext" It was in a sense uncool and yet at the same time he realized that he could manipulate the context and use it as a vehicle to express his marginality and the shocking subject matter, so unlikely to be found on a vessel.

<u>Nxumalo and the Concept of the Other</u>

Nxumalo could also be said to be marginalized by virtue of the political apartheid system that he was born into. He was subjected to the Bantu education system and was in his twenties when the present political dispensation was introduced to South African society. Hence it could be deduced that his education was marginalized and by virtue of his physical and geographical location of living on a

farm, not influenced too greatly by the metropolis. In this sense he could be perceived to be a marginalized outsider or “other”.

Nxumalo is an artist with little formal schooling and minimal art training. Born in Greytown in 1975,Wonderboy Nxumalo went to Candabuthule High School. There were no formal art classes at school and he learnt to trace and copy plants in a science class. He was apprenticed at Ardmore ceramic studio under the tutelage and mentorship of Fee Halsted Berning. He later studied printmaking with Malcolm Christian sponsored by the Caversham Press Education Trust. Fee encouraged him to look at the work of the Namibian artist John Mafengejo’s black and white lithographic work. He then moved to Springvale Farm and continued with his work at Ardmore studio. He has exhibited extensively, both locally and in the United Kingdom. He in a sense works on the periphery of the mainstream art world, working within a particular rural studio under the guidance of Fee Halsted Berning who is a fine artist trained within the art world academia and previously an art and ceramics lecturer. In terms of the concepts of the naïve and the primitive, he is difficult to categorize as he straddles two worlds; the western in the form of the tutelage that he has received and his exposure to Western culture and at the same time he is a proud Zulu conscious of his Zulu heritage and he is the product of a discriminating apartheid society that did not allow him the opportunities for further education. The desire to place him in a neat definitive box is not my intention and in a certain sense becomes a semantic debate. What is important for the purposes of this study is how his narratives evolve and how they are interpreted. Nxumalo’s work like Nel’s also presents as childlike and “naive” in style. His naivety however is not assumed, but is an honest expression of his sense of the world that that surrounds him. I shall give a detailed examination of his work in subsequent chapters within the relevant frameworks.

Childhood and Biography

When one refers to the concepts of biography and childhood, the two are almost inextricably linked to one another. Biography is the composite narrative of an individual’s life and childhood is that fragment that is arguably the most influential aspect of a persons sense of identity .It could be said to have the most profound effect on our lives and how we position ourselves within our own worlds and how it influences the way in which we operate in that world. Our sense of biography lies within the realm of memory and is responsible for how our identity and childhood is constructed and reconstructed.

Memory is embedded with our sense of identity. It is the fundamental way in which we contextualize ourselves in the world. Mack cites the writer and neurologist Oliver Sacks as stating:

> ’We have, each of us a life story; an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a” narrative”, and that narrative is us, our identities. He continues that this; “ narrative is, in effect, memory, the mechanism by which we recollect ourselves in that continuous drama which constitutes our sense of uniqueness in the face of the facts of our biological similarity. (Mack 2003:20)

Embedded within the tableau of memory lies a complex network of concepts related to childhood that manifests itself as a multiplicity of many narratives. Journalist Lynn Sampson cited in House and Leisure (Sampson 1994: 36) refers to childhood as “…a tricky landscape. It is illusionary and memorable only in transcribed snatches like scattered urges in the last moment before sleep”

These words imply the transient, disconnected fragmentation of a dream world that attempts to recollect the past .It is not just any part of the past, but the emotional fragments of childhood. It is that childhood is characterized by certain paradoxical elements. Childhood is said to reflect a certain innocence and naivety, yet it also reveals wisdom in certain children, whereby they reveal and display a certain deeper wisdom beyond their years. There is also a manifestation of cruelty when one considers William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies* (1952), where children became almost primal and demonic in their behaviour. The fairy tale presents as a multilayered narrative that unfolds and reveals a strange dynamic of repulsion and attraction to the macabre The brothers Grimm in their Fairy Tales (1812), deal with stories of devourment, monsters, griffins and fantastical creatures, all of which are highly attractive and repulsive to children. Childhood is characterized as an age of playfulness, humour, trickery and games. It is also a period of emotional honesty that perhaps is never really recaptured in adulthood, where the ego is too deeply embedded and scarred by cultural prejudice and societal convention.

<u>Grayson Perry –Childhood and Biography</u>

Grayson Perry’s biography reflects a working class background, born in Chelmsford, Essex in 1960, he recalls a traumatic childhood fraught with violence, loss and crisis of sexual identity with the ultimate emergence of his transvestite alter ego, Claire, and the winning of the Turner Prize in 2003. In his autobiography *Grayson Perry Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl* he narrates a childhood fraught with both emotional and physical violence The upbringing is in a working class family with the absence of a biological father and an abusive step father and weak mother.

Perry managed the brutality of his childhood by escaping into a fantasy world and the focal point of this imaginary world was his teddy bear Alan Measels.When his own father left he said that he felt “bereft”. He states:

> When he left, I felt bereft .The rug was pulled out from under me. As far as I am aware, it is the event that had the largest impact on me in my life. Emotionally I went numb; I closed down. And that’s when I handed everything over to Alan Measels. (Jones 2006:13)

This imaginary realm of Alan Measels consisted of four islands in the Atlantic Ocean, where nuclear wars set in the future were enacted. These imaginary wars became a way of Perry as a child to subvert his powerlessness against the onslaught of a terrifying adult. He states:

> As years passed, Alan became more of an underground guerilla, more of a spy…I was the guerilla fighter. Guerilla fighters are underdogs battling against invading forces, surviving on their wits, waging a sneaky war of ambush and sabotage to undermine a more powerful enemy, which was what was happening with my step father .I was a stealth fighter, an underground revolutionary pitted against someone who was too dangerous to challenge. (Jones 2006: 21)

He continues:

> I lived in Alan Measles realm, carrying it around with me like a comfy sleeping bag I could pop into at any time .I held my make – believe world in my head, returning into it to find ready formed landscapes, narratives and relationships. (Jones 2006: 20)

Perry’s vessels become the vehicle to manifest this imaginary world. Hence as will be demonstrated, the biography of his childhood becomes one of the overriding subjects of his vessels and Perry’s discovery of the work of the outsider artist Henry Darger was compatible with his concepts of childhood and his own traumatic biography.

Darger was born in Chicago in 1892 and incarcerated in a mental asylum for the crime of masturbation and feeble mindedness and ultimately with the diagnosis of functional schizophrenia. He escaped from the institution several times and eventually worked as a janitor in a Catholic hospital. Isolated and alienated his whole life, he created in the privacy of his apartment an illustrated narrative entitled *The Story of The Vivian Girls, in what is known as the realm of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused By the Child slave Rebellion.* This was a twelve volume tale comprising of 15,145 pages and containing 300 illustrations. The story is set in an alien planet where seven

Catholic girls (the Vivians) have adventures led by a child slave rebellion against the oppressive and brutal adults. There is panoply of heroes; all alter egos of the artist that help the children. The tale is a narration of an internal world. Perry could identify with this artist .He states:

> Darger is the artist I identify with most in terms of his creative pathways. I feel a kindred spirit with how his imagination worked, the way he sought refuge in a fantasy world in the same way that I secreted my imagination and artistic practice …I see in Henry Darger 's work that the real world was too painful to bear, so he made an alternative .The Story Of the Vivian Girls was a metaphor for his internal emotional life …I was searching for a metaphorical images that exactly matched what I wanted to say about looking back at one's childhood. In 2000 I made a Pot called *The revenge of the Alison Girls.* (Jones 2006:127)

In this pot, Perry constructs a classical shaped vessel (Fig 14) recalling a 17th Century Oriental vase, (Fig 15). In Perry's piece, the decorative imagery of the classical Imari vase is subverted; instead we see images in the background of hanging bodies and concentration camp watchtowers and barracks. In the foreground a man is shown, hanging with a board around his neck, stating:"Stup, Laz , Bast" these letters are obscured but if we fill the letters it reads " Stupid, Lazy, Bastard". Below, resting on the gallows steps another sign reads" Violent Father" The images depict the branding techniques of Nazi traitors used during the second world war. Perry takes revenge on his violent stepfather by transforming him into the traitor and torturer of innocent children. This revenge aspect is particularly interesting if we compare these images with the work of Henry Darger, both in terms of the formal aspects as well as the content. If we refer to a watercolour illustration of carbon traced images from children's comics (Fig 16) entitled: *"Trapped in Lighted cavern they try to elude the Glandelinians surrounding them"*, we see strong stylistic resemblances between Dargers' works and Perry's pot. Both are illustrated in a strong graphic manner not unlike a comic book style. Darger illustrated the children as naked throughout their pursuits in the story and are often shown in battle scenes armed with weapons. Perry also uses naked children that have both male and female genitalia. A child is depicted in his vessel, standing on a box, naked and having both male and female genitalia. The child points a gun to the head of the dead father. The depiction of the powerful child although physically small, yet able to kill the oppressor, makes for a very powerful image of revenge and indirectly rage. This fusing of male and female gender may indicate a confusion of sexual identity or the combining of the sexes to form a stronger force against the onslaught of brutality in an attempt to preserve the self. Taken from a Jungian perspective (Hall1973: 72) the self is an archetype whose function is to integrate the various structures of the personality. Perhaps the combining of the anima and animus – the male and female aspects of the self, as manifested in the dual sex of the children depicted by Darger and Perry, the self is then able to function as a more powerful, unified force. The depiction of the protagonists as always being naked

could refer to a Utopian age or time of innocence. The nudity of the children ironically heightens their vulnerability especially in the light of the continual presence of danger.

The use of stock transfers of sentimental imagery such as the kitsch teddy bear, a baby in the basinet sleeping and a reproduction of a portrait of a child, juxtaposed with the hard etched graphic imagery of the dead father and naked child all serve to heighten the irony of the classical Oriental vessel. Behind this classical shaped urn and allusions to respectability and sentimentality lies a message of society's depravity and cruelty against children. Interestingly enough, Darger was considered a pedophile (Jones 2006:123) due to rumour of him being involved with a missing child. However the theory now is that Darger identified with the children, that they represented his childish, innocent part hence his gravestone reads" Henry Darger, Artist and Protector of Children"(Jones 2006:123).

Perched on the top of this vessel is a gold glazed sculptural figure of a teddy bear. This Koons- like teddy with its glitzy Pop style represents Alan Measles (Fig 17) and forms a strong contrast to the typical bird imagery found on the lids of Oriental type vases. To Perry, Measles represented a powerful force that was the keeper of all good things. Perry states (Jones 2006:19,20)

> As I was growing up I progressively bestowed all my noble masculine traits of a high achiever, a winner, a lover even, on to my teddy bear for safe keeping .He was the guardian, the custodian of these qualities. To keep Alan safe, to ensure he was protected, I adopted the role of his bodyguard.

Alan Measles sits proudly on the lid of the vessel. In the light of these statements he appears to guard the pot .He becomes the custodian of the vessel, protecting and preserving the self. This comic – like figure, who contains all Perry's masculine attributes, becomes ironically a super hero imbued with special powers of protection.

Chapter 3

Didactic Narrative

The Didactic Use of Text and Image in the Narrative.

In chapter 1, one of the functions of the narrative is the ethical dimension that Paul Ricouer refers to in the semiotic study of the narrative. The interplay between the text and the image and its didactic aspect is best demonstrated by the analysis of medieval manuscripts. The twelfth century abbot, Sugar of Saint – Denis, observed in his verse:" *Mens herbes ad verum per materialia surgit"* cited (Panofsky 1970: 164) The idea is that uncultivated and uneducated minds are able to reach an understanding of truth though the recognition of concrete images. Fentress and Whickham (1992:49) refer to the didactic nature of the arts in this period. The illiterate masses are informed of their religious and moral obligations through the medium of the images, which act as signposts or visual clues of the narrative, as they represent various passages from the scriptures. If we refer to the illumination manuscript from the Moutier-Grondval Bible. (Fig 18) The word 'illumination' itself refers to a spiritual enlightenment. Within the medieval context illumination refers to the connection to a spiritual truth and the attainment of a higher moral understanding, these images were specifically designed to create a form of religious and social engineering, so as to move the masses towards moral and spiritual truth. In this manuscript we read the story of Genesis. The images of the characters reveal themselves in the narrative that is read from left to right and the saga unfolds in a series of visual clues that the viewer understood and recalled from the passages of the scriptures and church sermons. The story is informative underlying a moral message.

Tirrell (1990:119) refers to the moral agency of story telling. She states:

> Through telling and listening to stories, we learn to make subtle and not so subtle shifts in points of view, and these shifts are crucial to developing the sense of self and others so necessary to moral agency.

Nxumalo and the Didactic Narrative

A variety of examples of Nxumalo's vessels will demonstrate how his didactic and moral agency in his narratives unfold, also his cultural heritage and the moral and social issues that confront his community in the light of the pandemic of Aids and its devastating impact on the Ardmore community, has become an integral subject matter of his narratives. Tirrell further cites Hume as stating that stories help us to develop a " greatness of mind" (1990:119), "that requires two fundamental capacities of human nature: sympathy and comparison." It will

become evident in the narrative vessels of Nxumalo that he uses sympathy and comparison as tools to educate and inform his community.

Nxumalo reveals an interesting interplay between Western and African thought processes. It is therefore important to understand his position within this dynamic as this has a direct correlation to the analysis of his works and specifically in terms of the narrative. Although I have briefly specified his biography, it is important to expand on the context in which he makes his vessels.

He and family members are part of a community of farm labourers and domestic workers who are employed by white farmers. Nxumalo is not a farm labourer and is employed and lives as stated previously on the Ardmore farm and works in the Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio. However he is part of a larger system that in a sense brought him to the position he now holds. As Scott states (1998: 4), that when Fee Halsted – Berning and her husband bought the farm they bought not only the land, but also inherited "labour tenancy relationships" Scott further describes the harsh conditions that prevail in this rural community.

> It is not an easy place in which to earn a living either as a commercial or subsistence farmer, and the dry cold, brown, landscape of winter presents a truer picture of agricultural prospects…Rural poverty is a harsh reality; those left behind by migrant workers depend on the sporadic income generated by family members working in the city or on the farms, and this reality helped to shape Ardmore. (1998:4)

It is these facts that led many of the Ardmore artists each with their own personal experiences into the employment of Ardmore Studio. The significance of the studio to the Ardmore artists was gainful employment, which empowered them in a context of poverty and deprivation. Scott at the time of the publication of the book in 1998; *Ardmore, An African Discovery* refers to the art of Ardmore "not driven by greater issues and those who work in the studio know only their rural heritage and traditional background"(1998:5) These words in the present context no longer hold true. Many of the founder members of this artist's community have since died of Aids[6]. In the light of this tragedy the "larger issues" are certainly an imperative.

Nxumalo is an artist who is greatly concerned with the Aids issue and a large proportion of his work deals with this subject and his Zulu traditions. If we refer to the work of Nxumalo the didactic and moral aspect of his vessels narratives is not unlike the medieval manuscript. The vessels become the conduit to convey important messages through the medium of image and text, to the community.

If we refer to (Fig 19) a platter*;" Our Nation…"* the message of Aids is real and urgent. The inscription reads:

> Our Nation, Our life in our hands. There hope, there is life. We need more health and long life than the death. It is very painful to see someone in serious sickness. Remember the name of God. Pray and praise him for your problems. He can help you. AIDS is a real disease. More life is from protection like gloves, condoms, vegetables and fruit are very important .Let us all join the safety life than the friend of death [AIDS].

Nxumalo takes on the responsibility to inform his community of the dangers of unsafe sex and assumes the role of teacher informing the community of AIDS. He is not judgmental, but offers practical advise that his community can understand. His religious convictions are embedded in an attitude of hope and healing through gratitude towards a higher power. In African culture the storyteller is perceived as teacher, imparting practical advice and knowledge to the community. (Knappert 1990: 64)

This vessel depicts numerous monkeys involved in a variety of activities. Most are depicted drinking and in a state of inebriation, they scavenge through garbage bins and their body language is indicative of sloth and excess. Once again Nxumalo makes use of animals. In this platter the animal becomes a metaphor for human behavior. This calls to mind the *Aesop Fables*, where animals are personified in order to convey human behaviour and in so doing the reader is taught some moral lesson. Nxumalo personifies the monkeys and attributed them with human frailties in order to convey a moral message.

In the center of the vessel is a bunch of grapes flanked by two open condoms. Mielie plants, syringes, skulls, fish, fruit and vegetables as well as gloves are arranged in a balanced composition around the surface of the plate. On the top center a cartouche reveals the intaglio printed words. Flanked by this cartouche are skulls, and emaciated, dying monkeys.

The monkey, as a symbol has a specific interpretation, depending from which cultural viewpoint the viewer and the artist perceive it to be. In Eastern society the monkey is often depicted as the three mystic monkeys; that " See no Evil, Hear no Evil, and Speak no Evil." The monkey, which appears to chatter incessantly and fruitlessly, represents the distracted mind that must be focused by practices such as meditation; when tame the monkey is capable of great loyalty. The Indian monkey Hanuman, the hero of the *Ramayana* symbolizes cunning and strength. When fire is sent against him, he tames it, symbolizing theTantric power to transform even the fiercest emotions into spiritual energy. Nxumalo's monkeys although they indulge in behaviour that is negative one can almost anticipate their salvation by virtue of the hopeful message that Nxumalo conveys. One could foresee their transcendence, not unlike Hanuman. The monkeys if they fulfill the message of good health practices then achieve their redemption. Nxumalo's narrative is to my mind a universal one of redemption.

The monkey in African culture and in particular the chimpanzee has been regarded as Knappert (1990: 56) states as being more human in ancient times when people were more apelike. Monkeys and apes were also regarded as gods that looked after mankind. This symbolism could be applied to Nxumalo's use of the monkey as the personification of human kind. The monkey assumes the dual role of personification and as the symbol of redemption and saviour.

It is significant to compare the Tibetan healing manuscripts (Fig 20) with Nxumalo's vessel. Tibetan healing manuscripts were used for didactic purposes to inform the individual as to health related matters. This particular manuscript illustrates the kinds of behaviour that are conducive to health as well as those that lead to death. Nxumalo does precisely the same. He also expresses behaviour that leads to health and behaviour that leads to death. The comparison is significant as is suggests allusions to a Jungian collective unconsciousness. Two very diverse cultures and artists convey in a didactic narrative a universal truth of health and healing.

Another interesting aspect of the use of symbolism in this vessel is the depiction of death. Throughout history the skull has been a symbol of death and commemoration. Baker (1997: 89) in his book on *The Art Of Tibetan Healing* has referred to the image of the skull, in Tibetan culture, as "the face of impermanence" The use of the skull is both a symbol of danger and death, but that we are able to change that behaviour by our own actions. Nxumalo makes a statement of free choice that originates from our own mind set.

Nxumalo's use of the skull calls to mind the *momento mori* tradition in Western culture. Mack (2003: 87) cites in his book *The Museum of the Mind*, medieval usage of the skeleton and skull as the manner of commemorating the dead. If we refer to (Fig 21) the use of this medieval skull imagery Mack (2003: 90) states "They seem to be transformed into reminders not to forget who we are nor what we shall become." The implication is recognition of the frailty of human mortality. Nxumalo's use of the skull as in the medieval skull expresses the same didactic warning. Furthermore the use of the skull as commemorative device takes on a generic connotation .The warning and message is not directed to just one specific person, but to the whole community.

Nxumalo is Zulu and his cultural heritage is a crucial element of his work and approach to the narrative. This cultural influence is evident in certain areas namely the oral, historical, aesthetic and symbolic traditions of the Zulu nation.

From an aesthetic and symbolic point of view the use of pattern on the border of this plate is significant. In Zulu culture pattern plays an important role in communicating instructions and messages that act as signs that are decoded by the community. In Zulu beadwork, the formation, use of colour and arrangement

of the beads acquire symbolic interpretation. Credo Mutwa (1996: 4) in the booklet *Usiko* refers to the triangle as having the dominant relevance in symbolic interpretation. It is regarded as the symbol of male and female. Female in the shape of a diamond and male as an x .If we refer to the patterned border of this plate (Fig 22), Nxumalo makes use of traditional Zulu patterning. In these examples of Zulu beadwork and basketry (Fig 23), the chevron and triangular shapes are echoed in Nxumalo's plate. Nxumalo does not deliberately infuse any specific meaning to his patterns, but the use of them is embedded in his Zulu heritage and cultural background. They become a visual passport like a flag of a nation. Beadwork in particular in Zulu culture represents and expresses messages. For example a neckpiece the patterning decoded means;" You have many lovers, many stars in your sky. I refuse to be your wife"(Mutwa: 1996) One could be tempted to read the use of triangles as the male and female symbolism that Mutwa refers to, as being especially significant in the light of the AIDS message that he communicates.

His didactic message is not just a message to warn against the dangers of aberrant behaviour, but is rooted in the tradition of story telling and poetry in Zulu culture. Nxumalo's message calls to mind the Zulu tradition of praise poetry and the responsibility of the praise poet. Ntuli (1996:27) refers to this form of poetry as *izibongo* (from *bonga*- to praise) The purpose of the praise is to extol the virtues of human and non – human creatures, such as animals and inanimate objects. However the purpose of the praise poem extends further as Kresse (1998: 171) asserts, that the izibongo is a genre "of fundamental political and socio- regulative relevance … " and " contribute[s] to a socially accepted, just progression of social life, leads to *izibongo* being regarded as documenting and forming a self- descriptive and normative social discourse of Zulu culture" The author further reiterates that it has common features that point to an "interdependence of power between ruler and the people , between which the poet (and praise poetry on the whole) mediates , reconciling their interests for the common good of society" The *imbongi* (praise poet) therefore represents or acts as an intermediary to convey the virtues or criticism of the subject and hence convey some moral and didactic imperative that is relevant to the people and the society As Kresse further asserts(1998:179) that the " *imbongi* has a special social responsibility , since his art has a central normative function in "mediating power" and " izibongo fulfill an essential function in conserving and transmitting social consciousness… they are documenting history… this is why the imbongi is a 'chronicler' as well as a poet"(1998:180)

In this vessel Nxumalo appears to act as an *imbongi*. A praise poet that carries a social responsibility and conveys and records a message through the praise, that will act as a didactic tool to help or advise the community. These poems or *izihasho* are short pieces that are composed to highlight the quality and feats for which the person, animal or object will be remembered. *Izibongo* is primarily an oral tradition, but the *imbongi* (the poet) can write down their praise poetry before it is narrated. The implication in terms of Nxumalo's narrative as written in the

intaglio cartouche is that in this case although not strictly speaking an *izihasho* does carry certain aspects of one. Mutwa (1996:18) has also suggested that the praise poetry is not only to extol but to also to express negative attributes of behaviour. He states that the duty of the praise singer was to, " recount both negative and positive deeds of the sovereign. This would include the, for example the King's bad temper or his latest misdemeanor " In Nxumalo's narrative the personified monkeys behaviour is not praised, but the promise of a changed lifestyle does bring praise for God and ultimate salvation. It might also be said that in a certain aspect this *izihasho* is a praise poem to God. He writes, "Remember him. Pray and praise Him".

In the tradition of the *izibongo* the genre was part of an oral tradition and therefore had certain fundamental elements that formed its structure and characteristics. According to Scheub (1975: 353) the oral narrative in African tradition mediated between audience and reality. The performer shaped the audience's perception of the real. Image was conveyed through the performers body, gesture and the sounds and utterances of the words. The images were visualized and evoked in the minds of the audience. These as Scheub asserts were developed from early childhood a series of what he calls " core – clichés" that were repeated motifs that the audience could relate to. . Furthermore it was through the use of repetition that these clichés were inculcated in the collective memory of the society (1975: 354 ff). It was through the repertory of repeatable images that a narrative plot was developed. These repeated clichés in the narrative serve as Scheub (1975: 360) states to not " contain plot 'messages' so much as contain the potential communication of such messages…And the system is an educational system, the aesthetic and metaphorical elements of the tradition having been evolved subtly for didactic purposes" In the case of the izihasho as an oral tradition, it operates on a metaphoric level. Most praise songs employ the use of metaphor to highlight the behaviour of the subject of the poem. Ntuli (1996: 31) refers to the use of metaphor. He states:" The metaphor may be derived from various sources .In the animal kingdom, the lion, the elephant, the bull, the buffalo and the viper feature prominently …"

It could be argued that Nxumalo makes use of African oral tradition in the rendition of his narrative vessels in that he transforms the oral into a static textural one by the use of repetition, cliché and metaphor and didactic message. His images are not evoked by performance in the imagination of the audience, but by the inscribed rendition on the surface of the vessel. The repetition of the monkey as metaphor for the human condition develops into a "core cliché" that appears in many vessels and hence one his community can identify with. His narrative vessels appear to follow an African narrative model rooted in an African oral tradition.

If we refer to another plate *"Days of Our Lives"* (2000) (Fig24), Nxumalo again uses the monkey as the metaphor for human behaviour. The plate depicts a

Samango monkey in the center of the plate flanked by two large Mielie plants. An inscribed cartouche above the monkey reads:

> Days of our lives, days of smiles, days of joy and peace. Aids is chasing people like a ghost in the night. Nobody knows whose got this disease Aids. We must watch this ghost aids.

The metaphoric dimension of the script is evidenced by the comparison of Aids as a ghost in the night. This reiterates the poetic devices that Nxumalo's work reflects that is deeply embedded in his cultural background in the *Isibonga*. One has to view the repeated motif of the monkey in the light or context of African narrative tradition as elucidated above. The repetition of core clichés is the manner in which to inculcate the didactic message. Other motifs are repeated in other works, such as the shield and patterning.

The use of mandorla – like patterned border on this plate depict Zulu shields with smiling faces rendered in the center. From a Western perspective these geometric patterns were known as a mandorla symbol. (Fig 25) This symbol represented the intersection of the two spheres of heaven and earth. As Cirlot states:

> The union of the two worlds, or the intersection and interpenetration… it is a symbol of the perpetual sacrifice that regenerates creative force through the dual streams of ascent and descent, life and death, evolution and involution. (1988:203)

In the light of this statement it is interesting to equate Nxumalo's ghost like metaphor of Aids as intersecting the two realms of earth and heaven and hence life and death.

Nxumalo's use of the metaphor of the monkey and animals is evidenced in the oral and narrative tradition of Zulu culture. An interesting example of the way in which Zulu culture manifests in a metaphoric and hence didactic manner in Nxumalo's work is demonstrated in a vessel, (Fig 26) that depicts a cow and viper in the center. In this vessel the cow is featured as standing over a snake. An alternating pattern of flowers, assegais and shields frame the outer circumference of the vessel. Cattle in Zulu culture have great significance and are the subject of the *Isibongo* and are the measure of wealth and prosperity. Poland (1996: 35) has suggested that they are linked economically and spiritually in the life of Zulu people. She also suggests that the cattle traditionally owned by the Zulu people are of the Nguni variety. They are hardy and known for their remarkable diversity of colours. The Zulu have a specific vocabulary to describe the colour- patterns of the skins. Poland cites an example of the names; *amaqan-da kacilo* refers to the " eggs of the lark". In this vessel Nxumalo inscribes a text that appears to be copied from a book relating to the classification of the Nguni cattle colour patterning. The text states:

(i) Hamba (ii) Hamba / (Amahamba) (i) Puffadder.(bites Aritens (sic) (cf – Hungqu cf (ii) Ama – Hungqu(icii) (ii) Thickly whiskered man.This colour pattern is associated with the heavily mottled and bridled patterns such as Hungqu (icii) ama / .- Hlawalaha (icii) / ama) – Hwamqa (icLi /Ama 'Ihunqa/ Ihumqukazi ' describes a black, red or brown beast sprinkled with white and mottled like a puffadder.This colour is seen mostly among chickens and dogs.Lepen(1984) Lists " Ihugu" as a colour commonly used to describe fowls and dogs says that a beast with this colour pattern is similar to " Ikimo Emgampisi" which is Beast which is like hyena"

This script is revealing on a number of levels. Firstly it describes and lists information that appears to be copied from some text. This is significant as it poignantly reveals Nxumalo's background in education and perhaps his desire to emulate so called official and important information. His intention might be to appear more educated. However whatever his motivation the symbolic use of animals is evident. In this instance the metaphoric allusion to the cow's colour patterning relates to being compared to a puffadder. In African culture the snake represented as Knappert (1992: 221) elucidates, that in African society snakes had a relationship with the spirits or were inhabited by them or carried them. In Africa they may be a messenger of the ancestors and are therefore good. The Zulu king may reappear after death as a powerful Mamba. Interestingly enough snakes are seen in Zulu culture as teachers of medicine. In this vessel the cow's colour patterning is being compared to the Puffadder. Nxumalo illustrated this comparison by depicting the two. These animals represent a positive and powerful force in the Zulu culture and hence Nxumalo invests his vessel with animals that represent great pride to the Zulu people. The border around the vessel also represents the power of the Zulu people. The assegai is the shield worn in battle and in ritual as part of the traditional weaponry worn by Zulu warriors. It is my contention that Nxumalo's vessel represents a statement of pride for his culture and a didactic conveyor of information regarding cattle, the ultimate symbol of wealth and power.

In relation to the didactic element of the narrative, Nxumalo's vessels represent pride for his culture and a didactic and moral imperative. The narratives discussed refer indirectly to an almost sentimental desire for a Utopian reality in the face of a history of forced separation and the disintegration of the nucleus family unit. In the light of the impact of HIV AIDS epidemic on his community, with the loss of friends and fellow artists at the Ardmore Studio, the urgency and poignancy of his didactic message drives home to us the relevance of his narratives. His stories are invested with a rich cultural heritage that consciously or not are a reflection of an older African narrative model. The narrative in the light of the contemporary context in which Nxumalo operates can be said to as Scheub (1975: 362) reiterates;

> a means whereby social ideals are retained in the ‘memory ‘ of the people, the vehicle whereby essential historical and cultural values about which contemporary institutions are constructed are retained.

Grayson Perry and the Didactic Narrative

Grayson Perry also employs not so much a didactic approach to his narratives, but rather reveals a philosophical attitude to life as he experiences it. In an age of instant gratification and do it yourself solutions to the angst of life, his pot takes on an ironic contemporary moral message of a desire for the quick fix. His pot entitled *Assembling a Motorcycle from Memory* (2004) (Fig27) depicts a narrative of images of motor engine parts and bubbles of inscriptions that operates on a metaphoric level. He compares the assemblage of an engine with the complexity of human relationships. He states (Jones 2006:18,19) ”…men are at peace with life taking a motorbike engine to bits, a motor bike engine is finite. It doesn’t have the infinite possibilities and muddle of relationships.” The mechanical objectification of the process of assembling a motorbike by memory, as perceived by Perry is easier than the pain of the immediacy of relationships, whose manageability and outcome are not predictable His own troubled past is indicative of this. Perry does not moralize or impose his values on us, but through his life experience and the subject matter of the narrative the viewer can identify with his avoidance of pain. Through the process of assemblage Perry metaphorically attempts to create order out of chaos. In a comic book style he depicts the negotiation of a relationship with inscriptions in bubbles that take on the appearance of labels and dialogue. The didactic inscriptions read as a monologue and as instructions or directives as to the management and implementation of behaviour in a relationship. The ironic humour of the metaphor is evidenced by the inscriptions; “ take that bitch”, “you’ve upset your mother again”, I’m really sorry” “ well done!” “ Cry baby!” that correspond to the graphic representation of the machine part. The poignancy and black humour of these statements become evident in the light of his troubled past in that they are rooted in real and hurtful relationships. Furthermore the words reveal issues associated with communication and the way that dialogue is compromised in human interaction.

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Chapter 4

Genre , Language and Sign

This chapter will explore the work of Perry and Nel and how the artists depict their narratives through a variety of traditional narrative genres and literary devices, such as allegory, satire, metaphor, poetry, bible stories, fairy tales and diary recordings. I will also briefly explore the role of semiotics in the work of Perry as evidence of interplay between language and sign.

It is imperative to firstly define and explore what satire and allegory are. The use of allegory and satire are the underlying devices used to construct a Post Modernist approach to the analysis of Perry's narrative vessels.

Allegory

Allegory is defined by the Webster dictionary (1991:36) as "the representation of spiritual, moral, or other abstract meanings through the action of fictionalized characters that serve as symbols". Allegory can be seen as a tool in literature to convey underlying meaning that is moral, social and political and whose characters are personifications of abstract ideas of, for example, greed, charity, or envy. The allegory presents us whether reader or viewer with a continual dialogue between the forces of good and evil. It could be said to be an extended metaphor that is reliant on the use of imagination to decode meaning through the use of symbols and emblems .The allegory employs the use of the parable and the fable. In this sense the works of Nxumalo discussed earlier in chapter3 could be said to be allegorical fables in the use of personification of the monkey as the symbol of human foibles. However in this section, I shall concentrate on the works of Perry.

The critic Craig Owen (Rose 1992:14), placed allegory at the center of Post Modernism. Rose cites him as stating that Post Modernism is characterized by" appropriation, site-specifity, impermanence, accumulation, discursiveness [and] hybridization."

Owen (Rose 1992:14,15), cites Northrop Frye's definition of allegory as a "structure in literature when 'one text is *read through* another, however fragmentary, intermittent or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for allegorical work is thus the palimpsest' Owens suggests that allegory may be "essentially a form of script" Allegory as he suggests " first emerged in response to a …sense of estrangement from tradition…[and it has the] capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear …Allegorical imagery is

appropriated imagery …[the allegorist] does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured …Rather , he adds another meaning to the image."

Allegory manifests itself in the narrative vessel as appropriation, hybridization, accumulation, fragmentation and the layering of image and text. Perry uses the allegory to convey meaning through images and texts or scripts. As Owens (Rose 1992:15) further elucidates allegory in the formal sense is "consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete" and that it as Rose (1992:15) has suggested a process of confusing genres and aesthetic boundaries.

Satire

Satire as defined by the Webster dictionary (1991:1193), is " the use of irony, sarcasm, or ridicule in exposing, denouncing or deriding vice, folly, etc" Robert Harris in his article, *The Purpose and Method of Satire* cites Thrall (et al 437) as defining satire as:

> A literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humour and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved .The true satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man's devising and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling.

Satire is then concerned with a reaffirmation of values, morality and standards. Harris (2000) reiterates that satire is an attitude or stance more than a genre or type of literature. He further cites Haas (sa: 2) as stating that the application of satire "It is not bounded by form and structure but exists as an approach to a situation which can be present in any of the many literary forms"

Perry; Graphic Narrative; Allegory and Satire

Perry's vessels become allegorical and satirical representations that operate in a multi dimensional manner, both two and three dimensionally. The surfaces are the canvas for complex narratives that reveal meaning in often fragmentary and accumulated layers of imagery and text. Perry appropriates Pop Art iconography, comic imagery and techniques such as the use of photo decals or transfers. The use of a collage- like juxtaposition of formal elements stresses the complexity of the allegorical and satirical narrative. Perry confuses genres and uses these devices to form new hybridizations of form and meaning. He decontextualizes the original sources and transforms them into new narratives that hold new symbols and allusions that are paradoxically intensely personal, ironic and satirical and at the same time represent social truths and realities that are relevant to the society in which he exists.

Perry acts as a graphic journalist presenting the social realities of his own personal history and that of the world that surrounds him as a recorder of societies ills. He employs a variety of literary techniques that are transposed in irony, metaphor, allegory, satire, ambiguity and exaggeration. He follows a long line of predecessors that have traveled the path of satire and bitter humour. His vessels recall the comic like and graphic style and content of the works of Hogarth, Gillray, Lichtenstein and Polke

Gombrich (1949:149) has stated that the satirical artist

> …must crowd on his page a number of incongruous images which stand for the ideas or forces he wants to symbolize...[the] juxtaposition of disconnected symbols produces a disquieting paradox in need of resolution.

Perry's vessels do precisely just this in their layered and fragmented imagery, form, text and mark they force us into interpreting them to make sense of the juxtaposed symbols. Perry assumes and fuses seemingly many contradictory roles as satirist, allegorist and graphic journalist. To unravel the meaning of Perry's narratives is an extremely complex task. One has to use the visual clues that are revealed in the form of veiled photo decals that are superimposed almost surreptitiously or the text that is imprinted into the surface of the clay that alludes to the content and message. He states:

> I am always being asked to explain the content, and so my text can also be a clue for people to work out what's going on. My images aren't necessarily easy – I do mix and match some strange combinations. (.Buck 1989:40)

It is precisely the complexity of his work that makes interpretation of it difficult. However the inclusion of this compacted and complex imagery is not arbitrary. He states:" Everything, even the smallest bit of decoration has meaning. If I haven't got an idea, then I can't work at all. Nothing is included for the sake of it. (Buck1989: 40)

Hence it is the disjointed intricacy and enigmatic imagery and text and his manipulation of traditional ceramic techniques that aligns itself with the concept of allegory and a Post Modernist sensibility. If one compares the works of Sigmar Polke and Perry these alignments become clear. Perry's vessels, *Bad Art Bad Pottery* (Fig 28), and Polke's *Can You Always Believe Your Eyes?* (1976) (Fig 29) present as interesting formal comparisons. Polke and Perry's works are both depictions of a combination of multilayering and linear graphic imagery. Polke's

painting depicts graphic linear forms of men and a woman in the foreground that are superimposed by a comic strip that lies beneath them. Gestural paint marks contrast with the stark and rigid linear forms of an image of an owl that is partially coloured. The rhetorical question of the title of the painting is inscribed on the bottom foreground of the painting. If we refer to *Bad Art Bad Pottery* we also see a strong linear component and graphic quality to the work in the use of layered photo decal. Although differing in imagery and content or meaning, both Polkas and Perry use multilayered, fragmented and graphic imagery that results in enigmatic and poetic narrative representations that allude to the allegorical and Post Modernist sensibilities.

Perry's *Hot Afternoon in 75,* (Fig30) reiterates the allegorical and symbolic. The boy, Perry, dressed in a girl's dress stands in a desolate, yellow Essex landscape holding a glider that almost appears to dwarf hi. Perry has made several vessels depicting aeroplanes and fighter jets[7]. He refers in his autobiography to his childhood where he joined the cadets, dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot, collected model planes and invented games of flight.

> The day after my father left I was playing in the shed pretending to fly a plane, thinking the bench was the cockpit, and the vice with the metal handle that twiddles round was the controls .I even fashioned some earphones. (Jones 2004: 28)

Perry's passion for planes was linked psychologically to an escape from his turbulent family life. Furthermore the jet or glider becomes a modern day bird. His interest in the aeroplane can be assumed to be a desire for freedom .His difficult childhood resulted in the development of a rich interior world, to escape the reality of his external world." Events were upsetting, terrifying, much of the time and if I had allowed emotion to flood in it would have been overwhelming". He continues to state that between the ages of four and fifteen, he retreated further inward. "I would go upstairs and play out those feelings in my games… in detailed scenarios involving cars, tanks and my ever increasing collection of model aeroplanes." (Jones 2003: 67) The aeroplane can be seen as a modern emblem of the bird. Avian symbolism is equated according to Jung (Cirlot1990: 26) as representing "beneficent animals representing spirits, angels and supernatural aids. According to Cirlot (1990:27) the bird is also a symbol of the soul depicted in folklore in many countries around the world. Loeflerr (Cirlot 1990: 27) also cites the bird as originally being a phallic symbol, " endowed with the power of heightening – suggesting sublimation and spiritualization." Jung (1964: 156) makes a pertinent point that birds are the symbol of release and liberation,

> but today we could as well speak of jet planes and space rockets, for they are the physical embodiment of the same transcendent principle, freeing us from at least temporarily from gravity. In the same way the ancient

> symbols of containment, which once gave stability and protection, now appear in modern man's search for economic security and social welfare.

These interpretations of bird symbolism are apt in the analysis of Perry's imagery. The glider /plane is certainly the object that he identifies with in his desire to sublimate, but they are also the extended metaphor for the desire to attain an escape and release from the gravity of the real world and to soar beyond the confines and weight of a harsh childhood. The phallic symbolism becomes more poignant when one appreciates the fact that Perry depicts himself in a girls dress .His male gender veiled in an ironic transsexual gesture in the form of a girls dress decorated with a floral stock transfer pattern. The allusion and appropriation of the floral stock transfer patterning alludes to the type of floral patterning found on tea sets and hence to domesticity and the home. In that tiny floral print Perry creates a powerful innuendo that hints that all is not well and the home is not what it should be, creating a subtle yet powerful poignancy. He dispels the romantic notion of the home as a safe idyllic place of domesticity and peace in one small gesture of defiance in the form of a floral decal.

The allusion is taken even further when one considers Jung's explanation, of the symbol of containment as being representative of stability. The ceramic vessel itself becomes an ironic symbol of permanence and also of transcendence and of fight or flight, the instincts of survival. It is therefore an interesting supposition to realize that the phallic symbol of transcendence and flight is now grounded and fixed in glaze on the surface of a ceramic vessel, an ancient symbol of containment and forged out of a material that itself is made of earth.

Perry and Semiotics

Allied to the concept of transcendence is the idea of transporting oneself into another realm or place. It is the desire to escape to a safer happier state. Perry has made a pot that depicts the map as an allegorical symbol. *Transference (*1996) (Fig 31, Fig 31a) is comprised of path like or river like lines that meander across the surface punctuated by circular images of decals and words. The decals present as images of patterning found on domestic ware, the face of Christ, and imagery that are taken from popular sources such as comics and illustrations. Perry as a child was given volumes of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia* published in the twenties and he was fascinated by the images found in these volumes. It represented an escape to a magical world of foreign lands, with old maps and obscure places. He states:

> Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopedia were a comfort and an escape; I read the volumes in bed, gazing at the fuzzy images of the world. I was fond of the density of the information- the print was miniscule, the pictures compact. The quaintness and the richness of the volumes affected my

> aesthetic, playing a symbolic part in shaping the way I orientated myself in the world. (Jones 2004:38)

Perry further describes the imagery found in these volumes:

> There were countless diagrams and maps, and page upon page of illustrations of different varieties of seashells or British birds…The most beautiful photographs were those of foreign lands when they were still very foreign. (Jones 2006:37)

The map becomes the allegorical format of deeper symbolic representation, as the map is associated with travel and the journey. In this vessel the map like form depicts a meandering and winding path, which becomes a labyrinth of sorts. Jung (1978:78) referred to the labyrinth as "an entangled and confusing representation of the world." The map could therefore also represent the idea of a journey of self-discovery and individuation and the desire to acquire truth and contextualize and orientate oneself in the world. Perry's map is a symbol of his own journey of making sense of his place in the world, both as adult and as a child that wanted to escape from the harsh reality of his childhood It is his personal search for not only his sense of self and identity and individuation but also his creative process as an artist. Purce has aptly referred to the labyrinth and to his journey:

> It is a representation of the cosmos and all cosmoses, and hence of all ordered entities which correspond on the descending scale of analogy. It is therefore at once the cosmos, the world, the individual life, the temple, the town, the womb, the intestine, and the consciousness of the heart, the pilgrimage, the journey, and the way. (Purce1980: 29)

Perry's vessels are punctuated with words that are placed below the images. This interplay between word and image allows for interesting correlations that call to mind concepts of memory in relation to allegory, symbolism and semiotics. Fentress and Wickham (1992:17) have stated that:

> All societies, even the most primitive, possess ways and techniques of preserving their 'memory of things'… They support geographical memory by mapping out the sky in the figures of the zodiac…We call these information bearing representations, functioning as *aides- memoire*, 'maps' for short…Thus a map… is a visual concept, a constructed or visual image, referring to and bearing information about something outside of itself. It is a concept that supports the 'memory of things'

Perry uses the map as a vehicle to convey his 'memory of things', through the use of images and words. The words and images become in semiotic terms signs that stand for other things and ideas. Pierce (1955; 99) defines a sign As

“Something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” In other words the word or image can stand for some other thing or concept. Umberto Eco (1986:15) has defined the use of the sign as” something that is interpreted”

Perry uses ‘signs ‘ in a seemingly arbitrary way, there does not appear to be a direct correlation between the image and the word below it. He uses words such as, amputee, rubber, humiliation, butt plug, feet, faeces, manacles and hair, words that may relate to sado- sexual connotations. The title of the work gives a conduit to the meaning. The word ’Transference ‘is a pun that Perry plays with us. It can refer to the psychotherapeutic term, which is the transference of emotions to objects, but it also refers to the use of decal transfers on the surface of the vessel. The random association to the corresponding image heightens the enigma and search for interpretation. For example, the decal image of Christ corresponds with the word ‘faeces’, which is inscribed below it. The association is one that allows for differing responses that evoke either anger, humour, or shock. It is the very arbitrary nature of the correlation that from a semiotic perspective substantiates the paradox that words although they are bound by their social and historical context, are at the same time not bound or fixed in their interpretation. Perry’s signs expose a continual semiotic dialogue between the reading of those words and their relationship to the image. Voloshinov (1986:86) the semiotic philosopher has referred to a word as a “ bridge thrown between myself and another” and Perry’s words create these semiotic and communicative connections. They create ‘Transferences’ or reciprocal exchanges of meaning and interpretation between the sign and the viewer. Christian Metz (1980:56-68) refers to two processes in film that takes place in communication. These processes are pertinent to Perry as they are reflected in the formal and conceptual interpretation of his vessel. According to Metz these processes are called montage and decoupage. Montage is how we make sense of relationships between objects, as well as internal composition and sequencing. Decoupage is the assembly of pertinent traits of recognition. Metz states that we don’t need to see the entire object or word to gain recognition, but that as we go through the process of montage and decoupage we adopt cues- visual clues that lead to making sense of the signs that we are presented with .In so doing we arrive at a meaning and interpretation. Voloshinov (1986:11) has stated:

> The sign is a part of our reality and in this sense it is as material as any other natural or man-made object. The basic property of a sign is its ability to mediate between two realities: the sign brings the reality which it stands for into the situation where it is used. The sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but it is also itself a material segment of that very reality.

The ‘shadow ‘ and ‘reflection’ that Voloshinov refers to is the veiled presence of other referrals or meanings that connect us to other concepts or ideas. These shadows are also Perry’s own demons that he faces and communicates with us.

The reflections are the mirrored images of his own reality. There is a strong emotional content that is obliquely present such as anger, deviance, tragedy and hope that we associate when interpreting the 'signs'. Perry has experienced extensive therapy to overcome his traumatic childhood, so it is not presumptuous to assume that an interpretation of these signs from a psychological perspective is important. To continue with the allusion of the shadow it is not just the implied presence of other ideas, but it is also the shadow side of Perry's psyche that the 'signs' allude to. This shadowing presence is related to what Jung (1964:72,73), refers to as the" dark side of our nature" It is also an archetype that according to Nordby and Hall (1973:48,49), in citing Jung, is that it represents one's own gender and influences one's relationship with one's own sex. The shadow is the most powerful archetype and contains man's basic animal nature. If the shadow is supressed the creative and spontaneous parts of the self are limited .As Nordby and Hall assert:

> The person who suppresses the animal side of his nature may become civilized, but he does so at the expense of decreasing the motive power for spontaneity, creativity, strong emotions, and deep insights. He cut's himself off from the wisdom of the instinctual side of his nature. (1973: 49)

Perry's shadow self is evident in his transvestitism, as are words that are physically embedded into the surface of the clay. They leave an indelible mark and indentation that asserts his shadow. He does not totally suppress this shadow identity, but paradoxically flaunts it, in the form of his alter ego, the pseudonym, Claire.

Perry and the Art World

What is evident is, is the recurrent issues of child abuse, pedophilia and domestic violence; war and sexuality are narratives that Perry uses on his art. In an interview with Trace Newton- Ingham (2003), he stated;" I am a moralist .I see myself as moral crusader." Perry's social commentary also places the art world under scrutiny. It is the pretentiousness of the art world that he is apt to direct his attention. In vessels, *Boring Cool People* (1999) (Fig 32) and *We Are What We Buy* (2000) (Fig 33), Perry satirizes the art world and the pretentiousness of that dominant culture. The pots depict stereotypes of the art world and the consumers of so called high culture. In *We Are What We Buy*, Perry depicts consumers viewing products or cultural artifacts. The characters on the pot display serious facial expressions as they view the art and furniture on display. They gaze with earnestness and poke their nose in the sky expressing a superior air. They are connoisseurs of culture .As viewers we become aware of Perry's gentle yet subtly biting humour. This connoisseurship calls to mind the satirical etchings of James Gillray[8]. In a work *Connoisseur Examining A Cooper* (Fig 34), we see the

same expression of the connoisseur examining an artwork. Both artists gently mock the standards and norms of the art world, but remain within it.

Perry often places slogans on other works such as, “Exportware”, “Trendy and Proud” or the title of another vessel, *Another Exercise in Good Taste* that reflect an attitude that cynically derides and mocks the very consumers of his vessels. He states (Buck 1989: 41) “I’ve done a lot of pieces slagging off the very people who would buy them… but that didn’t stop them. People love to see themselves ridiculed”
The following statement, further reiterates such cynicism where he sees himself;

> A victim of a drive to spill my guts. On the other side all knows, controlling, a member of the sniggering classes. I make perversion to match the curtains, tribal artifacts for the psychotherapy – literate Islington tribe. (Perry 1997: 58)

When he won the Turner Prize in 2003, he perceived the whole art hype as a kind of circus .In an interview with Trace Newton- Ingram (2006) he said;”It’s a great laugh. That’s what it is, a circus…” He further referred to the art world; “The art world is a funny little place .It is a weird foreign country where they speak a funny language and if you want to operate in that land you have to speak that language.” He sees the artworld as an elitist world. “That word ‘elitistism’: they always think it’s a mafia .I say: Yeah, it’s a mafia that only accepts Essex transvestite potters …If I can get in then anyone can” This self depreciation is a recognition and acceptance of himself that reveals a cynical and sharp perception of the art world subculture. It is this very self-awareness and subtle humour in which satire operates.

Perry’s more recent works satirize and appropriate mass culture branding. He has recently made plates that depict the Ikea and Nokia logos (Fig 35 and Fig 36). These are reproduced as glazed images on his vessels in a style reminiscent of the work of Thomas Toft (Fig 37)[9]. Perry uses the homespun and very British tradition of the slip trailing technique juxtaposing a very traditional technique of pottery and aligning it with the appropriation of images from mass culture. This juxtaposition is the negation of the ironic elitism of mass culture branding, and subverts it to the past and its tradition. In so doing Perry makes a subtle, yet clever comment on the snobbism of branding in mass culture and consumerism.

Perry has appropriated mass culture from another source as a tool to convey satire in the form of the comic or comic style, which pertains to all culture. The comic has its roots from the broadsheets of medieval Europe as in the *Biblia Pauperum* or Brandt’s *Ship of Fools* and the Russian Lubok[10] or Goya’s, *Caprichos*, and later the illustrations of Cruikshank and James Gillray and Hogarth. Witek (Smoodin 1992:132) has stated that comics and the comic book

"…take part in the construction of ideology, that is, in the creation of a representational system that allows the individual to encounter and interpret his or her social surroundings" Hence the comic is the vehicle or creates the opportunity for the artist to communicate and to question the status quo. Furthermore Inge (Smoodin 1992: 135) states that the comic "…soften the impact of reality by providing a comic distance on life's dangers, disasters, and tragedies, and enable us to laugh at ourselves as the pretentious creatures we happen to be"

Perry's vessel (Fig 38) rendered in a comic imagery reflects the status quo and the distancing of reality, yet in that distance allows for us to question and probe that reality; The vessel depicts a large muscled man holding a bikini-clad woman against the backdrop of a suburban scene. The man's speech bubble states: "It's about time a transvestite won the Turner prize" The woman replies" Pottery is the new video". This vessel reflects two fundamental issues that are part of a mass culture and reiterate Perry's message. Firstly his comments represented by the words of the character reflect his cynicism at the art world's choice of the "other"; the transvestite as Turner prizewinner. He has become a commodity; a flavour of the art world's month .He recognizes the dilemma and has ambivalence in terms of his position within the contemporary art scene. He states (Perry 1997: 58): "Having rejected the values of craft; I find it hard to reconcile my stuff with the values of contemporary art."

Perry also implies a reference to a middle class consumerist society and gender roles within that mass culture. His characters depicted on this side of the vessel represent stereotypes He creates a stereotypical characters much the same way as the comic strip and through these stereotypical characters he creates a distance that divorces us from the realities of him being a transvestite. The muscled man holding the bikini-clad damsel reinforces the gender roles of a consumerist society. Behind the distance of the stereotype lies the reality of transvestitism and the hypocrisy and pretentiousness of the art world .In creating this comic like vignette Thompson (1975: 272) has asserted that:

> The subjective mode of experience on which it relies is the day -dream, the objective mode glimpsed action in which the Other is viewed as glimpsed subject. The result is a sequence of glimpses with stereotyped projections. When a person catches momentary sight of an action he involuntarily completes the action in his mind, filling out what must have come before and after.

The way in which we decode the images are not linear as in a strip but revert to the curved surface of the ceramic vessel. Meaning is created through our own subjectivity, whereby we complete the " story " in our own minds as our eye traverses the curved surface. Perry creates scenes which we may interpret and thus reinforce the hidden didactic message through satire and stereotype.

Furthermore these images calls to mind the British Pop artist Richard Hamilton and the American Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein.Hamilton's work (Fig 39) *Just what is that makes today's homes so different, so appealing*? (1956) also alludes to the muscled macho man, to mass culture and the consumerist society of 1960's Britain.

Perry also appropriates the use of the comic in the work of the American Pop Artist Roy Lichtenstein.Perry's drawing (Fig 40) refers to Lichtenstein's paintings. In Perry's work a man and woman are looking at a painting. The woman says: "Why Grayson darling, this painting is a masterpiece. Youll have all the B.A colleges clamouring for your work!" Perry is thus conscious of mass culture and its subsequent appropriation. Comics set up very clear gender roles as Whiting (1992: 11) has suggested:

> …the plots of the comic book stories created and managed gender roles in a relatively unambiguous manner. Men fought battles, while women fell in love and married .The narrative structures of comic books contained, and fulfilled the desires, anxieties, and satisfactions that in 1950's America constituted a normative view of masculinity and femininity.

Perry is conscious of these gender roles and as a transvestite is gently mocking and subverting the normative gender roles in society. In chapter Four I shall investigate the role of sexual identity as a subject of the ceramic narrative.

Perry and the Fairy Tale

Perry has often alluded to the fairy tale in his own work and has aligned himself with the writer Hans Christian Anderson and his own work. He states (Jones 2006: 5)

> ..his tales are autobiographical in varied ways. I sympathise him in that his psychology seeps out, often undiluted, often unchanged, into his fables. I thought about this recently while decorating a vase called "Internal Conflicts" because I was referring to a drawing I did as a teenager .It was a black and white sketch of a giantess towering over a street scene .I imagine parents on the school open day looking at the art display area and whispering " look at his drawing, he 's fucked up!"

The dedication on the frontispiece of his autobiography states:"' Eyes as big as saucers' Hans Christian Anderson,' The Tinder Box' " This is significant because it refers to the wonder of magic and fantasy and to the transformative power of the fairy tale. How things inanimate, become alive and how good triumphs over evil. Bruno Bethlehem an expert on the psychological interpretation of fairy tales has stated: "Children need fairy tales …in helping them cope with the

psychological problems of growing up and integrating their personalities"(Dundes 1991:74) .For Bettleheim the fairy tale functions much like a dream:" As we awake from our dreams, better able to meet the tasks of reality, so the fairy story ends with the hero returning, or being returned to the real world, much better able to master life" These words are so apt in the light of Perry's childhood, it is as if in the fairy tale and fantasy , Perry is able to conquer the demons of the past, where the wicked step- father has no power to overwhelm the defenseless child and more importantly the child wins in the end. He also alludes to his life as being a fairy tale, echoing these sentiments:" My life is like a fairy tale and it is; a lost parent, a step- parent, chores, banishment, apprenticeship, adventures, then eventually finding himself in a dress at a ball."(Jones 2006:4)

A work (Fig41) *We found the body of your child* (2000) seduces the viewer with its gold, silver and white hues. The subject matter is horrific, re- enacting the discovery of a murdered child. The stark black and white contrast of the bare winter trees set against the whiteness of the snow recall for the viewer a nostalgic yearning or subtle reminder of childhood fairy stories read to us or embedded in our consciousness, to resurface on this vase. The shock of the subject matter jolts one back to the present and the harsh reality of child murders. A lonely figure dressed in a cloak and headscarf reinforces the fairy tale scene. The theme set against the fairy tale winter forest is universal and timeless. It is precisely Perry's ability to counter- point these two realities that makes a mockery of our romantic perceptions of the past and that make this pots narrative so powerful. Hence the messages of child abuse veiled as a fairy tale becomes more real and immediate to the viewer.

Nel; Poetry, Bible and Diary

Nel makes use of the bible, poetry and diary or journal recordings. The canvas for these narratives is the ceramic vessel. Nel has repeatedly painted images of *Adam and Eve* (Fig42). This plate calls to mind Thomas Toft chargers. The religious nature of the subject has a spiritual connotation to Nel.In an interview with Michael Stevenson (2003; 88) he states that although he was raised as a Protestant, he was confirmed in the Anglican Church, which he preferred, but found the bleakness of Calvinism intolerable. He prefers the use of imagery in a religious context and hence this influences his approach to his work that reflects a religious nature. He states "They do have a spiritual kind of thing for me, without being specific."

If one refers to these vessels, the naïve style and the innocence that he attributes to the main characters is both amusing and ironic. The benign characters are depicted in the nude unafraid of their nakedness and still holding their fig leaves as they reveal themselves to the viewer. Nel unashamedly depicts these figures in an act of subtle defiance. He rejects his Calvinistic upbringing and rejoices in a

quiet rebellion. He makes no moral judgments, but in a subtle manner rebukes the conservatism of his Afrikaner roots.

The use of poetry is a genre that Nel uses repeatedly. If one refers to (Fig 43, Fig 43a) in this vessel he records the poetry of William Blake .It depicts a figure of a naked man holding in each hand pieces of paper inscribed with writing. The poem is written on the front and back of the vessel. The writing becomes a formal and aesthetic tool or devise that balances the floral side ornamentation.

One is perplexed and humoured by the nude figure. Is the naked man Blake or Nel himself? Blake had a very specific attitude and approach to nakedness and nudity in his work. Howard reports that Blake was a,

> …nudist and found justification for nudism in Christian and esoteric theory and practice.. Blake's theoretical attitudes towards sex were apparently emancipated he advocated…free love and concubinage. (1982:129)

The male figure in Nel's vessel represents a nudity that is uninhibited and free, comfortable in his own skin. Perhaps the figure is an illustration of Blake. Whatever the explanation it is interesting to equate the nude figure as representing a freedom and naturalness, in the same way that Blake approached nudity.

A vessel in a vase like form (Fig 44, Fig 44a) records the poetry of the English poetess, Stevie Smith. Her name is written on the top of the vase as a border that encircles the rim of the vessel. Flanking the sides of the vessel are fishes that form a cartouche like space that is inscribed with the words of a poem and illustrated with figurative imagery. This template is repeated on the other side of the vessel, forming a symmetrical composition .On the bottom of the one side of the vase is a Roman number two. This could indicate the second stanza of the poem.

This poem relates in a deceptively simple manner the value of friendship and on the other side of the vase a second stanza of the poem, which refers to issues of perhaps personal identity. Inscribed on the vessel is the following poem;

> The pleasure of friendship are exquisite
> How pleasant to go on a visit!
> I go to my friend, we walk on the grass
> And the hours and moments
> Like minutes pass
>
> I look in the glass

Whose face do I see?
It is the face of Lady T.
I wish to change
How can that be?
Oh Lamb of God
Change me, change me.

It is interesting that Nel should seek and transcribe the work of Stevie Smith on his vessel .I would like to suggest that whether Nel intended this as a deliberate choice or not, certain very interesting ideas and cross referencing allusions emerge from this choice of poetry and poet.

Smith was regarded in literary circles as a somewhat eccentric character both in terms of her personal life, appearance and her poetry [11]. Her critics have constructed her as "an isolated and/or reactionary figure"(Huk 1993: 241). She is further described (Stevenson 1992; 24) as one who drew crowds in their thousands at sixties poetry festivals in the United States and who was described at that time a woman in her sixties wearing schoolgirl dresses and white stockings, often sharing the stage with a much younger denim clad male groups. She is perceived as "strikingly original " and her work as" a complete separation from poetic fashion." Her deceptively simple literary and poetic style has been aligned with the poetry of Edward Lear and the verses of William Blake. Some critics have also perceived her as a Blakian satirist. (Huk 1993: 241) Martin Pumphery, (1986: 87) argues that Smith style incorporates "children's culture" – fairy tales, nursery rhymes and nonsense verse that challenge patriarchal assumptions of serious literature and as a "carnivalesque subversion of the authoritative personae " Reinforcing this alignment with the child - like is the accompaniment of cartoon drawings that illustrated her poems. Stevenson has suggested (1992: 25) that publishers and reviewers often balked at her cartoonish drawings or her "doodling" as she referred to them. These drawings ensure as Stevenson states, citing many critics, "that the poems present their dark subjects in the enigmatically simple, disturbingly comic manner which, to many readers marks her distinctiveness as a poet"

My contention is that I sense a congruence in these descriptions of Stevie Smith's approach to her poetry, with the work of Nel and within his particular choice of this poet and her words. It is almost as if the words of Stevie Smith are carried through Nel as a conduit for his own thoughts, that become a kind of code for his own pain, ideas, emotions and thoughts. Stevie Smith has been described by Heaney (1968: 201) as having a "wounded joie de vivre" There is a tragic – comic poignancy that runs as a thread in Nels work. Mikail Bakhtin in his translated book *Speech Genres* (1986: 169) once described himself in these words;"I hear voices in everything and dialogic relations among them" These words could apply to Nel, as he forms continual open-ended dialogues with his

viewers. The words of Stevie Smith becomes his voice and Nel uses the many other words that he does not reference, precisely because they become his voice, unfettered by their origins, the words reveal to us the viewer a dialogue and monolgic communication that speaks of a universal human condition. These messages of the frailty of humanity are disguised by the “carnivalesque playfulness” and the child like as a foil against the wounded psyche.

This vase reveals evidence of these sentiments. On the one side of the vessel is an image of a couple-walking arm in arm. The cartoon like image that Nel presents us is a direct correlation with the cartoon like images that Smith herself rendered as accompaniments to her poetry. If we refer to an illustration of Smiths (Fig 45), this correlation becomes evident. Both Nel and Smith use the childlike and cartoon like imagery, both mask issues of personal identity under the guise of stylistic allusion. They employ literal and figurative appropriations that serve this end. Smith appropriating the style of Blake and Lear and the fairy tale narrative as well as her childlike illustrations and Nel in his appropriation of her words and images in this particular vessel. The tragic comic aspect of the words and images they share heighten the poignancy of their work. The “carnivalesque playfulness reveals a paradoxical darker underbelly that is subtly submerged and disguised, using the mask of the naïve and the childlike.

Nel shares with Smith that mantle of the outsider that operates beyond the borders of the mainstream. It is I think significant that Nel appropriates her images and words as they reflect a synergism and sympathy that he can identify with. It is also no coincidence that has appropriated the words of Blake on his vessel; again Nel aligns himself with the outsider and the visionary.

Nels use of script is a recurrent stylistic devise. However the use of script on his vessels are used for a much more serious purpose. The scripts become a dialogue between himself and the viewer. These words become conversations and fragments of thought captured and frozen on the glazed surface. The works are also strongly visual, creating a visual linguistic structure. He makes an interesting statement:

> Well there was a short period when I used to give references, but then as soon as you do that it makes it look pedantic and comes between you and the words…. because the words themselves have impressed me, and so I like to just put the words there, so that you have a straight response to the words. (2003: 82)

He also stated in a statement in the catalogue of his retrospective exhibition that “naked words have their own power”(Hillebrand 2001:37) The implication of this statement is that Nel recognizes the impact and the immediacy, to make accessible the words to his viewer. The words impart pertinent emotional

responses and messages. If one has to holistically read a variety of the text on his vessels they range from excerpts of sentimental rhymes, classical poems, statements and recordings of personal interactions and political statements. It is the diversity of the fragments of textural thought where one can gain insight into a larger and more holistic narrative that he imparts to his viewers. If one refers to a plate (fig 46), the inscription reads

> My only wish is that men in the world below may sometimes pick up this tale when they are recovering from sleep or drunkenness, or when they wish to escape from the business worries or a fit of the dumps, and in so doing find not only mental refreshment but even perhaps, if they will heed its lesson and abandon their whim and frivolous pursuits, some small arrest in the determination of their vital forces. (2003: 80)

The origin of this text is not referenced, but this is not of any real significance as the text can be taken out of its original context and given a new meaning. The script has an old world style of language usage that harks back to another era or past. The choice of script emphasizes a desire on Nels part to recall another time or place. It has a nostalgic connotation. It is this nostalgia, recalled by the choice of text and its inherent language and vocabulary that heightens the emotional impact of the work and the unlikely decontextualization of such a text. One does not expect to find such a text on a plate. The text is then illustrated with a nude gentleman lying on the ground in his shoes on a mat. Once again it is the juxtaposition of the nostalgic with the humorous image, which emphasizes the irony of the work.

In another work (Fig 47) Nel has written a letter on a plate, it reads:

> Dear Henrietta,
> Susan just phoned. They will sleep here tomorrow. Not much new has come in yet. But I send you this parcel for now. I am returning a few books, which I already have or don't like. Bruce Chatwin I love. Death has claimed him alas. Best wishes and love to you. Hylton. (Stevenson 2003: 84)

Nel records a letter on a plate and in so doing invites his viewer into a private world. Although not as voyeurs, as he allows us a glimpse into this private domain, and thus we feel a sense of intrusion. It is the very unlikely context of a letter on a ceramic plate that heightens our surprise at the revelation of making something private, public. It also brings a new awareness to the art of letter writing. The writing of letters in itself in a digital age is also indicative of a certain

mindset and one that relates to another era, when writing a letter was afforded a certain attention to detail and time. The hand written script refers to the personal and to an intimacy that cannot be equated with the printed word. The minutiae of time and details of a person's life call to mind the Ricour theory of memory and the narrative as having experiential time and episodic time. In a sense Nel records the details of his life in a series of experiential fragments, not unlike a diary or the recordings of a journal in a hand written script that reinforces an intimacy with the viewer, through the personal style of handwriting.

Chapter 5

Sexuality:
Queer Politics and Transgression

Sexuality is a vast subject, but within the context of this study the topic is an imperative with regard to the ceramic narrative. Sexuality informs the work of all three artists, in areas that are different and unique. Perry as transvestite artist, Nel as gay artist and Nxumalo as a concerned artist confronted with the pandemic in his community. In this chapter I shall concentrate on the works of Perry and Nel. Nxumalo's relationship to the AIDS pandemic has been discussed in detail within the previous chapter.

In order to understand the use of sex and sexuality as subject matter in these artist's work one needs to explore some concepts that inform the cultural and theoretical context of sexuality. Some explanations are necessary in order to deconstruct and decode the images, text, material and forms of the ceramic vessel and hence the manner in which these narratives unfold and are made visible in the work.

Sexuality ; Gender Identity**.**

Mathieu (2003; 120) cites Blake who makes an important comment; "Are issues of sexuality and sexual identity irrelevant in discussing artworks? …Is it important to know the sexual orientation of the artist in order to understand the work?"

These questions reveal a discourse of wide ranging and complex ideas. Concepts of identity and gender, of privacy and disclosure, of fitting in and of defying and breaking boundaries. Much of the present discourse of sexuality has evolved out of Poststructuralist theory in the writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Post structuralism challenges foundationalist notions and asserts that individuals "are embedded in a complex network of social relations" (Namaste: 1994; 221) Poststructuralist theory believe that the individual needs to be deconstructed and, contested"

Foucault in his treatise *The History of Sexuality* [(1976), (1980)] explores the nature of human sexuality in modern culture. He refers to " the repressive hypothesis" (1980:15), which challenged the conventional understanding of Western sexuality. His most significant area of exploration was in the area of homosexuality, that the term homosexuality was in itself a product of a construct of social organization. (Namaste 1994: 221)

Derrida however asserts that meaning is arranged according to and through difference. He refers to the idea of the interplay between presence and absence (Namaste 1994: 223) this he believes allows for the idea that something can be both within a construct and out of it and is the interplay of binary operations- Inside/ outside. absence / presence. Furthermore he states that these binaries bring about or evoke nostalgia for a utopian longing for nature unfettered by the "violence of cultural systems"(Namaste 1994: 223)

How do these two philosophies impact or have bearing on human sexuality and the manifestation of it in the work of these artists? The assertion that sexuality is an interconnected social construct and that something can operate within and without, a system that allows one to reconstruct our perceptions of how we categorize gender and identity. Hence the boundaries of dominant culture are questioned and challenged and the parameters are extended and the status quo is altered. Much of this discourse including feminist and Afro-American writing became known as, or emerged in what is termed "Queer Politics" As Sedgwick has stated (Weinberg 1996:11)" the major nodes of thought and knowledge in the twentieth- century Western Culture as a whole are structured …by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition." Weinberg (1996:11) further suggests that the term "Queer" is an encompassing one that can include a whole range of identities – gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. "As a field of inquiry, queer studies potentially shifts the emphasis away from specific acts and identities to the myriad ways in which gender organizes and disorganizes society"

In the works of Perry and Nel the issues of gender identity are challenged and the limits of organized cultural boundaries are stretched. Horne and Lewis (1996:3) have stated, "Strategies for the inclusion of sexuality within the narratives of modern culture are unsettling to the existing paradigms and raise difficult questions of the categories to be used." Both Perry and Nel have created unsettling shifts in the way we perceive and react to sexuality and gender identity within the dominant culture and as viewers of work that reflects that very narrative. Cooper (1996: 14) has asserted that "artists that are gay have often found challenging, even confrontational, ways of subverting mainstream culture and inserting their own odd, even perverse perspectives on a largely unsuspecting and often unsuspicious public" This statement could easily apply to transgender artists as well. Cooper (1996:14) has further suggested that:

> Much if not all queer culture is concerned with aspects of social transgression … Fundamental to queer culture is the questioning and exploration of desire … around fetishism, and the ultimate excesses of bodily sensation and sado- masochism and it's connotations of sexual deviancy and 'kinky' sexuality.

Califia (Horne and Lewis 1996: 14) has referred to this transgression as making "use of all the forbidden symbols and all the disowned emotions"

Cooper makes the important observation that " Common to all Queer artists is a concern with self identity, with who and what we are, of artists articulating their own experiences" Gender is constructed within a social system and through social interaction .The Western system of gender makes it difficult for individuals who do not fit into the dominant culture of binaries to be accepted .The individual must (Gagne; Tewksbury; McGaughey 1997: 479) "gender in ways that are socially recognizable and decodable "Part of the interplay of gender and identity is the transgression of dominant cultures concept of homosexual/ heterosexual binaries and sexuality. Transgression is defined by Foucault (Faubion 1994: 73) as:

> … an action that involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage , but perhaps also its entire trajectory , even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses. The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line that closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable.

Perry and Nel challenge codes and cross boundaries extending the conventional limits. Perry as a transvestite uses imagery borrowed from queer culture; kinky sex, s/ m and melds it with religious iconography to form a transgressive statement of what constitutes a subversion of the normal binaries and recognizable codes of the limits of dominant culture. Perry explores and documents his experience as a transvestite from a personal, honest and often disturbing perspective .I will examine how the use of the Fetish, sado-masochism and cross – dressing are reflected as transgressive elements in his work as well as extremely personal reflections of his own identity. Nel on the other hand appropriates imagery from ancient Greek homo - erotic art and quirky literary statements that gently defy cultural barriers.

In a work by Perry, *Golden Ghosts* (2001)(Fig 48), he depicts an image of what could be himself as a child in a girl's frock .The dominant image of the child is almost androgynous and the clothing worn by the child recalls the Victorian era. The subtle allusion to this era becomes a metaphoric symbol of suppression and subversion. The perception of this society is one of a sexually repressive society, held firm by the notion of propriety and convention. By dressing himself in 19th Century clothing Perry subverts and extends the limits of cultural gender identity and reveals in such subversion the repressive nature of the way in which society defines sexuality, gender and hence identity. The revelation is made more poignant by the expression on the child's face; the large frightened eyes stare at

the viewer. Foucault comments on Bastille's interest in the eye as a metaphor for a philosophy of reflection. He states:

> …the eye , a small white globe that encloses it's darkness traces a limiting circle that only sight can cross. And the darkness within, the somber core of the eye, pours out into the world like a fountain which sees, that is which lights up the world in the pupil, that small black spot, where it is transformed into the bright night of an image .The eye is a mirror and a lamp: it discharges it's light into the world around it …Its globe has the expansive quality of a marvelous seed – like an egg imploding toward the center of night and extreme light, which it is and which it has just ceased to be .It is the figure of being in the act of transgressing it's own limit. (Faubion 1994: 81)

Foucault commentary can be applied to the child's gaze on Perry's vessel .It is that stare emanating from the eyes that is a metaphor for the limits that Perry transgresses. It is a stare that encapsulates and represents the manner in which Perry transgresses his boundaries as a heterosexual man and as transvestite. It is as if that child's stare holds within it an internal world and a mirror of an external world that contains within it not just Perry's worldview, but our own. It is in the words of Foucault:

> The eye in a philosophy of reflection, derives it's capacity to observe the power of becoming always more interior to itself. Lying behind each eye that sees, there exists a more tenuous one, an eye so discreet and yet so agile that its all-powerful glance can be said to eat away at the flesh of its white globe: behind this particular eye, there exists another and, then, still others, each progressively more subtle until we arrive at an eye whose entire substance is nothing but the pure transparency of a vision. (Faubion 1994: 81)

The child's gaze becomes metaphorically a "pure transparency of vision" Perry makes visible to us the invisible, the repressed and the hidden world of the "trannie". His transvestitism has as he states evolved out of a need for attention:

> I think of my dressing up as the heraldry of my subconscious, It's the physical manifestation, an outwardly worn symbol, of what is happening within. It's also a cry for a specific type of attention. (Jones 2006: 50)

Spencer asserts that (1992: 205) " never in Western society have gender roles been more rigid or more distinct, than in the late nineteenth century" The Romanticism and Gothic flavour of the works also reiterate this sensibility. In this

vessel there is a dark and haunting feeling that is reflected in the images and the lonely and dark subject matter. The title also alludes to the Gothic. It is this allusion that ironically reveals the repressive nature of sexuality through the context of the Victorian .In Victorian society as Spencer 1192: 207) asserts the " universe was dualistic: what was inside was good, what is outside is bad" It is this consciousness that still permeates today even within a Post Modern society. Perry subverts these dualistic ideologies, and challenges our set notions of what is transgressive and what is normative through the Victorian allusion.

History has many predecessors of cross-dressing and the breaking of barriers of gender roles. Dillimore (Cressey 1996: 441) suggests that cross – dressing " epitomizes the strategy of transgressive reinscription" that addresses " intense anxieties" about the" unsettling of gender and class hierarchies"

In the late nineteenth century, the idea of the dandy and the femme fatale was inherent in the cultural constructs of that society and represented a sense of sexual freedom and modernity. Photographs of artists depict woman dressed as men and men dressed as women as in the images of Georgia O'Keefe and Marcel Duchamp, (Fig 49). Man Ray reflects Marcel Duchamp alter ego in the form of Rrose Selavy represented in the dark and smoldering stare in a witty and ironic game, directed at a bourgeoisie society. Duchamp's cross-dressing alludes to a gentle transgression. Garber (Fillen-Yeh1995: 33) states: "Cross dressing becomes a way of ad- dressing and re-dressing the inequities of culturally defined categories of masculinity and femininity" Jones (1995: 22) further reiterates the point that "Rrose Selavy enables Duchamp to eschew the macho/ painter identity in favour of an ambiguously gendered persona" In the South African context Pieter Dirk Uys, has made use of cross dressing in the form of his alter ego Evita Bezuidenhout**.**[12]

Perry refers to a theory that (Barber 2006) believes that transvestism is a form of sexism. He states:" It's a manifestation of sexism against men because part of being male is suppressed" Perry's depiction of his transvestism in this work is far more brutal than Duchamp in that in the present context he contests the normative in a direct manner, perhaps addressing the iniquities of an ignorant public and society. He has recently been the subject of a documentary on transvestism. However he disguises the uncomfortable subject matter for the viewer through the accessibility of the familiar classical form of the vessel and filters the harshness and poignancy of the reality of the transvestite.

Perry's alter ego is a girl called Claire who wears a short blue dress with a bow in her hair .It was as Claire that Perry accepted the Turner prize in 2003.He speaks candidly:" A lot of Transvestites keep it a secret from their families and I think it's a daft in the long run. A secret does corrode a relationship – it sits there like a parrot waiting to speak"(Barber 2006).

Many of Perry's vessels allude to fetish and sado- masochism.
A work, *I Hate You, I Hate Myself,* (Fig 50) depicts images of male and female forms in a variety of poses, tied and gagged. These images representing an allusion to sado masochism, fetish and bondage. The background on which these forms float, are the words "I Hate You, I Hate Myself" The script is embedded in the clay surface and forms a patterning that becomes almost hypnotic in its repetition, spanning the entire surface of the vessel.. Perry speaks candidly about his sexuality. Many of his fantasies revolved around bondage and actual enactment:

> I used to wind my bed sheets round my whole body until I was tightly bound .It was about being held: I don't remember being touched or hugged by my mum and stepfather. The two requisites for a parent are love plus boundaries. I think sex is the embodiment of love and bondage is the physical embodiment of boundaries. The pressure on my body from the restriction and immobilization, then using my mind to imagine being humiliated or subjugated in cages reminded me that I was alive.(Jones 2006: 56)

Bondage involves and is defined as according to Weinberg, Moser and Williams (1984:383) "… the restraint of one partner by another through the use of such paraphernalia as chains, ropes, gags, wet suits and suspension… Bondage can fit into the framework of dominance and submission." The act of bondage and the wearing of woman's clothing become fetishes. Ellen (1988: 218) cites Freud's definition of fetish as " after effects of some sexual impression, received as a rule in early childhood." Furthermore he asserts that the fetish stands for the missing penis of the woman. Perry (Jones 2006: 57) defines a fetish:

> …in the particular sense of a technical , psychological explanation, is an object that takes the place of normal human relations. Instead of a loving woman, you love her high-heeled shoes. It is an ability of the mind to think metaphorically, to shift. If the unconscious can't express your feminine side as a man, something decides,"Well, you'd better dress up as a woman". If you can't get a hug from your dad, you wrap yourself up very tightly in bedclothes instead, though you don't equate the one with the other.

An aspect of arousal for the transvestite revolves around subjugation and humiliation. Perry comments (Jones 2006: 47) "Humiliation is one of the most powerful turn-ons for me". Much of his imagery concentrates on human forms subjected to some form of subjugation; bondage, restraint with chains, phallic objects and bodily piercing. A work *Suburban Orgy* (1994)(Fig 51) depicts a variety of sadomasochistic images. A naked man wearing a leather mask is bound sitting spread eagle on a chair. Female forms are depicted as admonishing him and holding instruments associated with sado- masochism.

African masks, and veiled images of domesticity.; a vase of wilted flowers, and a window to a room emerge out of layers of relief, stenciling and drawing. The man calls to mind the image of a gothic monster from the pages of Dracula and Frankenstein. Once again Perry alludes to the gothic and the late nineteenth century. There is a sense of drama and anticipation as the viewer waits for the performance to commence. Deleuze (1971; 115) in *Coldness and Cruelty* refers to sadomasochism in the following terms:

> Sadism is about autonomous acts, masochism about theatrical suspense. Sadism is about nature and power; masochism is about culture and ironically the law. Sadism deals with the imposition of natural law and masochism focuses on deferred subliminity and the vertiginous rhetoric of trust…. The sadist needs to see and his obsession is with 'images', while the masochist is a fetishist and his obsession is with objects. The sadist is fascinated by images of ideas and the masochist with things as images (for the fetish is not just a thing but operates, mostly, symbolically as well.)

In many ways Perry in his use of sadomasochism is able to create a narrative on the surface of the vessel, that by the very 3D nature of the vessel, becomes a performative experience. As the viewer moves around the vessel the images become like a mini movie or performance as each scene is revealed to the viewer. This performative aspect of the narrative vessel is interesting to allude to in terms of Sadomasochism and the quote above. The word 'sadism ' was derived from the writings of the Marquis De Sade.Masochism emerged from the writings of the Austrian writer Leopold Sacher –Masoch.These writers recorded the role that pain played in their own fantasies and sexual exploits .It is interesting that Perry uses his own fantasies that are played out on the vessel in the form of objects that metaphorically allude to the fetish.

Transvestite Brides of Christ (fig 52) is an overt and powerful statement against church, religion and its relationship and attitude to sex. The images are reminiscent of the medieval and the gothic in their strong linear and graphic quality. The iconic form of Christ is represented as a transvestite. Circular false breasts placed on the chest echoing the halo on the head .A nun watches from the side, her mouth gagged by piercings that silence her voice. She holds a phallic cross in her hands. This phallic object subverts the sacred and reveals the transgressive. It is as if the phallus represents the symbol of masculinity and object of desire and yet at the same time is the very object and symbol of anxiety and loss that the transvestite fears.

Bullough (1974:1381) defines transvestitism in terms of psychopathology and a desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex. He also asserts that it is been "little studied and little understood" Havelock and Ellis studied it under the term"Eonism". The current thinking is that there is" no genetic, constitutional, or

biochemical evidence to explain the phenomenon."(Bullough 1974: 1381). There is however certain circumstances that allows for the emergence of transvestism: an absent father, castration anxiety, " for which they compensate by making themselves into phallic women" (Bullough 1974: 1381) and " an efficient way of handling very strong feminine identification" without having to deny ones maleness and as Bullough asserts still being" acutely aware of the insignia of his maleness , namely , his penis"

A drawing that Perry made taken from a series called *Cycles of Violence* (Fig 53) reiterates these sentiments of male castration anxiety and the feeling of rejection that the transvestite experiences. If we refer to the text in the balloon in the work:

> What's this in your knickers Bradley? Pansy Girlies don't have one of these You'll never be a nice girl with one of these and nobody will love you. I think we will have to cut it off.

The humour of the text belies and disguises the severity of the issues and the strong emotional pain that the transgender has to face, amidst dominant culture.

In *Brides of Christ* Perry subverts sacred religious iconic images namely the cross and Christ himself. The central figure of the pieta – like nun holding the dying Christ is an iconic symbol of the sacred and the redemptive within the Christian religion. Here Perry depicts the nun holding a scissor like instrument ready to castrate the Christ while another nun restrains him. The subversion of these sacred images exposes the hypocrisy of the church in its treatment of gender and gender identity. These images reveal the ironic nature of gender identity in religion. Sedgwick (1990:140) refers to Catholicism in particular:

> Since Catholicism in particular is famous for giving countless gay and proto – gay children the shock of the possibility of adults that don't marry, of men in dresses, of passionate theatre, of introspective investment, of lives filled with what could, ideally without diminution, be called the work of the fetish … and presiding over all are the images of Jesus. They have, indeed, an unique position in modern culture as images of the unclothed or unclothable male body, often in extremis and / or in ecstasy – prescriptively meant to be gazed at adored .The scandal of such a figure within a homophobic economy of the male gaze doesn't seem to abate; efforts to disembody his body, for instance by attenuating, Europeanising or feminizing it only entangle it more compromisingly among various figurations of the homosexual.

These sentiments reiterate the ironic and transgressive as well as hypocritical attitude of religion that Perry reveals in his narratives. The ironic aspect of the relationship of the church to gender is evident in the fact as Bullough (1974:1382)

asserts that many of the saints were in fact female transvestites, dressed as males in order to gain more status in the church. This elevation of status arose from the church's attitude to the role of woman within the religion. Women were seen as less important and less rational. Thus if a woman assumed the role of man in the service of the church, she was then deemed to be superior[13]. There are many examples of woman transvestite saints: Pegalia, Aphrodite of Cyprus and Pope Joan to name a few. Yet Bullough asserts that there exists virtually no evidence of male transvestites recorded in the history of western Christian religion. In the light of this information, the Christ transvestite represented on the vessel thus reinforces this irony and powerful message of gender identity and status of gender within the church and its treatment of that subject. Perry makes an acute observation of transgression in Post modernism and questions the notion of the status quo. Perry by questioning and making transgression visible creates an order in which to make sense of the world and himself. Douglas has stated (Spencer 1992: 197)

> I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, and demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.

It is these sentiments that reinforce the element of transgression as a tool used by Perry in order to educate and inform an ignorant public. Perry's vessels become agents for change another way of making real his "moral crusade"

Nel and the Homo erotic and Queer theory

Stevenson's (2003: 94) conversations with Nel reveal his relationship to his art making in terms of his sexuality and hence the sexual narrative:

> **M.S** Another thread through your work is the male nude and other homo- erotic imagery – these themes, obviously an extension of one's own sexuality. At what point did art and this aspect of life become entwined.- were you drawing naked boys as a teenager ? Or was it only as your consciousness of gayness dawned that your imagery reflected an admiration with the male physique and engaging with the energy of sex itself? And your imagery has become increasingly bold in this respect, perhaps a reflection of the times we live in, or…
>
> **H.N** Or just me getting older and remembering joys receding. Must be careful not to do too many. But, I just draw people, whether male or

female, don't for me always have a sexual connotation, but drawing them naked seems to me to be the most basic way to draw them…But even drawing naked men, its not always for me sexual.

However Nels response to a further question posed by Stevenson is more illuminating**:**

M.S And any sort of conscious link between gay liberation and the changing times and your imagery, or…

H.N I suppose so, but not consciously .Gay liberation for a lot of people evokes images of parades of screaming queens. Not for me. *But at another level I feel rage at the deep-seated animosity that's out there against queers.* (my italics)

Whether Nel is completely candid about the relationship between his sexual orientation and his art is not really relevant. The works speak clearly and overtly about a freedom and gentle rebellion towards the status quo. The vessels naturally flaunt a gay sub culture. In a vessel (Fig 54) *A Good Queen Always Turns* (1997) here the words refer to an inside joke. It is a self-reflective humour, a joke not really intended for a heterosexual audience. The heterosexual thus becomes the outsider. Nel inverts the binary system and places the heterosexual as the marginal.

This apparently gentle humour is evidenced in another plate (Fig 55) .The text on the plate reads:" Give us international wanking awareness week" The words belie a much more serious meaning that relates to the way in which society at large views human sexuality .Nel includes everyone in this request. "Wanking" or masturbation is not the domain of only homosexuals and transgender, although the term also has homosexual connotations. In ancient Greece, homo - erotic clay vessels often had the word "Dophios"[14] inscribed on it. Nel makes visible an activity of human sexuality that is perceived as abnormal and perhaps deviant especially in the context of religion and mainstream culture. To place a text on a plate, a vessel that one eats from makes the intent more shocking to an unsuspecting or conservative viewer. This act of rebellion combines two basic bodily functions and needs; sex and eating. Nel (Stevenson2003: 94) asserts that the placing of erotic imagery or text for that matter is:

…uncomfortable to eat off a plate with something like that on it- you know what I mean .But there are times where it could be appropriate , but mostly not, not for using, for eating off plates- I mean the plainer they are the easier it is , because it doesn't interfere with your meal.

Thus Nels use of sexual references for his vessels are I think seated in a place that is subtly transgressive. Whether intended or not. The prolific use of phallic, homo- erotic imagery and text that is sexual either overtly or subtly must represent some form of transgression. I feel it is a way of asserting ones sexuality in a manner that is not overtly aggressive. It is through irony, and perhaps a subtle form of Camp. If camp can be subtle is a point that remains to be debated. However there is a paradox in these works .On the one hand they don't take themselves too seriously. As Usherwood cited in Mathieu (2003: 100) has defined camp as " making fun of something one takes seriously." It is also the 'solvent of morality' (Mathieu 2003: 100) In the light of these comments I think that Nel displays elements of humour and humour becomes the diffuser of shock or moral outrage on the part of the public. The vessels representing these texts are funny .We can laugh at them. He tries to make light of issues that are taboo, unspoken of, or hidden. Yet in the revealing of these taboo subjects Nel educates us in far more serious issues of categorization of sexuality and gender behaviour in a conservative dominant culture. In this way he is transgressive and subversive. . Green (2002:531) asserts and cites Bronski that:

> In the spirit of subversion …queer theory conceives of homosexuality as an open challenge to the normative sexual and gender order. Because the sexuality of homosexuals is marginal, their erotic practices are disruptive to the social order. Hence Bronski conceives of gay men as sexual outlaws:" Gay men have learnt how to use our sexuality as a social marker, as a disruption of the social and sexual status quo, and as a way to make our presence felt in the world"

Nel certainly makes his presence felt, he creates objects that balance a fine line between functionality, commodity and personal expression. The sexual narratives open a discourse that are veiled in domesticity and functionality, yet they very cleverly are able to subvert in a seemingly gentle way harsh statements of human sexuality and hence marginality. There is an almost passive aggressive stance taken, when one reads between the lines, so to speak, against the prejudice that is out there in dominant culture targeted against gay culture and gay individuals. Kilmer (1993: 104) refers to the erect penis as a symbol aggression in the painting on Greek vases .He states:

> The Greeks like us, were surely aware that the aggressiveness of sex and the aggressiveness of anger have many features in common, the most obvious of course, is the erection of the penis.

Many of Nel's vessels depict erect penises. One could argue that the use of the erect penises in his work is a symbol of anger, that is veiled by humour .A plate (Fig 56) that reiterates these sentiments, depicts a pair of naked young men, both with enlarged, erect penises. They embrace and appear to be in a state of

sexual arousal. On the left of the plate, a large fish, possibly a shark appears to bite the rear of the one man.

There is a playful naturalness in both their embrace and attraction to one another. Nel creates a scene that is humorous and benign which negates the transgressive nature of the subject as perceived by dominant culture. He appropriates the ancient Greeks in the use of homo- erotic art and these young males refer to the *pais kalos*, the young, beautiful, idealized males depicted on Greek pottery. If we refer to (Fig 57), we see a Greek vessel by Brygos painter. In Greek society, homosexual relationships were hierarchical in nature. It was represented by men and boy, master and slave and between dominance and subjugation, active and passive. The Kalos was a young boy of not older than 15 years old. Nel appropriates the same compositional devices as Brygos and the exaggeration of the two penises in Nels work could imply the equality in the relationship. In the Greek work there is a definite dominance and passive element. In Nel's work there are two equals confronting the dominant culture. The shark that bites the one man could be a metaphoric symbol of the persecution and attack on the playfulness and naturalness of the queer relationship that threatens to destabilize the union. Although the scene is humorous it is non the less insidious and Nel disguises and uses the scene as a metaphor for a subversive discourse representing queer politics within dominant culture. The scene is thus a fable of homosexuality and marginality and how the two interpolate.

One could suggest that as Foucault (1980: 101) has asserted in terms of how homosexuality was positioned within the institutions of dominant culture through psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature, that great advances were made in relation to social controls of the area of 'perversity'. He states:" It also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged."

Nel is revealed or decoded as a kind of social reformer not unlike Perry. They are moral crusaders expressing their outrage at prejudice and ignorance. Their narratives are of a very social, moral and political nature. Through a strange irony they are afforded the space to express their indignation of sexual prejudice at this point in time and there is, understandably a consciousness and consolidation of marginal entitlement. Oscar Wilde is the Victorian example of supreme subjugation and suppression. These artists are paradoxically transgressive and reformative at the same time. Perry says that his intention is to express "what is never said, what is not being said…Sexuality is never the main theme, but is part of a larger context and commentary on the political realm" (Mathieu 2003: 95)

CHAPTER SIX

Recalling the Past:
Commemoration and Nostalgia.

In this chapter I shall primarily explore the commemorative narrative in the work of the artists. I shall also include a section on nostalgia, as this concept is inextricably linked to the past and recalling that past in a specific narrative. Nostalgia represents a particular worldview in terms of history and the personal emotional perception of that history. Furthermore it is also a Utopian perception of the world. I shall examine the manner in which nostalgia and commemoration manifest in the works of Nel, Nxumalo and Perry.

Commemoration

The commemorative vessels of Nxumalo and Nel are deeply embedded in their own cultural identity and personal histories. Their personal identity is part of a history of a collective social memory that defines and is part of their present. The collective memory is reflected in the commemorative narratives that they depict on their vessels. I shall examine Nxumalos commemorative vessels that recall the Anglo-Zulu War. The various examples of his work demonstrate how the story of his cultural identity and past is commemorated. I will also explore the work of Nel in terms of his collective memory that is of as an Afrikaner. Many of his works were produced in an era of apartheid. I shall explore how he with gentle irony relates his Afrikaner identity within an Apartheid and Post Apartheid era**.**

There is a long tradition of recording an event or person on the ceramic vessel. It is not my intention to give a detailed account of the history of commemorative ceramics as this is in itself a wide and complex study, suffice to say that within the Western context the advancement of technology brought about by the industrial revolution saw the emergence of the representation of historical events and personages on ceramics. This was initially evident in the English ceramic ware of the early 18th Century. As the English empire spread her colonial tentacles so the need for the recording of those exploits expanded. It became necessary to document those conquests. With the advancement of ceramic printing processes and the invention of the ceramic transfer, so the ceramic vessel became the conduit to spread the message of colonial and national pride. Hence the subject matter at that time was the commemoration of military expansions in the form of marine and military scenes as well as the heroes and political leaders that represented those events. This trend later spread to America as well.

It is therefore important to define what is meant by the commemorative within the context of the historical narratives of Nxumalo and Nel.

The Webster dictionary (1991; 272) defines the word 'commemorate' as follows: "to serve as a memorial or reminder of …to honour the memory of by some observance …to recall, put on record … service, celebration in memory of some person or events."

This definition implies that the commemorative is the recording of events that act as a memorial to a person or an historical moment or occurrence. The element of time is introduced. Commemoration appears to be a recalling of a specific moment in time where the event or person is recorded for posterity or cultural enrichment and pride. Therefore the intention is to serve some implied or obvious moral or social purpose. To my mind the commemorative is the halting of time in the narrative or story telling. It highlights the events or person in a very direct way to serve its own imperative. Furthermore the commemorative engages in biography, recalling the very important elements of an individual and their achievements or notoriety .It is also the story of a people, or nation or tribe and their struggles and triumphs that are celebrated or recorded**.**

Commemoration manifests in many forms from the monumental to the miniature in the form of large-scale monuments to the smallest coin. Mack (2003:107) suggests that before the advent of technology, remembering past events or individuals were recorded in grandiose artwork in Western art from the Italian Renaissance artists such as Carpaccio or Bellini to the representation of the Norman Conquest in the Bayeaux tapestry. In the local context the frieze in the Voortrekker monument recording the battle of Blood River is also an example of the panoramic and monumental scale of commemoration. In these instances the events reflected as a record, as if the artist is an eyewitness, capturing in minute detail the land, costume and architecture. This gave as Mack suggests:

> an authentic record … often constructions of memory imitating history, rather than accurate records themselves. They appear to be documentary, some may indeed be illustrations informed by first hand accounts, but most are later reconstructions. (2003:107)

Commemoration is thus the reconstruction of history through memory, both collective and personal. In the remembering of the past is also the forgetting determined by the social and political constructs of those who are doing the remembering. Thus commemoration is also about erasure; the forgotten and the act of forgetting. It is the recording of a subjective and selective "truth".

<u>Wonderboy Nxumalo :</u>
<u>Historical Narratives of Subjective Experience and Collective Pride.</u>

Nxumalo has made a series of commemorative plates that record the story of the Anglo- Zulu War of 1879. Under the mentorship of Fee Halsted- Berning[15] Wonderboy was given the audiocassette *Day of The Dead Moon* to listen to. This recording is written and narrated by David Ratray a historian and tells the story of the Anglo Zulu War in the form of a detailed and historical adventure narrative. As a result of this, Nxumalo made a series of plates that commemorate specific events and personalities from the Anglo- Zulu War. He was given a variety of illustrations as Scott attests (2003: 24), and was thus given the impetus to make these works.

A plate, *The Hospital* (1999)(Fig 58) depicts a battle scene from what is commonly known as The Battle Of Rorkes Drift. In order to understand the interpretation that Nxumalo gives to the event, it is important to record these historical events.

One hundred British soldiers defended a British military hospital in Rorkes Drift against 4000 Zulu warriors in a 12-hour engagement. The context of this siege was set against the background of the Battle of Isandlewana, where the British faced a devastating and humiliating loss against the Zulus. An almost entire force of British soldiers numbering 1700 men were virtually wiped out by a Zulu army of over 20 000 men under the command of Ntshingwayo Khoza and Mavumengwana Ntuli. A few survivors reached Rorkes Drift to sound the alarm. The soldiers at the hospital decided to remain at their post and to defend it. Bags of maize and biscuit tins formed a defensive square between the hospital and the storehouse. The Zulus launched two attacks, the first on the Southern wall of the maize bags, where the British succeeded to beat off the Zulus with rifle fire. The second assault was on the hospital defenses, where the Zulus set the hospital roof alight. The British defenders desperately attempted to evacuate the sick and wounded, at the same time trying to repel the Zulus. Most of the combat was hand-to-hand at close range. The attack continued throughout the night until 4.00 in the morning. The British remained at the site, exhausted, and expecting the Zulus to return. Instead they were greeted in the morning by the approach of Lord Chelmsford's party .A record of 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded to the defenders, the most awarded throughout the Anglo- Zulu War.

With this information in mind, one can now contextualize the work, not only in terms of Nxumalos interpretation of the events, but also in terms of the formal rendering and comparison of the commemorative and historical narrative genre.

The images depicted on the plate display a battle between the British and the Zulus. The scene is depicted as an action packed narrative. As if one is watching a film. The scene depicted is that of the second attack by the Zulus on the

hospital. We see the burning hospital in the background. A spatial and perspectival shift is attained by the small scale of the Zulus on the rim of the plate. The soldiers and mielie bags and biscuit tins in the foreground are larger. The entire surface of the plate depicts the enactment of the dramatic events. There is a flurry of activity and action as the figures move across the surface of the plate, which takes on the panoramic dimensions of an epic historical drama. One almost forgets the small scale of the actual plate. Nxumalo creates an illusion of monumentality.

The top of the plate presents a cartouche with the following commentary inscribed:

> It was night nearly midnight, when the Zulus in the action to break the British hospital by burning it. The reason was to kill the whole sickness and wounded people. By that night the Zulu came to burn this hospital, few people got to get in and put the fire under the grass roof of the hospital. By that moment the Zulus jumped on the mielies bag and get in like raindrops and the bees to destroy everything in the hospital. Oh, it's happened so, the Zulus were very angry for the British fight in Natal. Look when they destroy hospital, people, biscuit boxes etc. There was no conscience or perhaps the Zulus left those poor sick and brave people because there was enough killing at Isandlewane.Those British were few and sick. They were not the main British army. They were lucky!

Nxumalo's interpretations of the events are interesting. In the imagery depicted he emphasizes the activity of the British soldiers as they desperately evacuate the sick and wounded from the burning hospital. The focal area is the actual evacuation and defense of the hospital. The Zulu warriors are shown on the periphery of the rim of the plate encircling the entire area. Their size is smaller than that of the British soldiers and the warriors are in different poses of combat. There is attention to detail in the rendering of the rifle in the foreground and the uniforms of the British soldiers. The factual recording of the defense behind the biscuit boxes and the mielie bags is recorded.

Nxumalo is thus a recorder of history. All history that is recorded or recalled is not entirely objective. There is an element of subjectivity in that telling of the story. His response to the event is more revealing when one examines the text on the plate. This text is not just a dispassionate recording of events, as a journalist would factually account, but a subjective and emotional commentary of how he perceives the turn of events. His words reveal a pride in the Zulu nation as they attack the hospital. He uses the simile of the Zulus infiltrating the defense like "raindrops and bees". This emphasizes the might and large numbers of the Zulu warriors. The word "water "also suggests a kind of cleansing and all pervasive

infiltration. He acknowledges the scale of the battle as not being the main one and that the motivation for the retreat from the battle as he surmises was either motivated out of mercy and perhaps pity but also intimating a pride of the power of the Zulu army as the British were indeed lucky to get away with their lives. That they could be killed, but were spared, due to them being weak and sick. There is an implication that the Zulu operated from a perspective of mercy and fairplay. He further acknowledges the fact that there was enough blood spilled at Isandlewana.The tone of the text is one of pride for his culture and sympathy for the British. They are not perceived as victors.

According to Crane (1997: 1372) when we think of history we "are thinking of commemoration" Nxumalo commemorates the story of Rorkes Drift in a personalized way. His interpretation is interesting in what is not said. Schwartz (1982: 374) has referred to the recollection of the past as "an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present." This is significant, in the light of Nxumalo's interpretation of the events at Rorkes Drift. He does not just retrieve information His need to portray his history is important in the light of an Apartheid history. Where individual's stories were silenced. Where people were denigrated on the basis of their skin colour. Here he restores that pride in his culture, but also balances that pride with a measure of humility and understanding of the plight of the British soldiers. It is interesting and ironic that this was the battle in which the British soldiers received the most Victoria crosses throughout the war. Nxumalo in his silence of this fact ironically raises the pride of his culture and subverts the British victory. Underlying this whole interpretation is an element of admiration for the ideas of bravery, mercy and pride.

Nxumalo's vessel becomes a commemorative device or tool or as Confino has suggested (1997: 1386) that " the way in which people construct a sense of the past " is to record that history through " vehicles of memory" The commemorative vessel becomes such a vehicle for a history that until only recently was silenced. Minkley and Legassick (2000: 7) suggest that:

> History, like politics, is constituted as much through these mechanisms of "not telling" as by the ways of telling. Here language, meaning and discourse as much as political need, social position and multiple and shared context and the related concerns with race, class and gender all contribute to the not telling of power in and of history.

By telling new histories, or by telling ones own historical narratives one can as Nxumalo has done reveal and commemorate the past and create a newer more positive future. Sherman (1998: 446) has suggested, "Commemoration seeks to restore the socio – cultural order that the commemorative event has disrupted."

Alexander makes the statement that is appropriate in the light of Nxumalo's commemorative vessel:

> The strategic- political and ultimately moral – historical question is how to move towards understanding without ever forgetting, but to remember without constantly rekindling the divisive passions of the past. Such an approach is only one which would allow us to look down into the darkness of the well of atrocities of the past and to speculate on their causes at the same time as we haul up the waters of hope for a future of dignity and equality. (Coombes: 2003)

Nxumalo's commemorative narrative represented on this vessel reveals this approach. He recalls an event from his own cultural past, but does not imbue it with bitterness or pity, but rather restores it to a position of grace that makes allowances for all. He creates a new discourse that allows for a renegotiation of that past conflict. Foucault refers to a term "emergence" in relation to commemoration. Nxumalo's interpretation of the commemorative narrative can be applied to Foucault's concept of emergence as cited by Sherman which can,

> …arise not out of willed actions and intentions but out of a confrontation of forces that clears a new political ,cultural and emotional terrain. An emergence thus consists of both conflict and the recasting of that conflict in new terms. (Sherman 1998: 446)

Not only does commemoration create a space for new understanding of conflict, but it is also marked representationally by the use of iconography. As Schwartz (1982: 377) has suggested that iconography is " one of the means by which society commemorates extraordinary people and events." The most common form of commemorative representation according to Mack (2003: 111) is the battle scene. In the battle scene the exploits are not commonly represented as defeats, but as triumphant victories and heroic achievements. The battle scene thus becomes an iconic representation of conflict and victory, bravery and pride, dominance and power within the context of commemorative narratives. If we compare John Muafengejo's the battle scene of Rorkes Drift (Fig 59) with that of Nxumalo the differences in the interpretation of that history becomes a manifestation of each of their own personal interpretation of their world view. Hence commemoration becomes in this sense a very personal response to an external collective history.

Both Muafengejo and Nxumalo have recorded a specific event in history. In Muafengejos work[16] he too depicts the Zulus attacking the hospital, which is

represented in the center of the format as an enclosed box. He gives equal attention to the scale and proportions of the characters of the story. There is movement created by the differing directional lines of the Zulu weaponry. The stylized and pattern like arrangement of the image creates a distance between itself and the viewer. There is not much emotional involvement in this rendition. The Zulus almost appear benign and the British soldiers are expressionless. He records the event in the text dispassionately. He states; “The Battle of Rorkes Drift about 1879 between the Zulu and British, started the battle of Rorkes Drift” The only subjective statement is in the implication that the British started the battle. Apart from that statement there is no other indication of emotional or subjective involvement on the part of the artist in his rendition of these events.

If we compare Nxumalos interpretation there is a direct involvement in the words of the text and in the manner in which the event is depicted. Nxumalo is in a sense a history painter. He creates a scene that has the authenticity and immediacy of something actually seen and experienced. He records the narrative from an emotional and experiential point of view. There is no distance between him and the rendition. He lives the history.

The depiction of the battle scene calls to mind the formal elements of the Lubok broadsheets of Russia. If we refer to (Fig 60) we see a battle scene between King Alexander and King Porus of India. The central cartouche narrates the story of the event. The distinction between Nxumalo’s work and the Lubok is once again that his depiction of the battle scene is an emotional and subjective rendition of the battle genre. Hence his depiction of a battle goes beyond that of the detached journalist.

Nxumalos commemorative narrative vessel could be perceived to hover between being an object of self-expression and a product of material cultural pride and that of being part of a fragment of history – that belongs to the genre of commemorative ceramics, many of which acted as souvenir objects. Mack refers to the souvenir as being a mnemonic device or short hand and as:

> such cannot contain elaborate narrative. Indeed they often act to generate oral accounts, stories, history and memory. Their task is to aid recollection of a great deal more than they immediately express. (2003: 135)

The souvenir is thus a remnant of commemoration – objects reflecting a fragmented cultural history. Made complete by the elaboration of the commemorative narrative. They are an *aid memoir.* Mnemonic devices that prompt the commemorative narrative. These objects effect or offer a selective memory of cultural history. It recalls a deconstructed or fragmented past. Mack (2003:134) refers to them as an “ unsentimental form of memory”, “It is a “ condensed form of reality” If we refer to the example of commemorative

ceramics, in this object (Fig 61) a plate commemorating the Jameson raid. It has the image of Jameson riding speedily on his steed. It has the text “Jameson Dash into the Transvaal”. It contains all the linguistic and visual clues that act as mnemonic devices to trigger the larger narrative. It is a condensed version of the original event, yet it calls to mind the original event in the mind of the viewer. In the light of these statements Nxumalo’s vessel cannot be seen as a souvenir as it contains and expresses a much larger and more detailed narrative. It is not intended as a mnemonic device, but rather a subjective commemoration of an event in history that reflects a greater imperative that of cultural pride and as a moral signifier of bravery and heroism.

Nxumalo has also made several other works that represent various heroic personalities. A work *King Cetshwayo kaMpande* (1998) (Fig 62, Fig 62a) is a bowl with the portrait of the king painted on the inside of the vessel. The portrait is set against the backdrop of the famous mountain Isandlawana.On either side of the king rows of Zulu warriors are depicted marching in a horn formation. On the left side a smaller coloumn of soldiers are shown marching in a snake like formation. Inscribed on the rim of the vessel are the following words;

> Cetshwayo was the one of the Zulu kings. He was a big problem for the British conscience. The British thought this king has more plan to fight other nations easily. One day they had decide to capture King Cetshwayo.He was first captured in British circle kraal and later they sent him to Cape Town. It was not only King Cetshwayo who had captured The British were believe that, if that they only take him out of the Zulus, they can invade the Zululand. The Zulus and the British fought to the Battle of Isandlawana.The best way of fighting in Zululand was the horns of the buffalo and a snake shape. Today in Natal 1999, the Zulu rule their land.

Nxumalo once again gives a personal interpretation of history in recording the relationship between Cetshwayo and the British. He records that battle of Isandlawana and infers that by removing Cetshwayo, the British were not able to defeat the Zulu nation, as the defeat of the British at Isandlawana was decisive and proof of their military prowess. The military formation of the buffalo horn and the snake is as he states” the best way of fighting” He states with a matter of pride that the Zulu nation survives and rules their own land.

Nxumalo selects a Zulu hero and commemorates him and his exploits that according to a Western perspective was perceived to be vilified as a bloodthirsty monster. Cope (1995:268) in his article refers to the manner in which colonial archives have distorted the character of Cetshwayo and in his article brings to light evidence of this distortion.[17] . Nxumalo too is able to bring to the fore another history He makes visible what was once unseen, in the light of our colonial history.

Harries (1993:106) states that " symbols provide people with unifying cultural markers. Those that are believed to be historical and traditional are particularly powerful as they link people not only spatially, but also temporally. A shared symbolism holds people within the boundary of belief…" From a cultural perspective Nxumalo as Zulu and reflected in his pride of his cultural heritage identifies with the concept of the King as a significant cultural marker. Within Zulu culture the King is deemed to be at the center of Zulu identity. Harries (1993: 108) reiterates this by stating;" It is clear that Zulu identity was strongly tied to the person of the king…The Zulu king was perceived as a crucial symbol" Mangosuthu Buthelezi confirms this when he stated (Harries 1993:115) that "The outstanding symbol of the Zulu nation is the King himself… who assumes the total unity of the Zulu people in his very being."Nxumalo thus identifies with the concept of king as part of his own cultural history. The portrait of Cetshwayo is not only a commemoration of a particular person in history, but also a strong symbolic marker of cultural pride and identity. The king becomes a kind of heroic archetype representing as Jung (1964: 68) has stated ' The universal hero myth… always refers to a powerful man or god –man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, demons, … and who liberates his people from destruction and death" Cirlot (1990:147) also reiterates this idea when he refers to the necessity of the " cult of the hero not only because of the exigencies of war, but because of the virtues inherent in heroism, virtues which have surely been apparent to man from prehistoric times and which he has felt the need to exalt, emphasize and record". Nxumalo does precisely this. The Kings importance is emphasized by his scale on the vessel and by his compositional centrality. The virtues of the hero are reiterated by the text and the military prowess of the Zulu nation.

Portraiture as Mack suggests (2003: 54) is

> … one of the most ubiquitous vehicles of memory .Indeed memory is so interwoven with the topic that , even if the image was not meant in the first instance to be created as remembrance , it may subsequently be judged according to it's ability to encapsulate likeness and imbue it with something of the' soul 'of the subject.

This statement confirms the attachment that Nxumalo has to Cetshwayo not only as a specific individual that represented a special moment in Zulu history, but as an idealization of the symbolic virtues as hero of the Zulu nation. If we refer to a photograph of Cetshwayo (Fig 63), and compare it with Nxumalos rendition we see a resemblance between the two. Nxumalo represents Cetshwayo with an expression of benevolence and strong countanance. He is not depicted in a menacing or aggressive manner, but as a strong proud ruler who stares directly into the viewers' space. Nxumalo attempts to create a strong likeness of the king paying attention to his physical presence and to his dark complexion. According to Ntuli (1996:28) Cetshwayo's complexion was recorded in praise poems as black as a bull;

Inzima lemnyama
(The black bull that is black…)

Nxumalo portrays Cetshwayo as a specific individual, but also imbued with the virtues of the idealized hero of the nation. Portraiture represents as Mack (2003: 76) suggests" the politics of representation, where the construction of the context of a portrayal, the detail of the individuation, … are all important" Nxumalo's portrait of Cetshwayo is representative of social, political and cultural aspirations. The portrayal becomes a record of how we contextualize the individual within a specific cultural context. For Nxumalo, Cetshwayo is the embodiment of African power and his individuation is made clearer by the labeling of his name on the bottom rim of the vessel. By naming his hero Nxumalo establishes his identity for posterity. This labeling and portraiture calls to mind coin portraiture. If we refer to (fig 64) we see an image of a face. The name of the individual surrounds the rim of the coin in much the same way that Nxumalo's portrait does. Nxumalo almost emulates the formal elements of a coin portrait that becomes metaphorically speaking an object of cultural currency and value. Mack (2003: 76) makes an important observation that highlights the importance of naming a subject and thus adding value to the commemoration and remembrance of that individual as Nxumalo has done in this work:

> Portraits which are unattributed to particular subjects do not hold the attention of the viewer as do those that are named…Without a named subject there remains little to contemplate except for the technical skill and aesthetic insight of the artist.

Nxumalo also painted a series of vessels that commemorated and recorded the death of Louis Napoleon, who came to South Africa to fight in the Anglo- Zulu War of 1879 and was killed in an ambush in a mielie field. A butter dish (1998) (Fig 65,Fig 65a), with a lid and plate is one of the examples of this series. The lid depicts an image of the Prince Imperial with his horse Percy. The top of the lid has a sculpture of the horse and a honeycomb pattern surrounds the border. The plate depicts the scene where the Zulus in the mielie fields attack the prince. The crown prince is depicted as surprised and the horse is startled. Once again Nxumalo records in detail the scene as if it were from a film, the plate becomes a tableaux enacted by characters in an historical drama. However the scene that we are presented with is not the actual killing, but moments leading up to the event. There is a sense of anticipation in the unfolding drama. It is also interesting that Nxumalo represents the horse as one of the main protagonists, for in reality it was the horse that in a sense failed the Crown Prince, the horse startled, as the Prince tried to mount it, reared and run off, breaking the Prince's arm in the process and leaving him to the mercy of the Zulus. The text on the vessel corroborates this; "One day!!! Percy would leave him to the hands of the

Zulus. Oh it happened so, this wonderful horse left him, and loose his life in that battle".

This narrative is not just a story of the death of a Prince, but for Nxumalo it is a metaphor for respect and loss, that the Zulus killed the Prince but spared him disembowelment, a process that was used on others. Perhaps it was a mark of respect because he was the son of a king, but to Nxumalo it represents Zulu grace and a sign of respect for the enemy.

Nxumalo in his attraction to historical subject matter records a past that for many South Africans was uncovered or lost and unheard. His cultural past is now recorded for and driven by needs in the present, but acts as a cultural marker for the future.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a vast and complex subject whose understanding is changeable within various contexts. As Stewart argues (1988:227):

> Nostalgia like the economy it runs with is everywhere. But it is a cultural practice, not a given content, it's forms, meanings, and effect shift with the context-it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present.

I shall attempt to examine the etymological analysis of the term nostalgia within the context of its relationship to the past and then how it is represented in the works of Perry and Nxumalo

The dictionary (Websters1991) defines Nostalgia as "wistful or sentimental longing for places, things, acquaintances or conditions belonging to the past"

Nostalgia in a sense recalls an almost romantic notion of a past that in some erases the reality, cruelty and hardships of life. Nostalgia could be said to evoke in us a desire to recall a personal truth. On the one hand as a romantic and obviously sanitized version of the truth or as an exaggeration of the truth As McDermott (2002:390) has stated that "Nostalgia is often seen as a conservative and regressive impulse, a form of escapism in which the past is idealized in contrast to an unsatisfactory present" .The negative aspects heightened and our pain almost martyred, Lyn Sampson in an article in House and Leisure states "recently I saw a plate in a shop ringed with frail green roses. It was like being touched by recognition. Nostalgia involves one's most primitive instincts…. it provokes a storm of the sweetest nostalgia"(1994; 37)

McDermott (2002:390) states that nostalgia can be:

> Defined as the [painful] longing to return home. Taken from the Greek *nostas* [to return home] and *algia* [a painful feeling], the word nostalgia was first coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer as a medical term for homesickness, on the part of Swiss soldiers who longed to the Alps [Probyn 1996; Spitzer [1998] 1999] By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the term had taken on a more general set of associations with absence and loss, in particular the loss of childhood. Kant claimed that " what the nostalgic desires is not the place of his youth, but youth itself, his childhood, His desire is not directed at a thing that could be recovered but towards a time that is irretrievable"(Probyn 1996:115)

Nostalgia is thus also strongly associated with the concept of memory. Greene (Mac Dermott 2002:390,391) has stated that Nostalgia is a harkening back to the past as a "repository of lost values" rather than "as the source of …something new", and is associated with "complacency" about the past (1991,292). She firmly distinguishes between the impulse and a more radical, tranformative memory:" Whereas 'nostalgia 'is the desire to return home,' to remember' is 'to bring to mind ', or 'think of again',' to be mindful of ', to recollect'. Both' re-membering' and 're- collection' suggest a connecting, assembling, a bringing together of certain things in relation to one another…In fact, nostalgia and remembering are in some sense antithetical, since nostalgia is a forgetting, merely regressive, whereas memory may look back in order to move forward and transform disabling fictions, altering our relation to the present and future (Greene 1991,297-98)

Fox (1981:636,637) in his review of Fred Davis's book *Yearning for Yesterday: Sociology of Nostalgia* has mentioned that nostalgia also is the reconstruction of the pasts of others. Fox continues to explain Davis's theories when he refers to the relationship between nostalgia and personal identity. He argues, "Nostalgia results in part from the problem of identity and maintenance and thus serves to foster continuity of personal identity". Davis further asserts that nostalgia is a "collective search for identity" … "a distinctive form of consciousness" and consists of "multiple realities" Frow (1991:136) reiterates that nostalgia is also defined and connected to loss and personal identity. He cites Turner as identifying certain elements of the nostalgic paradigm, amongst which are a:

> …lost grace; a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty…a sense of the loss of individual freedom and autonomy and a sense of loss of simplicity, personal authenticity, and emotional spontaneity

Frow (1991:135) also alludes to nostalgia in the early nineteenth century as a "general condition of estrangement, a state of ontological homelessness that became one of the period's key metaphors for the condition of modernity"

In the light of these cursory explanations on the concept of nostalgia, certain prime concepts emerge. These concepts are crucial to an understanding of the work of Perry, Nxumalo and Nel in relation to nostalgia. Before I examine the artworks, I will elucidate these main ideas. Nostalgia is a romantic yearning for a past, person, or place. It is also through the object that the desire or longing for that past is re- captured. Secondly, Nostalgia is the longing for a lost childhood or yearning for a Utopian childhood or state of being in the world. Thirdly it is the" re-assembling and bringing together of certain things in relation to one another." Fourthly it is a sense of personal loss of freedom or identity. Fifthly, it is the yearning for desire itself.

Perry and Nostalgia

With these ideas in mind I will examine the work of Perry first. A piece *Two Children Born On The Same Day 1995* (Fig 66, Fig 66a) depicts a pot covered with seemingly disparate images. The classical simplicity of the form belies the complexity and multi-layered surface imagery. The vessel narrates the synchronistic birthdays of Perry and a tattoo artist friend. A birthday party being the most universal form of personal commemoration. A sepia photographic decal of Perry is placed on the one side of the vessel and on the corresponding side is one of his friends. The use of sepia photography has a very strong evocative power in recalling a lost age or time and hence creating an aura of nostalgia and recalling of the past. Mack (2003: 143) makes the observation that photographs;

> Capture and retain a fleeting moment and from the instance of their realization on the surface of the film they have accrued a special potential to trigger recollection… it is like conscious memory, fragmentary.

The subject matter is almost anecdotal, the celebration of a shared birthday, yet there lies a darker narrative behind the innocuous title. One would expect to see images of a shared birthday party and the like; instead we are introduced to a darker sub- culture of sex, fetish and sado- masochism. Linear forms of comic like characters engaging in sado- masochistic rituals, juxtaposed with domestic scenes of a woman in a kitchen preparing tea, presumably for the birthday party heighten the sense of a fragmented and troubled past, hidden behind the veiled respectability of suburbia and domesticity.

Crude fetish like relief images of female forms adorns the outer surface of the vase. These images remind one of an ancient past. They evoke a universal memory of the early female fetish (Fig 67) The universal earth mother, who is perceived to be the archetypal nurturer and protector of the child. Perry's female fetish, crudely placed on the surface of the pot is an ironic reminder of a mother that was absent and certainly no protector.

The use of these multi layered and ironic features alerts one to the connections that MacDermott (2002: 391) refers to as nostalgia being the "re- membering" and "re-collecting" and" assembling ", "a bringing together of things in relation to one another" This montage of imagery in itself acts as a metaphor for this re-assembling of the past. The subject matter is representative of a loss of identity.

The sepia photograph of Perry confronts us with a haunting stare, perhaps a desperate cry for attention. The vessel becomes a type of souvenir of a past that does not recall pleasantries, but reveals a deeper and darker reality of past experiences.

Frow (1991:145) refers to the souvenir as:

> Its vocation the continual reestablishment of a bridge between origin and trace. Like the medieval relic, which operates "by principles of sympathetic and contagious magic ", it works by establishing a metonymic relation with the moment of origin…Like the fetish, the souvenir is a part object, and, since it is an allusion rather than a model, " it will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to the origin s and creates a myth with regard to those origins."

Perry's vessel operates in this manner; evoking a nostalgia that is fraught with echoes of a painful past. Perry tries to recall that past and in so doing relives it, in order to correct the loss. Frow (1991:145) refers to a "narrative of interiority and authenticity, a story not of the object but of the subject who possesses it and who thus, through the souvenir, possesses the lost and recovered moment of the past."

Perry possesses this vessel in the sense as the maker he imbues it with the character of a souvenir in that the subject of the vessel is a translation of his own inner narrative, which becomes transposed as an object that conveys a past experience. This "interiority "is an aspect of authenticity and a characteristic of nostalgia. The material of the vessel itself is a manifestation of authenticity: a hand made object that recalls a pre- industrial era, where the object is not mass-produced ironically like a souvenir is. Perry's vessel is akin to a unique souvenir. Herein lies the paradox of nostalgia.

Nel and Nostalgia

If we refer to a work by Nel, a plate (Fig 68), inscribed with the words; “Charming image of this potter as a young person in Antwerp”. We can find some interesting comparisons between Perry’s *Children Born…* and this plate. Both depict sepia portraits of the artists; Nel looks out into the viewer’s space with a sense of youthful optimism, in contrast to Perry’s haunting stare. Nel has created a nostalgic portrait of himself that ironically marks and affirms his position as a ceramic artist. Nel’s father was not encouraging of his son’s love of art; Nel states in his conversations with Stevenson (2003:14) that his father was a fair man, but:

> I had harsh disapproval .He actually told me he thought art was shit…We had years of a very difficult relationship, but somewhere in my 40s we found some sort of reconciliation and some peace.

If one considers these words, then the plate becomes a powerful and poignant affirmation of Nel’s sense of identity and achievements. Furthermore the sense of nostalgia that the plate evokes is evident by the sepia photography and the use of language. Nel uses the adjective “charming” to describe himself. This evokes in us a sense of another place and time. The dating of the plate defines it not only as an affirmation of his vocation and identity, but also as a commemorative object. The date inscribed as “ about 1967” also give the plate a sense of gentle reminiscences.

Nel’s work is to my mind a composite of many fragments of time and memory that forms a kind of cultural montage, straddling different worlds, at once European, English and Oriental and at the same moment deeply grounded in the present and African soil. Ulmer describes the purpose of the montage; “ Montage does not produce the real, but constructs an object, or rather, mounts a process in order to intervene in the world, not to reflect but to change reality.”(Jury 1996:103). Nel’s work is this montage of cultural raiding, whereby he raids cultural markers and reworks them according to his own agenda, snatching iconic signs of Apartheid, Lion matches, and springbok, the elephant and the Protea all used in a constant evolution of change. Tamar Garb observations on Nel and his work are significant. She describes him as a White African,

> immersed in the bizarre literary and linguistic sign systems of a culture in transition with its entrenched colonial past and its vision of the future.. An Anglophone Afrikaner who is at once a citizen of the world, heir to its artistic and cultural traditions, and fiercely rooted in the soil and succour of his birth. (Hillebrand 2001: 34)

A plate (Fig 69) that reflects this thinking depicts a man seated in a landscape, and is an unexpected rendition of nostalgia. This image calls to mind the Afrikaner trekboer, his chest open and exposed to the elements, seated on a rimpie chair with the long shadows of the day stretching across the canvas of the plate .The flat topped thorn trees reminiscent of the open veld. This figure with his hat, clothing and beard could be mistaken for presenting as a stereotypical gender type within Afrikaner culture. The Afrikaner culture and family life is essentially a patriarchal one. Brendan Jury suggests the portrayal of the Afrikaner man is perceived as:

> usually farmers, soldiers or men of courage who engage in heroic struggles and quests. The patriarchal nature of Afrikaner culture is faithfully reflected in these gender stereotypes. (1996:101)

Nel's iconic trekboer, the symbol of Afrikaner masculinity is an ironic and lonely figure, seated in this sparse landscape stripped of his gun, his woman and his horse. He is an ambiguous figure straddling two realities: a nostalgic Afrikaner past recalling bravery and attachment to land and conversely a modern man negotiating the future on his own terms. Furthermore the figure is interesting as it displays an ambiguous body language that refers to a masculine pose, with one leg resting on the other and the exposed hairy chest. Yet, Nel's figure strikes an ironic and humorous and camp like pose subverting the trekboer's masculinity and allowing us to question what actually constitutes Afrikaner masculinity, especially in the light of Nel's own sexual identity. According to Garb, Nel's work is:

> An art which is filled with both nostalgia and pain. For the sense we get of Nel's world is of something intensely private, built from his own sensual engagement with life and love …but also imbricated with references to a country and culture which place it historically at a very specific moment in time. (2001:35)

Nxumalo and Nostalgia

Nxumalo's work displays a nostalgia that has an inherent positive and innocent view of the world, which paradoxically is a world that confronts the harshness and brutal realities of poverty and AIDS in the rural parts of Kwazulu Natal. Janis makes an interesting observation that could be applied to Nxumalo:

> Whatever the reason may be there are people in the world who always retain an untouched quality, a spiritual innocence regardless of their experiences in life. Somewhere within them is an impregnable quality

> carried over from childhood, which experience does not assail. It is a spontaneous, innate uncommon sense, which remains inviolate in the face of out worldly imposed tensions and restraints. (Bock 1974:5)

Nxumalo's work presents an honest expression of his sense of the world that he lives in. A work *Speech of the Sun and the World* (1995) (Fig 70) is a plate, which depicts a landscape of mountains. In the blue sky is a large yellow sun with radiating rays two figures, one on either side of the hills stand with arms outstretched as if embracing the universe. An etched black and white leaf like and patterned design encircles the rim, with two relief figures that lie on either side. The title is also placed near the rim with a cartouche- like caption inscribing the following text;

> Written and painted by Wonderboy
> I am a sun of God. No-one have
> a right for come and touch me and then Im lighting everywhere
> Nobody will be same like me. By lighting without God I am laughing alone as a boss. Everything looks like small stones, the people the mountains and the trees, are like to talk with me. But it can't happened as they like. (Scott 2003:77)

The meaning of the text is difficult to ascertain as English is the artists second language. However my contention is that Nxumalo conveys an ideology that is connected and communicates a relationship with God and nature, speaking to the mountains and embracing the light of God on him as a human being that is one with the earth. He implies that without the light of God on you are alone as a "boss". By this he means that a person who assumes a certain level of power is nothing if you are not connected to nature and God.

Susan Stewart (Coombes 2003: 124) cited in *History After Apartheid*, refers to the psychological aspect of nostalgia:

> The nostalgic utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere… This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence, which is the very generating mechanism of desire… The realization of a re- union imagined by the nostalgic is a narrative utopia that works only by virtue of its partiality, its lack of fixity and closure: nostalgia is the desire for desire.

Nxumalo creates through his homespun philosophy a universal desire for a nostalgic representation of a utopian and prelapserian world or age. Every age or society has the desire for an archetypal paradise or Golden age. Nostalgia for paradise as Eliade (1960:40) states is

> The state of innocence and the spiritual blessedness of man before the fall… the pure, free and happy state of exemplary man, surrounded by a maternal and generous nature.

If one views this statement in the light of the fact that this plate was created in 1995, shortly after the new democratic process in South Africa, Nxumalo indirectly expresses a joy and desire for a sustained hopeful future- a land that is fair and just and interconnected to nature and God.

One can view Nxumalo's landscape as a pastoral one. The mountains, hills and trees of Kwazulu Natal become a paradisiacal garden. In landscape symbolism, the garden is set apart from the normal world. Nxumalo's "garden" represents paradise and Utopia and calls to mind the Greek myth of Heriod (c.700 BC) in his "Works and Days", refers to the first human population who live like Gods, and who were a peaceful agrarian community, free of pain and aged gracefully, dying peacefully in their sleep. Various other philosophers who adapted or revised this myth further perpetuated this golden age myth. For example, to Plato, the golden myth represented the concept of a continuum of societal decline. In this light Cavendish (1985:125) states: " man is seen as continually seeking to regain that lost Utopia". Jung further reiterates this platonic concept (Jung 1972: 74):

> It is the time hallowed archetypal dream of a golden age (or paradise) where everything is provided in abundance for everyone, and a great, just and wise chief rules over a human kindergarten… unconsciously we cherish the same prejudices, hopes and expectations .We too believe in the welfare state, in universal peace, in the equality of man in his eternal human rights, in justice and truth… in the kingdom of God on earth.

This statement correlates with Nxumalo's philosophy and in the light of the post Apartheid halcyon days, the new dispensation in South Africa is certainly perceived by Nxumalo as the formation of a perfect and benevolent society. The romantic agrarian community that Jung alludes to certainly calls to mind a nostalgic perception of the rural community that Nxumalo belongs to.

Chapter 7

"Object / Vessel Narratives of Containment"
Exhibition at the Substation on Wits Campus,

The work concerns itself with the object and the vessel as the conduit that relates stories of containment. My reference to the word "containment "is the metaphor for the idea that objects carry inherently within them cultural and social symbolic references or markers. These references bind one and hold one to a sense of identity and to the past. However containment also alludes to the physical vessel as a container that holds something and encloses it. Mathieu (2003:195) has made interesting observations about the concept of containment and the container. He states;

> Containment has to do with the relationship between the object and the environment. Containers are bridges between two spaces… They are about differences as continuity, not differences as rupture (contrary to images, which separate from reality)…A container is a space where opposites are unified, where differences are reconciled. Containers bring together the extreme in reconciliation. They cancel the dialectic impulse of language, so present in discourses, theory as well as images of all types. All binaries, polarities, opposites and dichotomies are reconciled within the container…

This exhibition is about telling stories or narratives through the vessels and the objects that act as cultural markers and visual clues to personal and collective stories. Scott (2001:14) makes the comment that vessels with their drawings and paintings:

> …informed the pots on which they were painted, so for example a funerary urn or grave markers might show a scene of the corpse laid out before the mourners, together with images of the deceased's adventures in life. They 'invite the viewer to engage in the world they view and enter into the fantasy life of the before and after of the picture, they open up a dialogue between art and life.

I have tried through the stories, inherent in the vessels and drawings, to reconcile many dynamics of history, biography, religion, memory, culture and identity and allow the viewer to " enter a dialogue between art and life", to complete the stories in their own minds and to interpret them according to their own life experience. This exhibition is also in an indirect way a story of myself and the cultural and social context that surrounds and contains me, as a South African Jewish woman. I have created ceramic vessels and drawings that reflect a number of stories, that thematically relate to three main areas; South African History and culture, Jewish History and Identity and Family Stories.

The exhibition is also about the concept of the object. Mathieu (2003: 216) makes another acute observation in relation to the object that is applicable to this exhibition:

> An object any object is at the same time not only a real thing, physically and conceptually, but also a representation of that thing. It operates simultaneously, conceptually as an object and as an image…This dual relation gets still further complicated when the object is also the carrier of representations of other images. Only objects operate in such a complex fashion within culture.

I have made works that are two-dimensional and three-dimensional. The actual physical object manifest in the ceramic vessel and the representation of an object in the two-dimensional makes for an interesting interplay between the space, perception and meaning.

The Medium

Clay is a paradoxical medium, on the one hand it carries a sense of permanency and on the other it is a medium that can dissipate and return to the very source that it came from. Ceramics calls to mind the ancient fragments of archeology and the modern functionality of contemporary design. It crosses bridges of time and space. It has a sense of continuity and universality and is the:

> essential tool for the continuation of memory, the maintenance of humanity's consciousness and the commemoration of precedence, in a process that unites with the past, through the present, to the future. (Mathieu 2003: 217)

The use of a glaze, underglaze and oxide afforded me the opportunity to see the transformative process of clay. It is a medium in which what you see is not necessarily what you get. In a way clay is a metaphor for life. It presents you with unexpected surprises and does not allow for any complacency. Clay has a memory and any crack that was once hidden will emerge either to destroy or to scar.

It is for these reasons that I have selected to work in ceramic, as the medium is for me a metaphor not only for life but also for history, memory and identity.

For the two dimensional works I chose to use a variety of paper, pastels, paint and collage. The mixed media allows for a multi-layered effect where the one

medium transposes itself on another. This layering becomes a metaphor for history as if the layers reveal themselves through fragments. They are not easily discernable and yet they become a composite for some other story. The smaller textures or details are narratives in themselves and yet part of a larger narrative.
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The use of text inscribed on the surface of the clay are obscure and enigmatic fragments of language, some are like old parchment of faded diaries and others are cryptic in meaning, forcing the reader to create and fill the gaps with their own interpretation and points of reference.

The Works

I shall examine both the ceramic works and the drawings in relation to the specific themes; South African Stories, Jewish Stories and Family Stories. I will however only examine a portion of the entire works, as there are so many works exhibited that space does not allow for a complete analysis. The works explored here exemplify the narratives that I have conveyed in this exhibition.

South African Stories

Claimed Lands (ceramic) (Fig71) refers to the colonization of Africa. Depicted are images of slaves, an African bridal couple and a Bushman portrait. These images act as clues to the viewer to unravel the story. The fact that the vessel form is constructed of thin slabs of clay is reminiscent of the fragmentary pages of a journal or diary. The ceramic' pages' call to mind the traveler recording his observations in his journal. The idea of the fragment is also echoed in the fragmented format of the two dimensional works, not adhering to the traditional rectangular shape. The idea of the fragment acts as a metaphor for history, for some connection to a past.
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The images themselves are rendered in under glaze and are intended to give the impression of old photographs or illustrations from encyclopedias or books on voyages of discovery.

The images appear to evoke a sense of nostalgia through the use of the sepia colour and they hark back to another era, but they create a paradoxical dialogue, they are ironically of a darker past, imbued with a veil of innocence. This creates a disturbing dialectic, in that History is always about the not telling and about the subjective recalling of that past.

The use of glazes, textures of lace on the surface and the use of the painted underglaze creates a sense of age and the layers become the metaphor for a lost history, or a history that is to be re- written.

African Winds, (ceramic)(Fig 72) is a work that also deals with an African and Southern African past and with the colonization of Africa. It reveals images that are again clues; for example, the portrait of Maria Van Riebeeck.This portrait becomes a symbol of the place of women within the framework of colonization and call to mind issues of displacement and alienation. I am fascinated with the idea of the woman as part of this colonization process. The question that begs to be asked is how from a personal view, did woman negotiate themselves through this masculine domain of colonization and domination? To what extent was there complicity in this process?

There is an image of a man standing at the foot of Table Mountain, looking towards a vista. This scene, a fragment of the whole vessel recalls a history of journeying of paradoxically taking oneself out of the familiar and seeing beyond the borders of the known. The representation is in a sense the opposite of containment. The form of a vessel is the container of those images and yet the images are about extending that containment.
I have also included images of a Trekker campsite and a scene of soldiers from the Anglo Boer war. These images form a composite collage of visual imagery that alludes to history and memory; the vessel becomes a repository of fragmented history.

I have painted an image of an aluminum water jug that acts as an aide memoire to the viewer that the theme of the exhibition is about containment. In many of the works I have repeated images that become motifs for more universal concepts. This will become evident as I elucidate various works in this chapter.

*The Writers, (*Fig 73,Fig 73 a) is a work that conveys many issues that refers to the feminine. The vessel relates primarily to South African woman writers, but it is also about the way woman play many roles as wife, lover, muse, nurturer, caregiver, homemaker and mother and how they are able to negotiate these many roles and still be true to their art. There are symbols of domesticity represented by the teacup, kettle and the vase, in places superimposed on the portraits of the writers, as if to confirm the many roles that woman perform, whilst attending and nurturing their own art. I have also rendered an old embroidery hoop that was my grandmothers. This hoop becomes a composite metaphor for the feminine and the domestic aspect of woman, but more importantly my grandmother wrote poetry and hence the hoop is a metaphor for her own love of language.

The vessel also relates to the idea of writing and language and the way language can transport one into another place and time and beyond the physical boundaries of home and responsibilities that are imposed on one as a woman. Hence there is an image of a symbolic map that acts as a metaphor for that mental journeying. Words become an escape and a source of healing. I have inscribed the words of poets on the vessel, as fragments of ideas, like snatches of conversation, calling to mind the ritual of tea drinking and the reciprocal

communication that this act affords woman almost as a conspiratorial and secret language.

The writers represented in sepia portraits reveal life stories that are at times courageous and at others tragic; Sylvia Plath and Ingrid Jonker both ended their lives prematurely, other portraits include Nadine Gordimer, Ingrid Jonker, Beatrice Hastings, Ellen Kuswayo and Olive Schreiner and a San writer! Kweiten ta//ken. In a sense the viewer, with the recognition of the writers faces, and perhaps informed with their own knowledge about their lives, can interpret their own narrative.

The use of text inscribed on the surface of the clay is obscure and enigmatic. Fragments of language, some of which are faded like old parchment of faded diaries and others are cryptic in meaning, forcing the reader to create and fill the gaps with their own interpretation and points of reference.

The idea of the fragment is also echoed in the fragmented format of the two dimensional works. The idea of the fragment acts as a metaphor for history, for some connection to a past .The works are narratives of containment, that reflect memory, identity and History

Sangoma's Basket (Fig 74) is a work that relates to African culture. The basket is a vessel that represents the concept of ritual contained within the bounds of that society. The enlarged scale of the vessel transforms it into an iconic symbol of ritual.

The use of the torn paper and layered collage and paint elements act as metaphors for an ancient and often to the Western eye hidden past and history and magic. The Sangoma's basket with its divining tools becomes a symbol not only for ritual, but also as the conduit for prophecy for the future and connection to an ancient past.

Jewish History and Culture

A work (Fig75, Fig 75a), *Anne Frank*, is a biographical portrait of Anne Frank. The vessel depicts images of the house in which the family hid, a concentration camp uniform and an image of people waving from a window as well as an image of an entrance to a cave. Although certain images are to an extent literal, they are a stark and sad reminder of a horrific past. However it is not just a Jewish past, but also a universal metaphor for genocide and cruelty.

On one of the sides of the vessel is the image of a cave entrance, which is depicted as a small landscape. The long dry grass reeds typical of the South African veld obscure the entrance. This cave becomes a symbol for the idea of hiding. A cave is subterranean and hides from view what is below. It also is a

burial space. This is what Anne Frank was subjected to and what millions of individuals are subjected to on a daily basis. Therefore the seemingly literal visual clues create an ambiguity as to the real nature of the vessel's story.

Cornucopia / Requiem (Fig 76, Fig 76a) is a vessel whose form is reminiscent of a cornucopia or horn of plenty. The meaning of the horn symbol according to Jung (Cirlot 1990: 151) is that the horn is a dual symbol. It is a penetrating shape, and therefore masculine and on the other hand it is a receptacle like a cup and therefore feminine in meaning. The vessel has legs that call to mind the forms of African headrests. The horn like form also alludes to the ritual of blowing the horn during important Jewish festivals. The vessel is a cultural fusion of universal forms, African, Western and Judaic.

This vessel relates to the holocaust from a personal perspective. On the surface are images of Gestapo soldiers and portraits of prisoners who were incarcerated in camps. On the topside of the vessel I have written the names of family members who were killed in the camps. Their names are slightly obscured and faded, like the way in which they sit in my memory. Present, but distant at the same time. They are reminders of the frailty of human life. Their names inscribed under the transparent glaze remind one of the indelibility of their memory. In the lip of the horn is a small sepia image of a shtetl family[18]. (18) This poignant image calls to mind families lost and dispersed due to the Holocaust.

A requiem as the title states is as the dictionary (Webster 1991:1145) defines as a prayer for the "repose of the souls of the dead". In the light of this definition, it is therefore evident that this vessel recalls and marks the memory of the souls that have perished in the holocaust.

A work *Hands Held* (Fig77) refers to imagery that is connected to Jewish custom and belief. On the one side of the vessel are parcel- like objects, these are ancient Jewish Teffilim; ritual objects containing the Jewish law and prayers. These objects are placed on the head and arm of a Jewish male over the age of thirteen and prayers are recited daily to remind the individual of the relationship between them and their maker. These Tefillim are ancient objects made of parchment and they represent the idea of containment, in both the literal and metaphoric sense. They inherently represent a history of a people and their identity that has survived for centuries. Also depicted on this vessel is a small hand like object that appears to point in a certain direction. This object is also a ritual object that is used as a pointer when reading the prayers from the Torah. (Scroll of sacred Jewish law) This object becomes in a sense a symbol of righteousness, a guiding hand that leads one to a path of goodness and moral order. These images are intended to be perceived as having some form of hierarchical, cultural and moral value and taken from the perspective that all ritual objects become a symbol for a societies or peoples sense of what is right and wrong.

A hand holds a Protea flower; this image is representative of a contualization of time and place. It reconnects the ancient with the present. The Protea is an iconic symbol of South Africa. A hand holds this flower as if to affirm its place. This image becomes a symbol of my own position in this country as a South African woman. It affirms my religious identity, but also my South African identity.

Two drawings (Fig 78) *Prayer Bag* and *Sabbath Greeting* (Fig 79) are drawings that represent Judaic artifacts that refer to Jewish rituals and to the concept of containment. Both are containers of specific elements that define the ritual. The prayer bag is a container that holds all the paraphernalia that a man needs to pray in a synagogue, namely a prayer shawl, Tefilim, and the prayer book. The image in the second work refers to the spice containers that were placed on the Sabbath table and contain sweet smelling spices that herald the new Sabbath and hence the new week.

Chanukah (Fig 80) refers to a specific Jewish festival that marks the occasion of the defeat of the Greeks by the Maccabees.The Greeks defiled the holy oils of the Sanctuary of the Temple and when the Maccabees searched the temple they found only one jar of oil enough only to burn for one day, yet a miracle occurred and the oil burned for eight days. Jews today celebrate and praise this miracle and this festival is perceived as a thanksgiving to G-D.My rendition of this story is transposed by the depiction of an ancient oil burner on the right of the drawing. On the left are a bundle of candles poised over an aluminum kettle used to cool the wax. In the center is a wide landscape/ or seascape that separates the two images on either side, the meaning is such that although we perceive our religions and beliefs to be so different we all celebrate the miracle of light. Light being the metaphorical meaning of redemption and hope for the future, that miracles can occur, good can triumph over evil.

Family Stories

I have made various small vessels that relate to family and the concept of home. These works are smaller than the previous vessels and hence allude to a more intimate and personal nature. A work *Sister* (Fig 81) alludes to my sister with whom I have a close relationship. The image is not as a portrait or depicting her as an adult, but as a child. The inference here is the relationships we forge in childhood echo into adulthood and carry with them experiences that last all our lives.

Two drawings (Fig 82) *Grandmother* and *Grandfather* (Fig 83) respectively refer to the stories of my grandparents. In *Grandmother* a fence – like structure, envelops a large tree like form. This structure could in a metaphoric sense allude to the idea of culture or family that informs one's identity. The tree is representative of my grandmother that binds or holds the family together. The

embroidery hoop represents her feminine qualities. I perceive the hoop to be representative of her as I have her embroidery hoop as a keepsake and hence associate it with her.

The circular as a symbol appears in the encircling fence, the buttons and the hoop, Jung (Cirlot1990: 47) refers to the circle as the “ultimate state of oneness” This reiterates my reference to the inclusively and unity that she represents. The buttons as symbols of the nurturing aspect of her personality, but also the metaphor of attachment to the family. She represents in a wider sense the concept of containment, containing and attachment to the family and the values inherent in that.

Grandfather narrates a family story that I experienced as a child. My grandfather was a Rabbi (priest) and as such a highly observant Jew. I have represented him by the same ancient Tefillim depicted in *Hands Held*.He observed the Jewish custom of separating utensils for the use of meat and milk consumption. As a child I mistakenly took the milk utensil to eat a piece of meat, he immediately took the fork and buried it in the soil and through prayer cleansed it of its impurity. This childhood experience had a profound effect on me and drifted in my consciousness for many years, for it opened up debates about faith and discipline and the adherence thereof, but also of the power of belief and custom as a symbol of containment and preservation and ultimately of survival. He had himself escaped Nazi occupied Poland, but almost his entire immediate family members, bar one sister did not. In the light of these facts his it was attention to faith became to me to be so poignant, for faith, culture and religion is what enabled him to survive. Hence this childhood incident is really a story of survival and the power of faith like a magic balm to attempt to heal the past.

The Space

For this exhibition I did not create an installation, but rather sought to achieve a space where each work could be seen as an individual narrative but I also wanted to create an interrelationship between vessel and drawing to form a kind of thematic tableau. I therefore placed certain vessels in a position that correlated in terms of both form and content. For example (Fig 84) I placed a vessel *Anne Frank* against the *Prayer bag* and the *Purim*. The drawings related to Judaic ritual objects. The vessel set against the representation of these ritual objects could be said to endorse or affirm the principles that were the very cause of the holocaust. The objects in a sense become symbols of religious affirmation; the vessel ironically represents religious intolerance and prejudice. The interplay between these two concepts creates an interesting dialectic inversion of concepts; one representing affirmation and the other the lack of tolerance for that affirmation, which resulted in the holocaust. Another example of a thematic tableau is created (Fig 85) by placing vessels and images that related to an African theme. Here the African stories of colonization on the vessels are placed

against a large work *Home* that refers to an interior of a rural homestead, where the space is empty, but the remnants of a burnt out and charcoaled fireplace, a mat and a string of beads are the only reminder of its inhabitants, the absence of a presence of people allows for a sense of anticipation and intrigue, where one questions where the people are. In contrast the vessels in front of the drawing refer to a space that has been inhabited and occupied in a complete context and thus opening up debates and dialogue.

In another example (Fig86) I grouped small vessels together to create an intimate effect, where the viewer has to approach the work very closely, to read the text or to examine the small images. I also wanted to create a contrast in scale and movement. If one refers to *Cross Roads*, (Fig 87) there is a distinct difference in scale, where this object, the pointer (also featured in *Hands Held)* that would ordinarily be small, suddenly takes on large proportions and where the viewer engages with the work from a distance. There is a sense of continual movement, forward and back as the viewer creates a dialogue with the narratives, large and small, engaging and retracting, engaging and retracting.

List of Artworks

Drawings

Purim
Sacred Space
Traverse
Greet the Sabbath
Sangoma's Basket
Grandmother
Head and Heart
Esther's Scroll
Home
Grandfather
Exodus
Ancestors Prayer
Chanukah
Spirits of the Wind
Cross Roads

Ceramics

Anne Frank
Thoughts of the Heart
Hand in Hand
Claimed Lands
African Winds

Ritual
Sister
The Hob
Requiem

Wall Plaques
Baggage
The Path

Large cups
Janie
Boys and Girls
Rebecca Baking
Partners of the Dunes
Silent Winds
Sweet Secrets
Silent Waiting

Small cups
Lily
Family
The Homestead
Repose
Children
Treblinka
Brother and Sister

Conclusion

This study afforded me the opportunity to research a discipline that is sadly lacking in critical discourse, especially within the South African context. The narrative is a diverse and fascinating subject, which mirrors the human experience in all its colours and hues, like a vast canvas. The complexity is heightened by the manifestation of it on the surface of a vessel. These artists have appropriated the rich history of Ceramics and subverted it to create vessels that are inherently a reflection of their own narratives, life experience and culture. Clay is in itself a transformative, healing and magical medium. As Cooper asserts: Clay is a medium limited as much by the imagination of the artist as by it physical properties, and as such will remain a vital medium for creative work, touching the past, the present and the future. (Cooper: 2000)

[1] There appears to be a large vacuum within the South African academic discourse, regarding contemporary ceramics. Recent literature regarding Wonderboy is almost non- existent. The only substantial material available for Wonderboy was from Gillian Scott's book: Ardmore An African Discovery. There are some books on Hylton Nel, namely Michael Stevenson's Conversations, and the catalogue for Nel's retrospective at the King George VI Art Gallery, by Melanie Hillebrand. These two publications are useful and approach ceramics within the fine art perspective and not purely as craft. Therefore the deductions and ideas for this research are based on my own insights and observations. I did have the privilege to travel to Ardmore to meet with Wonderboy and have interviewed Fee Halsted -Berning in Johannesburg in 2003.Much of my insights have been from the conversations and informal meeting with both.

Further literature that exists within the South African context are found within a few local magazine publications, e.g.;" The National Ceramics Quarterly ", a Publication by APSA (Association of Potters of South Africa) and "Sgraffiti"(this publication is no longer in print). The information within these magazines, approach ceramics from mainly a technical and craft perspective and do not emphasize symbolic, iconographic and metaphoric content.

Two recent publications such as" Craft South Africa ", devotes one section on South African Ceramics, where Hylton Nel features, although insightful in it's content, is again conducted as an over view. Michael Stevenson's Conversations (2003) gives an interesting documentation in the form of an interview with Nel.This is significant, as there appears to be a growing awareness and intent to reveal the value and richness of South African ceramics. However, as informative and insightful as the publications may be, they do not engage in great detail regarding the commemorative and narrative aspects of his work.

Within, an International context there are many publications that critically explore the nature and complexity of defining contemporary ceramics .The inclusiveness of Post Modernism, has allowed and created this discourse. Peter Dormer has investigated this in his book; The New Ceramics.Mark del Vechio and Garth Clark, an ex South African, have written an array of publications and articles on ceramics in America and England. There are also other international publications on ceramics This literature places contemporary ceramics not as a step child to the fine arts, but as a very specific visual art form that addresses, not only functionalism, but the metaphorical and the symbolic. It is precisely the lack of critical discourse on the narrative and the commemorative aspects of these artists's work that requires this research.

[2] A glaze is a compound of minerals that is applied to the surface of greenware or bisque ware and forms a glossy coating when fired.
An underglaze is the ceramic pigment that is painted under transparent glaze and gives a matt effect as opposed to a glossy one. Oxides are also mineral compounds that form the composite of glazes or can be used on their own to create a matt effect similar to charcoal. (Triplett 2001:139)

[3] Merete Bodelsen gives a detailed account of Gauguin's ceramics in her book Gauguin's Ceramics, A study in the Development of his Art. The title is indicative of the important part that ceramics played in his oeuvre. The book traces the interrelationship of ceramics with his paintings and woodcarvings from Brittany 1886 to Tahiti 1891-93.

[4] Many of the Modernist artists included clay as a medium in their artwork: Joan Miro made many large scale art works on tiles, for Barcelona Airport, Harvard University and UNESCO Buildings, Paris. Roaoul Dufy used the glaze as an extension of the watercolour medium.

[5] Nel has extensive knowledge of glazing. He has gleaned his recipes from a copy of *Hamers Dictionary Of Ceramics,* Natal University's collection of recipes taken from Professor Ditchburn and Dora Billington from the Royal College Of Art. His fascination however lies with Tin glaze, a white glaze that acts as the ground for his painted plates. . (Stevenson 2002:114) This process is known as in- glazing, as the ceramic pigments are infused into the tin white glaze to form a semi gloss fusion.

[6] The death of Bonnie Ntshalishali to AIDS devastated the community and much of the tireless work that Fee Halsted- Berning has done is to encourage Wonderboy and other artists at the Studio to bring awareness of the disease to the community through their artworks. This information was gleaned from an informal interview held in Johannesburg with Fee at Prof Alan Crump's house in (2003) Fee has also created a Museum on the farm at Rosetta, in memory of Bonni Ntshalishali.Much of the informal conversations with Wonderboy, for this study on his work took place at this farm in June 2003

[7] Perry's fascination for aeroplanes stemmed from childhood where his Uncle Arthur would buy him models to assemble. He accumulated over a hundred of them. The wallpaper in his bedroom also had images of a variety of planes.

(Jones 2006:71). It is therefore no surprise that the influence of this object on his work is evident, and becomes a symbol for transcendence.

[8] James Gillray (1757-1815), English cartoonist. He concentrated on political satire in support of William Pitt and the Tory Party in England. His work took the form of engraved broadsheets and are one of the progenitors of the modern day comic or graphic novel, marked by the use of text in speech "bubbles" and cartouches.

[9] Thomas Toft (1662-85) and his son also Thomas were English potters and there are over thirty signed dishes in existence today. These plates depict images such as Charles the first, men on horseback, and coat of arms all executed in a naïve style. They were large meat platters about 50cm in diameter called chargers and were irregular and not intended to be used for everyday use but for special occasions,' and never left the dresser…(they were) wont to adorn but on the grand festive days' (Pegrum199: 36)

Both Nel and Perry have appropriated the Toft style in the use of colour and in the slip trailing technique. The typical colouring of the vessels were a mustard yellow and brown / red. Nel has used the naïve – like style and colouring of their plates and the irregular forms as inspiration and appropriation. A work *The Temptation* depicting Adam and Eve is indicative of this influence. Perry has also appropriated their style and in his biography mentions his admiration for their work;" There was a certain old-worldly half timbered pubness about his work that I liked." (Jones 2006; 187) His recent work as mentioned in the text namely *Ikia* and *Nokia* are influenced by the Tofts in colour and slip trailing technique. Slip trailing was a method whereby the liquid pigmented clay is placed in a devise that was once squeezed by the hand; one is able to draw freely as the pigmented clay flows onto the surface of the clay vessel. Brenda Pegrum in her book Painted Ceramics (see bibliography for details) gives a detailed account of the method and history of the technique.

[10] The Russian Lubok was a type of street literature in the form of broadsheets, chapbooks, prints and advertisements. The study of this unique form of popular culture was little investigated, until a Russian lawyer, D, A Rovinsky a collector and art authority produced nine volumes of scholarship on the subject. Others, I. Snigirev and I, Golyshev have also since investigated the works. The origins of the Lubok are not entirely known, but the word *Lubok* derives from *Lub*, meaning the inner bark of the tree, or the lime wood block from which the Luboc were printed and another suggestion is the boat basket that the sheets were hawked

from village to village. Professor Alan Crump has suggested the enormous influence of the Lubok on the work of Marc Chagall and other early Russian Modernists, in the use of colour, form and iconography. The bright patches of colour that were printed on the broadsheets were poorly aligned and resulted in colour patches that extended beyond the intended image, thus forming bright areas of colour, irregular and expressive.

[11] Stevie Smith, a poetess, whose literary style related to the child- like and appeared deceptively naive. She has been perceived to be an eccentric in her work and in life, following her own style irrespective of trends and conventions. She lived her entire life in the same house at Palmers Green, in the company of her mother and her long – lived aunt, Margaret Anne Spier. Some perceived this behaviour as "pathological" and "claustral" and looking for secretarial work over seeking admission to college, heightened her isolation. (Breslin 1998: 311) Her manner of dress refers to the child- like, favouring to wear girl like dresses and long stockings. (Stevenson 1192:24) Her poetry alluded to the works of Blake in particular. Admirers of her work include Sylvia Plath, Phillip Larkin and Robert Lowell. This element of appropriation and assumed naivety are what attracted Nel to her work and is thus the subject of the discussed vessel .Her poetry appears on other vessels of Nel's. Nel like Smith is also drawn to the words of Blake, and both appropriate them accordingly to suite their own purposes.

[12] Pieter Dirk Uys in an interview with Daniel Lieberfeld, records his use of cross-dressing as a tool to bring about political and social consciousness and to expose the status quo in order to bring about change. (Lieberfeld 1997: 61ff) Evita Bezuidenhout as his seemingly benign alter ego and persona subverts the underlying severity of the ills of Apartheid and the present government through the use of humour.

[13] The dressing of woman as men in the context of the church was introduced as early as the 4th Century by Saint Jerome, who wrote that as " long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man" (Bullough 1974:1383). This implies that only by denouncing the feminine identity, could a woman be formally included in the churchhood. This inclusion was rare and is relegated to the status of legend e.g. Pope Joan who supposedly ruled as John Anglicus

[14] There is a history in Greek homo erotica of the use of erotic language on vessels. Mathieu (2003: 55) cites some examples found on Attic aryballos (a container for perfumed oils) by Niarchos from mid – 6th Century which reveals on the handle the following inscriptions: The word "Dophios" translated from the Greek means masturbator, other words such as "terpekelos" meaning shaft pleaser, "psolas" meaning peeled back and a phrase" He enjoys."

[15] These are the questions I asked Fee Halsted- Berning in an informal conversation with her on the 18th April 2003 in Johannesburg and telephonically in Dec 2006. I did not record her answers electronically and the answers that are given are not verbatim, but reveal the indication of the subject asked:

What is Wonderboy's connection to nature?

Wonderboy always connects man to animals and uses them as a referral for human behaviour. This is intended to teach or inform the community. He uses monkeys e.g. the Samango monkey, which frequently features in his work and other animals to convey messages.

Would you say that Wonderboy is a story – teller?

Yes, but more a poet. He constantly wants to give messages and communicate those messages. He wants to tell something. He wants to teach.

How does he see himself as a Zulu man and his ideas on Zulu history?

He is proud of his Zulu heritage, his plates record this. Many of the scenes relate a feeling of being in a movie, and there is a lot of movement shown. For example in the *Melville* plate, the ears of the horse are placed back against the head to show the horses speed. He was given the *Day of the Dead Moon* by David Ratray to listen to and made a series of plates on this subject.

What are his connections to Rastafarianism?

He was a Rastafarian, but no longer practices as one.

What works is he doing at the moment?

At the moment his plates and vessels relate to love. I don't know if he is in love, but it preoccupies his content at the moment. He continues to write messages on his plates.

What type of personality would you say he has?

He is a puck –like character and is very much the ladies man.

[16] Nxumalo has been strongly influenced by the intaglio process of John Muafengejo's (birth date uncertain – 1987) work." He was introduced to the work of the renowned Namibian printmaker, John Muafengejo, whose images inspired him." (Scott 1998:23). Initially Wonderboy was tutored in printmaking and learnt the intaglio method of scratching into the surface of the metal plate for printing. This was transposed to the surface of the bisque ware and scratched through the underglaze to reveal the white ceramic ground of the vessel. His later work combines the intaglio method with painting, creating interesting visual contrasts in colour and texture.

[17] Cetshwayo's character has been discussed in a paper: *Written in Characters of Blood by* R.L. Cope who cites the character assassination of Cetshwayo and how he has been perceived as a treacherous and cruel leader, trying to emulate his uncle Shaka.There is a historical debate as to what his real character was and this debate is between the recordings of Frere and Colenso.The debate in the twentieth Century is won by Colenso, who recorded Cetshwayo as a brave peace maker, as opposed to Frere's accounts of him as a " irresponsible , bloodthirsty despot" Cope's article makes for interesting reading and affirms the subjectivity of history in the light of power and personal greed. (1995:248 ff)

[18] *Shtetl* is a Yiddish term for a small village inhabited by a mainly Jewish population at the turn of the century in Eastern Europe. It was the shtetl that became the target for pogroms and persecutions of Jews in the holocaust that were displaced and transported to the death camps. The shtetl has in the Jewish mind become associated with a nostalgic and tragic past. It lies in the hearts of the Jewish people as a metaphor for loss and the perception of a world and a language that no longer exists. The realities of Shtetl life were far from romantic and represented hardship and predjudice. Many Jews left the shtetl life for America and to the rest of the world to escape those hardships and find a better life elsewhere. The Jewish Museum in Cape Town gives a fascinating and insightful depiction of the history of the shtetl, mainly representing the Lithuanian Jews.