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TEXTUALIZATION AND RE-TEXTUALIZATION: THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, at the university of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 1997.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for degree or examination.

R Fairhead
(Name of ~~candidate~~)

28 day of Feb, 1997.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the construction of identity in Mark Behr's The Smell of Apples and Ivan Vladislavic's Missing Persons. Both texts are written by white males who occupy positions of power within society, yet their depictions of identity differ while sharing concerns. The texts emerge from a context of Apartheid ideology which attempted to determine identity in its creation of a social structure based on officially regulated foundational identities. Thus a theoretical framework is delineated in which to situate the operation of identity within ideological and historical formations. The Smell of Apples is a subtle depiction of the construction and perpetuation of Apartheid identities despite cognisance of the violence which underlies its formation, illustrating the mechanisms which ensure that dissent is incorporated into the dominant paradigm. Missing Persons portrays identity as being as fragmented and dislocated as the social structure in which it is formed, illustrating the dissolving authority of the Apartheid system and constituting an alternative to official prescriptions of reality.

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INTRODUCTION

The struggle to delineate a white South African identity is a struggle to understand the self in terms of the context in which identities are formed. By context I am refering to a society structured by Apartheid ideology which attempted to delineate the identity of each individual in terms of their racial classification, where 'race' was equated with an idea of what should cohere according to official understandings. Within an Apartheid context of the strict prescription of identity, the question becomes one of what strategies can be employed to narrate the ambiguity of being both perpetrator and victim of the system - a victim in terms of being created within Apartheid delineations of reality, and a perpetrator in terms of being white and therefore within a position of power within the dominant social structure. Mark Behr's The Smell of Apples and Ivan Vladislavic's Missing Persons depict different conceptions of identity while utilising similar themes. Both texts interrogate notions of autobiography and history in attempts to understand the effects of the violence which underlies the system of official explanation, and how these explanations effect identity once internalised.

According to Stuart Hall, there are two broad frameworks for thinking about identity - the first involves the idea of one shared culture which reflects common historical experiences and cultural codes, providing "unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history".[1] In order for this concept to cohere, some type of collectivization of identity must be constructed in terms of the privileging of one or more foundational identities which are postulated as beyond time and therefore change. The second broad framework entails an examination of the ruptures and discontinuities of identity -

> It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in the mere 'recovery' of the past...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position

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[1]Hall,S."Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Chrisman,P.& Williams,L.Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory (New York: Columbia University Press,1994) p.g.393.

ourselves within, the narratives of the past.[2]

Identity is fluid, contingent on historical and cultural contexts which shift continuously. Identity is therefore constructed rather than 'natural'. Bhabha describes colonial representations as being 'doubly inscribed' because "...the ambivalent identification of the racist world turns on the idea of man as his alienated image..."[3] Thus, in describing the other, the self is delineated in terms of being its opposite. This idea extends beyond colonial settings and is appropriate within theories of identity generally as according to Derrida, without relations of difference no representation can occur.[4] The question thus becomes where the boundaries around varying differences are placed.

> For identification, identity is never a apriori, nor a finished product; it is only over the problematic process of access to an image of totality...For the image- as point of identification- marks the site of an ambivalence. Its

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[2]Ibid.p.g.394.

[3]Bhabha,H.The Location of Culture (London:Routledge,1994) p.g.44.

[4]Eagleton,T.Jameson,F.&Said,E.Nationalism,Colonialism and Literature (Minneapolis,University of Minnesota Press,1990) p.g.12.

> representation is always spatially split- it makes present something that is absent- and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition.[5]

Bhabha says that there are three conditions which underlie an understanding of the process of identification- to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, the place of identification itself is a place of splitting (the distance in-between self and other) and identification as the production of an image of identity as well as the transformation of the subject in assuming that image.[6] If the place of identification is a place of splitting, then the space in between self and other in which the otherness of the self is formed, assumes identity while simultaneously reflecting this splitting.It is this idea that W.E.B.Du Bois refers to when he speaks of 'double consciousness', of being both inside and outside which leads to a fragmentation of the self.[7]

The movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other

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[5]Ibid.p.g.51.

[6]Ibid.p.g.44\45.

[7]Gilroy,P.The Black Atlantic.Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge:Harvard University Press,1993) p.g.112.

> fixed me there in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.[8]

Fanon, in this statement, brings together the internal representation as well as the external representation of his identity. The discursive conditions of his environment define him from without which, once internalised, leads to a fragmentation of the self. Fanon could be seen to be representing the effects of the othering process from within, while Bhabha's concept of 'ambivalent identification' could be seen to be representing the othering process in terms of the self which, when combined together, constitute the spectrum of identity construction.

> ...racism is particularly powerful and its imprint on popular consciousness especially deep, because in such racial characteristics as colour, ethnic origin, geographical position, etc., racism discovers what other ideologies have to construct: an apparently 'natural' and universal basis in nature itself...racisms also

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[8]Fanon, F. Black Skin, White Masks (London: Routledge, 1986) p.g.196.

> dehistorisize- translating historically-specific structures into the timeless language of nature; decomposing classes into individuals and recomposing those disaggregated individuals into the reconstructed unities...[9]

Apartheid aimed at the collectivization of identity within a racist paradigm in which its mythologies were portrayed as natural. History became a tool in its maintenance of power, appropriating the past, re-textualizing it to serve the present -in an attempt to construct both time past and present in terms of its racist ideology. It is within this context of Apartheid ideology that identity was constructed in South Africa. Both self and other were defined by official ideology, overdetermining both in a quest for a society structured in racial dominance.

The texts under discussion represent Hall's two main delineations of identity theory- The Smell of Apples could be seen as a depiction of identity which is unable to move beyond itself thereby perpetuating the idea of one shared white culture with common historical experiences and cultural codes of official Apartheid ideology. Missing Persons could be seen as a

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[9]Hall,S."Race, Articulation and societies Structured in Dominance" in UNESCO.Sociological Theories:Race and Colonialism (Paris:1980) p.g.345.

representation of identity which is fluid, reflecting the ruptures and discontinuities of identity under the Apartheid system.

Identity is constructed within the ideological process which therefore necessitates an understanding of the function of the ideological world. Ideology can be defined as a system of beliefs and "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas."[10] Gramsci maintains that ideology should be examined as a superstructure, a lived relation where civil society is the terrain in which power (economic, political and ideological) is contested and in which hegemony is exercised. Politics, as a level of the superstructure, consists of a shifting sphere of contestation and constitution in which ideology is conceptualised.[11] Thus within a South African context, Apartheid could be seen as a superstructure in terms of being an ideology, which informed the construction of the political and economic structures in order to maintain a system which reflected its ideological basis. Identity, being a social construct, is therefore constituted and re-constituted within the ideological

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[10]Williams,R.Marxism and Literature (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1977) p.g.55.

[11]Hall,S.Lumley,B.&McLennan,G."Politics and Ideology: Gramsci" in Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies On Ideology (London:Hutchinson,1977) p.g.47.

realm as it is based on a "system of beliefs" in which meaning is produced.

Ideologies, being grounded in lived experiences, are themselves material forces in terms of their effects and have complex and contradictory views like the social formations of which they are part. Ideology is not born but rather structured in certain ways which correspond to the general structure of society- "Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously 'born' in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion..."[12]

> Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense', which are basically the most widespread conception of life and man. Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of 'common sense'...common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself...Common sense is the folklore of the future, that is a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time.[13]

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[12]Gramsci,A. in Bennet,T.Martin,G.&Mercer,C.Culture,Ideology and Social Process (London:Open University Press,1983) p.g.200.

[13]Ibid.p.g.203.

Common sense exists in the plural and is historically produced, it is diffused throughout society forming the sinew of individual philosophies and is the 'sub-stratum of ideology' while ideology is the more general term for the ways in which sets of ideas become material forces in society.[14] There is an interdependent and interactive relationship between the 'ideal' and the 'material', a constant dialectic where material forces are the content while ideologies are the form, resulting in a continually shifting ideological arena of contestation and contradiction. Within an Apartheid context, laws were enacted to support its ideology which had material effects- the Group Areas act enforced separate living spaces based upon the racial classification of all people under the Population Registration Act, while Bantu Education policies enforced separate education which geared different 'race' groups towards different careers thereby enforcing economic dependence or dominance. Identity, being made up of varying subject positions, is therefore partly determined by the historical circumstances of particular times.

> The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date

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[14]Ibid.p.g.207.

> which has deposited you in an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory...culture [cannot be separated] from the history of culture...One's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and 'original' in their immediate relevance.[15]

Identity or 'knowing thyself' is a historically constituted construct determined by a response to an ideological superstructure in which meaning is found.

> Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs, there is no ideology.[16]

Volosinov says that the domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. Consciousness forms once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content in the process of social interaction as the reality of the sign is determined by social context where "the word is the ideological phenomenon, par

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[15]Ibid.p.g.201.

[16]Volosinov,V."The Study of Ideologies and Philosophy of Language" in Bennet<u>Culture,Ideology and Social Process</u> p.g.145.

excellence."[17] The word therefore has the ability to carry out any ideological function, but once given meaning becomes part of the constituted consciousness.[18] Language is therefore the fundamental object in the study of ideologies which is also the form in which 'common sense' is constructed as a 'sub-stratum' of the more general term 'ideology'. Reality is therefore not reflected in language but produced by it.

> The Structuralist emphasis on the 'constructedness' of human meaning represented a major advance. Meaning was neither a private experience nor a divinely ordained occurrence: it was the product of a certain shared system of signification...Meaning was not 'natural', a question of just looking and seeing, or something eternally settled; the way you interpreted your world was a function of the languages you had at your disposal, and there was evidently nothing immutable about these.[19]

Bakhtin roots meaning in the social where the social is conceived as being dialogic in terms of language. The word is not seen as

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[17]Ibid.p.g.149.

[18]Ibid.p.g.151.

[19]Eagleton,T.Literary Theory:An Introduction (Oxford:Blackwell,1983) p.g.108.

a two-sided sign but rather a two-sided act.

> The presence of the other person's word thus defines the concept of the dialogic word, where the intention of the one speaker is penetrated by that of the other, yielding an 'intersection of two consciousnesses'.[20]

Meaning is therefore found in intersections as the word used is always half some one else's, resulting in a constantly contested arena of permeable meanings. This idea can be carried through into the arena of historical narrativization where the meaning of events is constantly contested.

> When we write we narrate, we tell a story; and narration is never a 'natural' way of transposing experience and insights into prose; narration is construction with time...[21]

Narrative involves construction in order to create a coherent story. Historiography which is involved in the process of

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[20]Danow,D.The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin.From Word to Culture. (London:Macmillan,1991) p.g.62.

[21]Fabian,J.Time and the Work of Anthropology.Critical Essays. 1971-1991. (Chur:Harwood Academic Publishers,1991) p.g.236.

historical narration, involves "fallible inference and interpretation"[22] of actual events. Thus the narrativization of history is imbued with the ideology on which such interpretations hinge.

Barthes defines myth as anything which can be conveyed by a discourse thus myth is a type of speech within history which is conveyed by a discourse.[23]

> Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal...what the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality.[24]

It is within this context that things loose the memory that they were once created and appear naturally justified. Historical

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[22]Mink,L."Narrative as a form of Cognitive Instrument" in Canary,R.&Kozicki,H.The Writing of History:Literary Form and Historical Understanding (Madison:University of Wisconsin Press,1978) p.g.131.

[23]Barthes,R.Mythologies (Glasgow:Collins,1990) p.g.109.

[24]Ibid.p.g.142.

interpretation therefore creates its own mythologies which are constructed as 'natural' by its ideological underpinnings. Competing historical interpretations thus involve varying ideological points of enunciation as power is exercised through the legitimacy of its claims.

While Gramsci views ideological struggle as a process of disarticulation and rearticulation between hegemonic principles in which power is contested, Foucault sees power as diffuse or distributed unequally throughout society rather than limited to polarised extremes. Foucault's subject inhabits both the realm of victim as well as agent therefore accounting for the ideological fractures which adhere.

> ...in society...there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we

> cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.[25]

Foucault establishes a discursive pattern between the production of truth (which could be seen to be the claim of ideology) and power (which could be seen to be the mechanism by which society is structured).

> Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation.[26]

The question thus becomes one of 'truth' and 'power' where the battle is not conducted on behalf of truth but is rather a battle around the status of truth.

> Meaning, then, in its most significant form as Truth, is created in dialogue, on the borders where two

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[25]Foucault,M.Power.Knowledge:Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984 (Ithaca:Cornell University Press,1977) p.g.93.

[26]Ibid.p.g.98.

> consciousnesses meet. It is realized at the interstices of the self and other, in affirmation of the notion that 'the reality of the word...resides between individuals.' Meaning as Truth may thus be said to belong to neither the self nor the other but inheres within an ideal third category, in which the word and intention of each are intermeshed but transcended.[27]

Dialogism therefore shifts emphasis from language to alterity- the search for and possible recognition of the other because if the presence of the other's word defines the concept of the dialogic word, then the presence of the other defines the self.

In The Smell of Apples the self is designated in terms of race. The protagonists contact with black people (the other) is limited to servants and one fisherman as a child where, despite his youth, an unequal power relation is omnipresent which prevents him encountering them on a human level- they merely pass through his life as shadows. As an adult Marnus's interaction with a black soldier in his platoon is clouded by 'Orientalism'- where Orientalism "delivers an other which is both an object of knowledge and surveillance and an object of libidinous

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[27]Danow. The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin p.g.64\65.

impulses."[28] The other is thus only made present in absence in the text as Marnus interacts with an image of black people rather than encountering them on any real level.

In Missing Persons the othering process is depicted in terms of its affects as an entire system on the self. Apartheid which officially and systematically created a social structure based on exotopy, is generalised in the text to the point where the self fragments due to the internalization of its dislocated context. Both Vladislavic and Behr write from positions of power as white males in South Africa; yet Behr depicts the assimilation of official ideology in his portrayal of identity despite the violence which underlies it, while Vladislavic depicts an identity which implodes due to the fragmentation inherent in the system, thereby contesting the official version of events which attempts to portray continuity in its constructions.

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[28]Ching-Laing Low,G.White Skins Black Masks Representation and Colonialism (London:Routledge,1996) p.g.3.

CHAPTER ONE: The sutures of memory in The Smell of Apples.

Mark Behr's The Smell of Apples is a text which straddles both the genres of autobiography as well as fiction in that it unfolds from the perspective of a first person present tense narrator, both differing from as well as paralleling certain aspects of the author's own life story.

The Smell of Apples consists of two narrative voices - Marnus as an eleven-year-old in the 1970's and Marnus as a soldier in the South African permanent forces fighting in Angola in the 1980's. The child's narrative occurs in Simonstown in the Cape where Marnus's father, Johan, is a General at a military base and his mother, Leonore gives music lessons after giving up her career as a soprano for marriage. Much of the narrative concerns Marnus's interaction with and understanding of his world as mediated through his parents' explanations. His sister, Ilse and his aunt, Karla offer alternative explanations in the text which do not impact on his understanding of events. Marnus's best friend is Frikkie who is sexually abused by Johan which forms the central motif of the narrative- how violence underlies this world and how it is perpetuated in the choice Marnus makes in becoming an agent of its continuation by joining the Defence Force on a

permanent basis.

The soldier's narrative is constituted as the inevitable result of the child's experiences, that violence perpetuates itself in the sense that he becomes a soldier rather than rejecting the lessons he has learnt as a child. Both narratives highlight the disjunctures between appearance and reality- as a child, the general from Chile is presented to those outside the family as "Mr Smith" in a depiction of Apartheid collusion with other repressive regimes; while as an adult, the South African presence in Angola is denied to the external world despite their involvement in the war thereby depicting the historical duplicity of the system, of which he is both a product and a perpetuation

> The book attempts to explain that such choices are made because of demands made on him and his masculinity by the system in all its dimensions. On Thursday Behr said that imitation of the "masculinist codes" which he had both loathed and adored since childhood could also have played a part in his decision to inform for the SAP.[29]

The text could be seen as autobiographical in the sense that Behr

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[29]The Sunday Independent July 7 1996,p.g.5.

is depicting the choice to perpetuate a system based on violence and the extent to which Apartheid permeated all aspects of life to ensure its continuation, merging political affiliation with family bonds which attempts to explain his own decision to become a spy in terms of motivation. Thus it could be seen as a type of emotional autobiography of the author rather than a 'factual' autobiography.

> The genre of autobiography raises important questions concerning the nature of identity. The autobiographical act necessarily entails a combination of two narrative genres- fiction and history. It is these narrative genre's that seek to impose definition on literature and its contents, endowing events with meaning and creating a framework in which the writer attempts to construct his\her identity.[30]

The Smell of Apples contains such a combination of history and fiction in which the protagonist's sense of identity and the choices on which his sense of self are predicated seem to support the writer's rationale behind his own choices. Yet the text is also fictional in that Marnus's biographical details are not

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[30]Levin,M.&Taitz,L.Fictional Autobiographies\ Autobiographical Fictions:(re)evaluating the work of Dambudzo Marechera (Paper presented at Zimbabwe Bookfair,1995) p.g.1.

those of the author, resulting in a text which has elements of fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction.

According to Eakin, autobiography constitutes a fundamental process of identity formation, a "self-conscious self-consciousness" where the author refers to the idea that the self is not given but made in the process of writing.[31] Yet the self that is presented in The Smell of Apples is a self that is described rather than made, rationalised rather than self-reflective.

> There could have been a misguided design at becoming part of the masculinist codes which I, since childhood, had both loathed and adored. Yet, in matric, I had written an essay which exhibited an awareness of the absurdity of the Group Areas and Immorality Acts. In the army, there was also a psychological insight that I didn't want to be bound by a system of such violence...I am certain that I knew from the outset that something was wrong with my involvement with state security.[32]

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[31]Eakin,P.Fictions in Autobiography:Studies in the Art of Self-Invention (New Jersey:Princeton University Press,1985) p.g.9.

[32]Mark Behr in Weekly Mail and Guardian (July 12-18,1996) p.g.27.

The tension which is reflected in this statement between knowing that something is wrong and still feeling compelled to perpetuate it is reflected in the text in a different form- Marnus is created in a context where things are not quite what they seem to be, where everything is shrouded with a violent cover which is incorporated into the psyche becoming 'normal' and articulated later in a mechanism which it forms the basis of - the army.

According to Louis Mink history is filled with 'things that are not so' while fiction is filled with 'things that are so', resulting in history and fiction, as well as autobiography and fiction, being narratives of events that contain elements of each other.[33]

> We are ir the midst of a vast process in which literary forms are being melted down, a process in which many of the contrasts in terms of which we have been accustomed to think may lose their relevance.[34]

The Smell of Apples could therefore be seen as a part of this

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[33]Mink,L."Narrative as a form of Cognitive Instrument" p.g.130.

[34]Benjamin,W.The Origin of German Tragic Drama (London:Verso, 1977) p.g.89.

process in which forms are being melted down, being both fictional and autobiographical, or consisting of both history and fiction.

> Self-definition is a creative process involving selection and omission, exaggeration and fabrication around a desired purpose. Pascal has argued that autobiography 'imposes a pattern on life, constructs out of it a coherent story.' Coherence is a function of having a 'meaningful standpoint' from which to interpret life, a present position which enables life to be seen as something of a unity, something which may be reduced to order.[35]

In The Smell of Apples, Behr constructs a coherent story in which identity emerges as 'something of a unity'. The context in which meaning is found is one of Apartheid ideology in which Marnus locates himself despite being exposed to fractures in the system, epitomising the functioning and effects of the system in perpetuating itself. He is exposed to the hypocracy and violence which lie at its core in the form of his father's actions yet

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[35]Gready, P. "Political Autobiography in Search of Liberation: Working Class Theatre, Collaboration and the Construction of Identity" in Gunner, L. Politics and Performance Theatre Poetry and Song in South Africa (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1994) p.g.165\6.

still becomes an agent of its extension. The utilization of a child narrator is an important mechanism in illustrating how fractures are re-incorporated back into the dominant paradigm in that the question posed in the text is how does an eleven-year-old child deal with the knowledge that his father has abused his best friend, a father whose explanations of his world are seen as 'truth'. The day after Marnus witnesses the abuse, he tries to avoid his father and putting the general's epaulettes onto his camouflage suit but when he refuses to go towards his father in fear, he is beaten by him until some type of catharsis is reached.

> I'm still struggling to breathe. And then I see for the first time that Dad is crying...He hugs me and holds me close to his chest, until I feel his tears through the shirt of my camouflage suit. I put my arms around his head and we both cry, holding onto each other....he picks up the epaulettes and fastens them on to the shoulders of my camouflage suit.[36]

The author utilises the implicit innocence of the child narrator. As a child, he cannot be expected to have the tools to deal with

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[36]Behr,M.The Smell of Apples (London:Abacus,1995) p.g.197.

such an occurrence, except to sublimate it. Yet an eleven-year-old's lack of responsibility or status as the victim of a larger system becomes problematic when extended into adult life. The concept of the return of the repressed is utilized to account for Marnus's choice to become a soldier, giving vent to familiar violence by way of explanation. Yet as an adult, the past cannot deny responsibility.

> For the political effects of such socially constructed pasts do not depend on their authenticity- on their fidelity to or distortion of the past 'as it really was' - but on their differential value: that is, on the position they take up in relation to the rival socially constructed pasts with which they compete or earlier ones which they seek to displace.[37]

The text, being an act of both imagination and memory in constructing identity, attempts to create a delineation of what it means to emerge from a conservative white family and why the choice is made to perpetuate the system. The technique employed in this process is one of memory and recollection which operates

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[37]Bennet,T.Outside Literature (London:Routledge,1990) p.g.48\9.

on different levels in that the world is apprehended through the vision of a child absorbing his environment and its ideologies in an attempt to construct order in his own mind. Memory in the text also operates on the level of historical memory in that it is firmly located within historical time- childhood in the 1970's and young adulthood in the 1980's of South Africa. The environment which Behr constructs therefore also needs to be apprehended in terms of its construction of the past.

> For both events and their representations are ultimately beholden to the forms, language and critical methodology through which they are grasped...what is remembered...depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn, on the texts now giving them form.[38]

History is presented in a mediated form based on a textualized memory or chronicle of events which are interpreted from within a political understanding or social activity. Therefore "hard history" or the memory of specific events may always be subordinate to the meaning ascribed to such history- its

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[38]Young,J.Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1988) p.g.1.

interpretation and re-interpretation.

> The point is that there are layers of spoken knowledge, but also of critical silences, that inform ones choice of each word within the academy and in the larger society. This is because there are, in fact, various...pasts calling for their own historians...[39]

Behr constructs a sense of history within a paradigm of a child's internalization of dominant historical interpretations, depicting a particular version of events as being inescapable.

> Frikkie says his oupagrootjie used to get hunters to hunt the Bushmen on his farm in the Cedarberg. The hunters from Cape Town could come and they had to pay twenty pounds for each Bushman they shot...When we learned about the Bushmen in history class, Frikkie told the story of his oupagrootjie. Miss Engelbrecht said it wasn't true. It wasn't the Boers who killed off all the Bushmen, it was the Xhosas. She said that the Xhosas are a terrible nation and it was them that use to rob and terrorise the farmers on

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[39]Atieno-Odiambo,E."The Production of History in Kenya:The Mau Mau Debate" Canadian Journal of African Studies (25,2,1991) p.g.300.

> the Eastern frontier, long before the Zulus in Natal so cruelly murdered Boer women and little children.[40]

An orthodox view of history replaces memory to suite the ideological underpinnings of a system which revolves on the idea of itself as a bringer of civilization. Genocide is denied on the side of the Afrikaners and attributed to their historical enemy in the Cape- the Xhosas.

> When we got back into the car, you could smell the apples everywhere. I turned around to look at the crates on the back seat, but it was already too dark to see them. 'Dad, do you smell the apples?' I asked into the dark. 'Ja, Marnus,' Dad answered as he turned the Volvo back onto the road. 'Even the apples we brought to this country.'[41]

Yet memory is selective, only acknowledging that which is consistent with its view of itself. Behr seems to be highlighting the complex layering of historical meaning- both the layers of 'spoken knowledge' as well as the 'critical silences' within the narrativization of the past.

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[40]Behr.The Smell of Apples p.g.8.

[41]Ibid.p.g.124.

Narration is construction with time, and the text too is construction with time. Edward Said speaks of the 'worldliness' of texts which are "always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society- in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly."[42] Texts are therefore both construction with time as well as in time. History, being the narration of the passage of time, is therefore apprehended in the text (which is both with and in time) both through its depiction of the past as well as its utilization of time in terms of its narrative construction.

> The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.[43]

In the text, a definite image of historical progression emerges which postulates a homogenous linear pattern while simultaneously highlighting its constructedness.

The General asks about our lovely house and Dad tells the

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[42]Said, E. The World The Text and The Critic (London: Vintage, 1983) p.g.35.

[43]Benjamin, W. Illuminations (Glasgow: Fontana, 1973) p.g.263.

> story of how Oupa and Ouma Erasmus came to South Africa. He tells the General how it was just as well that Oupa left Tanganyika when he did, because twenty years later all the white farmers were chased off their land and everything was lost...Once the Communists from Peking began indoctrinating the blacks, the blacks took over in Kenya and Tanganyika, and the Masai and other tribes were too stupid to see that Mao Tse-tung was taking them on a wild goose chase.[44]

The historical progression southwards, away from the threat of Communism is interwoven with personal history enforcing the point that what is remembered depends on how it is remembered. Thus this version of history relies on recollection which emerges with the authority which Marnus's father carries; the implication being that to disrupt this version of events would be to dismiss familial truth and become an outcast as in the case of Aunt Karla. Yet Frikkie's story illuminates the constructed nature of historical truth while simultaneously highlighting how such competing narratives are incorporated into the dominant one.

The concept of progress itself is not disrupted in the text despite the interweaving of the child's voice and the soldier's

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[44]Behr. The Smell of Apples p.g.37.

voice, but merely serves to reinforce the idea of linear progression. The General arrives from Chile and Marnus observes him from his bedroom window; in the next paragraph the narrative voice is that of Marnus as a soldier in Angola -

> ...Yet, by now, I know full-well that you cannot satisfactorily understand an event unless you have a picture of everything that accompanies it: the arrival of the visitor cannot be divorced from what preceded his coming. To understand my own choice, I need to muster as much of the detail as possible...It is essential to have a situation-report of even the smallest detail of the battle terrain...[45]

The narratives connect in terms of the importance of events with the soldier's containing dual meaning, in that Marnus's choice to join the army on a permanent basis is directly related to the events which followed the Generals visit. The adult Marnus almost seems to be saying that his life choices need to be situated in this context of violence in order to be understood.

History influences the present not as a set of real past

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[45]Ibid.p.g.31.

> events but as an account of such events in their bearing on currently existing relationships.'Similarly,' Attridge thus argues, the power possessed by history, whether that of the professional historian, the journalist, or the man-in-the-street, to sustain or alter prevailing value systems depends on the success of the stories it tells.'[46]

Behr locates personal agency within the realm of the historical where the past is omnipresent, sustaining the same value system on which it constructed itself.

> I feel Dad's face against my chest and my arms around his head, and I feel safe. But now it is a different safety. Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history.[47]

Marnus feels safe in his father's arms- a safety in duplicity and violence where things are not what they seem to be as in the annals of Apartheid history itself. He has become this adult because in life, there is no escape from history, both personal

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[46]Bennet.Outside Literature p.g.276.

[47]Behr.The Smell of Apples p.g.198.

and national as epitomised by this usage of both time (the interweaving narratives of child and soldier) and history (in terms of its constructedness).

> ...it is naturalized-spatialized Time which gives meaning (in fact a variety of specific meanings) to the distribution of humanity in space. The history of our discipline reveals that such use of Time almost invariably is made for the purpose of distancing those who are observed from the Time of the observer.[48]

The 'Other' in the text is defined in terms of the racial classification of the Apartheid system, but there is "no knowledge of the Other which is not also a temporal, historical, a political act."[49] The context of this interaction is one which Pratt has defined as a 'contact zone'. Contact zones being spaces where "disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination".[50] Marnus's understanding of his society is based

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[48]Fabian,J.Time and the Other.How Anthroplogy makes its Object (New York:Columbia University Press,1983) p.g.25.

[49]Ibid.p.g.1.

[50]Pratt,M.L.Imperial Eyes.Travel Writing and Transculturation (London:Routledge,1992) p.g.4.

on a temporalized social Darwinist conceptualization of different peoples.

> The Bantus are even dumber than the Coloureds. Luckily the Coloureds still have a bit of sailor blood in their veins. But now even that flows so thin that they're mostly alcoholics, who booze up their wages over the weekends... But Doreen, she's a good girl...In heaven she'll live with the other Christian Coloureds in small houses and the lord will reward her for never boozing it up like the rest.[51]

Black people are defined as what he is not, always from the perspective of a removed observer as both child and adult, enforcing the point that "if the first step toward the destruction of a people lay in the blotting out of its memory, then the last step would lie in its calculated resurrection."[52] This 'calculated resurrection' ties into Apartheid conceptions of history as in the case of Marnus's teacher who blames the Xhosas for the genocide of the Bushmen. In re-textualizing history, the history of 'the other' is revised to consolidate the official understanding of the past and thereby the present.

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[51]Behr. The Smell of Apples p.g.39.

[52]Young. Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust p.g.189.

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